

## Hebrews 11:32d “Jephthah a wanted man of faith”

### I. Introduction

#### II. Vs. 32d Bandit to leader of the band

#### I. Introduction

Jephthah preceded Samson as a Judge with his main task of defeating the Ammonites in stead of the Philistines. His story occupies the 11<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Judges but yet he finds his name mentioned in the Hebrews Hall of Faith. There is nothing about Jephthah that was normal. His life for the first 28 verses of the 12<sup>th</sup> chapter of Judges describes the fact that Jephthah had been dealt a bad hand. He was a man with deep emotional scars that seemed to direct his choices in life. Through our examination of him it must be noted at the offset that we neither recommend this kind of upbringing nor can we condone Jephthah’s responses to it. What we can do is appreciate our God who in spite of it can still reach into a person’s soul and not only redeem him but use him to redeem others. The chapter records five stages of development in the life of Jephthah:

- Vs. 1-2 Outcast
- Vs. 3 Outlaw
- Vs. 4-11 From bandit to the band leader
- Vs. 12-28 From street fighter to diplomat
- Vs. 29-33 Spiritual leader

Judges 11:1-2 records Jephthah’s being a “*mighty man of valor*” but it doesn’t coincide with his upbringing. His mother was a harlot, a *heathen prostitute*. His father “Gilead” (*rocky*) gave this child a “*rocky*” start in life. This situation would be difficult in any time but Israel was a “*Theocratic*” nation in which all of life centered on the worship of God. His father did the “*right thing*” by taking him into his home but he nonetheless grew up unwanted by his step mother and siblings as they drove him away and he fled to the frontier area of Tob where other outcasts and drifters lived, forced to make his own way in the world (verse 2-3).

Yet in Hebrews 11:32-34 the author says, “*For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and **Jephthah**, ... Jephthah whose name means, (**Whom God sets free**) was “free indeed” and is mentioned in the “**Hall of Faith**” as a man who “**through faith** subdued kingdoms, worked righteousness, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, quenched the violence of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, out of weakness were made strong, became valiant in battle, turned to flight the armies of the aliens.” At the start he certainly would not have been a person voted “**Most Likely to Succeed**”. Reading through our bibles causes me to realize **that God loves to fish in the pond of “dysfunction”**. **He finds and then develops by His love the most affective servants from the most unlikely places. Our God is in the business of making unusable people usable and ugly people beautiful.***

#### II. Vs. 32d Bandit to leader of the band

According to Judges 11:3 Jephthah went from “*outcast*” to “*outlaw*” which seemed like a natural path following his family’s rejection. ***He was unwanted and unloved and built walls around his rejection that kept him imprisoned in his insecurity.*** The guy becomes a thug, a gang leader as he hung around “*worthless men*” doing nothing but raiding folks as he surrounded himself with likeminded thugs and hit the streets of Tob; 15 miles from the Sea of Galilee (Good). It was a place where the Israelites and their enemies lived in constant conflict; all of which was normal to Jephthah. You could probably picture these

constant conflict, all of which was normal to Jephthah. You could probably picture these young men dressed in black riding their loud “*Harley Donkeys*” with the insignia on their backs that read “*Tob Mob*”. Jephthah served as the “*Robin Hood*” of the area along with his band hardcore thugs who for a price would protect the Jews from attacks from their enemies. It was in this wilderness of isolation that he graduated from the “*school of hard knocks*”.

It isn't until Judges 11:4-11 that we learn the condition of Israel to which Jephthah inherits as a judge. For 18 years Israel was under the oppression of the Ammonites and it had reached the point where God questioned the nation's confession and they realized that they need to submit to His authority and destroy their idols. When the Ammonites once again moved into the region of Gilead (*part of modern day Jordan*) the Israelites had a counter-response using the eastern tribes. It was then that the nation needed him and sent a delegation 80 miles to recruit him. The people were desperate they needed a deliverer and they need one now. There was no mention of prayer only a declaration that “*Whoever is the man that will fight against the Ammonites will be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead*”. Though they sought him out they reduced his job title from “head over all the inhabitants” in 10:18 to “commander” of the army in 11:6 something that he is quick to point out in verse 9. Jephthah hadn't applied for the position it was the nation that came calling based upon 10:17-18 the search for a leader was quite extensive. The nation chose a bully to beat a bully and what they didn't realize was that God was behind the scene putting Jephthah right in place all along. The one thing that Jephthah did well was fight but **he had never fought for something he had always fought against something**.

In Judges 11:12-28 we see that in a few days he went from outcast to leader of the band and was now standing negotiating with the enemy face to face. He sent his messengers with a simple message, “*What's your problem!*” His accusation was that they were demonstrating unwarranted aggression against a peaceful nation. The Ammonites sent back word that it was not unjustified as Israel had stole their land and they were here to take it back by force. Jephthah was no dummy with regards to Israel history as he knew that 300 years earlier when the nation passed this way they asked permission from king Sihon of the Amorites to pass through his land on the way to the promised land. Not only did Sihon refuse, he picked a fight against the nation but God was with His people and the Amorites went down to defeat and the land became Israel's. Jephthah did not react by name calling nor did he argue on any other ground except fact. Saint's, we will never win the world to Christ by fanning the flames of our opinions or stating our claims by our experiences. No we will only demonstrate the truth of our convictions by living by the facts of our resurrected Lord.

In Judges 11:29-40 we see the Spirit of the Lord coming upon the illegitimate son of a pagan prostitute who had become the leader of a gang. Maybe you know of a person who is the leader of the Mob from Tob and you have long ago given up that their life will ever be anything other than worthless. I'll never forget what my saved older brother told me before I received Jesus, “*You'll never come to Jesus; you're going to go to hell.*” I love to remind him of those words 37 years later. Jephthah prayed, “*Lord if you give us the victory and I'll give you whatever I see first when I come home.*” I'm certain that he wasn't thinking in terms of his daughter but a lamb or a calf. This was a foolish and unnecessary vow in an attempt to get God “*on his side.*” **It is far more important to be on God's side than to try and persuade Him to be on your side**. What this reveals is that even a Spirit-filled man can do foolish things. Hebrew scholars, translate this as “*I will consecrate it to the LORD. If it be a thing fit for a burnt-offering, it shall be made one; if fit for the service of God, it shall be consecrated to him.*” Human sacrifice was strictly forbidden by the Mosaic Law in passages such as Lev. 18:21 and Deu. 12:31. **Saints, your past may read like that of Jephthah's; you may think your education and experience has left you completely unfit for use but God can use even the worst of us to accomplish the best of His purposes.**

Judges chapters 11:34-40 and 12:1-15 give us four stories: ***The first three stories centers around Jephthah who had great zeal for God risking his own life to save others yet such zeal was no guarantee that he wouldn't fall into spiritual ignorance with regards***

to the character of God. God transformed Jephthah into a “mighty man of valor” because the “*Spirit of the Lord came upon him*” but such transformation doesn’t secure that a person will not fall back into poor decisions. Our transformation is a continual process degree by degree over the rest of our earthly existence.

In Judges 11:34-36 we see that the vow Jephthah made was completely voluntary and God was not requiring a vow or any sign to fulfill his promise. **It was completely unnecessary to manipulate God in doing what He already wanted to do** “*deliver His people though Jephthah*”. “*You can never use diplomacy with God who knows the thoughts and intents of our heart. **God doesn’t want to make a deal with you, He wants unconditional surrender!***” The problem with Jephthah was not the sincerity of the vow or the zeal to carry it out. It was he fell out of touch with the nature and character of God and thought that to get what he wanted he would need to make a deal and carry it out. Folks, all we need to do to ensure God’s promises for our lives is simply believe that He is who He said He is!

I’m afraid that many have adopted a ***Physical workout mentality*** to spiritually that says “**No pain, no gain**” but the truth of the matter is that it is “**His pain that has caused us to gain**”! Jephthah thought that if he committed himself to something that was extremely unpleasant he could “**buy**” God’s grace. God’s grace is not for sale because it’s already been lavished upon us while we were still sinners. Jephthah still had the scars of the abandonment of his childhood and felt like he had to prove himself worthy to the only One who is worthy. What should have been a joyous occasion of the victory of God became a time of mourning because Jephthah had a faulty view of who God. Jephthah had made a foolish vow and keeping that vow would directly affect his daughter yet she says, “*Dad, you’re a man of integrity don’t go back on your promise to God even if it changes my life.*” (verse 36)

People want to know in 11:37-40 Did Jephthah really kill his daughter? **Three things indicate that he didn’t:**

1. Jephthah knew his bible and therefore he would have known that to do such a thing would be against God’s word.
2. Based upon these verses “*She went with her friends, and bewailed her virginity . . . She knew no man,*” These phrases indicate that Jephthah set his daughter aside for the tabernacle service and never married. What was at stake was her ever marrying a man and continuing on Jephthah’s genealogy.
3. Jephthah is listed in the hall of faith and I doubt that in only serving 6 years he would have made that list if at the end he participated in a human sacrifice and surly Israel would not have a lament for four days commemorating human sacrifice.

This vow meant that his only child would remain a virgin and serve in the temple never knowing marriage or motherhood which means Jephthah would never be a grandparent and there would be no one to maintain his inheritance which you recall his brothers had ripped him off from.

In Judges 12:1-4 we read of a national crisis as the prideful and obnoxiousness of the Ephraimites come complaining that they didn’t get enough recognition for the victory which they had chosen not to participate in. They were the kind of folks who ***talked tough after the battle!*** They had made the same mistake 85 years earlier with Gideon but totally miss read Jephthah. Nothing grinds God’s work to halt more than complaining and it is usually on the heels of a great victory. The Ephraimites took “**firing Jephthah**” to a whole other realm as they wanted to “**burn**” him out watching him literally go up in flames. **The Ephraimites were critics who were content to sit in the pews and direct “gospel traffic”.** Jephthah’s problem was that his actions gave them the power that they didn’t deserve. Someone once came up to D.L. Moody and said, “*Mr. Moody I don’t much care for the way you teach!*” Moody said, “*Well please tell me what I can do better?*” The person replied, “*Oh I don’t have any specific suggestions!*” To this Moody said, “*I’ll tell you what I like the way I teach better than the way you don’t!*”

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In Judges 12:3-7 we see in the battle with the Ephraimites that this wasn't Jephthah's fault. As the Ephraimites began streaming back across the Jordan river Jephthah wanted to make them "***eat their words***"! When they came to the river's edge he asked them to pronounce the Hebrew word for stream, they had an accent and couldn't pronounce the "***sh***" sound. The mispronunciation of the word caused 42,000 to die on the spot. Jephthah killed more of his brothers than all the other Judges combined killed the enemy, with exception of Gideon. With this ***Jephthah became his own worst enemy!*** Jephthah had been a recipient of the grace and mercy of God in his own life but was unwilling to extend that grace towards others. He became hardheaded which caused him to become hardhearted. Far too often we Christians make what we differ on what divides us then we treat each other as enemies instead of brothers and sisters.