

Day 15 – Feb. 17

The decline of the People of God in the book of Judges continues with Jephthah. Jephthah, whose mother was a prostitute, is another step below the last judge in terms of morality. Though he is a pitiful figure, driven away from home by his brothers and seemingly a victim of circumstance when he has to kill his daughter, he is set also just a lesser leader than the previous judges, yet better than what is yet to come.

As I read about Jephthah's thoughtless vow today, I am drawn to the power of a promise. For the Israelites, here is yet another example of the unbreakable nature of a vow made to God. This is summarized in Ecc. 5, one of my favorite chapters in all of the scriptures, "4When you make a vow to God, do not delay to fulfill it. He has no pleasure in fools; fulfill your vow. 5It is better not to make a vow than to make one and not fulfill it. 6Do not let your mouth lead you into sin. And do not protest to the temple messenger, 'My vow was a mistake.' Why should God be angry at what you say and destroy the work of your hands?"

Growing up in our house, we seldom if ever "promised" our kids anything. This was not because we wanted to leave a loophole to wriggle out of but because we, having read this chapter, take our promises very seriously. To Promise something makes that vow unbreakable. If something at church came up after I promised my kids I'd be with them, I apologized to the church but would not break that vow to my family. And it is even more serious when we make a promise to God.

For Jephthah, the weight of this vow stood against the very life of his only daughter, and his vow was the more powerful. And interestingly this is not a character quirk of Jephthah, for his daughter recognized the same thing and offered herself to the flames rather than ask him to break his vow.

How often do we break our vows to each other? How often do we break our vows to God? This is more than a matter of our own honesty. It is a matter of God's holiness and position in our lives. So be careful before you make any promises to God. Weight the possible costs, and then decide. And if you make one, know that it is unbreakable, no matter what. God is worth that level of honor.