

# God's Providence in God's People

Contra Costa Gospel Church  
Adult Sunday School

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## THE JUDGES (Part 5)

When we read Scripture, particularly historical narrative, it's vital that we do what we can to "track" with the author, to follow his flow of thought, and to see nuance where he absolutely intended nuance to be. When we read it this way – the hermeneutical principle encapsulated by the phrase "Author's Intended Message" – we are better equipped to interpret properly the events about which we read. Are the events good? Are they exemplary? Or are they disappointing and shameful?

This is the case with the events in the book of Judges. When we understand that most of what we read about in the book is meant to be disappointing, then we read the events through that lens. Instead of seeing Gideon's fleece requests as exemplary (Judges 6:36-40), displaying the power of God, we see it as shameful, displaying Gideon's hesitancy and reluctance to fulfill the mission he was called by God to do.

We now move on to Jephthah. Hopefully by now we are convinced about the author's point in writing the book and will begin to look for the disappointing and less than honorable traits of our "heroes."

### Jephthah

- 1) The account of Jephthah begins in Judges 10, although he is not named until Judges 11:1. The setup to his story occurs in chapter 10 where the author details the sins committed by Israel leading to the Ammonites setting up camp on Israelite land preparing to wage war against her (see 10:17-18).

What is the promise from the leaders of Gilead to the one who would attack the enemy at the gates? What kind of person are they expecting to step up who could do such a thing?

- 2) What is it about Jephthah that is less than ideal when it comes to the kind of person Israel would want to lead her?
- 3) After a brief exchange of messages with the king of Ammon about the merits of this war, Jephthah makes a vow to the Lord should the Lord deliver Israel from the Ammonites (11:30-31). If you were NOT tracking with the author, how might this vow be seen as something that was positive and exemplary? In other words, if you were preparing a lesson/message about this passage, how might one spin this vow into something that was a demonstration of great faith?

- 4) How does the author make it clear in 12:34ff that Jephthah's vow was foolhardy, even if it's not explicitly described as such?
  
- 5) Jephthah's story ends with a curious interaction between the Gileadites and the Ephraimites in 12:1-6.
  - a. Why are the Ephraimites mad?
  
  - b. The Gileadites descend from Manasseh. What then is the relationship between the Ephraimites and the Gileadites?
  
  - c. How are we, the reader, supposed to respond to the account of 42,000 Ephraimites being killed at the fords of the Jordan (12:6)?
  
  - d. This whole story began because the Ammonites were attacking Israel and the Gileadites needed someone to save them, promising that the reward for this person was to be the head over Gilead. Ultimately that honor went to Jephthah because of his military victory. What can we say about the sum total of Jephthah's tenure as leader over Gilead?