

Judges: Broken Heroes/Faithful God JUDGES 10:6-12:7 A War of Words

Judges 10:6-16 6Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of the Lord. They served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, and the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites and the gods of the Philistines. And because the Israelites forsook the Lord and no longer served him, 7he became angry with them. He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites, 8who that year shattered and crushed them. For eighteen years they oppressed all the Israelites on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead, the land of the Amorites. 9The Ammonites also crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah, Benjamin and Ephraim; Israel was in great distress. 10Then the Israelites cried out to the Lord, “We have sinned against you, forsaking our God and serving the Baals.” 11The Lord replied, “When the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, 12the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you and you cried to me for help, did I not save you from their hands? 13But you have forsaken me and served other gods, so I will no longer save you. 14Go and cry out to the gods you have chosen. Let them save you when you are in trouble!” 15But the Israelites said to the Lord, “We have sinned. Do with us whatever you think best, but please rescue us now.” 16Then they got rid of the foreign gods among them and served the Lord. And he could bear Israel’s misery no longer.

Insincere Words of Repentance are No More than Manipulation (10:6-16)

Judges 10:17-11:11

17When the Ammonites were called to arms and camped in Gilead, the Israelites assembled and camped at Mizpah. 18The leaders of the people of Gilead said to each other, “Whoever will take the lead in attacking the Ammonites will be head over all who live in Gilead.”

11:1Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior. His father was Gilead; his mother was a prostitute. 2Gilead’s wife also bore him sons, and when they were grown up, they drove Jephthah away. “You are not going to get any inheritance in our family,” they said, “because you are the son of another woman.” 3So Jephthah fled from his brothers and settled in the land of Tob, where a gang of scoundrels gathered around him and followed him.

4Some time later, when the Ammonites were fighting against Israel, 5the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. 6“Come,” they said, “be our commander, so we can fight the Ammonites.”

7Jephthah said to them, “Didn’t you hate me and drive me from my father’s house? Why do you come to me now, when you’re in trouble?”

8The elders of Gilead said to him, “Nevertheless, we are turning to you now; come with us to fight the Ammonites, and you will be head over all of us who live in Gilead.”

9Jephthah answered, “Suppose you take me back to fight the Ammonites and the Lord gives them to me—will I really be your head?”

10The elders of Gilead replied, “The Lord is our witness; we will certainly do as you say.” 11So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them. And he repeated all his words before the Lord in Mizpah.

Opportunistic Promises Promote Selfishness over Faithfulness (10:17–11:11)

Judges 11:12–28

12Then Jephthah sent messengers to the Ammonite king with the question: “What do you have against me that you have attacked my country?”

13The king of the Ammonites answered Jephthah’s messengers, “When Israel came up out of Egypt, they took away my land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, all the way to the Jordan. Now give it back peaceably.”

14Jephthah sent back messengers to the Ammonite king, 15saying:

“This is what Jephthah says: Israel did not take the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites. 16But when they came up out of Egypt, Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and on to Kadesh. 17Then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, ‘Give us permission to go through your country,’ but the king of Edom would not listen. They sent also to the king of Moab, and he refused. So Israel stayed at Kadesh.

18“Next they traveled through the wilderness, skirted the lands of Edom and Moab, passed along the eastern side of the country of Moab, and camped on the other side of the Arnon. They did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was its border.

19“Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, who ruled in Heshbon, and said to him, ‘Let us pass through your country to our own place.’ 20Sihon, however, did not trust Israel to pass through his territory. He mustered all his troops and encamped at Jahaz and fought with Israel.

21“Then the Lord, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and his whole army into Israel’s hands, and they defeated them. Israel took over all the land of the Amorites who lived in that country, 22capturing all of it from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the desert to the Jordan.

23“Now since the Lord, the God of Israel, has driven the Amorites out before his people Israel, what right have you to take it over? 24Will you not take

what your god Chemosh gives you? Likewise, whatever the Lord our God has given us, we will possess. 25Are you any better than Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever quarrel with Israel or fight with them? 26For three hundred years Israel occupied Heshbon, Aroer, the surrounding settlements and all the towns along the Arnon. Why didn't you retake them during that time? 27I have not wronged you, but you are doing me wrong by waging war against me. Let the Lord, the Judge, decide the dispute this day between the Israelites and the Ammonites."

28The king of Ammon, however, paid no attention to the message Jephthah sent him.

Polished and Persuasive Words May be Convincing but They're Not Always True (11:12-28)

Judges 11:29-40

29Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites. 30And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands, 31whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."

32Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the Lord gave them into his hands. 33He devastated twenty towns from Aroer to the vicinity of Minnith, as far as Abel Keramim. Thus Israel subdued Ammon.

34When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of timbrels! She was an only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter. 35When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, "Oh no, my daughter! You have brought me down and I am devastated. I have made a vow to the Lord that I cannot break."

36"My father," she replied, "you have given your word to the Lord. Do to me just as you promised, now that the Lord has avenged you of your enemies, the Ammonites. 37But grant me this one request," she said. "Give me two months to roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry."

38"You may go," he said. And he let her go for two months. She and her friends went into the hills and wept because she would never marry. 39After the two months, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed. And she was a virgin. From this comes the Israelite tradition 40that each year the young women of Israel go out for four days to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

Desperate Bargains with God Detract from God's Victory (Judges 11:29-40).

Judges 12:1-7

1The Ephraimite forces were called out, and they crossed over to Zaphon. They said to Jephthah, "Why did you go to fight the Ammonites without calling us to go with you? We're going to burn down your house over your head."

2Jephthah answered, "I and my people were engaged in a great struggle with the Ammonites, and although I called, you didn't save me out of their hands.

3When I saw that you wouldn't help, I took my life in my hands and crossed over to fight the Ammonites, and the Lord gave me the victory over them. Now why have you come up today to fight me?"

4Jephthah then called together the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. The Gileadites struck them down because the Ephraimites had said, "You Gileadites are renegades from Ephraim and Manasseh." 5The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan leading to Ephraim, and whenever a survivor of Ephraim said, "Let me cross over," the men of Gilead asked him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he replied, "No," 6they said, "All right, say 'Shibboleth.'" If he said, "Sibboleth," because he could not pronounce the word correctly, they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand Ephraimites were killed at that time.

7Jephthah led Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in a town in Gilead.

Envy and Selfish-Ambition Lead to Division and Destruction (Judges 12:1-7).