

Word notes Sunday 13/10/13 Michael Meeks
Living for God - Jephthah

Summary (read this bit out to remind cell members what was said on Sunday)

Key Texts: Judges 10:6-11:40

After 18 years following the other gods Israel cried out to God who said to “talk to Baal” (10:14) - they cried out again, got rid of their idols and started to serve God such that he could not bear to see them suffer any longer. Jephthah was the son of a prostitute and driven out by his brothers so he would not inherit. He became a mighty warrior who gathered a gang of scoundrels around him. In their need, Israel realised they needed him and were ready to restore him to his rightful place. God was ready to rescue Israel and helped them to understand His grace by using a man they had also rejected whom they should have loved.

The elders of Gilead (Jephthah’s family) went to sort things out. In this account we see a picture of the rejected family member used by God to rescue the whole nation. Jesus was rejected by Israel too and yet is God’s salvation for all mankind. Everyone needs to recognise Jesus for who he is, all need to flow with the same grace that caused God to send Jesus and accept one another not reject, sideline or ignore.

Jephthah refutes the Ammonite claims on the land but the king ignores him so making this odd vow that whatever came out of his house he would sacrifice (11:30-31) he advances and devastates them in battle. On his return it’s his only daughter who came to greet him, so he ends up “sacrificing” his daughter. What are we to make of this – it’s cited by well known atheists to show that God is callous and not the kind of person you’d want to trust. here’s a closer look at the issue:

1, Jephthah was a man of his time and would easily fall back into local practices such as human sacrifice. Many reasons not to think this – he was a man of God who knew his nation’s story and relationship with God well, also the local practice was infant (babies) sacrifice not a grown child.

2, Jephthah was trying to bargain with God - He is going to fight but let God judge the dispute. Actually judges of any kind hate bribes as mentioned many times in scripture so Jephthah is not bribing God who shows no partiality. This would be more like the Baals where you had to give a big sacrifice to get what you wanted answered, and sacrifice it first not afterwards. His vow was an expression of gratitude that God had been amazing NOT “if I do this, you will do that”.

3, The sacrifice is not killing but a metaphorical sacrifice. (i) Jephthah knew that the people left behind in the homes would be the ones that came out. (ii) Seems the vow was made under the Spirit of God – the same God who intervened as Abraham was ready to sacrifice Isaac so why would He be wanting the death of a child now? If she was to be killed they would have mourned her death not her lack of sexual activity!

According to Clarke’s notes) v31 translates as “I will consecrate it to the Lord, **OR** I will offer it for a burnt-offering”; that is, “If it be a thing fit for a burnt-offering, it shall be made one; if fit for the service of God, it shall be consecrated to Him.” To dedicate that person to full time service of The Lord, to remain a virgin, is a figurative not a literal sacrifice, and one common though this period in Israel’s history. Jephthah vowed she would be dedicated, why else would they have mourned that she would be a virgin - he had sacrificed his inheritance,

Application (this is the bit where cell members get to participate. Lead discussions around these points)

Michael’s friend found out he had an adult son when he turned up on his doorstep! How would we act in such a situation? Can any share incidents in their own family where there was a choice to reject and disown or accept and love? From what we know of God’s grace how should we act – is “disowning” ever an option for the Christian?

Are you convinced by Michael’s exposition of the text that Jephthah did not give his daughter as a burnt offering? Why would the KJV say it that way if it were not the case? Why does this argue for careful study of scripture rather than glib reading of just one translation or quoting single verses out of context? How would you defend Jephthah to an unbeliever?

Witness (this is the bit where the cell talks and prays about how to share the Good News)

Briefly – ask each person to say one thing, a single word, which is important for them to be effective in evangelism.