

## January 27, 2021 | Hall of Flaw

### Hebrews 11:23-28 | Jephthah, the Thoughtless

We kicked off this series called "Hall of Flaw" by saying, "We can look to the heroes of faith from time to time, but we must always keep our eyes on the Son of God." That, even though Hebrews 11 is filled with good examples, our one and the only perfect example is Jesus Christ. And often, our flaws highlight God's faithfulness.

- In the second week, we studied Abraham. Though the father of Israel, he had trouble overcoming his fear.
- In the third week, we looked at Abraham's better half: Sarah. Unlike her husband, her primary flaw was doubt. How ironic that Abraham, a man known for his optimism, would have a wife known for her skepticism.
- Last week, we moved to a guy named Moses. His primary flaw wasn't fear or doubt but anger. Moses was a hothead. So much so that he'll eventually pay dearly for his lack of restraint.

Now, it's at this point that we start skimming the bottom of the "Faith Hall of Fame." In fact, our two remaining character studies come right at the end of Hebrews 11: Jephthah and David. We'll tackle David next week.

Out of all the characters in Hebrews 11, Jephthah is the most surprising to me. This is because while he was used by God during a tumultuous time in Israel's history, becoming a mighty general and unifier during the tribal wars, he was brash, hasty, and, for lack of a better term, thoughtless. The man simply didn't think before speaking, and, as we'll see today, he'll pay dearly for his foolhardy impulses.

But, as we've done every week, let's see what the writer of Hebrews has to say about Jephthah.

**READ:** Hebrews 11:23-28 (ESV)

<sup>32</sup> And what more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, of Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets— <sup>33</sup> who through faith conquered kingdoms, enforced justice, obtained promises, stopped the mouths of lions, <sup>34</sup> quenched the power of fire, escaped the edge of the sword, were made strong out of weakness, became mighty in war, put foreign armies to flight. <sup>35</sup> Women received back their dead by resurrection. Some were tortured, refusing to accept release, so that they might rise again to a better life. <sup>36</sup> Others suffered mocking and flogging, and even chains and imprisonment. <sup>37</sup> They were stoned, they were sawn in two, they were

killed with the sword. They went about in skins of sheep and goats, destitute, afflicted, mistreated— <sup>38</sup> of whom the world was not worthy—wandering about in deserts and mountains, and in dens and caves of the earth.

Jephthah comes in a summary conclusion right at the end of Hebrews 11. He's listed alongside other heroes from the book of Judges: Gideon, Barak, and Samson. This is important to notice because, as we know from our Samson series, though these judges were used by God, many of whom had the Spirit itself come upon them, they were a far cry from being "good men."

They, like all so-called "bible heroes," were deeply flawed. Gideon was like a combination of Abraham and Sarah. He feared so much that he was farming in secret and was continually asking God for signs because he doubted what God had told him. We're not really told a lot about Barak other than that he was a warrior. We assume he had faults, but we're told what they are. But, as we know, Samson was disobedient to his parents, vindictive, and slept with multiple women.

So, what about Jephthah? Was he fearful like Abraham? No. Was he filled with doubt like Sarah? No. Was he like Moses, who struggled with anger? No. Jephthah's problem was that he lacked sense. He was reckless and brash. He was naive. He often did things before thinking. So much so that he would end up killing his only child because of a vow he made in error.

**READ: Judges 11:1-11 (ESV)**

<sup>1</sup> Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute. Gilead was the father of Jephthah. <sup>2</sup> And Gilead's wife also bore him sons. And when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out and said to him, "You shall not have an inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman." <sup>3</sup> Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob, and worthless fellows collected around Jephthah and went out [raided] with him.

<sup>4</sup> After a time the Ammonites made war against Israel. <sup>5</sup> And when the Ammonites made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to bring Jephthah from the land of Tob. <sup>6</sup> And they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our leader, that we may fight against the Ammonites." <sup>7</sup> But Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me and drive me out of my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?" <sup>8</sup> And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "That is why we have turned to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the Ammonites and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead." <sup>9</sup> Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you bring me home again to fight against the Ammonites, and the Lord gives them over to me, I

will be your head.” <sup>10</sup> And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, “The Lord will be witness between us, if we do not do as you say.” <sup>11</sup> So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and leader over them. And Jephthah spoke all his words before the Lord at Mizpah.

Then, Jephthah tries to parley with the Ammonites. There's a ton of history that basically sets the groundwork for Israel's legitimate claim to the land making their opponents wrong. Ultimately, the conference failed. The Ammonites and their allies refused the terms of peace, and so war was imminent. So, it's now up to Jephthah, the *de facto* ruler of the loosely bonded Israeli tribes, to make a collation with other tribes in their area to find in the coming war.

**READ:** Judges 11:29-40 (ESV)

<sup>29</sup> Then the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh and passed on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed on to the Ammonites. <sup>30</sup> And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, “If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, <sup>31</sup> then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.” <sup>32</sup> So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them, and the Lord gave them into his hand. <sup>33</sup> And he struck them from Aroer to the neighborhood of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim, with a great blow. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel.

<sup>34</sup> Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah. And behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances. She was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter. <sup>35</sup> And as soon as he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow.” <sup>36</sup> And she said to him, “My father, you have opened your mouth to the Lord; do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the Lord has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites.” <sup>37</sup> So she said to her father, “Let this thing be done for me: leave me alone two months, that I may go up and down on the mountains and weep for my virginity, I and my companions.” <sup>38</sup> So he said, “Go.” Then he sent her away for two months, and she departed, she and her companions, and wept for her virginity on the mountains. <sup>39</sup> And at the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow that he had made. She had never known a man, and it became a custom in Israel <sup>40</sup> that the daughters of Israel went year by year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.

Jephthah killed his one and only daughter.

Now, admittedly, some would argue against this view. Typically, they have three primary objections to Jephthah killing his daughter.

First, Jephthah appears in Hebrews 11. How could a father who murders his own daughter appear in what is commonly referred to as the "Faith Hall of Fame?"

Second, Judges 11:29 begins by saying the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jephthah, then the vow, then the victory. It appears the Spirit is not only responsible for successfully rallying his fellow-Israelites listed in verse 29, but the following vow and victory. And, as we know, God would never condone human sacrifice, nor does it explicitly condemn Jephthah anywhere.

Lastly, Jephthah's daughter bewails her virginity and not her life. Indeed, if a girl, as young as she, were about to die, she would mourn for her life, not the fact that she never knew a man or bore children.

This line of reason had led many to assume that when Jephthah promised to "offer it up for a burnt offering," it was a metaphorical way of saying he was going to dedicate her to service in the Temple. This explains Jephthah's mourning, as, since she was his only child, his line would die out because she would live a life of celibacy. Then, the reason follows, explains why the girl mourned for her virginity instead of her imminent execution.

However, there are some problems with these objections. In fact, I have six objections to these three objections.

First, amongst them, all of these explanation goes against a simple reading of the text. This should in no way be the end-all reason to assume Jephthah killed his daughter. However, it is undeniable that, if you didn't know anything else about the bible, you'd think that this Jephthah character would, in fact, do the unthinkable.

Secondly, as far as Jephthah being in the "Faith Hall of Fame," we know all too well that everyone in Hebrews 11 had some colossal character flaws. We cannot assume the complete virtue of someone simply because they're in Hebrews 11. Human beings are not the protagonist of the story. Jesus is.

Thirdly, nowhere in this passage is temple service mentioned. Let's assume it was, Jephthah would have to be Levite for such a thing to be possible, and he would have to be, according to Deuteronomy 23:2, the legitimate son of both parents; which, as we

know, Jephthah was the son of a prostitute. Not even his daughter would be allowed to serve in the Temple. Only his 11<sup>th</sup> descendent would be permitted.

Fourthly, the Spirit of the Lord did, indeed, come upon Jephthah, which then helped him amass a large fighting force comprised of men from Gilead, Manasseh, and Mizpah. But this would've taken weeks, if not months, to do so. So, we can confidently assume there is a substantial time jump between verse 29 and verse 30. We know from other Judges that the Spirit of the Lord would come and go from them (cf. 1 Sam. 16:14). And, even if God didn't leave Jephthah, we cannot assume all actions done by a bible character are right and just because they have the Spirit of God in them (cf. Balaam - Num 24:2; Samson - Judges 14:6; 15:14; Saul – 1 Sam. 10:10; 11:6). We need only look in the mirror to see an individual who has the Spirit of the living God dwelling within them to know that followers of God can still do awful things even though God Himself has taken up residence with them.

Fifthly, Jephthah's daughter bewails her virginity instead of her coming death because being barren was worse to a Jew at this time than death (cf. Sarai – Gen. 16:2; Rachel – Gen. 30:1; Hannah – 1 Sam. 1:6, 10-11).

Lastly, there is no explicit condemnation of Jephthah's actions. While this correct, we cannot assume condemnation from silence. In fact, a lot of bible characters are not explicitly condemned for their deeds (cf. Judah sleeping with his daughter-in-law – Gen. 38:13-19; Samson – Judges 16:1). What's more, one could just easily argue for condemnation from silence.

The sad point is that Jephthah killed his daughter. We cannot shy away from the transparent black and white teachings of Scripture, no matter how much they make us uncomfortable. Jephthah was not a good man.

If he were indeed a good man and knew his bible, as many assume that he did, why did he not merely pay the penalty in the Levitical law for an improper vow? Lev. 5:4-6 stipulates that if someone makes a thoughtless vow and then regrets, he need only make a sacrifice. Or, in the case of giving someone to the Temple for service, if a person wishes to back out of that, they just pay a fine. In Jephthah's daughter's case, he would only have to pay anywhere between 20 to 30 pieces of silver depending on how old she was (cf. Lev. 27:1-8). Or what about the many passages in the OT which forbid human sacrifice altogether (cf. Gen. 22:1-24; Lev. 20:1-2; Deut. 12:31; 18:10). But the last nail in the coffin for Jephthah, which proves beyond all doubt that he was a horrible human being, is that even if he didn't know these bible passages, he could've

simply refused to sacrifice his only daughter. This may have brought a curse down upon his own head, and it would've sullied his honor, but it would've at least saved the life of his daughter. Yet, instead of sacrificing himself, he chose to kill his own daughter. He would not risk defeat at the hands of his enemies or bring judgment down on himself from God.

### **SO, WHAT'S THE TAKEAWAY?**

#### **Think before you speak.**

Be sure to taste your words before you spit them out. A smart person knows what to say, but a wise person knows when to say it.

#### **READ: Proverbs 12:18 (ESV)**

There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, but the tongue of the wise brings healing.

#### **READ: Proverbs 20:25 (ESV)**

It is a snare to say rashly, "It is holy," and to reflect only after making vows.

#### **READ: Proverbs 29:20 (ESV)**

Do you see a man who is hasty in his words? There is more hope for a fool than for him.

#### **READ: James 1:19 (ESV)**

Know this, my beloved brothers: let every person be quick to hear, slow to speak, slow to anger; for the anger of man does not produce the righteousness of God.

Words and actions made in haste inevitably come back to haunt us.

Jephthah was not the first to regret a thoughtless vow.

King Saul once made a decree that he'd kill anyone if they ate food on a particular day (cf. 1 Sam. 14:24). But Jonathan, his son, who had just won a great victory over the philistines, ate bread on the very day his father told everyone else not to. Saul heard about it, decided instead of killing his son, they'd throw lots between himself and Jonathan. Whoever lost would die. The lot still fell on Jonathan, and Saul was about to kill his own son, but the people stopped him.

In Mark 6, we're told that King Herod was once so overcome by the beauty of a woman that he told her. "Whatever you want, if it be in my power, I will give it to you." She then replied, "The head of John the Baptist." The passage tells us that he regretted his vow, but he went through with the execution nonetheless.

How much heartache has thoughtless speech caused throughout the world? The Christian ought to be mindful of what they say, for they know every word will someday be held accountable.

**READ:** Matthew 12:33-37 (ESV)

<sup>33</sup> “Either make the tree good and its fruit good, or make the tree bad and its fruit bad, for the tree is known by its fruit. <sup>34</sup> You brood of vipers! How can you speak good, when you are evil? For out of the abundance of the heart the mouth speaks. <sup>35</sup> The good person out of his good treasure brings forth good, and the evil person out of his evil treasure brings forth evil. <sup>36</sup> I tell you, on the day of judgment people will give account for every careless word they speak, <sup>37</sup> for by your words you will be justified, and by your words you will be condemned.”

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## VIDEO DESCRIPTION

Wednesday Night Live | Hall of Flaw | Week 5

TITLE: Jephthah The Thoughtless

TEXT: Hebrews 11:23-28

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Pastor's manuscript can be found [here](#):