

LESSON 12: Tola, Jair, and Jephthah

JUDGES 10:1-12:6

OPPRESSION #5 Read Judges 10:1-2.

1. What do we know about Tola?

- **When does Tola appear on the scene?**

In the wake of the devastation left by Abimelech and the men of Shechem.

- **Where is he from/where does he live?**

He leaves Issachar and comes to live at Shamir. **Note:** Shamir is not in Issachar but in Manasseh, in the mountain range that is generally referred to as the mountains of Ephraim. Shamir is very near Shechem where the narrative of Abimelech took place. (Judges 9)

- **What is his role(s)?**

He is a savior (moshia) and judge

- **How long did he judge Israel?**

23 years

- **What does his name/fathers' names mean?**

Tola, son of Puah, son of Dodo

- Tola means "worm"
- Puah means "splendid"
- Dodo means "beloved"

In other words, he is the beloved, splendid worm. What a perfectly awful name to name a child, and yet what a perfectly glorious picture this worm embodies.

The *tola* worm is referenced in Scripture a number of times because it is the source of the scarlet dye used in the Tabernacle fabrics and priestly garments (Tola is often translated not as "worm" but as "scarlet"). The scarlet from this worm is also used in offerings for cleansing from leprosy (Leviticus 14) and the defilement of death (Numbers 19:6).

On a less glorious note, the scarlet worm is symbolic of sin and a despised man.

"Come now, and let us reason together," Says the LORD, "Though your sins are like scarlet, They shall be as white as snow; Though they are red like crimson [tola], They shall be as wool." – Isaiah 1:18

*"How much less man, who is a maggot, and a son of man, who is a worm [tola]?"
- Job 25:6*

*"But I am a worm [tola], and no man; a reproach of men, and despised by the people."
– Psalms 22:6*

The picture of the *tola* worm. The worm is identified as “*coccus ilicis*” and is described by Henry Morris like this:

"When the female of the scarlet worm species was ready to give birth to her young, she would attach her body to the trunk of a tree, fixing herself so firmly and permanently that she would never leave again. The eggs deposited beneath her body were thus protected until the larvae were hatched and able to enter their own life cycle. As the mother died, the crimson fluid stained her body and the surrounding wood. From the dead bodies of such female scarlet worms, the commercial scarlet dyes of antiquity were extracted. What a picture this gives of Christ, dying on the tree, shedding his precious blood that he might 'bring many sons unto glory' (Hebrews 2:10)! He died for us, that we might live through him! Psalm 22:6 describes such a worm and gives us this picture of Christ. (cf. Isaiah 1:18)" (Henry Morris. Biblical Basis for Modern Science, Baker Book House, 1985, p. 73)

2. From what oppressor does Tola save Israel?

Abimelech reigned 3 years after his father Gideon, and then Tola arose after him. There is no indication of there being any other oppressor after Gideon's reign besides Abimelech. God's judgment against Abimelech and the men of Shechem sets a fire among the people, and when the fire finally burnt itself out, Shechem is left devastated.

- Did the death of Abimelech achieve peace? Does the death of any tyrant automatically end oppression?
- What usually happens when an oppressive leader dies and no new leader immediately steps into his place? Chaos reigns, or there is renewed fighting for the kingship.

A new leader is clearly needed, and God sends Tola. Tola left his home in Issachar to come to Shamir.

But that still doesn't answer the question of what oppressor Tola saves the people from. The answer lies in understanding the picture of Shamir.

3. Why Shamir? What is the significance of Shamir?

Shamir is the proper name derived from the root word, *shamir*, which means **thorns** in the sense of something **sharp, hard, or flinty** – that which pricks or cuts.

The word, *shamir*, is used most often in Isaiah to describe the effects of the Lord's judgment against a nation – Israel as a whole (Isaiah 5:5-7, 7:23-25), but also Samaria in particular (Isaiah 9:18), as well as Assyria (Isaiah 10:17). Consider the following verses:

"For wickedness burns as the fire; It shall devour the briers [shamir] and thorns, And kindle in the thickets of the forest; They shall mount up like rising smoke. Through the wrath of the LORD of hosts the land is burned up, and the people shall be as fuel for the fire; no man shall spare his brother." – Isaiah 9:18-19

"And now, please let Me tell you what I will do to My vineyard: I will take away its hedge, and it shall be burned; and break down its wall, and it shall be trampled down. I will lay it waste; It shall not be pruned or dug, But there shall come up briers [shamir] and thorns. I will also command the clouds that they rain no rain on it. For the vineyard of the LORD of hosts is the

house of Israel, and the men of Judah are His pleasant plant. He looked for justice, but behold, oppression; for righteousness, but behold, a cry for help.” – Isaiah 5:5-7

“It shall happen in that day, that wherever there could be a thousand vines worth a thousand shekels of silver, it will be for briers [shamir] and thorns. With arrows and bows men will come there, because all the land will become briers [shamir] and thorns. And to any hill which could be dug with the hoe, you will not go there for fear of briers [shamir] and thorns; but it will become a range for oxen and a place for sheep to roam.” – Isaiah 7:23-25

Where the word, *shamir*, is used in the Old Testament, it is most often in reference to a place being laid to waste, where judgment has come. A fire has swept through the land, destroying all the good vineyards, and in their place, thorns and briers [*shamir*] spring up again. The land becomes a hard, thorny place that is unfruitful and difficult to live in.

A place can become so overgrown with shamir that the only way to redeem the land is to set it on fire and burn it again. And so begins the curse of this vicious circle of oppression – devastation – thorns – oppression – devastation – thorns.

There are two conditions that God’s people fall into going into this time of devastation, and those conditions begin the events that land the people among the *shamir* and thorns.

4. **Read Isaiah 32:9-15 and Zechariah 7:12. How is the condition of the people described?**

Isaiah 32:9-15 describes a **people at ease who have become complacent**, upon whom judgment falls suddenly and they are laid waste. They weep for the fruitful field which have become desolate fields of *shamir*.

Zechariah 7:12 describes a **people who have “made their hearts like flint [shamir], refusing to hear the law and the words which the LORD of hosts had sent by His Spirit through the former prophets.”** And so God’s wrath burns against them, they fall under judgment, and their land is left desolate and given to brier and thorns.

Complacent people. People whose lives are occupied with pursuits after pleasure or riches.

Hardened people. People who have hardened themselves to God, and as a result, fall on hard times and have now become occupied with difficulties, needs, and sorrow.

Jesus talks about believers who fall into thorny places in life, whose lives get overgrown by *shamir*.

“And some fell among thorns, and the thorns sprang up with it and choked it . . . Now the ones that fell among thorns are those who, when they have heard, go out and are choked with cares, riches, and pleasures of life, and bring no fruit to maturity.” - Luke 8:7, 14 NKJV

5. **How do you deal with a land overgrown with *shamir* that seems unredeemable?**

The only way to deal with the brambles is to set them on fire and purge the land.

The problem began with the people being disobedient and pursuing what was right in their own eyes. They became preoccupied with pursuing things in this life by the Baal and Ashtoreth way and had no intention of returning to God or God’s ways.

6. How do you redeem a preoccupied and unrepentant people?

Abimelech (the bramble king, Judges 9:14-15) and the men of Shechem stand as examples of those who are positionally in the Land and yet have fallen away and become so unrepentant that the only solution is for the Lord to consume them – or have them consume each other. The resulting overthrow is likened to a fire burning through the people.

The overthrow that these men experienced can become our experience as well if we follow the same path. (*Hebrews 6:4-8*)

God must deal with our unrepentance – whether it comes from complacency or hardness of heart. He may need to set a fire in our lives to clear out the thorns that choke us, and it will be a devastating overthrow of our lives.

There are those who never repent, but those that *do* repent often face the brier and thorns (cares and sorrows) that spring up as a consequence and overrun their devastated life. Life gets thorny. Life becomes a different kind of difficult and just as oppressive, *even when there is no actual oppressor in their life*. But God doesn't leave them to deal with the devastation alone. For those who repent and return to Him, He is also a Savior who comes to their place of thorns and helps them rebuild.

THE PICTURE:

In the wake of the devastation caused by Abimelech, the bramble king, and the Shechemites, we have Tola, God's savior and judge who comes to Shamir, the place of thorns, and dwells alongside those people recovering from a devastating judgment.

Tola did not come to save them from an outside oppressor as the other judges had done, but to save them from the devastation their own behavior had brought on them as a result of having chosen the bramble king to rule over them and so falling under the curse.

He ruled and judged Israel, dealing with their issues and providing instruction, for 23 years. He is a picture of Christ as Savior, but also the Holy Spirit as helper.

This judge embodies the hope of renewed fruitfulness and peace after the devastation – something we can experience when God brings us out of our oppressions and begins to restore our lives. But this rebuilding can only happen when we return to Him through the Savior.

THE PROFILE:

Through this study of Judges, we have been talking about oppressions and how we get into them. There are oppressions that we cause by our own decisions and actions, and we can get caught up in the *shamir* and thorns for that reason. But life can be thorny for those who are in the middle of an oppression not of their own making. Believers can get caught up and become collateral damage in the wake of other people's disobedience, like the people of Thebez in Abimelech's narrative.

Life can also be thorny for those coming out of that oppression – those who are faced with a life that has been devastated as a consequence of sin and are trying to get back on track with God and make something fruitful out of what has become a field of thorns. In the end it takes an out-pouring of the Spirit to make those lands fruitful again, as it says:

It also takes the work of a Savior who stepped into the gap and brought stability and a return to the right path. Tola the worm offers the picture of a particular experience of life—the return of a devastated people through the work of a savior and the beginning of hope for the future. Ultimately it is the picture of the kingdom to come and the reward granted to those who press on.

Questions for Reflection

Consider the cycle of the shamir: disobedience and unrepentant sin ➡ oppression ➡ devastation ➡ shamir and thorns. Do you feel you are caught somewhere in this pattern?

- If you are feeling oppressed, have you considered where the oppression began? Is there something you need to deal with or repent of?
- Does the oppression or conflict involve something you have been pursuing?
- What effect is it having on your life and the lives of those around you?

There are right and wrong kinds of pursuit, and right and wrong ways to pursue the crown (reward). When Abimelech could not realize his desire by godly means, he pursued it by taking the Canaanite path. He took his crown by force, but did not keep it. In doing so, he brought the people into oppression.

- Oppression leads to devastation, which is a consequence of sin and judgment (whether on your or another person's part). Have you experienced devastation in your life? Has life become thorny for you in the aftermath? If so, in what way?
- Is it worth it to you to deal with the thorns in order to get back on a godly path and find some peace and fruitfulness? Or is it easier to live in a thorny place by finding your own ways to cope?
- Now that the Savior, Jesus, has been realized, how does He play a part in breaking this cycle of oppression?
- Has the Savior come alongside you in your place of thorns and brought you comfort or restoration? If so, how?

We can suffer oppression for following a godly path in life, in which case we endure the hardship and are rewarded with crowns in the coming Kingdom. But we can get sucked into the oppression caused by other people doing what is right in their eyes and falling into sin.

- Have you become occupied by someone else's oppression? If so, now that you are in this thorny place, how do you get out?
- Should you get out? Might there be a purpose in God's eyes for staying where you are?

God sent Tola to live and die in the place of Shamir for the sake of helping the people living in those conditions.

- Can you look beyond your own condition to help others suffering under the same conditions?
- How does being in that thorny place yourself make you more able to help those people?

JAIR

Read Judges 10:3-5.

1. **What do we know about Jair?** Jair the Gileadite, from the tribe of Manasseh (Num 32:41)

- **What does his name mean?** “he who God enlightens”
- **What is he known for?**

He has 30 sons (a measure of personal fruitfulness), who ride 30 donkeys (a measure of prosperity), and they have 30 towns called Havoth Jair (a relative kingdom).

Thirty, in Jewish tradition, is associated with kingship. Thirty is also the number associated with the Hebrew letter, *lamed*, which comes from the root, *lamad*, meaning to teach or enlighten.

The three sets of “30” paired with the meaning of Jair’s name gives us a picture of a ruler who enlightens – brings judgment and understanding – to his people.

- **What is his role?** Judge only
- **How long did he judge Israel?** 22 years
- **Jair dies and is buried at Camon. What does Camon mean?**

Camon means to be **risen, raised up**, or to **stand**, in the sense of being **exalted and established**.

THE PICTURE

Abimelech’s disobedience started the oppression and the fire that led to the devastation.

God called Tola, the savior and judge, to place of thorns to deal with a people who have come through the devastation of that judgment.

Now we have a follow-on picture of Jair, a judge who died and was buried and yet is “risen” – exalted and established. He reigns over a veritable kingdom, has many sons and vast wealth. His name suggests a picture of God’s light come upon a man. The man embodies that light, and he rules and judges in that light.

This sequence is a prophetic picture of Christ.

Before His death, Christ became the picture of Abimelech. Matthew 27:28-29 tells us:

“And they stripped Him and put a scarlet robe on Him. When they had twisted a crown of thorns, they put it on His head, and a reed in His right hand. And they bowed the knee before Him and mocked Him, saying, ‘Hail, King of the Jews!’”

For Christ, the true King, to assume the picture of the inglorious Bramble King is a cruel irony and a mockery. Even so, He takes upon his head that crown of thorns and with it, the curse that initiated the never-ending circle of oppression and devastation.

At His death, He then fulfills the picture of the tola worm who comes to save a people under that curse and caught in a place of shamir. He shed His blood on the wood of the tree that He might free them once and for all from the curse and thorns and restore them to abundant life.

He died, yet arose to be exalted and established, to reign as king and judge in the picture of Jair.

Oppression #6 (Judges 10:6-18)

1. Who does Israel serve? (v6)

They serve the Baals and Ashtoreths, but also the gods of Syria, Sidon, Moab, Ammon, and the Philistines. This is an all-out encroachment on Israel.

2. Who does God send to oppress them and how long does the oppression last? (v7)

The Ammonites and the Philistines. Note: the Philistines are on the western coast and classify as Canaanites; the Ammonites are on the eastern coast and outsiders. Israel is fighting an oppression on two fronts: east and west, internal and external. This goes on for 18 years. The Ammonites are going to take the forefront in Jephthah's narrative; Samson will deal with the Philistines.

3. What tribes are affected?

All of Israel that was east of the Jordan (in Gilead), but then the Ammonites cross over to fight Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim.

4. The pattern: God's response to the cries for relief until now?

- **Othniel and Ehud?** The children of Israel cry out, God sends a savior.
- **Deborah?** The children of Israel cry out, God sends a prophetess who engages a savior.
- **Gideon?** The children of Israel cry out, and God sends a prophet to tell them to do some self-reflection. Then God raises up a savior.
- **Now?** The children of Israel cry out. God has a conversation with His people. Tells them "I will deliver you no more. Go plead with your many gods for deliverance."

5. What causes God to relent?

The people put away their idols and served the LORD.

6. Where does the battle set up (17)?

The people of Ammon gathered together and encamped at Gilead. Israel encamped at Mizpah. The leaders of Israel seek the man who will lead the battle, with the additional condition that he will be "head" over them. What does "head" mean? Leader or chief, also a military commander.

Jephthah (Judges 11:1-11)

7. What do we know about Jephthah?

He is a son of the patriarch Gilead by a harlot. He is driven out of the family and goes to live in the Land of Tob (Ammonite territory), where worthless [empty] men gather to him and he becomes their leader. He goes about the country raiding.

- **Jephthah and Abimelech have similar pictures in their narratives. How are they similar and how are they different?**

- Both are stigmatized because their mothers are considered less than honorable. Abimelech was the son of a servant. Jephthah was the son of a harlot.
 - Both decamp from their father's house, though they retain their identity with their father.
 - Both gather to themselves bands of reckless and worthless men with whom they terrorize the surrounding area. Abimelech uses his army to slay the brothers with whom he has a grievance. Jephthah does not avenge himself, though he could.
 - Both are offered a rulership of sorts, but it comes about in different ways. Abimelech takes kingship by force. Jephthah is offered a lesser headship which he accepts.
 - Difference: Jephthah retains his identity with God, where Abimelech does not. ". . . if I fight and the LORD delivers them to me . . ." (v9) Jephthah gives the LORD the credit for the work Jephthah is tasked with.
 - "He spoke his words before the LORD at Mizpah." (v11) As he accepts the headship, he acknowledges that the LORD is the greater authority as judge and ruler of the people and he is accountable for his treatment of his brethren. Abimelech did not acknowledge any accountability.
- **What does his name mean?** "he who opens [a way]; he who sets free or lets loose"
 - **What is his relationship with his family like?** He is the black sheep of the family. His brothers have disinherited him—they only treat him like family when they want something from him.
 - **What reason do they give for turning (or returning) to him now? (v8)**
 So, the men of Gilead have a problem. The Ammonites are moving into the land and oppressing the people. They need a man with an army who will fight the enemy. (Funny that no one from their own ranks stepped up.) They don't go to Jephthah because they feel bad about how they treated him. They don't feel any conviction to make amends. They have a problem, they need a solution, and they need someone who is expendable and no great loss to the family if he fails. And they are willing to make some concessions to get it.
 - **What do they offer him as compensation? (v8)**
 Headship over Gilead—headship (rosh), not kingship (melech)
 If you were Jephthah, would you believe them? Jephthah expresses a little skepticism at this in verse 9.

8. Jephthah agrees, but he goes to Mizpah for the official contract-making. Why Mizpah?

- **What happened at Mizpah in the past here? (Gen. 31:48-52)**
Summary of Genesis 31: Jacob had an uncle named Laban. Laban is family through Jacob's father's line and by marriage, but he is a foreigner – a Syrian who does not serve Jacob's God.

Laban was an abusive father-in-law to Jacob. He tried to rob Jacob every chance he got. He dealt treacherously with Leah and used Rachel to extort more profit out of Jacob, and he had this mentality of “what is mine is mine, and what is yours is mine.” He was greedy and manipulative, and he yet demanded integrity from Jacob. (A lot like the world today when they deal with Christians.) When Jacob tried to get away from him, Laban came after him, and there is a confrontation at this place which has come to be called Mizpah for the covenant forged there.

Mizpah was the place where Jacob and Laban came to agreement over how to separate and how family relations would work going forward.

- **For what was Mizpah named?**

It was named for a heap of stones and a stone pillar that Jacob set up as a boundary and covenant reminder between him and Laban. The heap of stones was called Galeed, meaning “heap of witnesses” but also Mizpah meaning “watchtower”.

- **What were the two covenant conditions struck at Mizpah between Jacob and Laban?**

- 1) God will watch over Israel to see that they do not deal treacherously with their own family by afflicting them.
- 2) There is a boundary which family is not allowed to cross to do each other harm – to go to war with one another. Jacob adds this to the covenant, establishing a boundary to separate himself and his treacherous father-in-law.

Mizpah became the place where grievances and family issues get sorted out. It is a place where family makes covenants before God in regards to how family relations will work going forward, how they treat one another, and where boundaries are.

Like Jacob, Jephthah is faced with having to reconcile with his family who have treated him brutally in the past. Like Laban, the men of Gilead are claiming the familial relationship with Jephthah solely to use him. Jephthah takes the elders back to Mizpah to speak his covenant before the Lord claiming his headship over all of them. He speaks before the *galeed* (the heap of witnesses) and the *mizpah* (watchtower). If his brothers deny his headship, the stones will cry out.

Questions for Reflection

- If you were in Jephthah's shoes, how would you have responded?
- Why do you think Jephthah agreed to their proposal, knowing that his family was using him when their heart hadn't changed toward him?
- When reconciliation is desired, what barriers have to be overcome? (Think of the stumbling blocks to return: Seeking comfort in transient things, despair, fear, humiliation, destructive anger, silence, letting our dark side rule us.) In Jephthah's case: Shame and humiliation—for having been cast out of the family over something he could do nothing about. Anger—destructive anger that would lash back and seek revenge. Silence and withdrawal—tell them to go deal with their problems themselves. Fear of being hurt again—re-establishing trust.

Why doesn't Jephthah let fear of being hurt drive his response to his brothers? Because somehow, in spite of his circumstances, he has grasped the understanding of God's power and sovereignty and a vision of what is important—preserving the kingdom. He valued the headship and was willing to fight to gain it.

- Do we treat our Savior like this, wanting only a solution to the problems we get ourselves into without having a change of heart or even desiring to repair our relationship with Him first?

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. When dealing with an external enemy, a court of law is often required to settle the dispute.

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? *"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."* - Judges 11:13a

Ammon is laying claim to the territories of Reuben and Gad that Moses and the children of Israel took from the Amorites (Numbers 21:24-26) Israel took the Amorite land between the two rivers, but only as far as the border of Ammon. They didn't infringe on Ammon.

10. What other territories do the Ammonites infringe on? Judah, Benjamin, and Ephraim.

11. How does Jephthah build his case? What are his three main arguments?

- 1) To whom does he give credit for taking the land and to whom does the land ultimately belong? (v23-24) Jephthah gives a rather lengthy history of how Israel came to have claim over the area then presents his argument points in verses 23-27. God dispossessed the Amorites and gave it to Israel. He establishes God's sovereignty and Israel's right to the Land based on their relationship with God, then challenges the Ammonite god to take it if he wants it.

Point #1: This isn't a fight for territory between Ammon and Israel. It is a fight between Chemosh and God.

- 2) Jephthah brings up the point about Balak, who was king of Moab in the days when Israel took the land. Why bring up Balak? (v25)

Before the territories of Reuben and Gad belonged to the Amorites, they belonged to Balak, King of Moab. The Amorites took the land from Moab, so Moab would have the greater claim, and yet Moab did not dispute the territory.

Point #2: Moab has a greater claim to the territory than Ammon, but isn't disputing it.

Does Jephthah get his facts straight in regards to Moab not striving with Israel?

No, actually he doesn't. Balak was afraid that Israel would come after Moabite land and hired Balaam to curse them, but then Israel never knew about that. When the cursing didn't work, Moab conspired with Midian to lead the children of Israel into idolatry as a way of taking back the territory (if you can't beat them, get them to join you). But that didn't work either. Balak managed to hide his treachery against Israel.

- 3) How long has it been since Israel took over the disputed territory? 300 years have passed. Why did you wait so long? (Note: 300 years is a generalization. If you add up the oppressions and times of rest, the total comes to 316 years.)

12. What is Jephthah's conclusion? (v27)

"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." - Judges 11:27 NKJV

13. What word does Jephthah use for judge in verse 27? Shaphat. He defers his own station as head of Gilead, judge, and deliverer to the greater authority of the LORD.

JEPHTHAH'S VOW and VICTORY

Read Judges 11:29-40.

14. Is this a rash vow that Jephthah makes?

It is clear that Jephthah is devoting a person to death—the one who comes out of his house must be a person and not an animal. He leaves the selection of that person open-ended. If the LORD is the one avenging Israel, then the LORD is the one who gets to choose the sacrifice befitting the act.

It seems rash, and yet he makes this vow under the influence of the Holy Spirit.

15. What makes this episode with Jephthah's daughter so tragic?

Her innocence. The passage dwells very heavily on the emotion of the events as they play out. It belabors Jephthah's reaction to his daughter coming out the door to greet him, his daughter's response, even the community's response.

16. The daughter submits willingly. Why? What does her reaction tell us about her values and view of God? Her father has raised her to understand the sovereignty of the LORD. She understands that a vow must be fulfilled. She offers herself as a sacrifice of praise for the LORD's avenging of Israel.

17. 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?

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?
- Was his daughter's sacrifice worth the price?

- 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?
- Jephthah is named in the book of Hebrews hall of faith (Hebrews 11:32). When we look at this episode from God's eyes instead of human eyes, does it change our view of Jephthah's actions? Why or why not?

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, . . ."*

18. Of what does Ephraim accuse Jephthah? Not calling them to battle.
19. The threat seems out of proportion with the grievance. What is driving this? Arrogance, certainly. But also consider that the men of Ephraim were among those being victimized by the Ammonites, and their reaction when coming out of that oppression is one of destructive anger. But their anger is misdirected at Jephthah.

The stumbling block of destructive anger is pictured in Isaiah 63:3-5.

20. According to Jephthah, the Ephraimites accusation is unfair. How does he see it? (v2-3)
He called them to fight, but they did not respond, therefore he took his life into his own hands and fought without them. And God delivered the enemy into his hands.

Didn't Jephthah have more right to be angry than the men of Ephraim? Keep in mind, Jephthah has vanquished the enemy at great cost to himself. He has just put his only daughter to death in honoring the vow he made to deliver his people from their oppressor. And now he is faced with a squabble over who is greatest in the kingdom. I imagine he is looking at them, thinking, "You don't know what you ask for. Would you have been able to drink the cup that I had to drink to deal with this enemy?"

All they cared about was the glory. They scorned the cost. Now his own righteous anger breaks out against the Ephraimites.

21. What do the Ephraimites imply when they say "You Gileadites are fugitives of Ephraim among the Ephraimites and among the Manassites"? (v4)
"You belong to us. What is mine is mine, and what is yours is mine." They come at Jephthah with the same argument that the Ammonites used. They come at him like the enemy, so Jephthah deals with them as the enemy.
22. The covenant at Mizpah demands a respect for boundaries. How does this theme of boundaries play out?

The Ephraimites crossed the physical boundary of the Jordan to invade Gilead's territory for harm. It is an act of war. The Ephraimites crossed the boundary in the family relationship by fighting their own brethren and treating them like fugitives who deserve to be killed.

Jephthah re-establishes the physical boundaries, and then treats those who escape from the battle as fugitives to be killed. Who is the refugee now?

The test: Say “flowing stream” (shibboleth). The Ephraimites couldn’t pronounce the “sh” sound because of their dialect.

23. This is the second time the Ephraimites have voiced this grievance against their own countrymen. The first time was with Gideon. Compare Jephthah’s response with Gideon’s response (Judges 8:1-3) What two responses toward an accuser are modeled for us, and what is their outcome?

Gideon defused the situation with a soft, humble answer, which placated the Ephraimites but did not deal their bad attitude.

Consider the passing of time: 40 years of rest under Gideon, 3 years under Abimelech, 23 years under Tola, and 22 years under Jair = 88 years total. The men in Gideon’s day raised up succeeding generations with the same attitude, and each generation gets more arrogant, aggressive, and entitled than the previous generation. You might think that 18 years under the Ammonite oppression would have humbled them, but it doesn’t. Now, a victim mentality reinforces the attitude of entitlement. This is what Jephthah has to deal with.

Jephthah does not give his accusers a soft answer. He gets back up in their face with the truth, and he attacks the entitled attitude with destructive anger. God has appointed him judge over Israel, and he is modeling God in his judgment against the Ephraimites. The outcome is brutal but fair, and it comes at great cost to the “congregational” relationship.

24. Jephthah delivered Israel from the oppressor, but did his effort bring rest to the land? No. Israel does not experience rest after the days of Gideon.

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) **External enemy 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) **Nation 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.

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 invoke 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.