

Jephthah: Faith and Foolishness

Judges 11 & 12

I. Jephthah's Faith and Victory (Judges 11:1-33)

A. Jephthah was recruited by Gilead to lead the army (11:1-11)

Principle: Regardless of our background, God can use us greatly.

Principle: Trusting God is the key to forgiving and moving on.

B. Jephthah defeated the Ammonites (Judges 11:12-33)

➤ Jephthah is honored for his faith (Hebrews 11:32-34).

II. Jephthah's Foolish Vow (Judges 11:34-40)

A. Jephthah foolishly vowed to God to sacrifice whatever came out of his house if God gave Him victory (11:30)

B. Jephthah's daughter came out to greet him and he deeply regretted his vow (11:34-35).

C. Jephthah's daughter mourned for two months before her father fulfilled his vow (11:36-40)

Different interpretations of Jephthah's vow [see back]

1. Jephthah actually killed his daughter. *Possible*

2. Jephthah vowed to sacrifice his daughter to serve at the temple so she could never marry. **Probable*

Principle: Breaking promises to God is serious (Ecclesiastes 5:4-7).

Principle: Trying to manipulate God by making promises is foolish.

III. Jephthah's Unfortunate Civil War (Judges 12:1-7)

A. The Ephraimites claimed they weren't asked to help fight the Ammonites and then insulted the Gileadites (12:1-4).

Principle: Conflicts often arise from feeling slighted about who gets credit and from personal insult. Both are pride issues.

B. A civil war broke out which Jephthah won decisively – 42,000 killed (12:5-7).

Why Jephthah likely did not actually kill his daughter as a sacrifice.

1. Human sacrifice seems out of character for Jephthah who otherwise seems to have been a rational, God-honoring man (Judges 11:9-11,21-27, 30).
2. Human sacrifice was against God's law (Leviticus 18:21; Deuteronomy 12:31) and was abhorrent in Israel (2 Kings 3:26-27). If Jephthah understood God's law about vows, he would understand the law against human sacrifice.
3. There is no indication of reaction to this – that something so terrible would be done (though other barbaric acts got a reaction – Judges 19:25-30).
4. The wicked kings of Judah, Ahaz and Manasseh, practiced human sacrifice about 600 years later in Israel's history (2 Kings 16:4; 2 Chronicles 33:6) because they worshipped Molech (Jeremiah 32:35). It's highly unlikely God chose a Molech worshipper to deliver his people from the Ammonites who worshipped Molech (1 Kings 11:5).
5. Jephthah's vow probably referred to a *spiritual* offering – a dedication to God of a person. This vow of dedication meant the person would serve at the tabernacle the rest of their life (Leviticus 27:1-8; 1 Samuel 1:10-22). Women also served at the tabernacle (Exodus 38:8; 1 Samuel 2:22).
6. In the case of Jephthah's daughter, the vow evidently meant she must never marry. The passage emphasizes her virginity and that she would never marry (Judges 11:36-40); it actually says nothing about death. Since his daughter was an only child, Jephthah deep regret was therefore that his line would end. The foolishness of the vow was that he didn't think through how it might affect him and his daughter personally if she was the first to greet him.