JEPHTHAH’S VOW

**DATE: 11/24/2013 pm**

**TEXT: Judges 11:29-40**

**INTRODUCTION**

**Review**

**- v. 1 -** Jephthah was the son of a man named Gilead and an unnamed prostitute

**- vs. 2** - His birth caused him problems with his half-brothers

After their father died, they refused to share the family inheritance and they forced him out of the family home

**- v.3** - Jephthah became the leader of a band of mercenaries who protected the people of Israel from their enemies

**- v.4** - Sometime later, the Ammonites attacked the Israelites

**- vs. 5, 6** - This moved the leaders of Jephthah's tribe to reach out to him

Apparently, they were familiar with his ability as a military leader

They ask Jephthah to come back and lead them

If he would, they promise to make him Captain

**- vs. 7-10** - Jephthah answers their call and returns with them to address the Ammonite problem

Now we pick up where we left off last time (**vs. 12-28**)

This will be an abbreviated version for sake of time

**- vs. 12-28** – Jephthah tries a series of diplomatic measures to cool tensions with the Ammonites and avoid war

**- v.13** - In correspondence with the king of Ammon, Jephthah learns that they are attacking Israel because they want back some of the land that Israel took when it entered Canaan

Displaying an amazing grasp of Hebrew history, Jephthah answers the Ammonites with several convincing arguments that prove they are wrong in attacking the people of Israel

**- vs. 14-22** - The Israelites did not take the land from the Ammonites

They took it from the Ammorites who originally took it from the Moabites

The Ammonites had no stake in the land at all

**- vs. 23, 24** - The Lord had given the land to Israel

Jephthah give God all the glory and credit for giving them the land

Jephthah tells them to take what their god has given them and be satisfied

**- vs. 25, 26** - Israel had lived in the land for hundreds of years

The Ammonites had not tried to claim the land during the 300 years Israel had possessed it, why were they attempting to claim it now?

**- v. 27** - The Ammonites are reminded that by attacking Israel, they are in fact attacking God!

He will judge who is right and He will give the victory to whom He chooses!

The Ammonites fail to listen to Jephthah’s arguments because they are Ignorant of the Word of God; they do not Care about the Will of God; and they have no Regard for the Person or the People of God

Therefore they press their attack against Israel

By the way - When Jephthah attempted to negotiate with the Ammonites, he’s not compromising

He stands firmly upon the Word of God and declares the facts of the situation

What he is doing is trying to prevent them from being an\*ni\*hi\*lated in war

He knows that God will give Israel the victory and he is trying to save lives

Jephthah teaches us this great truth …

…the best response is always a peaceful response

When you are attacked, don’t attack back

Instead, approach those who attack you with offers of peace

If they receive your proposal, and reconcile, you have gained a friend

If they persist in their attacks, the Lord will take care of them in His Own way, and in His Own time

This great truth is taught in …

**Romans 12:17-21 – *“Be not overcome of evil, but overcome evil with good”***

**Matthew 5:38-48 – *“That ye resist not evil: but whosoever shall smite thee on thy right cheek, turn to him the other also”***

This now brings us to our text verses – **vs. 29-40**

In these verses Jephthah’s life has another valuable lesson to teach

In these verses we witness a man who makes a Vow that he lives to regret

Jephthah teaches us that we need to take heed to every word that comes out of our mouths,

And nowhere is that more important than when it comes to the words we speak to the Lord

In Children’s Church we sang this song …

*“Oh, be careful little mouth, what you say, For the Father up above, Is looking down in love, So be careful little mouth what you say”*

In our text, we are going to learn the truth that what we say, matters; especially when we say it to the Lord

This passage will teach us that He expects us to keep the Vows we make to Him

So, let's pray and then consider the *truths* that present themselves here as I preach on ***“Jephthah’s Vow”***

**~~~Prayer~~~**

**I. JEPHTHAH’S “VOW” – vs. 29-31**

Jephthah's attempts at peace are rejected by the Ammonites

So the stage is set for war

**v. 30 – *“And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD”***

As Jephthah leads the armies to battle, he makes a ***“vow”*** to the Lord

- A **“*vow*”** is Not something the Lord requires

- To not make a Vow is not a sin,

- But to make a Vow and not keep it, is different

A **“*vow”*** is “*a binding promise that involves a gift or sacrifice*

Vows in the Bible are never made to men, always to God

(I will talk more about what the Bible teaches about making vows to the Lord in a moment)

But first let's consider Jephthah's Vow

**A. The ‘Context’ – vs. 29, 30a**

The Pending Battle

***“Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and … he passed over unto the children of Ammon”  
“And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD”***

Jephthah made his Vow to the Lord when he and his men were headed out to do battle with the Ammonites

Apparently, Jephthah wants to be certain of victory

So he tried to make a contract with the Lord

It's one of those “*if you will do this for me, then I will do something for you*” types of thing

Have you ever done that?

Have you ever tried to bargain with God?

I think we all have, at some time or another

I think we all fail to recognize the seriousness of the Vow made to the Lord

(Again, I will say more about it in a minute, but God expects you to fulfill every Vow you make to Him!)

**The ‘Context’** was war

**B. The ‘Content’ – vs. 30b, 31**

***“and (he) said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands,” “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”***

In this Vow, Jephthah promises to offer up “***whatsoever”*** comes out of his house (first) when he returns home

Just a simple glance at this Vow tells us how rash and foolish it was

There’s a Truth here, which Jephthah will learn, the hard way, when he returns home

That's the problem with most of the promises we make to the Lord

We don't take the time to think them through

Before we make them

Then, when things don’t go exactly like we want them,

We go back on our Vows

That’s a Dangerous place to be!

**The ‘Context’, ‘Content’**

**C. The ‘Character’**

Look back at **v. 29**

Jephthah's Vow was totally unnecessary! Why?

We are told that **“*the Spirit of God was upon Jephthah*”**

God was going to give Jephthah the victory

Whether he made a Vow or not

Victory was assured because the Lord would give it!

Now here’s what is important that we need to know about making Vows

When Jephthah made the Vow, even though it was unnecessary, it was also Binding

The Lord gave Israel some very specific instructions for the use of Vows

Let’s look at them

**Deut. 23:21-25 …**

**Numbers 30:2**

**Leviticus 27 …**

While Vows were absolutely voluntary, once a Vow has been made; God expects that Vow to be paid in full

**Eccl. 5:1-6 …**

So, when you make a Vow to the Lord …

He will hold you to the keeping of that Vow

It is far better Not to promise the Lord something …

Than to make a promise and not keep it

Have you made a Vow that you have failed to pay?

**JEPHTHAH’S “VOW”**

**II. JEPHTHAH’S “VICTORY” – vs. 32, 33**

***“So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands” “Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel”***

When the children of Israel faced the Ammonites on the battle field, Israel carried the day

They defeated their enemy and won a great victory

A couple of thoughts regarding that victory are in order here

**A. A ‘Divine’ Victory – v.32**

The battle was waged and the victory was won

The children of Ammon were defeated because …

***“the LORD delivered them into his hands”***

It was a Divine Victory and God got the Glory

**B. A ‘Decisive’ Victory – v.33**

The language of this verse tells us how complete this victory was

We are told that Jephthah ***“smote”*** the Ammonites

This word means *to strike, hit, beat, slay, or kill*

We are told that Jephthah ***“smote”*** them with ***“a great slaughter”***

This phrase refers to *a great blow, wound, beating, or conquest*

It has the idea of being *overcome with a plague*

The children of Israel swept down on the Ammonites and cut them down like a plague

It was an astounding and complete victory

**Truth:** Just as a reminder, let me say that our God can still give His people great and decisive victories in our lives

He is still defeating enemies, and overcoming foes

We can, by his power experience deliverance in our lives

Regardless of what you might be facing

The Lord can give you victory over it for His glory!

I’m encouraged, when I remember that any victory

Is of Divine Origin

They come to us through God because of our relationship with His Son, the Lord Jesus Christ

**I Cor. 15:57 – *“But thanks be to God, which giveth us the victory through our Lord Jesus Christ”***

When there is victory over some sin, over some enemy, over some difficult period in life …

We should always be quick to praise the Lord and thank Him for the victory

If victory as come our way, it came to us through Him, and He deserves all the glory!

We should never take any credit for any of the victories

**Romans 8:37 – *“Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through Him that loved us”***

**II Cor. 2:14 – *“Now thanks be unto God, which always causeth us to triumph in Christ, and maketh manifest the savour of His knowledge by us in every place”***

**JEPHTHAH’S “VOW”**

**JEPHTHAH’S “VICTORY”**

**III. JEPHTHAH’S “VIGILANCE” – vs. 34-40**

The battle is over and the victory is won

Jephthah returns home as a conquering hero

I’m sure the Vow he made was fresh on his mind

He fully intends to carry out his Vow

Among other things, Jephthah was a man of his word

Let's watch as he fulfills his Promise

**A. The ‘Pain’ – vs. 34, 35a**

**v. 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”***

When he arrives home, the first person who comes out to meet him is his daughter

The Bible is clear to tells us she is his only child

She comes out to greet her father with songs of celebration because of the victory

She is excited that her father has returned home safe, and that he’s a hero

**v.35a – *“And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter!”***

When Jephthah sees her, his heart is broken

Remember in **v. 31** he had promised to give up ***“whatsoever cometh forth of the doors”*** ***“to meet”*** him when he returned home

He now sees his only child, his precious daughter,

…and it breaks his heart!

He knows what he has to do, and he intends to do it

He tears his clothes as a sign of mourning and cries

**“*Alas! My daughter thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me:”***

The word **“*alas*”** is an expression of Pain

It is the same as crying “*Oh My!*” or *“Oh No!”*

Then he tells her that she has **“*brought*”** him **“*very low*”**

This phrase means *to bring someone to their knees*

The thought of what he must do, to his own daughter, fills Jephthah with grief

The thrill of his victory vanishes completely and he is left with the searing pain and the overwhelming agony of loss

Imagine what you would feel like if it were you and your only child!

**The ‘Pain’**

**B. The ‘Problem’ – v.35b**

***“for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back”***

When Jephthah sees his daughter, …

…he tells her that he has made a vow concerning her

Jephthah knows that Vow must be fulfilled

Jephthah is certainly a man of his word

**Truth:** Jephthah's actions still speak today

We should also be a people of our word

When we tell someone we will do something, we should do it

When we tell someone we will be somewhere at a given time, we should be there

We should always do what we say we are going to do regardless of the personal cost or inconvenience

There was a time when a person's word was their bond

Business deals were made, livestock was traded, and crops were sold all on someone’s word and a handshake

There was a time when people said what they meant, meant what they said and did what they promised

Those days are gone!

Now you have to have a contract signed by both parties

That contract has to be notarized and filed with the courts

A person's word is no longer taken at face value

People cover themselves so that they can sue when someone reneges on a deal

That should never be said of a child of God!

When we give our word, we ought to be a people of our word

We ought to say what we mean, mean what we say and stand by our promises

This is especially true when that promise is made to the Lord

We are to be a people marked by truth!

**Eph. 4:25 - “*Wherefore putting away lying, speak every man truth with his neighbour: for we are members one of another*”**

**Colossians 3:9 - “*Lie not one to another, seeing that ye have put off the old man with his deeds*”**

**The ‘Pain’** and **The ‘Problem’**

**C. The ‘Performance’ – vs. 36-40**

**v. 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”***

Jephthah's daughter encourages her father to do all that he has promised the Lord he would do

What’s that tell you about the kind of job Jephthah did raising his family!

**v.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”***

She only asks for some time to mourn her virginity

This girl was willing to make a huge sacrifice to help her father honor his vow to the Lord

She willingly gave up the joy of becoming a wife and mother

She sacrificed the dream of every Israelite girl

That was the dream of giving birth to the Messiah

She sacrificed her dreams to help her father fulfill his vow to God

Wow! To have young people like that today

**v.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”***

She goes away with her friends for two months and they **“*bewailed her virginity*”**

That is, they mourned with her that she would never be a wife or a mother

Might I also interject here the sacrifice Jephthah made

By reason, he would not be a grandfather and he would have no heritage

No descendents to carry on his name

And we know how important ancestry was to the Jews

**v. 39a -**  ***“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”***

When she returned home, her father fulfilled his vow to the Lord and did with her the thing he promised to do

He offered her up as a sacrifice unto the Lord

We close out this portion of Scripture with the statement

**vs. 39b, 40 – *“And it was a custom in Israel,” “That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year”***

**The ‘Pain’,** **The ‘Problem’, and The ‘Performance’**

**D. The ‘Perception’**

So How did Jephthah Sacrifice his daughter?

Some believe she was offered as a literal burnt offering!

I don’t believe that for one minute

Nowhere in the Bible does God ever condone Human sacrifices!

As a matter-of-fact it is just the opposite

The phrase ***“to pass through the fire”*** is found 11 times in Scripture

It is a reference to the heathens sacrificing their children in the fire to their false gods

Each time it is stated, it is in the negative, and God is telling us it is an abomination

**II Kings 16:3 *– “But he walked in the way of the kings of Israel, yea, and made his son to pass through the fire, according to the abominations of the heathen, whom the LORD cast out from before the children of Israel”***

**II Kings 17:17 – *“And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke Him to anger”***

**Jeremiah 32:35 – *“And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin”***

So how did he sacrifice her?

Truth is he fulfilled his vow by dedicating his daughter to serve in the Tabernacle for the rest of her life

Here are the reasons why I believe this is the correct interpretation

The language Jephthah uses in **v.31** is ambiguous

He says **“*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*”**

The word **“*whatsoever*”** suggests that he did not know who or what he would see first

So, it was impetuous, done on impulse

Then, when he says, **“…*shall surely be the LORD’S, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering*”**

The word **“*and*”** can also be rendered **“*or*”**

This means that if it is a person he meets, he will dedicate that person to the Lord

If it is an animal that he sees first, he will offer that animal as a burnt offering

I think it stands to reason that Jephthah gave his daughter to the Lord to serve in the Tabernacle with the other women who served there

**Hannah – I Samuel 1**

**Anna – Luke 2:37**

The Bible talks about …

**Exodus 38:8 – *“the women assembling, which assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation”***

**I Samuel 2:22 - *“the women that assembled at the door of the tabernacle of the congregation”***

It seems these ladies came to the Tabernacle to serve the Lord

She remained a virgin for the rest of her life

Every year, her friends came and spent four days with her helping her mourn for her unmarried, childless condition

The word ***“lament”*** has the idea of *recounting,* or *of telling again*

Jephthah's daughter joins Isaac as a picture of the submissive, obedient child

She sacrificed family and motherhood to honor her father

By the way, Jephthah's daughter proves that it is harder to live for the Lord than to die for Him

Jephthah sacrificed too

Jephthah saw his line come to an end

There would be no grandchildren because he gave his daughter to serve the Lord all her days

**CONCLUSION**

What can we take away from this passage?

There are a few lessons here that we need to take to heart

- We must be a people characterized by the truth

Let it never be said that any child of God every failed to keep his or her word

- Vows made to God are sacred

They must be kept

Be careful what you promise God

He will expect you to fulfill every promise to the letter

Be aware that you will pay every vow you make to God!

Be very careful not to make rash promises to God

You will be called on to fulfill those vows

- It is always evil to fulfill an evil vow

While God expects us to do what we say,

He does not expect us to violate His Law in the process

It is a sinful thing to make a vow that involves evil,

And it would be even more evil to actually carry it out

If Jephthah had promised to sacrifice his daughter,

God would not have accepted that vow,

…and he would have never expected him to fulfill it

- Never try to strike a bargain with God

Your plan will not change His plan

Regardless of what you offer Him it will not change His mind about what He plans to do

Our God is sovereign and He will not be coerced into anything that is not part of His perfect plan!

We are to walk by faith and trust the Lord to do with us as He pleases

Don't bargain, simply obey!

**INVITATION**

If the Lord has spoken to you about your honesty and about the vows you have made to Him,

You ought to go into His presents and deal with that today

Remember that vow to love Him, serve Him and obey Him forever?

How's that going for you?

Remember that vow to honor Him with your life and income?

How's that coming along?

Listen to Him and do what He is telling you to do today