

## THE BOOK OF JUDGES

### "An Illegitimate Leader"

Judges 11:1-29

#### Introduction

1. The record is definite. Israel slipped into apostasy following the judgeships of Tola and Jair (10:1-9). They became engulfed in the worship of Baal and other gods (10:6).  
2. Then in their desperation, Israel repented (10:10-18). The sincerity of the repentance was such as to move God to consider their grief (10:16).  
3. Nonetheless, their difficulties with Ammon had to be faced (10:18). Ammon had oppressed both the east and west banks of the Jordan River for 18 years (10:8). But Israel laid no claim to a leader. They needed help. This is just where an approach was made to Jephthah. Four statements are made about him:

1. He gets RECOGNITION 11:1-3.

This section is like a flashback in journalism. It interrupts the narrative to fill in the background. Like Abimelech, Jephthah was the son of an harlot. Tradition says she was a concubine, but called an harlot for she apparently lived as a common-law wife with Gilead. The Targum says she was an innkeeper like Rahab. Jephthah means "God opens" (the womb) and due to his family circumstances, he was put out of the home by his family. He went to the area of Tob, probably near the Yarmuk River. He is called a man of valor, like Gideon (6:12), Kish (1 Sam. 9:1), and Naaman (2 Kings 5:1). The wrong of family ostracism is clearly taught here. It was through no personal fault of Jephthah and should not have been. But, like our Lord, he was rejected and then acknowledged. Meanwhile, so-called vain men followed him. This word "vain" may connote worthless men or unemployed men. The latter seems more consistent with the facts known about Jephthah. They probably operated like David and his men--protecting settlements and cities from marauders (1 Sam. 22:1, 2).

2. He gets an EXPLANATION 11:4-11.

The elders of Gilead (v. 5) were the leaders. They apparently traveled 80 miles to enlist the help of Jephthah. A personal contact was needed to assure his help. He agreed to come after he was promised the civil and military leadership (cf. Isa. 1:10; 3:6 where this word is used of civil authority). This was necessary since they had previously denied him (v. 7).

3. He has NEGOTIATIONS 11:12-28.

This is a most helpful section. What Jephthah does is give the Ammonite ruler a Bible lesson. That was his only

recourse at this crisis. He included three items:

a. Possession

Jephthah argues that Joshua had given Gad the land concerned (Josh. 13:25, 26). Israel had been forbidden the right to take Ammonite land because of Lot (Deut. 2:19). However, Israel had fought Sihon, the Amorite, and won. In doing this, they came into the possession of some Moabite and Ammonite land (Num. 21:21-31). In fact, they had not fought Ammon for the property!

b. Consent

Jephthah argued that Moab had not disclaimed Israel's right to the Moabite land acquired in this way. This was accepted as tacit consent that Israel had the right to the land in entirety (Num. 21:26).

c. Time

It is stated that Israel had held the land for 300 years. This means that the exodus must have been about 1400 B.C. and is an argument for the early date of the exodus and the entry into the land. The statute of limitations surely must have run out by this time!

NOTE: These items show Jephthah to be a shrewd debater and an astute thinker. But he used the Word of God! He taunted the Ammonites about their god, Chemosh, who was really a Moabite god (1 Kings 11:7, 33) while Milcom or Molech was the god of Ammon (1 Kings 11:5, 33). The Moabite Stone confirms all of this.

4. He has a CONFRONTATION 11:29.

Jephthah is God's man for the hour. However, he has two supports:

a. God It is specifically stated that the Spirit of God enables him for the task. No one, humanly speaking, is capable to do the job God requires. Hence, there is always divine enablement. Here it is! This is an instance of Old Testament filling by the Spirit.

b. Man Jephthah does not "sit by" expecting God to go to the field to war. He makes trips among the people to recruit troops. Three times the verb "pass over" is employed in this one verse. The number gained is not given, but sufficient responded to do the job.

Conclusion The restoration of Jephthah and the humility of the elders combined to bring about a civil and military victory for Israel. It was God Who did it (11:32), but it was done at the hands of Israel (11:33). What a lesson!