

Judges 11–21

Life Without God

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ONE

YOUR WORDS MATTER

Read Judges 11;
other references as given.

In the first Bible study on Judges (chapters 1–10), you learned several important truths about God and walking with Him. You learned that there is a big difference between knowing about God’s promises and trusting in them. And closely related to that, you learned how to overcome “iron chariot” problems in your life and why faith is always the x-factor that enables believers to transcend the limits of human reasoning. You learned how to discern God’s will for your life, why “fleece-casting” leads believers away from the authority of God’s Word, and why a good beginning does not always lead to a good ending. Lastly, you learned about the seven cycles of sin and that God delivers His people when they cry out to Him.

In this first lesson you will be introduced to Jephthah, the son of a harlot, who overcame his ignoble beginning to become a noble man of valor and a great leader of Israel. You will also learn why it is so important to say what you mean, to mean what you say, and to not make rash vows to the Lord. The Bible says **When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; for He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed** (Ecclesiastes 5:4). Now, before you begin each lesson, ask God to reveal Himself to you through His Word and to transform you into the image of Jesus Christ.

1. Israel was at war again with its neighbors (Judges 11:4). This time it was the Ammonites, a tribal nation that lived on the



Lombardi Time Principle

When the leader arrives 10-15 minutes early, he or she has time to pray, prepare the room, and greet the participants personally.

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southeast side of the Sea of Galilee. Israel mustered another volunteer army, but instead of having a leader (Gideon) with no army, they had an army with no leader (Judges 11:8). Describe the man God chose to lead Israel into battle (Judges 11:1–3; 12:7; Hebrews 11:32–35).

2. Jephthah was driven from his home by his half-brothers (Judges 11:1–2). Instead of becoming a “victim” or allowing prejudice and injustice to defeat him, Jephthah appropriated God’s grace and allowed his upbringing to be the Lord’s incomparable school of learning (Judges 11:11). In your study of Judges 1–10, you learned that God often uses man’s sin to accomplish His will. List three ways God used the rejection of Jephthah’s brothers to prepare him as a leader (Judges 11:2–3).

1. _____ (v. ____).
2. _____ (v. ____).
3. _____ (v. ____).

3. God uses trials and the daily routines of life to prepare believers for His service. Moses was a simple shepherd before God called him to shepherd a nation (Exodus 3:1–10). Simon Peter caught fish before Jesus called him to be a fisher of men (Mark 1:16–17). List two things that God allowed in your past (difficulties and challenges, failures, the routines of life, sinful actions of others) to prepare you to serve Him (left-hand column) and explain how those events changed your life (right-hand column).

1. _____
- _____
2. _____
- _____

4. a. The men of Gilead, including Jephthah's half-brothers, sought his leadership in their conflict with the Ammonites (Judges 11:5–7). Do you think Jephthah's response to the men of Gilead (**Did you not hate me?**—Judges 11:7) is evidence of his unforgiveness of their earlier actions or something else? If so, what?

- b. Jephthah seemed suspicious of the elders of Gilead. What did the elders of Gilead do to assure him that they would honor their commitment (Judges 11:9–11)?

5. Jephthah showed great restraint when he attempted to negotiate a peaceful settlement with the Ammonites (Judges 11:12–27). What did the Ammonite king want the Israelites to do (Judges 11:13)?

6. Some Christians misinterpret Jesus's words when He said, **To him who strikes you on the one cheek, offer the other also. And from him who takes away your cloak, do not withhold your tunic either** (Luke 6:29). They understand Jesus' words to mean that Christians should always yield to the demands of others even if they are sinful. While believers should always seek peace in their relationships with others (Romans 12:18; 1 Peter 3:11), Jesus never intended His followers to forfeit their God-given responsibility to stand for the truth (John 4:24, 8:31). What did Jephthah say when the king of Ammon accused Israel of stealing his land (Judges 11:15–27)?



Would you like to learn how to disciple another person, lead a life-changing Bible study, or start a new study? Lamplighters Int'l ministries can help guide you.

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7. American poet James Russell Lowell (1819–1891) said “Truth is always on the scaffold and lies are always on the throne.” He meant that the truth must be defended, but lies seem to be accepted without reservation. List five areas of life where Christians should be ardent defenders of the truth. The first one is provided for you.

1. *Within the church* _____

2. _____

3. _____

4. _____

5. _____

8. a. God doesn’t promise Christians freedom from all conflict in this world (Job 5:7; 14:1; Ecclesiastes 2:23), but He promises guidance, wisdom, and peace during life’s struggles. Ask yourself if you are more like 1) Jephthah—someone who sincerely wanted peace but who was willing to defend the truth—or are you like 2) the king of Ammon who was trying to deceive others to get what was not his?

- b. In what areas of your life do you need to become more of a truth-teller?

- Speaking the truth
- Not exaggerating/boasting
- Keeping your word
- Fulfilling your vows to God, spouse, and others
- Standing up for those who can’t defend themselves (unborn, poor, needy)
- Sharing the Gospel of Jesus Christ
- Not bearing false witness
- Not lying under oath (perjury)
- Not using guile or manipulative speech

9. The Ammonites wanted the Israelites to return the land that was occupied by the clan of Gilead. They believed Israel had taken the land unlawfully when Moses originally led the Israelites out of Egypt three hundred years earlier (Judges 11:13). List three reasons the second messengers gave to the Ammonite king to support the belief that the land should remain in Israel's possession (Judges 11:14–27).

1. _____
_____ (v. ____).
2. _____
_____ (v. ____).
3. _____
_____ (v. ____).

10. a. When his explanation was unacceptable to the Ammonite king (Judges 11:28) Jephthah went throughout Gilead and Manasseh to prepare the Israelites for war (Judges 11:29). Jephthah's desire to defeat the Ammonites was so intense that he made a rash vow to the Lord (Judges 11:30–31). What did Jephthah vow to the Lord if He would give them victory over the Ammonites (Judges 11:31)?

b. What happened when the Lord allowed Jephthah and his army to defeat the Ammonites and he returned home (Judges 11:32–35)?

11. a. It seems inconceivable that Jephthah offered his daughter as a burnt offering to the Lord. What evidence



Using table tents will help visitors feel more comfortable when they attend the group. If you are meeting online, encourage the participants to “rename” themselves if necessary.

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does the passage provide to indicate that he offered her as a burnt offering (Judges 11:31–40)?

- b. Many biblical scholars don't believe Jephthah offered his only daughter on a pagan altar as a human sacrifice. They believe Jephthah consigned her to a state of perpetual maidenhood (virginity), probably in service in the tabernacle. According to this interpretation, she would bear the curse of childlessness, and Jephthah would be deprived of an heir. What biblical evidence is given in the passage to support this view (Judges 11:37–39; Deuteronomy 12:31)?

12. What is the most important truth you learned from this lesson?

LEADER'S GUIDE

Lesson 1: Your Words Matter

1. Jephthah was the son of Gilead, who was also from the tribe of Manasseh (Judges 11:1). His mother was a harlot (Judges 11:1), which probably indicates that she was a Canaanite since prostitution was unknown among the ancient Israelites at that time. His half-brothers drove him out of their home (Judges 11:2–3), and he settled near Syria in the land of Tob (Judges 11:3). He became a valiant warrior and Israel's eighth judge (Judges 11:1, 12:7). His inclusion in the “hall of faith” (Hebrews 11:32–35) indicates that he possessed a sincere faith in God.
2.
 1. Jephthah's humble background as the son of a harlot would have been an antidote to pride—a sin that often hinders people in life.
 2. Jephthah's half-brothers' rejection would have taught him to be self-reliant and courageous at an early age.
 3. Jephthah led a band of worthless men (Judges 11:3; NIV: *adventurers*; the Hebrew word means “to make empty” or “to be reckless”) on raiding missions. The Lord would have used this time of leading a band of marauding misfits to develop his leadership skills. Other answers could apply.
3. Answers will vary.
4.
 - a. Jephthah's half-brothers demonstrated a lack of character when they drove him from their home. When the elders of the clan asked Jephthah to lead them against the Ammonites, he needed to know that they had learned from their past failures, and they had become men of character and commitment—men he could count on in battle. Apparently, one or more of his half-brothers had become elders and leaders of the clan of Gilead by this time.
 - b. The elders of the clan of Gilead made a commitment to Jephthah before the Lord. They asked him to be their military leader against the Ammonites and to be the leader of the clan after their victory. They called on the Lord God to be a witness of their commitment to

Jephthah (Judges 11:10), and they formalized their commitment at a swearing-in ceremony at Mizpah (Judges 11:10–11).

5. The king of Ammon wanted Israel to return some territory that he believed belonged to the Ammonites. Israel had won the disputed land when Moses originally led the Israelites out of Egypt.
6. Jephthah refuted the king's allegation (Judges 11:15). He said what the king of Ammon was saying was wrong and Israel had not taken their land.
7.
 1. Within the church
 2. At home
 3. In the workplace
 4. In schools (all levels)
 5. In neighborhoods
 6. In politics
 7. Other answers could apply.
8. Answers will vary.
9.
 1. The land in question never belonged to the Ammonites. The land of Gilead was taken from the Amorites (Moab), not the Ammonites or the Moabites (Judges 11:15).
 2. Sihon, king of the Amorites, had originally attacked the Israelites when they attempted to enter the land. Israel defended itself and defeated the Amorites, giving them a legitimate claim to the land (Judges 11:16–22).
 3. The land had remained in the possession of the Israelites for three hundred years without anyone questioning their possession of the land (Judges 11:26). Jephthah's point was, "Why are you laying claim to the land now?"
10.
 - a. Jephthah vowed to dedicate to the Lord as a burnt offering whatever came out of his house. Sometimes herdsman brought some of their animals into an area in the front of their homes to protect them. Perhaps Jephthah expected one of the animals to come out first when he returned home.
 - b. Jephthah's daughter came out of his house first to meet him.

11. a.
 1. The normal understanding of the phrase “burnt offering” would be a sacrifice (Judges 11:31).
 2. The extreme emotional response of Jephthah when he saw his daughter come out to meet him seems to support the belief that he believed that he had promised his daughter as a burnt offering (Judges 11:35).
 3. The daughters of Israel went every year to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah (Judges 11:40). Other support for this interpretation includes:
 - i. The Hebrew word for sacrifice (*olah*) normally refers to a sacrificial offering.
 - ii. Jephthah was the son of a prostitute, and he might have adopted heathen beliefs. Jephthah made a thoughtless vow and felt compelled to fulfill his vow so he would not be embarrassed before others and lose his leadership opportunity.
- b.
 1. Jephthah's daughter went with her friends to weep on the mountains because of her virginity (Judges 11:37–38). If she was going to be sacrificed as a human offering, it seems strange that she would spend the last two months of her life preoccupied with this concern.
 2. The Bible seems to make a point of the fact that, after she returned from her two-month period of mourning, she had no relations with a man (Judges 11:39). Other answers could include:
 - i. In Israel, a burnt offering was not thought of in terms of human sacrifice.
 - ii. Even though Jephthah had at one time a Canaanite influence, human sacrifice was not prevalent among the Canaanites at this time.
 - iii. Regardless of Jephthah's background, he was a godly man who is specifically recognized for his faith in God (Hebrews 11:32–35).
 - iv. As a God-fearing man, Jephthah would be aware of the Mosaic prohibition against all human sacrifices.

Conclusion: Although Bible scholars are divided on the nature of Jephthah's sacrifice, the better interpretation seems to favor the

perspective that Jephthah offered his daughter for perpetual service in the tabernacle.

12. Answers will vary.

Lesson 2: Pride and Punishment

1. 1. Jephthah told the Ephraimites that he had asked for their help, but they refused (Judges 12:2–3).
 2. He gathered the men of Gilead and fought against the Ephraimites and defeated them (Judges 12:4). Interestingly, the Gileadites seem to have been incited by the Ephraimites' statement that they were fugitives or renegades. Perhaps the Ephraimites' accusation offers some insight into how they viewed the original settlement of the Gileadites east of the Jordan River.
2. The Gileadites lived on the east side of the Jordan River and controlled the fords on the river. They made everyone who wanted to cross the river submit to a simple test which required the would-be crossers to say the word *Shibboleth*, which means an ear of grain or a flowing stream. If they pronounced the word correctly, they could cross the river without further detainment. If they mispronounced the word by saying “Sibboleth,” the Gileadites would know that they were Ephraimites who were fleeing across the river to their homes. During World War II, the Nazis used this same tactic to identify Russian Jews by requiring them to pronounce the word for corn, *kookoorooza*.
3. a. Forty-two thousand Ephraimites. While there is no mention of the number of Gileadites who died, it is reasonable to assume that a much smaller number of them were killed during the battle. The Lord could have supernaturally protected the Gileadites, but the larger number of deaths incurred by the Ephraimites is likely included to show the devastating effects of their sinful behavior.
 - b. Approximately 11,000 people die every year in the United States due to drunk driving. This equates to about 29 deaths per day or one every fifty minutes. There are approximately 74,000 injuries each year in America due to alcohol-related automobile accidents.