

Divine Direction - The Problem of Jephthah

Scripture used: [Hebrews 11:32-34 \(NIV\)](#)

OVERVIEW

Pastor Tilden gave the capstone sermon on the series Divine Direction! We continued to look at the lives of people mentioned in Hebrews 11. By faith, each of them was able to become a part of God's story of redemption. One of the people mentioned, Jephthah, seems out of place of this list of famous Israelites. His complicated, tragic story helps us see some important truths about God's plan, our individual roles, and how following Jesus lets us be written into His story.

KEY POINTS

- 1) **Jephthah's story is different.** His father, Gilead, was a powerful man. But Jephthah was born of a prostitute, and so he inherited no land or title from his father. Kicked out of his community, he formed a band of outlaws and became very powerful. When the Israelites were threatened by their neighbors the Ammonites, they turned to Jephthah rather than to prayer.
 - a. **God was not directly involved.** Jephthah was approached by the Israelites, and only agreed to defend them on the condition that he then become their ruler. They agreed, and he defeated the Ammonites.
 - b. **Jephthah made a foolish vow.** In [Judges 11:23-34 \(NIV\)](#), we see how Jephthah vowed to sacrifice the first person who left his home to greet him after the victorious campaign. That person turned out to be his only child. Despite the restrictions against human sacrifice in [Deuteronomy 12:31 \(NIV\)](#) and Abraham's example, Jephthah fulfilled the vow, sacrificing his daughter.
- 2) **Jephthah's story helps us confront 3 difficult questions.**
 - a. **Why did God allow Jephthah's daughter to die?** There were many ways that God could have changed this story and saved the innocent girl's life. But God fashioned us after His image, meaning we have free will. Our choices have consequences, and God does not usually interfere to protect us. But God is always working, first through Jesus and second through those who follow Jesus. Together, our efforts are critical to the fulfillment of God's plan. That's the profound truth in [Hebrews 11:39-40 \(NIV\)](#)! The world is being "made perfect" as God intended, but only "together with us".
 - b. **Why is Jephthah honored in Hebrews?** God uses broken people to make progress in the world. Every single person listed had made serious mistakes: deceit; adultery; and even murder. Without Jesus, no one would be fit to be a part of God's story. But because of His sacrifice for us, we can all be a part of the world's healing and redemption!
 - c. **What can we learn from this story?** Some people like to think of the Israelites in Hebrews 11 as a "hall of fame" (or even a "hall of faith"). A better way to see this list is as a list of witnesses. They bear witness that faith is necessary to know God, but also that we are all in desperate need of God's grace in our lives, and if we repent and come to God, He will accept anyone in His family.
- 3) **God can use anyone for His story!** The key is Jesus. Fix your eyes on Him! Study Him, read His word, pray to Him, and follow His example. Every one - from Abraham all the way to the current generation - is a witness to His glory.

DISCUSSION

- 1) **HEAR** - Like all of us, Jephthah was a broken person. And yet God found a way to use him to defend the Israelites from their neighbors, the Ammonites. Do you truly believe that you can be used by God? If not, what is holding you back?
- 2) **UNDERSTAND** - The Bible is full of intimate, tragic details. We get to know the personal details that many of us would not want to share about our own lives. Abraham, Isaac, Moses, David...they all made poor decisions. But no matter what they did, God wrote them into His story. They became a part of His plan to heal and redeem the world. How might God use you in your family, community, church, or work?
- 3) **DO** - God is calling each of us to make the difficult choices of following Jesus. God wants us all to be a part of His story. Pray aloud "Jesus, write your story in my life!"