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**Unfinished Business** 6

**Ups and Downs** 14

**Deliverers** 22

**Coming to the Help of the Lord** 30

**Signs of Security** 38

**A Few Good People** 46

**Royalty and Disloyalty** 56

**Repentance and Rashness** 64

**Born to Win** 72

**The Ungolden Rule** 80

**Strong and Weak** 88

**Misguided Devotion** 96

**Civil War** 104

# Contents



## Meet the Principal Contributor to This Quarter's Lessons

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Before coming to Andrews University, Dr. Gane served as assistant professor of religion at Pacific Union College for two years. He is a member of the Society of Biblical Literature, the American Oriental Society, the Adventist Theological Society, and the Adventist Society for Religious Studies. He has written a number of journal articles, including " 'Bread of the Presence' and Creator-in-Residence," *Vetus Testamentum* 42:2 (1992), pages 179-203.

He is married to Connie Clark Gane, who holds a master of arts degree in Mesopotamian archaeology from the University of California, Berkeley. They have a young daughter, Sarah.



Check with your local Adventist Book Center for the companion book to the Sabbath School lessons.

# Repentance and Rashness



## *Sabbath Afternoon*

**READ FOR THIS WEEK'S STUDY:** Judg. 10:6–12:7.

**MEMORY TEXT:** “So they put away the foreign gods from among them and worshiped the Lord; and he could no longer bear to see Israel suffer” (Judges 10:16, NRSV).

**KEY THOUGHT:** When God's people repent and return to His covenant, He can provide for them as He has wanted to do all along. Zeal for God's cause is an inspiring and motivating force, but rashness is destructive.

**PROMISES, PROMISES.** A father promises his son an outing but does not mark the promise in his appointment book. Responsibilities come up. The father forgets his promise. But the son does not.

A bride vows to “love, honor, and cherish” until death. But down deep, she knows that if things don't go as well as she hopes, she can be divorced and marry someone else.

While he is partying, a king promises with an oath to give his daughter whatever she wishes. Prompted by her mother, she asks for the head of a preacher on a platter. “The king was distressed, but because of his oaths and his dinner guests, he ordered that her request be granted and had John beheaded in the prison” (Matt. 14:9, 10, NIV).

Promises are a problem! We are in trouble if we don't keep them, but sometimes we are also in trouble if we do keep them. Making a rash promise, which should not have been made in the first place, can result in a no-win situation. This was the predicament in which Jephthah found himself. He vowed, but it never occurred to him that his daughter's future was at stake!



**REPENTANCE (Judg. 10:6-16).**

They did it again! The Israelites forsook the Lord. Their worship turned into a veritable United Nations of pagan gods from Syria, Sidon, Moab, Ammon, and Philistia (Judg. 10:6). So the Lord "sold them" into the power of the Philistines and the Ammonites (verse 7, NRSV).

**Why do you think the Lord permitted the Philistines and Ammonites to oppress Israel?**

Which of the following best answers the question?

1. The Philistines were from the west, and the Ammonites were from the east, so the Israelites would get a double dose of oppression, from both sides.
2. Allowing the Israelites to suffer at the hands of the Philistines and Ammonites, whose gods they worshiped, is another example of the Lord's tailoring punishment to fit a crime.
3. By this means, the Lord could make the gods of the Philistines and Ammonites odious to the Israelites.
4. Another answer:
5. All the above.

**In Judges 10:10-16, the Lord directly confronts the Israelites with their apostasy. Compare this with earlier passages that are similar: Judg. 2:1-5; 6:7-10. What similarities and differences do you notice regarding (1) the identity of the one speaking to the people, (2) the indictment, referring to past history and present disloyalty, (3) opportunity for hope (or lack of it), and (4) the reaction of the people?**

In Judges 10:14, the Lord made it clear that because the people had abandoned Him, He had justly abandoned them: "Go and cry to the gods whom you have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your distress" (NRSV). But the people did not give up. They fully admitted their guilt and the right of God to punish them (verse 15). And they did something to demonstrate their sincerity: They rid themselves of their foreign gods and began to serve the Lord. Because they had responded positively, the Lord was able to help them (verse 16).

**How can you rid yourself of those things that stand between you and the Lord?**

**JEPHTHAH (Judg. 10:17–11:11).**

After the Israelites had turned again to the Lord, the Ammonite oppressors showed up again. The Israelites were now looking for a deliverer to lead the battle. Who could do it? The book of Judges leaves that question hanging and moves on to some apparently unrelated background information regarding Jephthah (Judg. 11:1-3). But when the Ammonite threat is mentioned again, it becomes clear that Jephthah is to be the deliverer (verses 4-11).

**Jephthah was an illegitimate son of a prostitute (Judg. 11:1). How did circumstances arising from this social handicap result in his being chosen as leader? Judg. 11:2, 3.**

Like Ehud, who was left-handed (Judg. 3:15), and Gideon, who was the least important member of the weakest clan in Manasseh (Judg. 6:15), Jephthah had what would have been regarded as a disadvantage. But this resulted in his having an advantage, as was also true in the case of Ehud (Judg. 3:16, 21).

The legitimate sons of Jephthah's father forced him into exile so that they could keep any share he may have had in his father's inheritance (Judg. 11:2). Fending for himself in the land of Tob, he became a leader of a raiding party (verse 3). Thus, when an experienced military leader was needed for the impending battle against the Ammonites, Jephthah was the logical candidate (verses 4-6).

**How did the elders of Gilead persuade Jephthah to lead the Israelites into battle? Judg. 11:6-11.**

Jephthah had been exiled from Gilead, so he was not prepared to risk his life on behalf of the Gileadites without a substantial reward (Judg. 11:7). So they offered not only to make him leader of an army to fight the Ammonites (verse 6); they also promised to make him the administrative chief of their territory (verse 8). He agreed to those terms and made a covenant with them, which was solemnized before the Lord at Mizpah (verses 9-11), where the Israelites had gathered (Judg. 10:17).

**Consider other Bible characters for whom God turned disadvantages into advantages. In what ways has God done this for you? Reviewing your experience, why do you think the Lord blessed you in this manner?**



**WORDS BEFORE WAR (Judg. 11:12-27).**

Rather than immediately rushing into battle, Jephthah tried to avoid war through diplomacy. The Ammonite king argued that when the Israelites came out of Egypt, they took the land between the Arnon and Jabbok rivers from the Ammonites. He demanded it back.

**What elements of truth and inaccuracy were contained in the demand of the king of Ammon? Judg. 11:13-22; Num. 21:21-30.**

The Israelites had taken this territory from Sihon, king of the Amorites, who had earlier taken it from Moab (Num. 21:21-30). It appears that in the time of Jephthah, the Ammonite king claimed to represent Moab. The Moabites had been weakened by their defeat at the hands of Ehud and his fellow Israelites (Judg. 3:28-30), so perhaps for a time they were allied to the Ammonites, who were related to them through Lot, the nephew of Abraham (Gen. 19:36-38).

Even if the Ammonite king could legitimately represent the Moabites, who at one time had owned the land, Jephthah argued that the Israelites had taken it from Sihon, king of the Amorites, not from the Ammonites (Judg. 11:14-23).

**What did Jephthah mean by saying, "Should you not possess what your god Chemosh gives you to possess? And should we not be the ones to possess everything that the Lord our God has conquered for our benefit" (Judg. 11:24, NRSV)?**

There was no United Nations to arbitrate such disputes, so Jephthah appealed to divine justice (verse 27) in accordance with the principle that God had established the boundaries of the Israelites in relation to other nations (Deut. 32:8). When they came out of Egypt, God had guided them by that principle when He forbade them to fight against their relatives, the Moabites and Ammonites (Deut. 2:9, 19).

Jephthah may or may not have understood the sovereignty of God over all nations, but in any case, he stated his case in a way that the foreign ruler could understand. Chemosh was the god of the Moabites (Num. 21:29), so Jephthah was addressing the Ammonite king as the ruler of Moab.

**What efforts does Satan continually make to reclaim "territory" in our lives that has been taken over by the Holy Spirit? What is the answer to Satan's claims?**



**VOW FOR VICTORY (Judg. 11:28-40).**

Since the Ammonite king did not accept Jephthah's reasoning, Jephthah went into action, motivated by the Spirit of the Lord. Like Gideon, he attacked the enemy before they attacked him.

**Why did Jephthah make the vow that he did? Judg. 11:30, 31.**

Jephthah valued the security of promises made before God. Perhaps his unstable background had made him particularly sensitive to human unreliability and the need for security that only God could provide. In any case, his willingness to lead the Israelites had been based upon promises witnessed by the Lord (Judg. 11:10, 11).

Jephthah felt a need for security. Rather than seeking signs, he vowed that if the Lord would give him victory, he would offer as a burnt offering whoever or whatever should meet him when he returned home.

**What was the result of his vow? Judg. 11:34-40.**

To his dismay, Jephthah was met by his only child, a daughter. God had fulfilled his condition by giving him victory. Now he felt obligated to fulfill his vow. Heroically, his daughter did not protest (compare Gen. 22:9), but she asked to live for two more months. Then, he "did with her according to the vow he had made" (Judg. 11:39, NRSV). At this point, perhaps out of a sense of horror, the biblical text avoids stating directly what happened: he offered her as a burnt offering (verse 31). This does not mean, of course, that he burned her alive; he would have slain her with a knife first. (Compare Gen. 22:10.)

What went wrong? The Lord was already with Jephthah. He did not need to make his rash vow; God would have given him victory anyway. The vow showed insufficient faith. Furthermore, once the vow was made and the daughter designated, Jephthah should have offered an animal as a substitute, just as Abraham offered in place of Isaac a ram provided by the Lord (Gen. 22:13, 14). God did not demand or approve of human sacrifice (Deut. 12:31), which was practiced by Jephthah's enemies, the Ammonites (Lev. 18:21; compare 1 Kings 11:7) and Moabites (2 Kings 3:26, 27).

**When is an oath rash, and when is it a commitment to display the victories faith has wrought in our lives? Matt. 5:33-37.**

**FRIENDS WHO BECAME ENEMIES (Judg. 12:1-7).**

Just as the Ephraimites had given Gideon trouble after he defeated the Midianites (Judg. 8:1), so a later generation of these fellow Israelites harassed Jephthah after he defeated the Ammonites.

**Compare the trouble the Ephraimites gave Gideon and the trouble they gave Jephthah. What similarities and what differences do you see between the two situations?**

In both situations, "the tribe of Ephraim is presented in an unfavorable light. They were passive in time of oppression, and arrogant when others had taken the initiative and won the victory."—*SDA Bible Commentary*, vol. 2, p. 379. Whereas the Ephraimites answered Gideon's call once the Midianites were on the run (Judg. 7:24, 25), they did not help Jephthah at all (12:2). The Ephraimites disputed with Gideon (8:1), but they assembled their troops against Jephthah (12:1). The Ephraimites backed off when Gideon spoke to them (8:3), but they taunted Jephthah (12:4).

**Why did Jephthah fight? Judg. 12:4-6.**

Which of the following best answers the above question?

1. The provocation was too severe to go unpunished.
2. Jephthah had just suffered an intense personal tragedy owing to his vow regarding his daughter. Aside from losing her, which was terrible enough, he would be deprived of descendants. His tolerance for nonsense from the Ephraimites would be at an all-time low.
3. Since the Ephraimites were about to attack him and his fellow Gileadites, Jephthah led an effective defense.
4. Another answer:
5. All the above.

Civil war! The book of Judges begins with Israelite tribes cooperating together (Judg. 1:1-3, 22, NRSV—"house of Joseph" = Ephraim and Manasseh). They also cooperated under Barak (Judg. 5:14, 15, 18) and Gideon (Judg. 7:23-25). But intertribal problems grew from apathy (Judg. 5:15-17) to contention (Judg. 8:1-3) and finally, to war (Judg. 12:1-6). The Israelites had become their own enemies!

**How can we avoid strife among ourselves?**



**FURTHER STUDY:** On the topic of respect for oaths, read Joshua 9, describing the circumstances surrounding a treaty that the Israelites made with the Gibeonites. Read Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, "The Earlier Judges," pp. 557-559.

"The Gibeonites had pledged themselves to renounce idolatry, and accept the worship of Jehovah; and the preservation of their lives was not a violation of God's command to destroy the idolatrous Canaanites. Hence the Hebrews had not by their oath pledged themselves to commit sin. And though the oath had been secured by deception, it was not to be disregarded. The obligation to which one's word is pledged—if it does not bind him to perform a wrong act—should be held sacred. No consideration of gain, of revenge, or of self-interest, can in any way affect the inviolability of an oath or pledge. 'Lying lips are abomination to the Lord.' Proverbs 12:22. He that 'shall ascend into the hill of the Lord,' and 'stand in His holy place,' is 'he that sweareth to his own hurt, and changeth not.' Psalms 24:3; 15:4."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 506.

#### DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

1. What are the implications of the above statement (especially "if it does not bind him to perform a wrong act") for Jephthah's decision to sacrifice his daughter (Judg. 11:35)?
2. Do "moral dilemmas" really exist? In other words, is it ever true that keeping one of God's requirements necessarily results in breaking another of His requirements?
3. Do you keep your promises faithfully? What is the difference between ordinary promises on the one hand and vows, oaths, or pledges on the other hand?
4. What issues regarding vows are addressed in Numbers 30?

**SUMMARY:** When the Israelites turned again to God, putting away those things that came between themselves and Him, He forgave them and mercifully turned again to help them. To deliver them from the Ammonites, God raised up Jephthah as their leader. Jephthah was zealous for the Lord, but at a highly stressful time, he sought assurance from God in an unwise way, which was not consistent with faith. Rash vows that dishonor God should not be kept.



## Would You Be Willing to Try?

Adly Campos

Night after night Louis attended the evangelistic meetings in Mexico City alone. He seemed intensely interested in the topics on the home that were presented each evening. One night after the meeting, he stopped me. "I wish I had known what you are presenting before I got married, and now I don't know if it is possible to save our marriage. But I would like you to talk with my wife," he pleaded. I usually do not counsel someone who has not come to me for help, and she had not attended the meetings, so I felt I had little influence over her. But the pastor and I went to visit Louis' wife, and she agreed to talk with me. She was a fragile soul, wounded by misunderstanding, jealousy, and mistrust. This was her second marriage; the first one failed because of her husband's infidelity. Louis did not realize the trauma she had suffered in her first marriage and did not know how to treat her tenderly.

As we talked, tears flowed down her face, but after the storm of emotions, she began to realize that with Jesus, there was hope for their marriage. Mariela was willing to talk with her husband and receive marriage counseling. The next day Louis and Mariela came together to talk. The atmosphere was full of sincerity, recognition and acceptance. The couple asked pardon of each other, held hands, embraced, and finally decided to stop the divorce process.

Louis had attended a church but had never surrendered his life to the Lord. Mariela had been a Christian, but had abandoned her faith long ago. I explained the importance of inviting Jesus into the home. But Mariela was reluctant to be rebaptized.

Louis and Mariela began coming to the meetings together. They looked like a newly married couple. On Sabbath Louis stood to request baptism, and to his surprise and ours, Mariela suddenly appeared beside him; they were baptized together. Following their baptism Louis and Mariela reconsecrated their marriage to God at the close of the series of meetings. Louis and Mariela are good examples of what Jesus can do to create a happy home!



**Adly Campos is an administrative secretary in the Ministerial Association of the General Conference. She conducts family-life evangelistic meetings in Hispanic communities.**

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## Mission Projects:

- Sahel Union: Build chapels for new groups of believers.
- West Zaire Union: A medical clinic in Mbandaka, Zaire, and a medical launch to treat people living along the Zaire River.
- Nigeria: Build a multipurpose/classroom building on the campus of Adventist Seminary of West Africa.
- Madagascar: Build two medical clinics, one in the north and one in the south of Madagascar.



# AFRICA-INDIAN OCEAN DIVISION

Unions	Churches	Membership	Population
Burundi Mission (Attached Field)	117	40,863	6,000,000
Central Africa Union Mission	651	72,235	26,700,000
East Zaire Union Mission	812	169,729	22,383,250
Indian Ocean Union Mission	225	44,374	15,538,883
Nigeria Union Mission	539	123,083	98,100,000
Rwanda Union Mission	806	285,440	7,500,000
Sahel Union Mission	86	11,439	69,900,000
West Africa Union Mission	592	192,154	25,845,669
West Zaire Union Mission	293	109,440	20,106,750
Totals December 31, 1994	4,121	1,048,757	292,074,552