

Let's open our Bibles tonight to the book of Judges, chapter 10.

The book of Judges follows, like I have told you the last few weeks, the book of Joshua, chronologically. It starts at the death of Joshua. It carries almost 340 years forward until the time of Israel's first king, Saul. In the midst of those 340 years were fifteen overseers (judges, if you will) that arose in a nation during various times of their history (during that time) when the nation turns back to the LORD at a time of tremendous falling away. But when they cried out to God for help, God raised up these men and women to bring them back, if you will, to a relationship with God. Now, we've given you a list of those judges; we've handed them out. We mentioned to you last week that Abimelech is on that list because he ruled over the nation during those years. He was not a judge in the sense of being chosen by the LORD. He was an oppressor, a wicked man. He killed all of his brothers, save for one. But we finished his story last week in chapter 9. And tonight we want to begin in chapters 10 and 11, looking at the seventh and the eighth and the ninth judge that God used to raise up during these times.

Now, we've mentioned to you there are seven specific periods that God covers. Not all of them are covered, but these seven are that lay out this kind of a syndrome during these years. It starts with rest - things are going well, God is blessing. Because of that, rebellion sets in. People take advantage of the peace that God has given them. There is an unwillingness to get rid of the idolaters in the land that they had been assigned to go after and had not - they had left them to grow and fester. Because of their rebellion (and God's love for us), retribution followed. And for the nation, it was always dominated by some other power that abused them, used them, misused them, didn't treat them well at all. But it brought them, eventually, to a place of repentance. So it went from rest to rebellion to retribution to repentance. And when the people repented - and not all of them did, but enough of them did - the LORD, as a nation, restored them, sent a deliverer, a judge, and then rest came for a period of time. And then the whole thing begins again.

Most of the judges are inspiring. They are inspiring in the sense that they brought the people back to a godliness that the nation itself hadn't known. They brought

them back to fellowship with God and obedience to the LORD. Most of the revivals in the book of Judges ended with the death of the judge. It didn't carry over any more than the relationship between God and God's people during the days of Joshua. When he died (and his generation), the next generation (the Bible says) didn't know Him and didn't know His power. And so certainly one of the lessons in these last two books is all about passing along what God has passed on to us.

And so, like I said, we're going to jump in, and we're going to look at three judges tonight - two of them very quickly (all in five verses) and then the life of a fellow that is given to us with much more time. You would think after all of this that the people would learn to hang around. I read the book of Judges, and I just shake my head like, "Man, why don't these people learn?" and then I look at my own life, and I go, "Yeah, it's slow, isn't it?" to learn what to do that's right.

Well, verse 1, "After Abimelech there arose to save Israel Tola the son of Puah, the son of Dodo, a man of Issachar; and he dwelt in Shamir in the mountains of Ephraim. He judged Israel twenty-three years; and he died and was buried in Shamir." Bible names tended to mean more than they do today. A lot of folks, I don't even think know what their name means. But because Bible names were important in terms of how they were chosen, I don't always understand them. The name "Tola" means grubworm or maggot. (Laughing) I don't know what parent looked at the kid and went, "You know, he looks a little like a grubworm." Don't know. But he was the son of Puah. The word "Puah" means to scatter, and the word "Dodo," by the way, is Hebrew for loving. So if you say to somebody, "You dodo," that's actually a compliment if you're a Hebrew. We don't know anything about this little "grubworm" except he was from the Issachar tribe, and, for twenty-three years, Israel was delivered. Notice he saved Israel. He brought them back to a relationship with the LORD that hadn't taken place in quite some time, and he led them in the ways of God. He brought a sense of peace and godliness to the nation. He was a good leader and a good judge and a response of God to the repentance of the people.

Verse 3 tells us, "After him arose Jair, a Gileadite; and he judged Israel twenty-two years. Now he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys; they also had thirty towns, which are called 'Havoth Jair' to this day, which are in the land of Gilead. And Jair died and was buried in Camon." So the next judge whose name, by the way, means one who was enlightened, comes on the scene and again passes off the scene without much information. Some God covers in chapters, some in verses.

We know he was from the tribe of Manasseh. We know that that was the tribe who settled on the east side of the Jordan. He ruled for twenty-two years - again blessed the nation. So there're forty-five years of rulership by two men who brought Israel to a place of godliness again, and worship. We're told of his family that he had thirty sons who had thirty donkeys, who owned thirty cities; and oddly enough they're called the villages of Jair (Havoth is the word for village or town). If you had a son and a donkey, you were rich. All the kids got Mercedes. They all owned their own town; they had their own little hamlet. But here's the deal - these two, with whom we know very little, spent forty-five years of these almost 380 years leading the children of Israel into the ways of the LORD. Now, forty-five years of rulership covered in five verses.

The next guy that we're going to talk about that is following, if you will, Jephthah, is covered in chapters 10, 11 and 12. He only reigns for six years. Yet the LORD sees fit to give us much about his life and very little about these two. The only thing we know about these two is they were faithful, they were influential, they kept the people in a place that God wanted them to be, the LORD knows what they did.

But, verse 6 (when Jair died, after forty-five years of these two men), "Then the children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, and served the Baals and the Ashtoreths, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the people of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; and they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him. So the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel; and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the people of Ammon." So here's that mantra again, and if you've been with us, this is kind of repetitive, isn't it? And you read it, and you go, "Come on!" Forty-five years of a good life and then a turning back. There is a problem with prosperity and that is that it is oftentimes more dangerous for you than a difficult life. Something about adversity - it'll get me to pray. When things are hard, you'll pray. We had very little trouble getting people to church when the war in Iraq broke out. They were here early, they stayed late - for about five weeks. And then everything was fine again, "Okay, good. Off we go." Pressure tends to cause you to look up. There's that Scripture in Amos 6:1 that says, "Woe to you who are at ease in Zion." There's something about blessing that we have to be careful about because it is harder to take prayer seriously when things seem to be just fine. And we would encourage people to pray, but they don't always do it. In fact David, in Psalm 106:41-43, when he was rehearsing the history of the people (and especially this

part of the history, looking back), he said, "And He gave them into the hand of the Gentiles, and those who hated them ruled over them. Their enemies oppressed them, and they were brought into subjection under their hand. Many times He delivered them; but they rebelled in their counsel, and were brought low for their iniquity. Nevertheless He regarded their affliction, when He heard their cry; and for their sake He remembered His covenant, and relented according to the multitude of His mercies. He also made them to be pitied by all those who carried them away captive." God put up with this for a long time, as He does with us. But notice (in verse 6) that the minute that you turn away from God, look what choices you get. Everyone has a god - from the north, from the south, from the east - gods without power, but they rejected the God who loved them, who delivered them. They wouldn't serve Him, but they chose these other gods that were absolutely powerless. Once you forsake the LORD, the devil has lots of options for you. And among these gods would be Molech and Chemosh, gods that demanded to be placated. They were, historically, very angry gods that were always upset with you. They were the ones that demanded, Molech especially, the offering of children into these hot fires and set upon these hot arms that were heated hot, and the kids were sacrificed to these gods. And Israel turned away from God. Archeologists have found thousands of children's bodies and body parts put in the walls of buildings - kids being sacrificed to the gods and then put and stored in the walls of their homes. So, today we have millions of innocent babies being put to death to honor the gods of self. You may have heard the story from Iceland in the last couple of days that they've decided to get rid of kids with Down Syndrome. So if your child shows (and is tested for) that, you're encouraged to have an abortion, and they're now at 98.9% rid of Down Syndrome in Iceland. They're very proud of themselves. I doubt God is that excited about them. So here's the foolishness, though. These folks bend their knee to a god that God has delivered them from already. In other words, these are people that they've conquered, and yet they turn back to worship the very gods that couldn't protect the people from them when their God brought them in.

"So," verse 7, "the anger of the LORD was hot against Israel." And can you really blame Him? This ugly defiance that seems to come from every generation. And because the LORD loves them, He puts them, this time, in a vice. He sets against them the Ammonites - they lived on the east. He sets against them the Philistines - they lived along the coast. So Israel gets stuck, kind of, in a vice; on both sides, they are really being squeezed all because God wants to bring them to their knees, until they're severely distressed. Right? I mean, that's God's interest. Verse 8

says, "From that year they harassed and oppressed the children of Israel for eighteen years - all the children of Israel who were on the other side of the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, in Gilead." And so they were oppressed, literally so. Verse 9 says, "Moreover the people of Ammon crossed over the Jordan to fight against Judah also, against Benjamin, and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was severely distressed." They were put to task. But this went on for eighteen years. I don't know how many times we say to people, "What are you thinking? Why don't you make some good choices now?" And you find that people do it for year after year after year. Sin makes you dumb, doesn't it? God help us to be smart.

But eighteen years of worshipping these false gods, and it isn't until eighteen years pass that we read (in verse 10) that the children of Israel now looked up, "cried out to the LORD," and this is what they say, " 'We have sinned against You, because we have both forsaken our God and served the Baals! " "We've made the wrong choice." Israel was in trouble again. They'd failed to learn, now - seventh judge, eighth judge, they're looking for a ninth judge - and they hadn't learned for all of these years that this was the way things went, that until you get on your knees before Almighty God, things are going to get tough because God loves you. God's ready to forgive, God's ready to restore, God's ready to do something with your life. But these folks just were so bought-in to the culture around them. And notice verse 10, "We have sinned."

The Bible says a lot to us about sin. It tells us that sin is pleasurable for a while (Hebrews 11:25). It's pretty appealing. Sin isn't ugly - sometimes it looks good. But it is only good for a season. Proverbs tells us, in chapter 13, that the way of the sinner is hard. It's a hard way of life that you chose. Ezekiel tells us that the ultimate price of sin is separation from God. And watch the nation itself. They learn firsthand how hard sin is - the Ammonites, Philistines mercilessly dominated them, and, in their confession, they acknowledged that they were reaping what they had sown. "We have forsaken God. We have chosen the wrong god. We have taken the wrong side." And in response to their idolatry, God had forsaken them; He'd handed them over to these gods that were not gods at all.

You know, I'm sure - certainly the Bible tells us, that God made you and me to worship. That's how He created us - for His good pleasure. And if you look at the religious ways of man, once you forsake the LORD, you'll invariably seek to worship a substitute because that's how you were created; that's the DNA of man. You will

want to worship and bow your knee somewhere. When the prophet Jeremiah wrote in chapter 2:13, as the LORD was speaking to the nation during these times like this (though not this time), the LORD said, " 'My people have committed two evils: they have forsaken Me, the fountain of living waters, and hewn themselves cisterns - broken cisterns that can hold no water.' " Here're the two problems with man - he forsakes God, who has life to give; and he holds on to a cistern, a pot, that can't even hold water - it's broken - that has nothing to offer to you. Nothing at all that will lead you to life. Two errors that go together - the refreshing life that God gives, replaced by stale water that can't satisfy.

I was talking to somebody the other day. I got saved in 1973, at the age of 1, apparently, if I do the math correctly. (Laughing) In any event I think that's right..... 44 years. And for 44 years, Jesus has refreshed my soul. I used to be into skiing. That came and that went. We used to go surfing every morning. That came and that went. Got a lot of hobbies in my life that came and that went. And only He stuck around. He's still refreshing. Everything else kind of comes and it goes. Because He has life to give. You can't get tired of worshipping the LORD, but you can sure run on empty pretty quickly when you have these holes in these pots that you are trying to haul life around in. How tragic when you don't give God the proper place in your life. And if you don't take in the living water, you're going to look for something else. And in the Old Testament, they had names for these gods. Aphrodite was the goddess of sensual love, and Narcissus was the god of self-love, and Molech was the god of pleasure, and Mammon was the god of money or gain; and they all had names. Now we don't like to use those names anymore. It might help us if we just called it what it was. We don't want to call it, "We love money." We want to call it ambition. "We're just ambitious. We're go-getters." Or you're false worshippers who have set the love of the LORD aside for gain or self-confidence.

If God isn't the Master and passion of your life, something else will be. And notice that that happened to the nation. Every time the leadership dissipated, they didn't have someone to follow, they went right back to that old way of life, and they repeated it over and over and over again. And if you compound that with the Bible truth that man becomes like his god, eventually the evidence of the God that you serve will be seen in your life, and it will either disgrace you, or it'll bring honor to the LORD. I know people, and I imagine you do, too - they would give their right arm for fame or for power or for pleasure or for money; highly intelligent people who can sit around and chant themselves into some restful state. But the ultimate

consequence for the people of God - in forsaking Him - is to be deprived of the blessings He has. That's what happened here. You lose everything that you hoped to gain by turning away from Him. And Israel is oppressed and severely so, and unfortunately it took eighteen years for them to come to their spiritual senses. But as they do, here's the good news - God is ever ready to help. Right? We might be a little slower to be merciful. He's not. He responds immediately.

Verse 11, "So the LORD said to the children of Israel, 'Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites and from the people of Ammon and from the Philistines? Also the Sidonians and Amalekites and Maonites oppressed you; and you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hand.' " "Look, this isn't our first rodeo. This isn't the first time we've been here. We've been here, and I've taken care of you." And the LORD begins His response to these repentant cries by reminding them of His past work. "I gave you victory over these very people that are now oppressing you, and you've chosen their gods."

So the LORD says to them, in verse 13, " 'Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore I will deliver you no more. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress.' " "I'm done with you. You're in trouble? You need help? I know who you can call. Call 1-800-fill in the god of your choice. I have a record with you that apparently doesn't impress you. So turn to them. See if they'll help you." Now it is biblically correct that you can come to a place with God in your life where God can say, "I'm done with you." He said it to Ephraim in chapter 4:17 of the book of Hosea. "Just leave her alone. She's joined herself to her idols." Or what the LORD said (in Genesis 6:3), " 'My Spirit shall not strive with man forever.' " But you've got to push pretty hard to get God to give you up because it's you that He loves. And one of the most severe judgments that you find in the Bible is when God allows you to have what you want without any gracious interference; when the LORD just goes, "All right. Have it your way." That's what He's saying here. "Have it your way. Have it the way....." "I want what I want." "Okay. Here. Have it." It's what Paul said the LORD spoke to the nations about in Romans 1, when he said, "God gave them over," and then, "God gave them up." God give them over God give "Have what you want. Have it your way." And when a society gets to the point, as the nation does here, where God is set aside, when you get everything you've dreamed of but you don't have the LORD, that's the worst place of all to be. I heard a guy the other day, in a sermon I was listening to on the radio, say he's afraid that God is going to judge America. And my response to that is I think He is. He's given us exactly what we

want. It's not what He wants. But we're getting exactly what we, as a nation, are asking and clamoring for. And all that we've been pursuing, as a culture, with less and less interference or resistance from the Holy Spirit, that's tragic! We don't want that. And that's what the LORD said to Israel, "All right. Have it your way. I've shown you what I can do. I've brought you out through all of these things. Now if you don't want to follow Me and worship Me, you still think that those gods that I've defeated are still worth serving, then go that route." The old "all roads lead to God - it doesn't matter what god you serve as long as you're sincere." Well, that's ridiculous, isn't it? Obedience proves our love for the LORD. I don't think anybody would use that argument if you went to the pharmacy for drugs, and your pharmacist says, "I like to give him stuff out of the green bottle. I love green." You're not going to take that with very much hope. It isn't sincerity. It's truth that governs. And truth is objective, isn't it? So the LORD says to them, "Look, you've tasted and seen. I've given you all that I can. I've delivered you. You don't want Me, then have it your way. And you can go ask your gods to help you out." I remember reading, it was years ago (and I tried to remember it this week), I took bioscience at UCI, and pre-med, but there was a little rhyme that we used to say, and it went something like, "Shed a tear for Jimmy Brown. Poor Jimmy is no more. For what he thought was H₂O was H₂SO₄." Only "biosci" people care about that. But it's the difference between water and sulfuric acid. It's just one number and one letter, and it's just a little difference. It's sincere. Your gods may, indeed, give you a measure of pleasure and comfort for a while, the things that you exalt. But when you're in need, do they help you? It does interest me that folks who don't come to church here, when they're in trouble oftentimes call here. And you go, "Do you come to church?" "No, I don't go to church. But we need someone to pray, we need someone to come over, we need someone to visit. We're not comfortable. We don't know where to turn." And that's, I think, what the LORD said to the nation. "Well, check them guys out. See if they can help you."

And notice that Israel (in verse 15) said to the LORD, " 'We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best to You; only deliver us this day, we pray.' So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD. And His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel." Isn't that powerful? Verse 17, "Then the people of Ammon gathered together and encamped in Gilead. And the children of Israel assembled together and encamped in Mizpah. And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another, 'Who is the man who will begin the fight against the people of Ammon? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.' " But look at verse 16. The people had no argument to make with God. They couldn't say,

"Well, that's not fair" because He'd been more than fair. But they cast themselves upon His mercy, they repent of their behavior, they put away their foreign gods, they turn their back from them, and they turn their faces back to the LORD. And they say to the LORD, "Do whatever you want, but we're praying you'll deliver us." It almost sounds like the Ninevites (there in Jonah 3), who had no right to expect God's mercy, but they weren't going to rule it out either. And you remember that they even dressed up their animals in repentant clothes, and it upset Jonah to no end. But it's the heart of God, isn't it? And so notice (in verse 16) that, though mercy and grace are God's prerogative, you can never presume upon them even though the Bible would set God in front of you as a God with a history of soft-heartedness. And notice the people were suffering, He gave them over to their own ways, but He couldn't stand to watch their misery. Isn't that the heart of God? He can't stand to watch you hurt yourself. It's like punishing your kids. I remember sending the kids to their rooms when they were little, and they could make faces that could literally wipe out the whole punishment. I had plans for weeks of terrorism. "You can't be" They'd give one, and, "Okay, you can have whatever you want." I think that's what the LORD looks at us like. So, in His mercy, God prepares another judge for them. They cry out, "Who's going to lead us? Who's going to help us?"

Verse 1 of chapter 11, "Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, but he was the son of a harlot; and Gilead begot Jephthah. Gilead's wife bore sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out, and said to him, 'You shall have no inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman.' Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and dwelt in the land of Tob; and worthless men banded together with Jephthah and went out raiding with him. It came to pass after a time that the people of Ammon made war against Israel. And so it was, when the people of Ammon made war against Israel, that the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob. Then they said to Jephthah, 'Come and be our commander, that we may fight against the people of Ammon.' " Now Gilead is that mountainous region in the eastern part of the Jordan where the tribe of Gad was. This fellow Gilead had a son. He was born to a concubine. He had a wife and other kids, but they didn't get along very well with this one that stuck out. And so he's kind of sent packing, and he leaves the area, and he develops a pretty good reputation for being a tough guy, hanging around with a bunch of other tough guys - almost reminds me of David and his mighty men. Here was a guy that you'll find in the book of Hebrews as being a man of faith. He's an answer to the prayers of the people, and the repentance of the people, and the LORD takes

this guy; and maybe the thing you want to learn from Jephthah, early on, is that God will use anyone. I mean, here's a guy that doesn't come from highly-worldly qualifications. He's surrounded by a bunch of "worthless" men (Bible words). He's rejected by his own family. He's isolated from his own people. He's an outcast, lives in the middle of nowhere with a band of tough guys, learned to be a pretty tough guy. We know from, like I said, Hebrews 11:32 that he's a man of faith. And now he is being called upon to come and deliver Israel from their enemies. So, they come to him (verses 4-6) - the elders do - and they said, "Look, there's nobody that has a reputation like you do for being tough. Could you come and fight and protect us? Could we recruit your services so that you could fight against our enemy?"

You would expect (verse 7) when you read Jephthah saying, " 'Did you not hate me, and expel me from my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?' " (I'm having a little trouble with that concept). Verse 8, "And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, 'That is why we have turned again to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the people of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.' So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, 'If you take me back home to fight against the people of Ammon, and the LORD delivers them to me, shall I be your head?' " ("Am I going to be in charge?") Verse 10, "And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, 'The LORD will be a witness between us, if we do not do according to your words.' " And so they offer him a chief position. They take an oath in the name of the LORD. They convince him that he can have the last laugh, to come home to help the people, and this fellow, who'd been refused by the nation for his background, if you will, takes them up on their offer. "All right. I will be that guy that the LORD will use, and if the LORD blesses and He gives me favor, and He delivers us, then I want to be in charge of my home again and my homeland amongst my people."

"Then Jephthah" verse 11, "went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head" (they voted for him) "and commander over them; and Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD in Mizpah." He went to pray. Mizpah, that's the name of the place that was named because Laban (Genesis 31), years ago, and Jacob, you remember, when Jacob ran off from his uncle, and his uncle chased him down, and Jacob didn't want any more trouble - he was leaving with all of his stuff and kids and all. And Laban was angry with Jacob. It was a real tense confrontation, and finally Laban said to Jacob, "May the LORD watch between you and me." It wasn't a compliment. It was kind of like, "You're a dirty rat, and I can't keep an eye on you. I hope He will." But that's what the word "Mizpah" means. So that's where it

got the name. And he is now taken and recognized by the people. And I want you to notice verse 11 - he prays and seeks the LORD about this position as, now, the judge and hopefully the overseer.

Verse 12, "Now Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon, saying, 'What do you have against me, that you have come to fight against me in my land?' And the king of the people of Ammon answered the messengers of Jephthah, 'Because Israel took away my land when they came up out of Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok, and to the Jordan. Now therefore, restore those lands peaceably.' " So Jephthah's first words are, "Let's talk about this." He texted him, he twittered him. "What are you doing to my land?" And the king sends back, saying, "That's our land! You took it from us years ago when you came out of Egypt." And he lists some landmarks - the Arnon is south of Jericho, running east to the Dead Sea; the Jabbok's in the north of Jericho, running out to the Jordan. But Jephthah (not only a man of prayer, rejected, God had him close) - he shows this wonderful insight into the working knowledge of Israel's history, and he accounts for him in about nine verses (and we'll read them quickly, together, what you can read from Numbers to Deuteronomy). And it's kind of a three-pronged answer to this king who's trying to make peace. Number one - he gives him a history lesson; number two - he gives him a spiritual argument; and number three - he kind of, with logic, says, "Really? I mean, let's add this up."

Verse 14, "So Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon, and said to him, 'Thus says Jephthah: "Israel did not take away the land of Moab, nor the land of the people of Ammon; for when Israel came up from Egypt, they walked through the wilderness as far as the Red Sea and came to Kadesh. Then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, 'Please let me pass through your land.' But the king of Edom would not heed. And in like manner they sent to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained in Kadesh. And they went along through the wilderness and bypassed the land of Edom and the land of Moab, came to the east side of the land of Moab, and encamped on the other side of the Arnon. But they did not enter the border of Moab, for the Arnon was the border of Moab. Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, king of Heshbon; and Israel said to him, 'Please let us pass through your land into our place.' But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory. So Sihon gathered all his people together, encamped in Jahaz, and fought against Israel. And the LORD God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the

hand of Israel, and they defeated them. Thus Israel gained possession of all the land of the Amorites, who inhabited that country." ' ' "

So, "Here's your history lesson. First, pal, we didn't attack you. You attacked us. In fact, you lost, and we gained in battle what you lost." It's similar to the Syrians, now, in Israel, asking for the Golan Heights back. The Syrians (in 1973) attacked Israel with their Katyusha rockets out of Galilee, and Israel just responded, and they pushed the Syrians back all the way to Damascus; and they just kept the Golan and gave them everything back. They could have just stayed in Damascus. But it wasn't kind of like, "We attacked you. No, no. You came looking for trouble. If you're looking for trouble, you might very well find it."

His second argument (in verse 22) is a spiritual one. He said, " ' "They took possession of all the territory of the Amorites, from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. And now the LORD God of Israel has dispossessed the Amorites from before His people Israel; should you then possess it? Will you not possess whatever Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So whatever the LORD our God takes possession of before us, we will possess." ' ' " His second argument is this, "Look, God gave it to us. We were outnumbered. You guys had armies. We were sojourners. We were just walking through. We weren't ready for these things." They had had the land. This is about 1080 or so, 1085 B.C. They'd had the land for over 300 years now, in their possession. Jephthah says to these folks, "If your god, Chemosh," (the word means to subdue) "gives you a victory in battle, don't you keep it and declare your god gave it to you? Well, we're going to say our God gave it to us. Our God is bigger than your god. The historical argument is we never invaded. Number two - God gave it to us, victory, and we're going to hang on to what God has given to us."

Thirdly (verse 25), here's the logical argument, " ' "And now, are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive against Israel? Did he ever fight against them? While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and its villages, in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities along the banks of the Arnon, for three hundred years, why did you not recover them within that time?" ' ' " Or, in other words, "Did you forget what God did to Balak in his attempt to throw the children of Israel out? Are you any smarter than he is? You know, Balak tried to curse us, and that didn't work. God stood up for us. He still does. We've been here three hundred years. The statute of limitations has run out." That's his argument - historical, spiritual, logical.

Verse 27, " ' "Therefore I have not sinned against you, but you wronged me by fighting against me. May the LORD, the Judge, render judgment this day between the children of Israel and the people of Ammon." ' However, the king of the people of Ammon did not heed the words which Jephthah sent him." The negotiations for peace broke down, and war was inevitable. But Jephthah's just a godly guy. "Hey, let's let the LORD decide. I think we're on the right side of this thing."

Verse 29, "Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, and passed through Mizpah of Gilead; and from Mizpah of Gilead he advanced toward the people of Ammon. And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, 'If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever 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 it up as a burnt offering.' " So, the battle ensues. Jephthah makes a vow to the LORD.

By the way, vows in the Bible are pretty much not compulsory at any place. They are almost always voluntary. If you make one, the emphasis from the LORD is if you're going to make one, keep it. Or don't make it. The question is - why does Jephthah make a vow at all? The only answer, biblically, is unbelief. He's overwhelmed with what he's facing. He's laid out the case that the king is not backing down. Maybe there's a deal to be made, a bargain to be had. You find vows as often a practice in the Old Testament. You rarely find them in the New Testament. Twice in the psalms, the psalmist says this, "If you make the LORD a vow, you keep your vow to the LORD" (Psalm 65:1, 76:11). A vow was almost like a promise to God in exchange for a certain response. In the New Testament, Jesus discourages vow making all together (Matthew 5). I don't know how vows work in the Age of Grace because vows imply a legal relationship rather than a loving one. "I'll do this for you if you do this for me." Jesus said it was better not to vow at all, but if you're going to vow, keep it. I thought about this story maybe one of the better stories you can read about sometime (in 1 Samuel 14) was about Jonathan and his armor bearer. You remember? As his dad, Saul, was lying under the tree eating fruit, Jonathan wanted to get busy taking care of the enemy of Israel. He said to his armor bearer, "Let's go see if God will use us. Just the two of us. He can save by many or by few." And you might remember the story - that God just blessed this young man, and He went before him. And news eventually gets back to Saul and all of the folks that are with him, and in his foolishness to try to make himself look good in the eyes of the people, he had made a rule that

day that no one should eat until Saul was avenged of his enemies. But Jonathan was running, man, and fighting; and he ate some honey, and it gave him strength to finish - big sugar rush. And it was found out that he ate, and Saul, in front of the people, went, "He's got to die because he broke my rule." And people went, "Yeah, you're nuts. We're not killing him. He saved us!" And they came and stood with him, if you will, and protected him. And, like I said, the entire story is in one chapter in 1 Samuel 14. But Saul, in his pride, tried to force his hand. Cooler or wiser heads prevailed. But, look, we live in an Age of Grace which means everything you get is free. It's not earned by you, so you can't really make promises to God. You already belong to Him! Better that you just say, "LORD, by Your grace." And it's certainly not necessary to make vows. It was in Matthew 5 (in the Sermon on the Mount), that Jesus said, "There're folks that'll swear by anything to make it sound like you've got to believe me because I'll swear by heaven's throne or by the earth or something." And the Lord said, "You're just trying to cover up for the fact that you're a liar. So just let your 'yea' be 'yea' and your 'nay' be 'nay,' and it'll be fine."

So, anyway, this guy makes this vow, and we suspect it's because of pressure that he's facing as a man that God has used. And so far we've seen him to do everything well. He left. He seems to have defended the cities with a bunch of guys. The LORD used him. The Spirit of God was upon him. He prayed about his situation. Now he makes a vow.

Verse 32, "So Jephthah advanced toward the people of Ammon to fight against them, and the LORD delivered them into his hands. And he defeated them from Aroer as far as Minnith" (we don't know these cities) "- twenty cities - and to Abel Keramim, with a very great slaughter. Thus the people of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel." So God gives him great victory. Jephthah is now returning home to his family, and out of his front door comes his only daughter.

So we read (in verse 34), "When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing; and she was his only child. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter. And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he tore his clothes and said, 'Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! You are among those who trouble me! For I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot go back on it.' So she said to him, 'My father, if you have given your word to the LORD, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, because the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the people of Ammon.'

Then she said to her father, 'Let this thing be done for me: let me alone for two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains and bewail my virginity, my friends and I.' So he said, 'Go.' And he sent her away for two months; and she went with her friends, and bewailed her virginity on the mountains. And it was so at the end of two months that she returned to her father, and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. She knew no man. And it became a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went four days each year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite." Tough verses. I don't know what Jephthah would have anticipated coming out of his house. He was married, and he had one daughter. I mean, it seems to me the choices are small. Why he would be shocked to see his daughter come out of the house - who knows? It is the tragedy of not fully knowing the LORD and His ways that you would want to make God a promise like this. It was foolish. It was contrary to the heart and, by the way, is contrary to the will of God.

Let me give you some things to think about in terms of this being a very difficult Scripture. Jephthah knew the Law. He knew God's heart. There is nothing in his life, up to this point, that would suggest that he was a guy that would do human sacrifice, that he believed somehow that lined up with the will of God. That was certainly the way of the wicked around him. He would have known that. Second of all, his friends, I suspect, would have intervened like Saul's army when he vowed to kill his son, Jonathan. Because this was a time when Israel was returning to the LORD. They were crying out in their sin. My third question would be - where would he have taken her to offer her? The priests wouldn't have done it. They wouldn't have participated in this. There is no record of her death nor record of mourning for her death. In the next book (the book of Samuel), Samuel the prophet speaks about Jephthah as a man of faith, not as a guy who killed his daughter, and he is listed in Hebrews 11 as a man of faith. For those reasons, there are many Bible scholars that believe (and I think there's some credence to be given to it) that he did not sacrifice her in terms of what you might call "killing her life," if you will, but rather that what happened to her happened to Samuel - that Samuel's parents took him to the tabernacle and dedicated his life to the LORD. "You stay here with the priests. You serve the LORD here the rest of your life." Common practice in Israel at the time. And it could very well have been that this woman who wasn't married, hadn't had children - that, in his devotion to sacrificing his daughter to the LORD, he brings her to this tabernacle. She's not allowed to have children, she's not allowed to get married, she spends the rest of her life serving the LORD. Under the Law, firstborn children (when they were born) were not

redeemed by sacrifice like an animal would. You would rather pay cash or an offering to buy an animal in their stead, and they would be sacrificed in lieu of the human who was born. So, you can go to Leviticus 27. The price of a young girl between the age of 5 and 20 was ten shekels. That's what the family was to give to the LORD in thanking God for the gift of a daughter. So, it's a tough passage. There's really no way to put it on Jephthah in terms of what we are given. It could very easily be that sacrifice of her life to the service of God. I think helping that argument is the fact that the children of Israel lamented four days a year, but it only happened once. You never read about this four days of lament in the entire thousands of years of history that you continue to have on the right side of your Bible that you still have to come to. So, eventually that practice was quickly lost. Like I said, it's the only place it's mentioned - never to be repeated again. It is my personal conviction that that happened that way as opposed to the sacrifice of his daughter. I don't think there's any biblical support, necessarily, for it. And, on the other side, for me, Jephthah was a godly man in everything that he did. Samuel calls him that. So does Paul in the book of Hebrews. There's no comment or question or challenge to this behavior. It was a foolish vow. His daughter had to pay the consequences of what he did. It was an act of unbelief in the midst of a life that was pretty much dedicated to the LORD, and God used him as a deliverer. And I think that, in chapter 12 in fact next week, we'll take a look at some of the things that maybe will support that thought as well. But why don't you think about it, and see what the LORD might say to you tonight?

Submitted by Maureen Dickson
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