

## Introduction

[Judges 21:25](#) “25 In those days there was no king in Israel. Everyone did what was right in his own eyes.” *What is the theological significance of the book of Judges?* Judges shows what life is like without a king. Israel had no king, so they spiraled deeper and deeper into sin.

*When Israel finally asked for a king in 1 Samuel, what mistake did God say they had made?* [1 Samuel 8:7](#) “7 And the Lord said to Samuel, “Obey the voice of the people in all that they say to you, for they have not rejected you, but they have rejected me from being king over them.” The book of Judges prepares short term for God appointed David as king over Israel. But it prepares long term for God appoint Jesus as king over God’s eternal kingdom. We should submit to Jesus and do what is right in His eyes.

[Judges 10-12](#) list a few judges in Israel’s history, but focuses on Jephthah. One of the most significant details of this story is the sacrifice that Jephthah makes to honor the Lord for giving him victory over the Ammonites.

## Philistine and Ammonite Oppression

### Tola & Jair

[Judges 10:1-2](#) “1 After Abimelech there arose to save Israel Tola the son of Puah, son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, and he lived at Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim. 2 And he judged Israel twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried at Shamir.”

*What does Scripture tell us about Tola?* He was from the tribe of Issachar. He was likely named after Issachar’s son, Tola ([Num 26:23](#); [1 Chr 7:1](#)). He lived at Shamir, in Ephraim. He judged Israel twenty-three years.

[Judges 10:3-5](#) “3 After him arose Jair the Gileadite, who judged Israel twenty-two years. 4 And he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities, called Havvoth-jair to this day, which are in the land of Gilead. 5 And Jair died and was buried in Kamon.”

*What does Scripture tell us about Jair?* He was from Gilead, which was a region on the west side of the Jordan (Transjordan), at the Jabbok River. The region was split between Manasseh and Gad ([Josh 13:25, 31](#)). He was likely named after Manasseh’s son, Jair, who had founded the cities in this region ([Num 32:39-40](#)). He had thirty sons, thirty donkeys, and thirty cities (cf. [1 Chr 2:22](#)).

## Disobedience & Oppression

[Judges 10:6-9](#) “6 The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the Lord and **served** the **Baals** and the **Ashtaroth**, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. And they **forsook** the Lord and did not **serve** him. 7 So the **anger** of the Lord was kindled against Israel, and he **sold** them into the hand of the **Philistines** and into the hand of the **Ammonites**, 8 and they crushed and oppressed the people of Israel that year. For eighteen years they oppressed all the people of Israel who were **beyond** the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead. 9 And the Ammonites **crossed** the Jordan to fight also against Judah and against Benjamin and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was severely distressed.”

*Who did Israel worship?* They worshiped the gods of the nations/tribes that surrounded them. Hadad and Rimmon were the gods of the Syrians (see [2 Kgs 5:18](#)). Chemosh was the god of the Moabites ([Num 21:29](#)). Molech (also called Milcom) was the god of the Ammonites ([1 Kgs 11:5](#), [7](#)). Dagon was the god of the Philistines ([Judg 16:23](#)).

*Whom did God raise up to oppress Israel?* God gave Israel into the hands of the Philistines and the Ammonites. The Philistines will be addressed later by Samson. This section focuses on the Ammonite oppression.

## Prayer for salvation

[Judges 10:10-18](#) “10 And the people of Israel cried out to the Lord, saying, “We have **sinned** against you, because we have **forsaken** our God and have served the **Baals**.” 11 And the Lord said to the people of Israel, “Did I not save you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites and from the Philistines? 12 The Sidonians also, and the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, and you cried out to me, and I saved you out of their hand. 13 Yet you have forsaken me and served other gods; therefore I will save you no more. 14 Go and cry out to the **gods** whom you have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress.” 15 And the people of Israel said to the Lord, “We have sinned; do to us whatever seems good to you. Only please deliver us this day.” 16 So they **put away** the foreign gods from among them and served the Lord, and he became impatient over the misery of Israel. 17 Then the Ammonites were called to arms, and they encamped in Gilead. And the people of Israel came together, and they encamped at Mizpah. 18 And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said one to another, “Who is the man who will begin to fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.”

*What did Israel confess to the Lord?* They confessed their sin, specifically their idolatry.

*Who did the Lord say they should ask for salvation?* God told them to call out to the gods they had chosen ([Judg 10:14](#)) to save them. Idols cannot save; salvation belongs to the Lord ([Jonah 2:9](#); [Isa 43:11-12](#)).

# Jephthah's leadership

## Jephthah's call

[Judges 11:1-3](#) “1 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a **prostitute**. Gilead was the father of Jephthah. 2 And Gilead's wife also bore him sons. And when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out and said to him, “You shall not have an inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman.” 3 Then Jephthah **fled** from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob, and **worthless fellows** collected around Jephthah and went out with him.”

*Why was Jephthah rejected by his brothers?* Jephthah was the son of a prostitute. His brothers would not share their inheritance with a half-brother.

*Where did Jephthah live when he fled Gilead?* Jephthah lived in Tob. When the Ammonites fought against David, they hired 12,000 men from Tob to fight with them. Tob was likely near Gilead and Ammon.

[Judges 11:4-11](#) “4 After a time the Ammonites made war against Israel. 5 And when the Ammonites made war against Israel, the **elders** of Gilead went to bring Jephthah from the land of [Tob](#). 6 And they said to Jephthah, “Come and be our **leader**, that we may fight against the Ammonites.” 7 But Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, “Did you not hate me and drive me out of my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in **distress**?” 8 And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, “That is why we have turned to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the Ammonites and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.” 9 Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, “If you bring me home again to fight against the Ammonites, and the Lord gives them over to me, I will be your **head**.” 10 And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, “The Lord will be witness between us, if we do not do as you say.” 11 So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and leader over them. And Jephthah spoke all his words before the Lord at Mizpah.”

*How did Jephthah come end up back at Gilead?* Gilead asked Jephthah to return and help them because the Ammonites made war against Israel. He agreed, but he would be their ruler after the victory.

## Ammonites' hatred of Israel

[Judges 11:12-13](#) “12 Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites and said, “What do you have against me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?” 13 And the king of the Ammonites answered the messengers of Jephthah, “Because Israel on coming up from Egypt took away my land, from the Arnon to the Jabbok and to the Jordan; now therefore restore it peaceably.””

*Why did the Ammonites fight against Israel?* The Ammonites claim that Israel took this land (in the middle of the Arnon, Jabbok, and Jordan rivers) when they came from Egypt. So, the Ammonites are asking for Israel to return the land to them.

[Judges 11:14-17](#) “14 Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites 15 and said to him, “Thus says Jephthah: Israel did not take away the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites, 16 but when they came up from Egypt, Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh. 17 Israel then sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, ‘Please let us pass through your land,’ but the king of Edom would not listen. And they sent also to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh.”

*How did the Moabites treat Israel?* The Moabites and the Edomites would not let Israel pass through ([Num 20:14-17](#)).

The Edomites were the descendants of Esau ([Gen 36:9, 43](#)), Jacob’s brother. [Deuteronomy 2:4-5](#) “4 and command the people, “You are about to pass through the territory of your brothers, the people of **Esau**, who live in Seir; and they will be afraid of you. So be very careful. 5 Do not contend with them, for I will not give you any of their land, no, not so much as for the sole of the foot to tread on, because **I have given** Mount Seir to Esau as a possession.”

Moab and Ammon were the children of Lot, Abraham’s brother ([Gen 19:36-38](#)). [Deuteronomy 2:9](#) “9 And the Lord said to me, ‘Do not harass **Moab** or contend with them in battle, for I will not give you any of their land for a possession, because **I have given** Ar to the people of **Lot** for a possession.” [Deuteronomy 2:19](#) “19 And when you approach the territory of the people of **Ammon**, do not harass them or contend with them, for I will not give you any of the land of the people of Ammon as a possession, because **I have given** it to the sons of **Lot** for a possession.”

[Judges 11:18-20](#) “18 “Then they journeyed through the wilderness and went around the land of Edom and the land of Moab and arrived on the east side of the land of Moab and camped on the other side of the Arnon. But they did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was the boundary of Moab. 19 Israel then sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, king of Heshbon, and Israel said to him, ‘Please let us pass through your land to our country,’ 20 but Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory, so Sihon gathered all his people together and encamped at Jahaz and fought with Israel.”

*How did the Amorites treat Israel?* The Amorites would not let Israel pass through the land and went to war against them. God had not made any arrangement for land for the Amorites and Israel was allowed to fight against them. Noah’s son Ham had a son named Canaan, from which we get the term Canaanites. The Amorites were descendants of Canaan ([Gen 10:15-16](#)).

[Judges 11:21-23](#) “21 And the Lord, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them. So Israel took possession of all the land of the Amorites, who inhabited that country. 22 And they took possession of all the territory of the Amorites from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. 23 So then the Lord, the God of Israel, dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel; and are you to take possession of them?”

*How did the Lord treat the Amorites?* God gave Israel victory over the Amorites and gave the land to Israel. The problem stems from [Numbers 21:23-26](#) “23 But Sihon would not allow Israel to pass through his territory. He gathered all his people together and went out against Israel to the wilderness and came to Jahaz and fought against Israel. 24 And Israel defeated him with the edge of the sword and took possession of his land from the **Arnon** to the **Jabbok**, as far as to the **Ammonites**, for the border of the Ammonites was strong. 25 And Israel took all these cities, and Israel settled in all the cities of the **Amorites**, in Heshbon, and in all its villages. 26 For Heshbon was the city of **Sihon** the king of the **Amorites**, who had fought against the former king of **Moab** and taken all his land out of his hand, as far as the **Arnon**.”

The disputed land used to belong to Moab, then the Amorites, then Israel. There is a lot of crossover in the OT between Moab and Ammon, which suggests they viewed themselves as one people (much like the tribes of Israel).

[Judges 11:24-28](#) “24 Will you not possess what Chemosh your god gives you to possess? And all that the Lord our God has dispossessed before us, we will possess. 25 Now are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever contend against Israel, or did he ever go to war with them? 26 While Israel lived in Heshbon and its villages, and in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities that are on the banks of the Arnon, 300 years, why did you not deliver them within that time? 27 I therefore have not sinned against you, and you do me wrong by making war on me. The Lord, the Judge, decide this day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon.” 28 But the king of the Ammonites did not listen to the words of Jephthah that he sent to him.”

*How did Jephthah compare the Lord to Chemosh?* If their god wanted them to have the land, they would have possessed it. Chemosh was the Moabite god, but again, Moab and Ammon probably viewed themselves as one people. It is clear that the Lord wanted Israel to have the land because He gave it to them.

*How did the Ammonites respond to Jephthah?* The Ammonites were not satisfied with the answer, so they continued to go to war against Israel.

### [Jephthah's vow](#)

[Judges 11:29-33](#) “29 Then the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh and passed on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he

passed on to the Ammonites. 30 And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, “If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, 31 then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the Lord’s, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.” 32 So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them, and the Lord gave them into his hand. 33 And he struck them from Aroer to the neighborhood of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim, with a great blow. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel.”

*What vow did Jephthah make to the Lord?* Jephthah vowed to offer the first thing that came out of his house when he returned as a burnt offering to the Lord.

[Judges 11:34–35](#) “34 Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah. And behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances. She was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter. 35 And as soon as he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow.””

*Who did Jephthah vow to sacrifice?* The first one to come out of Jephthah’s house was his daughter, his only child. There are two possibilities about Jephthah’s intentions. First, he may have made a careless vow. Second, he may have intended a human sacrifice, but not his daughter.

[Judges 11:36–40](#) “36 And she said to him, “My father, you have opened your mouth to the Lord; do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the Lord has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites.” 37 So she said to her father, “Let this thing be done for me: leave me alone two months, that I may go up and down on the mountains and weep for my virginity, I and my companions.” 38 So he said, “Go.” Then he sent her away for two months, and she departed, she and her companions, and wept for her virginity on the mountains. 39 And at the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow that he had made. She had never known a man, and it became a custom in Israel 40 that the daughters of Israel went year by year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.”

*What was the daughter’s request before sacrifice?* Jephthah’s daughter requested two months to mourn the fact that she would never marry or have children.

**Application:** *What are some lessons that we can learn from Jephthah’s thoughtless vow?* One area that we see this displayed today is in church membership. Church membership is a covenant with other believers. As a covenant, it is relational (we are a family) and it is a commitment. While many have this right view of the church, many people view church membership as insignificant. You can see this in their attendance. You can see this in their participation (vs merely attending). You can see this in their ease of leaving the local church

with whom they have covenanted to attend another church. Church membership is a serious VOW.

## Jephthah and other judges

### Jephthah versus Ephraim

[Judges 12:1-4](#) “1 The men of Ephraim were called to arms, and they crossed to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, “Why did you cross over to fight against the Ammonites and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house over you with fire.” 2 And Jephthah said to them, “I and my people had a great dispute with the Ammonites, and when I called you, you did not save me from their hand. 3 And when I saw that you would not save me, I took my life in my hand and crossed over against the Ammonites, and the Lord gave them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?” 4 Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought with Ephraim. And the men of Gilead struck Ephraim, because they said, “You are fugitives of Ephraim, you Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim and Manasseh.””

*Why did the Ephraimites oppose Jephthah and Gilead?* It seems that they just didn’t want to be left out. Perhaps they wanted credit for the victory. Ephraim had the same response to Gideon ([Judg 8:1-3](#)).

[Judges 12:5-7](#) “5 And the Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan against the Ephraimites. And when any of the fugitives of Ephraim said, “Let me go over,” the men of Gilead said to him, “Are you an Ephraimite?” When he said, “No,” 6 they said to him, “Then say Shibboleth,” and he said, “Sibboleth,” for he could not pronounce it right. Then they seized him and slaughtered him at the fords of the Jordan. At that time 42,000 of the Ephraimites fell. 7 Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in his city in Gilead.”

*How did Gilead test the Ephraimites?* They tested their pronunciation of *Shibboleth* (flowing stream OR ear of grain).

**Application:** *What are some ways that this type of jealousy might be displayed in the church?*

### Judges of Israel

[Judges 12:8-10](#) “8 After him Ibzan of Bethlehem judged Israel. 9 He had thirty sons, and thirty daughters he gave in marriage outside his clan, and thirty daughters he brought in from outside for his sons. And he judged Israel seven years. 10 Then Ibzan died and was buried at Bethlehem.”

*What does Scripture tell us about Ibzan?* Ibzan was from Bethlehem. There were two Bethlehems at this time, one in Judah ([Judg 17:7-8](#)) and one in Zebulun ([Josh 19:15](#)). He had

thirty sons whom he married to people outside his clan. He had thirty daughters whom he gave to marry outside his clan. He judged Israel seven years.

[Judges 12:11-12](#) “11 After him Elon the Zebulunite judged Israel, and he judged Israel ten years. 12 Then Elon the Zebulunite died and was buried at Aijalon in the land of Zebulun.”

*What does Scripture tell us about Elon?* Elon was from the tribe of Zebulun. He was probably named after Zebulun’s son, Elon ([Gen 46:14](#)). He judged Israel ten years.

[Judges 12:13-15](#) “13 After him Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite judged Israel. 14 He had forty sons and thirty grandsons, who rode on seventy donkeys, and he judged Israel eight years. 15 Then Abdon the son of Hillel the Pirathonite died and was buried at Pirathon in the land of Ephraim, in the hill country of the Amalekites.”

*What does Scripture tell us about Abdon?* He had forty sons and 30 grandchildren. They each rode a donkey. He judged Israel eight years.

## Conclusion

### Child Sacrifice

*Was it right for Jephthah to offer his daughter as a burnt offering?* Scripture condemns child sacrifice. In fact, this was part of God’s warning before Israel went into Canaan. [Deuteronomy 12:31](#) “31 You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods.”

One of the ironic aspects of Jephthah’s child sacrifice is that it celebrated victory over the Ammonites, who were known for child sacrifice. [1 Kings 11:7](#) “7 Then Solomon built a high place for Chemosh the abomination of Moab, and for Molech the abomination of the Ammonites, on the mountain east of Jerusalem.” [Leviticus 18:21](#) “21 You shall not give any of your children to offer them to Molech, and so profane the name of your God: I am the Lord.” [Leviticus 20:2-5](#) “2 “Say to the people of Israel, Any one of the people of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones. 3 I myself will set my face against that man and will cut him off from among his people, because he has given one of his children to Molech, to make my sanctuary unclean and to profane my holy name. 4 And if the people of the land do at all close their eyes to that man when he gives one of his children to Molech, and do not put him to death, 5 then I will set my face against that man and against his clan and will cut them off from among their people, him and all who follow him in whoring after Molech.”

## Abortion

I suspect there is no civilization in history that has sacrificed as many children as the United States. Seth Gruber, quotes Peter Kreeft, who said (paraphrase), “Abortion is the demonic parody of the eucharist. That’s why it uses the same holy words, “This is my body,” but with the opposite, blasphemous meaning.”

Child sacrifice, whether to Molech or to secularism, is condemned by Scripture. All humans are made in the image of God.