

## Bible Studies in the book of Judges Judges 11 – Jephthah

### Starter question

Have you ever made a vow to God that you will do something for him, if he does something for you? Have you ever known someone who did this? How do you think God feels about this?

### Read Judges 11:1-11

1. What is your impression of Jephthah when you first meet him? Who does he remind you of?
2. How is the elders' treatment of Jephthah similar to Israel's treatment of God (see Judges 10:10-16), and of his Son, Jesus (see Psalm 118:22-23; Matthew 21:42)?
3. Unlike Abimelech, who we looked at last week, Jephthah mentions God several times in this chapter (in this section, verses 9 and 11). What does this suggest about his character and faith?

### Read Judges 11:12-28

4. What is the main point of Jephthah's message to the King of Ammon? Who was really at war here?
5. What light does this shed on the conflict over land between Israel and her neighbours in the Middle East today?

### Read Judges 11:29-40

6. What is your view of Jephthah's vow? Why do you think he makes it?
7. Verse 39 tells us that "Jephthah did with her according to his vow that he had made." This is a bit cryptic, as it doesn't tell us exactly what that was. In verse 31, he said he would offer her up as a burnt offering. But does that really mean that he killed and burnt her? Consider the following factors:
  - a. What esteem is Jephthah held in, and what was his relationship with God, according to Hebrews 11:32-39? Is this compatible with someone who committed such a horrific act?
  - b. Related to this, what was driving Jephthah, according to verse 29?
  - c. If your Bible is the same as mine, you will have footnotes in verse 31 saying that "*Whatever* comes out from the door of my house to meet me ... I will offer *it* up for a burnt offering" could in fact be translated as "*Whoever* comes out ... I will offer *him* ..." Given that we know that it was the custom when the men came back from war for the women of the household to come out to greet them, did Jephthah really make this vow, expecting it to be an animal that he would be dealing with, not a person? That is, did he really not understand the magnitude of what he was promising, or get caught by surprise when it was his daughter who came out to meet him?

- d. Does promising something or someone as an offering to the Lord really literally mean that they are to be killed? Consider what Paul urges us to do in Romans 12:1-2, using the language of sacrifice. Is it possible that he offered her in service to God, rather than killed her?
- e. Related to this, consider the parallel with Hannah's vow and actions in 1 Samuel 1:9-28.
- f. Further, look at the language of verses 37 and 39. What did she grieve over, and what is the comment made about her after the vow has been kept? Does this suggest that she died, or that it was something else that she gave up?
- g. Finally, consider the fact that God both allowed and rewarded the vow. Given what we know about God's view of human sacrifice (see Deuteronomy 12:30-32; 18:9-12; Leviticus 20:1-6), and the fact that he does not let Abraham sacrifice his son Isaac (see Genesis 22:1-14), do you think God would have allowed Jephthah to kill his daughter, or rewarded him for doing it?

### **Reflection**

- 8. Do you think God approved of Jephthah's vow?
- 9. What does the Bible say about making and keeping vows, and bargaining with God (see Numbers 30:2-4; Deuteronomy 23:21-23; Proverbs 20:25; Ecclesiastes 5:1-7; Matthew 5:33-37)?