

# Judges

## Lesson 21

After the death of Abimelech, Israel's sin began to foster again against the LORD. Each new generation of Israelites drifted further away from the covenant and commandments of the LORD and nearer to the worship of Baal and Ashtaroth. Tola and Jair helped curb the sin in some way that is not clear to us as the entry in the Scripture concerning these two men are vague at best. No less, Israel fell into Baal worship again, and the writer tells us of that sin and the entrance of the Philistines and Ammonites who oppressed the nation for eighteen years.

### d) Enter Philistines and Ammonites - Eighteen Years

#### (1) The Sin of Israel (10:6-9)

The writer tells us the sin of Israel in chapter 10, verse 6. *"Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; thus they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him.<sup>7</sup> The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the sons of Ammon.<sup>8</sup> They afflicted and crushed the sons of Israel that year; for eighteen years they afflicted all the sons of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in Gilead in the land of the Amorites.<sup>9</sup> The sons of Ammon crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah, Benjamin, and the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was greatly distressed."* (10:6-9)

As indicated in this passage, Israel was surrounded by Baal and Ashtaroth worshippers. Aram sat to the north of Israel, Sidon was northwest along the coast of Israel, Moab was southeast of Israel on the east side of the Dead Sea, and Ammon was on the east of Israel, on the far east side of Israel's eastern border on the east side of the Jordan River. What did Israel do to counter this significant influence of Baal and Ashtaroth worship? Nothing.

Enter the Philistines and Ammonites into the picture at the bidding of the LORD to oppress Israel. As you might remember, the Philistines were descendants of Egyptian heritage. As a reminder, Smith's Bible Dictionary states,

It has been generally assumed that Caphtor represents Crete and that the Philistines migrated from that island, either directly or through Egypt, into Palestine. But the name Caphtor is more probably identified with the Egyptian Coptos.<sup>5</sup>

As for the Ammonites, they were distant cousins of Israel through Abraham's nephew, Lot, who had two sons, Moab and Ammon. This group lived east of the tribal area of Gad next to the desert sands of modern-day Jordan and Iraq.

As for the Philistines, they lived on the coast of the Mediterranean Sea in the modern-day area called the Gaza Strip.

We are unclear as to the actual year the Philistines and Ammonites attacked and crushed Israel on the west side of the Jordan River, but, no doubt, it only took one year for them to oppress the nation. Then, according to the passage, that same year, they moved to afflict *"all the sons of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in Gilead in the land of the Amorites."* The mention of the Amorites in this verse does not mean that the Amorites were living in Gilead at the time. Instead, it means that the Israelites living in Gilead were on the land formally owned by the Amorites, specifically the land that was once controlled by Og, the king of the Amorites, who Moses totally defeated, destroyed all the people, and took the Amorite land to give to the tribes of Gad and half-tribe of Manasseh.

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<sup>5</sup> Smith, W. (1986). "Caphtor" In *Smith's Bible Dictionary*. Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

We must not confuse the Ammonite people with the Amorite people. The Ammonites were of the same heritage as Abraham and cousins to the Israelites, all being descendants of Noah's son, Shem. The Amorites were a Canaanite tribe, all descendants of Noah's son, Ham, through Ham's son, Canaan. As stated, the Amorites mentioned in this passage had been destroyed by Moses as recorded in Deuteronomy. The Ammonites, Israel's cousins, were not destroyed by Moses or Joshua.

In this passage, we learn that the Ammonite cousins of Israel, in conjunction with the Philistines, oppressed Israel for eighteen years. The Philistines were located to the west of Israel; the Ammonites were situated to the east of Israel. Both moved into Israel as oppressors. But the writer indicates in the passage that the Ammonite tribe “*crossed the Jordan to fight also against Judah, Benjamin, and the house of Ephraim, so that Israel was greatly distressed.*” From south to north, Judah's boundary touches Benjamin's southern boundary. Benjamin's northern border touches Ephraim's southern boundary. Attacked by Ammon, the lower strong section of Israel was greatly oppressed and distressed.

It is interesting to note before we continue that the Philistines have now become the enemies of Israel for the first time at the beginning of these eighteen years of oppression. They will continue from this point on to be bitter enemies of Israel even to this day in our lives.

### (2) The Cry of Israel (10:10-16)

The sin of Israel led to eighteen years of oppression, and that was long enough. Finally, we hear the cry of Israel. Verse 10. “*Then the sons of Israel cried out to the LORD, saying, “We have sinned against You, for indeed, we have forsaken our God and served the Baals.”*”<sup>11</sup> The LORD said to the sons of Israel, “*Did I not deliver you from the Egyptians, the Amorites, the sons of Ammon, and the Philistines?*”<sup>12</sup> *Also when the Sidonians, the Amalekites and the Maonites oppressed you, you cried out to Me, and I delivered you from their hands.*”<sup>13</sup> *Yet you have forsaken Me and served other gods; therefore I will no longer deliver you.*”<sup>14</sup> *Go and cry out to the gods which you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress.*”<sup>15</sup> The sons of Israel said to the LORD, “*We have sinned, do to us whatever seems good to You; only please deliver us this day.*”<sup>16</sup> *So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD; and He could bear the misery of Israel no longer.*” (10:10-16)

Just as before in the previous four cycles of sin, the people cried to the LORD, and He gave them a lecture concerning all He had done for them and how they had rejected Him. In this case, the LORD told Israel to go beg Baal to save them from the oppression. But Israel was caught. They knew Baal could not help them. They knew they had sinned. They knew they needed the LORD. What did Israel do? Israel cleaned up their act. They “*put away the foreign gods*” and began serving the LORD. The LORD saw their sincerity. The writer says, “*He could bear the misery of Israel no longer.*” In other words, the inpatients of the LORD with Israel's sin was over, and the LORD was obliged to help. I like what Keil and Delitzsch's Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament says about this phrase.

In order to bend the sinner at all, the love of God must withdraw its helping hand and make men feel the consequences of their sin and rebelliousness, that they may forsake their evil ways and turn to the Lord their God. When this end has been attained, the same divine love manifests itself as pitying and helping grace. Punishments and benefits flow from the love of God and have for their object the happiness and well-being of men.

### (3) The Search of Israel (10:17-18)

After crying to the LORD, it seems that Israel took it upon themselves to find a leader to bring victory against the Ammonites and Philistines. We see the search of Israel in verse 17. “*Then the sons of Ammon were summoned and they camped in Gilead. And the sons of Israel gathered together and camped in*

*Mizpah.*<sup>18</sup> *The people, the leaders of Gilead, said to one another, “Who is the man who will begin to fight against the sons of Ammon? He shall become head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.”* (10:17-18)

Evidently, the king of Ammon, or at least his commander, had gathered all the Ammonite army in a section of land in Gilead that had been captured. A summons had been issued for this gathering to take place, and all of Ammon's troops were there.

Learning that Ammon's troops were in Gilead, Israel gathered its troops in Mizpah, which was also located in the land of Gilead, near the Ammonite troops. No doubt, Israel was ready to fight Ammon, but Israel needed a leader. *“Who is the man who will begin to fight against the sons of Ammon?”* they asked. Israel needed a leader. Israel needed someone to organize the battle. Israel needed someone to sound the alarm and start the battle. Israel needed someone who could win the battle. But who would that be? As we will see next, Israel began to fight with Ammon even though they did not have the Lord's chosen man to judge in place.

## Chapter 11

### e) Enter Jephthah – Israel's Judge - Six Years

#### (1) The Selection of Jephthah

##### (a) His Disputed Family

Enter Jephthah into the scene as Israel's judge for six years. The writer begins with Jephthah's disputed family heritage. Chapter 11, verse 1. *“Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a valiant warrior, but he was the son of a harlot. And Gilead was the father of Jephthah. <sup>2</sup> 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.”*<sup>3</sup> *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.”* (11:1-3)

We are first introduced to Jephthah as a “*valiant warrior*” of the Gileadite family line. What does that mean? First, it means that in his life, Jephthah had proven himself to be a brave, courageous, and fearless soldier in military conflicts. Second, if you have never looked at scholar's comments in various commentaries, you would never know that this description of Jephthah is highly convoluted, and many disagree on how to explain it. Let me explain. If we take this passage and try to understand it at its face value with only the information on this page, here is what we gather in our knowledge. Jephthah was the son of Gilead, and that made him a Gileadite because the family was large. However, Jephthah's mother was not a legal wife of Gilead. Instead, she was a harlot or what is known today as a prostitute. In addition, Gilead's legal wife bore him more sons who were clearly in line to receive an inheritance when Gilead died. Not wanting Jephthah to share in that inheritance, the sons of the legal wife ran him off to the land of Tob, where Jephthah became the leader of a band of thugs who were well known for their war and battle successes. Simple. Yes? No.

Why? Here is where scholars take a turn with this story and conjure up a deeper meaning that has its roots buried many years in the past before Jephthah was born. Let me say this here as a reminder. Two similar stories with similar names and similar circumstances do not mean that the two stories are the same story. Let me explain.

Verse 1 says, “*Now Jephthah the Gileadite.*” The word *Gileadite* tells us that Jephthah was a descendant and member of the tribe of Manasseh. If you will remember, Joseph's son, Manasseh, had only one son, who was named Machir. Machir had several sons. He called one of his sons Gilead. Here is where the heritage problem begins. Gilead's mother was a concubine, not a legal wife of Machir. At this point in the passage, many scholars of the past have struggled with the writer's intent because of information about Gilead given in the book of 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles.

*The sons of Manasseh were Asriel, whom his Aramean concubine bore; she bore Machir, the father of Gilead. <sup>15</sup> Machir took a wife for Huppim and Shuppim, whose sister's name was Maacah. And the name of the second was Zelophehad, and Zelophehad had daughters. <sup>16</sup> Maacah, the wife of Machir bore a son, and she named him Peresh; and the name of his brother was Sheresh, and his sons were Ulam and Rakem.*

*<sup>17</sup> The son of Ulam was Bedan. These were the sons of Gilead the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh.<sup>6</sup>*

If Manasseh had only one son, who was “Asriel?” Some scholars say *Asriel* is the name of the Aramean concubine. However, that cannot be true because *Asriel* is the son of the concubine. But is *Asriel* the son of Manasseh? Or is *Asriel* the son of Machir? Furthermore, was the Aramean concubine the mother of Machir, Manasseh’s only son? What are we to make of this obscure passage?

We must be thankful for the book of Numbers because it tells us that *Asriel* is the son of Gilead.

*The sons of Manasseh: of Machir, the family of the Machirites; and Machir became the father of Gilead: of Gilead, the family of the Gileadites. These are the sons of Gilead: of Iezer, the family of the Iezerites; of Helek, the family of the Helekites; and of Asriel, the family of the Asrielites; and of Shechem, the family of the Shechemites; and of Shemida, the family of the Shemidaites; and of Hepher, the family of the Hepherites. Now Zelophehad, the son of Hepher had no sons, but only daughters; and the names of the daughters of Zelophehad were Mahlah, Noah, Hoglah, Milcah and Tirzah. (Numbers 26:29-32)*

Because of the placement of the name of *Zelophehad* in both passages, it is clear that *Asriel* was the son of Gilead by an Aramean concubine. *Asriel* was the great-grandson of Manasseh and, in the Hebrew way of considering sons, still a son of Manasseh as a great-grandson.

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<sup>6</sup> *New American Standard Bible, 1995 Edition: Paragraph Version*. (1995). (1 Ch 7:14–17). La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation.