

**{un}faithful - 6**  
**Week of March 12, 2017**  
**Bay Park Life Groups – Leader’s Guide**

Like the judges before him, Jephthah is full of surprises. He’s the embarrassing result of his dad’s affair with a prostitute (11:1). His half-brothers drove him away to ensure he had no part of their inheritance, only to call on him to be their leader when trouble came their way (11:4-11). Jephthah starts out as a relatively godly leader who:

- Declared God’s faithfulness to the people (11:15-28)
- Pointed to God as the ultimate Judge (11:27)
- Was used by God as an effective military leader (11:29-33).

But like all the judges before, Jephthah is also deeply flawed and unfaithful. He makes a rash vow revealing a heart that truly doesn’t know God. Though he himself knows what it’s like to be rejected, he perpetuated the sin by rejecting and killing some of his own people (12:1-6). Jephthah and his contemporaries remind us that it’s possible to know of God without really knowing God. That it’s so easy to become self-righteous in our own eyes, but far from righteous in God’s eyes.

Jephthah’s story is timely given our individualistic culture that worships at the alter of “me, myself and I.” The story is also timely because it clearly reminds us of God’s faithfulness and righteousness despite our unfaithfulness and self-righteousness – aka unrighteousness.

Enjoy your time in study together. Note - there’s a map at the end of the study showing each judge’s location as well as some of the cities and nations mentioned in Judges.

**Read Judges 10:6-16**

1. In what ways is Israel’s predicament the same as in the past? In what ways is it different? What does this teach us?

*Like:*

- *The Israelites returned to worshipping Baal and Ashtoreths (cf 6:25ff).*
- *They cry out to God for help (10:10, 15).*

*Unlike:*

- *The Israelites now also worshipped a whole host of other gods (10:6).*
- *For the first time we also learn that Israel “forsook the Lord and no longer served.” As one commentator put it, in Judges 10 Israel has reached the “the climax of the process of her Canaanization.”<sup>1</sup> More than ever Israel was blending in with the world around.*
- *This time God doesn’t immediately respond to their cry for help by raising a deliverer.*

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1. Daniel I. Block, *New American Commentary: Judges, Ruth* (Nashville, Holman Reference, 1999), 344

*Wilful, repeated disobedience (aka a cold and calloused heart) doesn't just lead to repeated cycles of sin, but to a downward spiral into deeper sin. In fact this is the first time there is no "peace" at the end of the cycle. Instead, this cycle ends with infighting and death (12:1-7). The absence of real inner peace and the presence of growing restlessness and anxiousness is often the first clue to a growing distance between us and God – a downward spiral.*

2. Having abandoned God, God turns a deaf ear to their cry for help by telling them to "go cry out to the gods you have chosen." How does this square up with God's love for his people?

*Some argue that the best teacher in life is the experience of others – especially their failures. The limitation of learning from the failures of others is that we can't experience their pain, and pain is one of the great teachers of life. Take kids for example. Parents love their kids by protecting them from harm while also allowing them to experience the consequences of bad choices. A pain and consequence free life leads to a ruined life. This is not the first time Israel has ignored God and suffered for it. As their loving heavenly Father, God allowed Israel to groan a while longer so that they might learn firsthand that: 1) The idols they chose to worship will enslave but cannot save. 2) There are real consequences to ignoring or abandoning God. Put another way, you can't serve God and other gods. 3) Repentance isn't just wanting the trial to be over. True repentance is being broken over how deeply we have hurt God.*

3. What's the difference between Israel's first cry for help (10:10) and their second (10:15-16)? What does this teach us when we're dealing with sin in our lives?

*The first time they repented their conscience told them that their idolatry was wrong, but they weren't ready to let go – their hearts were still tied to the idols. They wanted to be rescued while still clinging to their idols. They were using God. The second time they repented they:*

- *Surrendered to God – "do with us whatever you think best."*
- *Got rid of their idols.*
- *Served God.*

*Can it be that sometimes our prayers go unanswered because we are not prepared to deal with the cause of our problems, our sin? God knows when we're ready and when we're just trying to manipulate. On the flip side, like all repentance, Israel's was not 100%. There may even be hints to that in the passage – their insistence on being "rescued now" and their going ahead to find a leader for themselves. But even then, God still proves to be faithful and gracious. If not moved by their prayer, he was certainly moved by their suffering (11:15b). So though our surrender and repentance always leaves room for improvement, God still moves toward us in love and redemption. The greatest example of that is the cross . . . "while we were still sinners, Christ died for us" ( Rom 5:8).*

**Read Judges 11:12-28**

4. The Ammonite king accused the Israelites of stealing their land. Jephthah resorted to diplomacy before resorting to war. In light of the accusations, how convincing were Jephthah's arguments (11:14-27)?

*Jephthah used 3 arguments to refute the Ammonite claim to the land.*

1. *Historically speaking the land never belonged to the Ammonites (11:15-22). When the Israelites left Egypt, the Edomites and Moabites occupied the land south of Arnon. Israel asked for permission to pass through but was refused (11:16-18). When arriving at the land in question, the Amorites not only refused them passage, they engaged them in battle. Israel won the battle and so the land now belongs to them by conquest.*
2. *Theologically speaking Jephthah appealed to a common concept of the day, namely that God had given Israel their land and "Chemosh" the Ammonites theirs (11:23-24). A victory was always seen as a victory of one god over another. Only Israel saw its defeats as divine punishment from God for their disobedience.*
3. *Legally speaking Jephthah reminded the Ammonite king that at the time of conquest, the Moabite king did not challenge the Israelite's claim to the land, nor did the Ammonites thereafter (11:25-27).*

#### **Read Judges 11:29-40**

5. Why do you think Jephthah made the vow? Why did he keep it?

*God in his word is clear – human sacrifice is a "must never" (Deut 12:31). It's a crime against the sanctity of life and the image of God in us. Yet clearly Jephthah promised a human sacrifice. Why else would he have been so horrified at the appearing of his daughter if he only intended it to be an animal sacrifice? Also, animals didn't typically come out of the doors of houses (11:31) – family and servants did. As hard as it is to fathom, Jephthah probably thought his vow would be fulfilled through a servant. The text gives us Jephthah's actions, not his thinking. There are however a couple possible motives to be inferred:*

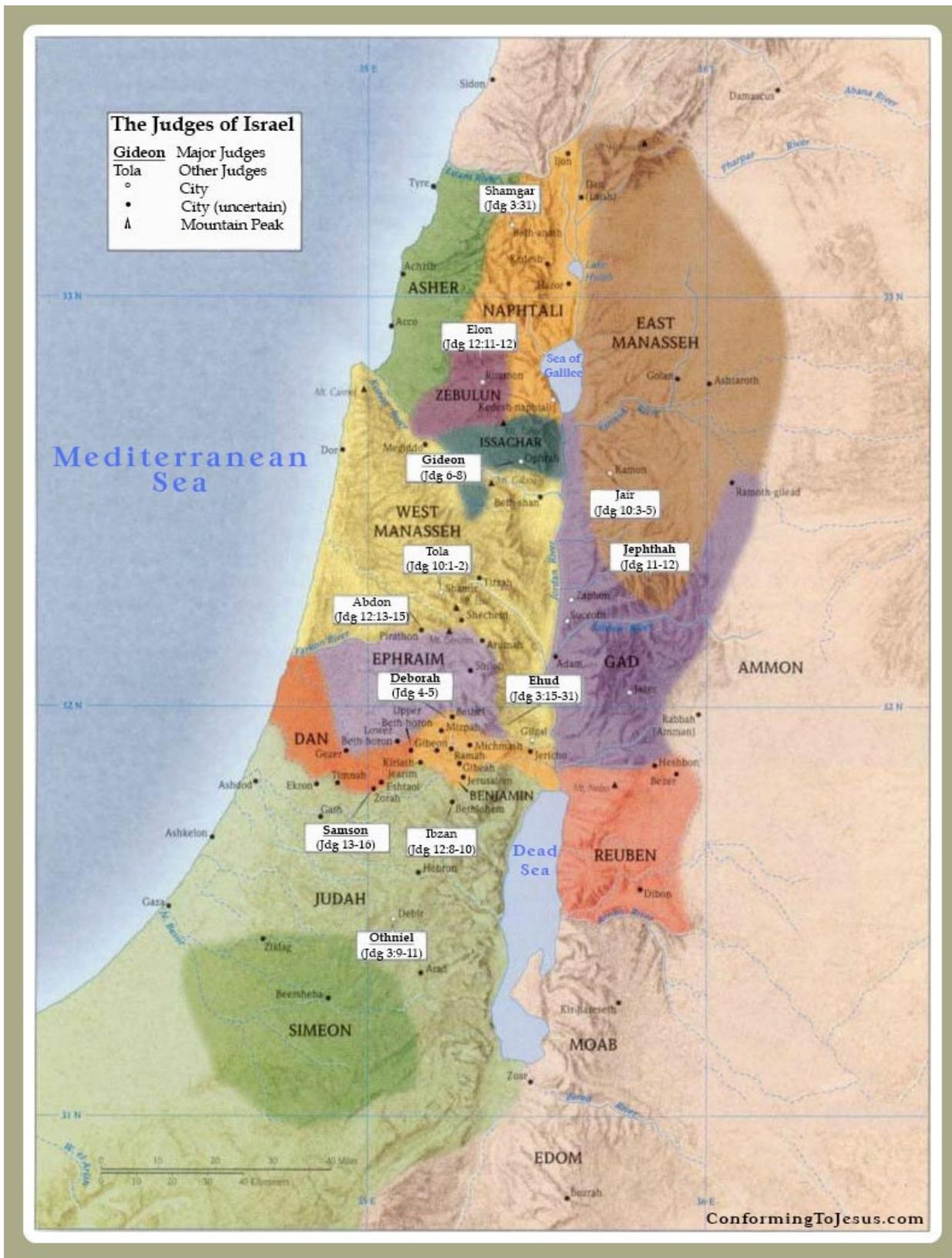
- *Jephthah was completely desensitized to violence given his past family rejection and his acceptance of the culture around him where human sacrifice was common.*
- *Jephthah thought he could buy God's favour instead of trusting God's faithfulness. Human sacrifice is a sad part of human history. The reason behind it has always been the same – to appease a god and thereby win his blessing. The God of the Bible is different – he's faithful, not because we are, but because that's who he is.*

*The saddest part of this whole affair is that whatever Jephthah's motives were for making such a rash vow, he certainly didn't need to go through with it. All he had to do was to humble himself and ask God to forgive his foolishness. Instead, he foolishly went through with his vow. How different things could have been for his daughter and family, even if he didn't sacrifice her but confined her to a life of celibacy in temple service.*

6. What lessons can we learn from Jephthah's rash vow? What other passages of scripture can you link to these lessons?

- *We need to pray that the Holy Spirit would filter and guide our words. Ps 141:3, James 3.*
- *Spiritual growth is more than information, it's transformation. Transformation starts within, not without. We need to be careful that what we know of God doesn't inflate our ego and result in a self-righteous attitude and outlook. Ps 51:17, Mtt 7:21*
- *Like Jephthah we struggle to truly grasp God's grace. To believe it, receive it, rest and live in light of it. An attitude of works doesn't lead to gratitude but to self-righteousness. To a religiosity without power or peace. Eph 2:1-10*
- *God's blessing on us doesn't mean God's approval of our behaviour. It's easy to become self-righteous when we succeed because pride would have us believe that we are better than others and that God likewise agrees. If anything, Judges reminds us that God can use anyone to accomplish his will. Lk 18:9-14, 2 Cor 12:7b-10*
- *Culture, world and/or church, influences the way we believe and act more than we're willing to see or admit. Culture is powerful because it feels so right, so much so that it often blinds us to what God's word says and what applying it would really look like in our lives. Culture leaves us with gaping blind spots. As shocking as Jephthah's story is to us, one can only wonder how shocked the people of Judges would be with our western church culture. For example, how much we spend on leisure and entertainment, or how little thought we give to matters of sexuality. Jephthah reminds us that only a humble hunger for God's word and the work of the Holy Spirit can help us overcome our blindness. Romans 12:1-2*

7. What's your one take away from Judges 10-12 and how can we pray for you in regard to it?



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