

BIBLE WOMEN - Lesson 8

Jephthah's Daughter - Samson's Mother and Wife

By Beverly McKey

I. The Daughter of Jephthah – Judges 10-12

A. As we studied the life of Deborah last week, we know that once the Israelites settled in Canaan, they failed to drive out all of the heathen nations as God instructed them to do.

1. **Joshua 2:1** – *"The Angel of the Lord spoke to the congregation of the Israelites and said, 'I led you up from Egypt and brought you to the land of which I swore to your fathers; and I said, 'I will never break My covenant with you. ² And you shall make no covenant with the inhabitants of this land; you shall tear down their altars.' But you have not obeyed My voice. Why have you done this? ³ Therefore I also said, 'I will not drive them out before you; but they shall be thorns in your side, and their gods shall be a snare to you.'"*
2. The people remained faithful to God during the life of Joshua, but when he and the first generation to enter Canaan had died, there arose "a generation of people who did not know God nor the work which He had done for Israel." **Joshua 2:10**
3. As it is in the nature of mankind to turn toward evil, the Israelites turned away from God and served Baal and the Ashtoreths (false idols of the Canaanites) **Joshua 2:13**
4. Because of their unfaithfulness, God allowed their enemies to plunder and oppress Israel severely. **Joahua 2:14**
5. When the oppression became so severe, the people would finally realize that God was against them as long as they continued worshipping idols so they would cry out to God, who sent Judges to lead them to victory in battles against the heathen nations.
6. But the cycle was everlasting. As long as the Judge lived, the people would be faithful, but when he died, they reverted to their evil, idolatrous ways, becoming more corrupt than ever. And again God allowed their enemies to afflict them severely both physically and economically. **Judges 2:16**
7. Deborah served in Israel as Judge for 40 years and the land enjoyed peace during that time. But when Deborah died, the people again reverted to their idolatrous ways and God allowed the Midianites to oppress Israel for seven years, destroying crops and livestock leaving Israel in poverty.

- B. After 40 years of peace during Deborah's term as judge, the people of Israel did evil in the sight of the Lord again and returned to worshipping idols.
1. The judges who followed Deborah were:
 - a. Gideon (of the eastern half-tribe of Manasseh)– served forty years and enjoyed peace during his life.
 - b. Tola (of the tribe of Issachar) judged Israel 23 years.
 - c. Jair, (a Gileadite of the tribe of Manasseh) judged Israel for twenty-two years.
 2. Then Israelites turned back to serving the idols of the Syrians, the Moabites, the Ammonites and the Philistines.
 - a. God's anger burned against them and He gave them into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites for eighteen years.
 - b. The people of Israel finally cried out to God saying, *"We have sinned against You, because we have both forsaken our God and served the Baals!"* **Judges 10:10**
 - 1) By this time God was no longer sympathetic to their plight and He reminded them that he had delivered them from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the Ammonites, the Philistines, the Sidonians, the Amalekites and Maonites when they cried out to God.
 - 2) God said, ¹³ *Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods. Therefore I will deliver you no more.* ¹⁴ *"Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in your time of distress."*
 - 3) However, the Israelites continued to beg God for help and they put away the foreign gods from among them and began to serve the Lord.
 - c. **Joshua 10:16** – gives more insight into the nature of God when it says, *"His soul could no longer endure the misery of Israel."* Seeing their repentance, God loved them so much that he could not refuse to help them.
 3. When the Ammonites gathered their army in Gilead (east of the Jordan), the Israelites assembled their army, but they had no commander who would lead the charge against the enemy.
- C. There was a Gileadite (tribe of Manasseh) named Jephthah who was a mighty man of valor, but he was the son of a harlot.
1. Jephthah was actually the son of Gilead (the grandson of Manasseh), but Gilead also had sons with his wife. When Gilead's wife's sons grew up

they drove Jephthah out and said to him, "*You shall have no inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman.*"

2. Jephthah fled from his brothers and settled in the land of Tob, east of Gilead. **Judges 11**
3. When the Ammonites made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to Jephthah and asked him to be their commander so that they could fight the Ammonites.
 - a. Jephthah said, "*Did you not hate me, and expel me from my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?*"
Judges 11:7
 - b. The elders said, "*We have come to lead our army and then you can be the head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.*"
 - c. Jephthah was surprised and he asked to confirm their statement saying, "*If you take me back home to fight against the people of Ammon, and the Lord delivers them to me, shall I be your head?*"
 - d. The elders of Gilead vowed that it was true, so Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead and the people made him head and commander over them. **Judges 11:7-10**
4. Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites saying, "*What do you have against me, that you have come to fight me in my land?*" **vs. 12**
 - a. The king of Ammon answered saying, "*Because Israel took away my land when they came up out of Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok, and to the Jordan. Now therefore, restore those lands peaceably.*" **Vs. 13**
 - b. *Jephthah again sent messengers to the King of Aamon saying, "Thus says Jephthah:*
 - 1) Israel did not enter the border of Moab. We asked permission to pass through Edom, but their King forbid it, so Israel bypassed Edom and the land of Moab. **Vs 15-18**
 - 2) Then Israel asked permission from King Sihon of the Amorites to allow us to pass through, but King Sihon gathered his army and fought against Israel and God delivered us from Sihon and all his people and we defeated him. Then Israel took possession of all the land of the Amorites and we will possess whatever land our God takes possession of before us.
 - 3) Jephthah reminded him that he has had three hundred years to make this claim, but he did not; therefore Jephthah denied that he

had wronged anyone. Instead Jephthah said that the Ammonites had wronged him by gathering to fight against Israel.

4) Jephthah said he would let God judge who is right this day.

However, the Ammonites did not listen to Jephthah **Vs 23-28**

- c. The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh to advance his army toward the Ammonites.
 - a) Jephthah made a vow to God saying, *"If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, ³¹ then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD'S, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering."*
 - b) Jephthah led the fight and the Lord delivered the Ammonites into his hands and they were soundly defeated and the people of Ammon were subdued by the Israelites.
5. When Jephthah returned to his home at Mizpah, there was his daughter coming out to meet him. She was his only child. **Judges 11:34**
 - a. Jephthah was horrified to see her coming out of the house and he tore his clothes as a sign of his great distress.
 - b. Jephthah told his daughter that seeing her come out first brought him great trouble because he had made a vow to God that he could not go back on. **Judges 11:34-35**
 - c. Jephthah's daughter (whose name is never given) must have trusted God deeply as well as trusting her father, because she agreed that he must keep his vow:
 - 1) She said, "The Lord has avenged you of your enemies, the people of Ammon."
 - 2) Then she said, *"Let this thing be done for me: let me alone for two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains and bewail my virginity, my friends and I."* **Judges 11:37**
 - 3) Jephthah agreed and she went away for two months and then she returned to her father and he "carried out his vow with her" and the final sentence says: *"She knew no man."* **Judges 11:39**
 - 4) What an amazing young woman. She must have been in her early teens since she was still unmarried.

D. Let's examine this story a little closer to see what answers we can find to some serious questions regarding God's nature and "inconsistencies" that seem to be part of this story.

1. The story of Jephthah's daughter is filled with questions and seeming contradictions with other passages in the Old Testament. Many use this story to accuse God of inconsistency and cruelty that such a vow would be made and carried out.
2. Let's examine some clues that may help us understand this event correctly:
 - a. Remember that God directly instructed Moses to take Isaac to the mountain to sacrifice his "son of promise" as a burnt offering.

Genesis 1-12

- 1) It is obvious when the whole story is read that this commandment from God was a test for Abraham, which he passed with flying colors. Hebrews 11 tells us that Abraham believed that if he had to kill Isaac that God would raise him from the dead.
- 2) God stopped Abraham from harming Isaac and provided an appropriate sacrifice with a ram caught by his horns in a bush near by.
- 3) **Deuteronomy 12:29-32** - ²⁹ *"When the LORD your God cuts off from before you the nations which you go to dispossess, and you displace them and dwell in their land, ³⁰ take heed to yourself that you are not ensnared to follow them, after they are destroyed from before you, and that you do not inquire after their gods, saying, 'How did these nations serve their gods? I also will do likewise.'* ³¹ *You shall not worship the LORD your God in that way; for every abomination to the LORD which He hates they have done to their gods; for they burn even their sons and daughters in the fire to their gods.* ³² Whatever I command you, be careful to observe it; **you shall not add to it nor take away from it.**
- 4) Human sacrifice would certainly be an unauthorized "addition" to the Law of Moses, since rules regarding sacrifices are given in detail in Leviticus, Deuteronomy and other books of the law.
- b. Some of this confusion may simply be a misinterpretation of a Hebrew term: The Hebrew word "vau" can be translated "and", or it may be translated "or" as in **Exodus 21:15**— *"he who curses his father or his mother shall be put to death"*. So Jephthah may have been saying that whatever met him as he returned home would be dedicated to Jehovah, or, offered as a burnt offering — depending upon which was appropriate.

- **Judges 11:31** – *“whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD’S, and (or) I will offer it up as a burnt offering.”*
- c. When Jephthah made his rash vow, he must have known that it was likely for some “person” to come out of his house to greet him.
 - 1) He may have “hoped” that it would be a servant and not his only daughter, but he could not likely have thought that some animal would be coming out of the door of his home.
 - 2) He would certainly know that human sacrifice was forbidden in the Law of Moses, so it would have been an insult to God to vow to make a human sacrifice for giving him a victory over the Ammorites.
 - d. **Hebrews 11:32** – ³²“And what more shall I say? For the time would fail me to tell of Gideon and Barak and Samson and **Jephthah**, also of David and Samuel and the prophets:”
 - 1) Jephthah is mentioned in the heroes “hall of fame” in Hebrews 11.
 - 2) God could never have ever approved of a vow that would result in his burning his own daughter as a human sacrifice to God?
 - 3) I don’t believe God would ever approve of such an action because it is totally inconsistent with His nature as shown throughout the Bible.
 - e. Jephthah’s daughter’s reaction and conduct also provides us with some hints that would explain this text.
 - 1) When Jephthah told her about his vow, his daughter’s reaction was incredible.
 - 2) **Judges 11:36-37** – *“My father, if you have given your word to the LORD, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, because the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the people of Ammon.”³⁷ Then she said to her father, “Let this thing be done for me: let me alone for two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains and bewail my virginity, my friends and I.”*
 - a) Jephthah’s daughter must have been in her early teens, since she was still unmarried.
 - b) It was every young Jewish woman’s dream to become a wife and mother because each young woman hoped that she would bear a son who would be the promised Messiah.

- c) Jephthah's daughter knew when she heard the vow her father had made that she would never be a wife to anyone nor a mother to any child. This was what caused her grief.
 - d) She understood that her father had vowed that she would "belong to the Lord" (vs. 31). There were positions of service at the temple for women who dedicated their lives in service to God. (Example: Anna, the widowed prophetess who had served at the Temple for over sixty years. (**Luke 2:36-38**))
 - e) Remember, Jephthah's daughter requested time to "lament her virginity", because she would never marry and never have a child. She did not ask to mourn her death.
 - f) If she was about to die, wouldn't she want to spend that last two months with her beloved father and not her girl friends. She knew the girl friends would understand the tragedy that remaining unmarried would be to her.
 - g) **Judges 11:39** – ¹³⁹ *And it was so at the end of two months that she returned to her father, and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. She knew no man.*
 - (i) This verse indicates that when Jephthah carried out his vow that his daughter "knew no man". That was how she kept his vow – by remaining a virgin all of her life which was dedicated to the service of God.
 - (ii) If Jephthah had killed her, that statement would be unnecessary.
- 3) Jephthah's vow brought other consequences to him as well.
- a) Since he had only one child, the fact that she would never marry and produce offspring meant that Jephthah's name and inheritance would be blotted out, since he had no descendants to carry on his legacy. (Just as the daughters of Zelophehad claimed on behalf of their father when they requested that they receive his inheritance, since he had no sons).
 - b) This same rule of inheritance would have applied to Jephthah's daughter if she had been permitted to marry, her father's name and legacy would be continued through her offspring. Ending the family line was a very serious loss to any Israelite family.
 - c) Jephthah's daughter was revered among all young women in Israel. It became a custom each year for young women to go for four days to lament the daughter of Jephthah. Since it says

they "went", perhaps they even went where she was serving the Lord to lament with her at that time.

- d) Her example of faith, courage, obedience and unselfishness has been of benefit to women all these thousands of years.
- 4) Jephthah was a Judge in Israel for six years, which also indicates that he did not commit an abomination before God by sacrificing his daughter as a burnt offering. Surely God would never have approved of a leader over the Israelites who was guilty of such an atrocity.

II. The Mother and Wife of Samson – Judges 13-15

- A. At this time, the people of Israel were again worshipping idols and God had delivered them into the hands of the Philistines for forty years.
 1. There was a certain man of the tribe of Dan whose name was Manoah. His wife was barren.
 2. The angel of the Lord appeared to Manoah's wife and said,
 3. **Judges 13:3-5** – *"Indeed now, you are barren and have borne no children, but you shall conceive and bear a son. ⁴ Now therefore, please be careful not to drink wine or similar drink, and not to eat anything unclean. ⁵ For behold, you shall conceive and bear a son. And no razor shall come upon his head, for the child shall be a Nazirite to God from the womb; and he shall begin to deliver Israel out of the hand of the Philistines."*
 - a. She went straight and told her husband and immediately Manoah prayed to God saying: **Vs 8** – *"O my Lord, please let the Man of God whom You sent come to us again and teach us what we shall do for the child who will be born."*
 - b. God listened to Manoah's prayer and the angel appeared to his wife a second time as she was sitting in the field.
 - 1) She ran quickly to tell her husband and said, "Look, the Man who came to me the *other* day has just now appeared to me!" **Vs. 10**
 - 2) Manoah followed his wife and spoke to the man asking if he was the one who told her she would have a son.
 - 3) The angel said, *"Of all that I said to the woman let her be careful. ¹⁴ She may not eat anything that comes from the vine, nor may she drink wine or similar drink, nor eat anything unclean. All that I commanded her let her observe."* **Vs. 13**
 - c. In due time Manoah's wife gave birth to a son and called him Samson.
 - 1) The child grew and the Lord blessed him.

- 2) Samson's mother was never named, yet she must have been a very faithful servant of God, since she was particularly chosen to bear this child who would be one of the most famous Judges of Israel.
- 3) She and Manoah prayed that they would have the wisdom to do the right things to help their son develop according to God's plan.
- 4) Even with her great desire to be a good mother, Samson was somewhat selfish and rebellious and did not always follow the good advice of his mother and father.
- 5) Unfortunately, that still happens to children in Christian families. Our children don't always behave or believe the way they are trained.
- 6) However, we trust in the words of Solomon in **Proverbs 22:6** – *"Train up a child in the way he should go, and when he is old he will not depart from it."*

B. As an adult, Samson went to a town called Timnah and saw a Philistine woman that appealed to him.

a. Samson went to his father and mother saying, *"I have seen a woman in Timnah of the daughters of the Philistines; now therefore, get her for me as a wife."* **Judges 14:2**

- 1) Apparently Samson's desire for this woman was based purely upon her looks. There is no indication that he even met her.
 - a) Samson gave no thought to God's command that the Israelites should NOT take the daughters of the heathen nations as their wives because God knew it would draw them away from God.
 - b) Samson's father was not happy with this request and he asked Samson: *"Is there no woman among the daughters of your brethren (Israel) or among all my people that you must go and get a wife from the uncircumcised Philistines?"* **Vs. 2**
- 2) But Samson selfishly insisted that he wanted her so he went with his father and mother to Timnah.
- 3) In the vineyards outside the city a young lion attacked Samson and he tore it apart with his bare hands as one would have torn apart a young goat. He did not tell his father and mother about it.
- 4) Then he went on into the city and talked with the woman and she pleased him so he went home to plan the wedding.
- 5) After some time, when he returned to get her, he turned aside to see the carcass of the lion and a swarm of bees and honey were in the carcass of the lion.

- 6) Samson took some of the honey and gave some to his mother and father, but he did not tell them he had taken it out of the lion.
- b. Samson gave a feast and he posed a riddle to the young Philistine men there. If they could solve the riddle within seven days he would give them thirty sets of clothing and if they did not, they would give thirty sets of clothing to Samson.

- 1) "Out of the eater came something to eat, and out of the strong came something sweet."
- 2) For three days they could not explain the riddle. But on the third day they said to Samson's wife, *"Entice your husband, that he may explain the riddle to us, or else we will burn you and your father's house with fire. Have you invited us in order to take what is ours?"*

Judges 14-15

- 3) So Samson's wife wept on him and said, *"You only hate me! You do not love me! You have posed a riddle to the sons of my people, but you have not explained it to me."* But he did not tell her **Vs. 16**
- 4) She kept asking Samson, so on the seventh day Samson told her the answer to the riddle, and immediately she explained the riddle to the sons of her people (the Philistines).
- 5) When they were able to solve the riddle, Samson knew that she had told them and he said, *"If you had not plowed with my heifer, You would not have solved my riddle!"* Isn't that an interesting statement?
- 6) Samson went to Ashkelon and killed thirty of the Philistine men and took their clothing and gave them to the men who solved the riddle.
- 7) Samson went back to his father and mother but his wife stayed with her father.
- c. When Samson went back to visit her, her father would not let him speak to her saying, *"I really thought that you thoroughly hated her; therefore I gave her to your companion. Is not her younger sister better than she? Please, take her instead."* **Judges 15:2**
 - 1) Samson was very angry, not so much because he loved her, but because his pride was injured. She belonged to him.
 - 2) He left and caught three hundred foxes; took torches and tied their tails together in pairs and tied a lantern to the tails of each pair of foxes and turned them loose in the grain fields, vineyards and orchards of the Philistines.

- 3) The Philistines learned that Samson had done this because of his father-in-law gave his wife to another man, so the Philistines went to them and burned Samson's wife and father-in-law. They were innocent bystanders in this drama. She did not seek Samson to marry, he pursued her. Yet his uncontrollable anger resulted in her death.
- 4) However, Samson vowed to take revenge on the Philistines for killing his wife and he attacked them savagely, killing many Philistines. Then he went to live in the cleft of the rock of Etam.
- 5) The Philistines went and encamped near Judah, looking for Samson to arrest him.
- 6) Three thousand men of Judah went down to the cleft of the rock of Etam and said to Samson, "Do you not know that the Philistines rule over us? What have you done to us?"
- 7) They told Samson that they were going to tie him up and take him to the Philistines. Of course, Samson was so strong that they could not have tied him up unless he allowed it. Perhaps he was just waiting for a chance to strike against the Philistines when the men of Judah turned him over to them
- 8) When they came out of the cleft, the Philistines came shouting against him.
- 9) The Spirit of the Lord came mightily upon Samson and the ropes tying his arms broke loose from his hands. Samson found a fresh jawbone of a donkey and used it as a weapon and killed 1,000 Philistines.
- 10) Afterward, Samson was thirsty and God split the earth and water came out for Samson to drink and he was refreshed.
- 11) Samson judged Israel twenty years while the Philistines oppressed Israel. **Judges 15:20**
- 12) **Next week we will examine the relationship between Samson and Delilah.**