

# **Jephthah's Folly**

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by

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Last Friday we read about how the elders of Gilead had sought out Jephthah – the son of Gideon, but also, the son of a prostitute – to make him ruler over the people of Gilead...

If only, he would come be their military commander, and drive out the Ammonites who were plaguing them.

Jephthah gave a very nice defense of why Ammon should pack up their stuff and go home, instead of waging war in Gilead.

BUT, our text tells us...

### **Judges 11:28-40**

<sup>28</sup>The king of Ammon, however, paid no attention to the message Jephthah sent him.

<sup>29</sup>Then the Spirit of the Lord came on Jephthah. He crossed Gilead and Manasseh, passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from there he advanced against the Ammonites.

<sup>30</sup>And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord: *“If you give the Ammonites into my hands,*

*<sup>31</sup>whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in triumph*

*from the Ammonites will be the Lord's, and I will sacrifice it as a burnt offering."*

<sup>32</sup>Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the Lord gave them into his hands. <sup>33</sup>He devastated twenty towns from Aroer to the vicinity of Minnith, as far as Abel Keramim. Thus, Israel subdued Ammon.

<sup>34</sup>When Jephthah returned to his home in Mizpah, who should come out to meet him but his daughter, dancing to the sound of timbrels! She was an only child. Except for her he had neither son nor daughter. <sup>35</sup>When he saw her, he tore his clothes and cried, *"Oh no, my daughter! You have brought me down and I am devastated. I have made a vow to the Lord that I cannot break."*

<sup>36</sup>“*My father,*” she replied, “*you have given your word to the Lord. Do to me just as you promised, now that the Lord has avenged you of your enemies, the Ammonites.*” <sup>37</sup>“*But grant me this one request,*” she said. “*Give me two months to roam the hills and weep with my friends, because I will never marry.*”

<sup>38</sup>“*You may go,*” he said. And he let her go for two months. She and her friends went into the hills and wept because she would never marry. <sup>39</sup>After the two months, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed. And she was a virgin.

From this comes the Israelite tradition <sup>40</sup>that each year the young women of Israel go out for four days to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

This is a sad, sad, sad episode we read about today. The battle is won hands down, and with very little fanfare. After all, the Lord is the victor here – who can stand against the Lord? No one, that’s who. In this 13-verse reading, only two verses are necessary for a description of the war.

<sup>32</sup>Then Jephthah went over to fight the Ammonites, and the Lord gave them into his hands. <sup>33</sup>He devastated twenty towns from Aroer to the vicinity of Minnith, as far as Abel Keramim. Thus, Israel subdued Ammon.

The Lord gave them into his (Jephthah's) hands, and thus, Israel subdued Ammon.

Ammon's intent was to take back all the land which the 2-1/2 tribes of Israel held on the east side of the Jordan River, and in 2 verses, the battle is settled – “God gave them.”

Now, I said this is a sad, sad story – so let's get to that.

Jephthah's residence among the Canaanites certainly shows evidence of the poison fruit in these verses. **WHY IN THE WORLD**

would Jephthah make such a vow as he made. Certainly, this was not an Israelite way of looking at what the Lord will do for His followers, or what He desires as tokens of our devotion.

As a matter of fact, again and again in the scriptures, Jehovah has spoken against the very thing that Jephthah speaks into existence – the sacrifice of humans as a spiritual commitment.

Israel's prophets spoke out – instructed by the LORD – constantly against this type of ritual sacrifice!

And yet, Jephthah – poisoned in the mind by living amongst pagan worshippers – vows to

God, to kill whoever comes out of his house when he gets home.

What was he thinking; that Bonzo the dog was coming out of the front door of his home? Did he think a stray cat, or an injured bird was going to come out of his front door?

Really? “*Whatever*” comes out of my house to meet me! How can we think other than that he meant, “*whoever?*”

Or had he been feuding with his wife, and in some twisted thinking, he thought this might be a way to get rid of his wife, and find a

newer model – one fit to be married to such a revered warrior and leader in Israel???

No! Jephthah was a product of syncretic religious beliefs. Syncretism is the amalgamation or attempted amalgamation of different religions, cultures, or schools of thought.

An easy example of this is the voodoo that is prevalent among a New Orleans religious culture that is distinctly Catholic, but that is “mixed” with the cultic practices of pagan beliefs.

This rash and unhappy vow had an ending that Jephthah could not even conceive of happening. His pagan/Israelite beliefs caused him to sin a great sin, which would have terrible consequences for him and his family.

Even the “*“touching submission”* of *Jephthah’s daughter to her terrible fate – while it reveals a most lovable character – seems also to show that the idea of a human sacrifice was not so strange to her mind as it is to ours.*”<sup>1</sup>

So why did Jephthah follow through with the rash vow that he made before his battle against the Ammonites?

For us, this is an illustration of the evil of rash vows. He who makes them, positions himself so that **he must sin.**

If he breaks his vow, he has taken God's name in vain.

If he keeps his vow, he breaks one of God's commandments.<sup>2</sup>

Church of Jesus Christ; this is perhaps one of the clearest pictures of why we must put all other “religious” ideas aside, and follow the clear path that the LORD places before us.

We cannot help but harm ourselves – that is, our spiritual position – when we allow other religious thoughts to slip into our hearts and

minds. It will pollute that pure spiritual river that flows through us by the indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit.

For us, the way to God is clear. It's always, Jesus! Not Jesus, plus this, or Jesus, and something else. As Jesus said (**John 14:6**),

***"I am the way and the truth and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me."***

**PRAYER**



1. <https://biblehub.com/commentaries/pulpit/judges/11.htm>
2. *ibid.*