

## JEPHTHAH DID NOT KILL HIS DAUGHTER

### HE GAVE HER TO THE SERVICE OF GOD IN THE TABERNACLE

Judges 11:30-39

#### INTRODUCTION

A. Obviously this text is "difficult" (like some of the writings of the apostle Paul, 2 Peter 3:16). It deserves a lot of careful study.

B. But we emphatically affirm that **Jephthah's daughter was not offered to God as a human sacrifice.**

C. Those who sacrificed humans were **worshippers of Molech, god of the Ammonites** (1 Kings 11:7) and Jephthah is never accused of being a worshipper of Moloch.

D. Moreover, if he had been a worshiper of Moloch, **God would not have chosen him to fight Israel's battles** (much less against the Ammonites themselves).  
Judges 11:33.

#### I. THE VOW (Judges 11:30, 31)

"And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, saying, If thou wilt deliver the Ammonites into my hand, <sup>31</sup> whosoever shall go out of the gates of my house to meet me, when he returns victorious from the Ammonites, shall be of the LORD, and I will offer him as a burnt offering." (Versión Valera 1960). "And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, If indeed thou wilt deliver the Ammonites into my hand, <sup>31</sup> it shall come to pass that whatever shall come out of the gates of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the Ammonites, shall be of the LORD, or I will offer him as a burnt offering." (New American Standard, footnote "and" instead of "or" but context demands that it be translated "or").

NOTE: The word translated "and" is translated "or" in Exodus 21:17 in the 1960 King James Version; that is, the translators of this version recognize that this word can be translated "or." **This point of grammar is very important in this study**

because if "or" is a correct translation, the vow says that if a person goes out to receive him, he or she will be dedicated to the Lord in perpetual service, "or" if the "whatever" is an animal, it will be offered as a burnt offering.

## II. JEPHTHAH WAS A MAN FAITHFUL TO GOD AND WOULD NEVER HAVE OFFERED HUMAN SACRIFICE.

A- Reading what the Bible says about this noble man it is impossible to believe that he would make a vow to offer a human sacrifice to the Lord, which was emphatically forbidden by the law of Moses. Leviticus 18:21, "And give not your son to offer him by fire to Molech; do not defile the name of your God in this way. I am the LORD." Lev. 18:29, "Whosoever shall do any of these abominations ... they will be cut off from among his people." Lev. 20:2, "Any male of the children of Israel, or of the foreigners who dwell in Israel, who offers any of his sons to Molech shall surely be put to death; the people of the earth will stone him."

**B. Having given this law and these warnings, would God accept a human sacrifice offered by Jephthah?** Also, Jephthah was not a priest (to offer sacrifices).

**C. Jephthah was a faithful man.** When the elders of Gilead wanted to bring Jephthah out of exile to fight the Ammonites, Jephthah expressed great confidence in Jehovah ("and the Lord will deliver them up before me," Judges 11:9). Then they brought Jephthah of Tob, made him their leader, and "Jephthah spoke all his words before the Lord at Mizpah" (Judges 11:11). Verse 29 says, "And the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah." No matter the purpose of "the Spirit of Jehovah" coming upon Jephthah, it would be exceedingly absurd to assert that the Spirit of the Lord would help this faithful and valiant man to overcome the Ammonites knowing that he was going to commit the abomination of offering a human sacrifice which was the religion of the god Moloch.

D. See also 1 Kings 11:7, "Moloch, abominable idol of the Ammonites." Who can believe that God would help Jephthah overcome the Ammonites who practiced the abomination of offering their children as sacrifices to Molech, and then accepting the human sacrifice offered by Jephthah? **Why punish the Ammonites if this great servant of God was going to practice the same abomination?**

E. Ahaz (2 Chronicles 28:3) and Manasseh (2 Kings 21:6) practiced this abomination and **were severely condemned, but there is no text condemning Jephthah. Rather, he is on the list of the most faithful in Hebrews 11 (v. 32).**

### III. THE HUMBLE, PIOUS DAUGHTER OF JEPHTHAH.

A. She was "his only child; he had neither son nor daughter besides her" (Judges 11:34).

B. Judges 11:36, "Then she said to him, 'My Father, you have given your word to the Lord; Do to me according to what you have said, for the Lord has avenged you on your enemies, the children of Ammon.

She was very resigned to God's will. She did not express a single complaint. She didn't say, "But it's not fair. Why are you punishing me?" She was very grateful to God for her father's victory over the Ammonites.

D. She made only one request: "Let me go and wander on the mountains for two months, and weep for my virginity, myself and my companions." **What was she sorry for? Her death? She did not lament her death but her virginity.** If she had been under sentence of death, why regret her virginity?

She did not say, "I didn't regret dying as a virgin." Rather, she lamented perpetually living as a virgin. She would never have a family of her own (remember the case of Hannah, 1 Sam. 1). And since Jephthah "had no son or daughter besides her," he would have no descendants. Why in the mountains? Because she was very modest, she sought solitude with her companions.

F. If language has any meaning, we must accept the fact that lamenting one's virginity had a specific relation to vow. Jephthah fulfilled the vow. How? Read v. 39 carefully: "At the end of the two months she returned to her father, who fulfilled the vow he had made. And she never knew a man."

### IV. JEPHTHAH FULFILLED HIS VOW.

A. **Does the text say that Jephthah fulfilled his vow and killed her? NO**, EMPHATICALLY NO, but "he did according to the vow which he had made, and what? **"She never met a man."** This phrase does not inform of her virginity (a fact already known), but explains the meaning of the vow. Jephthah fulfilled the vow – she never knew a man.

B. Jephthah fulfilled his vow, how, in what way? The answer: by the **fact** that "she never knew a man," that is, by dedicating her virginity to the Lord.

**C. Whatever our interpretation of this vow may be, honesty requires that we recognize that the text DOES NOT say that Jephthah killed his daughter and offered her as a sacrifice.**

D. The vow said that whatever goes out of the house to meet me "will be of the Lord." So after mourning her virginity in the mountains for two months with her companions, being "of the Lord" (v. 31) it is reasonable to conclude that she entered the tabernacle to serve the Lord (1 Samuel 2:22; Luke 2:36-38).

**Then, being "the Lord's," her life would be like a "burnt offering," offered totally to the Lord. Jephthah's daughter offered her life and service as a spiritual "burnt offering."**

#### **CONCLUSION.**

A. Judges 11:40, "And it became the custom in Israel, that from year to year the maidens of Israel should go and lament the daughter of Jephthah Gileadite, four days in the year." Where did they go? To the mountains? Probably to the tabernacle where she resided and served the Lord.

B. God accepted Jephthah's vow and gave him victory over the Ammonites. Did he give him this victory knowing that he was going to offer to Him a human sacrifice? Of course not.

So there are two possible explanations for this difficult text:

-- **The language of the vow is twofold in its implication:** "Whosoever shall come out of the gates of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the children of Ammon shall be the Lord's, or I will offer him as a burnt offering" (Judges 11:31).

-- **It would be possible to offer your daughter in perpetual service to the Lord,** and that would be basically and essentially the same as a burnt offering (spiritual burnt offering).

**D. But the conclusion that the fulfillment of the vow means that Jephthah offered his daughter as a human sacrifice, killing her and burning her body on the altar is a completely erroneous conclusion because there is nothing in the text to indicate disapproval on the part of God and the offering of human sacrifice would have been abominable to him. God would never have accepted such an offering!**

**E. THE TEXT MAKES IT CLEAR: JUDGES 11:39, "WHEN THE TWO MONTHS WERE OVER, SHE RETURNED TO HER FATHER, WHO DID WITH HER ACCORDING TO THE VOW HE HAD MADE. AND SHE NEVER KNEW A MAN."**

*F. He fulfilled his vow by giving his daughter to the service of God in the Tabernacle and she never knew a man, that is, she never married.*

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