



Jephthah

Jephthah who? The name Gilead has a long history. There are a land, town, and people named Gilead in the Bible. It appears that Joseph's Son Manasseh had offspring and one of those offspring bore Gilead. This became the Gileadite clan. Jephthah's father was called Gilead. They came from the half tribe of Manasseh. Are you keeping score? My point is that the line leading to Jephthah is a good one. They are good people that followed the Lord.

To know a person's faith, you need to know their past. Jephthah comes from good stock. Yet, this boy/man had a tough upbringing. His father bore him from a prostitute. The woman is never named. Yet, the people of Gilead received their inheritance from Moses' years before. However, Jephthah's brothers refused to give some of that inheritance to him. They did not recognize him as good stock. He was the son of a prostitute.

The son of a prostitute is not a bad thing in the Bible. I would even say it is a staple in the word of God. Jesus is the son of an unwedded birth. A prostitute named Rahab is in Jesus' line. Moses, Joseph and others were ridiculed by their peers. The jealousy of a sibling is big in the Bible. I mention all this because Jephthah was from a clan of mighty warriors. They were also great men of God. Although men did not like them, God did! We think that the Spirit of the Lord came to Samson first in Judges. No, there were others. One of those others was the son of a prostitute: Jephthah.

Judges 11:29 *“Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites.*

The story opens long before Jephthah. Starting in verse 7 of Judges 10 we see God giving the Israelites over to their enemies. They had stopped following God. These people were living in the land of Gilead. In verse 18 they had cried out to the Lord for help. They asked: who could save us? It sets up the dilemma. As chapter 11 opens we learn that Jephthah is a mighty warrior. Yet, his mother was a prostitute. I love the Bible because it's real. Jephthah is ridiculed by his peers as a child. Then those very men (probably) returned to Jephthah to ask his help. He replies *“Didn't you hate me and drive me from my father's house? Why do you come to me now, when you're in trouble?”* This is an honest drama.

What we get to witness from here on in is Jephthah: the leader for God. We will see his faith in action. Judges 11:9 *“Jephthah answered, “Suppose you take me back to fight the Ammonites and the Lord gives them to me—will I really be your head?”* Notice he gives the Lord the victory. In verse 24 he says that the Lord will give them all they possess. Then in verse 29 it says the Spirit of the Lord came upon him. This is a man of God. He is brave and arrogant for the Lord.

Again, what makes the Bible so real is its honesty. Jephthah is a great leader. Yet, there is the vow he makes. This is a very big controversy in the Bible. Jephthah makes a horrendous vow to the Lord in verse 31 *“whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the Lord's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering.”* The Problem is that his beloved daughter comes out the door. In the end it appears that he did not

burn her but rather kept her barren all the days of her life. The controversy is: did he break his vow?

Would a man of faith break his vow to the Lord? Trust me, I have heard a ton of arguments on this story. It's all in the words. He said he would burn whatever came out his door. It was his daughter. She told her father to keep the vow. Yet, she wept because she would never marry. Then it says he did to her as he vowed. Did he burn her? Why does it matter if she was a virgin? Some claim she remained a virgin and that was worse than death. Some things we just don't know in the Bible. We are missing some of the context. Yet, it says the daughter and Jephthah kept the vow. They were honorable people to the Lord.

All I know is that this was a good man, leader, and servant to the Lord. It says he led only 6 years. This man had great faith. He did what God asked of him. It appears he kept his vow to the Lord. This is a little-known Judge. I did not know his full story. This is a man who overcame exile. He put his grudges aside to save a nation. Yet, by faith he was a mighty warrior for the Lord. I can see why Paul loved this story. Jephthah was probably a Jewish childhood hero to the nation. A story repeated at bedtime.

Most people have a story. A hidden narrative they don't like to tell. Have you been ridiculed? Has someone rejected you? Maybe you had a great life but were passed over by a bad decision. I would be stunned if someone had a clean past. Yet, God wants His best for us. Regardless of our story, God wants us to thrive. Jephthah is a great example of all of us. We can do great things. The past should never hold us down. We can succeed. Having great faith is a story. It's how we got to this place. Faith is built on the tough stuff. What we believe in are the things that worked. God works every time!

