Jephthah: A Man of His Word

Welcome to the AS IT WAS Bible Series. This guide will provide a method for viewing the DVD episode with a small study group. To get the most out of the Jephthah episode, it is best if you can devote two full group sessions to viewing and discussing the story. In between the group sessions, there are six daily lessons for home study that will allow participants to thoroughly review the actual scripture passages that are mentioned throughout the episode. We recommend following three steps to get the most from the AS IT WAS series as a Bible Study Tool:

1) VIEW ➔ 2) STUDY ➔ 3) VIEW AGAIN

If you only have a limited time, you can view the DVD, choose a few questions to discuss together and then use the personal study guides to review the scripture later, as time permits.

★ BACKGROUND: The story of Jephthah is found in the Book of Judges (10:6 - 12:7). This book tells of a troubled time when the rulers of the Israelites were called “judges”, before the time of the “Kings”. It was the worst time in the history of Israel. It was a time of idolatry and greed. Time and time again the people are proud and trust in themselves. Then their enemies defeat them. They are then afraid and turn from their sin to God. Then God saves them. But they soon change again. They refuse God’s authority in their lives. There are a series of stories in Judges. They follow the same pattern nearly every time. Jephthah appears in the book of Judges when the Israelites have once again turned from God and as a result, have been delivered into the hands of the Ammonites and Philistines.

Jephthah was a courageous and valiant warrior. He was, however, a product of his father’s liaison with a prostitute, which is another clue to the moral state of Israel at the time of the Judges. He is driven from his home by his half-brothers and settles in Tob and lives a kind of “Robin Hood” existence. Jephthah was such a gifted warrior that when the Ammonites threatened Gilead, the elders overcame their personal dislike for Jephthah and begged him to defend them. Let’s find out what happens.

Watch the Jephthah DVD
In every AS IT WAS episode, there are characters that are biblical (i.e. they appear in the actual biblical account) and there are characters that are ‘extra-biblical’ (i.e. they do not appear in the biblical account, but there is reasonable evidence that they existed). In the episode of Jephthah, we heard from five characters. Two of these characters are biblical and three are extra-biblical.

Briefly Skim Judges 10-12 and circle whether the characters below are biblical or extra-biblical

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Character</th>
<th>Biblical</th>
<th>Extra-Biblical</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Galon, King of Ammonites</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>Hogla, Jephthah’s step-sister</td>
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<tr>
<td>Issaschar, Jephthah’s comrade</td>
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<tr>
<td>Gediel, Son of Tribal Leader</td>
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<tr>
<td>Yael, Jephthah’s daughter</td>
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Group Discussion Questions

After viewing the DVD, and depending on the time available, select a few questions from those listed on the next few pages and discuss them with your group.

℘ Individuals in this AS IT WAS episode describe Jephthah’s character. Please identify any character traits you recall.

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℘ Describe the relationship between Jephthah and the rest of his family as recounted by Hogla.

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Do you know anyone who, like Jephthah, was treated as an outcast by their family? How has that affected them? Discuss the role a family can play in the creation of our character.

When the elders came to ask for Jephthah’s help in fighting the Ammonites, what was his response? How do you respond when those who have wronged you suddenly need something from you? What is the Godly response?

Gediel tells us that Jephthah’s vow ‘electrified the men’. Do you think he made the vow to raise the morale of his men? Please discuss the reasons why you think Jephthah made his vow.

Have you ever made a vow to God? Why? Did you keep it or break it? What were the results of your vow?

Do you believe we need to bargain with God in order to receive His blessing? Why or why not?

Do you think Jephthah actually killed his daughter? Why or why not?
Going Deeper: Personal Study Lessons

Going Deeper: Personal Study Lessons

In this section, there are six daily lessons for your personal study time in order to dig deeper into the scripture story of Jephthah once you have viewed the AS IT WAS episode on DVD. You will need your Bible and about 30 minutes a day to complete each lesson.

In each section you will be given some background information, specific scripture readings and a few questions to answer. The icons above will help guide you in your study efforts.

The AS IT WAS series utilizes the New International Version for all scripture quotations on the DVD, but you may use whatever version best suits you for this study.

📖 READ Judges 10:6-11:4

🌟 Already in the book of Judges, we have seen Israel turn from the Lord, serve other gods and ‘forget’ the miracles and deliverance performed by the Lord. Now we see the Lord’s anger toward Israel as he delivers them into the hands of the Philistines and Ammonites.

📝 The Lord reminds the Israelites how often He has saved them from their enemies. Review the scripture and list all the enemies they faced and were delivered from in the past.

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How did the Israelites repent? Can we repent in the same way when we turn from God? Did He accept their repentance?

What reason does scripture give for why Jephthah was driven away from his childhood home?

Why do you think men would have joined Jephthah in Tob?

DAY TWO

READ Judges 11:4-11:10

Review Judges 10:6-10:18 side by side with today’s scripture. What similarities do you see between the way Israel interacts with God and the way the elders interact with Jephthah?

Why would the elders want Jephthah to be their leader?

How did Jephthah respond to their request? How could he have responded? How would you have responded?
DAY THREE
□ READ Judges 11:12-11:28

☀ BACKGROUND: Although Jephthah mentions God more often than any of the other Judges, it is interesting to note that the Lord is not involved in personally selecting Jephthah as a Judge. He does not speak to him in a dream, send a prophet or in anyway communicate with Jephthah. The Lord stands by silently as a desperate people select a qualified warrior as their leader.

✍ How does Jephthah show his wisdom once he is appointed leader of Israel?

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✍ List the three arguments Jephthah used in appealing to the King of the Ammonites for peace.

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DAY FOUR
□ READ Judges 11:29-35

☀ BACKGROUND: The scripture passage tells us that the “Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah”. In the Old Testament, the mention of the “Spirit” coming upon someone was a sign of divine enablement. Jephthah’s victory was assured from that moment.

✍ Why do you think Jephthah felt he had to make a vow to the Lord to ensure his victory?

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✍ Do you sometimes feel you must promise God something in order to receive his favor?

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✍ What does God say about human sacrifice? (see Lev. 18:21; 20:2-5; Deut. 12:31; 18:10). Do you think Jephthah would be familiar with this scripture? Why or why not?
If he intended to sacrifice an animal (and not a human), why was he so distressed when he saw his daughter?
DAY FIVE

 мяс READ Judges 11:30-40

**BACKGROUND:** The vow of Jephthah is certainly one of the most difficult scripture passages to understand. *The Nelson Study Bible* notes, "The conjunction in Jephthah's pivotal statement in verse 31, that whatever or whoever came out of the door 'shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering' could be translated or. Thus, if a person came out first, he would dedicate that person to the Lord, or if an animal came out first, he would offer the animal as a burnt sacrifice." Today's questions will help you think deeper about this vow and the different interpretations.

 мяс Read Judges 11:31 again with the possibility of the word “and’ being the word “or”. How does that change your understanding of the vow?

 мяс Why do you think Jephthah’s daughter encourages her father to keep his vow? Why does she lament the fact she will never marry?

 мяс Read Leviticus 27. Why do you think Jephthah didn’t avail himself of the laws for redeeming things vowed?

DAY SIX

 мяс READ Judges 11:38-11:40

**BACKGROUND:** The writer of Judges records that Jephthah "did to her as he had vowed" and then adds, "and she was a virgin." It is not recorded that Jephthah sacrificed her. In these times, barrenness was considered a curse and not to have an heir was considered a tragedy.

 мяс Read Exodus 38:8; 1 Samuel 2:22; Luke 2:36-37. Do these scriptures demonstrate women being ‘set aside’ or ‘dedicated’ in service for the Lord? How?
Is it possible that Jephthah kept his vow by offering his daughter’s life in service to God? Give reasons for your stance.

Although Jephthah’s rash vow may be difficult to understand, he is listed as a hero in the “Hall of Faith” in Hebrews, Chapter 11. Why do you think Jephthah earned his place in that chapter?

Do you think Jephthah is a good example of a man of faith? Why or why not?

Notes:
Sharing the Learning: Group Review

In this section, we review what we learned as we studied the scripture during the daily lessons and we watch the Jephthah episode with new insights and understanding of Jephthah, his family, his successes, and his vow to God.

It is difficult to understand how a loving God would allow a man to kill his only daughter. After studying the scripture passage, however, we see that Jephthah may have fulfilled his vow in a way that was acceptable to the Lord. The account of Jephthah tells us about a man who rose above disadvantaged circumstances—one whose inheritance had been denied—yet who bore neither hatred nor ill-will against those who had wronged him. He was not vengeful and bitter. When called upon during a national emergency, he rose to the occasion. He was a man who elevated himself above his handicap, a man who knew God and was devoted to Him. He was a seasoned and valiant warrior who did not shirk the responsibility given him. He completely understood that success depended upon God. Regardless of the cost to himself and his family, Jephthah was a man of his word. He truly was a great man of the Old Testament.

Let’s return once more to hear about Jephthah again with our additional scriptural insights and understandings.

Watch the Jephthah DVD

Group Discussion Questions

After viewing the DVD, Discuss the following topics with your group.
What new perspectives did you have on the characters when you watched it this time? Who did you see differently and why?

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If you were filming this Biblical account, what aspects would you emphasize (or de-emphasize) in this film? Why is the scene or person you selected important (or unimportant) to you or to gain understanding?

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How did you view Yael's discussion of her fate after having further scriptural insight?

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What did you learn about God’s character as you studied the scripture behind this story?

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Review

The story of Jephthah reveals to us that God is a loving and patient God that does not require us to make ‘bargains’ with Him in order to receive blessings. We can also be encouraged that God uses outcasts to further His kingdom. From this story in Judges we learn:

1) **God is long-suffering with His people.** Even though the people of Israel had turned from Him again and again, when they finally repent of their evil ways, God hears and responds. He delivers them once again from their enemies and uses Jephthah to do it.

2) **God provides blessing in spite of our promises.** Regardless of what we promise Him, God is sovereign and will act according to His will. We cannot ‘bend His will” to ours no matter what we promise. If we are faithful to His
commands and put our trust in Him alone, He will act on our behalf to deliver us from our enemies.

3) **God can use us regardless of our past.** Although Jephthah was the product of an illicit relationship and a social outcast, God was able to raise him up and use him as a leader and deliverer. Jephthah was not defined by his origins, but by his faith. Hebrews 11:32-40 lists Jephthah in the “Hall of Faith”. This prestigious list names men and women of great faith who accomplished much for God. We can accomplish what God designed us to accomplish regardless of our past.

**Action Item**

Ask the Lord to reveal to you any vows you have made which were not what He desires. Ask the Lord to increase your trust and faith so that you will not be tempted to ‘bargain’ for your blessings. Be encouraged that God has chosen to perform His will through mere men and that each one of us has a purpose in His greater plan. Seek the Lord, He wants to be found, and He desires for everyone to reach their potential.