

• *Ammonite demands*

The king of the Ammonites has an excuse for his attacks upon Israel. Ammon is demanding territory to be returned which (says the king) was stolen by the Israelites during the time when they first marched into Canaan ^{¶1}. He demands to be given the area to the east of the river Jordan between the Arnon and Jabbok rivers ^{¶2}, the area to the east of the northern half of the Dead Sea.

¶1 11:13
¶2 11:14

• *Jephthah's surprising knowledge of the historical facts*

At this point Jephthah shows a surprising knowledge of Israel's history. He has done his homework and is very familiar with what happened as Israel progressed northwards from the edge of the Sinai desert. Israel did not take any territory belonging to Moab to the south of Ammon; nor did Israel take any of Ammon's territory ^{¶1}. The first territory which Israel met which was related to Abraham and his family was Edom. The Edomites were descended from Esau, Jacob's brother. Israel asked permission to go through their territory but Edom refused ^{¶2}. Then they asked for similar permission from the people of Moab; they were descendants of Lot, Abraham's nephew. Moses was forbidden to attack Edom ^{¶3} or Moab ^{¶4}.

¶1 11:15

¶2 11:16-17a
¶3 see Numbers 20:14-21
¶4 Deuteronomy 2:9

• *No Ammonite territory was invaded*

So they stopped their northward travels at Kadesh ^{¶1}. Later they turned right and went around the territories of Edom (in the south) and Moab (north of Edom) ^{¶2}. When they reached the area north of the Arnon river (Moab's northern boundary) they were coming into an area ruled by Sihon, king of the Amorites. Again Israel asked permission to pass through their territory peaceably ^{¶3}; Sihon refused and attacked Israel ^{¶4}. The war was commenced by Sihon, but the Amorite king was defeated and his territory fell to Israel as a result ^{¶5}. No territory of the Ammonites was invaded (note Numbers 20:24).

¶1 11:17b

¶2 11:18

¶3 11:19
¶4 11:20
¶5 11:21-22

• *Jephthah speaks tactfully based on accurate knowledge*

Jephthah knows all of this and points it out to the Ammonite king. He mentions Moab because some of the territory claimed by the Ammonite king belongs to Moab. Israel captured territory south of Ammon as a result of war. What is interesting in all of this is to note how well Jephthah the 'adventurer', the rejected son of a prostitute, knows the history of the people of God. God made it quite clear that the disputed territory was Israel's ^{¶1}. Jephthah says to the king of Ammon 'You take what your god Chemosh gives you!'. He is speaking tactfully and respectfully of the god the Ammonites believe in. Chemosh was actually a Moabite god rather than an Ammonite god. But it seems that the Ammonites conquered Moabite lands north of the river Arnon, and adopted the religion of the area. So 'Chemosh' is the appropriate god to mention when thinking of northern Ammonite territory. The king of the Ammonites would do well to follow the example of Balak king of Moab and keep away from fighting Israel ^{¶2}. Jephthah insists that Israel has occupied the territory of Sihon for a long time; it had never belonged to Ammon. If Ammon attacks Israel God will act as Judge and give victory to Israel ^{¶3}.

¶1 11:23-24

¶2 11:25

¶3 11:26-27

1. Some gifted people may be found in some obscure places

1. Some gifted people may be found in some obscure places. Every part of our story reveals Jephthah as a knowledgeable person, a peaceful person, a diplomat who will turn to war only if he is forced to do so. Who would have thought that Jephthah, the son of a despised harlot, would know so much history! Who would have thought that he could have any political skill at all? But God has a habit of taking

ordinary people and – in a way that gives no glory to human cleverness – training them in knowledge and skill ready for usefulness in His kingdom.

• God loves to prepare people in obscure places

God loves to use people whom He has hidden away in obscure places. Much that God is doing in the world does not get noticed by the rich and the famous. God did not prepare Jesus to be the Saviour in mighty Athens or in Rome or even in Jerusalem. He prepared His Saviour in obscurity.

2. Jephthah now put his past experience to good use.

2. Jephthah now put his past experience to good use. He had been used to commanding a band of ‘adventurers’. In between his escapades this Jephthah had become a peace-maker, a thinker, a historian, a gifted negotiator. There must have been many times when Jephthah wondered whether anything good would come of his life. All he was good for was leading a mob of rough and tough ‘adventurers’ who went with him on various mercenary and military escapades. It did not look as if it was the kind of life that would ever do any good for anyone else. But suddenly the very experiences Jephthah had gone through became the very thing that was needed for the people of God. Everything in our past is useful in one way or another. He turned out to have precisely the mixture of experiences that were needed.



3. Jephthah put peace-making first but was willing to trust God for vindication

3. Jephthah put peace-making first but was willing to trust God for vindication. Sadly Jephthah’s attempts at peacemaking did not do much good ¹ although it revealed Jephthah as a gifted leader, worthy of a position of leadership in Gilead. Jephthah showed himself a great man when he revealed that he wanted if possible to live at peace with everyone (as Paul might have put it – see Romans 12:18). He was willing to fight as the rest of the story reveals, but conflict was his second choice and peace-making was his first choice.

¹ 11:28

When he has done his best, he looks to God for help. ‘The Lord the Judge be judge this day!’ When he has done all that he can to bring about peace, he is ready to take whatever action might be needed and look to God, that God might show in the outcome of events who is right and who is wrong. One day all disputes will be settled. When God acts as Judge, He puts down the wicked and exalts those ‘in the right’. He is slow to act as Judge, for He prefers that we find justice in the way of peace. After peace-making comes judgement.

• After peace-making comes Judgement

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