
Day 80 - March 21

Conquering a Land (1400 – 1100 BCE)

Jephthah and Five Others

Readings: *Judges 10:1-12:15*

Reflections:

- The cycle of Israel serving other gods and sinning, being oppressed by their enemies, then crying out to God for help reaches a pathetic level.
- Jephthah as a leader qualifies once again as a very unlikely hero. His mother was a prostitute. He ends up being rejected by his family and becomes a gangster. Here is a striking picture of how bad it gets. Israel is so desperate that they are turning to the mob begging a gangster to be their leader. Remember the overarching theme is “look at how bad it gets without a true King of Israel.”
- In Jephthah’s dialogue with the King of Ammon, he concludes with an important statement, “Let the Lord, the Judge decide the dispute this day...” Here is a subtle note again that God wants to be the true king, judge and ruler of Israel but she always rejects that direct relationship.
- The Spirit of the Lord comes on Jephthah and THEN he makes a vow that will ultimately lead to him sacrificing his own daughter. This shows that the Spirit coming onto a person does not make them into perfect people. They can still make foolish decisions. In the Old Testament, the Spirit was not poured out to dwell permanently with anyone because Christ had not yet died for our sins to open the way for that. The Spirit comes to help a person do a specific task and that is it. Here we see that Jephthah has the Spirit to win the victory but because of his lack of understanding makes a boastful promise to God. After the battle his daughter comes out and he actually thinks it would honor God more to sacrifice his daughter than to repent of his vow. This is not an example of how to truly honor God but it is an example of the kind of messed up gangster that Jephthah was and how little he understood God. God will work with the most messed up people but in this context it continues to show how bad it gets when people are doing what they think is right in their own eyes. Jephthah is doing what he thinks is right in his own eyes.

- As we will see, all of this is to set up the cry for a king which in turn will reveal that even the best human kings cannot change the heart of people.
- It should also be noted that his daughter suggests that he sacrifice her and her friends go along with it. It shows how messed up this whole thing is. It is meant to shock the reader and it does!
- The whole “shibboleth” and “sibboleth” episode shows again how pathetic everything has become. One tribe of Israel killing another tribe based on how they say a silly word. Forty two thousand are killed, no less. Can you believe that? Again this is meant to shock the reader to say, “What in the world is going on here? Where is God in all this madness?”
- Now the next story is perfectly inserted by the editor. At the height of our asking, “Where is God” he now chooses to tell the story of Ruth which shows that even in the midst of the world’s most screwed up times, God is at work showing his grace to a gentile woman who understands his covenant faithfulness and the importance of true humility and faith.