

Judges 11 - Cycle 6: Jephthah; Jephthah's Four Arguments; Jephthah's Vow; God Delivers the Ammonites

II. Failure in rescue of Israel through the seven cycles (Judges 3:7—16:31)

(9) Jephthah defeats the Ammonites (Judges 10:6—12:7)

(D) Salvation (Judges 10:17—12:6)

(b) Jephthah's favorable reputation (11:1-8)

(c) Jephthah's condition for leadership (11:9-11)

(d) Jephthah's communication with Ammon (11:12-28)

(e) Jephthah's rash vow (11:29-40)

Judges 11

(D) Salvation (Judges 10:17—12:6)

(b) Jephthah's favorable reputation (11:1-8)

1 Now **Jephthah the Gileadite** was a **valiant warrior**, but he was the son of a prostitute. And **Gilead** had fathered Jephthah.

1 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a valiant warrior, but he was the son of a harlot. And Gilead was the father of Jephthah.

1 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a valiant soldier, but he was also the son of a prostitute and Jephthah's father Gilead.

1 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he was the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah.

- Verses 1-3 are a flashback, chronologically comes before the events of 10:17-18 (1089 BC)

- "...Jephthah the Gileadite" - Jephthah means "he will open"

— He came from the very place now suffering from Ammonite oppression

- "...a valiant warrior" - phrased used only of Gideon (6:12) and Jephthah

- "...Gilead" - can be a geographic term; it can also mean the son or descendant of Machir, the son of Manasseh (1 Chr 7:14,17; Num 26:29-30)

2 Gilead's wife 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."

2 Gilead's wife 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."

2 Gilead's wife bore two sons through him, but when his wife's sons grew up, they expelled Jephthah and declared to him, "You won't have an inheritance in this house, since you're the son of a different woman."

2 And Gilead's wife bare him sons; and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father's house; for thou art the son of a strange woman.

- Jephthah, the unwanted brother

— He was unwanted to keep him from inheriting Gilead's wealth

— Normally the son of a prostitute would not inherit from his father any inheritance. This indicates that the father had adopted him and left him part of his inheritance.

— But the half-brothers, sons of the wife, legally challenge Gilead's will and had Jephthah disinherited; and the ones who were so deceived would have been the elders of the Land of Gilead.

3 So Jephthah fled **from** his brothers and lived in the land of **Tob**; and worthless men **gathered** around Jephthah, and they went wherever he did.

3 So Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob; and worthless fellows gathered themselves about Jephthah, and they went out with him.

3 So Jephthah escaped from his brothers and lived in the territory of Tob, where worthless men gathered themselves around him and went out on raiding parties with him.

3 Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and went out with him.

- "...from" - means "from the face of"

- "...Tob" - 80 miles to the north, near Syria, beyond the frontier of the Hebrew territories

— Jephthah led a band of adventurers ("reckless persons"); a "Robin Hood" of the area

- "...gathered" - *lakat*, gleaning (as opposed to the more common word *asaph*, gathered)

— This conveys the idea of a slow recruitment, man by man, rather than a sudden mass following

— He was known as a "man of valor" (v1) and had no trouble gathering a following

4 Now it came about, **after a while**, that the sons of Ammon fought against Israel.

4 It came about after a while that the sons of Ammon fought against Israel.

4 Later on, the Ammonites attacked Israel.

4 And it came to pass in process of time, that the children of Ammon made war against Israel.

- "...after a while" - in the Hebrew, it literally reads, "from days," however it had been 18 years since the Ammonite oppression began (10:8)

— Therefore, the phrase refers to the time of Jephthah's expulsion from his home, and so v4 picks up the narrative from 10:17, after the parenthetical interlude, and continues on with the recounting of the Ammonite oppression

5 When the sons of Ammon fought against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob;

5 When the sons of Ammon fought against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah from the land of Tob;

5 When this happened, the elders of Gilead went to the territory of Tob to find Jephthah.

5 And it was so, that when the children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob:

- His brothers didn't want him, but the elders sent a deputation 80 miles to solicit his help...

6 and they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our **leader**, that we may fight against the sons of Ammon."

6 and they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our chief that we may fight against the sons of Ammon."

6 They told him, "Come and be our commander so we can fight the Ammonites!"

6 And they said unto Jephthah, Come, and be our captain, that we may fight with the children of Ammon.

- "...leader" - a military term; but also used a ruler (Is 1:10, for the rulers of Sodom)

- Up until this point, Israel suffered Ammonite oppression, but now the Ammonites launched a military campaign of expulsion that had to be resisted

7 But Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me and drive me from my father's house? So why have you come to me now when you are in trouble?"

7 Then Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me and drive me from my father's house? So why have you come to me now when you are in trouble?"

7 But Jephthah replied to the elders of Gilead, "Weren't you the ones who hated me and drove me out of my father's house? And you come to me now that you're in trouble?"

7 And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?

- Among the group that came to appeal to Jephthah would have been members of his father's family, who had done the actual driving out

— As for the other elders, they had the authority to prevent the expulsion, but failed to do so. They may even have legally had Jephthah disinherited.

— Concerning the present, Jephthah asked, why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress? These elders did not help him in his distress, so why should he help them in their distress?

8 The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "**For this reason** we have now returned to you, that you may go with us and fight the sons of Ammon, and become our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

8 The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "For this reason we have now returned to you, that you may go with us and fight with the sons of Ammon and become head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

8 So the elders of Gilead told Jephthah, "Well, we're coming back to you now so you can accompany us, fight the Ammonites, and become the head of all the inhabitants of Gilead."

8 And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, Therefore we turn again to thee now, that thou mayest go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.

- "...For this reason" - basically, "because we have wronged you..."

— They now want to make amends with Jephthah, to the mutual benefit of both parties: Jephthah fights and leads the army; if he proves victorious, he will be head over the inhabitants of Gilead

(c) Jephthah's condition for leadership (11:9-11)

9 So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you bring me back to fight against the sons of Ammon and the LORD gives them up to me, will I become your head?"

9 So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you take me back to fight against the sons of Ammon and the LORD gives them up to me, will I become your head?"

9 Then Jephthah asked the elders of Gilead, "If you all send me to fight against the Ammonites and the LORD hands them over right in front of me, will I really become your head?"

9 And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the LORD deliver them before me, shall I be your head?

- Jephthah gives a pre-condition for his help: a firm guarantee, even if the Lord delivers the enemy without a fight

10 And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The LORD is **witness** between us; be assured we will do as you have said."

10 The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The LORD is witness between us; surely we will do as you have said."

10 The elders of Gilead responded to Jephthah, "May the Lord serve as a witness that we're making this agreement between ourselves to do as we've said."

10 And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words.

- "...witness" - listening; the Lord is listening to their negotiation

11 Then 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.

11 Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and chief over them; and Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD at Mizpah.

11 So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people appointed him head and military commander over them. Jephthah uttered everything he had to say with the solemnity of an oath in the LORD's presence at Mizpah.

11 Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain over them: and Jephthah uttered all his words before the LORD in Mizpah.

- His consistent piety of language reveals a personal spiritual posture despite his roving lifestyle

— Notice Jephthah's emphasis that it would be the Lord's victory, not his (v9). It was before the Lord that the agreement was witnessed (v11), and before the general assembly at Mizpah.

— This ceremony added a religious sanction to his appointment and also gave the campaign the element of a holy war

- Jephthah was a man of faith, not simply an opportunist: he would be included in the "Hall of Faith" (Heb 11:32). We can't help but be amused about how his brothers felt when he returned home as general of the army and leader of the land!

— Cf. Joseph, rejected by his brothers, and later prime minister of the then-known world!

— Cf. David, who took 7 years to gain the full support of the Twelve Tribes of Israel.

— Cf. Our Lord Jesus Christ, rejected by His people, but the Ruler of the Universe!

Negotiations with the Ammonites

Jephthah was not a hothead looking for a fight; he recognized the real cost of war. And he knew his Scriptures. He makes an attempt at an honorable peace by showing that there is no just cause for quarrel. This was required by law to avoid war until negotiation had failed (Deut 20:10-18).

(d) Jephthah's communication with Ammon (11:12-28)

12 So Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the sons of Ammon, saying, "What *conflict* do you and I have, that you have come to me to fight against **myland**?"

12 Now Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the sons of Ammon, saying, "What is between you and me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?"

12 Afterwards, Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites to ask him, "What's your dispute between us that prompted you to come and attack my land?"

12 And Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land.

- Jephthah immediately took charge of the situation with the Ammonites

— He attempted to avoid war by negotiation and diplomacy first

- It appears that the Ammonites were the aggressors in this war, and Jephthah wanted a reason for the Ammonite attack

- "...my land" - a statement of patriotism; this was the same land that had earlier rejected him

13 And the king of the sons of Ammon said to the messengers of Jephthah, "*It is because Israel took my land when they came up from Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok and the Jordan; so return them peaceably now.*"

13 The king of the sons of Ammon said to the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Israel took away my land when they came up from Egypt, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok and the Jordan; therefore, return them peaceably now."

13 The king of the Ammonites answered the messengers of Jephthah, "We're here because Israel took away my land from the Arnon River as far as the Jabbok River and as far as the Jordan River when they came up from Egypt! So restore it as a gesture of good will."

13 And the king of the children of Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, Because Israel took away my land, when they came up out of Egypt, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now therefore restore those lands again peaceably.

- The Ammonite king took issue with Jephthah's claim of "my land" (v12)

— This "take away" of land supposedly took place during the Exodus, 300 years earlier

— The problem is, the Ammonites had never held this territory, because the Arnon River served as the border between Moab and the Amorites

— The claim was due not only to a desire for more land on the part of the Ammonites, but also for a clearly marked border, which their control of these rivers would accomplish

— This was the same type of myth that Hitler used on the Sudetenland to subdue Czechoslovakia; this is similar to the myth that the Palestinians have promoted in their quest to exterminate Israel today

Historical Argument: The Facts

The following (v15-27) contain the content of Jephthah's message refuting the king's accusation against Israel. It is consistent with references from Numbers and Deuteronomy.

14 But Jephthah sent messengers once again to the king of the sons of Ammon,

14 But Jephthah sent messengers again to the king of the sons of Ammon,

14 But Jephthah sent additional messengers again to the king of the Ammonites

14 And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon:

15 and they said to him, "This is what Jephthah says: '**Israel did not take the land of Moab** nor the land of the sons of Ammon.

15 and they said to him, "Thus says Jephthah, 'Israel did not take away the land of Moab nor the land of the sons of Ammon.

15 and they informed him, "This is Jephthah's response:

'Israel didn't seize the land of Moab nor the land of the Ammonites.

15 And said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah, Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon:

- "...Israel did not take the land of Moab" - the Moabites had a stronger historical claim on the land than the Ammonites, yet did not dispute Israel's control

— Moab lost the territory through the conquest by the Amorites. Israel gained the territory by conquering the Amorites.

— Furthermore, Jephthah denies that Israel took away the land of the children of Ammon.

In keeping with Num 21:24, Israel made no claim to Ammonite territory. This was in keeping with Deut 2:9, which told Israel to respect the borders of Moab, Edom, and Ammon.

Jephthah then presented four arguments against the Ammonite claim. First, following the point of denial in Judges 11:16-22, he presented the historical argument.

16 For when they came up from Egypt, and Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea, and came to Kadesh,

16 For when they came up from Egypt, and Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh,

16 Here's what happened: When Israel came up from Egypt, passed through the desert to the Red Sea, and arrived at Kadesh,

16 But when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red sea, and came to Kadesh;

- Jephthah summarizes the 40-year period of the Israelite wanderings and pointed out three things: (1) Israel came up from Egypt, (2) they went through the wilderness to the Red Sea, and (3) they arrived at Kadesh-Barnea (Cf. Num 13:26; 14:25)

17 then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, "Please let us pass through your land"; but the king of Edom would not listen. And they also sent *messengers* to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh.

17 then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, "Please let us pass through your land," but the king of Edom would not listen. And they also sent to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh.

17 Israel sent a delegation to the king of Edom and asked him, "Please let us pass through your territory."

'But the king of Edom wouldn't listen. So they also sent word to the king of Moab, but he wouldn't consent, either. So Israel stayed at Kadesh.

17 Then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land: but the king of Edom would not hearken thereto. And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab: but he would not consent: and Israel abode in Kadesh.

- Jephthah reported on the two requests for passage through lands en route to the Promised Land: Edom, which was rejected (Cf. Num 20:14,17); and, Moab, which was also rejected

— The request to Moab is not recorded in Scripture, but is implied in Deut 2:29, where the sin of Moab is the same as the sin of Edom

18 Then they went through the wilderness and around the land of Edom and the land of Moab, and came to the east side of the land of Moab, and they camped beyond the Arnon; but they did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon *was* the border of Moab.

18 Then they went through the wilderness and around the land of Edom and the land of Moab, and came to the east side of the land of Moab, and they camped beyond the Arnon; but they did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon *was* the border of Moab.

18 Then they went through the desert, circumventing the territory belonging to Edom and Moab. They encamped on the other side of the Arnon River, but never entered the territory of Moab because the Arnon River is the border of Moab.

18 Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, but came not within the border of Moab: for Arnon was the border of Moab.

- Instead Israel chose an alternate route: they went through the wilderness, around [both] Edom and Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab

— Instead of crossing through, the Israelites had gone south through the Arabah, down to the Red Sea and had made a wide circle and then began going north again, marching on the east border of both countries until they encamped on the other side of the Arnon; but they did not tread within the border of Moab, for the Arnon was the border of Moab.

— Jephthah's point (v16-18) was that when Israel had come up from the land of Egypt, they had shown the highest respect for the territorial integrity of both Edom and Moab (Cf. Num 21:11-20; Deut 2:1)

19 And Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said to him, "Please let us pass through your land to our place."

19 And Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon, and Israel said to him, "Please let us pass through your land to our place."

19 'Then Israel sent a delegation to Sihon, king of the Amorites and king of Heshbon. Israel requested of him, "Please let us pass through your territory to our place."

19 And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place.

- Jephthah now moves on to review the history of the war with Sihon (Cf. Num 21:21-14; Deut 2:2,26,30)

— Israel attempted the same sort of diplomacy with Sihon as they had with Edom and Moab

20 But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory; so Sihon gathered all his people and camped in Jahaz, and fought with Israel.

20 But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory; so Sihon gathered all his people and camped in Jahaz and fought with Israel.

20 But Sihon didn't trust Israel to pass through his territory, so he assembled his entire army, encamped in Jahaz, and fought against Israel.

20 But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel.

- Sihon rejected Israel's request to pass through the land, then attacked Israel (Cf. Num 21:23; Deut 2:32; Is 15:4; Jer 48:21,34)

21 And the LORD, the God of Israel, handed Sihon and all his people over to Israel, and they defeated them; so Israel took possession of all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country.

21 The LORD, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them; so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country.

21 The LORD God of Israel handed Sihon and his entire army into the control of Israel, and defeated them. As a result, Israel took control over the entire land of the Amorites, who were living in that country.

21 And the LORD God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them: so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country.

- The Lord paid Sihon back for their lack of hospitality...

22 So they possessed all the territory of the Amorites, from the **Arnon** as far as the **Jabbok**, and from the **wilderness** as far as the **Jordan**.

22 So they possessed all the territory of the Amorites, from the Arnon as far as the Jabbok, and from the wilderness as far as the Jordan.

22 They took possession of the entire territory of the Amorites from the Arnon River as far as the Jabbok River and from the desert as far as the Jordan River.

22 And they possessed all the coasts of the Amorites, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto Jordan.

- "...Arnon" - the southern border

- "...Jabbok" - northern border

- "...wilderness" - eastern border

- "...Jordan" - the Jordan River, the western border

- Israel didn't steal any land; they captured it from the Ammonites and the Amorites (Num 21:21-35; Deut 33-36)

— Furthermore, the Amorites had originally taken the land from the Moabites (Num 21:29); so if Israel's claims by conquests weren't valid, neither were the claims of the Amorites!

To summarize Jephthah's historical argument: First, originally, Israel had no interest in the territory the Ammonites were claiming; they only wanted to pass through, and it fell into Israel's hands only because the Amorites had chosen to go to war with Israel. Thus, it belonged to Israel by right of conquest. Second, the Ammonites had no historical claim to this land, since that land had previously belonged to the Amorites and passed directly to Israel. This land had never belonged to the Ammonites to begin with. Third, the real issue was the border of the eastern frontier, labeled as the wilderness, and where this was in relationship to the Ammonite Kingdom. In other words, Israel did not take the land from the Ammonites, only from the Amorites.

23 And now the LORD, the God of Israel, has driven out the Amorites from His people Israel; so should you possess it?

23 Since now the LORD, the God of Israel, drove out the Amorites from before His people Israel, are you then to possess it?

23 'Now then, since the LORD God of Israel expelled the Amorites right in front of his people Israel, are you going to control their territory?

23 So now the LORD God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, and shouldst thou possess it?

- It was God who drove out the Amorites from the land, leaving it naturally to Israel
- Because Jehovah is the God of Israel, the land belonged to Israel, not to the Amorites
- Jephthah was careful to give the Lord the glory for any victories Israel had won (v9,21,23-24)

24 Do you not possess what **Chemosh your god** gives you to possess? So whatever the LORD our God has dispossessed before us, we will possess it.

24 Do you not possess what Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So whatever the LORD our God has driven out before us, we will possess it.

24 Don't you control what your god Chemosh gives you? In the same way, we'll take control of whomever the LORD our God has driven out in front of us.

24 Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever the LORD our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess.

- Since Israel only possesses what Israel's God has given her, so the Ammonites should be satisfied with whatever they have received from their god

- "...Chemosh" - the national god of the Moabites (Num 21:29; 1 Kings 9:7,33; Jer 48:7,13,46)

— Chemosh, rather than Moloch, is mentioned because the territory had belonged to the Moabites, but Chemosh had not been able to save it from the Amorites

- "...your god" - this phrase indicates a very close connection between Moab and Ammon at that time, possibly being under one king

"From Time Immemorial"

(Cf. Joan Peter's monumental exposure of the Palestinian myth)

25 Now then, are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever contend with Israel, or **did he ever fight against them?**

25 Now are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive with Israel, or did he ever fight against them?

25 Also ask yourselves: do you have a better case than Zippor's son Balak, king of Moab? Did he ever have a quarrel with Israel or ever win a fight against them?

25 And now art thou any thing better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? did he ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against them,

- If the territory in question was Moabite property, how come Balak laid no claim to it? He was the enemy of the Israelites, and yet when Israel took possession of the land, and dwelt in Heshbon, its capital, and the related villages thereof, and in Aroer and her villages, and the rest along the shores of the Arnon river, Balak never strove over them.

— The point was that the Moabite king, at the very time of Israel's occupation of the Land, did not lay claim to the territory that was formerly his. The implication is that if he had remained silent when he had had greater justification to intervene, the Ammonites were completely without justification in their demands at this point in time.

— This is plain proof that he did not look upon them as his property (Cf. Num 21:23ff; Deut 2:36; Joshua 12:2)

- "...did he ever fight against them?" - again, the answer is "No"; Balak did not venture to meet Israel in battle

— Because of this, would the king of Ammon, who was weaker than the king of Moab, attempt to do what Balak did not even attempt?

26 While Israel was living in Heshbon and its villages, and in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities that are on the banks of the Arnon, three hundred years, why did you not recover them within that time?

26 While Israel lived in Heshbon and its villages, and in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities that are on the banks of the Arnon, three hundred years, why did you not recover them within that time?

26 When Israel was living in Heshbon and its surrounding villages, in Aroer and its surrounding villages, and in all the cities that line the banks of the Arnon River these past three hundred years, why didn't you retake them during that time?

26 While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aroer and her towns, and in all the cities that be along by the coasts of Arnon, three hundred years? why therefore did ye not recover them within that time?

- Why was the King of Ammon making his claims now, 300 years later?

— During the three centuries of Israel's dwelling in the area (of present Jordan), they hadn't tried to reclaim their territory. Even back in the days of Moses, even the King of Moab hadn't tried to get his land back.

— If the Ammonites had a legitimate claim to the territory, they should have said something centuries ago!

The mention of 300 years (v26) shows that the period of the Judges covers about 350 years total: 300 years to the time of Jephthah, and 50 years from Jephthah to Samuel. If the 144 years covering the period from the second year of Jephthah to the fourth year of Solomon are added to the 38 years from the Exodus to the conquest of Heshbon and to the 300 years noted in v26, the total would be 482 years. This agrees with 1 Kings 6:1, which states that 480 years had passed from the Exodus until the fourth year of Solomon (see note below.) So the 300 years is very close to the figures stated in the Book of Judges for the judgeships and years of oppression given until this point. The actual total figure from Israel's entry into Canaan until the time in Judges 11:26 is 319 years, but since

Ammon's claim could be held to have commenced at the beginning of the 18 years of oppression, this would reduce the Ammonite King's claim to events that occurred 301 years previously to be very close to Jephthah's estimate of 300 years.

Chronology of Jephthah's Timeline

Events	Years
From Exodus to Israel's conquest of Heshbon (a city of Moab)	38
From Israel's conquest of Heshbon until Jephthah's message in 11:26	300
From Jephthah's second year as judge to Solomon's fourth year as king	144
Total	482
Compared to timeline from Exodus to Solomon's fourth year, in I King 6:1	480

27 So I have not sinned against you, but you are doing me wrong by making war against me. May the LORD, the Judge, judge today between the sons of Israel and the sons of Ammon."

27 I therefore have not sinned against you, but you are doing me wrong by making war against me; may the LORD, the Judge, judge today between the sons of Israel and the sons of Ammon."

27 I haven't sinned against you, but you are acting wrongly against me by declaring war on me. May the LORD, the Judge, sit in judgment today between the Israelis and the Ammonites."

27 Wherefore I have not sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me: the LORD the Judge be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon.

- Jephthah's final argument: he hadn't declared war on Ammon; it was Ammon that declared war on Israel

— If God gave Israel the Land, then the Ammonites were declaring war on the Lord God. And that could only spell defeat for Ammon.

28 But the king of the sons of Ammon disregarded the message which Jephthah sent him.

28 But the king of the sons of Ammon disregarded the message which Jephthah sent him.

28 But the king of the Ammonites wouldn't heed the message that Jephthah had sent to him.

28 Howbeit the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him.

- Jephthah's attempt to avoid war by diplomacy and negotiation failed; the rejection was a prelude to war

Summary of Jephthah's Four Arguments

(1) Historical: the land that Israel possessed originally belonged to the hands of the Amorites and not the Ammonites (Num 21:21-30; Joshua 13:21).

(2) Theological: the God of Israel gave the land to Israel, and even pagans recognized that when a god gave victory, the people of that god had every right to possess the conquered land.

(3) Political: if Balak the king of Moab did not fight with Israel over the land rights, then why should the king of Ammon do so now?

(4) Chronological: Ammon had waited too long to claim the territory since it had been 300 years since Israel settled in Heshbon; if Israel did not have claim to the land by right of conquest, why did no one lay claim to it much earlier?

(e) Jephthah's rash vow (11:29-40)

In the exuberance of going out to battle, Jephthah made his famous vow. It was acceptable to God to make vows, provided they obeyed the laws governing them (Lev 27; Num 30; Deut 23:21-25). Vows were completely voluntary, but the Lord expected them to be fulfilled.

29 Now the Spirit of the LORD **came upon** Jephthah, and 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.

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.

29 The Spirit of the LORD came on Jephthah, so he swept through Gilead and the territory of Manasseh, then swept through Mizpah in Gilead, and from Mizpah in Gilead he proceeded toward where the Ammonites were encamped.

29 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over [to] Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon.

- Jephthah took the war to enemy territory; a preemptive strike...

- "...came upon" - one of the ministries of the Holy Spirit in the OT: Othniel (Judges 3:9-10); Gideon (Judges 6:34); Jephthah (Judges 11:29); Samson (Judges 13:24-25; 14:6,19; 15:14); Saul (1 Sam 10:9-10); and David (1 Sam 16:13).

— Empowered by the Spirit of God, Jephthah called for volunteers (12:1-2) and mustered his army. Mizpeh was the capital, his base of operations.

- The Lord gave him victory over the Ammonites, and he captured 20 strongholds as he pursued the fleeing enemy army. This would guarantee freedom and safety for Israel as they traveled in the territory of Gilead. The Ammonites didn't threaten Israel for another 50 years (1 Sam 11:1ff).

30 And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, "If You will indeed hand over to me 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,

30 Jephthah made this solemn vow to the LORD: "If you truly give the Ammonites into my control,

30 And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands,

- Jephthah made the vow because he recognized the need for divine intervention

31 then **whatever** comes out the doors of my house to meet me when I return safely from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the LORD'S, **and** I will offer it up as a burnt offering."

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."

31 then if I return from the Ammonites without incident, whatever comes out the doors of my house to meet me will become the LORD's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering."

31 Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.

- "...whatever" - literally "that which cometh forth, which shall come forth"

— The Hebrew word translated "whatsoever" is in the masculine form, suggesting that he expected to meet a person (The Living Bible reads, "the first person coming out of his house")

— Jephthah had one daughter and a wife (if she were still living), so if Jephthah intended a human sacrifice, he would have used the feminine form, not the masculine. The use of the masculine implies he had an animal sacrifice in mind.

— The first floor of ancient Israelite homes had four rooms, one of which was for housing animals

- Jephthah made a bargain: if God would give the Israelites victory over the Ammonites, Jephthah would sacrifice to the Lord whatever came out of his house when he arrived

home in Mizpah. God gave him victory, and Jephthah kept his promise. But what was his promise and how did he keep it? What actually happened to Jephthah's daughter, his only child?

- "...and" - a *waw* connective; it could be either "and" or "or"; herein lies the controversy

32 So Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD handed them over to him.

32 So Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD gave them into his hand.

32 Then Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites and attacked them. The LORD gave them into his control.

32 So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands.

33 He inflicted a very great defeat on them 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.

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.

33 He attacked them from Aroer to the entrance of Minnith—twenty cities in all—even as far as Abel-keramim. As a result, the Ammonites were subdued right in front of the Israelis.

33 And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.

- God fulfilled Jephthah's request and gave the Ammonites into his hands in a decisive victory

- Aroer is 14 miles E of the Dead Sea, near the intersection of the Arnon River, the southern boundary of Reuben, and the "King's Highway" on the main N-S trade route

34 But Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, and behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. And she was his one *and* only child; besides her he had no son or daughter.

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.

34 When Jephthah arrived at his home in Mizpah—surprise!—it was his daughter who came out to meet him, playing tambourines and dancing. She was his one and only child. Except for her, he had no other son or daughter.

34 And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter.

- It was common practice for women to go out and welcome a victorious army with music and dance (Ex 15:20; 1 Sam 18:6)

35 So when he saw her, he **tore his clothes** and said, "Oh, my daughter! You have **brought me disaster**, and you are among **those** who trouble me; for I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot take *it* back."

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."

35 When he saw her, he ripped his clothes and cried out, "Oh no! My daughter! You have terribly burdened me! You've joined those who are causing me trouble, because I've given my word to the LORD, and I cannot go back on it.

35 And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back.

- "...tore his clothes" - a common sign of grief (Gen 37:29; 37:34; 2 Sam 13:19,31; Job 1:20)

- "...brought me disaster" - literally, "caused me to kneel in grief"; figuratively, it means she took the strength out of his legs so he was forced to his knees

- "...those" - emphatic in the Hebrew, meaning "you of all people"

- Jephthah's could not have gone back on his vow if it indeed entailed human sacrifice; this was not a valid vow, and an invalid vow could be canceled under Mosaic Law (Lev 27:1-8)

— However, if the vow was a vow of dedication, it was valid

— The fact that Jephthah felt the vow had to be kept shows that the vow was valid

36 So she said to him, "My father, you have given your word to the LORD; do to me just as you have said, since the LORD has brought you vengeance on your enemies, the sons of Ammon."

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."

36 She told him, "My father, you have given your word to the LORD. Do to me according to what has come out of your own mouth, considering that the LORD has paid back your enemies, the Ammonites."

36 And she said unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon.

- His daughter responded in full agreement of her father's interpretation, and she recognized the validity of the vow and did not attempt to avoid it
- If Jephthah was going to kill his daughter, he would want her home with himself, not running around on the mountains with her girlfriends
- Why would the girl lament her virginity if she expected to die? Of what significance is virginity if you're heading for the grave? She would have been lamenting her impending death instead.

37 And she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me; allow me two months, so that I may go to the mountains and weep because of my virginity, I and my friends."

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."

37 Then she continued talking with her father, "Do this for me: leave me alone by myself for two months. I'll go up to the mountains and cry there because I'll never marry. My friends and I will go."

37 And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows.

- She did not bemoan her coming death, but because of her virginity, she would now die childless

— This was a major source of grief in ancient times

- Nowhere in the text does it indicate that Jephthah actually killed his daughter, nor do we find anyone bewailing her death

- The emphasis in v37-40) is on remaining a virgin

38 Then he said, "Go." So he let her go for two months; and she left with her friends, and wept on the mountains because of her virginity.

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.

38 So he said, "Go!" He sent her away for two months. She left with her friends and cried there on the mountains because she would never marry.

38 And he said, Go. And he sent her away for two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains.

39 And at the end of two months she returned to her father, who did to her what he had vowed; and she had no relations with a man. And it became a custom in Israel,

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,

39 Later, after the two months were concluded, she returned to her father, and he fulfilled what he had solemnly vowed—and she never married. That’s how the custom arose in Israel

39 And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man. And it was a custom in Israel,

40 that the daughters of Israel went annually **to commemorate** the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite for four days in the year.

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

40 that for four days out of every year the Israeli women would go to mourn the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite in commemoration.

40 That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

- "...to commemorate" - *tanah*, to recount, rehearse, tell again; celebrate, attribute honor
— The "lament" is actually to celebrate her devotion and obedience. She actually deserves to stand with Isaac as a faithful child, willing to obey both father and God, no matter what the cost.

Key Lesson: Jephthah kept his commitment! The absence of the sanctity of our commitments is a major problem in our society. We see it the fabric of our businesses; we see it in our marriages...

There are a number of arguments put forth by scholars for both the human sacrifice view and the offering for full-time service of Jephthah’s daughter. Here are some of the arguments presented:

Human Sacrifice View

First,	the Hebrew word used here is <i>olah</i> , which throughout the Old Testament is always used of a burnt offering, and there is no reason to take it any other way in this passage.
Second,	in the Septuagint version, the same word is used of Jephthah's daughter that was used of Isaac's sacrifice, which initially was understood to be a human sacrifice.
Third,	if he had only dedication in mind, then he should have used the language of Hannah in her dedication of Samuel in I Samuel 1:11, 22, 25, and 28.
Fourth,	Jephthah was a son of a common prostitute since the word used here is <i>zonah</i> , which means a common prostitute, as over against a temple prostitute. He also spent much time with the peoples east of the Jordan (Judges 11:1-3), where such practices as human sacrifices were common (II Kg. 3:26-27), practices followed by later Jewish kings such as Ahaz (II Chron. 28:3) and Manasseh (II Kg. 21:6); if later leaders of Israel engaged in such practices, it was possible that early leaders did as well.
Fifth,	the fact that he was a judge does not remove the possibility of his making a rash vow, and the common philosophy of his day was that every man did that which was right in his own eyes. This was in opposition to the Law of Moses, as was the case earlier with Gideon and his golden ephod and even with Samson and his sins.
Sixth,	if Jephthah could slaughter 42,000 Israelites (cf. Judges 12:1-6), he certainly had the capacity to kill his own daughter.
Seventh,	his daughter's lament over her virginity implied that there was no hope for children because of her impending death.
Eighth,	the Hebrew word for lament here is <i>tavach</i> , which is used only one other time, in Judges 5:11, where it can be best translated as "to recount," not "talk to" as if she were still alive.

Opposing Arguments to the Human Sacrifice View

First,	as to the argument that Jephthah knew the Law of Moses and therefore would not be ignorant of the prohibition against human sacrifice, they would answer that knowledge of the Law did not preclude disobedience to that Law. This was also true in the case of King David. Jephthah must have known that it would be a human being coming out of his house, for if it was an animal coming out of his home, it would be too small to sacrifice for such a great victory.
Second,	in response to the argument that Jephthah's name appears as a man of faith in Hebrews 11:32, they would answer that this does not mean he did not commit sin, since Rahab and Samson also appear, and both are guilty of sins.
Third,	as to the argument that Jephthah could not have done this in light of the fact that the Holy Spirit came upon him, they would answer that the vow was not taken right after. There may have been a break of time between the Spirit's coming upon him and the vow itself. Furthermore, the same was true of Samson.
Fourth,	as to the argument that there were full-time women serving in the Tabernacle (Exod. 38:8; I Sam. 2:22), and so his vow was that, if he had the victory, he would dedicate to the Tabernacle one member of his household, they would respond: It is not clear that these women served as permanent residents of the Tabernacle, and even so this argument is weak because there appears to be no order of perpetual virgins in the Mosaic order.
Fifth,	as to the argument that claims that the conjunction in verse 31 should be translated as "or" and not as "and," so that the vow would then be that "whatever comes from the door of the house to meet him shall be devoted to God's service if it was human, or if it was a clean animal, it would become a burnt offering," they would answer: it is doubtful if the <i>vav</i> here is disjunctive, rather than conjunctive, and it should be "and" and not "or."
Sixth,	as to the argument that the Hebrew word for <i>lament</i> is translated as <i>to talk to</i> , which indicates that they ought to remain alive, their answer is: but a better translation would be <i>to recount</i> .

Arguments in Favor of Dedication to Full-Time Tabernacle Service

First,	there was an order of devoted women working in the Tabernacle (Exod. 38:8; I Sam. 2:22).
Second,	the vow was made right after he was clothed with the Holy Spirit, and this mitigates against its being a human sacrifice. There is no indication that there was a gap of time between the coming of the Spirit and the making of the vow.
Third,	if it was clear that the vow was to include human sacrifice, and if God gave him victory, would God have honored such a vow? And the answer is obviously “No” because it would

	go against His own law.
Fourth,	human sacrifice was clearly forbidden by the Law of Moses and understood to be an abomination against God (Lev. 18:21 and 20:2-5; Deut. 12:31 and 18:10).
Fifth,	there is no evidence that any Israelite offered human sacrifice until it was transplanted by unbelieving kings such as Ahab and Manasseh who worshipped other gods. But Jephthah was a Jehovah-worshipper, and would not have performed such a crime and abomination. The fact that subsequent Jewish kings did so is not a valid argument here because they worshiped other gods but Jephthah did not.
Sixth,	there is a constant, strong emphasis on Jephthah's daughter's virginity, not on her death. If she were killed, there would be no point in emphasizing her virginity; and yet she bewailed her virginity, not her coming death. To mourn one's virginity does not necessarily mean to mourn because one has to die a virgin, but because one has to live and die as a virgin, and therefore would produce no descendants. His daughter was allowed two months of mourning, not to bewail her approaching death, but her virginity. The final phrase in the story is: <i>and she knew not man</i> . This does not conform well with death, but it conforms well with dedicated virginity. This statement would add nothing to the issue of her dying since it was already stated that she was a virgin. But, the statement follows, <i>who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed</i> , and he did so by the fact that she remained a virgin. In other words, when the text states he did according to his vow, which is then followed by the next phrase, <i>she knew not man</i> , it means that he fulfilled the vow by her remaining a virgin. This statement does not harmonize with a physical sacrifice, but it does harmonize with a spiritual sacrifice to fulltime service in the Tabernacle, and therefore lifetime virginity. So Jephthah fulfilled the vow through the fact that she knew no man; i.e. he dedicated her life to the Lord as a spiritual burnt-offering in lifelong chastity.
Seventh,	the narrator never actually says that Jephthah killed or sacrificed his daughter. There was no altar at that time for human sacrifice on either side of the Jordan to which he could bring her. Furthermore, no priest would perform such a sacrifice.
Eighth,	the word <i>olah</i> or <i>burnt offering</i> implied "totally given to God," and the offerer received no portion of it back, and could not derive any benefit from it. With other offerings, the offerer often did receive some benefit or got part of it back, but not with the burnt offering. So when a virgin was set apart as a spiritual <i>olah</i> , she totally belonged to God and remained single. She remained a virgin for the rest of her life, and Jephthah derived no benefit, meaning no seed, from her. The result was the sure extinction of Jephthah's line since she was his only child. This was a stronger religious vow than the Nazirite Vow, which was temporary, while this one was lifetime. Judges 11:39 states that Jephthah performed his vow, and then it is followed by the statement that <i>she knew not man</i> . Again, this later phrase would be pointless if she had been put to death. But it has relevance if she was devoted to the service

	of God at the door of the Tabernacle for the rest of her life. Jephthah's lament was based on her being an only child. They were not lamenting her dedication to God's service, rather they were lamenting over the sure extinction of Jephthah's line. Thus both he and she bewailed her virginity.
Ninth,	Jephthah was approved by God in Samuel's address in I Samuel 12:11, and by Hebrews 11:32, which would not have been the case if he were guilty of such a gross idolatry as human sacrifice. To say, for example, that Samson also sinned is irrelevant because Samson was not guilty of idolatry. His disobedience was to the laws of God as a Nazirite, but he did not fall into idolatry. For Jephthah to offer up his daughter would be an idolatrous act, which would not have been commended by Samuel or by the writer of Hebrews.
Tenth,	Jephthah's negotiations with the king of Ammon show Jephthah did not as a matter of habit act rashly but instead thought things out first.
Eleventh,	the daughter's virginity and dedication was in the plan of God, as the chronology shows, and thus Jephthah's daughter would still be working in the Tabernacle when Hannah brought Samuel there to be raised. Although, according to First Samuel, some of the women working in the Tabernacle were not chaste, Jephthah's daughter was. Therefore, Samuel would have been around a spiritual woman as he was growing up in the Tabernacle.

So the better view is that Jephthah did not offer his daughter as a human sacrifice, but offered her in full-time service.