

BIBLE BRIEFING

“All in the Family”

JUDGES 10-12

Introduction

There is an unusual concentration of relatives to the Judges in these next three chapters. We'll read about the thirty sons of Jair; thirty sons, thirty daughters, and thirty daughters-in-law of Ibzan; forty sons and thirty grandsons of Abdon; and the daughter of Jephthah.

We don't want to infer too much from their mere mention; but it seems to me that they represent a godly offspring. Thus, these can be encouraging chapters for parents raising kids in rough times.

Judges 10:1 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.

Judges 10:2 He judged Israel twenty-three years; and he died and was buried in Shamir.

Despite his lengthy service as a Judge, you're given no details about Tola. He went about serving the Lord and the Lord's people with very little to distinguish him.

Tola is my new hero in the Book of Judges! He's just like most of us; or, I should say, just like most of us ought to be. He served day-in and day-out for twenty-three years; he was faithful; he was stable. Sure, nothing amazing was recorded about him. But neither was anything shocking, or shameful, or sinful.

We shouldn't set our sights on mediocrity. But, as our lives unfold, many of us will walk with the Lord in a relative obscurity, overshadowed by others who seem just like us but in and through whose lives God seems to be doing much more remarkable things. His most remarkable work is in your heart.

Judges 10:3 After him arose Jair, a Gileadite; and he judged Israel twenty-two years.

Judges 10:4 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.

Judges 10:5 And Jair died and was buried in Camon.

These guys were like a mounted police force. One was assigned to each city. It's like Barney Fife (from the Andy Griffith Show) with his one bullet. Better not attack one of those cities, or you'll be chased down by the Donkey Patrol.

Jair was blessed to have not one... Not several... But **thirty** faithful sons.

I'm blessed to have Geno involved in the ministry of CCHanford. A lot of the Calvary pastors are seeing their sons get into ministry - either at home, or somewhere else. It's to be admired.

I'm also blessed that we've grown-up a lot of young men who - at least for now - are willing to ride donkeys around Hanford!

Judges 10:6 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.

When it says they served these various gods, it doesn't just mean that they changed their religion. It means they adopted the practices of the people who worshipped these gods. For example: They began to sacrifice their kids.

Once you open the door, lots of weird stuff comes in and fills your life. As it has been said, "When a man stops believing in God, he does not believe in nothing; he believes in anything."

Judges 10:7 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.

Judges 10:8 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.

Judges 10:9 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.

If you are lukewarm, **God gets hot!** He was angry in a way that called for Him to discipline His wayward children. God used the other nations to discipline them.

When you let the world in, it eventually takes control. There's no real compromise – only a temporary one, until you are a captive.

Judges 10:10 And the children of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, "We have sinned against You, because we have both forsaken our God and served the Baals!"

Suddenly, it all became so clear! It's too bad we wait to repent until so much damage has been done – either to ourselves, or to others, or both.

Judges 10:11 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?*

Judges 10:12 Also the Sidonians and Amalekites and Maonites oppressed you; and you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hand.

Judges 10:13 Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore I will deliver you no more.

Judges 10:14 Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress."

God had already delivered them. They had voluntarily gone to them. It's not unlike a Christian, who was set free from some besetting sin, only to ease back into it. Or – more prevalent today – a Christian who never was in bondage to a sin, who takes it up as a new hobby or habit.

Does it strike you odd that God should wait to deliver them? Sometimes we need to learn how awful sin actually is – not by committing it, but by regretting it.

Judges 10:15 And the children of Israel said to the LORD, "We have sinned! Do to us whatever seems best to You; only deliver us this day, we pray."

Judges 10:16 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.

First, it was confession: We have sinned.

Second, it was submission: Do whatever seems best to You.

Finally, it was repentance: They put away the foreign gods.

Israel had finally discovered that the *worst* of serving God was better than the *best* of serving idols.

God reacted from His compassion, as He always will when there is a true repentance.

Judges 10:17 Then the people of Ammon gathered together and encamped in Gilead. And the children of Israel assembled together and encamped in Mizpah.
Judges 10:18 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."

The children of Israel were set free spiritually. But they were still being oppressed. Who would God raise-up?

Judges 11:1 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, but he was the son of a harlot; and Gilead begot Jephthah.
Judges 11:2 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."
Judges 11:3 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.

The son of a prostitute, disowned by his family, leading a gang of worthless Raiders (not from Oakland) – he was God's choice! They were the Tob Mob. (Probably had customized donkeys).

(The worthless men, by the way, were probably the same type of troubled folk that would later rally to David and become his mighty men. They weren't wicked.).

Your natural birth... Your family ties... Your earthly associations... Do not hinder you from serving the Lord. Your reputation may precede you; but it doesn't disqualify you.

On the other end: If you have a better birth and situation, quit trusting in those things!

Judges 11:4 It came to pass after a time that the people of Ammon made war against Israel.

Judges 11:5 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.

Judges 11:6 Then they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our commander, that we may fight against the people of Ammon."

They may have been looking too much on the outward appearance. Jephthah was the toughest guy they knew.

Judges 11:7 So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "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?"

Great question! Trouble makes us look at people differently. Take Hurricane Katrina, for example. It's been suggested that it was a judgment upon wicked people in New Orleans. Well, then explain to me why the most wicked sections of New Orleans were the ones spared? Perhaps we haven't had enough trouble of our own.

Judges 11:8 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."

Judges 11:9 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?"

Judges 11:10 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."

Judges 11:11 Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and commander over them; and Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD in Mizpah.

This is a negotiation. Jephthah doesn't want to risk his life unless these guys commit to follow him *in* and *after* the battle. You can't blame him.

We're in a spiritual battle, against serious enemies. We need to be mutually committed – to lead, and to be led.

Judges 11:12 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?"

Judges 11:13 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."

Judges 11:14 So Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the people of Ammon,

Judges 11:15 and said to him, "Thus says Jephthah: 'Israel did not take away the land of Moab, nor the land of the people of Ammon;

Judges 11:16 for when Israel came up from Egypt, they walked through the wilderness as far as the Red Sea and came to Kadesh.

Judges 11:17 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.

Judges 11:18 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.

Judges 11:19 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."

Judges 11:20 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.

Judges 11:21 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.

Judges 11:22 They took possession of all the territory of the Amorites, from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan.

Jephthah was rough, but not a dummy. Israel was blameless. They had wanted peace, but were attacked. In defending themselves, they won territory. **That's the way it is in war!** Think of how, even today, Israel is constantly pressured to return land they won when attacked. It's ridiculous.

Judges 11:23 'And now the LORD God of Israel has dispossessed the Amorites from before His people Israel; should you then possess it?

Judges 11:24 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.

Judges 11:25 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?

Judges 11:26 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?

Judges 11:27 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."

Judges 11:28 However, the king of the people of Ammon did not heed the words which Jephthah sent him.

You cannot live peacefully with people who do not want peace. So you'd better be on the right side when things go wrong. Better be on God's side.

Judges 11:29 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.

The secret to success was the Spirit of the Lord. This battle was over before it began.

But – and it's a huge one - Jephthah did a foolish thing: He interjected himself in the equation. He elevated himself to a partnership with God, when God was looking for a willing servant.

Judges 11:30 And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, "If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands,
Judges 11:31 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."

What!? What kind of crazy vow was that? Jephthah was offering the Lord something not asked for. Better to offer the Lord what He has required – your own life as a living sacrifice, not someone else's.

Judges 11:32 So Jephthah advanced toward the people of Ammon to fight against them, and the LORD delivered them into his hands.

Judges 11:33 And he defeated them from Aroer as far as Minnith - twenty cities - and to Abel Keramim, with a very great slaughter. Thus the people of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.

Judges 11:34 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.

Judges 11:35 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."

Scholars disagree as to whether or not Jephthah should have kept or broken his vow. For sure, there is much to be said about

commitment and dedication. But I'm in the go-ahead-and-break a foolish vow camp. Especially since human sacrifice is an abominable thing to God. You offer yourself, a living sacrifice; not your daughter, a burnt offering!

His daughter was surprisingly spiritual:

Judges 11:36 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."

Judges 11:37 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."

Judges 11:38 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.

Judges 11:39 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

Judges 11:40 *that* the daughters of Israel went four days each year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

Many scholars believe Jephthah carried out his vow and killed the girl. Others point out that the word *and*, in verse thirty-one, can be translated *or*. In other words,

"...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, **OR** I will offer it up as a burnt offering."

The idea is that, if it was one of his kids, he would dedicate him or her to serving God; if it was an animal, then he would offer it as a sacrifice.

That seems weak, though, based on his reaction. I think he went through with it. I think he killed her. After all, being dedicated to serve the Lord – what's to mourn about that?

There's another episode in the career of Jephthah; it's recorded in verses one through seven of Chapter Twelve. I want to wait on it – take it next time – and jump down to verse eight through the rest of the chapter. Several Judges are presented in rapid, historical

succession. The only details given involve the number of sons, grandsons, daughters, and daughters-in-law. But that is significant.

Judges 12:8 After him, Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel.

Judges 12:9 He had thirty sons. And he gave away thirty daughters in marriage, and brought in thirty daughters from elsewhere for his sons. He judged Israel seven years.

Judges 12:10 Then Ibzan died and was buried at Bethlehem.

Judges 12:11 After him, Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel. He judged Israel ten years.

Judges 12:12 And Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried at Aijalon in the country of Zebulun.

Judges 12:13 After him, Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel.

Judges 12:14 He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy young donkeys. He judged Israel eight years.

Judges 12:15 Then Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died and was buried in Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the mountains of the Amalekites.

Remember, in Chapter Ten, we saw Jair and his thirty sons. Jair; Ibzan; Abdon; all had a godly heritage. And Jephthah had a godly daughter.

These children and grandchildren were so numerous, unfortunately, because these judges had multiple wives. God is not into polygamy. His pattern for marriage is what you see in the Garden, with Adam and Eve.

Polygamous marriage doesn't detract from these kids. It wasn't their fault. And it seems they grew to serve the Lord.

Even in difficult times, and under distressing circumstances, you can raise-up godly kids.