

JUDGES 10-12

JEPHTHAH

A HARD BARGAIN

Bartering and bargaining have been around since time began. Built into any human society is some form of transactional economic and social system. This approach is also the general way humanity approaches their relationship with God. It's a 'karma', 'this for that', 'do good things to get good things' mindset which aims to placate the gods.



JEPHTHAH'S STORY

The story of Jephthah is bookended by the brief mention of other judges (chapters 10:1-5 & 12:8-15) which serve to focus our attention on the long story in between.

Read Judges 10:6-16.

1. We return to the Judges cycle once again. What's new in God's response to Israel? Does that surprise you?

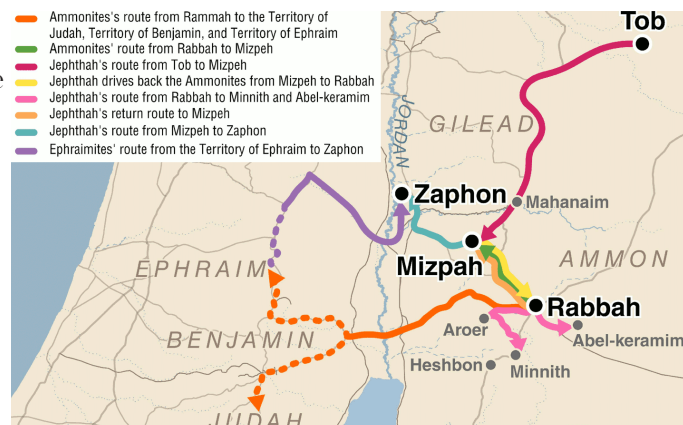
2. What's different about Israel's response? What's right about it? What's wrong with it?

Read Judges 10:17-11:11.

3. What's wrong with Israel's immediate action after God's mercy? How is this different to the way other Judges have been appointed?

4. What deal does Jephthah broker with Israel? What does this reveal about him? (compare the motives of God in 10:16 and Jephthah in 11:9-10)

In 11:12-28, Jephthah tries to broker a deal with the Ammonite king. He gives a long, stirring speech about God's actions for Israel in the past and how the Ammonite king shouldn't mess with Israel. Unfortunately, any Israelite who knows Israel's actual history with God from books like Numbers would know that this stirring speech is actually full of errors! Jephthah is doing his best. But it seems that living his life far outside Israel (see Tob on the map) has left Jephthah without much knowledge of Israel or their God. Unsurprisingly, the Ammonite king doesn't listen and war proceeds.



Read Judges 11:29-40.

5. What deal does Jephthah broker with God? Why might he have thought it was needed? Was it needed?

It was never going to be an animal that came out of Jephthah's house to meet him. He knew that when he made the vow. Probably he hoped it'd 'just' be a lowly slave girl, not his only daughter. But he knew it would be a person. Jephthah thinks like a Canaanite, that he can put God in his debt by promising 'the ultimate gift': human sacrifice.

LEVITICUS 5

¹ If anyone thoughtlessly takes an oath to do anything, whether good or evil (in any matter one might carelessly swear about) even though they are unaware of it, but then they learn of it and realise their guilt - ⁵ when anyone becomes aware that they are guilty in any of these matters, they must confess in what way they have sinned.⁶ As a penalty for the sin they have committed, they must bring to the Lord a female lamb or goat from the flock as a sin offering; and the priest shall make atonement for them for their sin.

6. Jephthah goes through with the vow he made. What does this show us about Jephthah? (see **sidebar: Leviticus 5**)

7. Who does Jephthah feel sorry for? (v35) Who does the narrator seem to feel sorry for?

Jephthah spent most of his life outside Israel. It seems that left him ignorant of the true God. Not just of Israel's history with God, as earlier, but even just the basics of how to relate to God.

Read Judges 12:1-7.

8. Compare the Jephthah/Ephraimite conflict to the Gideon/Ephraimite conflict. What's similar? What's different? What does that say about Jephthah?

LIVING GOD'S STORY

Jephthah wasn't an ideal Israelite, like a Judge was meant to be. He was a carbon-copy Canaanite. Like the Canaanites who worshipped false gods, he was a 'deal maker' - he drove a hard bargain with people and with God. That's just how he assumed God worked. He'd give anything to be king. He'd sacrifice anyone else - even his own daughter - to get ahead.

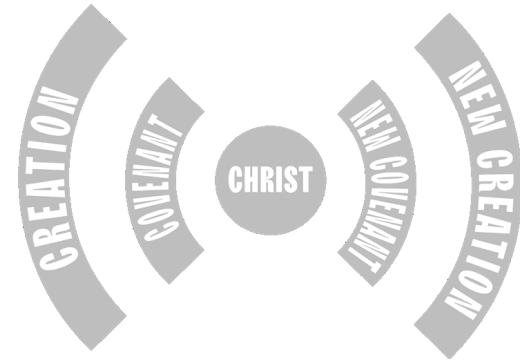
But Jesus Christ is the opposite. He's the king who sacrificed himself for his people.

9. How do Australians generally relate to God? What bargains might we try to make with God?

Read *Philippians 2:1-11*.

10. What bargain or deal has God made with us in Jesus? How should that change how we 'bargain' with God and others?

We can't bargain with God. We're creatures made by God who have rebelled against him. We have nothing to offer God that can put him in our debt. The good news is: we don't need to bargain with God. Instead of us offering God something, Jesus offered himself in our place. All we need to do is accept the mercy shown to us in Jesus. When we realise that, that should free us up to serve other people, not ourselves, knowing we're already completely looked after by Jesus. Let's pray that would really reshape the way we relate to God and to others.



PHILIPPIANS 2

¹If you have any encouragement from being united with Christ, if any comfort from his love, if any common sharing in the Spirit, if any tenderness and compassion, ² then make my joy complete by being like-minded, having the same love, being one in spirit and of one mind.³ Do nothing out of selfish ambition or vain conceit. Rather, in humility value others above yourselves, ⁴ not looking to your own interests but each of you to the interests of the others. ⁵ In your relationships with one another, have the same mindset as Christ Jesus:

⁶ Who, being in very nature God, did not consider equality with God something to be used to his own advantage;⁷ rather, he made himself nothing by taking the very nature of a servant, being made in human likeness.⁸ And being found in appearance as a man, he humbled himself by becoming obedient to death—even death on a cross!⁹ Therefore God exalted him to the highest place and gave him the name that is above every name,¹⁰ that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, ¹¹ and every tongue acknowledge that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.