Times of the Judges

GOOD MAN, BAD DECISION

Friday, November 13

Reading: Judges 10-11

> ***Judges 11:29*** *Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites.* ***30*** *And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD: "If you give the Ammonites into my hands,* ***31*** *whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph from the Ammonites will be the LORD's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."*

Israel has again deserted God to follow the idols of the nations around them. When God allows the Philistines and Ammonites to oppress them, they again cry out to God for help. At other times their cries were merely for deliverance. This is the only time that they actually appear to be repentant. They admit their sin in forsaking God and get rid of their idols. However, God does not raise up a judge to deliver them. Instead, He works behind the scenes to rescue His people.

Enter Jephthah! Born the illegitimate child of a prostitute, Jephthah was rejected by his brothers and forced to leave his homeland to live in Tob (probably in Syria). There he formed a "Robin Hood" band of men and became famous as a warrior. Now in their time of need, the elders who had rejected him turn to Jephthah to lead in their war against Ammon, promising to make him their leader if he is successful.

Jephthah eventually agrees but does not immediately go to war. First, he tries to make peace with their enemies. The Ammonites claimed that the Israelites under Moses had stolen their land, but Jephthah gives them a history lesson to prove that it was the Amorites (not the Ammonites) who were defeated by Moses and the Ammonites had no claim on the land God had given to His people.

With peace not an option, Jephthah prepares for war. The Spirit of God came on him, strengthening him for the battle. However, in a rash decision, Jephthah vows that if God gives him victory, he will offer as a burnt offering whatever comes out of the door of his house to greet him. Sadly, it is his only daughter who comes out to meet him after the victory. Heartbroken, he fulfills his vow. After a two-month period of morning, Jephthah offers his daughter as a sacrifice to God.

LESSON ONE: There is a lot to like about Jephthah. He could have let the rejection by his family and countrymen ruin his life, but instead he let the Lord use him. He does not hold a grudge but helps those who had rejected him. He is a spiritual man who often speaks the name of God (more than any other judge in this book), prays (11:11, 30) and knows his history of God's dealings with his people. Despite his past, Jephthah was a man of faith. How does your past affect your present and future? How should you respond when people treat you badly?

LESSON TWO: There is much debate over what happened to Jephthah's daughter. Was she killed (burnt offering) or was she dedicated to the Lord's service at the Tabernacle for the rest of her life? There are good and bad arguments on both sides. The reading of the text seems to favor that Jephthah offered her as a burnt offering as he had promised (an act forbidden by God). Either way, Jephthah's family line is over! This is a warning about making rash promises. God expects us to keep our word, but we must be sure that what we promise is consistent with His will. Otherwise, we will find ourselves stuck with a bad choice that could ruin our testimony.