

THE BOOK OF JUDGES

"Vow and Complaint"

Judges 11:30-12:7

Introduction

1. Israel's apostasy resulted in a deep contrition before the Lord (10:6-16). God, in mercy, yearned in His heart for them (10:16).

2. But the sin of the nation brought a problem with a foreign nation, Ammon (10:17, 18). Leaderless, Israel turned to Jephthah who had previously been despised (11:1-6). Jephthah agreed to lead Israel, if he were given a civil and religious leadership role (11:7-11). This was a serious agreement and made "before the Lord in Mizpeh" (11:11).

3. Marvelously, the Lord came upon Jephthah and gained the victory for Israel over Ammon (11:29, 32, 33). But so earnest was Jephthah for victory that the victory led into two difficult situations. Leadership roles have a way of constantly testing character, both weaknesses and strengths.

1. VOW TO KEEP 11:30-40.

a. Recorded vv. 30, 31.

The words of the text are simple and direct. There is no possible way to misinterpret them. Jephthah boldly affirms that he will give to the Lord what comes to meet him following the battle with Ammon. He bargains with God. In the light of the text, he vows to "cause that which goes up to go up" (v. 31). The concept is clear. Whatever comes must be given up to God. Apparently Jephthah was serious before the Lord.

b. Interpreted vv. 34-39.

This is the crux of the issue. What really did Jephthah do in vowing? Some take his words to actually connote a burnt sacrifice literally. The Hebrew text does not necessarily mean this (v. 31). It connotes the concept of giving something to the Lord. In any case, human sacrifice was contrary to the Mosaic law (Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5; Deut. 12:31; 18:10). It hardly seems possible that Jephthah would have contravened God's law, since he apparently had respect to the Lord (v. 11). There are several phrases in the text which clarify the issue: "virginity" (vv. 37, 38) and "she knew no man" (v. 39). Hence, what is involved is the daughter being assigned perpetual virginity and service to the tabernacle. Other women had so served (Ex. 38:8; 1 Sam. 2:22). The law of vows (Lev. 27) certainly allows for a suitable

animal to be sacrificed, but an unsuitable one had to be redeemed and the money given to the sanctuary. So with a house and a person. A whole scheme of evaluation was allowed to give an alternative to sacrifice. Apparently, women were expected and allowed to serve in the tabernacle. Hence, this is what was involved here. The point is clear, however. He was so sincere in his vow and his daughter so inclined to do what God had been promised that she consented to the arrangement of the vow. It is a fantastic testimony to keeping one's word with God.

c. Applied

Jephthah granted his daughter two months respite in which she bewailed her virginity. The amazing thought behind this is that she was Jephthah's only child (v. 34). The same Hebrew word is used of Isaac (Gen. 22:2). It was a fantastic evidence of dedication to the will of God! Here is a tremendous lesson for believers concerning keeping of promises!

2. COMPLAINT TO RESOLVE 12:1-6.

a. Registered v. 1.

This was the same problem that erupted under Gideon (8:1-3). The situation is so common. Ephraim felt he had been left out of the center of activities. But the facts were to the contrary for Jephthah had given them equal opportunity and failed (vv. 2, 3). The same sort of problem often erupts in churches today!

b. Answered vv. 2-4.

While Gideon apparently answered Ephraim with softness and conquered, Jephthah replied with vigor. There is not one way to handle internal problems. What may resolve one situation may not be acceptable on another occasion. Personal problems are not open to easy solution.

c. Rewarded vv. 5-6.

While all the facts may not be available, it is certain that God stood with Jephthah and subdued Ephraim. 42,000 lost their lives. The simple test of the pronunciation of a word was really aimed at the differentiation of a Hebrew consonant, a shin or a sin. This demonstrated, however, that dialectical differences had developed which, in turn, were an evidence of a divided nation! All was not well in Israel!

Conclusion Jephthah served the nation for six years. He was God's man for the people and remains a hero of faith to this hour (Heb. 11:32).