

# OUR GOD'S FAILURES & FAITHFULNESS

## STUDIES IN THE BOOK OF JUDGES

Part 16 — “Knowing God by His Word”— September 7, 2025

### Introduction: Corruption or Confusion?

Last week we spoke about the OT false prophet Balaam, a man referred to as a “soothsayer” or “diviner.” These occult practices were specifically condemned in the Scriptures and he was justly killed as a false prophet (Josh. 13:22) and is condemned in Scripture (Rev. 2:14). As we will see this morning, Jephthah falls into the sin of syncretism (the blending of true worship with pagan practices, usually out of ignorance or cultural influence), and this has terrible consequences for him and his family. Scripture, however, acknowledges him as a flawed but genuine hero of the faith (1 Sam. 12:11; Heb. 11:31-32).

**Main Point:** The story of Jephthah warns us of the dangers of \_\_\_\_\_ and underscores the necessity of knowing and obeying God’s Word.

### Judges 11:29-12:7

Jephthah demonstrated a talent for negotiation in his acquisition of power among his people and in attempting to avoid conflict with the Ammonite king. His failure to secure peace through diplomacy meant that he would now have to look to Yahweh, whose exploits in redemptive history he had spoken so clearly of to his enemies.

#### Exposition:

#### I. With battle against the Ammonites imminent, the text focuses in on Jephthah’s interactions with the Lord. (vv.29-31)

##### Observations:

(1) In spite of the Lord’s rebuke of Israel (10:13), He sent His \_\_\_\_\_ to empower Jephthah.

“...the Spirit’s indwelling in the life of a person [in the OT] had no evident relationship to the person’s spiritual condition... [it] was a sovereign working of God in the person to perform a specific task...[and] was temporary.”  
—The Moody Handbook of Theology

(2) Jephthah’s former confidence in the Lord seemed to wane and he therefore sought to \_\_\_\_\_ with Him in order to ensure victory.

*“And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord”*

⇒ Vows were \_\_\_\_\_ promises that were made to God that were to be fulfilled in light of the Lord answering the particular request of the individual.

“Jephthah is desperately seeking the respect, social status, and power that will come with victory and the position of ‘governor for all the inhabitants of Gilead.’” —Boda & Conway

(3) That Jephthah did this was evidence of a syncretistic view of God that blended the worship of Yahweh with the \_\_\_\_\_ practices of the surrounding nations who believed they could manipulate the power of their gods.

⇒ The language that he used in the vow was somewhat vague, indicating that he knew that he was potentially offering to make a \_\_\_\_\_ sacrifice.

“His negotiation strategy may have involved *seeming* to offer YHWH a costly sacrifice—his daughter—while *actually* leaving him a way to avoid doing just that should an animal wander out first.”—Boda & Conway

**Key Point:** It is the height of \_\_\_\_\_ to attempt to negotiate with the Lord as if He can be manipulated by our gifts or works.

#### II. Following the defeat of the Ammonites, Jephthah fulfilled his foolish vow to the Lord. (vv.32-40)

##### Observations:

(1) The Lord fulfilled His \_\_\_\_\_ through Jephthah and the Ammonites were destroyed.

(2) Following the battle, it was Jephthah’s only \_\_\_\_\_ who came out from his tent to greet him.

- (3) The consequences of the vow were made all the more tragic because of Jephthah's ignorance of the \_\_\_\_\_ of the Lord.  
 ⇒ Syncretism was specifically forbidden (Deut. 18:9-10).  
 ⇒ Provision was made to redeem the lives of individuals dedicated to the Lord (Lev.27:1-8)

**How did Jephthah fulfill the vow?**

*It is possible that he dedicated his daughter to the Lord as a perpetual \_\_\_\_\_.*

*It is more likely, however, that he offered her as a human \_\_\_\_\_.*

- \* The language Jephthah uses is similar to the description of the king of Moab in 2 Kings 3:27 who sacrificed his son as a burnt offering.
- \* Jewish tradition (Targum Jonathan—1st-2nd c.) takes this view.
- \* In the text, Jephthah's grief and the institution of a feast argue for the fact that she was killed.

"Although the present story ends with the death of the young girl, her father is the tragic figure, presenting a pathetic picture of stupidity, brutality, ambition, and self-centeredness. Ironically, the one who appeared to have become master of his own fate has become a victim of his own rash word. . . . The man who had tried to manipulate Yahweh to guarantee his 'peace' (shalom) is doomed by the one whose life he was willing to sacrifice for his own well-being." —Daniel L. Block

- (4) Jephthah's daughter is presented as a tragic-\_\_\_\_\_ in the account.

**Key Point:** Ignorance of God's Word can at times have consequences that are just as \_\_\_\_\_ as those of willful disobedience.

**III. The end of Jephthah's reign was marked by further conflict and devastation. (vv. 12:1-7)**

Observations:

- (1) The tribe of \_\_\_\_\_ once again rose up and confronted a judge (as they had done with Gideon).
- (2) Rather than negotiate with them, Jephthah highlighted his own \_\_\_\_\_ and turned his forces against them.
- (3) The result was that thousands of Israelites were killed at the fords of the Jordan.

**Key Point:** Grief and regret can often lead us to focus on ourselves rather than on faithfully carrying out our \_\_\_\_\_.

**Assessing Jephthah**

- Although the Lord brought about partial deliverance through him, Jephthah's time as judge further illustrated the decline in the quality of Israel's \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ leadership.

**Applying the Text**

1. Syncretism is always a danger for God's people if we do not continually \_\_\_\_\_ ourselves to instruction from God's Word.  
2 Tim. 3:16-17—<sup>16</sup> All Scripture is breathed out by God and profitable for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, <sup>17</sup> that the man of God may be complete, equipped for every good work.
2. We face a continual temptation to accommodate pagan \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.  
Rev. 2:14-16—<sup>14</sup> But I have a few things against you: you have some there who hold the teaching of Balaam, who taught Balak to put a stumbling block before the sons of Israel, so that they might eat food sacrificed to idols and practice sexual immorality. <sup>15</sup> So also you have some who hold the teaching of the Nicolaitans. <sup>16</sup> Therefore repent. If not, I will come to you soon and war against them with the sword of my mouth.  
*Accommodating worldly \_\_\_\_\_ Sexual \_\_\_\_\_ Use of mind-altering \_\_\_\_\_*

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Accommodating worldly ideologies    Sexual Immorality    Use of mind-altering substances