

....I Have Opened My Mouth Unto the Lord

<<< *Judges 11:8 – 40*

~ Jephthah was a man with a real problem in this section of Scripture. We are examining the ninth judge in the time of the sixth apostasy of the nation Israel in the Book of Judges. This is a man who was highly unlikely to become the leader of Israel; but not because he didn't have ability. The unlikelihood of Jephthah becoming a judge was much more serious than that. See, he had three black marks against him that would have been impossible to overcome under normal circumstances, and we considered each of those in our last report. This is a man who was an exiled son of a harlot, and the Mosaic Law would have shut him out altogether from the camp of the nation Israel and the tabernacle without a second thought. It was certainly humiliating for the men in Gilead to have to appeal to Jephthah for help, you may be sure. Well, before Jephthah will accept, he has terms of service they must agree to, and those terms are repulsive to the people of Gilead. But, if this man is going to be their judge and deliver them, then he is going to rule them. I'm sure they swallowed hard as they agreed to that condition. Read verse seven again as Jephthah, actually, humiliates these men.

Well, when the children of Israel find themselves in a desperate situation, they are willing to conveniently overlook one's shortcomings. In this leg of our Spiritual Safari, we have the Ammonites prepared to take over the entire Promised Land. Israel is characterized by a lack of leadership at the time in which we are studying, and they desperately need a God-appointed leader. The moral and spiritual decay of any people or nation is ALWAYS from lack of Godly leadership. It was true in ancient Israel, and it's true in twenty-first century America. Modern day politicians think they are our leaders, and they say they can solve our problems; but the problems we face today have no solution outside of the Lord Jesus Christ - so, they couldn't be more wrong; because none of the modern "leaders" are looking to the Lord – they don't know Him – and they don't look for Him nor to Him. I don't even have to know anything about our politicians to know they cannot solve our problems. If just ONE of them would confess their weakness and inability to do anything properly, they would reveal

some semblance of creditability; but they don't – because they can't – because their pride will not permit them to....

8 And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Therefore we turn again to thee now, that thou mayest go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

9 And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the LORD deliver them before me, shall I be your head?

10 And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words.

11 Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the LORD in Mizpeh.

12 And Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land?

~ The elders of Gilead winced as Jephthah took command over them, you may be sure. As we read on, he outlines the way Israel came into the land. The land legitimately belonged to Israel, and the way they possessed it was God-given and theirs was a God-ordained inheritance. You can argue with that truth all day long and you'll still be wrong, friends. Of course, the Ammonites wanted more than Israel's eviction from the land – the Ammonites wanted them exterminated entirely.

The nation Israel is in precisely the same situation today; and they have been in their precarious predicament since forever. Many different nations and people want them off of the land and removed completely; in fact, from before Ptolemy to beyond Hitler, the extermination of the Jews has been attempted in just about every single generation. The Iranians today would drive them into the sea; or, as former Iranian president Mahmoud Ahmadinejad said, “.... wipe Israel off the face of the earth!” If the Iranian's

could – trust me – they would. Well, here in Judges, we have the reason, history and basis for their being in the land; and the reason under which they occupy it. I hope you read this very, very carefully....

13 And the king of the children of Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land, when they came up out of Egypt, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now therefore restore those lands again peaceably.

14 And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon:

15 And said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah, Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon:

16 But when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red sea, and came to Kadesh;

17 Then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land: but the king of Edom would not hearken thereto. And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab: but he would not consent: and Israel abode in Kadesh.

18 Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, but came not within the border of Moab: for Arnon was the border of Moab.

19 And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place.

20 But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel.

21 And the LORD God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them: so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country.

22 And they possessed all the coasts of the Amorites, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto Jordan.

23 So now the LORD God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, and shouldest thou possess it?

24 Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever the LORD our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess.

25 And now art thou any thing better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? did he ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against them,

26 While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aroer and her towns, and in all the cities that be along by the coasts of Arnon, three hundred years? why therefore did ye not recover them within that time?

27 Wherefore I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me: the LORD the Judge be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon.

28 Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him.

29 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon.

30 And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands,

31 Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD'S, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.

~ Well, the king of the Ammonites isn't paying any attention to Jephthah; and when Jephthah sees the Ammonites, he is a little fearful. He does something that likely would never have been done under normal circumstances. Remember, Jephthah has spent many years in exile when he is suddenly exalted to the highest place of authority he could be promoted to – judge of the nation Israel! It is a natural reaction for a man in his position to become a little excited. In that excitement, a rash statement of promise was made to the Lord; the kind we all make erroneously from time to time.

It is important to remember that Jephthah didn't have the light you and I have today. This is a half-pagan man with a heathen background. Jephthah knew God, but not very well; and he did not understand the power of God. The Lord never required this vow. Victory was not a reward for Jephthah potentially keeping some promise or doing anything at all, for that matter! Jephthah had every assurance God would bring him the victory and yet, here is making this extreme and rash vow.

Jephthah says the same thing to God that Gideon said, "... IF Thou shalt deliver the enemy into my hands..." – friends, there's no "IF" here. God never put it on an iffy basis. The cause of Jephthah was just; read verse twenty-seven again carefully. God Himself had elevated Jephthah to this position and he should have recognized God's hand was leading him to victory. That recognition would have revealed the Lord was going to see it through. Also, we just read that the Spirit of the Lord had come upon Jephthah. So, the rash and hasty vow made by Jephthah was completely unnecessary. Imagine if it had been his neighbor who had been the first person out the door to meet Jephthah. I don't think the neighbor would have agreed with Jephthah's theology...

32 So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands.

33 And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.

34 And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.

35 And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back.

36 And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon.

37 And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows.

38 And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains.

39 And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel,

40 That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

~ Jephthah made a vow to God which he obviously felt he could not renege on. However, God did not command it, will not accept it, and does not recognize it. Even so, I believe Jephthah foolishly and unnecessarily offered his daughter as a human sacrifice. There is a Greek myth about

Agememnon offering his daughter Iphigenia to obtain favorable winds in order for his ships to sail to Troy. Well, the Scripture here is silent, neither affirming nor denying. However, Scripture never finds fault with Jephthah; and that is critical to note. The writer to the Hebrews says the time would fail him to tell of Gideon, Barak, Sampson and of Jephthah, Samuel, David and the prophets – but there he is listed with those who had faith in God.

It is abundantly clear that child sacrifice is forbidden by God. The Mosaic Law commanded in Deuteronomy chapter twelve verse thirty-one "... Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods" God never asked anyone to do that, friends. God didn't allow Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, and God repeatedly condemns Molech, the god the pagan was offering their children to at this time. Abraham was willing to do it; and he went as far as lifting the knife and, as far as Abraham was concerned, Isaac was a dead boy; but, as far as God is concerned, that cannot happen. God doesn't permit child sacrifice, He doesn't require it and doesn't accept it or recognize it, either.

The construction of the language in this current chapter's verse thirty-one through forty determines the interpretation thereof. Verse thirty of this chapter in Judges is more accurately translated: "... then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD'S, or I will offer a burnt offering." Again, maybe a neighbor or a friend would have been the first to come out to meet him. Many great Bible teachers believe what happened was this: his daughter never married. The life of an unmarried Hebrew woman would have been worse than death. Jephthah was illegitimate himself, remember. This would mean there would be no grandchildren. We can be absolutely sure by reading verse thirty-six through forty – with verse thirty-nine being the key, saying "... she knew no man."

You can interpret this chapter any way you want to if you have asked the Spirit of God for wisdom, judgment and discernment but, either way, God ends this account with a woman totally dedicated to Him and to His service.

People have argued this point for years, and it is one of the most-asked questions regarding the Bible there is. The point that always seems to be missed is that Jephthah kept his vow. I never hear that as the moral of the story. His vow to the Lord was sacred to him. It wasn't idle boasting as a show to others. This was not some hollow promise or sham statement. The Word of God has sharp and severe warnings relative to vows, friends. We went over this thoroughly when we studied Leviticus, so we aren't reviewing that again here in Judges.

Ecclesiastes 5:2 Be not rash with thy mouth, and let not thine heart be hasty to utter any thing before God: for God is in heaven, and thou upon earth: therefore let thy words be few. 3 For a dream cometh through the multitude of business; and a fool's voice is known by multitude of words. 4 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for he hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. 5 Better is it that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay ~

We're going to get to Ecclesiastes soon enough in this so-called safari, and we'll take this up again – and again. You'll do well to promise no more to God than that which you are able to execute. So many Christians go down to an altar in a service where they burn more candles than the fires of hell, and they dedicate this and dedicate that until they smell as if they just came out of a burning building! God says, "don't be rash with your mouth!" Making a careless vow to God is what a fool does. Christians today are NOTORIOUS at making vows and then breaking them. God keeps His Word – why can't YOU? God is wonderful and we are fools; Jephthah should be a real lesson for all of us. We really need to think all of this over to its final conclusion today, my Christian friends....

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