Judges: Straight Lines – **wk 9 – Jephthah – The Vow**

**(Best narration voice) 3000 yrs ago, the land of Israel was ruled by a succession of judges, rather than kings. 15 crooked sticks…**

**They became legends and heroes of faith.**

**Heb 11:32 And what more shall I say? I do not have time to tell about Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, David, Samuel and the prophets, 33who through faith conquered kingdoms, administered justice, and gained what was promised…**

**Why are these stories so strange? Dark ages of Israel / 1300BC Israel / 12 tribes living in a small area about 120 miles radius.**

**Today a new well-meaning judge from the other side of the track.**

**The first three verses are telling… Judges 11:** **Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior, (part of the Manasseh tribe - great… grand-dad was Jospeh) *but* he was the son of a prostitute. Gilead was the father of Jephthah. 2 And Gilead's wife also 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.” 3 Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob, (the other side of the tracks, outside Israel) and worthless fellows (NIV, scoundrels – lit. empty) collected around Jephthah and went out with him.**

**They were landless, unemployed men who lived on off the wild. Considered worthless - nothing to offer.**

**If you knew that you were going to be written about and read for 3000 yrs - what do you want in your first three verses? Jephthah – an illegitimate, homeless, rejected, outcast.**

**(It’s been 43 yrs of quite) 4 After a time the Ammonites made war against Israel. 5 And when the Ammonites made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to bring Jephthah from the land of Tob. 6 And they said to Jephthah, “Come and be our leader, that we may fight against the Ammonites.” 7 But Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, “Did you not hate me and drive me out of my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?”**

**You hated me, ignored me – now you call me for help?**

**Ever had that happen to you? BT - We do the same to God.**

**8 And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, “That is why we have turned to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the Ammonites and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.” (Will you fight for us!) 9 Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, “If you bring me home again to fight against the Ammonites, and the Lord gives them over to me, I will be your head.” (If I do, I am in charge) 10 And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, “The LORD will be witness between us, if we do not do as you say.” 11 So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and leader over them. And Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD at Mizpah. (The place Jacob asked for Rachel’s hand – family covenant)**

**Big deal for Jephthah - If I win – I get my life back, a home, position, inheritance… I am off the streets – out of the wild.**

**The next 20 verses, Jephthah’s attempts peaceful negotiations. He is a warrior – but not a war monger.**

**12 Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites and said, “What do you have against me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?” (what’s the deal?) 13 And the king of the Ammonites answered the messengers of Jephthah, “Because Israel on coming up from Egypt took away my land, from the Arnon to the Jabbok and to the Jordan; now therefore restore it peaceably.” (You drove us off theland 300 yrs ago – we want it back!)**

**14 Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites 15 and said to him, “Thus says Jephthah: Israel did not take away the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites, 16 but when they came up from Egypt, Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh. 17 Israel then sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, ‘Please let us pass through your land,’ but the king of Edom would not listen. And they sent also to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh. (Not only did not let them pass - but they also trailed us and attacked!)**

**18 “Then they journeyed through the wilderness and went around the land of Edom and the land of Moab and arrived on the east side of the land of Moab and camped on the other side of the Arnon. But they did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was the boundary of Moab. 19 Israel then sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, king of Heshbon, and Israel said to him, ‘Please let us pass through your land to our country,’ 20 but Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory, so Sihon gathered all his people together and encamped at Jahaz and fought with Israel. (They attacked them for no reason)**

**21 And the LORD, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them. So, Israel took possession of all the land of the Amorites, who inhabited that country. 22 And they took possession of all the territory of the Amorites from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. (You attacked us – we won – God gave it to us) 23 So then the LORD, the God of Israel, dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel; and are you to take possession of them? ( I like this next line…) 24 Will you not possess what Chemosh your god gives you to possess? And all that the LORD our God has dispossessed before us, we will possess.**

**We were just passing thru, you attacked, but our God whooped your god and gave us the land. If you’re god could do it, you would too. But guess what, our God lives and Chemosh is dead!**

**Despite all that was riding on this, Jeph saw it as a spiritual battle. He knew the history of Israel – he knew the God’s Word.**

**25 Now are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? (Their king in charge when it all went down) Did he ever contend against Israel, or did he ever go to war with them? 26 While Israel lived in Heshbon and its villages, and in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities that are on the banks of the Arnon, 300 years, why did you not deliver them within that time? (You did nothing for over 300 years, why now?)**

**27 I therefore have not sinned against you, (I don’t need to repent for past gen actions) and you do me wrong by making war on me. The LORD, the Judge, decide this day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon.” (Let the LORD decide) 28 But the king of the Ammonites did not listen to the words of Jephthah that he sent to him. (They attack!) 29 Then the Spirit of the LORD was upon Jephthah, (Let’s do this!) and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh and passed on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed on to the Ammonites.**

**Then Jephthah does something on his own… apart from God. He makes a dumb promise.**

**30 And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, “If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, 31 then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.” (God does not answer)**

**God was already with him, but Jephthah had a big “what if” - we do the same thing, as if we can barter w/ God**

**God if you help me pass this test – if you get me out of this jam. If you get me through this… most the time we don’t keep our vows to God – did he?**

**32 So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them, and the LORD gave them into his hand. 33 And he struck them from Aroer to the neighborhood of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim, with a great blow. So, the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel.**

**God shows up and they drive them out. It was a good day! God was faithful. Let’s go home and celebrate!**

**34 Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah. And behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances. She was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter. 35 And as soon as he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to the LORD, and I cannot take back my vow.” (man of his word to others and God… but this?) 36 And she said to him, “My father, you have opened your mouth to the LORD; do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the LORD has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites.”**

**She loved the LORD – knew God and was willing to do whatever was asked.**

**37 So she said to her father, “Let this thing be done for me: leave me alone two months, that I may go up and down on the mountains and weep for my virginity, I and my companions.” (Notice what she was weeping about?) 38 So he said, “Go.” Then he sent her away for two months, and she departed, she and her companions, and wept for her virginity on the mountains. (2 mth road trip, hanging w/ friends) 39 And at the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow that he had made. She had never known a man, and it became a custom in Israel 40 that the daughters of Israel went year by year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.**

**What just happened? Did he just sacrifice his daughter as a burnt offering? Did he just murder his daughter for God?**

**Atheists and skeptics accusations. Apologetics Q.**

**Its brevity adds to its controversy and questions.**

**Differing views - Let’s take a closer look**

**I do not think he killed his daughter here is why:**

* **Everything in Jephthah’s life was dedicated to the LORD God.**

**He knew the word of God passed down from Moses. To make a murderous sinful vow would be unthinkable!**

* **Human sacrifice is an abomination forbidden by the Law (Lev 18:21, Lev 20:1-5, Deut 12:31, 18:10) No priest would ever have participated.**
* **The LORD does not intervene.**
* **The use of “Vav”**

**Possible reading - Jud 11:31 then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the LORD's, and (vav) I will offer it up for a burnt offering.” (The flexibility of the “vav” conjunctive – could also be – or.)**

* **Not morning her loss of her life, but that she would not marry.**

**She cried for two months that she would never be a mother.**

**He has no sons; she would never marry or have kids and he would never have one to share his inheritance – his story ends with her.**

**V39 “(he) did with her according to his vow that he had made. She had never known a man…” Thus, mourning for both emphasizing her virginity. It was perpetual virginity.**

**Jephthah assumed an animal, or another person would greet him**

**And would be dedicated to the Tabernacle. Might have expected a servant to greet him… but not her.**

**Jephthah set apart his daughter for the Lord’s service**

**Lev 27:2 – a reference to that kind of vow, this was not a sinful vow**

**Similarly, Samuel (the author might have known her)**

* **Rabbinical teaching – taught they would go and lament with her, four days every year until she dies. (v.40 – lament with the daughter)**

**Regardless of how you read it – it was a hasty vow that should have never been made – an attempt to bargain w/ God out of fear.**

**\*\*\*\* She loved the LORD – she took responsibility for the vow – embraced it - she is to be pitied and admired.**

**2 images of Jesus – Jephthah keeping his word and defending the weak - and daughter submitting to the father, laying down her life**

**I wished the story ended there… Family Civil war - a sad final legacy.**

**Judges 12:1 The men of Ephraim (his cousins) were called to arms, and they crossed to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, “Why did you cross over to fight against the Ammonites and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house over you with fire.” (They lost their minds!! - What else would you use??)**

**Why didn’t you ask us - you dishonor us – do you think we’re nothing? We will burn your homes down!**

**2 And Jephthah said to them, “I and my people had a great dispute with the Ammonites, and when I called you, you did not save me from their hand. 3 And when I saw that you would not save me, I took my life in my hand and crossed over against the Ammonites, (When I really needed you – you would not help me – I moved on without you) and the LORD gave them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?”**

**When you were not there for me - the LORD was there for me. This is the LORD’s work – why fight what the LORD is doing?**

**Then it turns petty and violent quick. The LORD did not do this.**

**12:4 Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought with Ephraim. (Civil war with cousins) And the men of Gilead struck Ephraim, because they said, “You are fugitives of Ephraim, you Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim and Manasseh.” (You’re a bunch of nobodies & rejects! You have no home with us!)**

**5 And the Gileadites (Jephthah and friends) captured the fords of the Jordan against the Ephraimites. And when any of the fugitives of Ephraim said, “Let me go over,” the men of Gilead said to him, “Are you an Ephraimite?” When he said, “No,” 6 they said to him, “Then say Shibboleth,” (Hebrew for an ear of grain or corn – or flood) and he said, “Sibboleth,” for he could not pronounce it right. (Checking their accent) Then they seized him and slaughtered him at the fords of the Jordan. At that time 42,000 of the Ephraimites fell.**

**They identified Ephraimite’s (cousins) by their dialect accent.**

**They killed 42,000 cousins - with a bad accent!!??**

**7 Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in his city in Gilead. (This is the first time in Judges the deliverance is shorter than the oppression! Turns out Jephthah was a disappointment.)**

**FOUR POINTS TO PONDER from this story:**

* **Don’t confuse being used by God, with being approved by God**

**God is silent and did not approve of Jephthah’s vow or actions that follow**

* **Giftedness doesn’t equal spirituality**

**Jephthah’s skill did not mean he heard God clearly**

* **God does not desire a vow – he desires your obedience**

**Jeph – knew what God wanted – God was on him - but he let fear take over and tried to bargain with God.**

**There is no need to bargain with God – if we keep HIS promises, he will work all things for our good and his glory.**

**You cannot buy or wager God’s favor. God’s favor is a gift.**

* **God doesn’t always clean up our messes**

**His vow caused tremendous sorrow, God did not fix or clean it up**

**Jephthah and Us - WHAT DOES THIS MEANS FOR US TODAY?**

**1. Our primary purpose is to make God look good**

**Jephthah fearful of failure and more rejection – made God look bad - thru a vow.**

**Sometimes our actions make God look bad & misunderstood.**

**We are guilty of doing the wrong things for the right reasons.**

**Supporting things God says is sin – as an act of compassion.**

**2. Our speech often gives us away**

**Who you belong to (the world or Jesus) can be identified by your talk.**

**Luke 6:45 - for out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks.**

**Negative, hateful, perverted, foul, aggressive, gossip, lies**

**vs. kind, gracious, hopeful forgiving, loving, patience, truthful**

**3. Your past does not disqualify you**

**Regardless of his family – he was not disqualified from God**

**God loves to use crooked sticks to draw straight lines.**

**1 Co 1:26 Brothers, think of what you were when you were called. Not many of you were wise by human standards; not many were influential; not many were of noble birth. 27 But God chose the foolish things of the world to shame the wise; God chose the weak things of the world to shame the strong. 28 He chose the lowly things of this world and the despised things—and the things that are not—to nullify the things that are, 29 so that no one may boast before him. 30 It is because of him that you are in Christ Jesus, who has become for us wisdom from God—that is, our righteousness, holiness and redemption. 31 Therefore, as it is written: "Let him who boasts boast in the Lord.” (Boast = confidence)**

**That is why his 1st 3 verses are so important – It tells the story of not what he did, but what God did in him - in spite of him.**

**Jephthah name means – to breakthrough – he had to breakthrough his past and lay it at God’s feet.**

**He might have been a half bread to people, but he was a whole man in the LORD. And so can you thru Christ**

* **God’s grace overrides our stupidity**

**Jeph did not understand the grace of God. He did not have to offer his daughter; his story did not have to end there, instead he was trying to work for God’s favor. \* What resulted was rage against his own family.**

**You can’t make a deal w/ God, but he has wagered a deal for us. Jesus made the ultimate vow & sacrifice and promise - sufficient.**

**Regardless of who you are – here is the deal given to you: John 1:12 But to all who did receive him, who believed in his name, he gave the right to become children of God, 13 who were born, not of blood nor of the will of the flesh nor of the will of man, but of God.**