

Intro. I encouraged you last week to thank one of your pastors in our series to honor local heroes. How many of you did that? You know, pastors are expected to do a lot of different things. The most important is ministry of the Word & prayer, but they also attend meetings, lead staff, visit hospitals, witness to unbelievers, offer premarital counseling & so much more. Pastors may even be called to rush off in a moment’s notice to help someone in need. Someone captured this on video recently during one of my sermons (play Joel as the Flash video). You probably don’t notice those times in the service, but they do occur from time to time! One of the other functions of a pastor can be the role of negotiator to get 2 parties to come together on something, but pastors aren’t the only ones who negotiate from time to time. As we continue our series on “Heroes: Man’s Rebellion & Repentance, God’s Provision & Peace,” today we look at portion of Judges 10-12 on “Jephthah & Negotiations Gone Bad.”

Theme: Apostasy—Oppression—Repentance—Deliverance

Background: I’m going to address 10:1-5 next time & couple it with 12:8-15, because there are a lot of similarities. This is the 5th or 6th (if you count Abimelech) major cycle seen in Judges. They serve false gods, including the gods of the Ammonites & the gods of the Philistines & the next 2 major accounts deal with oppression from them.

➤ **Lessons to learn from the life of “Jephthah & Negotiations Gone Bad”:**

1. Don’t continue in sin & presume on the grace of God (10:6-14)

- As we have noticed these cycles play out, it seems that Israel not only continued to do evil in the eyes of the Lord, but they thought they could simply cry out & get God’s help anytime they were tired of their oppression
- Notice how depraved Israel had become—they not only turned away from serving Yahweh, but they served all the false gods of their surrounding nations

Illus: I’ve had friends & other acquaintances who were Roman Catholic & while this isn’t true for all of them, many of them have committed serious sins, planning to go to confession & get them cleared—that’s a misunderstanding of sin & presuming on the grace of God. Of course, I’ve known some Baptists claim “once saved, always saved” & live like the devil—but that, too, is presuming on God’s grace

- Not only do the people of Israel in general sin against the Lord, but Jephthah is marked by sin—16x the narrator uses the verb that can literally mean “crossover” or “pass,” but theologically means “transgressed” (e.g., 11:29 [3x], 32)—it’s as though the writer is trying to show us that Jephthah’s journeys are taking him farther & farther from the Lord—he had more of pagan Canaan in him than redeemed Israel

2. Repent with heart & hands in crying out to the Lord & He will deliver you (10:15-18; 11:11, 29)

- There does appear to be a more sincere form of repentance than what Israel had undergone in previous cycles—they didn’t simply claim it, but they destroyed the false idols
- When repentance is real, it affects your whole being—head, heart & hands

Illus: Jesus touched on this notion when He talked about things causing you to sin—eye, hand, foot—better to cut them off & enter into heaven than remain whole & enter into hell—He wasn’t speaking literally, or every Christian would be without an eye, hand & foot, but He was saying our repentance needs to affect more than our hearts but also all that we are

3. When dealing with problems from others, look to the Lord for His will & ways (11:12-27)

- After Jephthah determined he would lead Gilead against the Ammonites, he asked why they were in Israel territory. When Ammon claimed Israel had come against them, Jephthah corrected them with a history lesson of how Yahweh led Israel out of Egypt & around Edom & Moab. They killed the Amorites only after Sihon their king attacked them. They never touched the Ammonites.
- When you face problems in our country, or at work or in your community or in your family, look to the Lord for His guidance. He won’t always give you a crystal-clear answer, but you can trust in His will & His ways

Illus: Christians face different levels of persecution around the world today, but the Lord seems to work the most miracles when everyone else tries to silence His people—recently during Islamic extremism in Syria & throughout North Africa, even while they turned on other Muslims, many have come to Christ (see Cru newsletter)

4. Don't negotiate with the Lord & beware of making rash vows, because both are foolish (11:30-40)

- Jephthah was accustomed to negotiating with others—whether people of Gilead who called for his leadership or with the Ammonites about who was to be blamed. Jephthah was wrong to negotiate with the Lord, for the Lord had already empowered him to defeat the Ammonites

Illus: You probably heard about the man who was shipwrecked some 10 miles from land & he prayed, “Lord, if you get me to land, I’ll give you all my riches.” Once he made it halfway, he prayed, “Lord, if you get me to land, I’ll give you half of all I have.” Once he made it to shore, he said, “Lord, forget it, I got this on my own”—that’s foolish negotiations

Illus: I’ve heard Christians confess from their hospital bed, “Pastor, I’m going to start serving the Lord now—He’s got my attention. I’m going to start giving like I should have.” Some of them do, but some of them just talk

- But beyond negotiating with the Lord, Jephthah made a foolish vow to offer a burnt offering to Yahweh concerning whatever came out of his house first—was he expecting a family dog? A goat? A bird?
- Jephthah’s daughter, his only child, came out to meet her father, excited he had returned home & cheering his victory. Little did she know about his vow, a vow she urged him to keep & that he did. Her sorrow isn’t simply death, but death as a virgin—she had never known a man, there was no offspring; when she died, so would Jephthah’s hope for his family
- Jephthah committed an absolutely heinous act in sacrificing his daughter, for the Mosaic Law condemns child sacrifice in a dozen places (Leviticus 18:21; 20:1-5; etc.) & it permitted an escape for such rash vows (Leviticus 27:1-8), but Jephthah was either unaware of the Law or more intent on keeping his word as though he were someone especially pious—trying to avoid personal curse (Malachi 1:14), he ironically brought a curse upon himself

5. Unless it is a foundational issue, avoid civil war (12:1-7)

- Jephthah could have talked his way out of Ephraim’s anger, but he was prideful & angry & wouldn’t back down from a fight. They used a password that people of Ephraim couldn’t pronounce, determining who was really with them. Jephthah led his followers to kill 42,000 Ephraimites—Israel had become its own worst enemy
- We had a Civil War over the issue of slavery—I know Southerners who say it was over state’s rights, but it was over the issue of slavery. Civil war should be one of the last choices, but if foundational issues are at stake, it is a fight worth having.
- What are foundational issues? Life, religious freedom & the like. I wouldn’t expect civil war in our country, but if things got too bad, Texas might secede from the Union.
- There isn’t much to mimic when looking at Jephthah’s life—he is among the spiritually & ethically lowest leaders in Israel in the Book of Judges—while used to fight against the Ammonites, he left his country in a worse state than when he found it; he was gifted with words, speaking more than any other of the judges, but his own words entrapped his future
- **Thank a local hero—coaches (#Heroes #FirstBaptistSweetwater)** Some coaches are not to be mimicked, but many are & they make sacrifices to influence others

Conc. Have you ever heard the statement, “There are exceptions to everything?” A few weeks ago, I said you should not put the Lord to the test (cf. Deuteronomy 6:16). But God actually commands us to put Him to the test in one area—giving (see Malachi 3:8-10). Today you heard me say, “Don’t negotiate with the Lord,” but the Lord is willing to negotiate with you. Isaiah 1:18, “Come now, let us reason together, says the LORD: though your sins are like scarlet, they shall be as white as snow; though they are red like crimson, they shall become like wool.” That’s quite a deal! But the Lord negotiates on His terms, for the next 2 verses give blessing for those who are obedient & curse to those who rebel. Jesus Christ died for your sins so you can respond to the Lord’s call—come now, let us reason together. His deal is the best you’ll ever find, so you better take it.