

14.14b Ninth Judge—Jephthah’s Victory and Vow (Judges 11:11–12:7)

✓ “*Check*” it out; opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows

[. . .] indicates a remark to the teacher that usually should not be read. It also indicates answers to questions.

Visuals and Tools:

- Pictures and other visuals found at the end of this lesson. Please give credit to the sources of pictures.
- Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional materials.

Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach: Vocabulary words are enlarged for flashcards at the end of this lesson. Print, cut out, and glue to card stock, or just print on colorful cardstock.

- *civil war*: war between citizens of the same country

Scripture: (ESV)

Judges 11:12 Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites and said, “What do you have against me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?” 13 And the king of the Ammonites answered the messengers of Jephthah, “Because Israel on coming up from Egypt took away my land, from the Arnon to the Jabbok and to the Jordan; now therefore restore it peaceably.” 14 Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites 15 and said to him, “Thus says Jephthah: Israel did not take away the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites, 16 but when they came up from Egypt, Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh. 17 Israel then sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, ‘Please let us pass through your land,’ but the king of Edom would not listen. And they sent also to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh.

18 “Then they journeyed through the wilderness and went around the land of Edom and the land of Moab and arrived on the east side of the land of Moab and camped on the other side of the Arnon. But they did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was the boundary of Moab. 19 Israel then sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, king of Heshbon, and Israel said to him, ‘Please let us pass through your land to our country,’ 20 but Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory, so Sihon gathered all his people together and encamped at Jahaz and fought with Israel. 21 And the Lord, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them. So Israel took possession of all the land of the Amorites, who inhabited that country. 22 And they took possession of all the territory of the Amorites from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. 23 So then the Lord, the God of Israel, dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel; and are you to take possession of them? 24 Will you not possess what Chemosh your god gives you to possess? And all that the Lord our God has dispossessed before us, we will possess. 25 Now are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever contend against Israel, or did he ever go to war with them? 26 While Israel lived in Heshbon and its villages, and in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities that are on the banks of the Arnon, 300 years, why did you not deliver them within that time? 27 I therefore have not sinned against you, and you do me wrong by making war on me. The Lord, the Judge, decide this day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon.” 28 But the king of the Ammonites did not listen to the words of Jephthah that he sent to him.

29 Then the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh and passed on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed on to the Ammonites. 30 And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, “If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, 31 then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the Lord’s, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.” 32 So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them, and the Lord gave them into his hand. 33 And he struck them from Aroer to the neighborhood of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim, with a great blow. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel.

34 Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah. And behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances. She was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter. 35 And as soon as he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you

have become the cause of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow.” 36 And she said to him, “My father, you have opened your mouth to the Lord; do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the Lord has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites.” 37 So she said to her father, “Let this thing be done for me: leave me alone two months, that I may go up and down on the mountains and weep for my virginity, I and my companions.” 38 So he said, “Go.” Then he sent her away for two months, and she departed, she and her companions, and wept for her virginity on the mountains. 39 And at the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow that he had made. She had never known a man, and it became a custom in Israel 40 that the daughters of Israel went year by year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.

12:1 The men of Ephraim were called to arms, and they crossed to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, “Why did you cross over to fight against the Ammonites and did not call us to go with you? We will burn your house over you with fire.” 2 And Jephthah said to them, “I and my people had a great dispute with the Ammonites, and when I called you, you did not save me from their hand. 3 And when I saw that you would not save me, I took my life in my hand and crossed over against the Ammonites, and the Lord gave them into my hand. Why then have you come up to me this day to fight against me?” 4 Then Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and fought with Ephraim. And the men of Gilead struck Ephraim, because they said, “You are fugitives of Ephraim, you Gileadites, in the midst of Ephraim and Manasseh.” 5 And the Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan against the Ephraimites. And when any of the fugitives of Ephraim said, “Let me go over,” the men of Gilead said to him, “Are you an Ephraimite?” When he said, “No,” 6 they said to him, “Then say Shibboleth,” and he said, “Sibboleth,” for he could not pronounce it right. Then they seized him and slaughtered him at the fords of the Jordan. At that time 42,000 of the Ephraimites fell.

7 Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in his city in Gilead.

Introduction/Review:

Do you remember Lot, the nephew of Abraham who was rescued from Sodom? Lot’s descendants are Moab/Moabites and Ammon/Ammonites. In Deuteronomy 2:9 and 19 God had told Israel not to fight these two nations as they came into Canaan. Even when these people refused to let Israel pass through their country on the highways, Israel did not fight them. However, when the Amorites refused to let Israel pass through their country and came out against them, Israel did fight against the Amorites and won much territory (from the Arnon River to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan) from kings Sihon and Og.

Jephthah had been rejected by his brothers. But when those brothers were being troubled by the Ammonites, they called on Jephthah to help them out, even making him their chief ruler. Last week we said Jephthah must have been a God-fearing man, for he brought all his concerns before the Lord.

Story:

Why fight?

Preparing to face the Ammonites in battle, Jephthah sent messengers to the king of Ammon, asking, “Why are you fighting us?”

The king answered, “Because Israel took away my land three hundred years ago when they came from Egypt into Canaan. Now give me that land back.”

Jephthah responded, “Israel did not take away Moab’s land nor Ammon’s land. In fact, we sent messengers to Edom and Moab, asking to travel their roads, but they didn’t allow this; so we went around the land. We asked the Amorites also, but they came out for war against us. We won the battle, and the Lord gave us all that land. Why should you have the land the Lord won for us from the Amorites? Why not just conquer the land your god Chemosh gets for you? Do you think you are better than Balak, king of Moab, who refused to fight us? His descendants haven’t fought us since then.¹ Why haven’t you come to get your supposed land in all these three hundred years? Israel has *not* sinned against you, but you do wrong to war against me. The

Lord, the Judge, shall judge between us today.”

When the king of Ammon insisted on fighting Israel, the Spirit of God came upon Jephthah, and he and the men of Gilead and Manasseh [locate] went to war.

Why such a vow?

Jephthah lived wholeheartedly for the Lord, but I think he made a big mistake in his zeal for God. He vowed, “If You give the Ammonites into my hand, then whatever comes out of my house to meet me when I return shall be the Lord’s.” ✓I wonder what he thought would greet him—his dog? a pet sheep?

God did give victory to Jephthah and Israel: they conquered twenty cities and much territory. Israel now could take this land from Ammon because they had conquered it in a war provoked by Ammon. From then on Ammon was subdued and did not harass Israel anymore.

Jephthah went home to Mizpah. He remembered his vow: he would give to God whatever came out of his house first. He might have wondered, ✓“What would come out of his house? When he arrived, it was not *what* but *who* that greeted him—his . . . daughter, his only child. ✓She was so happy to see her victorious father that she came out of the house with a tambourine and danced, ✓maybe saying, “Praise the Lord for victory! The Lord used my father, Jephthah, to defeat the Ammonites!”

Jephthah, grieved at the sight of his daughter but intent on fulfilling his vow, tore his clothes, crying out, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow.”²

But Jephthah’s daughter humbly submitted to her father, saying, “Father, do to me as you promised because God has defeated the enemy, the Ammonites. However, since I will not be married before I die, please let me go throughout the land with some friends for two months in order to lament the fact that I will not be married.”

Jephthah allowed her to do this. It became a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went four days every year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

Why be so offended?

But that’s not the end of the story. Remember how the Ephraimites of Israel whined against Gideon that he hadn’t asked them to come fight the Midianites at first? Guess who comes whining again, trying to pick a fight? The Ephraimites. “Why didn’t you call us?” they asked Jephthah.

Jephthah answered, “I *did* call, but you didn’t come to help. Why are you coming to fight against me now?”

Since the Ephraimites had provoked this war, Jephthah fought against them in a civil war. Gilead, Jephthah’s territory, was east of the Jordan River; Ephraim’s was west of Jordan. Jephthah’s men guarded the Jordan River while Jephthah chased the Ephraimites. As Ephraimites tried to get across the river in order to flee to their homes, Jephthah’s guards asked, “Are you an Ephraimite?”

The Ephraimites would answer, “No.”

Then the guards would demand, ✓“Say, ‘I want to cross this stream.’” The Hebrew word for *stream* was *Shibboleth*. The guard wanted the man to say *Shibboleth* because Ephraimites couldn’t say *Shibboleth*. Rather, they pronounced it as *Sibboleth*.

✓“Aha!” Jephthah’s guards might have said. “You can’t say *Shibboleth*. You *are* an Ephraimite! Take that, you traitor!” as he thrust the man through with a sword.

Many (42,000) Ephraimites were slain in that civil war. Why would God allow the killing of His own people? Well, what had these people been doing? [Worshipping false gods.] God used one of their own, Jephthah, to punish His own people for their disloyalty to Him and for their wicked worship of idols.

Jephthah ruled six years.

¹“Israel had dwelt in three hundred years; and during this time, neither Balak king of Moab, nor any of his successors, had ever disputed Israel's title to those cities, or commenced a war with them on account of them; but they had continued in the peaceable enjoyment of them so long as three hundred years; which are thus reckoned in the Jewish chronology; Joshua governed Israel twenty eight years, Othniel forty, Ehud eighty, Deborah forty, Gideon forty, Abimelech three, Tola twenty three, Jair twenty two, and eighteen years Israel was oppressed by the children of Ammon, which with the six years of Jephthah make just three hundred; so that, according to this computation, there were six years short of it; but being so near, the round number is given” (<https://www.biblestudytools.com/commentaries/gills-exposition-of-the-bible/judges-11-26.html>).

²Bible scholars are divided on what Jephthah actually did to fulfill his vow. Did he offer his daughter as a burnt offering, or did he keep her a perpetual virgin? John Calvin gives five reasons why the latter is likely what happened: #1) “Women Nazarites were . . . offered to God, and as a part of their ‘holiness’ requirement they were forbidden to marry (Numbers 6:1, 8; Leviticus 12). #2) “It is very improbable that Jephthah, who is noted in Hebrews 11:32 to be a pious man, would consider offering his daughter as a human sacrifice in that it is contrary to the teaching of the Word of God. This would be little different than the practice of the Ammonites who offered human sacrifices to their God Molech (Leviticus 20:2).” #3) “Being offered up as a human sacrifice is inconsistent with her request to . . . ‘bemoan her virginity’ (Judges 11:37).” #4) The second sentence of Judges 11:39, “‘she knew no man’ tells us exactly what that vow was.” #5) When Jephthah says, “Alas my daughter! You have brought me very low!” he means “that his family line will cease. Jephthah now ‘had no [physical] issue to inherit his estate, or keep his name in remembrance, which in those days was looped upon an exceeding great calamity.’” (The five reasons are from Jonathan Edwards, *The Works of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven, Connecticut: Yale University Press, 1998), Volume 15, “Notes on Scripture,” 15:160ff, but the above quotations are from W. Gary Crampton, *Sovereign Grace Messenger*, Issue 42, Fall 2015, “Jephthah’s Vow,” pp.16, 17.

Lessons from this lesson:

- We see Jesus:

We read, “The Spirit of the Lord was upon Jephthah” (Judges 11:29). Although the Spirit of God came upon some men, none had the Spirit lead him as Jesus did. He read from Isaiah 61:1 in the synagogue of Nazareth, “The Spirit of the Lord is upon me . . .” (Luke 4:18). When Jesus finished reading these words, He stated, “Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing” (Luke 4:21).

Activities:

- Play dough: sword; young lady
- Snack: Quinoa [pronounced keen WAH] is one of the top forty hard-to-pronounce foods. A recipe for quinoa breakfast bars may be found halfway down the page at <https://www.superhealthykids.com/recipes/simple-quinoa-breakfast-bars/>. Perhaps you can substitute other ingredients for the coconut sugar (plain sugar?) and ground flax seed (ground pecans?) in this recipe.
- Play-act the guards and the Ephraimites.
Guard: Are you an Ephraimite?
Ephraimite (obviously lying): Nooo!
Guard: Say *Shibboleth*.
Ephraimite: Sibboleth.
Guard: Take him away!
- Pronounce hard words: *Shibboleth*, *molybdenum* [mohl LIB deh num], *specific*, *Pueblo* [pooEB loh].

- Note some sounds are found in English but not in other languages or changed in other languages: German has no *|w/* or *|th/* or *|j/*. Spanish has no *|j/* sound; its short *|i/* becomes *|ee/*, and *|v/* and *|b/* sound almost the same.
- Sing “Jephthah, Jephthah” by Mary Shackleford to the tune, “London Bridge.”

Jephthah, Jephthah go away, go away, go away.
Jephthah, Jephthah go away; we don't want you.

Israel, Israel turned from God, turned from God, turned from God.
Israel, Israel turned from God to serve idols.

Jephthah, Jephthah please come back, please come back, please come back.
Jephthah, Jephthah please come back, we need you.

Jephthah fought the Ammonites, Ammonites, Ammonites.
Jephthah fought the Ammonites, saved his people.

- Sing the names of the judges to the tune, “Ten Little Indians” or “Reuben, Reuben.” Have students beat tambourines in time to the music.

Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah,
Gideon, Abimelech, Tola, Jair,
Jephthah, Ibzan, Elon, Abdon,
Samson, Eli, Samuel.

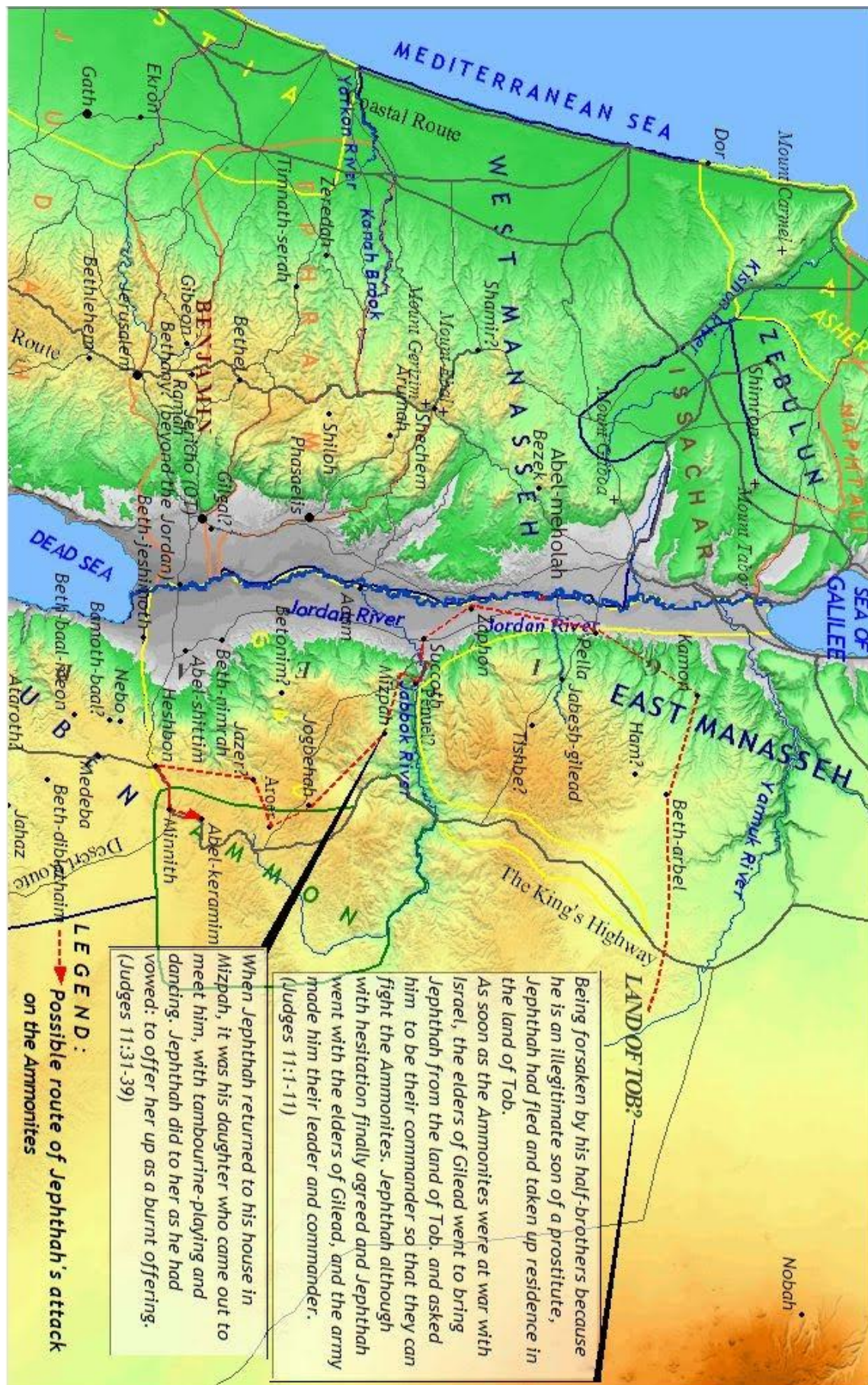
- Review questions: (Game: Print on cardstock and cut out the letters *S H I B B O L E T H* found below. For each correct answer, a student may place a letter in a pocket chart. If placing random letters, have students unscramble the word.)
 - Why did the Ammonites want to fight against Israel? [Because they mistakenly thought Israel had taken land from them 300 years before.]
 - Fill in the blanks. Jephthah said to the Ammonites, “You should ossess the land that Chemosh _____ gives you to possess.” [your god.]
 - What was Jephthah’s vow? [“If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return shall be the Lord’s.”]
 - Who won the war: the Ammonites or Jephthah and Gilead? [Jephthah and Gilead.]
 - How many cities did Israel take from Ammon? [Twenty.]
 - Who or what came out of Jephthah’s house to greet him when he returned? [His daughter.]
 - What was the daughter’s attitude about being given to the Lord? [She was submissive but asked for two months’ time to mourn the fact that she would not be married.]
 - Who, again, was offended that they hadn’t been asked to go to war with Jephthah? [The men of Ephraim.]
 - After Jephthah defeated the Ammonites, who did he fight in a civil war? [Ephraimites.]
 - When the Ephraimites tried to get back across the Jordan to their homes, how could the Gileadites discern whether they were Ephraimites or not? [Gilead asked them to say a word, *Shibboleth*. If they said *Sibboleth*, Gilead knew they were Ephraimites.]

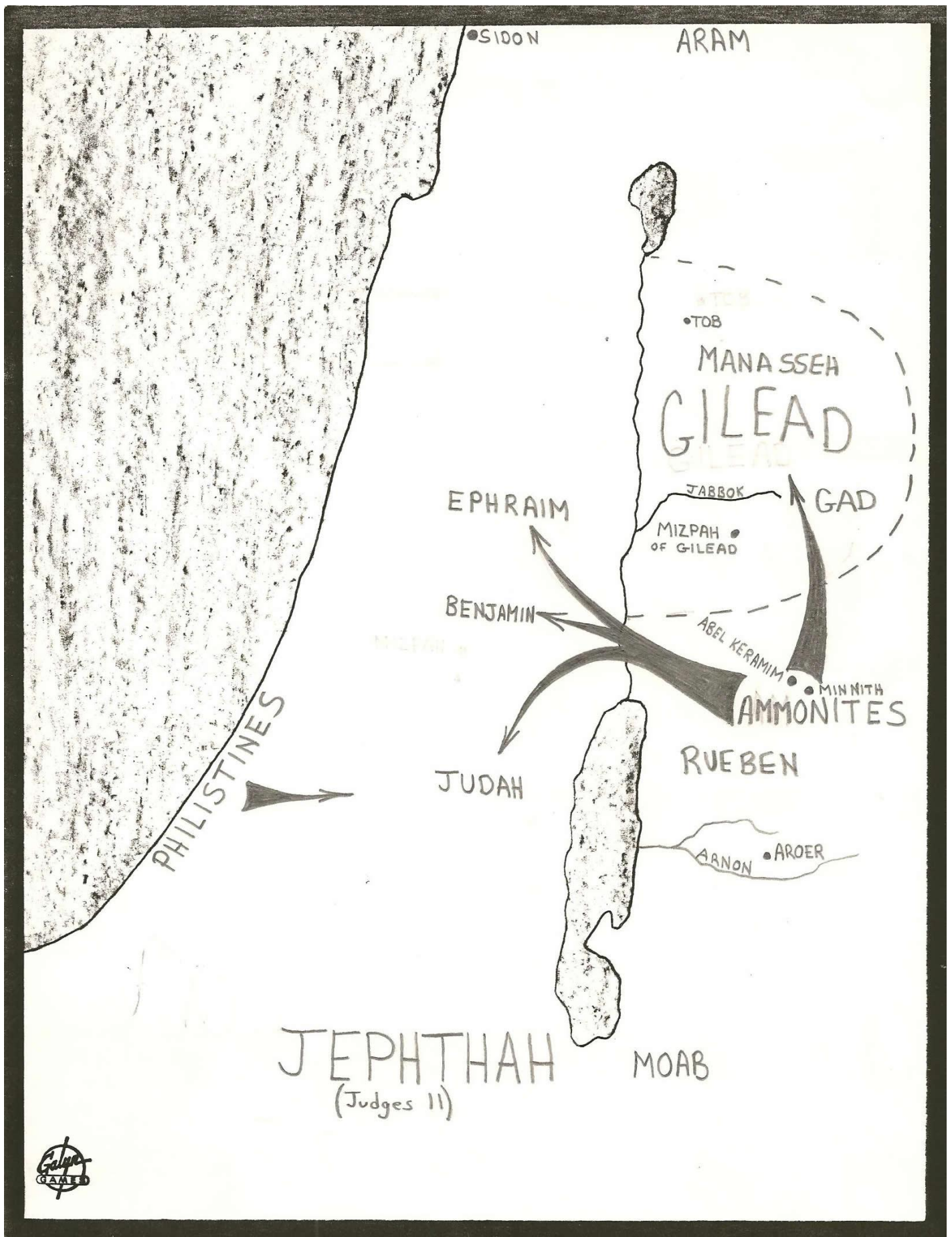
Memory Verse[s]: (ESV)

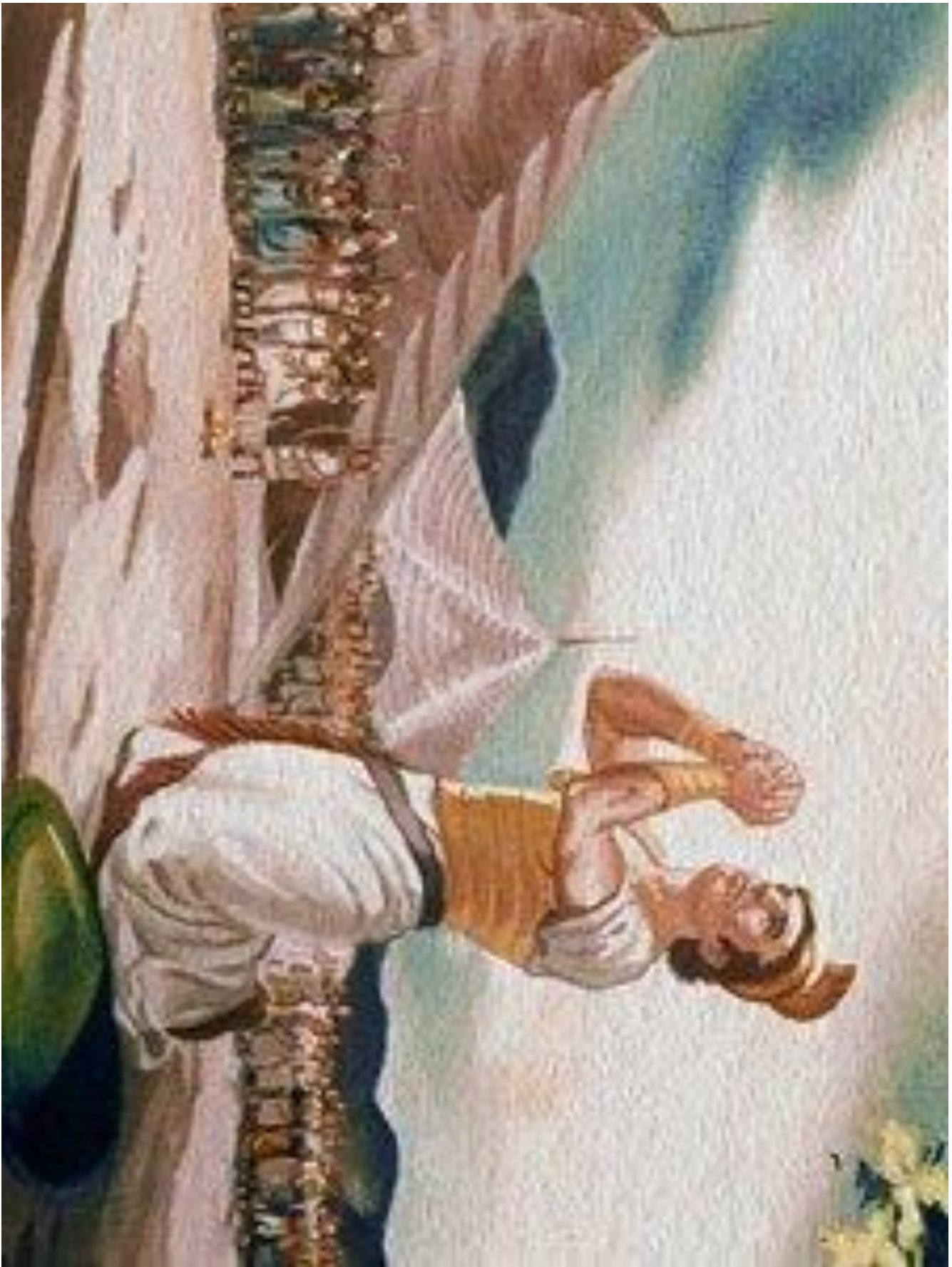
- Luke 4:18—“The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he has anointed me to proclaim good news to the poor. He has sent me to proclaim liberty to the captives and recovering of sight to the blind, to set at liberty those who are oppressed.” [The words of Jesus.]

Handwork:

- Print one page of the stream found below for each student. Have students color the picture, making the colors more brilliant.







<https://i0.wp.com/dianaleaghamatthews.com/wp-content/uploads/2017/04/Jephthah-3.jpg?resize=300%2C225>





S H I B

B O L

E T H

“I want to cross this stream
—this *shibboleth* . . . or is it *sibboleth*?”

Jephthah led Israel 6 years.

