

Judges 11

Verse 1 - 3

Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a valiant warrior, but he was the son of a harlot. And Gilead was the father of Jephthah. ² Gilead's wife bore him sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out and said to him, "You shall not have an inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman." ³ So Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob; and worthless fellows gathered themselves about Jephthah, and they went out with him.

Judge # 8 JEPHTHAH 1118 to 1094

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This is a case where a family member was judged by his half-brothers as unworthy of the family name because of an immoral act committed by his parents.

³ So Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob

See map 1105



And worthless fellows gathered themselves about Jephthah, and they went out with him.

The "worthless fellows" were like the men who gathered themselves around David. These men had great military ability but their communities had rejected them for various reasons.

"Went out with him" means they went out on raids. This was not the lawless plundering of villages within Israel but rather like David's men, who raided the enemy (Philistines) and protected Israelite settlements from marauders.

Verse 4 -11

⁴ It came about after a while that the sons of Ammon fought against Israel. ⁵ When the sons of Ammon fought against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob; ⁶ and they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our chief that we may fight against the sons of Ammon." ⁷ Then Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me and drive me from my father's house? So why have you come to me now when you are in trouble?" ⁸ The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "For this reason we have now returned to you, that you may go with us and fight with the sons of Ammon and become head over all the inhabitants of Gilead." ⁹ So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you take me back to fight against the sons of Ammon and the Lord gives them up to me, will I become your head?" ¹⁰ The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The Lord is witness between us; surely we will do as you have said." ¹¹ Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and chief over them; and Jephthah spoke all his words before the Lord at Mizpah.

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It had to be humbling for the elders to plead with Jephthah to become their leader seeing they had expelled him from his father's house. But now they needed help and they felt compelled to do whatever it took to get his help. Isn't it great how God uses the circumstances of life to make the last first and the first last?

⁹ So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, “If you take me back to fight against the sons of Ammon and the Lord gives them up to me, will I become your head?”

¹⁰ The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, “The Lord is witness between us; surely we will do as you have said

Jephthah had one condition for helping them. He would be the ruler of the Gileadites' after the military campaign was over.

¹¹ Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and chief over them; and Jephthah spoke all his words before the Lord at Mizpah.

It seems the people were quite happy to have Jephthah as their leader since they made him leader before the war with Ammon took place.

The covenant that both sides agreed to was finalized before God at Mizpah.

Verse 12 - 13

¹² Now Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the sons of Ammon, saying, “What is between you and me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?” ¹³ The king of the sons of Ammon said to the messengers of Jephthah, “Because Israel took away my land when they came up from Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok and the Jordan; therefore, return them peaceably now.”

¹² Now Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the sons of Ammon, saying, “What is between you and me, that you have come to fight against my land?”

It's always good to know why you're going to war.

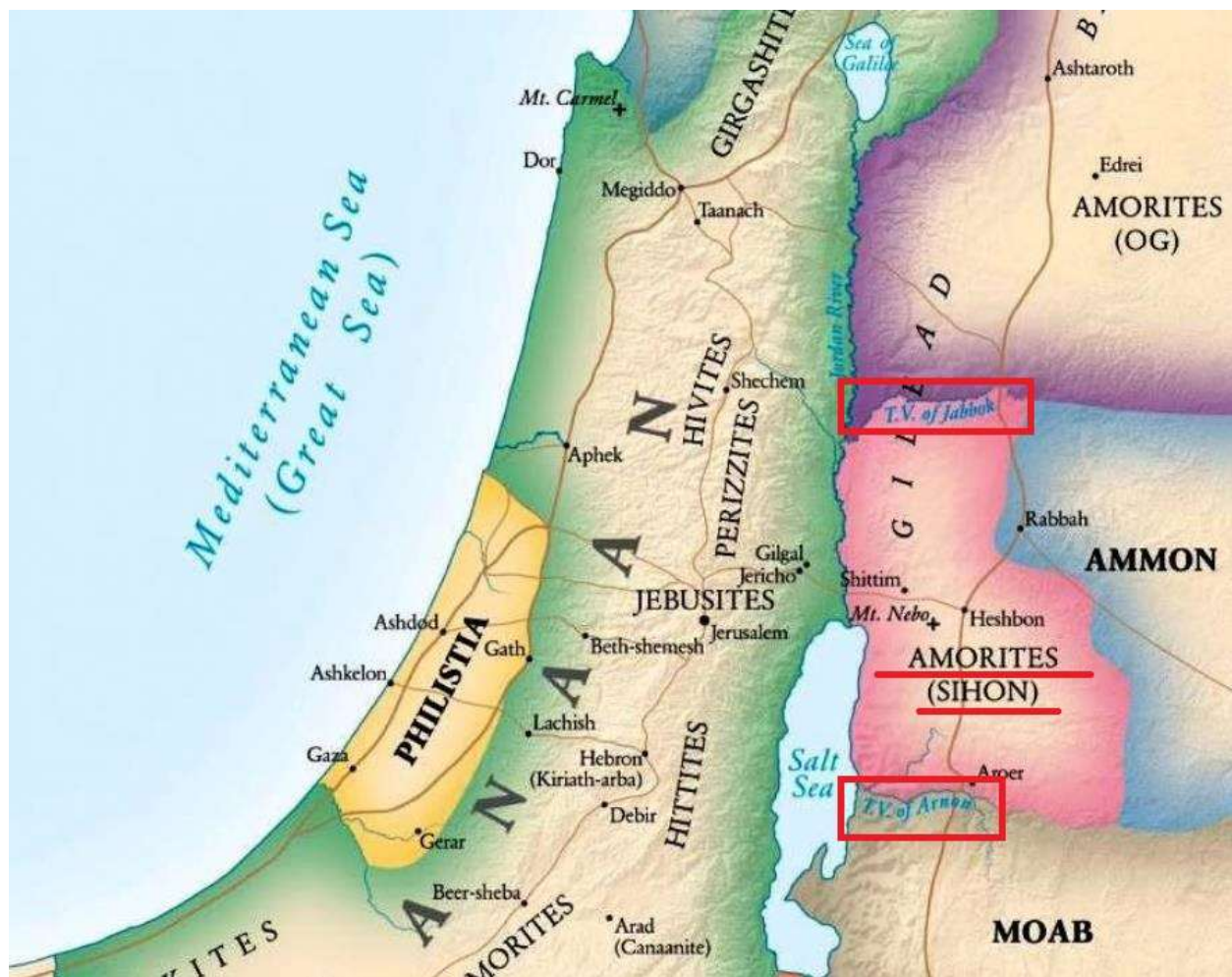
¹³ The king of the sons of Ammon said to the messengers of Jephthah, “Because Israel took away my land when they came up from Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok and the Jordan; therefore, return them peaceably now.”

The King of Ammon must have had a “senior moment” because none of this is true.

See Numbers 21:23-26

²³ But Sihon would not permit Israel to pass through his border. Instead, Sihon gathered all his people and went out against Israel in the wilderness, and came to Jahaz and fought against Israel. ²⁴ Then Israel struck him with the edge of the sword, and took possession of his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, as far as the sons of Ammon; for the border of the sons of Ammon was Jazer. ²⁵ Israel took all these cities, and Israel lived in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon and in all her ^lvillages. ²⁶ For Heshbon was the city of Sihon, king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab and had taken all his land out of his hand, as far as the Arnon.

See map 1110



Israel did not take the land of the Ammonites because this was not their land to begin with. It belonged to the Amorites and was ruled by King Sihon.

The king of Ammon was either ignorant of this his history or he was lying hoping that Jephthah didn't know his history.

Verse 14 - 22

¹⁴ But Jephthah sent messengers again to the king of the sons of Ammon, ¹⁵ and they said to him, “Thus says Jephthah, ‘Israel did not take away the land of Moab nor the land of the sons of Ammon. ¹⁶ For when they came up from Egypt, and Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh, ¹⁷ then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, “Please let us pass through your land,” but the king of Edom would not listen. And they also sent to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh. ¹⁸ Then they went through the wilderness and around the land of Edom and the land of Moab, and came to the east side of the land of Moab, and they camped beyond the Arnon; but they did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was the border of Moab. ¹⁹ And Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon, and Israel said to him, “Please let us pass through your land to our place.” ²⁰ But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory; so Sihon gathered all his people and camped in Jahaz and fought with Israel. ²¹ The Lord, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them; so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country. ²² So they possessed all the territory of the Amorites, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok, and from the wilderness as far as the Jordan.

¹⁴ But Jephthah sent messengers again to the king of the sons of Ammon

The King of Ammon stated that Israel had taken the land of Gibeah away from them. But that was not the case because Israel had in fact taken the land of Gibeah away from the Amorites.

See map 1110 above.

Verse 23 - 24

²³ Since now the Lord, the God of Israel, drove out the Amorites from before His people Israel, are you then to possess it? ²⁴ Do you not possess what Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So whatever the Lord our God has driven out before us, we will possess it.

Jephthah then states that the God of Israel drove out the Amorites and therefore Israel should possess the land of Gilead, just as the Ammonites should keep whatever was given to them by their god.

Verse 25

²⁵ Now are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive with Israel, or did he ever fight against them?

Jephthah gives us some additional history concerning the land of Gilead. Moab owned Gilead before the Amorites took it over.

Since Moab owned this land prior to the Amorites and they never disputed Israel's right to possess Gilead, why should the king of Ammon think he has any rights to Gilead?

Verse 26

²⁶ While Israel lived in Heshbon and its villages, and in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities that are on the banks of the Arnon, three hundred years, why did you not recover them within that time?

Jephthah gives his 4th reason why the King of Ammon is wrong about their right to possess Gilead.

Israel had been in possession of Gilead since the days of Moses. It was too late for Ammon to claim any rights to the land, since Israel had owned the land for such a long period of time.

At this point it seems Jephthah is going a bit overboard and it might have been wise to stop after the third argument.

Verse 27

²⁷ I therefore have not sinned against you, but you are doing me wrong by making war against me; may the Lord, the Judge, judge today between the sons of Israel and the sons of Ammon.

Jephthah appealed to the Lord, the only true Judge.

Verse 28

²⁸ But the king of the sons of Ammon disregarded the message which Jephthah sent him.

The king of Ammon made no reply to Jephthah's arguments.

Verse 29

29 Now the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah, so that he passed through Gilead and Manasseh; then he passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he went on to the sons of Ammon.

Most likely the trip through Gilead & Manasseh was to enlist as many men as possible in the army. This action was guided by the Spirit of the Lord. Just as God choose 300 men for Gideon, He also guided Jephthah to the men that were needed for this war.

Verse 30 - 31

30 Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, "If You will indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand, 31 then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering."

Did Jephthah not recognize that the Spirit of God had already come upon him? There was no need to make this vow.

Secondly, why not offer the best of your herd rather than whatever comes out of the doors of his house to meet him? This is such a sad mistake!

This will be discussed in greater detail shortly.

Verse 32 - 33

32 So Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them; and the Lord gave them into his hand. 33 He struck them with a very great slaughter from Aroer to the entrance of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim. So the sons of Ammon were subdued before the sons of Israel.

33 He struck them with a very great slaughter from Aroer to the entrance of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim

This is in the southern half of Ammon

Verse 34 - 40

³⁴ When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. Now she was his one *and* only child; besides her he had no son or daughter. ³⁵ When he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you are among those who trouble me; for I have given my word to the Lord, and I cannot take *it* back.” ³⁶ So she said to him, “My father, you have given your word to the Lord; do to me as you have said, since the Lord has avenged you of your enemies, the sons of Ammon.” ³⁷ She said to her father, “Let this thing be done for me; let me alone two months, that I may go to the mountains and weep because of my virginity, I and my companions.” ³⁸ Then he said, “Go.” So he sent her away for two months; and she left with her companions, and wept on the mountains because of her virginity. ³⁹ At the end of two months she returned to her father, who did to her according to the vow which he had made; and she had no relations with a man. Thus it became a custom in Israel, ⁴⁰ that the daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.

³⁵ When he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you are among those who trouble me; for I have given my word to the Lord, and I cannot take *it* back.

It seems almost impossible that a judge of Israel, one who had received the spirit of God, could make such a foolish vow. But he did and he could not take it back.

Jephthah says, “You have brought me low”. In the context we understand what he means but what he should have said was “I have caused myself untold grief” because of my rash vow to the Lord.

³⁶ So she said to him, “My father, you have given your word to the Lord; do to me as you have said, since the Lord has avenged you of your enemies, the sons of Ammon

This kind of submission could only come from a woman of great faith, which makes his vow an even greater tragedy. Think about all the great deeds she could have done in this world as a wife, a mother, and part of the Jewish community.

With this kind of faith she could have become a prophetess of Israel.

³⁷ She said to her father, “Let this thing be done for me; let me alone two months, that I may go to the mountains and weep because of my virginity, I and my companions.”

It's too bad she didn't ask for 50 years and 2 months. 😊

³⁹ At the end of two months she returned to her father, who did to her according to the vow which he had made; and she had no relations with a man.

Again this shows the quality of her character.

Thus it became a custom in Israel, ⁴⁰ that the daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.

This tells us that the people of Israel were deeply affected by this misfortune.

Despite the foolish vow that Jephthah made his name appears in the roster of God's faithful servants.

See Hebrews 11:32 - 34

³² And what more shall I say? For time will fail me if I tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets, ³³ who by faith conquered kingdoms, performed *acts of righteousness*, obtained promises, shut the mouths of lions, ³⁴ quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, from weakness were made strong, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight.