

JUDGES AND RUTH: FACING GROUP APOSTASY AS INDIVIDUALS

Part VIII: Overcoming Social Inferiority To Serve God By Faith

(Judges 11:1-40)

I. Introduction

- A. One of the most difficult obstacles to functioning in a group can occur when one feels disadvantaged due to his background, ethnicity or religious heritage. He may even feel rejected by others.
- B. Jephthah suffered severe sociological discrimination, and his encounter with the Lord gives us insight on handling this need so we can be used by God even to **lead** the "group" that makes us feel so inferior to it!

II. Overcoming Social Inferiority To Serve God By Faith, Judges 11:1-40.

- A. Jephthah was rejected because of his illegitimate birth and Israel's history, Judges 11:1-3; 8:31; 9:1-57:
 1. Long before Jephthah's birth, Gideon, a judge in Israel, had a son named Abimelech by a concubine, Judges 8:31. This made Abimelech Gideon's sole illegitimate son, cf. Judges 8:30-31.
 2. Possibly feeling disadvantaged due to his birth, Abimelech sought to rule his countrymen at Shechem, his mother's home town. Thus, he publicly slaughtered nearly all of Gideon's legitimate sons to become king, Judges 8:31 with 9:1-5. This led to war and the death of Abimelech, Judges 9:6-57.
 3. Accordingly, when Jephthah was born as an illegitimate son of a harlot, he came into a socially outcast role that was even more despised by the deeds of Abimelech, the illegitimate son of Gideon, 11:1-2.
 4. Hence, he was cast out of accepted society by his relatives, and outlaws collected around him, 11:3.
- B. However, he trusted the Lord, and Jephthah thus countered his social stigma with some success, 11:4-29:
 1. When Israel became desperate for leadership to fight the Ammonites in Judges 10:18, the elders of Israel sought Jephthah, an outcast leader of outlaws, to lead them to victory, Judges 11:4-6.
 2. Jephthah wisely gained a promise from these elders that he would be their judge were he to deliver them from the Ammonites, and made a covenant with them before the Lord on the matter, 11:7-11.
 3. By using Scripture, Jephthah assumed the proper decision as leader in overcoming the Ammonites:
 - a. Jephthah opposed the Ammonites in the power of God by using Scripture's former pronouncements on Israel's rightful claim to the land the Ammonites had seized from Israel, Judges 11:12-28.
 - b. In faith in God and his rightful land claim, Jephthah led Israel into conflict with the Ammonites, and was used of God to subdue this enemy, Judges 11:29.
- C. On the other hand, Jephthah's lingering social insecurity caused him to fail to trust God completely, and it hindered him from gaining God's fullest blessings, cf. Judges 11:30-40:
 1. Not **sure** God would bless him with victory and acceptance in Israel, Jephthah made an unnecessary vow, Judges 11:30-31: he promised that were the Lord indeed to give him victory in battle, he would sacrifice to the Lord the first thing that came out of his house to greet him after the battle.
 2. Consequently, Jephthah's blessings were a mixed bag of joy and grief, Judges 11:32-40:
 - a. Joyfully, Jephthah gained a great military victory over the Ammonites, Judges 11:32-33.
 - b. Yet, in great grief, Jephthah's rash vow made out of his social insecurity led to continued social insecurity and inferiority for his beloved daughter, Judges 11:34-40: (a) The first party out of his house who greeted Jephthah when he returned from battle was his beloved and only child, his daughter, Judges 11:34-35! (b) Consequently, since she as a person could not be slain as a sacrifice, she was destined to live as an unwed woman who would thus bear no children for the rest of her life, Judges 11:36-40! This was a socially destitute experience for a woman in Ancient Israel, cf. Luke 1:24-25. (c) Hence, the social rejection Jephthah so dreaded, led to his making a rash vow in unbelief that only passed on the pain of social grief for the next generation in his daughter!

Lesson: *Though Jephthah's trust in God equipped him to gain personal acceptance in Israel by leading the nation to victory, his deep desire to gain victory and social acceptance led to a self-help, rash and unnecessary vow that only prolonged the grief of social inequities for his daughter!*

Application: *(1) If we suffer DEEP inferiority due to our background(s), we must TRUST God COMPLETELY with it and NOT resort to self-help manipulations! Otherwise, we can only hurt those around us we love! (2) Our ACCEPTANCE by others is GOD'S responsibility to solve, NOT OURS!*