



International Bible Lessons Commentary

Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series

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Judges 11:4-11 & 29-31

New Revised Standard Version

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The [International Bible Lesson](#) (*Uniform Sunday School Lessons Series*) for **Sunday, June 18, 2017**, is from **Judges 11:4-11 & 29-31**. **Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further** follow the verse-by-verse *International Bible Lesson Commentary*. **Study Hints for Discussion and Thinking Further** will help with class preparation and in conducting class discussion: these hints are available on the [International Bible Lessons Commentary](#) website along with the *International Bible Lesson* that you may want to read to your class as part of your Bible study. You can discuss each week's commentary and lesson at the [International Bible Lesson Forum](#).

(Judges 11:4) After a time the Ammonites made war against Israel.

Jephthah (meaning to open, God opens, or to release) was driven out of Gilead (meaning heap of stones or monument of testimony) by his half-brothers. Gilead was also the name of Jephthah's father. The Ammonites were descendants of the youngest daughter of Lot, whose son was named Ben Ammi (meaning son of my kinsman). The Ammonites worshiped the idols Ammon and Molech (also Moloch), and worshiping these idols required child sacrifices, which was forbidden by the LORD. Later, King Solomon built altars to the idol Molech to please his Ammonite wives, which led to the decline and destruction of both the kingdoms of Israel and Judah.

(Judges 11:5) And when the Ammonites made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to bring Jephthah from the land of Tob.

The location of Tob is not known exactly. Jephthah gathered an army of adventurers and located in Tob after he was forced from his home by his half-brothers and the elders of the town. The Ammonites, who lived in the area of modern day Jordan (note: Amman is now the capital of Jordan), were fighting Israel. These elders (probably including Jephthah's half-brothers) went to him for help since he had the qualities of a military leader and a band of fighters.

(Judges 11:6) They said to Jephthah, “Come and be our commander, so that we may fight with the Ammonites.”

God did not “raise up” Jephthah as a judge. Jephthah was recruited by the elders in Gilead, and later God gave Jephthah the strength and wisdom to lead the Israelites to defeat the Ammonites. In a similar way, the Israelites demanded a king at the close of the period of the judges, and they chose King Saul before they allowed the LORD through Samuel to choose King David. Jephthah was a judge for only six years.

(Judges 11:7) But Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, “Are you not the very ones who rejected me and drove me out of my father’s house? So why do you come to me now when you are in trouble?”

Jephthah asked two excellent questions. His half-brothers hated him because of his mother, and they did not want him to have any share of their inheritance from their father. The Bible gives strong indication Jephthah was Gilead’s oldest son. His half-brothers now wanted him to help them protect their inheritance from the Ammonites. They did not come to him with brotherly love or repentant hearts: they only came because they were in trouble and wanted to use Jephthah to help them preserve their inheritance from the Ammonites who would steal it.

(Judges 11:8) The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, “Nevertheless, we have now turned back to you, so that you may go with us and fight with the Ammonites, and become head over us, over all the inhabitants of Gilead.”

After driving Jephthah away, these leaders were now so desperate that they offered to make him their commander and head, both before and after he defeated the Ammonites (if he defeated the Ammonites). As their head, Jephthah would enjoy benefits far above his half-brothers’ inheritance, but only for a short six years.

(Judges 11:9) Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, “If you bring me home again to fight with the Ammonites, and the LORD gives them over to me, I will be your head.”

Based on his previous experiences with them, Jephthah had no reason to trust the elders from Gilead. He declared to them that it would be the LORD who would use him to defeat the Ammonites. Furthermore, Jephthah wanted to make certain that if the LORD helped him defeat their enemies that he would indeed be there supreme leader.

(Judges 11:10) And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, “The LORD will be witness between us; we will surely do as you say.”

The elders made an oath to the LORD that they would keep their promise to Jephthah or be subject to punishment by the LORD. As a tribe, they knew what it meant to suffer from disobeying the LORD; therefore, Jephthah had some assurance they would not want God to punish them further for breaking their promise to the LORD and him.

(Judges 11:11) So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them; and Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD at Mizpah.

Jephthah went with them and they made him their head, but before battle Jephthah affirmed their promises to him before the LORD. Mizpah (meaning watchtower or look out, and “LORD watch over me”) was a place where promises between people were made before the LORD (see Genesis 31:49). He may have also made vows before the LORD at this place while seeking the LORD’s help. Between Judges 11:11 and Judges 11:29, Jephthah tried to negotiate peace between the Israelites and the Ammonites. In doing so, Jephthah demonstrated his knowledge of the history of Israel and the history of the Promised Land.

(Judges 11:29) Then the spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh. He passed on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed on to the Ammonites.

Though God had not called Jephthah to be a judge as He had Gideon, Jephthah called upon the name of the LORD for help, and he acknowledged that God would be the One to give them victory; therefore, the Spirit of the LORD came upon him. His victory was the result of God’s grace and mercy toward His people, not because the Gileadites and others in Israel deserved His salvation. Notice: The Spirit of God did not come “into” him as the Spirit comes “into” and “dwells within” those who trust in Jesus Christ as their Lord and Savior. The Spirit of God worked upon and used Jephthah to defeat the Ammonites at his request: as a tool in (or an extension of) a person’s hand to achieve a task.

(Judges 11:30) And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, “If you will give the Ammonites into my hand,

The Spirit of the LORD did not direct Jephthah to make this vow. Jephthah made this foolish vow to God despite the fact that the Holy Spirit had come upon him with power. He did not need to make, nor did God demand or require, this vow. The vow was so foolish that God did not use Jephthah to defeat the Ammonites because of that vow. In spite of, not because of, Jephthah’s foolish vow, God used him to gain a great victory over the enemies of Israel to free His people from their oppressors.

(Judges 11:31) then whoever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be the LORD's, to be offered up by me as a burnt offering."

Notice Jephthah said "whatever," not "whoever." Jephthah sinned and made a mistake when he decided and vowed to offer a burnt offering to the LORD that was not approved of, or authorized by, but strictly forbidden by the Law of Moses. Burnt offerings were supposed to be made by Levitical priests according to the strict standards established by the LORD in His Law. [King Saul also violated the Law of God when he offered an unauthorized sacrifice and lost his dynasty (1 Samuel 13:9-14).] Obedient Levitical priests would never have made such an offering as Jephthah vowed to make. Jephthah was more influenced by the pagan burnt offerings and practices of his day than he was by the official requirements for burnt offerings by Levitical priests according to the Law of God.

Human sacrifices were totally forbidden by God in His Law, but practiced almost exclusively by those who worshiped the pagan idols of the Ammonites (who sacrificed their own children by passing them through the fire to guarantee their success, usually in agriculture). Jephthah could have immediately repented for his foolish vow when his daughter was the first person out of the door of his house. If he had repented, God would have forgiven him to prevent her murder (Jephthah sacrificed his only child, a virgin daughter). Jephthah had an additional two months to come to his senses and repent of his sin while his daughter was in the mountains, but he did not. His daughter was a willing sacrifice to the LORD, and obedient to her father, but she would have been justified before the LORD if she had fled from her father rather than be sacrificed in violation of the Law of God (but that would have been too much to expect at that time and in that pagan culture). Jephthah died six years later, and that was the end of the line of Jephthah: he had no descendants other than the daughter he murdered.

Questions for Discussion and Thinking Further

1. Since God did not speak to Jephthah as He did to Gideon, do you think God wanted Jephthah to be a judge? Give a reason for your answer.
2. Jephthah was rejected by his brothers and the elders of Gilead. Can you think of anyone else in the Bible who some people rejected but God chose to do His will?
3. What did Jephthah do right in his relationship with God?

4. What did Jephthah do wrong in his relationship with God?
5. What is one truth you learned from the life of Jephthah?

Begin or close your class by reading the short weekly *International Bible Lesson*.

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