

JUDGES 10-12

"Choices"

Last week we viewed the life of Abimelech.

A self-appointed leader with selfish motives and no real desire to follow or serve the Lord.

His choices brought death to his people and death to himself.

That chapter causes us to wonder about the leadership then and today.

How we can make a difference in this world today?

I want to encourage you that our choices can make a difference.

Romans 13:1-2

Let every soul be subject to the governing authorities. For there is no authority except from God, and the authorities that exist are appointed by God.

Therefore, whoever resists the authority resists the ordinance of God, and those who resist will bring judgment on themselves.

No matter who is in leadership, whether a godly or ungodly person. God is in control!

We can sometimes choose to be so critical of leadership. We all can look upon decisions made by any leader and wonder, why would God allow this to happen?

I am not saying that we shouldn't question and hold people accountable. We are to do those things. But we are held accountable for the decisions we make we must choose to deal with these situations in a godly way.

Romans 13:8-10

Owe no one anything except to love one another, for he who loves another has fulfilled the law.

For the commandments, "You shall not commit adultery," "You shall not murder," "You shall not steal," "You shall not bear false witness, You shall not covet, and if there is any other commandment, are all summed up in this saying, namely, "You shall love your neighbor as yourself."

Love does no harm to a neighbor; therefore, love is the fulfillment of the law.

We often are more concerned about what others are doing and less concerned about our own actions.

Let us as believers in Jesus, represent the Lord well. This is a choice!

We will all stand before the Lord someday and answer for one person and one person only, ourselves. Not what the guy at work has done, not what a politician has done, our friends or boss. We will answer for our choices and actions.

Let's move forward in love and respect for others. And we saw in chapter 9, Abimelech was out for #1, himself. This is not how the believer in Jesus should act.

Judges 10:1-2

After Abimelech there arose to save Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in the mountains of Ephraim.

He judged Israel twenty-three years; and he died and was buried in Shamir.

There are some great names here if you know anyone that is about to have a baby.

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Tola, Puah, Dodo? Dodo means "His beloved"

We do not get much information about Tola other than he judges Israel for 23 years.

Judges 10:3-5

After him arose Jair, a Gileadite; and he judged Israel twenty-two years.

Now he had 30 sons who rode on 30 donkeys; they also had 30 towns, which are called "Havoth Jair" to this day, which are in the land of Gilead.

And Jair died and was buried in Camon.

Jair was a wealthy man; chances are a man with many wives having 30 sons. Each of his sons had property. Jair judged for 22 years.

So for almost 50 years, it appears that Israel is doing something right.

But then our repeated theme comes again:

- Sin
- Suffering
- Supplication
- Salvation

Judges 10:6-8

Then the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the people of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him.

So the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the people of Ammon.

From that year they harassed and oppressed the children of Israel for eighteen years—all the children of Israel who were on the other side of the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, in Gilead.

Israel stops worshipping Jehovah God and picks up 7 other gods from the surrounding nations.

- **Baal**-a weather god and associated with financial success.
- **Ashtoreths**-goddesses related to fertility, sex, love and romance.
- **Syria**-Canaanite gods
- **Sidon**-hunting, provision
- **Moab**-Lot's son with his oldest daughter, this god was Chemosh (k-mowsh), meaning destroyer.
- **Ammon**-this god was Molech, practicing child sacrifice.
- **Philistines**-the god Dagon of fertility and agriculture

Israel took on the gods of the neighboring nations around them, it was as if they were conforming to the popular culture and doing what everyone else did.

This lesson of Israel's worship of neighboring gods should remind us that the church is often in danger of following or worshipping what the world follows or worships.

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Vs 7

So the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the people of Ammon.

This rebellion of Israel brings the Lord to do something.

God is just and the Lord told them because of their covenant with Him, that if they broke the covenant, there would be consequences. God's anger is just, Israel is breaking the covenant.

So here are the consequences.

Ammon is east of the tribe of Gad, east of the Jordan river.

Gilead is a mountain range just east of the river as well.

It seems the tribe of Gad has been overtaken.

So the region of Gilead was now under attack and the Ammonites were crossing the Jordan to attacking Ephraim, Manasseh and Benjamin. This goes on for 18 years!

Judges 10:10-15

And the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, "We have sinned against You, because we have both forsaken our God and served the Baals!"

So the LORD said to the children of Israel, "Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites and from the people of Ammon and from the Philistines?"

Also the Sidonians and Amalekites and Maonites (ma-own-ites) oppressed you; and you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hand.

Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore, I will deliver you no more. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress."

And the children of Israel said to the LORD, "We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best to You; only deliver us this day, we pray."

The Lord has proven Himself faithful, every time in the past!

I think we can read this and forget how easy it is for us to let the challenges of life get in our way and lead us away from our relationship with God.

When things are going good, we have no need for God.

When things get bad, we are crying out to Him for deliverance.

It makes me wonder sometimes. Do you know anyone that just seems to have consistent drama in their lives? IF anything in their live gets better, they immediately fall back into sin again and the drama continues? Any application?

Just a thought.

So the Lord tells them,

Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore, I will deliver you no more. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress."

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This is harsh, but it is very true.

We will forsake the Lord in an area of lives. Then when that thing we have invested in leaves us high and dry. We are puzzled at why we are in such distress. We made a bad choice!
We have reaped what we have sown....

This time for Israel, God tells them to let the gods they have worshipped take care of them.

And they respond:

"We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best to You; only deliver us this day, we pray."

It's almost as if they are saying: Hey God, we have wronged you, just do whatever to us, but please help us.

But are they being cynical?

They not only ask the Lord for help, they make a choice to do something to change their situation.

Judges 10:16

So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD. And His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel.

True repentance is a wonderful thing that speaks volumes to the Lord, to our friends and family and to us!

2 Corinthians 7:9-10

Now I rejoice, not that you were made sorry, but that your sorrow led to repentance. For you were made sorry in a godly manner, that you might suffer loss from us in nothing.

For godly sorrow produces repentance leading to salvation, not to be regretted; but the sorrow of the world produces death.

Paul had confronted sin in the church in his 1st letter to Corinth. And they responded with repentance.

So often people are sorry because they got caught or because of the consequences of what they have done. But true repentance is for the sin itself.

True repentance, restores our broken relationship with God.

And GOD chooses to do something, why? Because His heart is for His people!

When we truly repent, God will move on our behalf!

2 Chronicles 7:14

"if My people who are called by My name will humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven, and will forgive their sin and heal their land.

Israel's repentance moved the Lord to provide relief.

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Judges 10:17-18

Then the people of Ammon gathered together and encamped in Gilead. And the children of Israel assembled together and encamped in Mizpah.

And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another, "Who is the man who will begin the fight against the people of Ammon? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

Ammon is getting ready to invading the region of Gilead (Gad), so the leaders get together and try to figure out a plan.

Judges 11:1-3

Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, but he was the son of a harlot; and Gilead begot Jephthah.

Gilead's wife bore sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out, and said to him, "You shall have no inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman."

Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and dwelt in the land of Tob; and worthless men banded together with Jephthah and went out raiding with him.

Our next judge is introduced.

Jephthah has an interesting past, a past that is more against him than for him.

- The son of a harlot (Gilead, his dad wasn't faithful to his wife)
- His half-brothers run him out of town.
- What family he has, disowns him.
- He is on the run, with a bunch of **worthless men** (sounds like the guys that hung out with Gideon).

Judges 11:5

And so it was, when the people of Ammon made war against Israel, that the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob.

Tob is an area east, almost to the border between Gad and Ammon.

Jephthah and his worthless men were probably raiding in Ammon.

This could be where he gets a reputation of a man of valor and why the people of Gilead want him to lead in battle.

Judges 11:6-8

Then they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our commander, that we may fight against the people of Ammon."

So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me, and expel me from my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?"

And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "That is why we have turned again to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the people of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

We find out, not only did his brothers run him out of town but the elders of the town as well. Is there way of apologizing?

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Judges 11:9-10

So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you take me back home to fight against the people of Ammon, and the LORD delivers them to me, shall I be your head?"

And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The LORD will be a witness between us, if we do not do according to your words."

So if Jephthah fights and wins, he is the head? That's an interesting negotiation strategy. Yet the elders agree to it. They are desperate.

It is an interesting negotiation for Jephthah. They need him, he doesn't need them.

This is the art of buying or purchasing.

You always buy *in distress*, someone else's.

You will always get a deal when someone NEEDS to sell.

If you are in distress and NEED to buy; you might end up paying more for the product of service.

Judges 11:11

Then 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 in Mizpah.

Now we might just read thru this verse but the place of Mizpah has value.

Laban had swindled Jacob into serving him and for his daughters Rachel and Leah for over 20 years. Laban prospered because of Jacob.

Jacob finally had enough and he packed his family and left. ***Genesis 31:43-52.***

Laban comes after him and ***Mizpah*** was the site where Jacob and Laban made an agreement.

They made a stack of rocks and ate a meal and made a covenant with each other.

Mizpah means *"May the Lord watch between you and me when we are not together."*

So Jephthah is running the show, let's see what choices he makes.

Judges 11:12-13

Now Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon, saying, "What do you have against me, that you have come to fight against me in my land?"

And the king of the people of Ammon answered the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Israel took away my land when they came up out of Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok, and to the Jordan. Now therefore, restore those lands peaceably."

Jephthah chooses to find out exactly why Ammon is attacking.

He is not as much of a scoundrel as you might think.

He knows his history. He knows the scriptures.

Jephthah sends messengers back explaining to them their real problem.

Israel didn't take land from Moab or Ammon.

When they came up from Egypt, as they passed thru Edom they asked for permission to pass thru. The king of Edom said no.

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So they went around Edom and Moab and camped at Arnon.
They then asked Sihon king of the Amorites for passage thru.
Go to verse 20.

Judges 11:20-22

'But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory. So Sihon gathered all his people together, encamped in Jahaz, and fought against Israel.

'And the LORD God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them. Thus Israel gained possession of all the land of the Amorites, who inhabited that country.

'They took possession of all the territory of the Amorites, from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan.

See where this is going? Israel defended themselves against the Amorites. When Israel defeated the Amorites, they took possession of what they had. Which included the land of Ammon.

Judges 11:23-24

'And now the LORD God of Israel has dispossessed the Amorites from before His people Israel; should you then possess it?

'Will you not possess whatever Chemosh (k-mowsh) your god gives you to possess? So whatever the LORD our God takes possession of before us, we will possess.

This is awesome! Jephthah lays out the true battle!
The battle between God and Chemosh (k-mowsh).

Judges 11:25-26

And now, are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive against Israel? Did he ever fight against them?

While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and its villages, in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities along the banks of the Arnon, for 300 years, why did you not recover them within that time?

So if this is bothering you so much, why have you not done anything for the past 300 years?

Judges 11:27-28

'Therefore I have not sinned against you, but you wronged me by fighting against me. May the LORD, the Judge, render judgment this day between the children of Israel and the people of Ammon.'

However, the king of the people of Ammon did not heed the words which Jephthah sent him.

Jephthah again puts this before the Lord.

This is faith! Jephthah makes the choice to trust the Lord and he is certain that he is in the right and he is willing to accept that whatever happens, the decision is the Lord's.

So the spirit of the Lord falls on Jephthah and he is moving to fight Ammon.
And as this is happening, he chooses to make deal with God.

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How often are we on one hand, so sure of the Lord and what He is going to do, then on the other hand, we decide to barter with God.

"Hey God, if you get me thru this, I will do _____."

Ecclesiastes 5:4-5

When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it;

For He has no pleasure in fools.

Pay what you have vowed—

Better not to vow than to vow and not pay.

This advice from Solomon is very interesting, why?

Leviticus 19:12

'And you shall not swear by My name falsely, nor shall you profane the name of your God: I am the LORD.

Swear means to take an oath or a vow.

How often have you heard someone say?

- I'm going to go on a diet.
- I'm going to quit smoking.
- I'm going to stop cussing.

They tell the world, taking a vow, then 2 days later. They blew it.

Remember Ecclesiastes? ***God has no pleasure in fools.***

God isn't honored when we vow, swear or promise something and then we don't keep it.

Matthew 5:33-37

"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform your oaths to the Lord.'

"But I say to you, do not swear at all: neither by heaven, for it is God's throne; nor by the earth, for it is His footstool; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

Nor shall you swear by your head, because you cannot make one hair white or black.

But let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No.' For whatever is more than these is from the evil one."

It is foolish for any of us to make an oath, take a vow or make a promise and then we don't do it. So if you are going to diet, then diet. If you are going to quit smoking, quit. If you are going to stop cussing, stop cussing. Don't set yourself up for failure by making a promise you cannot keep.

So let's see what Jephthah is doing.

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Judges 11:30-31

And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, "If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering."

So Lord, if you let me win this battle, whenever I get home, the first thing that comes out my door is yours.

This seems fairly innocent, right?

Jephthah goes to war and wins.

He defeated 20 cities and verse 32 says ***with a very great slaughter.***

Judges 11:34-35

When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing; and she was his only child. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter.

And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he tore his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! You are among those who trouble me! For I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot go back on it."

It always amazes me how we read in the OT that people will make a oath to the Lord and do anything and everything to keep it. Yet they will not be obedient to the covenant that God has made with His people. I don't get it.

Now for you or I we must discern something here.

Could Jephthah have asked for forgiveness from God from his "bad choice" of making this ridiculous oath to God?

Is Jephthah going to sacrifice his child on the altar? Kill her for the Lord?

Jephthah's oath was foolish, and he should not have kept it.

He had no right to punish or afflict his daughter in any way because of the vow he made to God.

It was one thing to make and keep the vow when Jephthah believed that a cow or a sheep would come out of the house at his arrival; yet when his daughter came he should have immediately said, *"I have made a foolish vow, and it would be more sinful for me to keep it than to break it. I will repent before God for my foolishness."*

At the same time, **for the sake of principle only**, there was something wonderful about the spirit of Jephthah's willingness to keep his vows, even when it cost him something.

In this specific vow he was foolish and should not have kept it, but the tenacity of character that says, ***"I have given my word to the Lord, and I cannot go back on it"*** should be the word of every follower of Jesus Christ.

So very careful of what you promise the Lord!

Maybe we should just let our yes be yes, and our no be no.

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Judges 11:37-38

Then she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me: let me alone for two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains and bewail my virginity, my friends and I." So he said, "Go." And he sent her away for two months; and she went with her friends, and bewailed her virginity on the mountains.

Bewail means to cry or weep. She is going to weep because she will never bear children. Something that in this culture for a woman was extremely important.

In **1 Samuel**, Hannah would weep because she wanted a child. And she made a vow to the Lord.

1 Samuel 1:11

Then she made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a male child, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall come upon his head."

Hannah made the same vow to the Lord but for completely different reasons.

Judges 11:39-40

And it was so at the end of two months that she returned to her father, and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. She knew no man. And it became a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went four days each year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

There are a couple of different interpretations here.

1. One opinion is that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter on the altar.
and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.
2. The second have the opinion that Jephthah's daughter became a servant at the temple. Women serving in the temple were often older or widows. This view seems to make more sense with the wording ***and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. She knew no man.*** She was forever celibate serving in the temple for the Lord.

I believe it was the 2nd.

God made it very clear with Abraham that He would have nothing to do with human sacrifice. One of the worship practices for the god Molech was human sacrifice. God would NEVER accept this.

Judges 12:1

Then the men of Ephraim gathered together, crossed over toward Zaphon, and said to Jephthah, "Why did you cross over to fight against the people of Ammon, and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house down on you with fire!"

Does this sound familiar? Some 50-60 Ephraim said the same thing to Gideon.

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And they threaten Jephthah, ***We will burn your house down on you with fire!***"

Gideon responded with wisdom and calmed them down with his words.

Proverbs 15:1

A soft answer turns away wrath.

What does Jephthah say? This choice that he makes here is not good.

Judges 12:2-4

And Jephthah said to them, "My people and I were in a great struggle with the people of Ammon; and when I called you, you did not deliver me out of their hands. So when I saw that you would not deliver me, I took my life in my hands and crossed over against the people of Ammon; and the LORD delivered them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?"

Now Jephthah gathered together all the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. And the men of Gilead defeated Ephraim, because they said, "You Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraim and among the Manassah."

Jephthah takes a fight to them.

Ephraim's pride gets the best of them.

Jephthah proves something to Ephraim, they aren't as tough as they think they are.

Ephraim has crossed the Jordan to the east side. Jephthah attacks them and they are on the run. As Ephraim heads back to the fords to cross the Jordan, men of Gilead have arrived before them and they are trapped.

Judges 12:5-6

The Gileadites seized the fords of the Jordan before the Ephraimites arrived. And when any Ephraimite who escaped said, "Let me cross over," the men of Gilead would say to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he said, "No," then they would say to him, "Then say, 'Shibboleth!'" And he would say, "Sibboleth," for he could not pronounce it right. Then they would take him and kill him at the fords of the Jordan. There fell at that time 42,000 Ephraimites.

Shibboleth? Sibboleth?

Garage or Gar age?

So what started off as a battle to protect Israel then became internal. One tribe against another and 42,000 men of Ephraim are killed by their brothers of Gilead.

Judges 12:7

And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in among the cities of Gilead.

Jephthah is used by the Lord to defeat the Ammon.

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Yet his bad choices lead to a dumb vow that his daughter has to pay and civil war that leaves 42,000 men of Ephraim, dead.

He is in charge for 6 years then dies.

Our choices in life do make a difference!

We have 3 more judges in this chapter with very little information about them.

Judges 12:8-10

After him, Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel.

He had thirty sons. And he gave away thirty daughters in marriage, and brought in thirty daughters from elsewhere for his sons. He judged Israel seven years.

Then Ibzan died and was buried at Bethlehem.

Ibzan was wealthy, a BIG family and judged 7 years.

This is not the same Bethlehem that David or Jesus was from.

This Bethlehem was in the west part of tribe of Zebulun north of Megiddo.

Judges 12:11-12

After him, Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel. He judged Israel ten years.

And Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried at Aijalon in the country of Zebulun.

Zebulun is north of Manassah. 10 years

Judges 12:13-14

After him, Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel.

He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy young donkeys. He judged Israel eight years.

Then Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the mountains of the Amalekites.

Another wealthy judge. He judges 8 years.

Pirathon is a town in Ephraim

The choices we make are so vital to us and the people around us.

Choices to use a bucket of water on the fire or a bucket of petrol?

Which one will you use?

Choices that put the Lord first or that put ourselves first.

Will we choose to be patient and trust the Lord or will we choose to be selfish and think only of ourselves.

The choice is yours!