

## Dr. David Howard, Joshua-Ruth, Session 27

### Judges 10-12 Jephthah and Five Minor Judges

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This is Dr. David Howard in his teaching on the books of Joshua through Ruth. This is session 27, Judges 10-12, Jephthah and Five Minor Judges.

Greetings again. We are continuing in the book of Judges and we are now in chapter 10. In this segment we will be looking at chapters 10 to 12, covering a lot of ground in terms of characters involved. There are six judges mentioned in this section, but only one story that's really highlighted.

The other five are minor judges that we just learn almost nothing about. Nevertheless, that's what's going to take us between the stories of Gideon, in chapters 6-8, plus Abimelech, his son, in chapter 9, and then the final stories of the final climactic judge, Samson, in chapters 13-16. So, here the first part of chapter 10, it follows immediately upon these three turbulent years of Abimelech from chapter 9. So, it says in chapter 10, verse 1, after Abimelech, there arose to save Israel Tola, the son of Pua, the son of Dodo, the man of Issachar.

He lived at Shamir in the hill country, judged Israel 23 years, and he died and was buried at Shamir. That's all we know about Tola. Just right before this taping, I was told by someone that he wanted to learn more about Tola, and I was looking forward to what I had to say about Tola, but I'm sorry, that's all I know.

That's all that's in the text, so we'll have to leave it at that. Obviously, as we said earlier, there are seven, actually. Some people count it as six major judges, whose stories we know in terms of fighting battles and things.

Five, maybe six minor judges. Tola is certainly one of these minor judges. And after him, of course, is another one of the minor judges, verses 3 and 4, actually 5. His name is Ya'ir, Ja'ir, and we learn he judged for 22 years.

He had 30 sons who were 30 donkeys, and they had 30 cities, which are in the land of Gilead, which is east of Jordan and east of the Sea of Galilee. We don't really know the significance of that. There are lots of places where 30 is a number in scripture.

Most famously, maybe, Judas sold Jesus for 30 shekels of silver, but not sure there's any real basic significance of this, except to show that he was prosperous, and he was productive and fruitful. In verses 6 to the end of the chapter, or at least till around verse 16, we have kind of a restatement of the themes found in chapter 2, which was the sort of programmatic, generalizing overview of the whole book of Joshua, telling about the apostasy and the things that God was doing. And so, we

have, again, in verse 6, the people of Israel again did evil on the side of the Lord, served the Baals, the Ashtoreth, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, the Philistines.

So, all around, they weren't discriminating. They took anything they could get, and everything they could get, in terms of pagan worship. And God's anger was kindled against them.

In verse 7 again, and this time in the hand of the Philistines, in the hand of the Ammonites, and they were oppressed, and people cried out. In verse 10, one difference here now, in this chapter, as opposed to chapter 2, is right here in verse 10, and then verses 16 and 17, or 15 and 16, where Israel now, for the first time, is seen as confessing their sin. Before, they just kind of cried out in anguish and asked for deliverance, but here, it specifically says, in verse 10, we have sinned against you, speaking to God, because you have forsaken our God and served the Baals.

And the Lord responds, I have been your faithful Savior all the way through, and yet you have forsaken me. And sarcastically, he says to them, in verse 14, go serve the gods that you were following. Maybe they'll save you.

And to their credit, whether we know how sincere they were or not, they say in verse 15, no, we have sinned. They repeat it again. And they say we deserve what we get.

Do to us what you would have to do, but please still deliver us this day. Verse 15, verse 16, so they put away the foreign gods from among them, served the Lord. You may remember from reading the book of Joshua or watching the lectures at the end of Joshua, where Joshua urges the people in chapter 24 to put away the gods that your fathers served from beyond the river, or from Egypt.

So, several times at the end of the book of Joshua, it appears that Israel has maintained, at least secretly if not publicly, the worship of these other gods, and Joshua urges them to put them away. But there's no evidence that they actually did that here. For the first time, we see that that's done consciously by the people of Israel, and that can only be a good thing.

So, God became impatient over the misery of Israel. In other words, he is ready to deliver them. The scene shifts then.

Verses 17 and 18, the final verses of the chapter, where the Ammonites live east of the Jordan, straight east. The modern-day country of Jordan, the capital is Amman, and that name goes back to the Ammonites from the Bible. And so they were called to arms.

They encamped in Gilead, to the east of the Jordan and to the north there, and they encamped at Mizpah. And so, the people of Israel are wondering who's going to lead them against the Ammonites, and that's how chapter 10 ends. That leads into the story of Jephthah in chapter 11 and the first part of chapter 12, but especially chapter 11, which is the chapter that tells about the conflict with the Ammonites.

So that's how we learn about him. Notice in verse 17, chapter 10, that the Ammonites are encamped in Gilead, again, which is north and east of the Sea of Galilee. And Jephthah, chapter 11, verse 1, is from Gilead.

So, it says, Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute. So that's kind of an inauspicious beginning for him, but it turns out he has a lot of positive qualities. So, Gilead's wife birthed some sons, and as the sons grew up, they drove him out for some reason.

And he fled, and he gathered worthless fellows around him, verse 3. And that's not a very salutary thing to have done around you. That's the same term we find in chapter 9, a couple of chapters before, with Abimelech. In chapter 9, verse 4, it says Abimelech is also associated with worthless fellows.

And that doesn't bode well for Jephthah's future. We're not told that God raised up Jephthah. So, for whatever good he did and how he delivered, it doesn't appear that he's maybe on the same level as some.

Gideon, we're talking about Jephthah here. Gideon represents, in a sense, a turning point in the book, where you have early judges are either neutral or very positive. Certainly, Deborah shines above everybody else.

Gideon has some good qualities, but he also finishes poorly. And then there are these minor judges. But then Jephthah doesn't say he's raised up, and then he does some very unwise things as well.

So, in verse 4 and following, the Ammonites make war against Israel. And in verse 11, we find out that Jephthah is with the people. They make him the leader over them.

And he spoke all his words before the Lord at this place, Mizpah. In verse 12 and following, he sends messengers to the king of the Ammonites and says, why are you opposing us? Verses 12 to 28 are a long, impressive speech, actually, by Jephthah answering the charge that they had leveled. In verse 13, verse 13 says, The king of the Ammonites answered the messengers of Jephthah and said, Because Israel, on coming up from Egypt, took away my land from the Arnon to the Jabbok and to the Jordan.

Therefore, restore it peaceably. So, we'll just review a little bit of the map. And so, remember, Israel came out of Egypt, went to Mount Sinai, came here, and sent the spies into the land.

They came back with a bad report. So, God had sent the water in the wilderness. And Sihon and Og were the kings here east of the Jordan.

And they did not give permission for Israel to cross their territory. They had to go around. But there was conflict, and the Israelites defeated Sihon and Og in the wilderness.

So, this has stuck as a burr under the saddle for the Ammonites and the descendants of Sihon and Og here. And the king of the Ammonites reminds him of that historical slight years earlier. And so, the rest of that section, in verses 12 or 13, and then 14 and following, all the way to verse 28, Jephthah is answering the charge that they were the aggressors, and they were the ones that were doing injustice to their ancestors.

And Jephthah asserts that it is God himself who has dispossessed them. Israel was not the aggressor. In verse 15, he says, Israel did not take away the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites.

But when they came up from Egypt, Israel went through the wilderness. They sent messengers. In verse 17, the king of Edom says, Let us pass through.

But the king of Edom would not listen. So, Jephthah is turning it back on them and saying, no, the fault lies in your ancestors. Israel was not supposed to take any of the Ammonite land, because they had been forbidden from doing that back in Deuteronomy.

But Sihon, the king of the Amorites, had actually taken some of the Ammonite territory in Moabite territory back in the book of Numbers, chapter 21. So Israel was not the aggressor there. The Ammonites, if they had been involved at all, in a sense, Jephthah is saying, you deserve what you had coming.

And, of course, he also makes the point, in verses 19 and following, that the land really was never theirs to begin with. It was the land of the Amorites. And so this is a sustained rebuttal, in a sense, on Jephthah's part to the accusations of the Ammonites.

When you get to verse 24, we have a reference to the Ammonite, the Moabite god, and he is, I'm sorry, verse 24 mentions the Ammonite god as a god named Chemosh, or Chemosh. In the book of Kings, 1 Kings 11, he is mentioned as the god of the

Moabites, and the Ammonite god was a god named Molech, or Melchom. But Ammon and Moab were closely related to each other.

Ammon was in this area here, the Moabites were here, and so there would have been a lot of communication back and forth. And, again, we've mentioned earlier kind of the fluidity between the gods and goddesses and the different pantheons of the pagans, and so they would have shared cultural and religious heritages. So, in verses 29 to 40, we have the final defeat of the Ammonites by Jephthah.

In verse 29, we see that the spirit of the Lord was on Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead, Manasseh, and so on. In verses 32 and 33, it mentions that he struck him down, the Lord gave the Ammonites into his hand, he struck him down, and the Ammonites were subdued then before the people of Israel. So that was a good thing, and clearly God is part of this, God is in control and giving Jephthah this victory.

But there's a little side issue that becomes a big issue that's not so good. And that is because in the process, when Jephthah is speaking to the Lord, and the Lord graciously answers him in spite of his rash words, I would say the same way that God answered Gideon back in chapter 6 when Gideon is asking for a sign and his confirmation, the fleece and so on, even though that was an unnecessary thing and a sign of lack of faith, God still answered graciously. Similarly, same here, God did defeat the Ammonites at the hand of Jephthah, but in the process, he made a vow, and it turned out very badly.

So, he speaks to the Lord in verses 30 and 31, it says, If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whoever or whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites, shall be the lords, I will offer it up for a burnt offering. So, he says, here's this deal, Lord, let's make it. If you give me the victory, when I get home, whatever comes out, I'll sacrifice that to you.

Now, there's lots of ink has been spilled over the discussion of what exactly he intending and what exactly happened. On the face of it, the way my version reads, it says, Whatever comes out from the doors of my house, many interpreters would see, including this Bible version and others as well, that it would appear that Jephthah is intending, expecting that an animal would come out of some type, a sheep or a goat or maybe a dog or something and that that's what he would offer to the Lord. But it's possible that, let me say two things.

One, even if it's that general, could include a human that came out. And of course, that's what happened. It ends up his daughter comes out.

And it's possible that even he was saying whoever might come out. The footnote in my version, the English Standard Version, does say it could be whoever, in which case then Jephthah's vow is a rather perverse vow. There's a theological

underpinning to the idea of human sacrifice, not only in the Bible or outside the Bible but in any culture that has practiced that over the millennia.

We know of stories in Central America of Indians doing this and in biblical cultures. And the theological underpinnings, if people think about it, is the idea that we are giving the best of what we have to appease or to please the gods. And the goddesses.

So, if it makes sense to give the first fruits of our crops if it makes sense to give the firstborn of the animals, then the next step in something even better will be, well, why wouldn't God see my dedication even more greatly if I offer the first fruits of my body or the best of the humans? So that's sort of the theological underpinnings for sacrifice in general, including child sacrifice, which the Canaanites especially practiced. But the Bible's very clear that, yes, God did want the best for their crops and their animals, but the line is very starkly drawn that he did not sanction at all. He forbade, in the strongest terms, human sacrifice.

And so, this is a very rash vow when it turns out that he comes to his home, his daughter comes out dancing and excited with tambourine and dancing and so on, and it turns out then that he feels obligated to follow through on this vow. Many, many places human sacrifice is forbidden. Just to give you a few references if you're interested in looking them up on your own.

Leviticus 18, Leviticus 20, Deuteronomy 12, Deuteronomy 18, Jeremiah and the prophets, Jeremiah 19, Ezekiel 20, Ezekiel 23. So from beginning to end, from the earliest times to the latest times, God is consistently telling Israel not to engage in human sacrifice. Undoubtedly partly because some of the Canaanites around them did do that, and that was something they were not to do.

Now, when someone makes a vow, a vow is a very serious thing. And so we have instructions, Deuteronomy 23, verses 21 to 23, talk about the sacredness of a vow and following through and doing it. And we have many other places that talk about that.

But so, the question is, well, did Jephthah have to follow through on this vow? But these circumstances were not the normal kind of a vow. They were not the kind of a vow to do something positive for the Lord or whatever. It involved a conflict with one of the most basic prohibitions that God had.

And human sacrifice was an abomination. So, it seems to me that Jephthah was not really bound to follow through with his vow, and yet he did. Now, that last point that I just made is disputed.

There are some scholars, including evangelical scholars, that say, no, he was bound, he should have followed through. The problem was not following through. The problem was with the rashness of the original vow.

My view is that no, both were rash, the vow itself plus the following through. He shouldn't have done that. Finally, there's a little ambiguity, or some discussion at least, about what actually happened at the end.

She tells her father that she seems to be resigned to this, but she would like to be left alone for a couple of months and to mourn that she hasn't seen a man, she hasn't been married, she's mourning her virginity. And the debate in the question comes in verse 39. At the end of the two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow that he had made.

The language is vague enough that some scholars suggest that he actually did not follow through with the vow. If he had, it would have said something like, he offered her as a sacrifice, he killed her before the Lord, or something to that effect. So some scholars try to soften the blow of this episode by suggesting that Jeff really didn't follow through with the vow after all.

It's hard for me to see that because it's pretty clear that the vow was to sacrifice whatever came out. As ambiguous as that term was, she was the one that came out. It's clear that she expected to be offered as a sacrifice.

He was distressed when she came out because now he realized he was going to have to do something that he did not want to do. And when the text says in verse 39, she returned to her father who did to her according to his vow that he had made. It's hard for me to see anything but he is following through on how the text is sort of inexorably leading us to that conclusion.

So, it seems this is a very tragic event, and Gideon, Jephthah, despite some good things that he did early on in opposing the Ammonites, ends spectacularly poorly. Just as Gideon sort of also is this flawed hero that we can see. So that's a sad ending to this story.

It seems to be then something that resonated in years to come in Israel. It says at the end of verse 29, she had never known a man. It became a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went year by year to lament the daughter of Jephthah of Gilead four days in the year.

So that became some repeated observance by which her memory was kept alive, and maybe the tragedy of that vow is remembered. Chapter 12, verses 1-7, tells us one more story about the conflict of Jephthah with Ephraim, an internal conflict with Israel. And Ephraim challenges Gideon, Ephraim challenges Jephthah in a manner

that in a sense echoes the challenge of Ephraim against Gideon back in chapter 8. Chapter 8, verses 1-3 is Ephraim challenging Gideon.

In the first instance, Gideon was able to mollify or pacify the Ephraimites to satisfy them, but here Jephthah did not, and so there's a civil war that erupts. The Ephraimites are defeated, and they really never played much of a role in the rest of the book or in much of Israel's history after this. There's an interesting little, small thing, kind of a trivial thing almost.

As part of the conflict, in verse 6, the Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan against the Ephraimites, and so they were guarding the fords, and it tells us when any of the fugitives of Ephraim said, let's go across, and they would ask them, are you Ephraimite or not? And if they said no, then they asked him to say a word, and this was a way to sort of verify if this person was on the right side or not. The word itself is not an important word. It just means an ear of grain or something.

Some scholars think it means something like a flowing stream, but the word is shibboleth, and the sh sound at the beginning is hard to say, we know that even in the modern day, people have a lisp sometimes and can't say certain kinds of sounds. So, it sounds like people's pronunciation of that, some would have said sibboleth with an s sound and some with an sh sound, and if the person said it wrong, they knew they were the wrong type. And so they would, if he said sibboleth, then he wasn't pronouncing it right, and he would be captured.

And eventually, in that battle, 42,000 Ephraimites fell, and there were six, and Jephthah judged Israel for six years, and he was buried himself. So that forms the end of the story of Jephthah, and kind of a mixed bag, kind of a tragic figure toward the end of his life. We now have the final verses of chapter 12, which is three more of the minor judges.

There are three quick notices, verses 8 to 15. Ibzan was the ninth judge. He was distinguished mainly, in verses 8 to 10, he was distinguished mainly by marrying off his 30 daughters to 30 foreigners, and that itself would be a negative thing.

I've mentioned that the judges themselves embodied some of this downward spiral of apostasy in the book. Most of the minor judges are just neutral characters, we don't know much about them, but here, just in a kind of a by-the-way comment, we see Ibzan sort of catering to or capitulating to the prevailing thing about intermarrying and intermixing with foreigners, and presumably importing the worship of those foreigners' gods even into his own family, it would seem. So that's, why he does not come across very well.

Interesting, for whatever it's worth, the number 30 figure is quite a bit in this section, because the judges that immediately preceded him, now Jephthah, ended up being



childless, so we don't know if he had other children, but earlier, remember, Yair had 30 sons, and the next judge, then this Ibzan, had 30 sons, kind of bracketing the childless Jephthah. So, it may be the reference to the 30 sons in the previous judge, and this one is to kind of highlight the tragedy of Jephthah's life, that he ends up with no children at all, because he sacrificed his only daughter. In verses 11 and 12, we have Elan, who judged Israel for about 10 years, then he died, that's all really we know, and then verses 13 and 15, Abdon, many children, he was rather well off, he had 40 sons, 30 grandsons, 70 donkeys, and so several of these judges seem to have gotten rich somehow in their professions, or were rich, but that's really all we know.

He's the 11th judge, and then the final judge is Samson, who comes in chapter 13 and follows. So, we will stop here and we'll pick up Samson in a separate episode. This is Dr. David Howard in his teaching on the books of Joshua through Ruth.

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