

22 OCTOBER

BIBLE LESSON

Judges 11:1-3

LESSON

Jephthah
rejected

VERSE 2

*And Gilead's wife
bare him sons;
and his wife's sons grew up,
and they thrust out Jephthah,
and said unto him,
Thou shalt not inherit
in our father's house;
for thou art the son
of a strange woman.*

Jephthah, whose mother was a harlot, was a son of shame. His half-brothers (born of the lawful wife) despised Jephthah and expelled him from the family so he would have no part of the father's inheritance. May we beware never to despise the weak, the small and disadvantaged [Matthew 18:10]. Jephthah fled to the land of 'Tob, where he learned to survive, living by the sword and hunting wild animals. His courage and skill attracted men of similar disposition and he led them in guerrilla warfare against the enemy. Little did Jephthah or his kinsmen dream that one day he would be called upon to save Israel. God in His sovereign plan was preparing Jephthah for that role.

God often first humbles those whom He has chosen to exalt and makes that "stone which the builders disallowed ... the head of the corner" [1 Peter 2:7]. Joseph, Moses and David, the three most eminent shepherds of Israel, were all rejected by men before they were called of God to their high office. Likewise, the Great Shepherd gave His life for His sheep, even us, and purchased us by His death on Calvary's cross.

Dear reader, are you in the doldrums of despair and misery because you feel despised by those around you? Do they consider you a failure by the standards of the world? Do they mock and persecute you for your faith? Take heart for God has a plan for His children. May we be patient and faithful, "looking unto Jesus, the author and finisher of our faith".

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 2
2 THESSALONIANS 3

THOUGHT

Humble yourselves therefore under the mighty hand of God, that He may exalt you in due time.
— 1 Peter 5:6

23 OCTOBER

BIBLE LESSON

Judges 11:4-11

LESSON

Jephthah
accepted

VERSE 11

*Then Jephthah went with the
elders of Gilead,
and the people made him head
and captain over them:
and Jephthah uttered all his
words before the LORD
in Mizpeh.*

Faced with the reality of total defeat by the Ammonites, the Israelites were prepared to make anyone who could lead them to victory against the Ammonites as their ruler. Jesus has won for us the victory over death and sin, have we been faithful to crown Him Lord and King of our life? Being aware that Jephthah was a “mighty man of valour”, the elders sought him out and begged him to lead them. Jephthah chided the elders for abetting the injustice done against him by his half-brothers in expelling him from the family.

Jephthah had been an outcast, but God did not cast Jephthah away. He had received God’s sustenance and protection while in exile so he forgave his brothers and accepted their plea. If God could forgive a recalcitrant sinner, like Israel, when he/she repented, Jephthah could also forgive his brothers. May we learn from Jephthah’s example to be willing to forgive others too.

Jephthah would have recalled Israel’s past cycles of rebellion against God, retribution, repentance and restoration by God in sending a judge to deliver them. He must have realised that God was calling him now to save his nation so he responded to God’s call. Jephthah was humble to acknowledge that any victory would be from the Lord and the Lord was witness to his agreement with the elders. Finally, he committed his campaign to the Lord.

We thank God for our gracious, merciful and loving heavenly Father who sent us His Son, our Lord Jesus Christ, to be our Saviour and Deliverer in our time of need. May we always acknowledge God and obey when He calls us to serve Him.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 3
1 TIMOTHY 1

THOUGHT

Speak, LORD; for Thy servant heareth.
— 1 Samuel 3:9

BIBLE LESSON
Judges 11:12-33

LESSON
Jephthah
victorious

VERSE 32
*So Jephthah passed over
unto the children of Ammon
to fight against them;
and the LORD
delivered them into his hands.*

Jephthah was “a man of valour” but possessed godly wisdom as well. He attempted to convince the Ammonite king that he had no right to invade Israel’s land, thereby avoiding bloodshed and loss of life. Based on historical, political and, most importantly, theological grounds, the land rightly belonged to Israel and the Ammonites had no title to it. Israel’s God had dispossessed the Amorites of the land, not the Ammonites, and given it to Israel. What God had given to Israel, Israel would not give away. Jephthah confidently concluded Israel’s case by declaring “... the Lord the Judge be judge”.

With God on his side, Jephthah maintained a calm and civil composure throughout his negotiations with the King of Ammon. Jephthah’s example will stand us in good stead in our dealings with controversy, be it civil, ecclesiastical or theological. “If God be for us, who can be against us” [Romans 8:31]? May the peace of God always prevail in our hearts as we uphold His Word, knowing God’s truth ultimately will triumph.

The King of Ammon refused to be persuaded. “Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah”, empowering him to lead Israel to war against the Ammonites. The Ammonites were completely defeated and subdued because God gave Jephthah and Israel the victory.

As children of God, we too can thank God for the gift of the Holy Spirit that indwells us [John 14:16-17], renewing, transforming, enlightening and strengthening us to live a holy and victorious life. May the Lord fill us with His Spirit and enable us to serve Him faithfully till Jesus comes.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 4
1 TIMOTHY 2

THOUGHT

When the enemy shall come in like a flood, the Spirit of the LORD shall lift up a standard against him. — Isaiah 59:19b

25 OCTOBER

BIBLE LESSON
Judges 11:29-40

LESSON
Jephthah's
vow

VERSE 31
*Then it shall be, that
whatsoever cometh forth of the
doors of my house to meet me,
when I return in peace from
the children of Ammon,
shall surely be the Lord's,
and I will offer it up
for a burnt offering.*

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 5
1 TIMOTHY 3

THOUGHT

Before the battle with the Ammonites, Jephthah had acknowledged that victory would be due solely to the mighty hand of the Lord [verse 9]. In humility and faith, he made a vow to the Lord. On his return from victory, his daughter was the first to emerge from the door to welcome him. Jephthah was shocked and devastated, and lamented in deep sorrow, "Alas, my daughter ... for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back."

Jephthah was sincere and zealous for the Lord but too hasty and rash in making that vow. Whether it meant committing his daughter to a life of celibacy or actually sacrificing her as a burnt offering, both options were too painful and impossible for Jephthah to fulfil. How we thank God that Christ is the perfect sacrifice for our salvation.

Jephthah's folly teaches us that we are not to be rash and sin by making vows that are out of the holy character of God, nor possible for us to fulfil. We must count the cost [Luke 14:28] and refrain from making vows we cannot fulfil. Having bestowed upon us His amazing grace and bountiful blessings, God has a rightful claim over all that we possess – our heart, body, substance and life [Romans 12:1] – whether we make a vow or not. We must not make a vow to buy favour from God. Beloved, have we been faithful in fulfilling our baptismal vows, marriage vows and church membership vows? May we seek God's grace to live for Him and fulfil these vows.

When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for He hath no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast vowed. — Ecclesiastes 5:4

26 OCTOBER

BIBLE LESSON

Judges 12:1-7

LESSON

The pride
of Ephraim

VERSE 1

And the men of Ephraim gathered themselves together, and went northward, and said unto Jephthah, Wherefore passedst thou over to fight the children of Ammon, and didst not call us to go with thee? We will burn thine house upon thee with fire.

After Jephthah's great victory against the Ammonites, the men of Ephraim made an accusation against Jephthah that was uncalled for. They accused him of not calling them to help in the fight and even threatened to burn down Jephthah's house and his entire family.

Jephthah tried to set the record straight. "I did. I called you but no one responded. So I risked my life and fought the Ammonites myself. And the Lord gave me victory! Now why have you come up today to fight me? Why are you so unhappy?"

The Ephraimites sat on the sidelines all the time and came out only after the war was over and started criticising. They reacted the same way to Gideon [Judges 8:1]. Their hearts were filled with pride, inflated ego and sense of self-importance. They wanted a share of the glory and claimed credit for the victory. But now there was nothing for them to boast about. It was unfortunate that Jephthah reacted to the Ephraimites' criticism and resulted in the two groups fighting each other and 42,000 Ephraimites killed.

In any conflict, watch the motivation of your heart. Inflated egos are what conflicts feed on. We stray when we seek to assert self-importance. We can be blinded to our own faults and desires. What can we do? Pray like David in Psalm 139:23-24, "Search me, O God, and know my heart: try me, and know my thoughts: And see if there be any wicked way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting."

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 6
1 TIMOTHY 4

REMINDER

Do not react to criticism, choose to respond with patience, grace and wisdom. Read Philippians 2:3-5.

27 OCTOBER

BIBLE LESSON

Judges 12:8-15

LESSON

Ibzan, Elon
and Abdon

VERSE 8

*And after him Ibzan of
Bethlehem judged Israel.*

We are told very little about these three judges. Ibzan was known for his 30 sons and 30 daughters whom he arranged marriages outside his own clan. He was probably a man who worked for unity among the tribes through inter-clan marriages. Elon died after leading Israel for ten years. He was probably a conservative leader who tried to maintain the traditions and values during difficult times. Abdon was known for his 40 sons and 30 grandsons who rode on 70 donkeys. This probably indicates that Abdon placed much importance on communication between the tribes. Donkeys were used for travel to find out what was going on in one place and spread the news to the next place.

We live in a world today where success is measured by appearance, academic credentials, financial wealth, popularity or fame. This is where the world looks for heroes. From these three obscure judges; Ibzan, Elon and Abdon – we see that these are not places God looks for in His potential heroes.

Just like Jesus chose blue-collar Galileans for His disciples, God is looking for heroes in extremely ordinary places today. He picked guys who are the “least in their family” [like Gideon], or 80 years old (like Moses), or abandoned people (like Jephthah), or total unknown (like Elon). God does not need the high and mighty to do the work He wants done. He chooses the weak and ignoble so that people will know for certain that it was God who made it happen, and not any puny human.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 7
1 TIMOTHY 5

CHALLENGE

If God picks you for something, you will be able to do it because God Himself will be with you. He will enable you to succeed.

BIBLE LESSON

Judges 13:1-7

LESSONBad times
but bright beginning**VERSE 5**

*For, lo, thou shalt conceive,
and bear a son; and no razor
shall come on his head:
for the child shall be a Nazirite
unto God from the womb:
and he shall begin to deliver
Israel out of the hand of the
Philistines.*

The children of Israel again did evil in the sight of the Lord. So God delivered them into the hand of the Philistines for forty years. This was the longest servitude that Israel experienced at a time judges reigned.

While we were told in this chapter of the people's new sins, we hear nothing of their repentance or their earnest cry for deliverance. Despite their lack of repentance God stepped in because of His divine love for His people. God initiated the move to save Israel and made plans for a deliverer to be born.

An angel appeared to a Jewish woman, wife of Manoah and told her that though she had been barren, she would conceive and bear a son. The woman was commanded to abstain from wine, strong drink and from anything unclean. This child would be a Nazirite to God from birth. A Nazirite is one who is dedicated to God by a vow of separation in three ways: (1) not to drink wine or any intoxicating drink; (2) not to go near a dead body; and (3) not to cut his hair. This Nazirite vow was usually a temporary state which might last a few weeks or months. But in this case, the child was to be dedicated to God from the womb.

This child would deliver the Israelites from the oppression of the Philistines. This is the thoughtfulness of God's mercy to a backsliding people. Are you complaining and criticising more than you are being thankful?

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 8
1 TIMOTHY 6

REMINDER

God is always there for us. Let us not take God's grace and love for granted.

29 OCTOBER

BIBLE LESSON

Judges 13:8-14

LESSON

What shall we do
with the child?

VERSE 8

*Then Manoah intreated the
LORD, and said, O my
Lord, let the man of God
which thou didst send come
again unto us, and teach us
what we shall do unto the child
that shall be born.*

Manoah prayed earnestly for the angel of God to appear to them again. Manoah did not go or send his servants abroad to find out this man of God, but sought Him upon his knees. He prayed to God, and, in seeking, found Him.

The angel appeared the second time to the wife when she was sitting alone, probably tending the flocks. Solitude is often a good opportunity of communion with God. She went in all haste to call her husband who very willingly followed after his wife to the man of God. If the wife will lead, let not the husband think it any disparagement to him to follow her in that which is virtuous and praiseworthy.

Manoah having come to the messenger and being satisfied that he was the same that had appeared to his wife, humbly begged that the instructions of caring for the child be repeated. All his care was what they should do to in the careful management of the child. He spoke with faith that the child shall be born as promised. Blessed are those that have not seen, and yet, as Manoah here, have believed.

When God is pleased to bestow any mercy upon us, our great care must be how to use it well. God has given us bodies, souls, estates - but how shall we order them? In particular, those to whom God has given children must be very careful how they manage them and train them in the way wherein they should go.

TO COMPLETE THE BIBLE
IN 2 YEARS, READ
2 KINGS 9-10
2 TIMOTHY 1

PRAYER

Lord, teach us how we may order our children that they may be living examples of Thee.