

# Jephthah: statesman or Swindler ?

Judges 10:6-12:7

Read Judges 10:6-16

1. What is God's response to Israel's cry for help?
2. How does this compare with what happened in the Gideon story?
3. What is God getting sick of?
4. How genuine do you think Israel's repentance is?

God is sick of being called on to rescue the Israelites when they're always serving other Gods. If they want to be rescued they can go and ask the idols they spend their time serving. The Israelites protest and get rid of their idols, but in the light of their previous record it sounds a bit hollow. Even so, it seems that God relents and has pity on them.

Read Judges 11:1-11

5. What is Jephthah's background?
6. What differences are there between the way Jephthah's appointed and the way the other Judges have been appointed?
7. What do you think of the bargain Jephthah makes with the elders of Gilead? How would you rate his negotiation skills?

Read Judges 11:12-28

8. How convincing is Jephthah's speech to the king of Ammon?
9. Do you think the speech is only for the benefit of the king of Ammon (see v 27)?
10. Given what we've seen of Jephthah so far, what character trait seems to be coming to the fore?

## Read Judges 11:29-32

11. Is there anything that makes you feel uncomfortable about Jephthah's vow?
12. Why do you think he makes it? Does he need to?
13. How does Jephthah's vow fit with his character as it's been developed so far?

## Read Judges 11:34-40

14. Who's the first person who comes to meet Jephthah?
15. Is she doing anything inappropriate?
16. Jephthah is distressed about the whole situation, but in v 35 who does he blame and who does he feel sorry for?
17. How appropriate is Jephthah's attitude?
18. How appropriate is Jephthah's daughter's attitude?
19. Who do you feel sorry for?

## Read Judges 12:1-7

20. Does the capturing the fords episode remind you of any other campaigns in Judges?
21. What is different about this campaign?
22. Why is this final episode of the Jephthah story a disturbing one for Israel?

Manipulation is at the centre of this story. Israel is trying to manipulate God. But

then they get the judge they deserve. Jephthah, who not only manipulates the Israelites to become their king, but also tries to manipulate God. The tragic ending to Jephthah's attempt to manipulate God with his vow is a warning about trying to bargain with God, however religious a bargain it may seem.

23. In our relationship with God, do we have anything to bargain with? How should we relate to God?

24. What kind of bargains are you tempted to try and make with God?

25. How can religious people today try and manipulate God? (for an example, see Acts 19: 13-17)

