

Jephthah, the Unlikely Instrument of Salvation.

Judges 10:17-11:11.

Sunday afternoon, July 10, 2011.

I. The setting 10:17, 18.

- A. Following the reign of two relatively obscure judges, Tola and Jair, a period of unprecedented apostasy occurred in the land of Israel. A time in which Israel not only served the Baals and Asherahs, but also every imaginable god of the nations surrounding them.
In the past they had served these gods often alongside the lord their God, but not this time; they forsook Him altogether. Judges 10:6,7.
- B. As a result of this the Lord dealt with them in an unprecedented way as well. He delivered them over in the hands of not one, but two enemies; one from the East, the Ammonites, and one from the west, the Philistines. Israel was squeezed in between, and was in dire distress.
- C. As a result they cry out to the Lord, who tells them to go to the gods they have chosen. They continue to implore Him, and they put all the foreign gods away. Judges 10:14-16.
- D. The Lord on the other hand is said not have been able to endure Israel's misery any longer. Judges 10:16.
- E. What follows is God's undertaking for Israel against the Ammonites first, under the leadership of Jephthah, Ch. 11,12, followed by His undertaking against the Philistines under the leadership of Samson Ch. 13-16. Both are colorful and unlikely servants of the Lord.
- F. The scene opens with the Ammonites assembled against Israel in Giliad, which is that part of Israel which was on the East side of the Jordan River. Israel assembles in Mizpah, midway between the land of the Philistines and the Jordan River, as though they are not sure who to defend themselves against, the Philistines or the Ammonites. There is however a problem; who will lead Israel? Judges 10:18. One of the curses God brings upon a people when they forsake him is poor leadership or no leadership. On the other hand, one of the blessings God gives to a people that seek Him is good leaders. God gives us leaders according to the kind of people we are. This is a principle that has not been abrogated in the New Testament; it still applies to kings and kingdoms and peoples today. For that reason we are exhorted to pray for kings and all those in authority. 1 Timothy. 2:2; and what applies to kings and kingdoms and peoples, applies to churches as well.
- G. It is in this setting that the writer of Judges turns our attention, and introduces us to this unlikely savior, Jephthah.

II. An unlikely savior.

- A. Jephthah was born to a man named Giliad who lived in that part of Israel which was located East of the Jordan River.
- B. Giliad carried on an affair with a prostitute, and Jephthah was born.
- C. Giliad and his wife also had legitimate children. By the time these sons were old enough to think of inheritances they ran Jephthah out of town since he was the

- son of another woman and obviously didn't belong.
- D. Jephthah's problem was not a lack of military ability, but his parentage. He was the son of a harlot. Here we have an example of what is still all too common in the world around us; the parents sin, and the children are made to suffer.
 - E. Jephthah flees his father's house and settles in the land of Tob, a sparsely populated region some 20 miles East of the Dead Sea. There the dregs of humanity join themselves to Jephthah, making up a band of guerillas, led by a social outcast, making a living by way of a life of crime.
 - F. Even in the midst of this setting a positive character quality of Jephthah is highlighted for us; Jephthah is called a "mighty man of valor." This means that Jephthah was possessed by a spirit of courage and determination in the face of danger. This quality can come to light in the honorable setting of fighting for a just cause, or, as in the case of Jephthah, in the setting of a life of crime.
 - G. Since no one in Israel emerged as a leader to lead Israel in battle against the Ammonites, not even when the promise was made that such a person would be made the head of all the people in Gilead, the elders finally resort to traveling to the land of Tob to seek out Jephthah. (Imagine their desperation!).
 - H. The elders ask him to lead them in battle against the Ammonites, and they offer him the leadership position over all Gilead in return for his services. Jephthah can not hardly believe this turn of events, and he, upon reviewing the offer of the elders, reluctantly accepts the offer. Judges 11:7-11.

Application:

We are left at this point with some difficult questions in terms of coming to grips with the Lord's providential dealings. Why would the Lord take a common criminal like Jephthah, who had victimized countless people in a life of crime, and make him the head of His people Israel? As all of the history of God's people points us forward to the Lord Jesus Christ as the Greater Deliverer, how does a man like Jephthah foreshadow the Person of Christ? Why then does the Lord choose Jephthah?

To come to grips with these questions we need to observe two parallels: First, Israel's way with the Lord, and Gilead's way with Jephthah parallel each other. (1) Both the Lord and Jephthah were rejected. (2) Distress comes to Israel as a whole, and to Jephthah's clan of Gilead in particular. (3) There is repentance on both their parts; the Lord and Jephthah are sought out. (4) There is hesitation on both the part of the Lord and Jephthah. (5) There is a renewed appeal on both the part of Israel and Gilead. (6) There is an agreement on the part of the Lord and of Jephthah. (7) In summary; Gilead's approach to Jephthah is a parable of Israel's approach to the Lord.

The second parallel we might be reluctant to make, but we need to make it none the less calling to mind that every parallel and type in Scripture has their limitations as they are constituted by frail and fallen men. Jephthah is a type of the Lord Jesus Christ. He was cast out of his own home and regarded as worthless by his own brothers, as were Joseph and Moses, and so was the Lord Jesus Christ. Jephthah fared no better than his Master, but he did not respond righteously to his suffering as did his Master. Furthermore, Israel's hope was ultimately found in this rejected one alone. Just the same there is no hope for the Jewish people today (or for us), apart from welcoming home this rejected One, and humbly asking Him to rule over us.