

## LESSON 13: Jephthah (part 2), Ibzan, Elon, Abdon, Samson (p1) JUDGES 12-13

JEPHTHAH DEALS WITH THE AMMONITES **Read Judges 11:12-28.**

Jephthah has sorted things out with his family, provisionally, and is established at Mizpah. Now he turns to deal with the Ammonites.

Jephthah's dealing with the Ammonites resembles something like a court case as Jephthah steps into his judge's shoes to deliberate the issue. Jephthah doesn't address the king of Ammon personally; he sends messengers (as a superior would address an inferior). The dialogue plays out between the king and the messengers.

9. What is Ammon's grievance against Israel?
10. What other territories do the Ammonites infringe on?
11. How does Jephthah build his case? What are his three main arguments?
12. What is Jephthah's conclusion? (v27)

JEPHTHAH'S VOW and VICTORY **Read Judges 11:29-40.**

13. What is Jephthah's vow and is it a rash vow?
14. What makes this episode with Jephthah's daughter so tragic?
15. The daughter submits willingly. Why? What does her reaction tell us about her values and view of God?

**Questions for Reflection:**

- Why would the deliverance of a people from the oppressor be conditional to the death of a person? Why would it have to be part of the picture?
- It is a horrifying thought to think of an innocent young girl put to death over what appears to be a rash vow. Are we as equally horrified at the thought of God putting to death His own Son to set us free?
- Was his daughter's sacrifice worth the price? What would you sacrifice for God's glory?

JEPHTHAH DEALS WITH THE EPHRAIMITES **Read Judges 12:1-7.**

**Note:** The name, Zaphon, means "north or northward." Most Bible versions will render this as a proper name, but the KJV will render it "northward." *"And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward, . . ."*

16. Of what does Ephraim accuse Jephthah?
17. The threat seems out of proportion with the grievance. What is driving this?

18. According to Jephthah, the Ephraimites accusation is unfair. How does he see it? (v2-3)
19. What do the Ephraimites imply when they say "You Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites and among the Manassites"? (v4)
20. The covenant at Mizpah demands a respect for boundaries. How does this theme of boundaries play out?
21. Jephthah delivered Israel from the oppressor, but did his effort bring rest to the land?

### PROFILE OF THIS OPPRESSION

Jephthah is dealing with oppression on three levels. What forms do the oppression take and what does it take to resolve them?

- 1) **Family level:** Be reconciled with a family who has dealt with him cruelly in the past. In this case, some barriers have to be overcome before reconciliation can happen.
- 2) **National level:** Deal with the foreign Ammonite oppressor who claims Israel has taken something from them and wants it back. He has to re-establish physical boundaries with the outside world. It plays out in a court-like picture of judgment being rendered, and then there is war.
- 3) **Congregational level:** Deal with the Ephraimites who are acting like Ammonites. They accuse him of taking what should have been theirs and come at him with threats. He judges them but because of their unrepentance, it ends in war.

### Questions for Reflection: Boundaries

We are faced with similar issues in regards to family, nation, or congregation.

**In regards to family,** we may face issues that require putting up boundaries or removing barriers to reconciliation.

- Have family members ever crossed boundaries with you? If so, in what way?
- Did you reset the boundaries? If so, how? If not, why not?
- How do you let family know when they have crossed a boundary with you?
- How does family let you know when you have crossed a boundary with them?
- Is a lack of reconciliation adding to the oppression in your life?

**In regards to Ammonites foreigners—the secular world**—we do not battle over a physical kingdom as Jephthah did. In this age, we battle to hold the borders of a spiritual kingdom against an Enemy who would impose his own kingdom and values on us. Though the battle is spiritual, we often find ourselves facing physical, worldly combatants.

- What kind of borders or boundaries do we fight to maintain against the secular world?  
*Definition of sin, in intrusion of secular worldview and ideologies.*

- Sometimes, we find ourselves in a fight over the right to physical things. Do we fight? If so, how do we fight? (Consider Matthew 5:38-42.) *We do not fight over the physical things of this world. They are transient, of no eternal value. God will give us what we need.*
- We may find ourselves fighting a secular world to maintain the right to practice our faith in regards to conscience. Where does the battle play out in this regard? *In courts of justice.*
- Sometimes we are called by national leaders to fight for a physical kingdom. Do we fight? (Note: This can be an area of heated debate for Christians and very much a matter of conscience, which is why much of the New Testament writings include a focus on relating to masters and those in authority over us. We will not discuss this, but it is an aspect of the faith that comes out in this narrative.)

**In regards to the congregation**, sometimes we are faced with combatant co-laborers. Instead of joining us in the fight to hold the borders against the outside world, they begin to view the body of Christ (the congregation/ministry) as a physical kingdom to be fought over. Or the fight between fellow believers may simply be over physical things.

- What is the source of the fighting, according to James 4:1-6?
- Fights with foreigner are sorted out in courts of law. How do we sort out this kind of fight within the body? **Read 1 Corinthians 6:1-11.**
- What should be our goal in any conflict with a fellow believer?
- When someone has accused you wrongly of something, how did you react—like a Gideon or a Jephthah?

## THE BIG PICTURE OF CHRIST IN JEPHTHAH

Israel in Jesus' day was a lot like Israel in Jephthah's day. There was an outside oppressor, Rome, but there was also a tremendous amount of oppression within Israel itself at a congregational level. They understood obedience, but had no heart for God. Their spiritual shepherds fattened themselves on God's flock. They walked according to what was right in their own eyes, and they afflicted one another even as Rome afflicted them. And God was watching. Into this hotbed of oppression, Jesus, like Jephthah, was born.

Jephthah's mother was a harlot; Mary would have been considered a harlot for having born a son out of wedlock and not by Joseph. Jesus, like Jephthah, suffered rejection by his own people. Jesus lived in exile for a period of time to escape Herod; He left Judea for a ministry in Galilee when His own brother's rejected Him.

There is a shadow picture of Jesus' triumphal entry in Jephthah's return to Mizpah. Jephthah's name means "he who opens [a way]; he who sets free or turns loose." Inherent in the name is the expectation of Jephthah being the one to set his people free from bondage from the oppressor. There is the same expectation of Jesus. While His own people hail him as king, their expectation of Him as king is that He would throw off the oppression of Rome as the Messiah and claim the physical kingdom—not that He would reconcile them to God through Himself. Jesus allowed Himself to be hailed as king, and when the

Pharisees object, He reminds them that if the people do not hail Him as king, the *galeel*—the stones who were the witnesses—would cry out. That was the agreement. Jesus' words evoke that picture of the covenant at Mizpah, which is a warning against crossing familial boundaries with the intent to do harm and not to afflict one another because God is watching.

The Pharisees, like the Ephraimites, contend with Jesus over His right to headship over His people at a national/congregational level. They charge him with horning in on territory that is rightfully theirs as spiritual leaders—that He and His followers are nothing more than renegades. They even raise the point of his less than honorable birth. The fight over words escalates to a physical fight as Jesus takes up a whip of cords, and in righteous anger and judgment, drives them out of His Father's house, just as Jephthah drove the Ephraimites out of his father's territory. It is a moment of reestablishing the boundaries.

The Ephraimites come to Jephthah in the wake of his victory and his daughter's death, and demand a greater place in the kingdom. I imagine Jephthah looked at them wearily and wondered if they would make the same sacrifice he had made to claim the inheritance they presumed to take by force. Similarly, among Jesus' own disciples, we see the argument over who is the greatest in the kingdom as if the kingdom were a physical thing. Jesus, knowing at what cost the kingdom will be delivered, questions whether they are willing to pay the cost he would have to pay to achieve it.

The least addressed oppression in Jesus' narrative is the fight with the external oppressor, Rome. His confrontation with the Roman authorities is brief. We see him on trial before Pilate in a conversation over the right to rule the kingdom and by whose authority.

The picture of Christ then shifts to Jephthah's daughter, and Jephthah's anguish is the anguish of God the Father Himself. The salvation of God's people is conditional upon Jesus' death on the cross, and Jesus fulfills his Father's vow to redeem His people by giving His life.

## Ibzan, Elon, Abdon                      JUDGES 12:8 – 12:15

These three judges follow closely on the heels of Jephthah's narrative and wrap into the big picture of Christ in much the same way Tola and Jair wrapped into Abimelech's narrative. Jephthah parallels the picture of Abimelech to an extent, while Jephthah's daughter is the counterpart to Tola in portraying Christ's death on the cross. Now we have a three-fold picture of the kingdom in Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon. Let's look at each one, and then consider their combined picture.

### IBZAN

1. What do we know about Ibzan?
  - What does his name mean?
  - Where does he live/die?
  - How long does he judge Israel?
  - What is he known for?

## ELON

2. What do we know about Elon?
  - What does his name mean? What does the root word mean?
  - What does Zebulun mean?
  - How long does he judge Israel?
  - Where does he die?

## ABDON

3. What do we know about Abdon?
  - What does his name/father's name mean?
  - Where does he live/die?
  - How long does he judge Israel?
  - What is he known for?

## ABOUT HEBREW NUMBERS

The narrative of these three judges dwells heavily on the use of numbers, which form much of the picture. The meaning of numbers in the Scripture is important, but their interpretation can go far afield, especially when studied from Jewish sources that incorporate elements of kabbalah and traditions. The best way to understand the meaning of numbers is to investigate them the way we look up Hebrew words, that is, look for where they are used in the biblical text and in what context, then draw some conclusions from that. I have summarized for you below the basic pictures behind the numbers in these judges' narratives.

**Seven:** Seven is the number of completeness and perfection (spiritual and physical). It marks the completion of creation week and is tied to the picture of sabbath rest.

**Eight:** Eight is one step beyond the completion represented by seven that marks a step into a new beginning. It is tied to the celebration of the Feast of Tabernacles which is a seven-day feast held over for an eighth day. The Feast of Tabernacles is associated with Messiah's kingdom (Zechariah 14).

**Ten:** Ten is one of the numbers representing completion, along with the number three, seven, and twelve. It represents testimony. In the book of Genesis, the phrase "God said" appears ten times which is testimony to His creative power. It represents the fullness of the law, in the giving of the ten commandments. It represents completeness of order, but also the fullness of judgment, as seen in the 10 plagues on Egypt.

*Note: Any number times ten represents a fullness of that number.*

**Thirty:** Thirty (3 x 10) is associated with the Hebrew letter, lamed, meaning teaching and enlightenment; it is also the redemption price of a bondservant, and beginning of ministry or service as priest or king (King David is an example).

**Forty:** Forty (4 x 10) represents the fullness of creation. It can also represent a generation. For example, Israel spent forty years in the wilderness until that generation was dead. It can also represent the fullness and completion of time or action, as in “forty days and forty nights” or the land having rest for forty years.

**Seventy:** Seventy (7 x 10) is completion in its fullness. The number, seventy, brings to mind Daniel’s seventy weeks as well as Jesus’ command to forgive not just seven times, but seventy times seven.

## THE PICTURE

The fullness of all things is invested in this three-fold picture of the judges.

**Ibzan** is the judge, brilliant in whiteness and enlightenment, who reigns from the house of bread—a place of blessing and provision—with an abundance of sons and daughters. Thirty evokes a sense of a kingdom full of light and enlightenment, even the fullness of the Godhead, and his seven years of service evokes the picture of physical and spiritual completion and perfection associated with sabbath rest.

**Elon** is the judge who is mighty in strength like the oak, the ram, or the strong man. He reigns from an exalted dwelling place. His resting place is the field of stags or mighty rams (this reinforces the imagery of his strength and majesty, even in death). His ten years of service denotes a completion with the added fullness of testimony, law, order, and judgment.

**Abdon** is the judge who has a duality in him as servant with a royal lineage. He is the servant, son of praise, son of the king. His kingdom encompasses the fullness of creation, generation upon generation of abundant life and prosperity associated with a Messianic kingdom that is also a kingdom of light. The picture in Abdon is tempered with servant pictures. There is the remembrance of the redemption price of a servant and marks the beginning of service for priest and the (Davidic) king.

In their combined expression, these three judges portray a Judge of majestic strength and wisdom and a kingdom in its fullest expression.

OPPRESSION #7 **Read Judges 13:1-25.**

1. Who are the Philistines and where are they generally located?
2. How long do they oppress Israel?
3. There has been a pattern of Israel crying for help and God answering. What happens this time?
4. The narrative begins at a place called Zorah.
  - The name Zorah (*Heb. tsorah*) comes from the root word, *tsirah*, meaning “hornet.” What is the purpose of the hornet? (Exod. 23:28, Deut. 7:20, Josh. 24:12)
  - *Tsirah* comes from the root word, *tsarah*, which means to be leprous. What is the connection between a hornet and leprosy—how are they alike in purpose?
 

The purpose of the hornet (*tsorah*):

The purpose of leprosy (*tsarah*):
  - In what sense is Israel leprous at this point?
5. The narrative begins with a man named Manoah. What does the name Manoah mean?
6. Why would the author want to remind us at this point that Israel still has a “sitting down” place in the Land (that their place in the kingdom is secure)? Because there is still hope.

**Questions for Reflection:**

- Which churches in Revelation 3 follow the model of leprous Israel pictured here?
- Why would these churches need that reminder that they still have a “sitting-down” place in the kingdom—a secure inheritance?
- Obviously, God no longer afflicts us with physical leprosy, but our spiritual “old man” can have a leprous quality about him. Paul says in Ephesians 4:17-19:

*“This I say, therefore, and testify in the Lord, that you should no longer walk as the rest of the Gentiles walk, in the futility of their mind, having their understanding darkened, being alienated from the life of God, because of the ignorance that is in them, because of the blindness of their heart; who, being past feeling, have given themselves over to lewdness, to work all uncleanness with greediness.” (NKJV)*

Blindness, being past feeling, being alienated from God—these are all “leprous” conditions.

- How does God drive hidden sin to light in our lives?
- What catalysts does He use? What form does the hornet take in our life?

## THE PROMISED SON

7. Manoah's wife is barren. The Angel of the LORD appears to her to announce she will have a son who will be devoted to the Lord's service from birth as a Nazirite.
  - Who else in the Bible follows a similar pattern?
  - What Nazirite rules must she follow?

*"... he shall begin to [chalal] deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines." (Judges 13:5b) "Shall begin" implies that Samson would not deliver Israel fully. That is the literal meaning of the statement, but there is a deeper nuance in the text.*

8. Look up the word, *chalal*, which is behind the phrase "began to."
  - What does *chalal* mean?
  - Look at how this word is used in these passages. Where do these "beginnings" lead?

*Genesis 6:1-2: "Now it came to pass, when men began to [chalal] multiply on the face of the earth, and daughters were born to them, that the sons of God saw the daughters of men, that they were beautiful . . ."*

*Genesis 9:20: "And Noah began to [chalal] be a farmer, and he planted a vineyard."*

*Genesis 11:6: "And the LORD said, 'Indeed the people are one and they all have one language, and this is what they begin to [chalal] do . . .'"*

*Numbers 25:1: "Now Israel remained in Acacia Grove, and the people began to [chalal] commit harlotry with the women of Moab."*

*Isaiah 53:5: "But He was wounded [chalal] for our transgressions, He was bruised for our iniquities."*

- How does Isaiah 53:5 illustrate *chalal*-ing?

The word ***chalal*** shows up four times in Samson's narrative (Judges 13:5, 25; 16:19, 22).

### Questions for Reflection:

Have you ever had a *chalal*-ing moment in life? Have you ever done something that seemed innocent or even right at the time, but in hindsight, you realize it started you down a path that didn't end so well for you?

- What prompted your decision to start down that path?
- If you had to do it over again, would you make a different choice?