

A FEARLESS JUDGE IN ISRAEL

PLEASE do not read these comments until you have prayed for wisdom and read the Bible to learn what the Holy Spirit wants you to teach your students. Then let Him guide you in using these notes below to meet the needs of your students.

Lesson Aim: To defend the humble and innocent and defeat the proud and guilty.

Suggestion: Give next week's Student Lesson to your class to answer the questions. Let them share their answers in class. The questions below will reveal important truths you may want to emphasize.

Introduction: The next major judge was Jephthah, who in many ways was an outstanding person. He became a worthy judge of Israel when he defeated the Ammonites, who demanded the land of Gilead on the east side of the Jordan River be given to them. The LORD also used Jephthah to squelch the jealousy of the Ephraim tribe. They claimed he did not invite them to fight against Ammon, so they threatened to destroy him and his house with fire. He met this threat with war which he won at great cost to the Ephraimites. However, he is most remembered for his "burnt offering" vow that he promised to give the LORD, if he defeated Ammon (11:31). The question persists: did he offer his daughter as a burnt offering to the LORD or not? Many believe that he did, others believe he did not, but gave her to the LORD as a virgin to serve Him instead of redeeming her with money as the Law provided in such cases. For six years he successfully ruled Israel on behalf of the LORD. "Now we exhort you, brethren, warn them that are unruly, comfort the fainthearted, support the weak, be patient toward all" (1 Thess 5:14).

Why was Jephthah cast out of his home by his brothers? 11:1-2

He was the son of a harlot by Gilead and his brothers did not want to share their inheritance with him. This was wrong. God accepts those that trust Him: Rahab (harlot), Bathsheba (adulteress), Samson (fornicator), Mary Magdalene (demon worshipper). Who do you accept?

How did Jephthah treat his brothers when they needed him? 11:4-10; cf 10:17-18

His brothers humbled themselves and negotiated with him. He simply asked to be their leader after the war, if the LORD enabled him to win the war with the Ammonites. They agreed and he trusted their word. How do you treat those that need your help after they have mistreated you? Jesus told us to love one another and we should help defend those that humble themselves.

How did Jephthah deal with the Ammonites? 11:15-28

He told the Ammonite king why Gilead belonged to Israel and not to Ammon in order to avoid war. When the king refused to listen, he went to war with Ammon with the power of the Spirit and won. Believers must patiently teach spiritual truth to their enemies to avoid conflict, but if that fails, they must deal with them forcefully by the Spirit's power. Will you follow that practice?

What options did Jephthah have for fulfilling his vow? 11:30-40

He could offer his daughter as a burnt offering to the LORD, but that would be an abomination to Him and would be rejected (Deut 18:9-10). He could give an offering to the LORD to pay for his vow he made and she would be free (Lev 27:1-8). He could give his daughter to the LORD to serve Him all the days of her life as Hannah had given Samuel to the LORD. Since she was a virgin, she would never be married and have children. This may have caused her mourning, but she would enjoy the LORD's fellowship and favor all the days of her life on earth. She agreed with her father's decision. If you were his daughter, what decision would you want him to make?

How did Jephthah handle the jealousy of the Ephraimites and their threat? 12:1-7

The Ephraimites were jealous because he won the war with the Ammonites without their help. He had asked them for men to serve in his army, but they did not respond. Maybe they did not want to be under his leadership. However, Jephthah did not take their threat to burn him and his house lightly. He immediately went to war with them and was victorious. Ephraim suffered heavy losses. Jealousy is cruel, so you need to deal with it seriously and defeat it.