

## **“Don’t Let Your Beginning Determine Your Ending”**

**Judges 11:1-11**

**05/10/11**

**Introduction:** Most sports fans understand that if the team they are supporting plays well at the beginning of the game that does not necessarily mean that their team will win the game. It is not until the end of the game that the winner is determined. In other words, although the beginning of a game may assist with the outcome, it does not always determine the ending. Today, we will read about a man whose life began in a not-so-favorable situation, but that situation did not determine his future (ending). Reading this story should encourage us to not let our past control our future (**Philippians 3:13**).

### **Verses 1-3**

### **The Animosity**

Here we see the animosity (hostility) that Jephthah experienced. In verse 1, Jephthah is identified as a mighty man of valor. In a military situation, this means a strong adept warrior, such as Gideon (**Judges 6:12**). We read that Jephthah’s father was Gilead and his mother was a **prostitute** (harlot). From the text, we can infer (or surmise) that Jephthah was mistreated by Gilead’s other sons because he was a child of another woman (vs. 2). There are many lessons we can learn here. As Christians, we need to remember that we are not what others **label** us as (who they say we are). God says we are called, chosen, holy, the head and not the tail (**1 Peter 2:9**) (**Deuteronomy 28:13**). Many of us have experienced animosity because of who we are, because of our past, etc. But, let’s ask ourselves how often have we displayed animosity towards others because of how they look, their economic status, level of education, denomination, etc.? When we experience animosity, instead of getting upset, we should ask the Holy Spirit to convict us of similar attitudes that may be in our own hearts (**Matthew 7:3**). Remember, God works in us (first) and then through us (to transform others) (**John 12:24**). When we bless others in word or deed, we are in fact setting ourselves up to be blessed (by God) as well. We see that Jephthah ran away from his family and banded with worthless (“vain”) men. He became involved in leading attacks against the Ammonites and other pagan peoples. This brought **fame** to Jephthah. It also enabled Jephthah to build his military skills. As in this man’s situation, sometimes God takes us out of our environment to work on our predicament. Even though the animosity was **disheartening** to Jephthah, we will see that God had a better plan for him. In tough times, we need to focus on God’s purpose and not the pain. Our God is always in control (**Romans 8:31**).

## Verses 4-8

### The Approach

When the Ammonites **attacked** the Israelites, the elders of Gilead approached Jephthah. Even though Israel was being attacked and Jephthah was looked down upon, God sovereignly turned the bad circumstance into a favorable one for Jephthah. The people who had once rejected and expelled Jephthah now wanted him to lead them and fight their enemy (vs. 6-8). The elders were **desperate**. They were willing to make Jephthah their leader. This should encourage us. If we persevere, God can cause those who were against us to approach us in humility (**Proverbs 16:7**). This was also true in Joseph's life. Regardless of the situation we find ourselves in today, we should never give up (**2 Corinthians 4:15-18**) (**Romans 8:18**) (**1 Peter 1:7**). The truth is that God raised Jephthah to lead the Israelites to freedom from the oppression they were facing. In other words, when God has an **assignment** for us, no amount of disappointment can derail the plan. But, in the mean time, we need to have the right attitude. What kind of attitude should we have? We need to go about doing good things for others and praise God for what He is about to do for us. If we just do what we can do, God will do what we cannot do. Trials are sometimes unavoidable, but that does not mean that they have to be **unprofitable** for us (**James 1:2-3**). These are troubles that God allows in our lives to identify where we are spiritually and to develop us for where He wants us to go.

## Verses 9-11

### The Agreement

These three verses tell us that Jephthah and the elders reached an agreement. What was the agreement? If the Israelites win over the Ammonites, then Jephthah would become their **leader**. Notice the blessing that Jephthah was about to receive required him to do some work. He could not expect to be a leader without first doing something. In the same way, we cannot pray for a **blessing** and then not expect to work towards that blessing. God wants to bless us, but He expects us to believe and work for it. Here we see Jephthah's faith. In verse 9, he says, "the LORD deliver them to me." He understood that any **victory** he was going to experience was going to be through and by the Lord (**Psalm 20:7**) (**Zechariah 4:6**). In addition, the book of Hebrews identifies Jephthah as a man of faith (**Hebrews 11:32-33**). We understand that both parties (Jephthah and the elders) confirmed the agreement in a solemn public meeting and, through prayer, invoked God as their witness. These men realized that even though they could not see God with their physical eyes, He was present amongst them (**Psalm 34:15**). Jephthah's life shows us that when God determines our future, He doesn't consult our past. Persecution now could be a **promotion** later. Don't let your beginning determine your ending!

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