

A Marred Salvation.  
Judges 11:29-40  
Sunday Afternoon, July 24, 2011

I. Jephthah's vow.

- A. The negotiations with the king of the Ammonites come to a halt; the lines have been drawn; each knows where the other stands:
1. Jephthah has taken his stand with the Lord, and the inheritance the Lord has given to Israel, and he has made this clear to the king of the Ammonites.
  2. Now the king of the Ammonites takes his stand as well; it is said of him that he "did not heed the words which Jephthah sent to him." Vs. 28.
- B. Jephthah, having taken his stand, the next thing we read about Jephthah is that the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and in the strength of the Spirit of the Lord he goes throughout Gilead and Manasseh to gather up his troops to face the people of the Ammonites in battle.
- The order is significant. First Jephthah takes his stand with the Lord and His inheritance. He makes it clear; here I stand; and then the Spirit of the Lord comes and equips him to do what must be done to face the enemy who is intent of taking the Lord's inheritance away from His people.

Application:

That order remains ever the same; the Lord wants us to exercise faith first by going to Him, and taking our stand with Him, for better or for worse. Then comes the Spirit with enabling grace.

- C. There is the pressure of that moment; Jephthah has never done anything this big; as a guerilla he had fought many battles, and he had faced danger many times; he had looked death in the eye many times, but he had never undertaken something as large as this, and neither had the consequences of his actions been as significant and weighty as these. The future of the Lord's inheritance was riding on the outcome of this battle.
- D. Under the pressure and the weightiness of the moment Jephthah makes a vow to the Lord. Large favors call for large sacrifices, and so Jephthah vows literally: "Whoever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer him up as a burnt offering."
- E. Over the centuries both translators and commentators have taken to desperate measures to get this text to say something other than what it is saying. We want to rescue Jephthah daughter from her awful plight at all costs. The remarkable thing in this is that we are far more desperate to do so than she seems to have been.
1. Did not Jephthah know that human sacrifices were wrong? He surely was aware of this on some level, but did he act consistently with that knowledge? Life as a guerilla in the company of the dregs of humanity in the land of Tob had not nourished a life of refined Christian ethics in Jephthah.
  2. Jephthah spoke rashly, fuelled by his zeal to "give it his all" he acted foolishly.

## II. Jephthah's battle.

- A. The author is brief and sketchy on the battle with the Ammonites; this story is not about this battle. "The Lord delivered them into his hands," and "Thus the people of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel" sums it up for us.
- B. The story is about what marred the salvation of the Lord; Jephthah's vow and his only daughter's untimely death.

## III. A marred salvation.

- A. Jephthah comes home, and his only daughter comes out of the house with timbrels and dancing to meet her father. She had already heard the news of the victory the Lord gave to her father.
- B. Jephthah is devastated; only now does the reality of his vow sink in, and it becomes Jephthah's darkest hour.
- C. He discusses what he has vowed with his daughter.  
Two things stand out about her reaction:
  - 1. She can see what is the important thing here, and it is not her life as an individual, but the victory that the Lord gave to his people as a whole, safeguarding their inheritance. For that she is willing to lay down her life.
  - 2. She does have a regret however; it is that she will not leave a legacy by way of offspring in the land of promise and among the Lord's people. This she asks permission to mourn for two months, she and her friends.
- D. After the two months she returned to her father, and Jephthah carried out what he had vowed. Once before a father (Abraham) went to sacrifice his only child; then there had been a voice from heaven stopping him, but this time there was only silence. Once more a Father would sacrifice His only Son; then too the heavens would watch in silence.
- E. The legacy of Jephthah's daughter, having no children, became that the daughters of Israel remembered and mourned for her four days every year.
- F. These were days that should have been very happy and bright. The Lord had worked a great salvation for them, safeguarding their inheritance and defeating their enemies. Yet Jephthah's vow had marred all that; the skies were as dark and grey over Gilead as though Israel had lost her inheritance in the battle.

### Application:

- 1. We see here the mixture that is always in the human heart. The Spirit of the Lord is upon Jephthah; he takes his stand with the Lord; he prepares for the battle, and then there is that disastrous vow. Truly we ought not to think of ourselves too highly.
- 2. Consider here how sin is always looking to mar the good gifts the Lord in His salvation bestows on us. Here may well be the reason why we often do not enjoy fuller measures of the Lord's blessings. If He gave them, what would we do with them? Would we become prideful, boastful? Would we look down on others; full of ourselves? Wise and wealthy fathers often leave an inheritance for their children in the form of a trust which only becomes accessible to them over time; when they hopefully have the maturity and wisdom to use their inheritance wisely and honorably. If earthly fathers deal thus with their children, should not the Father of spirits deal thus with us much more so? The more we grow in humility, the more grace He makes available to us by way of the trust fund of our inheritance, for He gives His grace to the humble.