

## **“Failure of the Family”<sup>1</sup> (Judges 10:6–12:7)**

Have you been on a commercial airline flight this year? What happens when you get on an airplane? You likely locate your seat, store your carry-on luggage, and then sit down and buckle your seatbelt. While you are settling in or preparing to taxi out to the runway, a flight attendant gets up and delivers a sermon. The sermon goes something like this, “Please take out the card located in the seat in front of you and familiarize yourself with all of the safety features located on this plane.” The exposition of this three-point sermon includes a discussion on how to operate your seatbelt. The flight attendant then provides instructions on how to use the oxygen mask in case the cabin loses pressure. The message concludes with an explanation as to how your seat may serve as a flotation device! As you look at your seat, you realize that this is not a comforting thought.

I don’t know about you but I have to confess, I don’t pay attention to airplane sermons any more. Right or wrong, I typically read something else or rest my eyes. Occasionally, I will attempt to be courteous and make eye contact with the flight attendant, but by and large I’m not listening. Now I hear the person talking in the background but it is all noise, because I am not engaging in a sermon. Honestly, it just doesn’t seem very relevant to me. I figure if we get into a difficult situation, a flight attendant will repeat the sermon. If it is a worst-case scenario, it’s not going to matter anyway. We’re all going to die!<sup>2</sup>

I think this may be how you and I approach the Bible. It’s easy to think that we really know God’s Word. Perhaps you have thought to yourself, I don’t need to read or study the Bible. I’ve been doing it for so many years. Seriously, what else is there to learn? Maybe you’ve said, “I’ve listened to hundreds or thousands of sermons in my life. I’ve heard the good, the bad, and the ugly. Do I really need to keep attending church every week? Scripture suggests that this is a dangerous attitude that can affect every area of your life. In the Book of Judges, we will discover that right theology and a thorough understanding of the Bible are essential. To put it another way: *A biblical mind is a terrible thing to waste.* Judges 10–12 breaks down into five scenes.

**Scene 1: The devastating demise of Israel (10:6-16).** Our story begins in 10:6 like a broken record. Israel once again does evil in the sight of the Lord. In fact, she serves a total of seven gods.<sup>3</sup> The number seven emphasizes Israel’s complete spiritual corruption.<sup>4</sup> In her idolatry, Israel forsakes the Lord and fails to serve Him. This is terribly ironic. The “gods” that Israel is worshiping belong to nations that God’s people have conquered in battle. Who gave Israel the victory? Yahweh, the one true God! Yet, instead of worshiping Him, Israel worships their “gods” (see Deut 32:36–38). That’s insane! Yet, you and I are frequently guilty of the same insanity. We are prone to worship various idols such as our house, yard, possessions, leisure, job, spouse, children, and even our ministry. Interestingly, idolatry seems to be rampant during times of peace and rest. God gave Israel forty-five years of peace (10:1–5) and they respond by worshiping seven different gods. Similarly, when God grants us rest and success, we can put other people and pursuits before Him.<sup>5</sup> We are just like Israel.

In 10:7, the Lord gets righteously ticked<sup>6</sup> over Israel’s idolatry and sells her as slaves to the Philistines and Ammonites. These tribes afflict<sup>7</sup> and crush Israel for eighteen years (10:8). That’s a long time! (If you have teenagers, you surely understand this.) Nevertheless, God loves His people enough to discipline them, with the goal of wooing them back to Himself. Israel becomes distressed as a result of her slavery (10:9). Thus, in 10:10, we read these words: **“Then the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, ‘We have sinned against You, for indeed, we have forsaken our God and served the Baals.’”** This is the first time that Israel acknowledges her sin in the Book of Judges. It is refreshing to hear God’s people call their behavior “sin.” What a great reminder that we too must call sin “SIN”...not a mistake, an error, or a shortcoming. When you and I call sin “SIN,” we demonstrate that we have a proper view of ourselves and an exalted view of God.

In 10:11–14, the Lord verbally drops the hammer on Israel and reiterates the fact that He delivered her from all of her enemies;<sup>8</sup> yet they have forsaken Him and served other gods. Therefore, the Lord declares, **“I will no longer deliver you. Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress”** (10:13b–14). Since Israel has been worshiping seven other gods, the Lord “gives them over” (cf. Rom 1: 24, 26, 28) to find what they are looking for in their other lovers. This is “tough love,” but this is what it takes to get Israel’s spiritual attention. Spouses and parents often have to make similar tough-love decisions when a loved one is in rebellion. The goal is to let the individual reach rock bottom and eventually, Lord willing, be reconciled in the marriage or family. Spiritually speaking, as long as we are comfortable we will not change. But when we are “given over,” God can humble us and draw us back.

Israel responds to God’s judgment by exclaiming: **“We have sinned, do to us whatever seems good to You; only please deliver us this day.’ So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD; and He could bear the misery of Israel no longer”** (10:15–16). God’s people finally decide that they are going to worship and serve the Lord, whether it pays them to do so or whether it doesn’t. In the past, all that Israel cared about was God delivering them from their circumstances. They seemed to view God like a Vegas slot machine. They pumped in a few coins (i.e., prayers) and expected blessing in return. But God doesn’t typically work this way. In fact, God doesn’t promise His people worldly happiness and success; He promises them joy in the midst of life’s circumstances.

The last phrase of 10:16 is fascinating: **“and He could bear the misery of Israel no longer.”** This phrase speaks of God’s compassion toward His people. In the wake of Israel’s dark ages, God’s grace, mercy, love, and compassion are evident. Believers and unbelievers alike often speak of Jesus as the one who brought love to this world (see esp. Matt 5:43–48), yet Yahweh exhibits love when His people are at their absolute worst! The only appropriate response to this kind of love should be gratitude and obedience. After all, *a biblical mind is a terrible thing to waste.*

**Scene 2: God delivers His people with a judge (10:17–11:11).** Even though the Israelites have confessed their sin, their repentance is short lived. Rather than inquiring of God for a battle strategy, the Israelites seek out a human leader whom they can put their confidence in. They are rejecting Yahweh’s authority over them by doing this (10:17–18; cf. 1 Sam 8:7).<sup>9</sup> Israel’s mistake is one that the church frequently makes as well. Instead of depending upon the Lord, we look to men and women to lead us. Granted, God does use men and women to lead His people; however, we must be careful to not trust in people instead of the Lord. *A biblical mind is a terrible thing to waste.*

In 11:1–3, a man by the name of Jephthah is introduced. **“Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a valiant warrior,<sup>10</sup> but he was the son of a harlot.<sup>11</sup> And Gilead was the father of Jephthah. Gilead’s wife bore him sons; and when his wife’s sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out and said to him, ‘You shall not have an inheritance in our father’s house, for you are the son of another woman.’<sup>12</sup> So Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob [“good”]; and worthless fellows gathered themselves about Jephthah, and they went out with him.”** Jephthah’s name means “he opens,” and he is quite good at opening his mouth and speaking.<sup>13</sup> Unfortunately, his mouth ends up getting him in a lot of trouble. Jeff is the Peter of the Old Testament. Yet, initially he is the victim, not the victimizer. When Jeff’s dad dies and the inheritance is to be divided, his brothers drive him away because he is the son of a harlot. Little do Jeff’s brothers realize they are rejecting the man that would deliver them and all of Israel. Jephthah is in good company though. Joseph was rejected by his brothers and later became their savior. It also took King David seven years to gain the full support of the twelve tribes of Israel. Even Jesus was rejected by His people, but will be received by them when He comes again. Indeed, God has a huge sense of humor and He shows it here. Jephthah turns out to be the most gifted guy in the family. What a great reminder that God chooses the weak and foolish people of this world to shame the wise and strong.

As the two nations gather for battle, Israel realizes that they need a general who will lead them into war (11:4). Israel asks Jephthah to be their leader (11:5–6). Jephthah responds by saying, “Why now? You dogged me out, and now that you’re in need, you come crawling back on bended knee?” (11:7) Jeff and Israel agree that if he destroys the Ammonites he will become their “head and chief”—their main man (11:8–11). In this dialogue, Jephthah shows a lack of faith and manipulates the elders with shrewd diplomacy. He uses his powers of persuasion to assure himself of leadership. Interestingly, there is no mention that Jephthah is called to be a judge. Yet, the writer of Judges tells us that the Lord raised up Othniel (3:9) and Ehud (3:15) and through a prophetess summoned Barak (4:6) and through an angel called Gideon (6:14) and Samson (13:5). But there is no such word regarding Jeff!<sup>14</sup>

**Scene 3: Jephthah proclaims Israel’s right to the land (11:12–28).** In an attempt to avoid war, Jephthah preaches an eloquent and persuasive sermon to the King of Ammon. This sermon can be succinctly summarized: God gave Israel the land that they now occupy (11:23–24). Israel has lived on the land for centuries (11:25–26). If the Ammonites declare war on Israel, they will be fighting against the Lord, which will result in disaster and defeat (11:27). Jephthah tries to reason with the King of Ammon, but in the end he disregards the message (11:28). Literally, the king “did not listen to the words.” This is typical of many people who sit under God’s Word. Although King Ammon is an unbeliever, he is still accountable for his response to God’s Word. *A biblical mind is a terrible thing to waste.* The person who hears God’s Word is accountable for his or her response. To coin Jesus’ words: “To whom much is given, much is required” (Luke 12:48).

**Scene 4: Jephthah makes a rash vow (11:29–40).** The battle between Israel and Ammon is set to begin. Therefore, the author informs us that the “**Spirit of the LORD**” comes upon Jephthah as he makes his way to the battle line (11:29).<sup>15</sup> In 11:30–31, we read that “**Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, ‘If You will indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand, then it shall be that whatever<sup>16</sup> comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the LORD’S, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.**” Jephthah seeks to manipulate the Lord Himself with his rash vow. This vow is totally unnecessary, but Jeff needs God to come through big so that he has the allegiance of his people.<sup>17</sup> So he opens his big mouth and makes what turns out to be an awful mistake. In 11:32–33, God gives Jeff the victory. It is clear that God would have done this with or without the vow, but Jeff didn’t believe that simple faith was sufficient. Yet, the Bible declares that simple faith is all that is required for salvation and the Christian life. The issue is not the amount of faith a person has; what is critical is the object of a person’s faith. If a believer has Jesus Christ as the object of his or her faith, even the faith of a mustard seed is more than enough.

In 11:34–40, we come upon one of the most tragic sections of Scripture. As you read these verses, make sure you read them aloud, with emotion. Feel Jeff’s agony and the horrible loss of his unnamed daughter. “**When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. Now she was his one and only child; besides her he had no son or daughter. When he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, ‘Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you are among those who trouble me; for I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot take it back.’ So she said to him, ‘My father, you have given your word to the LORD; do to me as you have said, since the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the sons of Ammon.’ She said to her father, ‘Let this thing be done for me; let me alone two months, that I may go to the mountains and weep because of my virginity, I and my companions.’ Then he said, ‘Go.’ So he sent her away for two months; and she left with her companions, and wept on the mountains because of her virginity. At the end of two months she returned to her father, who did to her according to the vow which he had made;<sup>18</sup> and she had no relations with a man. Thus it became a custom in Israel, that the daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.”**

Now, I must acknowledge that this is one of the most disputed accounts in the Old Testament. There are two primary views on how this passage should be understood: (1) Jeff offered his daughter as a human sacrifice or (2) Jeff offered his daughter as a living sacrifice (see Rom 12:1). Godly men and women disagree on which of these views is correct.<sup>19</sup> In fact, some scholars believe that this issue won't be settled until Jesus returns. Nevertheless, this past week my twelve-year-old son, Joshua, settled this debate for me. (I say this facetiously.) After we read this account out loud together, I said, "Joshua, what do you think happened to Jeff's daughter?" Joshua said, "Dad, that's easy. Judges 11:39a reads that Jeff **'did to her according to the vow which he had made.'** Jeff killed his daughter and offered her as a human sacrifice!" From the mouth of babes! Since Joshua wasn't familiar with the theological debate, he just accepted what appears to be the plain meaning of the text.<sup>20</sup>

One of the reasons I believe that Bible students struggle with this account is that they cannot grasp how a supposedly godly man could offer his daughter as a burnt offering. Many people claim Heb 11:32 and point out that Jephthah is included in the "Hall of Faith." This is true, but Jephthah is included alongside Gideon and Samson. Like Jephthah, these two men are not exactly stalwarts of the faith. I would argue that all three of these men failed to finish well. Thus, it is important to understand that the author of Hebrews takes snapshots of Old Testament examples of faith. He is not suggesting that these individuals are to be imitated in every area of their lives.

Many careful Bible students also observe the emphasis upon the virginity of Jephthah's daughter (11:37, 38, 39). It is argued that if Jephthah offered his daughter as a human sacrifice, virginity would not be emphasized. This appears to be a rather convincing argument. However, the author of Judges emphasizes the theme of family throughout the book. In the case of Jephthah, he seems to be emphasizing that this father forfeited a lasting legacy. Consequently, God had to raise up other judges to carry on the generations. This is one of the primary points of the secondary judges in 12:8–15. Ibzan had thirty sons and daughters (12:8–10) and Abdon had forty sons and thirty grandsons (12:14–15).<sup>21</sup> The principle is: There is no lasting success apart from godly generations.

Going back to the Jephthah account in Judges, I think it is clear that Jephthah was influenced by the culture around him. If you recall, Israel has been worshiping seven different gods (10:6). Some of the nations that worshiped these gods offered human sacrifices (Ammon = Milcom/Molech: Lev 18:21; 20:2–5). Apparently, Jephthah was guilty of going with the spiritual flow in Israel. He may have assumed that he was obligated to fulfill his vow (see Num 30:1–2). Yet, would God take seriously a vow that violated both human rights and divine law? The sixth of the Ten Commandments forbids murder. God does not want a vow that violates His Law and is abhorrent to Him.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, Lev 27:1–8 provided a way out. As a successful soldier who had just returned from looting the enemy, Jephthah could easily have paid the redemption price to redeem his daughter. Jephthah knew his Old Testament, but he chose not to obey. *A biblical mind is a terrible thing to waste.*

Like Jephthah, perhaps God has given you success in your job and ministry. Praise God! But I have a few questions: Are you listening to the Lord in every area of your life? Are you applying your knowledge of God's Word in all the circumstances of your life? Specifically, have you focused on your family and your subsequent generations? The danger that you and I face is a failure to apply God's Word in the difficult circumstances of our lives. Generally, it's not that we don't know what to do. We know the Word... we just fail to apply it. Today, will you be a doer of the Word and not merely a hearer (Jas 1:22)? Will you spend time alone in God's Word on a daily basis? Will you make a commitment today that you will spend five to ten minutes a day five days a week reading God's Word and praying with your children? This simple discipline will not only change your own life, but it will impact your children and their children. There are no easy answers, quick fixes, or guarantees in parenting, but parents who read God's Word to their children and pray with them typically experience amazing results. Will you focus on your family and raise up a godly line of believers who will transfer truth of next generation?

**Scene 5: Jephthah turns on his own people (12:1–7).** Just when you thought things couldn't get any worse, they do! The author of Judges writes in 12:1, **“Then the men of Ephraim were summoned, and they crossed to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, ‘Why did you cross over to fight against the sons of Ammon without calling us to go with you?’”** The word “us” is emphatic in the Hebrew text. Ephraim’s gripe is that they are somebodies and you don’t treat somebodies like nobodies.<sup>23</sup> This tribe wants to be on the front page of the Jerusalem Times. They are glory hounds! So in their outrage, Ephraim exclaims, **“We will burn your house down on you.”** This statement is dripping with irony, for Jephthah just finished burning his own house (i.e., lineage) down. In 12:2–3, Jephthah responds by explaining that he had called on the Ephraimites, but they had left him in the lurch. In fact, Ephraim had eighteen years to step up and get involved in the battle, but they never did. Nevertheless, the Lord Himself gave Israel the victory over Ammon.

This scene concludes with a tragic civil war. Initially, the Israelites were fighting together, against their common enemies. Now, the Israelites are fighting among themselves.<sup>24</sup> In 12:4–6, Jephthah and his men fight Ephraim, capture the land, and play a game of Bible Password. The Ephraimites who tried to escape are asked to say the word **“Shibboleth,”** meaning “stream.”<sup>25</sup> Unfortunately, the Ephraimites cannot pronounce the “sh” sound so they say **“Sibboleth.”** This hits particularly close to home for me. When I first came to my present church, I would frequently say “tanks,” instead of “thanks.” For whatever reason, I did not pronounce the “th” in the word “thanks.” People gave me a hard time about this and I was eventually able to change my ways.<sup>26</sup> Unfortunately, the Ephraimites were not able to do so! So every Ephraimite who played Bible Password that day lost.<sup>27</sup> The death toll reached 42,000! Jephthah exacts revenge when offended and does not know the true character of the Lord or the content of His law.<sup>28</sup>

Verse 7 concludes with these words: **“Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.”** The Jephthah cycle ends without declaring that the Ammonite menace has been eliminated or that the land was secured during his tenure, let alone attributing this newfound security to the Lord.<sup>29</sup>

I own a high-tech piece of computer software called Bible Works. I have been using Bible Works since 1994. Over the course of many years, I have moved from version 3.5 to the brand new version 8. Yet, I am ashamed to admit that I have never read the user manual or watched the online videos. I keep saying, “I’ve spent hundreds of dollars on Bible Works and the various updates; I really need to learn all of the potential of this software program.” But I never do. I have all kinds of great intentions, but the tyranny of the urgent always keeps me from mastering the potential of this valuable software. When I talk with Bible Works users, I admit that I am probably only utilizing 5–10% of the software’s capacity.

When it comes to the Bible, you may know just enough to be dangerous. Maybe you get by on the bare minimum. Yet, you know God has entrusted you with a great deal of knowledge and many resources. Perhaps the following statements reverberate through your heart and mind, “To whom much is given, much is required.” “Right theology and a thorough understanding of the Bible are essential.” If so, make a commitment that today you will seek to live out God’s Word like never before. *A biblical mind is a terrible thing to waste.*

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### **Scripture References**

Judges 10:1–6; 12:8–15

Mark 10:35–45

Judges 10:6–12:7

Deuteronomy 23:21–23

Leviticus 27:1–8

Ecclesiastes 5:4–5

Proverbs 20:25

### **Study Questions**

1. Why is it so easy for me to “tune out” when I am listening to God’s Word? In my personal Bible reading, do I typically skip biblical passages that I am familiar with? Do I often sense that I know more about the Bible than I really do? What can I do to remedy this faulty mindset?
2. How has my personal comfort diminished my character (10:6ff.)? Which of God’s good gifts have I abused to the point that my character has suffered? How can I bring this gift back into balance? What will I do this week to ensure that I do not continue to be spiritually soft? Who will help me reach my full potential in Christ?
3. God has always exhibited a heart of compassion and pity for His people (10:16). In what specific ways has God shown me mercy and compassion in the midst of my sin? How has He responded when I have repented? Read Psalm 51:17; Isaiah 57:15; and 66:2b. When I sin, what can I do to ensure that I keep short accounts with God? Read 1 John 1:9. This week pray, “Lord, when my sin interrupts my fellowship with you, may I immediately confess my sin and seek to be in harmony with you.”
4. Jephthah ended his family line in one foolish move. While Jephthah seems to have had a good grasp of Israel’s past and God’s working in and through the nation (11:12–27), he ended his own line so that there was no one to carry on the faith (11:29–40). In what ways am I guilty of this same sin, spiritually speaking? How have I succeeded at work and church only to fail at home? How can I begin to correct my failure this week?
5. Jephthah’s failure with his family led to a civil war massacre (12:1–7). How do my failures with my own family lead to problems in my church, community, and nation? Why is the family so strategic in God’s program? What can I do to ensure that my family has a solid foundation? How can I help other families grow in Christ? As my children and grandchildren mature, what can I do to help them *spiritually* succeed in life?

## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> See Michael J. Smith, “The Failure of the Family in Judges, Part 1: Jephthah,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 162:647 (July 2005): 279–98.

<sup>2</sup> This opening illustration was adapted and revised from a sermon by Steven Mathewson, “Right Theology: Why it Matters” (Judges 10:6–12:7): <http://www.lefc.com/sermons.asp>.

<sup>3</sup> The lengthy list of gods in Judges 10:6 seems to indicate the progression of idolatry, which includes many more gods than in the past (see 2:11; 3:7; 3:12; 4:1; 6:1).

<sup>4</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2007), 605.

<sup>5</sup> Wiersbe writes, “Comfortable living often produces weak character. Henry Ward Beecher said, ‘Happiness is not the end of life, character is.’ But character is built when we make right decisions in life, and those decisions are made on the basis of the things that we value most.” Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Available* (Omaha, NE: QuickVerse 2006 [1994]), Electronic ed.

<sup>6</sup> This is the first time God’s anger has occurred since Judges 3:8.

<sup>7</sup> The Hebrew verb *raats* (“afflicted, crushed”) occurs but one other time in the OT, in Exod 15:6, where it describes Yahweh’s affliction of the Egyptians.

<sup>8</sup> God sold Israel into the hands of two nations, and these two nations were the focus of deliverance for the last two primary judges: (a) Philistines, (b) Ammon, (c) Ammon (Jephthah story), (d) Philistines (Samson story). Boling explains the mention of the two nations by saying that 10:6–16 forms a theological introduction for the remainder of the Book of Judges. Robert G. Boling, *Judges: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, Anchor Bible (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1975), 193; and Barry Webb, *The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1987), 162–63.

<sup>9</sup> Thomas L. Constable, “Notes on Judges” (2009 ed.): <http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/judges.pdf>, 68.

<sup>10</sup> Block states, “The narrator’s characterization of Jephthah as a ‘valiant warrior’ (gibbôr ḥayil, 11:1) hardly commends him spiritually for the role of savior in Israel. Indeed, he was a most unlikely candidate for leadership, being the ostracized son of a harlot and a leader of a band of brigands in the mountains of Gilead (11:1–3). Although his bargaining with the Ammonites reflects political astuteness and an awareness of YHWH’s actions in Israel’s history (11:12–28), his negotiations with the leaders of Gilead are motivated by opportunistic ambition (11:9–11). His rash vow, preceding his battle with the Ammonites, sounds like the type of bargain foreigners would make with their gods (11:30–31). Daniel I. Block, “The Period of the Judges: Religious Disintegration under Tribal Rule,” in *Israel’s Apostasy and Restoration*, ed. Avraham Gileadi (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1988), 50.

<sup>11</sup> Abimelech was the son of a concubine (Judg 8:31), a secondary wife; Jephthah was the son of a prostitute. Both Abimelech and Jephthah are sons of sexual relationships outside of marital vows. Block notes, “Gideon raised Abimelech in a setting of religious syncretism, and Gilead produced Jephthah as a result of his immoral passion with a harlot (11:1).” Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth*. The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman, 1999), 387.

<sup>12</sup> This action of Jephthah’s half brothers may be a violation of Deut 21:15–17.

<sup>13</sup> Webb, *The Book of the Judges*, 342. Webb points out that in each of the five episodes: “The power of the spoken word is a key motif.” In the first episode Israel spoke, telling God that they had sinned and asking Him to deliver them. God also spoke but He was exasperated with Israel. In the second episode Jephthah confronted the elders of Gilead, asking why they hated him but had now come to him for help. In the third episode Jephthah gave a speech to the Ammonites, but they did not respond favorably. In the fourth episode Jephthah said to his daughter, “I have given my word [lit., ‘opened my mouth’] to the Lord” (11:35). His daughter responded, “You have given your word [lit., ‘opened your mouth’] to the Lord; do to me as you have said [lit., ‘whatever has gone out of your mouth’]” (v. 36). In the fifth episode the spoken word was “Shibboleth,” and if it were mispronounced as “Sibboleth,” it announced a death penalty on the speaker. Jephthah, whose name means “He opens,” was good at opening his mouth and speaking (75, 41).

<sup>14</sup> Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 605.

<sup>15</sup> Barry Davis, “How could Jephthah make such a foolish vow if the Spirit of the Lord had come upon him? Under normal circumstances, even though the Holy Spirit may have guided an individual, that individual still had the freedom either to follow the Holy Spirit’s leading or to reject it. Jephthah here, apparently, chose to act on his own. Thus, in his own exuberance (albeit misplaced), he made an unwise vow (Pr 20:25; Ec 5:2–4). Furthermore, the guidance of Jephthah by the Holy Spirit may have related solely to Jephthah’s activities as a judge (e.g., leading God’s people into battle—Jdg 11:29, 32–33) and not to his private life (Jdg 11:30–31).

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Certain other ancient Israelites (e.g., Samson, Saul, and David) experienced the Holy Spirit coming upon them to be the leaders of God's people (Jdg 13:25; 14:6, 19, 23; 15:14; 1 Sam 10:10; 11:6; 16:13) but also were, at times, failures in their own private lives (Jdg 14:1-3; 16:1; 1 Sm 13:9-13; 2 Sm 11:2-4)." Barry C. Davis, "Notes on Judges/Ruth" in the *Apologetics Study Bible*.

<sup>16</sup> Kaiser says that Jephthah could have had only people in mind when he made the vow. "What then did Jephthah vow? Some have tried to soften the vow by translating what was vowed as *whatever comes out*. However, if the Hebrew text intended this neuter idea (which would have allowed for anything including Jephthah's animals), it should have used a different gender here (neuter in the Hebrew would have been signalled [*sic*] by the feminine form of the word). Since the masculine form is used, and the verb is *to come out*, it must refer (as it does in every other context) only to persons and not to animals or anything else." See Walter C. Kaiser Jr., "Jephthah Did with Her as He Had Vowed," in *Hard Sayings of the Old Testament* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1988), 103; italics his). Howard is more specific regarding the feminine gender required for animals. "That is because things with no specified gender—abstracts or neuters—are expressed in Hebrew by the feminine... 'Whatever' is an inclusive form that would fall into this category." David M. Howard Jr., *An Introduction to the Old Testament Historical Books* (Chicago: Moody, 1993), 116.

<sup>17</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 366.

<sup>18</sup> In contrast to Caleb, who brought blessing on his daughter (Judg 1:12–15), Jephthah's foolishness brought a curse on his daughter.

<sup>19</sup> For an excellent discussion on the two options see Constable, "Notes on Judges," 74–76. For further discussion of Jephthah's vow see Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 365–69.

<sup>20</sup> I say this with all humility because one of my favorite OT scholars, John Sailhamer, sees it differently. See John Sailhamer, *NIV Compact Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1994), 211.

<sup>21</sup> See also Smith, "The Failure of the Family in Judges," 283.

<sup>22</sup> Waltke, *An Old Testament Theology*, 607.

<sup>23</sup> Dale Ralph Davis, *Judges: Such a Great Salvation*. Focus on the Bible (Ross-Shire, Great Britain: Christian Focus, 2000), 150.

<sup>24</sup> Bob Deffinbaugh, "Israel's Dark Ages" from the series *From Creation to the Cross* [http://www.bible.org/page.php?page\\_id=1482](http://www.bible.org/page.php?page_id=1482).

<sup>25</sup> Because of this story, the word "shibboleth" has become a part of our English vocabulary and is now found in our dictionaries. It stands for any kind of test that a group gives to outsiders to see whether they really belong.

<sup>26</sup> Depending upon the region one lives, there are different pronunciations of words such as aunt, almond, theater, lawyer, and root. I also get a kick out of Oragon vs. Oregon and Wershington vs. Washington.

<sup>27</sup> Davis, *Judges*, 151.

<sup>28</sup> In contrast to Ehud who took the fords of the Jordan against a Gentile army (Judg 3:28–30), Jephthah is fighting against Israel.

<sup>29</sup> Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 385.