

Finer Grounds

Judges and Ruth

Lesson 7: Strength Turned to Weakness (Judges 10 & 11)

Read Judges 10:1-5

List the two judges mentioned in these verses.

Once again, we see the interjection of two judges that don't have a significant narration attached to their names. It is possible that the judges discussed in detail were the ones that best illustrated the central themes of the book. These also may have been added to bring the total to twelve judges; the number twelve in scripture represents completeness and authority.

Read Judges 10:6-16

Identify the elements of the cycle of the judges found in these verses.

More description is given to the events of the cycle here than anywhere else. It appears as though the nation was now very much entrenched in the pagan culture that surrounded them; in fact, there are seven false gods listed in verse 6 that they are serving instead of Yahweh. This time He would double their affliction by giving them into the hands of two other nations.

According to Judges 10:7, by which two nations was Israel oppressed?

These two will correlate directly with the next two judges we see. Jephthah will deal with the Ammonite threat and Samson will face the Philistines. We should take note of the fact that these two nations were included in the list of false gods Israel was worshipping. The cultures and people they were trying so hard to conform with were the very countries that caused them pain and hardship.

What are some ways we try to assimilate into the culture around us that cause us to compromise God's rightful position in our lives?

What can you do to work toward eliminating one of these cultural threats from your life this week?

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How many accounts of deliverance does God give in Judges 10:11-12? Why is this significant? (cf. Judges 10:6)

While God could have recounted hundreds of accounts of Him rescuing His people, He lists only seven. These vividly contrast the false gods Israel has been serving; the one true God is living and active.

How does God respond to their cries in Judges 10:14?

God isn't interested in their empty words. They can take their shallow, inactive dialog and bring it to their nonresponsive false gods. God continually demonstrates what He desires: action! He doesn't simply want them to say they want deliverance; Yahweh demands repentance, a complete turning away from their sinful behavior.

What action did Israel take in Judges 10:16?

How did the Lord respond to Israel's actions?

The Lord is always faithful and when His people turn to Him with their whole hearts He will respond. The book of Judges illustrates this attribute on every page. As long as there is breath

in our body, we have the opportunity to turn back to God, no matter what we have done.

This time deliverance will be harder fought and last much longer (starting with Jephthah and ending with Samuel), but God allows men to save the Israelites from these enemies. Just like the Israelites, the longer we allow ourselves to be enslaved by a particular sin the more difficult it is to free ourselves from its grasp. That doesn't mean we can't be delivered, only that we will have to work harder for success.

What are some sins that you have had to work harder at defeating because of the length of time you had been involved in them?

What are some practical ways that you can fight these long-term battles with sin?

Read Judges 10:17-11:11

Here is where we break from the typical pattern; while generally God appoints a deliverer, the people are the ones searching for a leader. It seems that other than the oath made in Judges 11:9-11, little consideration is given to what God desires in this situation.

Based on these verses, what do we know of Jephthah?

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What do we learn about Jephthah's half-brothers?

The Gileadites were desperate; if someone helped them they would give them the position of leadership over all Gilead. The word they used in Judges 10:18 is different from the offer they made to Jephthah in 11:6. The former being a presidential-like leader over the nation and the latter acting as merely a military commander. Even though they needed Jephthah, they were blinded by their prejudice. Jephthah, however, was used to their behavior and had become a shrewd negotiator.

How did Jephthah respond to their request?

At first glance, our hero seems very self-seeking. He does redeem himself a little when he discusses the battle; he understands that if they win it will be because the Lord gives the Ammonites into their hands (Judges 11:9).

Read Judges 11:12-28

This is one of the longest interactions we see between the opposing army and the current judge. Jephthah, preferring to come to a peaceful agreement, again shows his eloquent and hard-nosed bargaining style. It seems as though this was a gift that he relied on much of the time; however, as we will see, this gift is going to be a weakness as well.

According to Judges 11:28, how did the king of Ammon respond to Jephthah's message?

It didn't matter how logically laid out Jephthah's argument was, the king was looking for a fight.

Read Judges 11:29-40

Before we begin looking at this section, I will mention that there are many scholarly disagreements on these events. I will present what I feel is the most likely interpretation; however, I would encourage you to look into the matter for yourself.

For the first time in this chapter, Yahweh becomes more than a passive witness. It is clear from the statement in Judges 11:29 that he approves of Jephthah as judge and will help him defeat the Ammonites. God will give Jephthah success, but we will see Jephthah's gift for negotiation cause him problems.

What negotiation does Jephthah attempt in Judges 11:30-31?

The language of this vow can be interpreted in two different ways: "...it shall be the Lord's AND I will offer it up as a burnt offering." Or "...it shall be the Lord's OR I will offer it up as a burnt offering." (Simeon 54). I believe the proper interpretation of this vow is the latter with the word "or" instead of "and." There were only very specific animals that would have been acceptable burnt offerings to the Lord and Jephthah would

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have understood this. Other gifts outside of burnt offerings could be given to the Lord by donating them to the tribe of Levi or directly to the temple.

According to Judges 11:34, what came out of the door to meet Jephthah?

What was Jephthah's response to this?

Considering the ramifications of his vow, this would have been a terrible thing in the eyes of an Israelite. It was a major source of pride to have many children; if his daughter was given to the Lord for temple service he would have no heirs. His line would essentially be dead. We have already seen throughout the book of Judges several of the men ascribed honor because of the number of sons they had. Jephthah would never have this honor.

According to Judges 11:37, why did Jephthah's daughter go to the mountains for two months?

In Judges 11:39 what statement is made in conjunction with Jephthah fulfilling his vow?

The emphasis here is not on the loss of life but on perpetual virginity. The daughter is mourning because of her virginity and when she

returns Jephthah's vow is fulfilled as she "had no relations with a man." To further this idea, we are told the daughters of Israel went four times a year to "commemorate" the daughter of Jephthah. This would make sense in this setting if they were visiting their friend who sacrificed a normal life for the fulfillment of her father's vow.

As you go throughout your week, remember that sometimes your greatest strength, like Jephthah's diplomatic nature, can turn into a major weakness. Stay vigilant and don't allow Satan any opportunities!