

# Judges 10-11 • The words of your mouth

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We are in the tenth chapter of Judges. Just having dealt with the rather lengthy fallout information that had been given us after the judgeship of Gideon. Who did such a great job at first, but then whose life just spiraled out of control. And affected his whole family. And we went through all of that with his son Abimelech and that whole thing. And that is in fact where Judges chapter 10 picks up.

Before we get started, let's just begin in prayer,

Heavenly Father, we thank You for giving us this time. And we pray that Your Holy Spirit, would use it to minister to our hearts. We pray, Lord God, that from these chapters, we would open our hearts to the things that You want to say, and the things that are in these verses and in these chapters that are wisdom for us to lay hold of. So grant us this we pray, Lord God. And open our hearts through Jesus Christ, amen. Amen.

Judges chapter 10 begins by saying in verse one that, "*1 After Abimelech there arose to save Israel Tola the son of Puah, son of Dodo, a man of Issachar, and he lived in Shamir in the hill country of Ephraim. 2 And he judged Israel twenty-three years. Then he died and was buried at Shamir.*

*3 And after him rose Jair the Gileadite, who judged Israel twenty-two years. 4 And he had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities, (That's their favorite number) called Havvoth-jair to this day, which are in the land of Gilead. 5 And Jair died and was buried in Kamon."* (ESV)

These two individuals and frankly not just these two, but some of the other individuals who are judges and mentioned very briefly in the Book of Judges, are known as minor judges. And not so much because they didn't do as much. But because we have such very little information about them. Much like we refer to the smaller, prophetic books in the Old Testament as minor prophets.

But you can see that between these two men they judged Israel a total of forty-five years. And it seems that while they were judging Israel that there was

relative propriety, maybe we should say, in terms of worship. It seems that people were sticking with the worship of the Living God. And it wasn't until after both of these men had passed, that we then read about a new return into paganism which is what takes place here in verse 6 and following.

And it's the broken record of Judges. But it begins in verse 6. Look with me in your Bible where it says, *"The people of Israel again (and that word is just all over, again) did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroath, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. And they forsook the LORD and did not serve him."* I want you to stop there for just a moment.

This is so ironic that we read that the people of Israel, took up the worship of these pagan deities. Because all of these gods (small - g) that Israel worshiped instead of Yahweh, are the very gods that the nations worshiped that Israel conquered. That's the interesting thing. Israel conquered all of these nations and their gods couldn't save them from Yahweh. And yet the people of Israel took up the worship of these gods.

And we have to ask ourselves the question: Who gave Israel their victory? Was it not Yahweh, Himself? Well, yes, it was Yahweh, the One True God, gave them the victory over these other nations, and so forth. But instead of worshiping and serving Yahweh, the one who had given them the victory, they chose to worship and serve the gods of the pagan nations around them. The very gods who could not keep those people from being conquered by Israel.

It's just so crazy that sort of thing. I mean, it's just insane. And yet when we think about our own lives, we realize that we are pretty much guilty of the same insanity. It's not uncommon for believers today to worship the things that God gave, instead of the God who gave them.

And we can worship our belongings. We can worship our house. We can worship... We can make idols of our yard, our other possessions. We can make idols of people, whom God gave into our lives. We can make idols of money and all sorts of other things. And just like Israel that idolatry seems to crop up in a time of easiness.

Because you'll notice that every time, before we read that Israel entered into a time of disobedience, it was coming out of a time of rest. It will usually say something to the effect of, and God gave Israel rest... Or, the land had rest from her enemies... Or, the people were at peace for this period of time. And then what happens? They move back into an idolatrous lifestyle.

And just like Israel, the kind of idolatry in our lives - where we put our focus on things or people - seems to also crop up when we are in those times of peace and rest. And when we go through a period of difficulty, it just... It brings us back to center, doesn't it? It just rattles us enough that we can bring our hearts back to the Lord.

And we're going to see here that, that is what the people of Israel did here. But just keep in mind, we can be just like Israel, lest we be a little, too hard on them.

Verse 7 goes on and it says, *"So the anger of the LORD was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of the Philistines (Which we'll deal with, frankly, in our next judge) and into the hand of the Ammonites, 8 and they crushed and oppressed the people of Israel that year. For eighteen years (in fact,) they oppressed all the people of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead."*

Now that's an important statement there that end of verse 8. Because it tells us where this oppression is really centered, although it will spill over. I want to, for those of you who are needing perhaps a reminder of the geography of the area. Let me put a map up here for you, so you can see it.



And you can see that this is a color-coded map of the tribes of Israel and their different tribal locations. I want you to notice on the right side of the map, you can see the tribe of Gad. And then right above Gad, perhaps you can read the word Gilead. It's the one - the word - that's going from down-to-up there. This is the area where we are focusing here tonight.

And you'll notice that right underneath and to the right of Gad, is the land of Ammon. Which is, of course, where the Ammonites come from. And where our story is focusing. It is the Ammonites, who along with the Philistines... But we're not going to deal with the Philistines yet. But they are the ones who are oppressing Israel during this time.

But I want you to notice on the map, which side of the Jordan... Can you see the Jordan River? It runs right along down by the left border of the tribe of Gad. That is the Jordan River. And Gad, you'll remember, is one of the tribes - along with Reuben and the half tribe of Manasseh - who took up positions on the other side of the Jordan.

God really never intended for His people to live there. But they wanted to live there. He gave them the land. And it invited all kinds of additional problems because of it. You'll notice that on the map, too, that I have circled the area of the tribe of Gad, where the Ammonites - the tribe of Gad and where the Ammonites were located.

And in the very next verse, we read that the Ammonites would also, periodically, make their way down into the land of Judah, which you can also see on the map. It's the larger area there in green.

And verse 9 says, *"And the Ammonites crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah and against Benjamin and against the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was (and note this) severely distressed."*

*10 And the people of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, "We have sinned against you, because we have forsaken our God and have served the Baals." And the LORD said to the people of Israel, "Did I not save you from the Egyptians and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites and from the Philistines? 12 The Sidonians also, and the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, and you cried out to me, and I saved you out of their hand. 13 Yet you have forsaken me and served other gods; therefore (and this is sobering; look what God says,) I will save you no more. 14 Go and cry out to the gods whom you have chosen; let them save you in the time of your distress."*

Now, obviously the gods that they have chosen are not going to be able to save them. They weren't even able to save their own people. But I want you to notice something new in this - in what we're going to read in the coming verses. There is a new cry of distress that we've never heard from Israel before. And it's refreshing.

Look with me in verse 15, *"And the people of Israel said to the LORD, (Look at this) 'We have sinned; do to us whatever seems good to you. Only please deliver us this day.'"*

And then I want you to notice further, and this is really incredible. We haven't seen this up to this point in the Book of Judges. But now they're saying... They're calling it sin. And I want you to notice a very real sign of repentance that takes place in the next verse.

It says, *"<sup>16</sup> So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD."* It has not said that, really, in that way up to this point, *"they put away the foreign gods."*

People, that is the definition of repentance: To repent is to turn around and go the other way. It literally means, a change of mind. But it carries with it the assumption of a change of action that goes along with that change of mind.

And I want you to notice God's response, at the end of verse 16. Because this is very important. It says, *"and he (meaning God) became impatient over the misery of Israel."* The NIV renders it this way, *"and he could bear Israel's misery no longer."* And what that basically means is, that God was moved. God was moved by their hardship, particularly, in the face of their repentance.

And in the same way, you and I need to learn to do what Israel did, at least in this instance. And that is refer to sin as sin. We live in a culture today, that is absolutely masterful at finding new ways to identify sin without calling it sin. And we can easily as Christians, take up that familiar refrain. And we've got to be careful not to do that. We can't re-categorize sin. We can't call it a mistake, or an oversight, or a byproduct of some rampant DNA, or something like that. We have to confess sin as sin. And when we do - when we confess sin as sin - God responds. God responds.

And in verse 17, it says, *"Then the Ammonites were called to arms, and they encamped in Gilead. And the people of Israel came together, and they encamped at Mizpah. <sup>18</sup> And the people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one*

*another, "Who is the man who will begin to fight against the Ammonites? He shall be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.""*

This is a slightly negative response, at least, that we're picking up here. The response of the people to the Lord's confrontation of them that they had completely gone away from any real true worship. And because of that, He was no longer going to help them. The response of the people to that was a genuine repentance. It was true. It was real. They put away the foreign gods from among them.

But their understanding of trusting God is so dulled, that you'll notice that the very next thing they do is they turn around and ask each other, so who are we going to find to help us here? Who's going to lead this thing?" They're looking for a human leader. They're seeking a human leader. And it's in the next chapter that we're going to hear about that. The leader that they chose.

As we go on here in chapter 11, look with me in your Bible. Verse 1 of chapter 11 says, *"Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute. Gilead was the father of Jephthah. 2 And Gilead's wife (meaning his legal wife, not the prostitute, but his legal wife, if you will) also bore him sons. And when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out and said to him, "You shall not have (any) an inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman.""*

It probably means that Jephthah's father died. And when that took place and the time for the sharing of the inheritance came around, the brothers got together and informed Jephthah that he would get nothing of their father's inheritance. And they basically, chased him away. Little did they know, they were chasing away the man that was going to deliver them from their enemies.

Verse 3 says, *"...Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob, and worthless fellows collected around Jephthah and went out with him."* Jephthah attracted a crowd but it wasn't a good one.

*"4 After a time the Ammonites made war against Israel. 5 And when the Ammonites made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead (And it's probably referring to the sons of Gilead. If not some, but all of them) went to bring Jephthah from the land of Tob. 6 And they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our leader, that we might fight against the Ammonites. 7 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?" 8 And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "That is (what we have that is) why (rather) 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." 9 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." 10 And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The LORD will be witness between us, if we do not do as you say." (and) 11 So Jephthah (went with them) 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."*

And what that means is, they went to Mizpah, and the Lord was called as a witness of these arrangements or these agreements.

*"12 Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites and said, "What do you have against me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?" 13 And the king of the Ammonites answered the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Israel on coming up from Egypt took away my land, from the Arnon to the Jabbok and to the Jordan; now therefore restore it peaceably."*

Now the Ammonites are basically saying here that they want the land returned to them that had been given to the tribe of Reuben, and Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh. You'll remember those plots of land were taken when Moses initially brought the people of Israel into the land. And Jephthah is going to give a little historical background on it. He gives them a little bit of a refresher here in verse 14 and following.

*It says, "14 Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites 15 and said to him, "Thus says Jephthah: Israel did not take away the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites, 16 but when they came up from Egypt, Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh. 17 Israel then 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."*

*18 Then they journeyed through the wilderness and went around the land of Edom and the land of Moab and arrived on the east side of the land of Moab and camped on the other side of the Arnon. But they did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was the boundary of Moab. 19 Israel then sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, king of Heshbon, and Israel said to him, 'Please let us pass through your land to our country,' 20 but Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory, so Sihon gathered all his people together and encamped at Jahaz and fought against Israel."*

This again, this is Jephthah giving this history lesson. *"<sup>21</sup> And the LORD, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all the people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them. So Israel took possession of all the land of the Amorites, who inhabited (the) country. <sup>22</sup> And they took possession of all the territory of the Amorites from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. <sup>23</sup> So then the LORD, the God of Israel, dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel; and are you to take possession of them?"*

And then I love this next comment. *"<sup>24</sup> Will you not possess what Chemosh your god gives you to possess? And all that the LORD our God has dispossessed before us, we will possess."*

This is a pretty interesting comment on Jephthah's part He's basically telling him, tell you what, let's make a deal. You guys live in the land that your god gives you. And we'll live in the land that our God gives you. How about we just call it even right there. Well, that's obviously going to make these guys mad but it's an interesting statement nonetheless.

Verse 25 says, *"Now are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever contend against Israel, or did he ever go to war with them?"*

He's referring to something that happened hundreds of years before, when Balak, the king of Moab, was very distressed about the people of Israel passing nearby his land. Remember he hired Balaam to curse them. And of course, that backfired on him. But even then, Balak did not go to war. He knew better. And he's saying, are you any better than Balak? He knew enough to stay home. So do you know good enough?..., " sort of a thing.

*"While Israel (verse 26) 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, 300 years, why did (not you) deliver them within that time?"*

He's basically saying, "You guys have taken 300 years to come back for this land? Where were you back then? How about your fathers, why didn't they do this?" And of course the reason is clear. They believed that they can get it back from Israel, because they appear right now to be stronger than Israel They've been harassing them for 18 years and they figure this is a good time to pounce on the opportunity to get this land back.

Verse 27, *"I therefore (Jephthah still speaking, I) have not sinned against you, and you do me wrong by making war on me. The LORD, the Judge, decide this*



day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon." <sup>28</sup> But the king of the Ammonites did not listen to the words of Jephthah that he sent to him.

*"<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 (listen to this very careful) and (he) 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." And this is going to prove for those of you that know the story to be a very foolish vow that we'll see in a very short time.*

But it says, verse 32, *"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."* Success. God empowered Jephthah, as a leader. He was able to push the Ammonites back and so forth.

*(And) "<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." 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 the 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."*

In the end, Jephthah's boldness and leadership ability, was ultimately not balanced by wisdom. He foolishly made a promise to the Lord, that if he was given victory, he would sacrifice the first thing that came out of his home when he got there. And as you saw, Jephthah got the victory. But when he got to his

home, it wasn't a bull, or a goat, or a sheep that came out of his door. It was his daughter celebrating the victory.

And as Westerners, we read this story, this passage and we're horrified. We're absolutely horrified. We're thinking, seriously? I mean, would he really do something so despicable? Well there are, I'll tell you, some Bible scholars who question whether he did. But the text sure seems to leave us without any doubt that he did in fact offer his daughter as a sacrifice.

Now, I want to be quick to add that the Lord, deplored the idea of human sacrifice. And if Jephthah knew the Mosaic Law, as well as he knew the history of Israel, which he knew well... He recited well, the history of Israel. But apparently didn't know the law. Because in the Mosaic Law, a vow of this kind could be substituted with an animal. And, in fact, God told them to do that.

Years later, king Solomon, would write in the Proverbs, "*It is a snare to say rashly, 'It is holy,' and (then) to reflect only after making vows.*" Or, as the NIV renders that verse,

**Proverbs 20:25 (NIV)**

*It is a trap for a man to dedicate something rashly and only later to consider his vows.*

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Why? Well, because God takes vows seriously. The Book of Numbers, particularly, covers this whole idea of vows and being very careful about what you say in a vow. In fact, Numbers 30:2 says,

**Numbers 30:2 (ESV)**

*If a man vows a vow to the LORD, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word. He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.*

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Which is God's way of saying, it's better not to make a vow or rather than to make one and to then break it. Jesus spoke of vows, you'll remember, earlier on in our study of Matthew.

**Matthew 5:33-37 (ESV)**

*"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil."*

*"Again you have heard that it was said to those of old, 'You shall not swear falsely, but shall perform to the Lord what you have sworn.' But I say to you, Do not take an oath at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not take an oath by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let what you say be simply 'Yes' or 'No'; anything more than this comes from evil."*

Or your Bible may say, *"from the evil one."* And James echoed the same exhortation, in the fifth chapter of his letter when he said,

**James 5:12 (ESV)**

*But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.*

*But above all, my brothers, do not swear, either by heaven or by earth or by any other oath, but let your "yes" be yes and your "no" be no, so that you may not fall under condemnation.*

If Jephthah, had just gone into battle without the vow, he still would have gotten the victory. That's the sad part about this whole thing. God, was going to give the victory. We read earlier the Spirit of the Lord came upon him and empowered him. And he could have gotten the victory without all this terrible foolishness. And it can be so hurtful.

James says elsewhere, concerning our words that become quick, and rash, and hurtful. He says,

**James 3:7-10 (ESV)**

*For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, can be tamed and has been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, full of deadly poison. With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth, come blessing and cursing. My brothers, these things ought not to be so.*

*For every kind of beast and bird, of reptile and sea creature, (they) can (all) be tamed and (they have) been tamed by mankind, but no human being can tame the tongue. It is a restless evil, (He refers to it here as) full of deadly poison. (He says) With it we bless our Lord and Father, and with it we curse people who are made in the likeness of God. From the same mouth, come blessing and cursing. (He says) My brothers, these things ought not to be.*

And then there are a lot of passages in the Book of Proverbs that talk about the tongue. But one of those that I'll share with you right here. Says,

**Proverbs 12:18 (ESV)**

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

*There is one whose rash words are like sword thrusts, (If you can imagine that) but the tongue of the wise brings healing.*

The question we all need to ask ourselves tonight is: What kind of a tongue do we have? Do we have one that is rash and foolish? And says things quickly, and in the heat of the moment, and the emotion of the moment? Or, do we have a tongue that considers what it's about to say? And in fact, brings healing.