

JEPHTHAH

1. His name meant “he opens.”
2. 6th Judge in the Book of Judges - i) Othniel (tribe of Judah); ii) Ehud (tribe of Benjamin); iii) Shamgar (tribe unknown); iv) Deborah (tribe of Benjamin or Ephraim); v) Gideon (tribe of West Manasseh).
3. A Gileadite (probably the tribe of Gad) on the east side of the River Jordan.
4. He was the son of a prostitute and was ostracised by his father’s family. His half-brothers disinherited him.
5. He fled north-east to a land bordered by Aram, Ammon and Gilead where he led a band of outlaws.
6. The Ammonites had laid claim to the territory of Gilead, between the Rivers Arnon to the south and the Yabbok to the north. Their oppression had lasted 18 years.
7. It is possible that the Ammonites had made an alliance with the Philistines so that between them they would control the north-south trade routes along the coast and through the Jordan valley, the fords across the Jordan and the east-west trade routes from the Jordan to the coast.
8. Desperate for relief, the elders of Gilead (who had turned a blind eye to Jephthah’s expulsion) capitulated to his demands and granted him full political and military leadership of the territory. Revenge was sweet.
9. Jephthah sent couriers to the king of Ammon with a history lesson which demonstrated that the king had no right to Gilead, but it fell on deaf ears. Hardly surprising if **point 7** was indeed the king’s agenda.
10. Jephthah took the initiative and invaded Ammon. He promised God that on his safe return he would offer up as a burnt sacrifice the first thing that came out of his house.
11. His blitzkrieg was successful and Ammon was subjugated.
12. On returning home, he was greeted by his only daughter playing music and dancing, just as Miriam had done at the Reed Sea. He reeled in horror as he realised the folly of his vow.
13. His daughter understood that his vow could not be annulled and persuaded him to allow her two months with her friends to mourn her virginity – possibly the lack of sexual pleasure and no prospect of a family.
14. She returned home as she had promised and, presumably, she died at the hands of her father.
15. As with Gideon, Jephthah was confronted by the tribe of Ephraim who came in force to his headquarters. They felt that they had been excluded from the victory over Ammon and threatened to destroy him.
16. Jephthah pointed out that he had sought their help in vain. Suitably affronted, he took control of the Jordan crossings which left the Ephraimites stranded on the wrong side of the river. He slew 42,000 men.
17. This inter-tribal conflict was the second civil war amongst the Israelites. Avimelech had started the first.
18. Jephthah was Judge of Israel for only six years.
19. We don’t know if the land had rest from external warmongers or internal quarrels.
20. At no point in Jephthah’s story did God or any of his angels materialise or perform any miracles for him.

**Notes by Nahum Gordon
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