

Lessons from Japheth (Slide 1)

Judges 11

Have you ever said something that you genuinely wish that you could take back? Something you have said in haste or with the wrong motivations.

Perhaps in the heat of the moment or in your youth or a statement made without truly understanding the consequence.

Perhaps you said something based on your feelings and not based on sound judgment or having all the facts.

Even worse, have you ever made a promise to someone and wish you hadn't done so? So often I hear young people say when trying to convince someone of the truth of a story or to prove their sincerity, "I swear to God!" They have no idea what they're saying.

We have to be cautious not only what we say but in giving our word to someone else.

The wise man Solomon wrote;

Ecclesiastes 5:4-7 (Slide 2)

4 When you make a vow to God, do not be late in paying it; for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow! 5 It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay. 6 Do not let your speech cause you to sin and (Slide 3) do not say in the presence of the messenger of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry on account of your voice and destroy the work of your hands? 7 For in many dreams and in many words there is emptiness. Rather, fear God.

Jesus says;

Matthew 5:33-37 (Slide 4)

33 “Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, ‘YOU SHALL NOT MAKE FALSE VOWS, BUT SHALL FULFILL YOUR VOWS TO THE LORD.’ 34 But I say to you, make no oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, 35 or by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet, (Slide 5) or by Jerusalem, for it is THE CITY OF THE GREAT KING. 36 Nor shall you make an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. 37 But let your statement be, ‘Yes, yes’ or ‘No, no’; anything beyond these is of evil.

Japheth in our reading makes a foolish vow to God:

Judges 11:30b-31 (Slide 6)

“If You will indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand, 31 then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the LORD’s, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.”

This passage of scripture has caused difficulty for many.

I believe *Japheth* thought that one of his livestock would be the first to greet him. That may be why he stated ***“whatever”*** and not *“whoever”* would be the first to greet him. Some scholars, however, believe the proper translation for **whatever** should be *whoever*.

I used to interpret this vow *Japheth* made a bit differently than others do. More study is needed here but just asking questions. What first strikes me is that he is making an offer to God that perhaps he feels that He can’t possibly refuse. If so, is this testing God or tempting Him?

“You do this for me, I’ll do this for you.”

I don’t think God works that way. I am convinced that if it is God's will, He will act on it. Now that’s not to say that our prayers don’t have influence. He wants and is willing to hear the prayers of the righteous. We know the following verse very well:

James 5:16

Confess your faults one to another, and pray one for another, that ye may be healed. The effectual fervent prayer of a righteous man availeth much.

However, keep these in mind as well:

(Slide 7)

1 John 5:14

This is the confidence which we have before Him, that, if we ask anything according to His will, He hears us.

John 9:31

We know that God does not hear sinners; but if anyone is God-fearing and does His will, He hears him.

Proverbs 15:29

The LORD is far from the wicked,

But He hears the prayer of the righteous.

There is really no indication that *Japheth* in our lesson text was righteous. In fact, a view to the contrary could easily be taken. He was born as the son of a prostitute whom his father had relations with. He was a mighty man of valor but he ends up after being driven off by his half brothers, running with what the Bible deems as “worthless

fellows.” I’ve heard it said since these men followed Japheth and that he became a “*gang leader*.” (vs 1-3)

However, two factors should be considered: (1) Japheth is being guided by the Spirit of the Lord and he is mentioned by the Hebrew writer as a man of faith. I think this indicates his righteous relationship with God.

Here again it is important to use the entirety of the Bible before drawing any conclusions.

Japheth presents a valuable lesson to us today by this vow he makes to God. Because even righteous people make mistakes.

God does deliver the “***sons of Ammon***” in battle. As he returns home we learn that his daughter, his only child, comes out to greet him.

Apparently, she was anxious for him to return and was ready to rejoice that her father came home alive. I truly believe she missed her father as indicated in how she greeted him; ***tambourines and with dancing***.

Japheth was distraught and tore his clothes because of his vow when he saw her coming to him.

Amazingly, after telling his daughter she did not resist;

(Slide 8) ***"My father, you have given your word to the LORD; do to me as you have said, since the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the sons of Ammon."*** (vs 36)

The Bible says that she went away and wept, she and her companions because of her **virginity**. Some will say that *Japheth* actually offered her as a burnt offering just as one would a bull or goat. However, the Bible tells us that God condemns human sacrifice. In addition, sacrifices must meet certain criteria.

I believe he offered her as a sacrifice to the Lord by keeping her a virgin. Therefore, this was the end of his lineage;

(Slide 9) ***At the end of two months she returned to her father, who did to her according to the vow which he had made*** (vs 39)

The Bible says;

that the daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year. (vs 40).

Did they commemorate her virginity or her death? This will make a great Bible study in the future but the focus of the lesson is on making a vow or the promises we make.

Three lessons to consider from the “*foolish vow of Japheth.*”

1. Carefully consider the promises we make.

Whether it be in marriage, friendship, a business transaction, a promise to complete something or whatever it may be, we need to carefully evaluate the words that we speak.

Jesus says in;

Matthew 12:36-37 (Slide 10)

***36 But I tell you that every careless word that people speak, they shall give an accounting for it in the day of judgment.
37 For by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”***

Someone may ask me; “Have you ever said something that you now regret?” Of course my answer will be “Yes!”

The follow up question will be; “How will you answer “*for*” it?” My answer is; “Without the Blood of Christ I can’t! I can only say I’m sorry. Please forgive me.”

2. The words we speak can have devastating consequences for others. Sometimes for those we love the most.

In the Old Testament culture to remain a *virgin* was a disgrace for a woman. To be childless was looked down on. To be sacrificed as a burnt offering would be ghastly.

Either way, Japheth's daughter paid a heavy price for his "*foolish vow.*"

Perhaps this is one reason we have the lesson from his life in the Bible.

The Proverb writer records in;

Proverbs 18:21 (Slide 11)

Death and life are in the power of the tongue,

And those who love it will eat its fruit.

3. Even righteous people make mistakes.

Let us choose our words and our promises wisely.

Invitation

Today, if you haven't accepted the Gospel call; why wait?!! Hear the invitation, repent, confess your belief in Jesus as Christ, and submit yourself to that watery grave of baptism that will indeed bring you to Life. The Lord Himself will add you to His church.

If you have been baptized but haven't lived according to your commitment, may we pray for you and with you as you travel this journey in Christ on earth.

Until the Lord comes: make your wish known before He returns.

Reading:

Judges 11:29-40

29 Now the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, so that he passed through Gilead and Manasseh; then he passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he went on to the sons of Ammon. 30 Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, "If You will indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand, 31 then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the LORD'S, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering." 32 So Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD gave them into his hand. 33 He struck them with a very great slaughter from Aroer to the entrance of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim. So the sons of Ammon were subdued before the sons of Israel.

34 When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. Now she was his one and only child; besides her he had no son or daughter. 35 When he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you are among those who trouble me; for I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot take it back." 36 So she said to him, "My father, you have given your word to the LORD; do to me as you have said, since the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the sons of Ammon." 37 She said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me; let me alone two months, that I may go to the mountains and weep because of my virginity, I and my companions." 38 Then he said, "Go." So he sent her away for two months; and she left with her companions, and wept on the mountains because of her virginity. 39 At the end of two months she returned to her father, who did to her according to the vow which he had made; and she had no relations with a man. Thus it became a custom in Israel, 40 that the daughters of Israel went yearly to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.

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