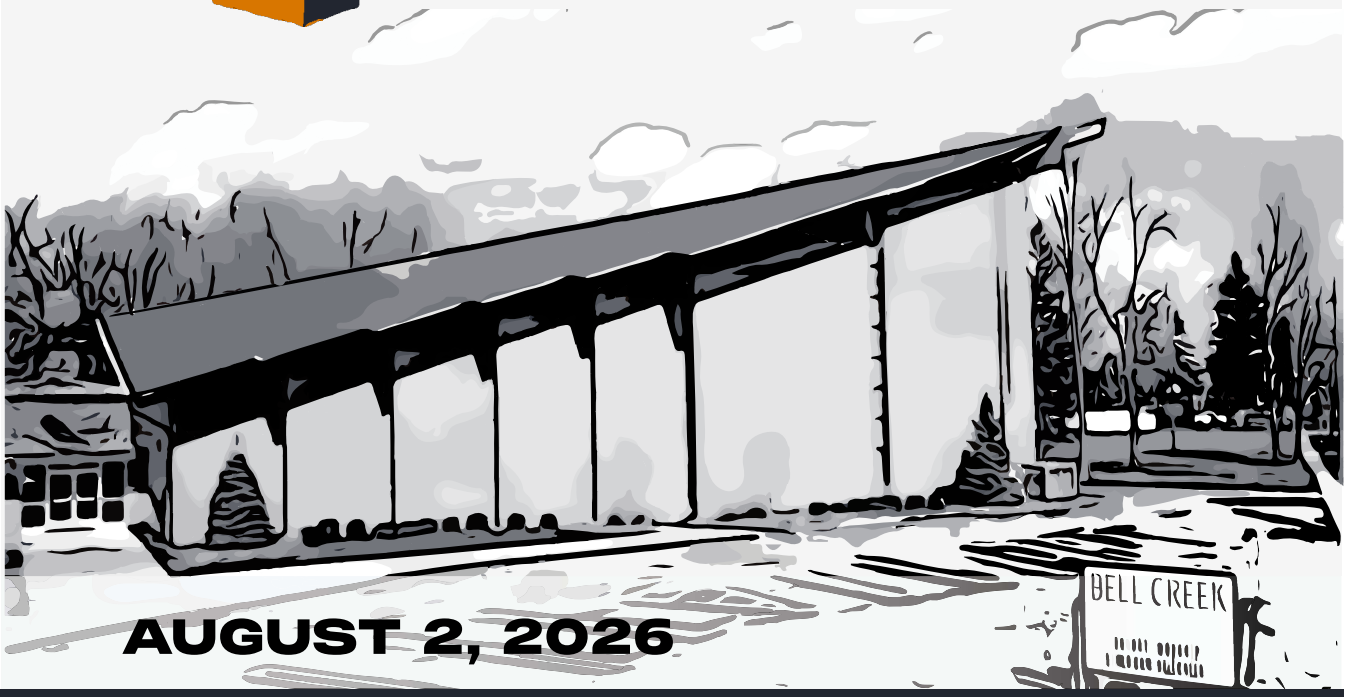
WELCOME TO

BELL CREEK
Community Church



AUGUST 2, 2026

JEPHTHAH – FAITH, FOLLY, FRACTURE
JUDGES CHAPTERS 11–12

SERMON BY: PASTOR FRED WRIGHT

CURRENT SERMON SERIES:
JUDGES–THE GOD WHO DELIVERS

JEPHTHAH — FAITH, FOLLY, FRACTURE

JUDGES CHAPTERS 11–12

Faith

Folly

Fracture

FOR NEXT WEEK

Read Judges Chapters 13-14.

DAILY CHRONOLOGICAL BIBLE READING

AUGUST 2: 2 KINGS 20-21
AUGUST 3: 2 CHRONICLES 32-33
AUGUST 4: NAHUM
AUGUST 5: 2 KINGS 22-23; 2 CHRONICLES 34-35
AUGUST 6: ZEPHANIAH
AUGUST 7: JEREMIAH 1-3
AUGUST 8: JEREMIAH 4-6

UPCOMING AT THE CREEK

DADCO

DadCo is a community just for dads that gives an opportunity to build real friendships, share honest advice on parenting and life, and helps dads find encouragement through monthly meetups and events. Whether you are a new dad or your kids are grown, DadCo equips you to thrive as a father, husband, and man–together in community! The ministry meets the first Monday of each month. Join us at our next gathering on Monday, August 3 at 6:30 PM in the Prayer Room. Please reach out to Alex Quint or email info@bellcreek.org to learn more.

KIDS' CREEK MIDWEEK

Children ages 4 through 4th Grade are invited to the Large Group Room to enjoy Bible Lessons, discussion, activities, worship, and games on Wednesday, August 5 from 6:30-7:45 PM. Please register your child at www.bellcreek.org/calendar to join us for the class. If you have any questions, please reach out to Rachel Nash (rachel@bellcreek.org) or Elyse Quint (elyse@bellcreek.org).

AS THEY GO PRAYER MEETING

Join our group of parents of adult children to pray together in the prayer room from 9:00-10:00 AM on Saturday, August 8. We will continue to meet every month on the 2nd Saturday of the month. Join us as we cry out to God in praise for the amazing gift our children are and cry out for guidance and mercy as they navigate life as adults. Please reach out with any questions to Kelly Salter (ksalter1122@gmail.com).

YOUNG ADULT MINISTRY

Our Young Adult group is now open for adults 18-30 years old! Our next gathering will be Sunday, August 9, after the second service in the Prayer Room. Join us for lunch, fellowship, games, and encouragement in our faith. Other gatherings and outings will be planned for various times throughout the year. Join us as we gather and build friendships with other young people in a fun and laid-back environment!

MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES

PRAYER MEETINGS

WEDNESDAYS 6:30 - 7:30 PM
FRIDAYS 12 NOON

PRE–TEEN & MIDDLE SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY

WEDNESDAYS 6:30 - 7:45 PM
SUNDAYS AFTER WORSHIP
2ND SERVICE

AWANA

WEDNESDAYS 6:30 - 7:45 PM
SEPTEMBER-MAY

HIGH SCHOOL BIBLE STUDY

SUNDAYS 11:00 AM

FIND OUT MORE ABOUT MINISTRY OPPORTUNITIES AND EVENTS AT BELLCREEK.ORG

OUR MISSION

MATTHEW 22:37–40

He said to him, “Love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul and with all your mind. This is the greatest commandment. The second is like it: Love your neighbor as yourself. All the law and prophets depend on these two commandments.”

MATTHEW 28:19–20

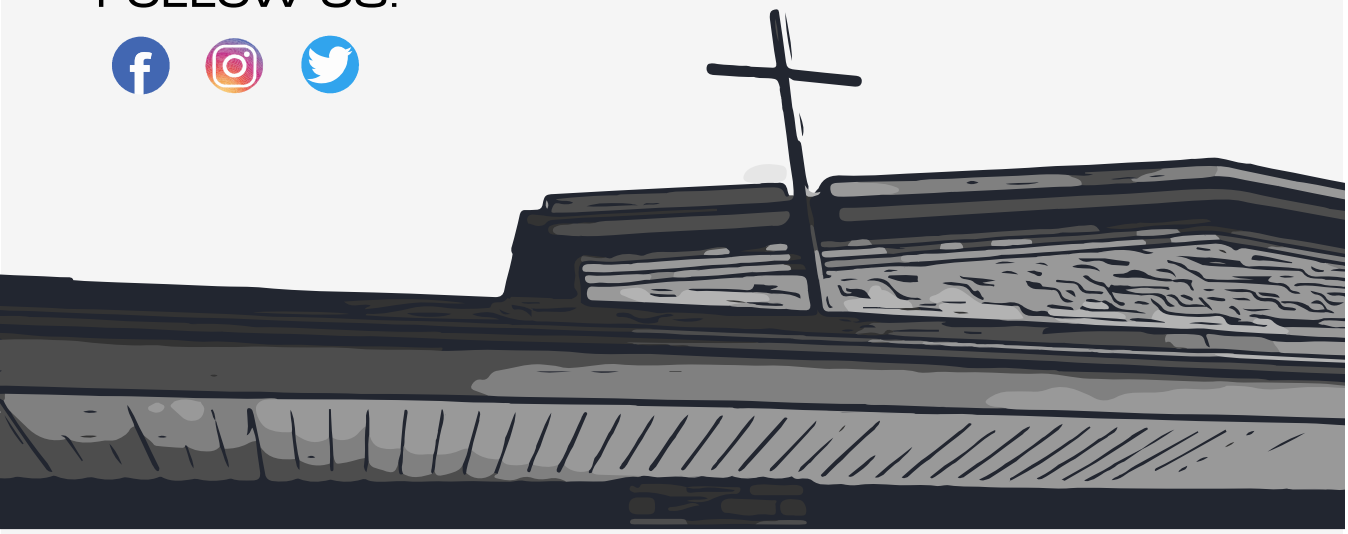
Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe everything I have commanded you. And remember that I am with you always to the end of the age.

STAY CONNECTED

WE HOPE TO SEE YOU HERE!

WWW.BELLCREEK.ORG/CONTACT–US

FOLLOW US!



BELL CREEK
Community Church

30000 FIVE MILE RD.
LIVONIA, MI 48154

Sermon Series | Judges – The God Who Delivers

Sunday, August 2, 2026 | Jephthah - Faith, Folly, Fracture

Judges Chapters 11-12

FAITH

Negotiations with Ammon (Judges 11:12–28)

"Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites and said, "What do you have against me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?"" (Judges 11:12, ESV)

> Ammon is gathering for war against Israel. Using Biblical history, Jephthah makes a detailed case to the King of Ammon that Israel took neither Moabite nor Ammonite land (God told the Israelites not to harass the Moabites or the Ammonites – they were distant cousins of Israel, descended through Abraham's nephew, Lot). When Israel was entering the promised land, Sihon the Amorite (Amorites and Ammonites are different people groups!) attacked Israel, and the LORD gave Israel the victory. Israel possessed the Amorite territory for 300 years. Jepththa then submits the dispute to the LORD as Judge.

"So then the LORD, the God of Israel, dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel; and are you to take possession of them? Will you not possess what Chemosh your god gives you to possess? And all that the LORD our God has dispossessed before us, we will possess." (Judges 11:23–24, ESV)

> Why does Jephthah bring up the god Chemosh? Jephthah is not confessing Chemosh is equal to the LORD. He is simply saying, "The LORD gave us that land, so be content with what your god has given you. It's kind of a dig at the weakness of Chemosh, but maybe also an acknowledgement that these idols have some supernatural authority. But Jephthah appeals only to the LORD as the true God and Judge (v. 27).

"I therefore have not sinned against you, and you do me wrong by making war on me. The LORD, the Judge, decide this day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon." But the king of the Ammonites did not listen to the words of Jephthah that he sent to him." (Judges 11:27–28, ESV)

> Jephthah's Main Argument: When Israel came into the land, they respected the territorial rights of Edom and Moab. The disputed land belonged to Sihon and the Amorites, not to Ammon or Moab, when Israel acquired it. The LORD gave the Amorites into Israel's hands and this is the grounds for Israel's possession of the Gilead territory. And besides? It's been 300 years! WHY are you fighting about this now, King of Ammon?
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> Jephthah's rehearsal is a small "history of salvation": The LORD defeated Sihon, King of the Amorites and gave his land to Israel. That history should produce gratitude and trust for God's past deliverances in Jephthah and the people of Israel.

FOLLY

The battle, the vow and the victory (Judges 11:29–33)

"Then the Spirit of the LORD was upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh and passed on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed on to the Ammonites." (Judges 11:29, ESV)

"And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, "If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering."" (Judges 11:30–31, ESV)

"So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them, and the LORD gave them into his hand. And he struck them from Aroer to the neighborhood of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim, with a great blow. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel." (Judges 11:32–33, ESV)

The Spirit comes upon Jephthah (Judges 11:29) to empower him for this battle!

But then Jephthah adds a bargain (Judges 11:30-31) as if the Holy Spirit's empowerment wasn't enough! He lapses into an idolatrous mindset. The idols, the false gods, and the demonic powers behind them require payback. They don't help you for free. Jephthah has forgotten the nature and character of the LORD. There is nothing he can do to coerce the LORD or twist His arm, or pay Him back for the empowerment of the Holy Spirit or His all-powerful help. The whole idea that "You do something for me and I'll do something for you, LORD," is a pagan idea. What do we do in return for the LORD'S help? We praise Him, we worship Him, we acknowledge that we are weak and He is strong, and we tell everybody what He has done for us. That's what it means to give Him glory.

God grants the Israelites a stunning victory (Judges 11:32–33); Jephthah's vow was never needed.

Note that the author of Judges compresses the entire battle into a few lines. Why? Because the Ammonites are not the main dramatic concern (!). The story shifts our attention from public victory to the consequences of Jephthah's vow. Note God's silence about Jephthah's vow and what is about to follow…

The tragic situation with Jephtha's daughter (Judges 11:34–40)

"Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah. And behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances. She was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter." (Judges 11:34, ESV)

"And as soon as he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to the LORD, and I cannot take back my vow."" (Judges 11:35, ESV)

"And she said to him, "My father, you have opened your mouth to the LORD; do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the LORD has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites."" (Judges 11:36, ESV)

"So she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me: leave me alone two months, that I may go up and down on the mountains and weep for my virginity, I and my companions." So he said, "Go." Then he sent her away for two months, and she departed, she and her companions, and wept for her virginity on the mountains." (Judges 11:37–38, ESV)

"And at the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow that he had made. She had never known a man, and it became a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went year by year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year." (Judges 11:39–40, ESV)

Did Jephthah sacrifice his daughter? Some who read this passage argue that she was consigned to lifelong celibate service at the tabernacle, which is why she and her friends mourned her lost opportunity to have a husband and a family.

However, when Jephthah made this vow, the Hebrew grammar suggests he expected to encounter a human coming out of his house and then offer that person as a sacrifice. It's clear that he just didn't expect it to be his own daughter!

The burnt-offering language in verses 30–31 and the fulfillment statement in verse 39, if taken in their most natural sense, indicate that Jephthah actually sacrificed his daughter. "Coming out to meet" someone is purposeful action, most naturally describing a person, not an animal.

This is very disturbing, and raises very disturbing questions! How is it conceivable that Jephthah, who was empowered by the Holy Spirit and was the instrument of deliverance for Israel, who was not ignorant of Israel's history or necessarily of the law of God, could do such a thing?

Let's remember, Jephthah lived a rough existence, leading a band of ruffians in Tob, where life was cheap. He was surrounded by an evil, brutal, pagan culture in which human and child sacrifice were considered a well-regarded means of compelling supernatural powers to do one's bidding. See 2 Kings 3:27, and note the many places in the Book of Jeremiah where the Lord is grieved by the child sacrifices perpetrated by His people.

The tragedy here is that Jephthah's knowledge of God did not translate into obedience to God. Given the culture he was immersed in, it seems he could convince himself that an evil, forbidden act was deeply pious in a crisis. So Jephthah got the Ammonites out of Israel, but there was still some Ammonite paganism in Jephthah.

Judges 11:35 Jephthah's folly: "I have opened my mouth to the LORD and I cannot take back."

A rash vow to do what God forbids is not binding and should have been repented of, not performed. Jepthah's corrupt theology, not his integrity, is what traps him. Zeal is not holiness when it disregards God's revealed will. And why didn't his daughter object? Why didn't the people object?

FRACTURE

"The men of Ephraim were called to arms, and they crossed to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, "Why did you cross over to fight against the Ammonites and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house over you with fire."" (Judges 12:1, ESV)

> The tribe of Ephraim's complaint is driven by pride: they must dominate, be consulted, and receive recognition. Jephthah, once treated as a nobody, has little patience for these self-important 'somebodies.' Unlike Gideon in Judges 8:1–3, he answers their pride with the sword rather than tact.

"And the Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan against the Ephraimites. And when any of the fugitives of Ephraim said, "Let me go over," the men of Gilead said to him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" When he said, "No,"" (Judges 12:5, ESV)

"they said to him, "Then say Shibboleth," and he said, "Sibboleth," for he could not pronounce it right. Then they seized him and slaughtered him at the fords of the Jordan. At that time 42,000 of the Ephraimites fell." (Judges 12:6, ESV)

"Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in his city in Gilead." (Judges 12:7, ESV)

End of Chapter 12 - Minor Judges (12:8–15)
Ibzan, Elon, and Abdon pass by quietly, and the author of Judges dwells on their many children and grandchildren (Ibzan's sixty; Abdon's seventy). That abundance is a silent rebuke: Jephthah destroyed his only child, severing his own line.

> What do we learn from Jephthah? He was a man who trusted God, and God used him mightily to rescue Israel from the Ammonites' threat. He was also a man who likely committed a horrible sin because he believed he had to. Could faith and the potential for awful, destructive acts coexist in the same person? Yes. And that is true of all of us.
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> Jephthah knew the Biblical history of God's people. He could recount what the Lord had done for Israel and he could defend Israel's claim to the land. But just knowing the Word of God did not mean that crucial portions of his mind had been renewed by the Truth of God. So, when the crisis came, Jephthah appears to have reached instinctively for a pagan solution. The beliefs of the surrounding culture had penetrated more deeply into him than he realized.
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> That should cause us to ask: What remains in us, God's people, from the world around us?

What have we absorbed from our culture that's false or destructive about who God is, or the value and dignity of human beings, marriage, family, work, success, power, money, sex, security? What have we absorbed that contradicts what God wants for us?

Where might we be attaching the name of God to attitudes or actions that God has actually forbidden?

What might seem perfectly reasonable to us resort to in a crisis just because everyone around us thinks the same way?

Even as committed Christians, we can still be terribly blind! And like Jephthah, sometimes we convince ourselves that our sins are justified because the situation is desperate and the stakes are high.

But here's Good News! Jesus is so good to us! He loves us. He came to forgive us, and save us from thoughts, actions, and habits that are terrible. He has sent the Holy Spirit to guide and transform us. And the Holy Spirit does not merely help us win a battle; He dwells within us! He knows we tend to wander into bad things, so He promises to lead us! He knows we need our minds continually renewed, so He teaches us the Scriptures. He knows we need brothers and sisters who will challenge and encourage us, so He gives us love for one another. He knows we need correction, so when the Word exposes something in us that does not belong there, He urges us to repent and helps us do so.

Jephthah got the Ammonites out of Israel, but that didn't get all of Ammon out of Jephthah. In the same way, Christ has rescued us from this present evil age, but some of its patterns still cling to us. Therefore, we must keep bringing every thought, every desire, every instinct, and every decision under the gracious rule of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Questions: What false ideas about God or life have you absorbed from the world, and will you trust Jesus enough to let him forgive you, correct you, and bring your life under his gracious rule? He loves you, and all His ways are life and peace.

Does it seem like you are facing something hopeless like the Ammonite army in your health, your marriage, your job, your mental state, your finances, your emotions? Whatever it is, will you trust that Jesus loves you, and His help is a gift of grace! You do not need to twist His arm, or bargain with him, or earn his compassion, or promise him something in exchange for His care. You need to ask Him for help, and when He does help you, praise Him and tell all of us and everybody else what He did for you!

BENEDICTION:

"Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."" (Psalm 50:15, ESV)

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Jephthah got the Ammonites out of Israel, but that didn't get all of Ammon out of Jephthah. In the same way, Christ has rescued us from this present evil age, but some of its patterns still cling to us. Therefore, we must keep bringing every thought, every desire, every instinct, and every decision under the gracious rule of our Lord Jesus Christ!

Questions: What false ideas about God or life have you absorbed from the world, and will you trust Jesus enough to let him forgive you, correct you, and bring your life under his gracious rule? He loves you, and all His ways are life and peace.

Does it seem like you are facing something hopeless like the Ammonite army in your health, your marriage, your job, your mental state, your finances, your emotions? Whatever it is, will you trust that Jesus loves you, and His help is a gift of grace! You do not need to twist His arm, or bargain with him, or earn his compassion, or promise him something in exchange for His care. You need to ask Him for help, and when He does help you, praise Him and tell all of us and everybody else what He did for you!

BENEDICTION:

"Call upon me in the day of trouble; I will deliver you, and you shall glorify me."" (Psalm 50:15, ESV)