

• *Jephthah – God's next rescuer*

1. God demands that His people spend some time in seeking His rescue

• *God's delays*

• *Deeper repentance is needed before God intervenes*

2. Israel's saviour was one rejected by his own family but chosen by God

• *Jephthah's difficult background*

3. Israel's saviour, rejected by society, is needed by the very people who rejected him

• *Parallels with Jesus*

Our next judge is Jephthah ^{☐1}. The same old dreary pattern of sin ^{☐2}, defeat ^{☐3} and distress ^{☐4} is repeated. God's rescue comes through Jephthah.

1. **God demands that His people spend some time in seeking His rescue.** This time God is slow to rescue them ^{☐5}. He points out to them the great ingratitude that they have shown towards Him. God knows how to deal with us wisely. Sometimes He forgives our waywardness very easily. But at other times He knows that we need to be compelled to seek Him. He is not quite so quick about restoring us, and requires that we seek Him. It is not that He needs to delay. The time-gap is not needed by God; it is needed by us His people. Sometimes we need to face the wickedness of our ways and God takes His time about healing and restoring us. So in our story, God's intervention was not quite immediate. He asks them a few questions first.

So the Israelites are brought into deeper repentance before God will help them ^{☐1}. They are brought to the point where they are willing for God to do anything, if only He will intervene in their plight. They were in a desperate state. The Ammonites were camped in Gilead ready for war ^{☐2}; the Israelites were wanting to defend themselves and were looking for a mighty leader ^{☐3} to make the first blow in the fight.

2. **Israel's saviour was one rejected by his own family but chosen by God.** I could be referring to Jesus! He too was rejected by his half-brothers but chosen by God. But many of God's men and women of faith follow the same pattern. Jephthah was God's man for the hour! He had a very unhappy family-background. His father was married but at one stage of his life had conceived a son through a girl who was not his wife. The illegitimate son was Jephthah. He was taken into the home and had grown up with the more respectable sons of his father. But his half-brothers despised him ^{☐1}. When he was quite young – perhaps in his late teens – Jephthah became the leader of a gang of 'adventurers' ^{☐2}. He was no doubt an unstable and undisciplined character at first, used to doing exactly what he liked, with no one to guide him. He had to cope with the feeling of being rejected by his own family. On the other hand his experience of leadership in his gang of 'adventurers' was good training for the future.

3. **Israel's saviour, rejected by society, is needed by the very people who rejected him.** Some time after Jephthah had been rejected by his own family, the area of Israel around the river Jabbok, called 'Gilead' found itself in trouble ^{☐1}. The only person they knew who might help them was Jephthah. So they invited him to be their military leader ^{☐2}.

At first Jephthah protests. 'Did you not throw me out of your very respectable society?' he asks ^{☐1}. They have to humble themselves and admit that the one they rejected is the one they need ^{☐2}. It reminds us of Jesus. The One society rejects is the One they need. Jephthah agrees to help them but he wants to know what his position will be after he has done so. 'Will I really be your head?' ^{☐3}. This too could be applied to Jesus. When He has rescued us, will He be our ruler? Or do we want His rescue but not His rule? Leadership is a reward. Jephthah looks for recognition. It is something we all want, although some admit it more than others. We like commendation, but it comes as a result of faithfulness.

☐1 10:6-12:7
☐2 10:6
☐3 10:7-9
☐4 10:10
☐5 10:11-14

☐1 10:15-16
☐2 10:17a
☐3 10:17b-18

☐1 11:1-2
☐2 11:3

☐1 11:4-5
☐2 11:6

☐1 11:7
☐2 11:8
☐3 11:9

• Leadership accepted and publicly proclaimed

The people of Gilead agree that Jephthah will be the continuing leader in that part of the land ¹, and Jephthah agrees to be their leader. He is a young believer. At some stage in his experiences he has come to faith in Yahweh, the God of Israel. They go to Mizpah, a prominent town in the area of Gilead and they publicly proclaim him their leader. Judges 11:11 must mean that Jephthah makes promises before the Lord that he will lead the armies of Gilead with the intent of delivering the people from the Ammonites ².

¹ 11:10

¹ 11:11

4. Israel's saviour has greater gifts than anyone realised

• Surprise – Jephthah – the diplomat

4. **Israel's saviour has greater gifts than anyone realised.** At this point in the story we get a surprise. Jephthah tries diplomacy before he tries warfare! He sends a message to the Ammonite king asking 'What do you have against us?' ¹. He is looking for a way to avert war with the Ammonites. This comes as a bit of a surprise. The men of Gilead did not go to Jephthah because they thought he had gifts of diplomacy. They went to get his help because they thought he would be an ideal leader in war! They were not expecting him to be a peace-maker! Jephthah wanted to go to the negotiating table before he went to the battle field.

¹ 11:12

• Past experience becomes useful

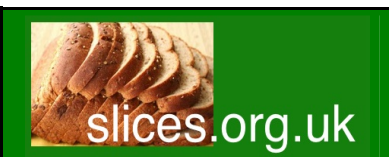
Where did Jephthah learn to be a diplomat? What was it that made him look for peace before he went to war? It was undoubtedly something that had arisen in his experience of leading his 'adventurers'. The mob of young men that he had led would have been a unruly and undisciplined gang. There must have been many times when Jephthah had had to settle disputes and keep the peace. Now his past experience comes in useful.

• For us too, negative past experiences make some contribution to our usefulness to God

When we are brought into a position of usefulness in God's kingdom we shall find that all of our past experiences make some contribution to where we are now. Our sufferings, our bitter experiences, our loneliness, it will all fit in somewhere, and we shall find that God has been preparing us and training us in readiness for greater ventures for His kingdom. He conceals us in His quiver ¹ until He has got us ready as a 'polished arrow' ². A painful past prepares for a present position of usefulness in God's kingdom.

¹ see Isaiah 49:2

² Isaiah 49:2



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