

# Judges 11

Judges 11:1–40

Jephthah, the Gileadite

## Outline of Chapter 11:

- Vv. 1–3 Jephthah, a Gileadite, born of a prostitute, is run out of town by his half brothers
- Vv. 4–11 The elders of Gilead, suffering under Ammonite oppression, go to Jephthah for help
- Vv. 12–28 Jephthah corresponds with the king of Ammon
- Vv. 15–28 Jephthah Explains the History of the Disputed Land to the King of Ammon
- Vv. 29–31 Jephthah's vow
- Vv. 32–33 Israel defeats Ammon
- Vv. 34–40 The fulfillment of Jephthah's vow

## Special Charts and Features:

Jephthah's Recollection of History

The Wâw Conjunction

**I**ntroduction: Judges 11 is an unusual chapter in God's Word. It begins with Jephthah's mother, who is a prostitute, and ends with his daughter who will never marry and never have sex. In between, we have the enigmatic Jephthah. Jephthah's father apparently had an affair or slept with a prostitute, and that prostitute bore him a son. Jephthah's father did marry and had several sons, all of whom turned on Jephthah. They did not want him to be a part of their family—and particularly, they did not want to share their inheritance with him and his mother, so they drove them out of town. Jephthah moved to a place called Tob, about which we know nothing. It appears as though Jephthah became quite successful, although he apparently hung out with a worthless bunch of devos. However, since he developed a strong reputation as a leader and a military man, the elders of Gilead approached him, asking if he would lead Israel against the sons of Ammon, who had oppressed Israel for almost two decades. There is quite an interesting exchange at this point—what Jephthah requires is to rule over that portion of Israel at the end of the war, and he is granted that.

Interestingly enough, the longest portion of this chapter is a letter from Jephthah to the king of Ammon, trying to settle things diplomatically. Jephthah reveals in this letter that he has a strong background in God's Word—he knew exactly what had transpired between Israel and Ammon over the past several centuries and that Ammon had no legitimate claim on the land of Gilead that they occupied.

When it becomes obvious that the king of Ammon is not about to back down, Jephthah prepares to war against him, first making a vow to God to dedicate whatever comes out to meet him first when he returns home. The actual war is given but two verses in a chapter of 40 verses. When Jephthah returns home, the one who meets him is his daughter, and she is thus, resignedly, dedicated to God, meaning that she will not marry or know a man. The chapter ends with the daughters of Israel mourning her virginity as a yearly custom. Believe it or not, there is quite a theological argument as to whether Jephthah offered up his daughter as a human sacrifice or whether she simply remained a virgin for the remainder of her life. Most of the extent theological writings for the first thousand years since the first advent of our Lord favor that this was a human sacrifice; and even the great Albert Barnes, from whom I have learned much, takes this position. However, the idea that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter as if she were some animal is absolute foolishness. This will be covered in great detail at the end of this chapter. Furthermore, I have quoted extensively from Keil and Delitzsch, who offer outstanding and persuasive arguments. You might think that I employed overkill in this area, but you will have no doubts about this issue by v. 40.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Since a half dozen of the references which I employ go into great detail concerning this event, and since several of them are dead wrong, I would rather cover this issue in great detail so that there is no confusion on your part. One author, Victor H Matthews, actually cites this as the lone example of human sacrifice in Israel's history in his book *Manners and Customs in the Bible*.

My first thought when I began this chapter was why is there is separate chapter 10? Why aren't these two chapters melded together? Barnes suggests that we are dealing with different authors, as though this chapter was inserted into the book of Judges. The history and background of Jephthah actually pre-date Judges 10:17–18 and vv. 3–4 of this chapter seem to be independent of the previous chapter. On the other hand, it is often the Hebrew literary style to give one or two verses of summary and then to expand upon that. A reasonable suggestion is that the person who wrote Judges 10 was a later editor who was tying Judges 9 and 11 together.<sup>2</sup> However, there is not a smooth transition between Judges 10 and 12, indicating that chapter 11 was not simply inserted.

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## Jephthah, a Gileadite, Born of a Prostitute, Is Run out of Town by His Half Brothers

Slavishly literal:

**And Jephthah the Gileadite was a soldier of strength and he [was] a son of a fornicator and so sired Gilead Jephthah.**

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Moderately literal:

**And Jephthah the Gileadite was a veteran of strength; furthermore, he [was] the son of a prostitute and Gilead sired Jephthah.**

**Now there was an heroic veteran named Jephthah the Gileadite. He was the son of a prostitute as well as a Gileadite.**

Jephthah is actually the Hebrew word yiph̄tâch (יִפְתָּח) [pronounced *yif-TAWKH*], which means *he [God] opens*. Strong's #3316 BDB #836.

Jephthah is described as the masculine construct of gibbôwr (גִּבֹּוֹר) [pronounced *gib-BOAR*], which means *strong man, mighty man, soldier, warrior, combatant, war veteran*. Strong's #1368 BDB #150. This is further modified by the masculine singular noun chayil (חַיִל) [pronounced *CHAH-yil*] and it means *efficiency, army, strength, valour, power, might*. Strong's #2428 BDB #298. Only four of the judges are mentioned in Heb. 11 (the hall of faith chapter of the Bible); these include Gideon, Barak, Samson and Jephthah (Samuel, who was also a judge, is also mentioned). The author of Hebrews only gave a short summary of various people and acts of faith in the history of Israel, and only mentions these five plus David and the prophets, in v. 32, where he says *and I could go on and on with illustrations*. The author of Hebrews was not intending to delineate the spiritual giants of the Old Testament, but rather to show how much faith played a part in the lives of the acknowledged spiritual of Israel.

Jephthah also finds himself mentioned in another mini-hall of fame, in I Sam. 12:11: “**Then Jehovah sent Jerubbaal and Bedan [or, Barak] and Jephthah and Samuel, and He delivered your from the hands of your enemies all around, so that you lived in security.”**

What Jephthah is the son of is the Qal active participle of zânâh (זָנָה) [pronounced *zaw-NAW*], which means *to commit adultery, to fornicate, to [sexually pursue]*. As a participle, this describes a person often by their occupation and what they do at their occupation. Jephthah's mother was a fornicator. This was her modus operandi at work. She fornicated for a living. We might go with the more genteel *prostitute* as a translation. Strong's #2181 BDB #275. Jephthah's father was well-known and respected and he did a very *male-thing* and went to a prostitute and this prostitute had his son. Obviously, he is not going to acknowledge such a thing nor will he support such a birth, so the prostitute and her son, Jephthah, are outcasts in Israel's society. Obviously, this is a double standard and obviously, Gilead should have taken responsibility for his actions and obviously, his son should not have had to suffer for what he did. Three thousand years have gone by since then and it would be acceptable for a man to have a liaison in this society with a prostitute, for her to have his child, and for him to abandon them both. Some would raise a fuss, but others would reason that she is simply a prostitute and that, by her very profession, was responsible for any unexpected arrivals.

<sup>2</sup> We do not impugn the inspiration of Scripture by asserting that some books are the result of a later editor piecing together manuscripts of various origins.

By Deut. 23:2, Jephthah would not have been allowed in the assembly of Jehovah. Now, a young person could have used this along with the ostracism of his town to turn away from God. This was not Jephthah. Jephthah turned toward God, as will become apparent by his knowledge of Scripture.

The verb which goes with Gilead is the Hiphil imperfect of yâlad (יָלַד) [pronounced yaw-LAHD], which means *to bear, to be born, to bear, to bring forth, to beget*. With a male, this could be better rendered *sired, fathered*. Strong's #3205 BDB #408. The name of Jephthah's father is significant. Although it is possible his name was actually Gilead, it was more likely that he was simply a Gileadite, a man of Gilead, and he was given that name purposely so that he would not be remembered by his actual name. He is quite obviously not the Gilead from Num. 26:29, but a descendant of his.

Jephthah will prove that it is not *where you came from* that is significant, but who you are. According to McGee, William the Conqueror signed his name *William the Bastard*, because that is what he was. A point of irony is that Jephthah was raised primarily by a prostitute, rather than by his own father and he apparently turned out a lot better than his half-brothers, as we will see. We are not blank slates completely controlled by the environment in which we find ourselves. Jephthah rose above his beginnings and will become the man of the hour for Israel.

**And so bore a woman of Gilead to him sons and so became mighty sons of the woman and so they drove out Jephthah and so they said to him, "You will not inherit in a house of our father because son of a woman another you [are]."**

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**Also the wife of Gilead bore sons to him and these sons became strong and they drove out Jephthah. Furthermore, they said to him, "You will not inherit in our father's house of because you [are] a son of another woman."**

**Gilead's wife also bore sons to him and once they became strong enough, they drove Jephthah out of town and out of Gilead's life, saying to him, "You will not inherit anything from our father's house because you are a bastard son."**

The wife of Gilead is described by the feminine construct of 'îshshâh (אִשְׁשָׁה) [pronounced eesh-SHAWH], which means *woman, wife*. Strong's #802 BDB #61. Since this is in the construct and followed by *Gilead*, it would be reasonable to render this *wife*. What these sons did is quite interesting—it is the Qal imperfect of The Qal perfect of gâdal (גָּדוֹל) [pronounced gaw-DAWHL], which means *to grow strong, to become great, to grow up, to become mighty*. Strong's #1431 BDB #152. It is the verbal cognate of *mighty* in the previous verse.

What they did after becoming mighty was the Piel imperfect of gârash (גָּרַשׁ) [pronounced gaw-RASH] and it means *to cast out, to throw out, to drive out*. Strong's #1644 BDB #176. When a man becomes strong, that is when you develop some insight into their true character. Some men, once they become strong, bully others, and that is what these young men did. What method they used was not given; however, they put the pressure either on Jephthah or on his mother and got them to move out of town. And they were caused to move out as though they had done something wrong. Now you may point to the fact that Abraham sent his children by Keturah away, so as not to interfere with the inheritance of his child Isaac (Gen. 25:1–6); however, this is not the same as being sent away by one's half-brothers who do so out of simple greed. Furthermore, Abraham did this knowing that his one son, Isaac, would be the heir to all that God had for him.

As far as the Law is concerned, this was a rather tough call. If a man married two women and loved one more than the other, he could not cut his first children from the unloved wife out of their inheritance (Deut. 21:15–17). However, we do not deal with the liaison of a man and a prostitute in the Law. In any case, his children did not act out of some act related to doctrine—their concern was greed. One less person meant there was more for them in the pot to be split up. You must realize that a lot of what you think is human viewpoint. What they did to Jephthah did not give them one iota more wealth—in fact, they probably lost far more than they expected to gain when the Ammonites took over Israel.

What was apparently the case is that Gilead had a liaison with a prostitute during his marriage or prior to his marriage (and she may have even become a prostitute after this affair), and they apparently all lived in the same city (possibly even the same house, although I doubt that). Furthermore, it was known, possibly even well-known, who this boy belonged to. There may have even been some sort of a relationship after the child. However, Gilead either married or was married; she bore him sons, and they drove Jephthah and his mother out of town, promising that he would not get a portion of their father's inheritance. What was significant here was the land. The land was passed on from generation to generation. Also, of course, the little wealth which the family had accumulated was also passed along.

Now you will notice that I have hedged a great deal as to the relationship between Gilead and Jephthah's mother as well as in regard to some of the events which took place. Here is the key: the sons of Gilead tell Jephthah that he will not inherit *in* his father's house as opposed to *from* his father's house. The implication is that Gilead had maintained some sort of relationship here with the son, even to the point of him coming into his house and there may have been some financial support as well, implying that he could inherit some of their inheritance.

I hope that you recall from the previous chapter that there are some choices that we make which affect the rest of our lives. Case in point: Jephthah's mother. Whether a prostitute or not at the time of her liaison with Gilead, she became one. The upshot of all of this is that she remained unmarried at least until Jephthah grew up and they were forced out of town. This means she chose to have sex out of wedlock and she obviously did not marry her right man. She was a marked woman after that. She had her son and he had no future to speak of. Now, she and he might have both been believers (in fact, this is probably the case), and it is possible that they remained in fellowship for most of their lives after his birth (in fact, this is probably the case). I say that this was probably the case because Jephthah grew up to be a great man—much greater than his brothers; in fact, he was the man of the hour for Israel. His mother was likely a believer who steered him in the right direction. However, bear in mind that she never married her right man. She may have had happiness and blessing, but she never had her right man. Keep this in mind if you are a young woman with hormones exploding like a special effects movie—one of your greatest desires in life is a young man. By having sex outside of marriage, you might cut off from yourself that great desire of yours.

**And so fled Jephthah from faces of his brothers and so he dwelt in a land of Tob and so gathered [themselves] unto Jephthah men of worthlessness. And so they went out with him.**

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**Then Jephthah fled from before his brothers and he then lived in the land of Tob. Worthless men then gathered [themselves] to Jephthah and went out with him.**

**Jephthah then left his brothers and lived in a land known as Tob. Worthless men gathered themselves to Jephthah and hung out with him.**

The beginning of this verse also indicates that there was a relationship maintained at first between Jephthah and his father, as these young men who force him out of his home town are called his brothers.

We do not know where Tob is, although there are suggestions (when is there not?). It is likely in Bashan (later known as Hauran), which is either southern Manasseh or northern Gad. Obviously this is all found within the Gilead. The land itself is quite fertile, as the result of volcanic activity. The grain grown for Damascus and Palestine came from this area, which is also almost treeless.<sup>3</sup> Rotherham also places it northeast of Palestine, in what is today, Syria. *Tob*, according to Rotherham, means *fruitful district*. A comparison of II Sam. 10:6 and 8 would also place Tob in Syria.

In the third phrase, we have the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine plural, Hithpael imperfect of *lāqat* (לָקַת) [pronounced *law-KAHT*], which means *to gather, to gather up, to pick up*. Strong's #3950 BDB #544. The Hithpael is the reflexive of the Piel, so it means that these men gathered *themselves* to Jephthah. The men who went out with Jephthah

<sup>3</sup> This information came from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; ©1976; Vol. 3, p. 47 and Vol. 5, p. 761.

are called men of the masculine plural adjective rēq (רֶק) [pronounced *rake*] means *empty, vain, worthless*. Strong's #7386 BDB #938. Jephthah himself was a man who had a great deal of potential. However, he surrounded himself with worthless and vain men. What they all did together was the Qal imperfect of yâtsâ' (יָתֵשׁ) [pronounced *yaw-TZAWH*], which means *to go out, to come out, to come forth*. Strong's #3318 BDB #422. In reading the rest of the narrative you may ask yourself *why on earth was this mentioned?* Jephthah will gain the reputation of being a great military leader. We are given few details, other than (1) worthless men gathered themselves to him; and, (2) when Gilead was overrun by Ammonites and had to find a man to deliver them, Jephthah's name came to the forefront. We can only fill in the gap here and figure that Jephthah took these worthless men and whipped them into line, giving them discipline and direction, displaying his own leadership skills. One of the qualities of a leader is that he is able to bring men up, as opposed to allowing them to pull him down.

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## The Elders of Gilead, Suffering under Ammonite Oppression, Go to Jephthah for Help

And so he was from days and so made war  
sons of Ammon with Israel.      Judges 11:4

And it was after [many] days [or, after a time]  
that the sons of Ammon went to war with  
Israel.

After awhile, when the sons of Ammon engaged Israel in war...

The beginning of this verse is literally *and so he was from* and we have the masculine plural noun yôwd (יָוֹד) [pronounced *yohd*], which means *days*. Altogether, these words mean *and it was, after a time; and it came to pass after awhile*. *Days* is preceded by the mîn preposition, which generally means *from, out from*; however, with a time period, it can mean *after*. This phrase is given a variety of translations: *And it cometh to pass, after a time* (Young); *And it came about after awhile* (NASB); *And so it came to pass, after a time* (Rotherham); and *Sometime later* (NIV). Mîn = Strong's #4480 BDB #577. Yâmîym = Strong's #3117 BDB #398. This verse simply sets up the historical context.

This is a *meanwhile, back at the ranch* verse. In Judges 10, we saw that Israel was under great pressure placed upon them by the sons of Ammon and that God did not seem to come to their assistance this time. Then, with chapter 11, we began to look at Jephthah and his background.

Grammatically speaking, this, and the beginning of the next verse, are rather confusing. The two verses are very similar—so similar in fact that the repetition is not found in the Greek (and the NIV follows suit). However, this does not appear to be a case where the scribe copied one verse a second time. Perhaps Young's rendering will help us out here: *And it cometh to pass, after a time, that the Bene-Ammon fight with Israel, and it cometh to pass, when the Bene-Ammon have fought with Israel, that the elders of Gilead go to take Jephthah from the land of Tob...* In the first case, we have the verb *to fight, to war* in the Qal imperfect. In other words, after the time when Jephthah was being cast out of his land of Gilead and having these worthless men gathered to him, the sons of Ammon began to go to war against Israel. The imperfect tense indicates an incomplete action. In v. 5, the verb is in the perfect, meaning that the action was completed. In other words, once the war of the Ammonites against Israel had come to a halt, the Ammonites being the victors, then Gilead sent men out to find Jephthah. In other words, what is being done with these verses is the setting up of a time line or a sequencing of events. This is rarely done in the Hebrew. In fact, one of the problems with interpreting Old Testament Scripture is that our *Greek* minds tend to think in such a linear fashion, whereas the Hebrew mind thought more in terms of subject matter and topic. Therefore, the arrangement of their literature is not done as we would.

Still, there seems to be a break in the rhythm, and one could guess that perhaps v. 4 was thrown in by the editor in an attempt to smooth out the events of the previous chapter and this chapter.

We already know about the attack of Ammon upon Israel—this was all given in the previous chapter. Here we are told the history of Jephthah and what his life was like prior to this attack. Sometimes, in order for a man's greatness to come out, he must be put to the test.

**And so he was as which had made war sons of Ammon with Israel and so went out elders of Gilead to bring Jephthah from a land of Tob.**

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**And so it was when the sons of Ammon had made war with Israel, the elders of Gilead went out to bring Jephthah out from the land of Tob.**

**...the elders of Gilead went out to bring Jephthah back from the land of Tob.**

Early on in this verse, kaph and the relative pronoun together mean *when*. The verb for *make war* in this verse is the Niphal perfect, meaning the attack by Ammon was looked upon as a completed, accomplished fact. Jap had lived outside of the area for this period of time; Ammon had moved in and the fighting, at least for awhile, was over and done with. Israel had succumbed to Ammonite rule.

Jephthah was obviously a grown young man when he was forced out of Gilead and he showed obvious leadership potential. In fact, he had made such an impression on his hometown that they thought he would be the correct man to lead Israel. This would be because of the impression that he left and because he was a leader of men at this time. The men that Jephthah whipped into shape were *worthless men*, which is much more difficult than taking strong, vigorous men with a great deal of self-motivation and whipping them into shape. The men of Gilead knew that Jephthah was the man for the job.

**And so they said to Jephthah, "Come and you will be to us for a leader and we will fight against sons of Ammon."**

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**Then they said to Jephthah, "Come and be to us for a leader and we will fight against the sons of Ammon."**

**Then they said to Jephthah, "Come to us and be our commander-in-chief and we will fight against the sons of Ammon."**

What Jephthah would be to Israel is the lamed prefixed preposition (*to, for*) and the masculine singular noun qâtsîyn ("קָטֵן") [pronounced *kaw-TSEEN*], which means *captain, ruler, prince*. It is similar to the words meaning *end, extremity* and it might mean that the buck stops here. This word has only been used one time previously and that in Joshua 10:24 of his high ranking generals. Therefore, this is not necessarily, at least at this time, a word for a man with complete and total authority. In using this word, the men of Gilead are making it clear to Jephthah that they would like him to lead the troops in battle—period. There is nothing else implied after that. Strong's #7101 BDB #892.

**And so said Jephthah to elders of Gilead, "Did not you [all] hate me and so you [all] drove me out from a house of my father and why have you [all] come unto me now when [there is] distress to you?"**

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**So Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not all hate me and [consequently] drive me out from my father's house? Then why have you come to me now when [there is] distress to you?"**

**Then Jephthah replied to the elders of Gilead. "Didn't you all hate me and consequently drive me away from my father's house? So now, why have you come to me when you are in a jam?"**

The first adverb in this verse is maddu'a ( מַדְעָה ) [pronounced *mah-DOO-ahg*] means *why, wherefore, on what account*. Strong's #4069 BDB #396. This continues the question which Jephthah began.

At the end of this verse we have the kaph preposition and the relative pronoun again (*when*), and the relative pronoun often insinuates the verb *to be*. We then have the lamed prefixed preposition and the masculine singular

noun tsar (צָר) [pronounced *tsahr*], which means *an adversary, an enemy, distress, affliction, a stone*. These correspond to the slightly different meanings of its verb cognate. Strong's #6862 BDB #865.

In comparing this verse to vv. 2–3, among the elders of Gilead are several of Jephthah's brothers. It is obvious that Jephthah has been thinking about this for a long time and was himself quite distressed over it. After all, the nature of his birth was not of his choosing. With a lesser man, their act of hatred could have doomed Israel—i.e., Jephthah could have chosen not to return to Gilead to help them.

**And so said elders of Gilead unto Jephthah,  
“For thus now we have turned unto you and  
you will go with us and fight against sons of  
Ammon and you will be for us for a head to all  
inhabitants of Gilead.”**

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11:8

**And so said elders of Gilead unto Jephthah,  
“That being so now we have turned to you so  
you will go with us and fight against the sons  
of Ammon and you will become to us a head to  
all inhabitants of Gilead.”**

**Then the elders of Gilead answered Jephthah, “Even though that is true, we have now turned to us that  
you would go with us to fight against the sons of Ammon; as a result, you will become a leader to us and  
to all of the inhabitants of Gilead.”**

Their quote begins with the prefixed lamed preposition and the adverb kén (כֹּן) [pronounced *kane*]; together, they mean *according to such conditions, that being so, therefore*. L<sup>e</sup> = Strong's #none BDB #510 Kén = Strong's #3651 BDB #485. This is followed by 'attâh (הַתְּעִ) [pronounced *gáht-TAWH*], which is an adverb of time meaning *now*. Sometimes, the idea of time is lost when it is used as a word of incitement. Strong's #6258 BDB #773. I am thinking that these three particles strung together had a more cohesive meaning, but I don't know what that is. Together, in this passage, they have been rendered *that is why now* (Owen), *therefore...now* (Rotherham and Young), and *for this reason* (the NASB). The impression that I am getting is that they are presenting this as an opportunity to right all the wrongs which have since occurred.

Back in v. 6, they offered Jephthah a position of military leadership in Gilead—in fact, they pressed him to take the position, seeing him as their only hope against the Ammonites. Now, in this verse, they up the stakes somewhat, although it is not quite as clear in the English. We'll cover this in more detail in the next verse.

**And so said Jephthah unto elders of Gilead, “If  
you cause to return, [even] you, me to fight  
against sons of Ammon and gives Y<sup>h</sup>owah  
them to my faces, I [even] I will be for a head.”**

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**Then Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, “If  
you bring me back to fight against the sons of  
Ammon and Y<sup>h</sup>owah gives them in my  
presence, [then] I will be a head [over you].”**

**Then Jephthah replied to the elders of Gilead, “So, if you take me back to fight against Ammon and  
Jehovah gives me victory over them, then I will be leader over all of you.”**

We have a verb used in this and the previous verse. In v. 8 we have the Qal perfect of shûw<sup>b</sup>v (שׁוּב) [pronounced *shoo<sup>b</sup>V*]; which means *to return, to turn, to reminisce, to restore something, to bring back something*. In this verse, it is in the Hiphil stem, so it means *to be caused to return, to bring, to be caused to turn back mentally, reminisce, to return something, to restore, to bring back, to regain, to recover, to make restitution, reconsider, think again, or to be caused to return*. Strong's #7725 BDB #996.

The continuation of that *if* adds the Qal perfect of nâthan (נָתַן) [pronounced *naw-THAHN*], which means *give, grant, place, put, set*. Strong's #5414 BDB #678. This is followed by the direct object with the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine plural (referring to the sons of Ammon), the lamed preposition and the masculine plural noun lamed prefixed preposition plus the masculine noun pâñym (פָּנִים) [pronounced *paw-NEEM*], which together mean *in the sight of, in the presence of, in your face, before the face of or, more literally, to or for the faces*. Pâñym = Strong's #6440 BDB #815. Jephthah is simply negotiating his place in Israel if he consents to go with them and fight against Ammon.

What Jephthah is doing is repeating back what he understands the terms of the agreement are as proffered to him. You will note that they originally offered Jephthah one thing and then they upped the ante, so to speak, and, at that point, caught his interest. This is not at all clear from the English but it is ever so clear in the Hebrew. What they offer Jephthah in v. 6 is for Jephthah to simply be a military leader over them in this war against Ammon. There is nothing implied about his position in Israel after that. In v. 7, Jephthah complains about how he was previously treated and why on earth would they come to him for this if they were the very ones who expelled him from the Gilead in the first place. In v. 8, they up the stakes, although, again, this is not at all clear in the English. In v. 6, he was offered the position of qâtsîyn (קָצֵן) [pronounced *kaw-TSEEN*], which means *captain, ruler, prince*. Strong's #7101 BDB #892. In this case, it was a temporary military appointment. Furthermore, the implication is that they might have some authority over him. Therefore, he hems and haws so that they come back in v. 8 and ask him if he would like to have the position of rô'sh (רֹשׁ) [pronounced *roshe*], which means *head, top, chief, front, choicest*. Strong's #7218 BDB #910. This is a position of power which means that he would call the shots and that he would be ruler over that portion of Israel after the war was over.

You will note how these negotiations went. Jephthah did not come right out and tell them what he wanted. He didn't say directly that they would have to up the ante a little. The negotiating process there was a great deal more subtle. The men from Gilead had the need and they approached with the options that Jephthah could choose from. When he didn't take the first offer, then they upped it. A car salesman might do the same thing. If he senses a person is ready to buy a car, but that the price is the problem, then he drops the price even if they had not asked him to do so. Obviously, he would only do so as the *clincher* and that is how these elders from Gilead operated. Jephthah was not going to take a temporary military appointment so they had to offer him more.

**And so said elders of Gilead unto Jephthah,**

"Y<sup>eh</sup>owah is listening [or, is a listener] between us: if not as your word, so we will do."

Judges 11:10

**Then the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah,**

"Y<sup>eh</sup>owah is a witness between us if we do not so do as your word."

**Then the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "Jehovah will be a witness between us if we do not do just as you have said."**

This has a few difficulties so let's see what others have done:

*The Emphasized Bible*

And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah— Yahweh himself will be hearkening between us, if according to thy word so we do not.

*NASB*

And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The LORD is witness between us; surely we will do as you have said."

*Young's Lit. Translation*

And the elders of Gilead say unto Jephthah, 'Jehovah is hearkening between us—if according to thy word we do not so.'

The easy part is the two verbs with Y<sup>eh</sup>owah: We have the Qal imperfect of hâyâh (הָיָה) [pronounced *haw-YAW*], which means *to be*. Strong's #1961 BDB #224. This is quickly followed by the Qal active participle of shâma' (שָׁמַע) [pronounced *shaw-MAH*], which means *to listen, listen intently, to listen and obey, to listen and give heed to, to hearken to, to be attentive to, listen and take heed to, listen and take note of, listen and be cognizant of*. In the Qal active participle, this would be *listening, hearkening, hearing, a hearer, a listener, and a less than literal rendering* might be a *witness*. Strong's #8085 BDB #1033.

The biggest problem is the negative. The literal translation is as you see in my translation: *if not as your word, so we will do*. However, the meaning is closer to what we find with Rotherham or with Young: *Jehovah is a witness if we don't do as you have spoken*. Although the negative does not properly go with the verb, this is how we would understand it in the English. Essentially, what is being done here is that they are formally ratifying the terms of their agreement as stated by Jephthah. The statement that *Jehovah will be a witness between us* indicates that they have come to an agreement and that God is a witness to the terms of the agreement. We find similar statements

throughout Scripture (Gen. 31:49–50 Jer. 29:23 42:5). Today, we sign contracts before witnesses and/or public notaries.

**And so went Jephthah with [or, unto<sup>4</sup>] elders of Gilead and so made the people him over them for a head and for a leader and so said Jephthah all of his words for a faces of Y<sup>e</sup>howah in the Mizpah.**

Judges  
11:11

**And so Jephthah went with elders of Gilead and the people made him over them for a head and for a leader and so Jephthah spoke all of his words before the face of Y<sup>e</sup>howah in the Mizpah.**

**Therefore, Jephthah went along with the elders of Gilead and he was made the head and a leader over them. Afterwards, Jephthah spoke all of the terms and conditions of this contract before the face of Jehovah in the Mizpah.**

We have our two words for *leader* in this verse; the first word, *head*, indicates a higher position. The second word, *leader*, indicates simply a military leadership position.

The last line of this verse might seem rather enigmatic to some, but the REB's rendering makes it clear what is means: *And at Mizpah, in the present of the LORD, Jephthah repeated the terms he had laid down.* The NJB is also helpful here: *So Jephthah set off with the elders of Gilead. The people put him at their head as chief and commander; and Jephthah repeated all his conditions at Mizpah in Yahweh's presence.* Jephthah left with the elders of Gilead and went to their center of operations at Mizpah. There, the terms and conditions of his return to Gilead were spoken before God.

The implication is that this was a formal, public ceremony, a coronation, if you will. The elders acted as representatives of the people and their actions were essentially recognized and ratified by the people at these ceremonies. We will find similar ceremonies to recognize the authority of King Saul (I Sam. 11:15), Rehoboam (I Kings 12:1), and Jeroboam (I King 12:20).<sup>5</sup>

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## Jephthah Corresponds with the King of Ammon

**And so sent Jephthah messengers unto a king of sons of Ammon to say, “What to me and to you that you have come unto me to fight in my land?”**

Judges  
11:12

**First Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the sons of Ammon, saying, “What [is it] to me and to you that you have come to me to fight against my land?”**

**To begin with, Jephthah sent a message to the king of Ammon, which read: “Why exactly have you come to fight against my land?**

Jephthah takes an interesting approach. Recall that the sons of Ammon—well, you know what? you might not recall much about the sons of Ammon, which means that this would be a good place to examine them. You see, there was a reason that Jephthah first appealed to reasonableness of the king of the sons of Ammon and there is a good reason for that. Jephthah simply did not muster his troops and attack nor was Jephthah a coward looking for the easy way out. In fact, what is to follow will be a lengthy bit of correspondence between the two leaders;

<sup>4</sup> According to three early printed editions (Joseph Bryant Rotherham's *The Emphasized Bible*; ©1971 by Kregel Publications; p. 273).

<sup>5</sup> Barnes suggests that there was even more of a ceremony than this. He suggests that this was done before the tent of Jehovah in the presence of the High Priest and the ark. However, I see no evidence of this, either directly stated or by implication.

correspondence which will reveal to us that Jephthah does know his Scripture. To fully appreciate what Jephthah was doing, we need to first examine the **Doctrine of the Sons of Ammon**.

It is also important to note that Jephthah was simply following the advice of Moses. “When you approach a city to fight against it, you will offer them terms of peace...if they do not make peace with you, but engage in war, then you will besiege it.” (Deut. 20:10, 12). Although Moses was not speaking directly to the situation at hand, this was still a reasonable application of what Moses had said. As we have seen in the Doctrine of the Sons of Ammon, God, at first, was quite protective of Ammon, giving them their own land and preserving them in this land, and preventing Israel from attacking them.

And so said a king of sons of Ammon unto messengers of Jephthah, "Because took Israel my land in his rising up from Egypt from Arnon and as far as the Jabbok and as far as the Jordan. And now return them in peace."

## Judges 11:13

**Then the king of the sons of Ammon said to the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Israel seized my land in her rising up out of Egypt—from the Arnon to the Jabbok and to the Jordan. Now return them in peace."**

The king of the sons of Ammon replied to the messengers of Jephthah, “Because Israel seized our land when she arose out of Egypt—from the Arnon to the Jabbok and to the Jordan. Now, return this land in peace.”

The first verb with Israel is the Qal perfect of *lāqach* (נִלְקַח) [pronounced *law-KAHKH*] which means *to take, to take from, to take in marriage, to seize*. Strong's #3947 BDB #542. is the Qal infinitive construct of 'âlâh (הָלֵךְ) [pronounced *gaw-LAWH*], which means *to go up, to ascend, to rise*. Here, in the Qal infinitive construct (in Job 5:26), it would mean *a rising of, an ascending of, a climbing of*. Strong's #5927 BDB #748.

What the king of Ammon requires of Jephthah is the Hiphil imperative of *shûwb* (שׁוּב) [pronounced *shoo<sup>b</sup>v*]; which means *to return, to turn, to reminisce, to restore something*. In the Hiphil stem, it means *to be caused to return, to bring, to be caused to turn back mentally, reminisce, to return something, to restore, to bring back, to regain, to recover, to make restitution, reconsider, think again, or to be caused to return*. Strong's #7725 BDB #996. The Hebrew word indicating the direct object relation follows, and the suffix of that word is the feminine plural, apparently referring to *land* in the plural? The final word in this verse is the masculine singular noun *shâlôwm* (שָׁלֹום) [pronounced *shaw-LOHM*], which means *completeness, soundness, welfare, peace, safe, secure, tranquil, undisturbed, unagitated*. This is not the only noun cognate for the verb, by the way. Strong's #7965 BDB #1022.

The land which we are speaking about is east of the Jordan and the Dead Sea. About midway down the Dead Sea is the Arnon River, coming in at a right angle; and about a third of the way up the Jordan is the Jabbok, also coming in at a right angle. This would be all of the land of Reuben and most of the land of Gad (depending upon how Gad and Manasseh are divided). Now, as we discussed in the **Doctrine of the Sons of Ammon**, Israel was told specifically by God not to act aggressively toward Moab or Ammon and Moses obeyed these instructions from God (Deut. 2:9, 19, 37). However, when he came to the land of the Amorites, which stood between him and the crossing over of the Jordan, they were not about to let Israel pass on by without a fight (Num. 21:21–25 Deut. 2:26–31). Moses defeated Sihon the Amorite, the king of Heshbon, and Israel took his land (Deut. 2:32–36). Apparently, the Amorites had taken some of this land from Moab (Num. 21:26) and we can deduce from Joshua 13:21–25 that they took some of the land from Ammon. Now, given the fact that neither Ammon nor Moab was at all helpful to Israel in their trek northward (Deut. 23:3), there is no moral obligation whatsoever on the part of Israel to return this land that they took from the Amorites back to Moab or to Ammon.

And so added again Jephthah and so sent messengers unto a king of sons of Ammon.

Judges  
11:14

So Jephthah added again [to the correspondence] and sent messengers [back] to the king of the sons of Ammon.

**So Jephthah then sent additional correspondence, via Israelite messengers, to the king of the sons of Ammon.**

The first verb is the Hiphil imperfect of yâçaph (יָצַף) [pronounced yaw-SAHPH], which means *to add, to augment, to continue to do a thing*. The Hiphil is the causative stem, so Jephthah caused to be added, or caused to augment this message. Strong's #3254 BDB #414. The adverb which is 'ôwd (וֹעֶד) [pronounced góhd] (it is also written וְעֶד), which means *still, yet, again, besides, in addition to, even yet*. Strong's #5750 BDB #728.

You will notice that Jephthah is not hotheaded nor does he just jump into doing something. If there is a problem which he can resolve peacefully, then that is what he would prefer to do. We have no particular direction from God; however, we can assume, since there was no direct contact, that whatever Scripture had already been written still applied. Jephthah is going to reveal that he is an expert in Scripture—he certainly knows more about the historical events than you or the king of Moab did—and he will follow the same instructions which God gave to Moses; to wit, he will not harass or act aggressively toward the children of Ammon or Moab.

The NIV Study Bible has an excellent commentary on this second letter: *Jephthah responded in accordance with international policies of the time; his letter is a classical example of contemporary international correspondence. It also reflects—and appeals to—the common recognition that the gods of a people established and protected their political boundaries and decided all boundary disputes. Jephthah's defense of Israel's claim to the land is threefold: (1) Israel took it from Sihon king of the Amorites, not from the Ammonites (vv. 15–22); (2) the Lord gave the land to Israel (vv. 23–25); (3) Israel had long possessed it (vv. 26–27).*<sup>6</sup>

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### Jephthah Explains the History of the Disputed Land to the King of Ammon

Num. 21:21–35 Deut. 2:1–37

**And so he [or, they] said to him, “Thus says Jephthah: did not take away Israel a land of Moab and a land of sons of Ammon.**

Judges  
11:15

**So he said to him, “Thus says Jephthah: Israel did not take away the land of Moab or the land of the sons of Ammon.**

**The content of the letter was as follows: “From Jephthah: Israel did not take the land of Moab or the land of the sons of Ammon.**

Said is in the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular in the Massoretic text; however, it reads *they* in some codices.<sup>7</sup> Jephthah places what is crucial to this discussion right up front: Israel did not take any land which belonged to Moab or to Ammon.

**“For in their rising up from Egypt and so went Israel in the wilderness as far as a sea of reeds and so he came [to] Kadesh.**

Judges  
11:16

**“For when they rose up from Egypt and Israel went in the wilderness as far as the sea of reeds and then came [to] Kadesh;**

**“After Israel rose up from Egypt and went into the wilderness as far as the sea of reeds, and then came to Kadesh...**

Now Jephthah is going to demonstrate something which is quite impressive: he knows God's Word. It is interesting that Jephthah mentions three places: Egypt, the wilderness up to the sea of reeds, and then Kadesh. He skipped

<sup>6</sup> The NIV Study Bible; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; pp. 344–345.

<sup>7</sup> Joseph Bryant Rotherham's The Emphasized Bible; ©1971 by Kregel Publications; p. 273.

a great deal of Israel's history. He focuses on the leaving Egypt and he focuses on the leaving of Kadesh (which is in the far southern region of Judah).

To give you a brief background of Israel's silent years: Israel was in Kadesh-barnea, in the far, far southern portion of Judah. They were far enough south of civilization as to not be a problem. They sent spies from Kadesh to examine the land for conquest upon their arrival at the foot of the promised land. This was about a year out of Egypt (Num. 13:14; see Num. 13:26 specifically). The minority report of the spies, Caleb and Joshua, was that Israel should go into the land and take it. The majority reports was one of fear, apprehension, and a total lack of trust in God. The people themselves listened to the report of fear, and fell into great fear themselves, rebelling against Moses.

Moses manages to persuade God to allow the people to live; however, Israel's movement into the land was stopped dead in its tracks. God also promised to wipe out that generation. When they realized that they had screwed up and that they were going to die anyway at the hand of God, a large group of Israelites attacked the land, against the direction of Moses. They were beat back to Hormah, which is still far north of Kadesh (about 50 miles north, actually). Although a great deal is said about Israel wandering through the desert for the next 38½ years, it does not appear as though they really wandered much. 38½ years, we find Israel still in Kadesh (Num. 20:1). It is from Kadesh that Israel contacts Edom and apparently Moab (we will discuss that further in a moment).

**“And so sent Israel messengers unto a king of Edom to say, ‘Let me [or, us<sup>8</sup>] pass over please in your land’ and would not listen a king of Edom; and also unto a king of Moab he sent and he would not consent. And so remained Israel at Kadesh.**

Judges  
11:17

**“and Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, ‘Let us pass through, please, through your land.’ but the king of Edom would not listen. Furthermore, they [Israel] sent [a similar request] to the king of Moab and he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh.**

**“..she sent messengers to the king of Edom, who said, ‘Please, allow us to pass through your land.’ However, the king of Edom would not listen. Furthermore, Israel sent a similar request to the king of Moab and he would not consent to their traveling through his land either. Therefore, Israel temporarily remained at Kadesh.**

In the second half of this verse we have the wâw conjunction and the adverb gam (וְגַם) [pronounced *gahm*], which means *also, furthermore, in addition to, moreover*. Strong's #1571 BDB #168. What is implied is most of the former sentence. Jephthah does not repeat himself, but with these two little words, implies that he also sent a similar request to the king of Moab.

The final verb with the king of Moab is the negative and the Qal perfect of 'âvâh (הָבֵא) [pronounced *aw-BVAWH*] is a verb always found with a negative (except in Job 1:19 39:9). In the Qal perfect, it generally means *would*; in the Qal imperfect it means *consent, yield, willing*. Strong's #14 BDB #2. The final verb is the Qal imperfect of yâsha<sup>b</sup>v (יָשַׁאַב) [pronounced *yaw-SHAH<sup>B</sup>V*] and it means *to remain, to sit, to dwell*. Strong's #3427 BDB #442.

When it was time to move on, Israel contacted the kings of the lands that they wanted to travel through. In both cases, they were turned down. While the messengers were traveling back and forth, Israel stayed put in Kadesh. When the messengers returned with the response of the kings of Edom and Moab, Israel paused in Kadesh while a new route was planned.

Now, by the way the v. 17 reads, the messengers being sent to Moab might be a parenthetical statement—that is, just as Moses sent messengers to Edom to allow for Israel to pass through, Moses had also sent messengers to Moab, but not necessarily at the same time. Don't misunderstand me—I am not saying that this is the way that it

<sup>8</sup> This reads *us* in the Syrian codices (see v. 19). Joseph Bryant Rotherham's *The Emphasized Bible*; ©1971 by Kregel Publications; p. 273.

is. I'm saying that it could be read that way. Edom is not that much further away so the messengers could have been sent to both countries at the same time (Edom is south of the Dead Sea and Moab is southeast of the Dead Sea); they could have even been the same messengers. We are not clearly told here exactly the sequence of events; and, surprisingly enough, in the book of Numbers, we are told even less. The actual events took place in the book of Numbers; however, only the delegation to Edom is mentioned. The delegation from Israel to Moab is never mentioned in the Pentateuch whatsoever. Furthermore, God's directive to not take aggressive action toward Moab and Ammon, although given during the time period of Num. 20, was not mentioned until Deut. 2. And, interestingly enough, we could reasonably conclude that God also directed Israel not to behave in a hostile manner toward Edom, although that is not recorded anywhere (however, the actions of Israel toward Edom indicate this to be the case).

We will find this occurring throughout Scripture: when an event takes place, we sometimes do not get the complete and full picture. You may wonder why that is, but the explanation is fairly simple: during the time an event occurs, we do not always record what might be the most important details. We often confuse the big events with the small, day-to-day events. It is possible that if we kept a daily or a weekly diary, that we would leave out events or underplay events that we would easily recall in an end of the year summary. It is a matter of perspective—our perspective often improves when we move further and further from the time of the actual event. Even a better illustration is what is on the front page of the newspaper and what is not. Day-to-day there will be front page stories which are barely footnotes in history, if that. However, at the end of the year, the important stories are often summarized, and a better perspective as to which ones were significant seems to be a result of the looking back. The relative importance of these events is even better determined at the end of a decade or at the end of a century.

Historical	Recollection	History
Numbers 20	Deut. 9	Judges 11

Events	Scripture	Author
Sending out messengers to Edom and being refused passage.	Num. 20:14–23 Judges 11:17	Moses Jephthah?
Sending out messengers to Moab and being refused passage.	Judges 11:17	Jephthah?
Moses being instructed not to act aggressively toward Moab or Ammon as well as confirmation of that.	Deut. 2:9, 19, 37	Moses
Moses being told not to act aggressively toward Edom.	Not found	

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**"And so then went in the wilderness and so they went around a land of Edom and a land of Moab and so they went from a rising of a sun to a land of Moab and so they encamped beyond Arnon and they did not enter a border of Moab for Arnon [was] a boundary of Moab."**

Judges  
11:18

**"Then they went into the wilderness and they went around the land of Edom and [around] the land of Moab; in fact, they went east of the land of Moab and they encamped beyond Arnon. They did not enter the border of Moab for Arnon was the boundary of Moab."**

**"They then took a less-traveled route through the wilderness, going around the land of Edom and going around the land of Moab. In fact, they ended up east of Moab, encamping beyond Arnon. They never even entered the border of Moab, as Arnon was the boundary of Moab at that time."**

What Jephthah does is show how Israel made every effort possible to avoid violence with Edom and Moab. Ammon was not in the way of their movement to the east side of the Land of Promise.

After going around Edom and Moab, we have the Qal imperfect of the verb bôw' (בּוּא) [pronounced *boh*], which means *to come in, to come, to go in, to go*. Strong's #935 BDB #97. This is followed by the mîn preposition and the masculine singular construct of mizrâch (מִזְרָח) [pronounced *miz<sup>2</sup>-RAHKH*], which means *eastward, east, place of sun rising*. Strong's #4217 BDB #280. This is followed by the feminine singular noun shemesh (שֶׁמֶשׁ) [pronounced *SHEH-mehsh*], which means *sun*. Strong's #8121 BDB #1039. Together, these words simply mean *east*.

Prior to Arnon we have the bêyth preposition and the masculine singular construct of 'êber (בּּעֵבֶר) [pronounced *GAY<sup>B</sup>-ver*], which means *region across, beyond, side*. With the bêyth preposition, it means *beyond*. Strong's #5676 BDB #719.

Jephthah knows Scripture, which contains the historical records of what has occurred. He might even think that this is a no-brainer. I have gone before committees and groups with what I felt was a perfectly reasonable proposal—one where an opposing view seems completely unreasonable; and I am guessing that Jephthah felt the same way. He has the facts on his side. Israel purposely avoided hostile contact with Moab and Edom, as God had ordered them: “Then Jehovah said to me, ‘Do not harass Moab, and do not provoke them to war, for I will not give you any of their land as a possession, because I have given Ar to the sons of Lot as a possession. And when you come opposite the sons of Ammon, do not harass them nor provoke them, for I will not give you any of the land of the sons of Ammon as a possession, because I have given it to the sons of Lot as a possession.’” (Deut. 2:9, 19).

It appears as though, by the mention of the Sea of Reeds, that Israel made almost a beeline for Egypt, then traveled along the Gulf of Aqaba, south of Edom and Moab, going through the desert until they were east of Moab. Then they headed north and then cut back west toward the Dead Sea along the Arnon River. It was a terrifically long journey, given how circuitous it was. *Then they set out from Mount Hor by way of the Sea of Reeds, to go around the land of Edom and the people became impatient because of the journey* (Num. 21:4).<sup>9</sup> We actually have a rather well-defined route given us in Scripture, as Deut. 2:8 is quite explicit: “So we passed beyond our brothers, the sons of Esau, who live in Seir, away from the Arabah road, away from Elath and from Ezion-geber. And we turned and passed through by the way of the wilderness of Moab.” Ezion-geber is at the most northern tip of the Gulf of Aqaba, which means Israel traveled south of Edom. Elath is also found in that general area.<sup>10</sup>

**“And so sent Israel messengers unto Sihon, a king of the Amorite, a king of Heshbon; and so said to him Israel, ‘Let us [or, me<sup>11</sup>] pass through, please, in your land as far as my place.’”**

Judges  
11:19

**“Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon, the king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and so Israel said to him, ‘Let us please pass through your land as far as my place of abode.’”**

**“Then Israel sent an envoy to Sihon, the king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon. Israel said to him, ‘Let us please pass through your land in our journey toward our own land.’”**

<sup>9</sup> There are actually two different routes that Israel could have taken, the one mentioned being by far the more circuitous of the two. The other route would have been a northern route, traveling between the Salt Sea and Edom, and then going east or southeast between Edom and Moab, circling around the east side of Moab, and then heading back west at the Arnon River. Although this would have been a much shorter route, it still would have been unusually long, going through some difficult area. The primary problem with this route is that it would not be in keeping with Deut. 2:8.

<sup>10</sup> Barnes: *Elath (Akaba) is at the northern extremity of the eastern arm of the Red Sea, and gives to that arm the name of the Elanitic Gulf. The name means “trees” and is still justified by the grove of palm-trees at Akaba. Barnes’ Notes, Volume 2, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 273.*

<sup>11</sup> As per two early printed editions and the vulgate. Joseph Bryant Rotherham's *The Emphasized Bible*; ©1971 by Kregel Publications; p. 273.

Deut. 2:26–30 is the parallel passage: “So I then sent messengers from the wilderness of Kedemoth to Sihon, king of Heshbon with words of peace, saying ‘Let me pass through your land; I will travel only on the highway; I will not turn aside to the right or to the left. You will sell me food for money so that I may eat, and give me water for money that I may drink, only let me pass through on foot, just as the sons of Esau, who live in Seir, and the Moabites, who live in Ar, did for me, until I cross over the Jordan into the land which Jehovah our God is giving to us.’ But Sihon, king of Heshbon, was not willing for us to pass through his land; for Jehovah your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, in order to deliver him into your hand, as today.” The passages of Num. 21:21–25, Deut. 2:26–30 and vv. 19–22 of this chapter are so close as to imply that Jephthah did have a copy of the Law at his disposal, which would have been an unusual thing for that day and time.

Now you will notice that nothing whatsoever is said about Ammon because Ammon was not between Kedesh and the land east of their land. Israel began in far southern Judah, in a desert area, and was going to go the Gulf of Aqaba and then move north, toward the King’s Highway and then on the King’s Highway along the Salt Sea in order to enter into Israel from the east side. Israel had to circle around Edom and then go all the way to the east side of Moab, which was way out of their way; all of this in order to avoid conflict with the peoples with whom Jehovah did not want them to fight. What Israel was going to was the masculine singular *mâqôwm* (מָקוֹם) [pronounced *maw-KOHM*], which means *place*; for a soldier, it may mean where he is *stationed*; it might be where the ark is *situated* or *placed*; for people in general, it would be their *place of abode* (which could be their house or their town). Strong’s #4725 BDB #879. Jephthah is making a point here. He is not laying claim to the land east of the Jordan—not yet. He is pointing out that Israel would have preferred to simply cross through or around Moab, Ammon, Edom and the land of the Amorites, in order to get to the land given her by God. However, Israel’s hand was forced by Sihon and his actions.

With Sihon, we have Israel’s second serious conflict after cooling their heels in the desert for 38½ years. Israel’s plan is to get to the east side of the Jordan and then take their land from the east. There is no reason for Israel to be in conflict with the other countries between Kadesh and their destination; furthermore, God made it clear to Moses that they were not to attack Edom, Moab or Ammon. However, Jephthah does not even bring up this point. In fact, although Israel was guided by Jehovah, he has left this out of his message to the king of Ammon.

What is key here is that this is the disputed land. We are now dealing with the land that the king of Ammon believes belongs to them. The Amorites apparently carved out an empire of land which had formerly belong to Ammon and to Moab.

**“And so Sihon did not trust Israel a passing through in his boundary and so gathered together Sihon all of his people and so they encamp at Jahaz and so they fight with Israel.”**

Judges  
11:20

**“But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass over through his border so Sihon gathered together all of his people and they encamped at Jahaz and they fought with Israel.”**

**“However, Sihon did not trust that Israel would peacefully pass through his border, so he gathered all of his army together and they camped at Jahaz and fought against Israel.”**

The first verb is the Hiphil perfect of ‘âman (אָמַן) [pronounced aw-MAHN], which means, in the Hiphil, *to stand firm, to believe, to trust*. Strong’s #539 BDB #52. The second verb is the Qal infinitive construct (without the lamed prefix) of ‘âbvar (אָבַר) [pronounced aw<sup>b</sup>-VAHR], which means *to pass over, to pass through, to pass, to go over*. Strong’s #5674 BDB #716.

Jephthah is presenting things as they happened. Israel was moving quickly toward her own land. What was east of the Jordan was not specifically given to her, and she had been specifically told not to encroach on the land of Ammon and Moab (and probably Edom as well). However, Sihon gave Israel no choice. **“But Sihon would not permit Israel to pass through his border. So Sihon gathered all his people and went out against Israel in the wilderness, and came to Jahaz and fought against Israel (Num. 21:23). “But Sihon, king of Heshbon, was not willing for us to pass through his land; for Jehovah your God hardened his spirit and made his heart obstinate, in order to deliver him into your hand, as today.” (Deut. 2:30).**

**"And so gave Y<sup>eh</sup>owah, God of Israel, Sihon and all of his people into a hand of Israel and so they struck them down. And so possessed Israel all of [the] land of the Amorite inhabiting the land the that.**

Judges  
11:21

**"And so Y<sup>eh</sup>owah, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all of his people into the hand of Israel; so they [Israel] struck them down. So Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that land.**

**"So Jehovah, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all of his people into the hand of Israel—Israel completely defeated them. Therefore, Israel came to possess all of the land of the Amorites—who lived in that land.**

This is the first time in Israel's journey that Israel took any property. Here, Jephthah mentions the God of Israel, Jehovah. Jehovah God gave this land of the Amorites into the hand of Israel—the Amorites, Jephthah emphasizes at the end, who occupied that land. You see, this is the land which is the bone of contention between Israel and Ammon.

That parallel passages have a completely different emphasis at this point. Surprisingly enough, the *contemporary* account is fairly brief: **But Sihon would not permit Israel to pass through his border. So Sihon gathered all his people and went out against Israel in the wilderness, and came to Jahaz and fought against Israel. Then Israel struck him with the edge of the sword, and took possession of his land from the Arnon to the Jabbok, as far as the sons of Ammon; for the border of the sons of Ammon was Jazer. And Israel took all these cities and Israel lived in all the cities of the Amorites, in Heshbon, and in all her villages. For Heshbon was the city of Sihon, king of the Amorites, who had fought against the former king of Moab and had taken all his land out of his hand, as far as the Arnon** (Num. 21:23–26). In this account, it is clear that some of this land had belonged to Moab, and that Sihon had taken it from Moab. Apparently some of this land had belonged to Ammon, as we have noted before, but it appears as though Moses was not aware of that fact. **"So Jehovah our God delivered Og also, the king of Bashan, with all of his people, into our hand, and we struck them until there were no remaining survivors. We captured all of his cities at that time; there was not a city which we did not take from them: sixty cities, all the region of Argob, the kingdom of Og in Bashan. All of these were cities fortified with high walls, gates and bars, besides a great many unwalled towns. We completely destroyed them, as we did to Sihon, king of Heshbon, completely destroying the men, women and children of every city. However, we took all of the animals and the spoil of the cities as our recompense. Thus we took the land at that time from the hand of the two kings of the Amorites, who were beyond the Jordan, from the valley of Arnon to Mount Hermon."** (Deut. 3:3–8). In retrospect, Moses emphasizes God's graciousness and power and faithfulness that He manifested toward Israel in this fight. Joshua, speaking in God's stead, told the people, **"Then I brought you into the land of the Amorites, who lived beyond the Jordan; and they fought with you and I gave them into your hand, and you took possession of their land when I destroyed them before you."** (Joshua 24:8). In Jephthah's letter, you will note that no emphasis is given upon the actual battle—the point is the Jehovah, the God of Israel, gave this land to Israel and, Jephthah points out, land that was occupied by Amorites when Israel took it. It did belong to Moab at one time, which Jephthah is probably aware. That some of it did at one time belong to Ammon, he may have been aware, but that is a fact which is buried fairly deep in Scripture (Joshua 13:25). Israel only took that which was in the hands of the Amorites; they never took any land which belonged to Moab or Ammon.

**"And so they possessed all of [the] boundary of the Amorite from Arnon and as far as the Jabbok and from the wilderness and as far as the Jordan.**

Judges  
11:22

**"So they possessed all of the territory of the Amorites from Arnon to as far as Jabbok and from the wilderness to as far as the Jordan.**

**"Therefore, they possessed all of the territory which had belonged to the Amorites, from Arnon to Jabbok, and from the desert wilderness to the Jordan.**

The boundary of the Amorite was quite well-defined: the Arnon River runs into the middle of the Salt Sea from the east, and the Jabbok river runs to the middle of the Jordan River from the east. Therefore, the Arnon and the Jabbok make up the southern and northern boundaries of the Amorites. On the west side was the Jordan River and the Salt Sea and on the east side was the masculine singular of *wilderness* is the word mid<sup>b</sup>âr (מִדְבָּר) [pronounced

*mid<sup>e</sup>-BAWR].* The word itself does not mean *desert* because it is a place where sheep are grazed (Joshua 2:22 Psalm 65:13). The only way it may be thought of as a desert is it often an *uninhabited* (or *deserted*) land (Job 38:26 Jer. 9:1). We generally render this *wilderness*. Strong's #4057 BDB #184. In other words, in the only boundary of the four which is difficult to define, no one lives. On the other side of that wilderness live the Ammonites.

Moses recalls to the people the same territory: "From Aroer which is on the edge of the valley of Arnon, and from the city which is in the valley, even to Gilead, there was no city that was too high for us; Jehovah our God delivered them all over to us. Only, you did not go near to the land of the sons of Ammon, all along the river Jabbok, and the cities of the hill country, and wherever the Jehovah our God commanded us [not to]." (Deut. 2:36–37). Thus Israel lived in the land of the Amorites (Num. 21:31).

"And then Y<sup>e</sup>howah, God of Israel,  
dispossessed the Amorite from faces of His  
people Israel and you possess him.

Judges  
11:23

"Then Y<sup>e</sup>howah, the God of Israel, caused to  
dispossess the Amorites before the presence  
of His people Israel; and you possess it!

"So, given that Jehovah, the God of Israel, caused the land of the Amorites to be given over to Israel,  
what claim do you have to possess it?

The last portion of this verse is a bit difficult, so let me give you a couple of other translations:

*The Emphasized Bible*

Now therefore it was Yahweh God of Israel that dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, —and shalt thou possess it?

*NASB*

'Since now the LORD, the God of Israel, drove out the Amorites from before His people Israel, are you then to possess it?'

*Young's Lit. Translation*

'And now Jehovah, God of Israel, hath dispossessed the Amorite from the presence of His people Israel, and thou wouldest possess it!'

The verb is the Hiphil perfect of yârash (yaw-RAHSH) [pronounced yaw-RAHSH], which means *to possess, to take possession of, to occupy [all] geographical area—by driving out the previous occupants, to inherit, to dispossess*. In the Hiphil, it means *to cause to possess, to cause to inherit, to cause to dispossess*. Strong's #3423 BDB #439.

The final phrase we might set up as a question, but Jephthah uses an exclamation at this point. He uses the Qal imperfect of the verb yârash again. Now Jephthah expresses this as though he is aghast. God gave this specific land directly from the Amorites into the hand of Israel—and now, suddenly, Ammon possesses this land? Give me break.

In this verse and the next we have a contrast of the God of Israel and the god of Moab and Ammon, which was a popular theme in those days.

"Will not [that] which is caused to be  
dispossessed Chemosh, your god, him you will  
dispossess and all which has dispossessed  
Y<sup>e</sup>howah our God from our faces him we  
possess.

Judges  
11:24

"Will not that which Chemosh your god causes  
to be dispossessed, you will possess it? And  
all which Y<sup>e</sup>howah our God has dispossessed  
from before us, we will possess it.

"Will you not possess all that Chemosh your God causes you to possess? And all that Jehovah our God has dispossessed before us, we will possess.

Okay, although the concept is easy, the grammar in this one is difficult, so let's look at several renderings:

*The Emphasized Bible*

What Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess that wilt thou not possess? and whatsoever Yahweh our God hath set before us to possess that shall we not possess?

NASB

'Do you not possess what Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So whatever the LORD our God has driven out before us, we will possess it.

Young's Lit. Translation

That which Chemosh thy god causeth thee to possess—dost thou not possess it? and all that which Jehovah our God hath dispossessed from our presence,—it we do possess.

We have the word for *dispossessed* used four times in this verse with the negative used at the very beginning. We might better phrase the first sentence as: **Will you not possess that which Chemosh your god causes you to possess?** In other words, we would place the negative with the second possess and place all of that first? This is not the style of the Hebrew, which reads, literally: "**Will not [that] which is caused to be dispossessed Chemosh your god, him you will possess?**

Chemosh was the Moabite god of war. We find his person represented on coins with a sword in one hand and a spear and lance in the other and he is flanked by burning torches. His name means *destroyer* or *desolater*.<sup>12</sup>

Jephthah speaks as a man to these people: whatever Chemosh, their god, places before them, they would take. Whatever Jehovah, Israel's God, places before Israel, she will take. We have a lot of opinions as to what is going on here. You see, Molech is the god of Ammon, not Chemosh. So, the explanations are as follows: (1) Over the years, Ammon began to worship another god, Molech, rather than Chemosh. Moab and Ammon both worshipped Chemosh in the beginning, and then Ammon later worshipped Molech (I Kings 11:7). (2) The NIV Study Bible suggests that the king of Ammon was also ruling over Moab or that there was a coalition of sorts (although that is never mentioned). (3) Barnes suggests that the king of Ammon may have been a Moabite. (4) Another likely explanation, partially given by Barnes, was that the land's immediate owner prior to the Amorites was Moab; Ammon apparently possessed some of that land prior to Moab. However, since the most recent owner prior to the Amorites was Moab, then the god to speak of is more properly Chemosh rather than Molech. In other words, this was somewhat tongue-in-cheek. Clearly Moab had possessed most or all of that land prior to the Amorites possession; and Chemosh was their demon-god. Therefore, since the king of Ammon is laying historical claim on the land, Jephthah references not the god of Ammon but the god of Moab, as they, if anyone, should have claim to the land (along with their god, Chemosh). (5) And one more possibility: Ammon and Moab both shared the god Chemosh and Ammon also had Molech, and their functions were different. (6) ZPEB suggests that we cannot expect absolute accuracy from a robber chief.<sup>13</sup> Given Jephthah's obvious intellect, I would lean more towards explanation #4.

**"And now are—a better—better you from Balak, son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did—a disputation—disputing with Israel and going to war he went to war with them..."**

Judges  
11:25

**"Now are you any better than Barak, son of Zippor, the king of Moab? Indeed, did [he] dispute with Israel? And an engagement of war—[did] he engage in war with them..."**

**"Now listen, are you really better than Barak, the son of Zippor, the king of Moab? Didn't he also have a dispute with Israel, as well as engage in war with them..."**

In these next couple verses, we will have Jephthah's second argument, as Keil and Delitzsch describe: *Balak had neither made war upon Israel on account of the territory which they had conquered from the Amorites, nor had he put forward any claim to it as his own property, which he certainly might have done with some appearance of justice, as a large portion of it had formerly belonged to the Moabites...If therefore Balak the king of the Moabites never thought of looking upon this land as being still his property, or lay claim to the land of Gilead as belonging to him, or to take it away from the Israelites by force, especially after the lapse of 300 years...If the Ammonites had any*

<sup>12</sup> Quoted and paraphrased from *The New Bible Dictionary*; editor J. D. Douglas; ©Inter-Varsity Fellowship, 1962; ©by W. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co.; pp.376–377.

<sup>13</sup> *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; ©1976; Vol. 3, p. 750.

right to it, they ought to have asserted their claim in Moses' time. It was much too late now, after the expiration of 300 years.<sup>14</sup>

Now, again, we have a tough sentence with some difficult grammar; furthermore, the verse ends mid-sentence, which adds to our confusion. Here's what others have done:

<i>The Emphasized Bible</i>	Now therefore, art thou really better than Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab? Hath there been any striving at all with Israel, or nay fighting at all with them,...
NASB	'And now are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive with Israel, or did he ever fight against them?
<i>Young's Lit. Translation</i>	'And now, art thou at all better than Balak son of Zippor, king of Moab? did he at all strive with Israel? did he not at all fight against them?

What is particularly difficult in this verse is that there are three infinitive absolutes in this verse. The infinitive absolute can act as a noun, a verb or an adverb. It takes the part of a noun, but with another verb (which may or may not be in the same stem, and it intensifies the verb's meaning, where it functions either as a complement of affirmation, and therefore translated *surely* or *indeed*; or it may act as a complement of condition, and therefore be translated *at all*, *freely* or *indeed*).<sup>15</sup> Its primary use when found before its verb is to strengthen or emphasize. Its use does not simply intensify the meaning of a verb, as would a Piel, but applies an intensification to the entire phrase. Therefore, the infinitive absolute strengthens the note of certain in affirmations and in promises or threats, and of contrast in adversative or concessionary statements, while it reinforces any sense of supposition or doubt or volition present in conditional clauses or questions or wishes. For this reason, it is a characteristic of grammar generally not found in the narrative. This would be used in speech and in letters in order to make a point. The use of the English adverbs *indeed*, *surely*, *of course*, *even*, *really*, *at all* or by the addition of the modals *should*, *could*, *must*, *may* might catch the nuance, but actually are often unnecessarily strong.<sup>16</sup>

The first verb is the Qal infinitive absolute of **תָּוֹב** (טוֹב) [pronounced *tow<sup>b</sup>v*], which means *to be pleasant, to be delightful, to be delicious, to be cheerful, to be happy, to be joyful, to be good, to be kind, to be well, to do well, to do right*. Even BDB has a difficult time with its usage here and presents this verb as a case by itself, meaning *are you really better than Barak?* Strong's #2895 BDB #373. This is followed by the Qal active participle of the same verb. A completely literal rendering obfuscates the meaning (as you can see in the most literal of my three renderings; the second rendering is easier to comprehend).

Of course we have next the Qal infinitive absolute of **רִיבַּוּ** (רִיבּוּ) [pronounced *ree<sup>b</sup>v*], which means *to debate, to contend, to dispute*. Strong's #7378 BDB #936. After the Qal infinitive absolute, we have the Qal active participle of the same verb (there is no noun and no 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular here). Jephthah brings up the little matter of another king who decided to have a dispute with Israel. Jephthah knows his Scripture and he is depending upon this king to know the local history. If the king is a stupid man who knows no history, then what Jephthah will say to him will make little or no difference.

The third set of verbs is the Niphal infinitive absolute of **לְחַמֵּם** (לְחַמֵּם) [pronounced *law-KAHM*], which means *to fight to do battle, to war*. In the Niphal stem, the verb appears to mean *engage in battle, engage in war, to wage war*. Strong's #3898 BDB #535. Jephthah immediately follows this with the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular, Niphal perfect of the same verb.

Apparently, Barak, the former king of Moab, was a rather famous king, well-known to the king of Ammon three centuries later. However, despite his notoriety, Barak could not even hire someone to curse the Israelites. This incident is mentioned quite a number of times in Scripture. The book of Numbers devotes three chapters to it (Num. 22–24), which we exegeted sometime ago. Joshua, in one of his two last recorded messages, said,

<sup>14</sup> Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 277.

<sup>15</sup> Paraphrased from *The Complete Word Study Old Testament*; Dr. S. Zodhiates; ©1994 AMG Publishers; p. 2277.

<sup>16</sup> Quoted or paraphrased from J.C.L. Gibson, *Davidson's Introductory Hebrew Grammar-Syntax*; 4<sup>th</sup> Edition, © T&T Clark Ltd., 1994, pp. 123–124.

speaking from the standpoint of God: “Then Balak ben Zippor, king of Moab, arose and fought against Israel and he sent for and summoned Balaam ben Beor to curse you. But I was not willing to listen to Balaam. So he had to bless you, and I delivered you from his hand.” (Joshua 24:9–10). God speaks in the book of Micah: “My people, remember now what Balak king of Moab counseled, and what Balaam ben Beor answered him—from Shittim to Gilgal, in order that you might know the righteous acts of Jehovah.” (Micah 6:5). Even Peter, 15 or so centuries later, writes: **Forsaking the right way, they have become deluded, having followed the way of Balaam Beor, who loved the wages of unrighteousness, but he received a rebuke for his own transgression; a dumb donkey, speaking with the voice of a man, restrained the madness of the prophet** (II Peter 2:15–16; see also Deut. 23:3–5 Rev. 2:14).

The king of Ammon will illustrate the old adage we learn from history that we learn nothing from history.

**“...in a dwelling of Israel in Heshbon and her villages and in Aroer and her villages and in all the encampments that [are] by sides of Arnon [for] three hundred years? And why did you not deliver [it] in [the] time the that?**

Judges  
11:26

**“...when Israel dwelt in Heshbon and its villages and in Aroer and its villages and in all of the encampments which [are] by the sides of the Arnon [for] three hundred years? And why did you not snatch [it] away within that time?**

**...when Israel lived in Heshbon and in its villages and in Aroer and it villages, as well as all of the encampments which were along the banks of the Arnon for three hundred years? Why did you not take the land away at that time?**

Again, Jephthah reveals himself to be rather intelligent and slick in the Hebrew language, which makes our job more difficult to ascertain his points. Now, the narration prior to this is simpler language, but what he writes is rather difficult. The inference is possibly that Jephthah did not write this portion of Scripture (although his message is transcribed here word-for-word).

*The Emphasized Bible*

...all the time that Israel hath been dwelling in Heshbon and in her towns and in Aroer and in her towns and in all the cities that are on the banks of Arnon,—for three hundred years? Wherefore, then, have ye not made a rescue within that time?

NASB

'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, three hundred years, why did you not recover them within that time?'

*Young's Lit. Translation*

In Israel's dwelling in Heshbon and in its towns, and in Aroer and in its towns, and in all the cities which are by the sides of Arnon three hundred years—and wherefore have ye not delivered them in that time?

There are two different words used here for places to live. The first, used twice, is the feminine plural noun *bath* (בָתִים) [pronounced *bahth*], which means *daughters* or *villages*. Strong's #1323 BDB #123 The second substantive used is the feminine plural of *îyr* (אִיר) [pronounced *eer* or *geer*], which means *encampment*, *city*, *town*. This is used in the very widest sense of a group of people, from an encampment, to a village, to a city. Strong's #5892 BDB #746. This noun is followed by the relative pronoun (which often implies the verb *to be*) and the preposition *Next* is the feminine noun *yâd* (יָד) [pronounced *yawd*] is the Hebrew word for *hand*. With the preposition *'el* (לְ) [pronounced *el* ], it means *by the side of*, *into the custody of*. Noun = Strong's #3027 BDB #388 Preposition = Strong's #5921 BDB #752.

At the end of this verse we have the wâw conjunction and the adverb *maddu'a* (מַדְעָה) [pronounced *mah-DOO-ahg*], which means *why*, *wherefore*, *on what account*. Strong's #4069 BDB #396. Then we have the negative and the Hiphil perfect of *nâtsal* (נָצַל) [pronounced *naw-TSAHL*], which means, in the Hiphil, *to snatch away*, *to deliver*, *to rescue*, *to snatch out of danger*, *to preserve*. Strong's #5337 BDB #664.

Finally, this ends with the bêyth preposition and the feminine singular noun *'êth* (אֵת) [pronounced *gayth*], and it means *time*, *the right time*, *the proper time*. Strong's #6256 BDB #773.

Historically, the great king Barak never disputed Israel's possession of the former land of the Amorites, and he was the king of Moab. He was more concerned with keeping what he had, and he hired Balaam to curse Israel. After all, having a new, aggressive people camped right across the river from you can be rather disconcerting. Barak felt that if he could find a man of God to curse the Israelites, then he would feel more at ease with their presence—in fact, he might work up enough nerve to attack them. However, in none of this did Barak ever question Israel's ownership of the land, nor does anyone question it for the next three hundred years.

Note what Jephthah is doing here. He is conceding that even if this area did ultimately belong to Ammon, why on earth in 300 years when Israel occupied the area and cities in question did Ammon not recover these cities from Israel? Rosenmüller sums up Jephthah's arguments: *Jephthah urged everything that could be pleaded in support of their prescriptive right: possession, length of time, the right of conquest, and undisputed occupation.*<sup>17</sup>

Now, as an aside, this also allows us to determine where we are in history. The exodus would have occurred in 1446 B.C. and entrance into the land (along with this incident with Barak) around 1407 B.C. This 300 years is a round number, indicating that at the time that Jephthah writes is circa 1107 B.C., just a half a century away from the time of King Saul.

**“And I [even] I have not sinned with respect to you and you are doing with me evil to war against me. Judge Y<sup>eh</sup>owah, the One judging, the day between sons of Israel and sons of Ammon.”**

Judges  
11:27

**“Finally, I [even] I have not sinned with respect to you and you are doing evil to war against me. [Let] Y<sup>eh</sup>owah judge, the Judge, today between the sons of Israel and the sons of Ammon.”**

**“Finally, I have not sinned with respect to you and you are doing wrong to war against me. Let Jehovah judge today between the sons of Israel and the sons of Ammon.”**

In using the pronoun *I*, Jephthah is personifying himself as Israel. He is saying, “I [i.e., Israel] have not sinned against you.” Then Jephthah ends his powerful message. He has given the complete historic background on the land possessed by Israel, which possession is questioned by Ammon. In asking for Jehovah to judge between Israel and Ammon, Jephthah is saying that God has already made that judgment. The NIV Study Bible: *It is significant that in the book of Judges the singular noun “judge” is found only here, where it is used of the Lord, Israel’s true Judge.*<sup>18</sup> The land is in Israel’s hand—God gave it to Israel—and, in three hundred years, Ammon has done nothing about that.

Now, have you ever put forth an almost perfect and logical argument; one so succinct, one which covers all of the points of disputation—and then have the other person say, “Yeah, well you’re wrong and I’m right and that’s all there is to it.” This is what happened to Jephthah.<sup>19</sup>

Although Jephthah does not formally call the sons of Ammon to war, he lets them know with this last phrase that Jehovah will judge between them—and if that requires war, then so be it. God has a design and a purpose, and part of that includes the area which will be occupied by any given country at any given time. Jephthah does not herein declare war upon Ammon—he merely states that they are ready to go to war, if necessary, and allow Jehovah to decide. You will note that Jephthah uses a great deal of subtlety throughout many of his dealings.

**And did not listen, king of sons of Ammon unto words of Jephthah which he sent unto him.**

Judges  
11:28

**But the king of the sons of Ammon did not even listen to the words of Jephthah, which he sent to him.**

<sup>17</sup> Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 277.

<sup>18</sup> The NIV Study Bible; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 345.

<sup>19</sup> Four of my sources gives almost the exact same reference verses: Gen. 16:5 18:25 31:53 I Sam. 24:12, 15 for similar phrasing; I did not quote from these passages, as they did not exactly pertain to the narrative.

**However, the king of the sons of Ammon did not listen to the words of Jephthah, which he sent to him.**

Have you ever had a disagreement with someone or an argument and your point of view was persuasive, cogent and logical? And then that other person responds, but what they say really makes little sense and is far off point? It did not matter that Jephthah was 100% correct. The king of Ammon's response when the message was brought to him: "I don't even want to hear it. Just talk to the hand."

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## **Jephthah's Vow**

**And so was with Jephthah a Spirit of Y<sup>h</sup>owah and so he passed through the Gilead and Manasseh and he passed through Mizpah of Gilead and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed through [to the] sons of Ammon.**

Judges  
11:29

**And so the Spirit of Y<sup>h</sup>owah was with Jephthah; therefore he passed through the Gilead and Manasseh and he then passed through Mizpah of Gilead and from Mizpah of Gilead, he passed over to the sons of Ammon.**

**Now the Spirit of Jehovah was with Jephthah; therefore, he passed on though the Gilead and Manasseh and then passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead, he passed over to the sons of Ammon.**

The narrative is much different in vocabulary than was the text of the message sent to the king of Ammon. However, here we have a repetition of a verb, which was done as well in the message to the king. The verb that we find three times in this verse is 'â<sup>b</sup>var (אָבַר) [pronounced aw<sup>b</sup>-VAHR], which means *to pass over, to pass through, to pass, to go over*. Strong's #5674 BDB #716. We find it the first two times in the Qal imperfect and the third time in the Qal perfect. The language is a bit rough, as it makes sense when speaking of the land and the various areas—this is something that Jephthah would pass through. However, it makes less sense to pass *through* the sons of Ammon, so I have added the words *to the*. The Aramaic, Syrian, and Vulgate codices read *unto* rather than *through*.<sup>20</sup>

Barnes: *The geography is rather obscure, but the sense seems to be that Jephthah first raised all the inhabitants of Mount Gilead; then he crossed the Jabbok into Manasseh, and raised them; then he returned at the head of his new forces to his own camp at Mizpeh to join the troops he had left there; and thence at the head of the whole army marched against the Ammonites, who occupied the southern parts of Gilead.*<sup>21</sup> That the troops were in Mizpah is told to us in Judges 10:17. The impression which I have concerning this scenario is that Israel simultaneously built up her army and went out looking for a man to lead them. Therefore, Judges 10:17–18 are simultaneous with Judges 11:5–11. In this verse, Jephthah goes to where the primary Israeli forces are gathered.

The king of Ammon has given Jephthah no other choice. He can back down, which would not be a real option; or he could attack Ammon within Israel's territory.

Now I want those of you who believe in peace on this earth to concentrate on what is said here and recall to mind Judges 3:10: *And the Spirit of Jehovah cam up upon him [Othniel, Caleb's son], and he judged Israel. When he went out to war, Jehovah gave Cushan-rishathaim, king of Mesopotamia, into his hand, so that he prevailed over Cushan-rishathaim.* Two places in the book of Judges, which is one of the bleakest times in Israel, the Spirit of God comes upon two men, and what do they do? They go out to war. If there was something that I could do or say that would end war, I probably would, even though it falls outside of God's plan. We do not live on an earth where mankind can dwell side-by-side in peace. No matter what we do or say, there will always be war on this earth. Because people foolishly believe in evolution, they often believe that man can evolve past that aspect of life. There

<sup>20</sup> Joseph Bryant Rotherham's *The Emphasized Bible*; ©1971 by Kregel Publications; p. 273.

<sup>21</sup> Barnes' Notes, Volume 2, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 447.

is no genetic evolution of man's inner nature. Man is a fallen creature, and war will never be something that he can somehow program away. How can you be so stupid as to not realize how unsafe the outside world is (when I was a young child, I could wander for hours around my house, unsupervised, and I was absolutely safe; now, the average parent cannot let their young ones even out of their sight for a few minutes when outside). And yet you think that somehow you can end war? If you think that you can end war by having some nice thoughts, taking a stand, and/or muttering some simplistic slogans—then try that the next time you are at an ATM machine at night, or in the wrong part of town at night, or when you open your front door and let your pre-school children run loose outside. I wish that I could tell you that you will not see war; that your family and loved ones will not be exposed to war, but that is not on the horizon. If you want to prevent war, you need to do two things: you pursue God's Word with a fervor; and you build up a military that no other country wants to challenge. That is the only way that you will even see a bit of peace in your lifetime.

**And so vowed Jephthah a vow to Y<sup>eh</sup>owah and so he said, "If a giving You give sons of Ammon into my hand,..."**

Judges  
11:30

**Then Jephthah vowed a vow to Y<sup>eh</sup>owah and said, "If You indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand,..."**

**And then Jephthah made a vow to Jehovah, saying, "If you give the sons of Ammon into my hand,..."**

What we have heard is something which makes one question the motivation of Jephthah in sending the letter to the king of Ammon. At first, I was thinking, Jephthah is being reasonable and allowing this people of Ammon a way out. However, when Jephthah makes this vow, it is as if he is bribing God. I hope you don't think that there is something that you can promise God that will tip the scales in your favor? What Jephthah lacked here was direct communication with God. He knew in his heart that he had been called by God. He went from being an outcast in his home city to the #1 VIP of Israel, so proclaimed by the people who had shunned him. He knew the history and background of Israel and knew that this land had been given to Israel by God. Furthermore, the Spirit of God was with him. In other words, he had all the guidance that he needed. What he desired was just one more thing—one additional good luck charm to cinch this victory for him, and he decides upon a vow. Now, how many times have you promised God you would do this if He did that? Probably half of the time you even reneged on your part of the deal. You are not unlike Jephthah, except that he followed through with what he promised.

**"...and he will be the one coming out who comes out from doors of my house to meet me in a returning of me in peace from sons of Ammon and he will be for Y<sup>eh</sup>owah and I have offered Him [or, him] a burnt offering."**

Judges  
11:31

**"...and the one coming out who comes out from the entrances of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon—it will be for Y<sup>eh</sup>owah or I will offer it [as] a burnt offering."**

**"...then the one who comes out of my house to meet me at the entrance when I return in peace from the war with the sons of Ammon—it will be for Jehovah or I will offer it [as] a burnt offering [or, I will offer Him a burnt offering] ."**

Let's first have a couple of renderings for this verse:

**The Emphasized Bible**

...then it shall be, that whosoever cometh forth out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return successful from the sons of Ammon shall belong unto Yahweh, and I will offer him up as an ascending sacrifice.

**NASB**

...then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the LORD's and I will offer it up as a burnt offering."

**Owen's Translation**

And the one going forth shall be who comes forth from the doors of my house to meet me when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be Yahweh's; and I will offer him up for a burnt offering.

*Young's Lit. Translation*

...then it hath been, that which at all cometh out from the doors of my house to meet me in my turning back in peace from the Bene-Ammon—it hath been to Jehovah, or I have offered up for it—a burnt-offering.

What this thing that will come out will come through the feminine plural noun *deleth* (דְּלָתִים) [pronounced *DEH-leth*], which means *doors, gates of a city*. Strong's #1817 BDB #195. We might picture a double door, but what actually is the case is that there might be several entrances to the house of Jephthah. Or we might really be looking at a double gate.

Jephthah probably has something in particular in mind; perhaps his wife, whom he is determined not to have sexual relations with if she comes through the gate; however, this is given in the masculine, so I am thinking that he is not thinking of a person, but probably an animal. He is definitely not thinking of his daughter and probably not his wife, as this is the masculine gender. Maybe it had been traditional for his wife to throw open the gates when he returned home and some of his animals charged out to meet him. Perhaps it was a servant that he had in mind. It obviously was not a female that he was thinking of, as he used the masculine voice. However, using the masculine voice is not enough to conclude that Jephthah had a person in mind (as opposed to an animal). The use of the term *burnt offering* suggests he was thinking of an animal, despite the opinions of Augustine, Pfeiffer, ZPEB, Zodhiates, Barnes or Keil and Delitzsch. However, let's first look at the wâw conjunction:

At the end of his vow, Jephthah uses a wâw conjunction. We don't discuss this word too often, as we find it sprinkled throughout almost every verse, and often several times. Now might be a good time to deal with it. The wâw conjunction the Hebrew letter wâw and the shiva vowel point (which is not a vowel, strictly speaking, but that is a different topic). The wâw conjunction is used as ❶ a simple copulative, used to connect words and sentences, in which case it is usually rendered *and*. ❷ It can be used to explain one noun or clarify one noun with another, in which case it is rendered *even* or *yea* (see Job 5:19 Dan. 4:10). ❸ The wâw conjunction can introduce two nouns, where the first is the genus and the second is the species; in which case, we would render it *and particularly, and specially, and namely, and specifically* (and it can be used the other way as well) (see II Kings 23:2 Psalm 18:1 Isa. 1:1 2:1 Zech. 14:21). ❹ It can be prefixed to a verb also by way of explanation; it could be reasonably rendered as a relative pronoun (*who, which*) (see Gen. 49:25 Job 29:12 Isa. 13:14). ❺ It can be used to begin an apodosis (the *then* portion of an *if...then...* statement) (see Gen. 2:4, 5 40:9 48:7). ❻ It is used between words and sentences in order to compare them or to mark their resemblance (I Sam. 12:15 Job 5:7). ❼ When doubled, it can mean *both...and...* (Num. 9:14 Joshua 7:24 Psalm 76:7). ❽ It can be prefixed to adversative sentences or clauses and rendered *but, and yet, although, otherwise* (Gen. 2:17 15:2 17:20 Judges 16:15 Ruth 1:21 Job 15:5 6:14). ❾ And, what we were after, is the wâw conjunction can be used in disjunctive sentences; that is, it can be rendered *or* (which will help us to understand what Jephthah does) (Ex. 21:17 Lev. 5:3 Deut. 24:7). ❿ Finally, the wâw conjunction can be used before causal sentences and rendered *because, for, that, in that* (Gen. 18:32 30:27 Psalm 5:12 60:13); before conclusions or inferences, and therefore rendered *so that, therefore, wherefore* (II Kings 4:41 Isa. 3:14 Ezek. 18:32 Zech. 2:10); and before final and consecutive sentences, which mark an end or an object: *in order that* (Gen. 42:34 Job 20:10 Isa. 13:2). No Strong's # BDB #251.<sup>22</sup> In this case, which helps explain what occurs at the end of this chapter, the wâw conjunction is properly rendered *or*.<sup>23</sup>

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What he promises is, to offer this to his God, Jehovah. The verb is the Hiphil perfect of 'âlâh (אָלָה) [pronounced *gaw-LAWH*], which means *to go up, to ascend, to rise*. In the Hiphil, it means *to cause to go up, to lead up, to take up, to bring up*. Strong's #5927 BDB #748. This is followed by the feminine singular noun cognate 'ôlâh (אָלָה) [pronounced *go-LAW*], which is consistently rendered *burnt offering*. Strong #5930 BDB #750. Now, let's go back to the use of the masculine singular suffix used at the of the verb 'âlâh and the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular used

<sup>22</sup> Paraphrased, summarized and/or quoted from H.W.F. Gesenius, *Hebrew-Chaldee Lexicon to the Old Testament*; ©1979 by Baker Books; pp. 233–235.

<sup>23</sup> Keil and Delitzsch vehemently disagree here, and out of respect, I will refer you to Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 278 for their opinion.

for the verb *to be*; twice, Jephthah refers to the thing to be sacrificed in a masculine gender. Never does he refer to the thing to be sacrificed in the feminine gender (the word for *burnt offering* only comes in the feminine gender). Now recall how many sons did Jephthah have; recall how many brothers did Jephthah have living with him; think about how many fathers lived at his home. If you total up this number, you will come up with zero. His brothers were half brothers who sent him packing out of Gilead. His father allowed this to happen and remained in Gilead with his wife (who was not Jephthah's mother—Judges 11:1–3). Apart from his daughter, he had no sons or daughters (Judges 11:34). In other words, whatever Jephthah was accustomed to have meet him, whether it be a servant or an animal or animals, it is referred to twice in the masculine gender. He had never returned from war before (or, at least, not from a full-scale war).

Now, some mistakenly try to equate the last two phrases; that is, to say *he will be to Y<sup>e</sup>howah and I have offered him up a burnt-offering* do not refer to the same thing. First of all, a burnt offering is never said to be to *Jehovah* because it is already *Jehovah's*. In saying that a burnt offering was to *Jehovah* would be a repetition. Secondly, we do have human beings dedicated to *Jehovah*, e.g., the first born (Num. 3:12–13), yet no one ever questions whether or not they are offered up as burnt sacrifices. I say this in anticipation of what is to come. Jephthah's daughter will be the first one out the door to meet him; therefore, she will belong to *Jehovah*. Next, burnt sacrifices were males (Lev. 1:3). Keep in mind that these sacrifices portrayed our Lord Jesus Christ on the cross.

Now, what I find surprising is that I have not come across any translators who render this as: "...and he is *Jehovah's* and I have offered Him a burnt offering"; although that is the most literal rendering. Both *is* and *offer* are in the perfect (completed) tense. This generally refers to an act which has been completed; however, it can refer to an act in the future and it can refer to an act in the future whose futurity is certain. However, note what we do not find prior to the word *burnt-sacrifice*; we do not have the kaph preposition, which means *as*; nor do we have the lamed preposition, which means *for*. In other words, if you just cannot accept the wāw conjunction as the disjunctive *or*, then please realize that even if the wāw conjunction is taken as a non-disjunctive conjunction, this does not mean that Jephthah is promising to offer whatever comes out to him as a burnt sacrifice. **There is no *as*; there is no word *for* in this clause.** The thing which comes out to Jephthah is not even here being literally offered as or *for* a burnt offering. We could take this more literally in one of two ways: (1) Jephthah offered a burnt sacrifice right then and there to seal his vow; or, (2) Jephthah would later offer a burnt sacrifice in addition to dedicating whatever or whoever came out to meet him, the sacrifice sort of finalizing the vow.

So that there is no confusion—Jephthah is not under any sort of obligation to do anything. There is not a chance in the world that, without this vow, he will die in battle or the sons of Ammon will defeat him. He is just throwing salt over his shoulder and making certain not to walk under the ladder.

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## Israel Defeats Ammon

**And so crossed over Jephthah unto sons of Ammon to fight against them. And so gave them Y<sup>e</sup>howah into his hand.**

Judges  
11:32

**So Jephthah crossed over to the sons of Ammon to fight against them. Yehowah gave them into his hand.**

**Jephthah crossed over into the occupied territory to fight against the sons of Ammon. Jehovah gave them into his hand.**

The first verb is the Qal imperfect again of 'âvar (אָוָר) [pronounced aw<sup>b</sup>-VAHR], which means *to pass over, to pass through, to pass, to go over*. Strong's #5674 BDB #716. The land which the sons of Ammon have taken would be Reuben and most of Gad, from the Arnon River up to the Jabbok River. Ammon has already crossed over the Jordan and have made in-roads against central Israel (Judah, Benjamin and Ephraim—Judges 10:9). Jephthah was probably brought down from northeast Manasseh by those who were just north of occupied Israel and he is probably crossing over the Jabbok River in this verse.

**And so he struck them down from Aroer and as far as your going to Minnith, twenty cities and as far as Abel of vineyards—a very great smiting—and so were subdued sons of Ammon from faces of sons of Israel.**

Judges  
11:33

**And he struck them down from Aroer to as far as your going to Minnith—twenty cities—and as far as Abel of the Vineyards—an extremely great striking down—so [that] the sons of Ammon were subdued before Israel.**

**Therefore, Jephthah struck down the sons of Ammon from Aroer all the way to Minnith—through twenty cities; and as far as Abel of the Vineyards—a tremendous victory. So were the sons of Ammon subdued before Israel.**

There are a couple of ways of looking at this verse:

*The Emphasized Bible*

...and he smote them from Aroer even till thou enterest in to Minnith, even twenty cities, and as far as Abel-kermim, with an exceeding great smiting, —and thus were the sons of Ammon subdued before the sons of Israel.

*Young's Lit. Translation*

...and he smiteth them from Aroer, and unto thy going in to Minnith, twenty cities, and unto the meadow of the vineyards—a very great smiting; and the Bene-Ammon are humbled at the presence of the sons of Israel.

About the only location that we can place here is Aroer. This takes us all of the way to the southeastern tip of Reuben. This would be right in the corner between the countries of Moab, Ammon and Israel (essentially forcing Ammon out of Israel). One possibility is that Minnith is not a city of Israel (it is not listed in the book of Joshua; plus it is only found elsewhere in Ezek. 21:17). A possible implication here is that not only did Jephthah push Ammon out of Israel, but kept pushing him even through his own country, continually striking them and taking out twenty cities. However, since the Ammonites occupied Israel, it is not unlikely for them to set up cities of their own; and certainly military outposts. This could have been the eastern-most military outpost which was still within Israel's boundaries. Eusebius identifies it with Manith (or, Maanith, as mentioned by Barnes), which is four Roman miles from Heshbon on the road to Philadelphia (or, Rabbah, which you will recall is the Ammonite capital).<sup>24</sup> Minnith is also mentioned in Ezek. 27:15, and is therein identified with Israel. It is Barnes' contention that Jephthah's attack remained in Israel, which is reasonable.

Abel-kermim: As you see by the two translations, Young takes this to be a description of the area in general and Rotherham (as do most translators) understand it to be (*Abel-kermim* means *meadow of the vineyards*). Barnes identifies Abel-kermim with an Abel which is located in some vineyards seven miles outside of Rabbah (in fact, we could call it *Abel of the Vineyards*). In either case, we do not know the exact location. ZPEB boldly places this south of the Jabbok; the area of which we are speaking is either the occupied areas of Gad and Reuben; or we have moved into Ammonite territory.

In thinking this over, I would think that Jephthah's attacks occurred entirely within the boundaries of Israel, the unfamiliar cities being military outposts of the Ammonites. Jephthah is not looking to take any territory back from Ammon. We know that because Jephthah knows the Scriptures and God has not revoked His instructions to allow Moab and Ammon their territory. Ammon was given the chance to gracefully back out and did not take that route. Remaining within the boundaries of Israel would seem to be the most likely target of an Israeli attack.

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<sup>24</sup> Paraphrased/quoted from *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*; ©1976; Vol. 4, p. 241 and Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 279. It appears as though most scholars are content with this identification.

## The Fulfillment of Jephthah's Vow

**And so came Jephthah [to] the Mizpah unto his house and behold his daughter coming out to meet him with timbrels and with dances. And only she [was] an only one; not to him from him son and daughter.**

Judges  
11:34

**So Jephthah came [to] Mizpah to his house and, observe, his daughter coming out to meet him with timbrels and with dances. And only she [was] an only one; he had not from him [another] son or daughter.**

**Finally, Jephthah came to Mizpah and to his house, and he saw his daughter coming out to meet him, playing a tambourine and dancing. She was his only daughter; apart from her, he had no other son or daughter.**

Not an easy verse to unravel in the Hebrew. Let's again look at a couple of renderings:

*The Emphasized Bible*

Then came Jephthah towards Mizpah unto his own house, and lo! his daughter coming forth to meet him, with timbrels, and with dances, —and she was none other than his only child, he had not besides her either son or daughter.

NASB

When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing. Now she was his one and only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter.

*Young's Lit. Translation*

And Jephthah cometh into Mizpeh, unto his house, and lo, his daughter is coming out to meet him with timbrels, and with choruses, to save her alone, he hath none, son or daughter.

We have two very common synonyms in this verse. What Jephthah does is the Qal imperfect of *bôw'* (בָּוֶה) [pronounced *boh*], which means *to come in, to come, to go in, to go*. Strong's #935 BDB #97. What his daughter does is the Qal active participle of *yâtsâ'* (יָצָא) [pronounced *yaw-TZAWH*], which means *to go out, to come out, to come forth*. Strong's #3318 BDB #422. He goes into his property and she comes out to meet him. This gives us: **And so came Jephthah [to] the Mizpah unto his house and behold his daughter coming out to meet him...**

What she meets him with is the masculine plural of *tôph* (תוֹפֵח) [pronounced *tohf*], which means *timbrel, tambourine*; it is generally held in the hand of a dancing woman. Strong's #8596 BDB #1074. We have the wâw conjunction and then the feminine plural of *m̄chôwlâh* (מְחוֹלָה) [pronounced *m̄khoh-LAW*], which means *dancing* (which usually accompanies and celebrates a victory of some sort). For some reason, Young renders this *choruses*. Strong's #4246 BDB #298. Jephthah, who knew Scripture, undoubtably taught it to his daughter. His daughter, taking her lead from Miriam, the sister of Moses (see Ex. 15:20), met her father, dancing and playing a tambourine. This apparently became a tradition, repeated once again in Scripture I Sam. 18:6–7 (see also Psalm 68:25 Jer. 31:4).

The second phrase is easy enough to understand, but the grammar is a bit tough, made more difficult as no one translates this verse literally. After the wâw conjunction, we have the adverb *raq* (רָקְ) [pronounced *rahk*] means *only, provided, altogether, surely*—it carries with it restrictive force. Strong's #7534 & #7535 BDB #956. This is followed by the 3<sup>rd</sup> person, feminine singular pronoun (which often carries with it the implied verb *to be*). This is followed by the feminine singular adjective *yâchîd* (יָחִיד) [pronounced *yaw-KHEED*], which means *single, solitary, only one*. This is **not** the adjective which we find in Deut. 6:4 ("The Lord our God is one God.") Strong's #3173 BDB #402.

This is followed by the negative construct 'ayin (אַיִן) [pronounced *AH-yin*], which means *naught, nothing*; or it can be used as a particle of negation; *no, not*. The Hebrew construct is 'êyin (אַיִן) [pronounced *AYH-yin*]. I don't know that there is a difference and my sources disagree as to which one it is. Strong's #369 BDB #34. This is followed by the prepositional phrase *to him*. So far: **And so came Jephthah [to] the Mizpah unto his house and behold his daughter coming out to meet him with timbrels and with dances. And only she [was] an only one; not to him...**

Then we have a problem. The next word is the prepositional phrase *mimennûw* (מִמֶּנּוּ) [pronounced *mih-men-NUW*], which literally means *from him* (prepositions with suffixes tend to be irregular). My problem here was that Owen rendered this simply *besides*; Young's translation is unclear as to what words have been translated what (quite unusual for him); Rotherham, *The Amplified Bible*, the KJV, the NKJV and the NASB all rendered this *besides her*. At first glance, until I could check my resources,<sup>25</sup> I thought that Owen's calling it the *mîn* preposition plus the masculine singular suffix was a mistake. The real problem is that no one chose to translate this correctly. This should be rendered *from him*. The phrase *to him, from him* refer to Jephthah.

The final words of this verse are *son and daughter*. One of the tough decisions for a translator is do you render a verse literally (which is generally what Young and Rotherham do) or do you render it in such a way as to be understood, sticking as closely as possible to the literal translation (the KJV, the NKJV and the NASB). Or do you just get the gist of the verse and translate that rather than the individual words (the NIV, the Good News Bible—TEV, the NEB, the REB, the NAB, and the NJB; all which have varying degrees of literalness, or lack thereof). When I first began exegeting the various books of the Bible, I gave one rendering of each verse and felt terrifically constrained and constantly fought the battle, literal or readable. Even when I moved to two translations, my problem then became *just how literal?* Most of you reading think that if it essentially means that she was his only child, then render it that way and go on. Listen carefully: a translation to a certain degree is an interpretation. Just exactly how much latitude do you want your translator to have? Theological battles are waged all the time where adherents to this or that quote this or that passage, emphasizing specific words and phrases which are mistranslated from the original or the understanding thereof is lacking on their part (an example of the latter is Deut. 6:4). This is why every pastor needs some rudimentary understanding of the original languages so that he can ferret out what God has in Scripture. Personally, through the study that I have done, I have found two points of doctrine, one major and one minor, the latter which provides great insight into Moses and what he wrote, which have **never** been taught before—both from carefully exegeting Scripture.<sup>26</sup> My intent in rendering these passages as literally as possible is to help those who follow after me to accurately interpret God's Word.

**And so he was in a seeing of him her; and so he tore his clothes and so he said, "Uh-HAWH, my daughter, a bringing low [in grief] you have brought me low [grieving] and you—you are in those troubling me. And I, [even] I, opened my mouth unto Y<sup>e</sup>howah and I am not able to turn back."**

**So, when he saw his daughter, he tore his clothes in grief and said, "Oh, my daughter, you have caused me to be grieved and you are even among those who trouble me! I have made a vow to Jehovah and I am unable to take it back."**

Judges  
11:35

**And it was when he saw her that he tore his clothes and said, "Alas, my daughter, you have surely grieved me and you—you are troubling me. And I, [even I], have opened my mouth to Y<sup>e</sup>howah and I am unable to take [it] back."**

Not only are Jephthah's missives difficult, but the way Jephthah speaks is difficult. Now here is a difficult call: the average or the sub-average person might speak in very correct Hebrew, with each sentence put together traditionally as it should be. However, a particularly intelligent person will phrase things in a more complex manner and will mix up the wording in his sentences in order to spice up his speech. Similarly, a person who lacks a good education will also tend to use grammar and phrasing which is not the norm. It is then interesting to try to determine, when translating a particular person, is if their deviations from the norm indicate great intelligence or lack of education and training in their own language. I personally tend to assume that these deviations from the norm suggest a superior intelligence, but realize that they could indicate almost the opposite. In any case, Jephthah's vocabulary, whether spoken or in writing, is certainly one or two standard deviations outside the mean, which means that we will spend a lot more time with the grammar of this passage, to wit:

<sup>25</sup> Specifically *Biblical Hebrew*; by Page Kelley; William B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., ©1992, p. 70.

<sup>26</sup> Please understand that this was not the result of one tiny word and then building a huge doctrine upon it.

*The Emphasized Bible*

And it came to pass when he saw her that he rent his clothes and said,— Alas! my daughter, Thou hast brought me low, Even thou has come to be among them who trouble me,— Yet I opened wide my mouth unto Yahweh, and cannot go back.

*Keil and Delitzsch*<sup>27</sup>

And it came to pass when he saw her that he rent his clothes, and exclaimed, “O my daughter! thou has brought me very low; thou art among those who trouble me [thou belongest to their class]. I have opened my mouth to the Lord [i.e., I have uttered a vow to Him] and cannot turn it [i.e., revoke it].”

*NASB*

And it came about when he saw her, that he tore his clothes and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you are among those who trouble me; for I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot take *it* back.

*Young's Lit. Translation*

And it cometh to pass, when he seeth her, that he rendeth his garments, and saith, ‘Alas, my daughter, thou hast been among those troubling me; and I—I have opened my mouth unto Jehovah, and I am not able to turn back.’

The first thing that Jephthah says is the interjection 'āhâhh (אָהַהּ) [pronounced uh-HAWH], which is somewhat onomatopoeic; it is as much a cry of sadness as it is a word. The KJV render it as *Ah!* or as *alas*. Gesenius calls it an interjection of lamentation simply from the sound of it. It comes from a word which means *to grieve, to mourn*. The only contemporary interjection which comes to mind was *oh dear*, which is better than what I found in Roget's Thesaurus.<sup>28</sup> That being unsuitable, I would almost rather transliterate it. Strong's #162 BDB #13.

As we have seen, Jephthah is fond of using infinitive absolutes and here we have the Hiphil infinitive absolute coupled with the 2<sup>nd</sup> person feminine singular, Hiphil perfect of the verb kârā' (קָרָא) [pronounced kaw-RAH or kaw-RAHG], which means in the Hiphil, it means *to cause to bow down in death* or *to cause to bow down in grief*. Strong's #3766 BDB #502.

This is followed by the wâw conjunction and the 2<sup>nd</sup> person personal pronoun, giving great emphasis to the daughter, and the 2<sup>nd</sup> person feminine singular Qal perfect of *to be*. This is followed by the bêyth preposition and the masculine plural, Qal active participle of 'âkar (אָקָר) [pronounced aw-KAHR or gaw-KAHR], which means *to stir up, to disturb, to cause trouble*. Strong's #5916 BDB #747. The verb carries with it a 1<sup>st</sup> person singular suffix. Our semi-literal translation so far is: *And it was when he saw her that he tore his clothes and said, “Alas, my daughter, you have surely grieved me and you—you are among those troubling me...*

Jephthah then says, “*And I have opened my mouth unto Jehovah and...*” and then we have the negative and the Qal imperfect of yâkôl (לֹכֶד) [pronounced yaw-COAL], which means *to be able, to have the ability, to have the power to*. Strong's #3201 BDB #407. This is followed by one of our old friends, the Qal infinitive construct of shûwb'v (שׁוּב) [pronounced shoo<sup>b</sup>V]; which means *to return, to turn, to turn back, to reminisce, to restore something, to bring back something*. Strong's #7725 BDB #996.

Jephthah has vowed that whatever he saw first at his house would be dedicated to God. What was he thinking? I don't know...perhaps a favorite lamb always ran to meet him or the family dog. Perhaps he expected his wife or a servant.<sup>29</sup> From the way this passage reads, it is obvious that he did not expect to be greeted by his daughter. Now note in the rest of the passage, his vow did not mean that he had to sacrifice his daughter as he would an animal. Eccles. 5:2, 4 reads: *Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God. For God is in heaven and you are on the earth; therefore, let your words be few...When you make a vow to god, do not be late in paying it, for He takes no delight in fools. Pay what you vow.* Num. 30:2: *If a man makes a vow to Jehovah, or takes an oath to bind himself with a binding obligation, he will not violate his word; he will do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.*”

<sup>27</sup> Actually, KJV as modified by Keil and Delitzsch.

<sup>28</sup> Roget's Thesaurus has been a God-send when it comes to finding contemporary words for the Hebrew.

<sup>29</sup> You may wonder what did he have in mind if it were a servant or his wife; my thinking is celibacy for either (and, if it was his wife, then celibacy for them both, which meant no more children).

The tearing of his own clothing indicates severe emotional distress. Gen. 37:29, 34 Num. 14:6. We might as well look at the scholars who were mistaken in their interpretation of this passage first. *The Amplified Bible* has a nice summary here: *Scholars fail to agree as to what Jephthah really did. For example, "This plain and restrained statement that 'he did with her according to his vow' is best taken as implying her actual sacrifice. Although human sacrifice was strictly forbidden to Israelites, we need not be surprised at a man of Jephthah's half-Canaanite antecedents following Canaanite usage in this matter" (New Bible Commentary).* And, *"Although the lapse of two months might be supposed to have afforded time for reflection, and a better sense of his duty, there is but too much reason to conclude that eh was impelled to the fulfillment by the dictates of a pious but unenlightened conscience"* (Jamieson, Fausset and Brown's Bible Commentary). And, *"The religious system of Israel had fallen into suspension. From the days of Phinehas [Judg. 20:27, 28] to the time of Samuel, we hear nothing of the high priest, the ark or the tabernacle"* (Cambridge Bible).<sup>30</sup> While I am at it, just let me throw in what is found in the NIV Study Bible: *[M]aking a vow was...a common practice among the Israelites...The precise nature of this vow has been the subject of wide speculation, but v. 31 indicates the promise of a burnt offering and leads to the conclusion that Jephthah probably offered his daughter as a human sacrifice (v. 39). A vow was not to be broken (see Nu 30:2; Dt 23:21–23; see also Ecc 5:4–5).*<sup>31</sup>

Furthermore, this is one of the few passages where Barnes wholly and totally misses the mark, which is a rarity. Barnes reasons because of Jephthah's environment among the Syrians, that he would be more predisposed toward human sacrifice. Barnes also adds that Jephthah was *right in not being deterred from keeping his vow by the loss and sorrow to himself...just as Abraham was right in not withholding his son, his only son, from God, when commanded to offer him up as a burnt-offering.*<sup>32</sup> What Abraham did was on direct order from God prior to the Law. One of the things God clearly states in the Law is how much He despises human sacrifice—it is one of the chief reasons why the Jews were not to intermarry with those of other faiths (Lev. 18:21 20:2–5 Deut. 12:31 18:10). The sacrifice of Isaac, Abraham's son, was a one-time thing, which Abraham realized would result in he and his son returned from the top of the mountain where he was to sacrifice his son (Gen. 22:5).<sup>33</sup> It does not matter that Jephthah was living among degenerate people (hell, the Jews themselves were quite degenerate during that time). It does not matter that human sacrifice was widespread (II Kings 3:27 16:3 17:17 II Chron. 33:6 Jer. 7:31 19:5 32:35). The key fact, which all expositors seem to totally miss is that Jephthah knew Scripture well enough to know that he could not sacrifice a human being. Furthermore, nowhere in this passage do we have a mention of his daughter being sacrificed. The emphasis is upon her remaining a virgin. It would be incongruous for several verses to be spent describing his daughter's concern over her virginity if she is about to become a human sacrifice. There are times when I am not certain as to whether it was *this* or *that* which happened, and I give the arguments on both sides in such a case. However, here, Jephthah set aside his daughter from men unto God—he did not offer her as a human sacrifice.

**And so she said unto him, "My father, you have opened your mouth unto Y<sup>e</sup>howah; do to me as that which has gone out from your mouth after that has done for you Y<sup>e</sup>howah—vengeances out from your enemies; out from sons of Ammon."**

Judges  
11:36

**Then she said to him, "My father, you have opened your mouth to Y<sup>e</sup>howah; then do to me just as that which has gone out from your mouth and according as that which Y<sup>e</sup>howah has done for you—vengeance [extracted] from your enemies; [extracted] from the sons of Ammon."**

**She replied to him, "My father, you have made a vow to Jehovah; therefore, do to me just as the vow which you have made according to what Jehovah has done for you—that is, vengeance executed upon your enemies, the sons of Ammon."**

<sup>30</sup> *The Amplified Bible*, The Lockman Foundation; ©1965 by Zondervan Publishing House; p. 305.

<sup>31</sup> *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 345.

<sup>32</sup> *Barnes' Notes, Volume 2*, reprinted 1996 by Baker Books; p. 448.

<sup>33</sup> In case your Bible did not render this properly, in Gen. 22:5, the verb *return* is in the 1<sup>st</sup> person plural.

Jephthah's daughter is also rather sharp and her vocabulary tends to fall outside the norm as well, although it is not quite as difficult as her father's. She uses the preposition *mîn* in an unusual way. We have the feminine plural noun *n<sup>e</sup>qâmâh* (נָקָם) [pronounced *n<sup>e</sup>kaw-MAW*], which means *vengeance*. Strong's #5360 BDB #668. Following this we have the *mîn* preposition, which usually means *from, out from, away from*, affixed to the Qal active participle, which means *enemies*. It is repeated prior to *sons of Ammon*. I do not find an easy explanation for this in BDB; the only reasonable explanation that I can come up with is that she is speaking of the vengeance taken out from or extracted from the enemies of Israel. Owen and Young render this simply as *on*. The NASB plays looser with the Hebrew than usual, rendering this: "...since the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the sons of Ammon." Rotherham, also recognizing the *mîn* problem, renders this: ...Yahweh hath exacted for thee an avenging from thine enemies, From the sons of Ammon. The problem<sup>34</sup> may not really be with the *mîn* preposition but with the rendering of the word *n<sup>e</sup>qâmâh*, which might be better rendered *an exacting of vengeance*.

The daughter seems to understand exactly what has been vowed; it has come to her almost instantly. Not only does she grasp the vow and its implications, she consents to this vow as a believer in Jesus Christ. She knows the Law; she learned it from her father.

**And so she said unto her father, "Be done to me the word the this; you leave me alone two months and I will go and go down on the mountains and bewail on my virginity; I and my companions."**

Judges  
11:37

**So she said to her father, "Let this word be done to me; you leave me alone [for] two months and I will go and I will go down to the mountains and I will cry because of my virginity; I and my companions."**

**Then she said to her father, "Let this vow be done to me; leave me alone for two months and I will go to the mountains and cry because of my virginity along with my friends."**

We will need to see what others have done with this:

*The Emphasized Bible*

And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me,— Let me alone two months that I may depart and go down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my companions.

*NASB*

And she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me; let me alone for two months, that I may go to the mountains and weep because of my virginity, I and my companions."

*Young's Lit. Translation*

And she saith unto her father, 'Let this thing be done to me; desist from me two months, and I go on, and have gone down on the hills, and I weep for my virginity—I and my friends.'

The first thing that Jephthah's daughter says is the 3<sup>rd</sup> person masculine singular, Niphal imperfect of 'âsâh (הָשַׁה) [pronounced *gaw-SAWH*] which means *to do, to make, to construct, to fashion, to form, to prepare*. In the Niphal, it means *to be done for* (when followed by a lamed). Strong's #6213 BDB #793. We then have the lamed and the 1<sup>st</sup> person suffix. The subject of the verb is *this word* (or, *this thing*).

Then she uses the 2<sup>nd</sup> person masculine singular, Hiphil imperative of râphâh (רָפַח) [pronounced *raw-FAW*], which means *to sink, to relax, to loosen and let drop, to let down, to cast down, to let fall* in the Qal. In the Hiphil imperative, it means *leave me alone*. Strong's #7503 BDB #951.

It was fully understood that dedicating a person to Jehovah God did not mean to sacrifice them as an animal. This was not something that Jephthah and his daughter even discussed. It was understood that they were to live the rest of their lives apart from their right man or right woman, and live a life of celibacy.

<sup>34</sup> And please, if you are a casual reader, don't misunderstand this to be some great, deep theological problem; it is simply that the use of this preposition here is outside the norm or not the preposition one would expect.

What this means is that we should examine the **Doctrine of Celibacy**, as this is something which has been completely and totally confused throughout the ages. Now, what was promised here and what happened here was a very rare situation. Jephthah did not have to make God any promises. He did not need to make any promises as he had. He could have made any sort of a vow or none at all. God would still have delivered Israel.

What we should look at next is the vow of Jephthah. Zodhiates begins to summarize this quite well: *This vow of Jephthah has caused much concern for many Bible scholars. If no other considerations are brought into the discussion, the language of this passage would naturally lead one to believe that Jephthah actually did offer his daughter as a sacrifice to the Lord. Most conservative commentators, on the contrary, hold that Jephthah did not actually put his daughter to death, but dedicated her to the service of the Lord.*<sup>35</sup> Unfortunately, then Zodhiates goes quite a bit off-track by saying that technically Jephthah promised a human sacrifice. Jephthah did not promise a human sacrifice. Human sacrifices were forbidden under the Law of Moses and were one of the reasons Israel was told to stay away from the heathen. When we went into the language of the v. 31, the disjunctive use of the wāw conjunction was discussed and justified. The simple explanation is that Jephthah cannot honor his vow to God by offering up a human sacrifice to God—which human sacrifice is forbidden by the Law (and the Law which Jephthah knows very well). It is obvious that Jephthah was not going to sacrifice his daughter's life as if she were an animal, and the wording of v. 37 indicates that she was not sacrificed (otherwise, her virginity would not be much of an issue if she were dead). What Barnes and Zodhiates seem to miss is the great sacrifice of a young, healthy, Israelite woman who cannot marry and raise children.<sup>36</sup>

Let's approach this from a slightly different standpoint. Just because it happened in the book of the Judges, does not mean that God approved of it. Throughout the Bible, the incorrect and sinful acts of man are recorded, often without apology or even specific, in-context condemnation of same. If Jephthah did such a thing, that does not mean that it was approved by God or honored by God; and Jephthah, living among and near human-sacrificing heathen would be predisposed to that kind of heathen behavior. In other words, this thinking provides an *out*, so to speak, for those who believe that Jephthah offered his daughter as a sacrifice, but that such an act was heinous. Again, you completely forget how well Jephthah knew God's Word. He almost quoted directly from Scripture when describing the chain of title of the land in question. The implication is that he knew God's Word and therefore was not going to do something which is so diametrically opposed to God's Word.

Keil and Delitzsch present one of the best logical arguments against Jephthah offering his daughter as a human sacrifice; I will quote from them at length: human sacrifice was not a part of all heathen cultures—in fact, it was more of a rarity, belonging to only the most depraved of human societies,<sup>37</sup> the kind which God would summarily dispose of, as in Sodom and Gomorrah. Now, to assign this kind of degeneracy to Jephthah, who exhibits intelligence, subtlety and the filling of the Spirit, is unwarranted and incongruous with his character and actions. In fact, we find them [Israel] repeatedly falling away in the worship of Baal; yet we discover no trace whatever of human sacrifices even in the case of those who went a whoring after Baalim. And although the theocratical knowledge of the law seems to have been somewhat corrupted even in the case of such men as Gideon, so that the judge had an unlawful ephod made for himself at Ophrah; the opinion that the Baal-worship, into which the Israelites repeatedly fell, was associated with human sacrifices, is one of the many erroneous ideas that have been entertained as to the development of the religious life not only among the Israelites, but among the Canaanites, and which cannot be supported by historical testimonies or facts. That the Canaanish worship of Baal and Astarte, to which the Israelites were addicted, required no human sacrifices, is indisputably evident from the fact that even in the time of Ahab and his idolatrous wife Jezebel, the daughter of the Sidonian king Ethbaal, who raised the worship of Baal into the national religion in the kingdom of the ten tribes, persecuting the prophets of Jehovah and putting them to death, there is not the slightest allusion to human sacrifices. Even at that time human sacrifices were regarded by the Israelites as so revolting an abomination, that the two kings of Israel who besieged the king

<sup>35</sup> The Complete Word Study Old Testament; Dr. S. Zodhiates; ©1994 AMG Publishers; p. 678.

<sup>36</sup> I should point out that a great many scholars believe that Jephthah offered up his daughter as a burnt offering; these include many of the ancient Rabbis as well as Josephus, Augustine and Pfeiffer. However, this general view changed in the Middle Ages.

<sup>37</sup> Taken from Keil & Delitzsch's Commentary on the Old Testament; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 281 who quote a similar statement from Hengstenberg (Diss. iii. p. 110).

of the Moabites,—not only the godly Jehoshaphat, but Jehoram the son of Ahab and Jezebel—withdrawn at once and relinquished the continuance of the war, when the king of the Moabites, in the extremity of his distress, sacrificed his son as a burn-offering upon the wall (2 Kings 3:26, 27). With such an attitude as this on the part of the Israelites towards human sacrifices before the time of Ahaz and Manasseh, who introduced the worship of Moloch into Jerusalem, we cannot, without further evidence, impute to Jephthah the offering of a bloody human sacrifice, the more especially as it is inconceivable, with the diametrical opposition between the worship of Jehovah and the worship of Moloch, that God should have chosen a worshiper of Moloch to carry out his work, or a man who was capable of vowing and offering a human-being sacrifice. The men whom God chose as the recipients of His revelation of mercy and the executioners of His will, and whom He endowed with His Spirit as judges and leaders of His people, were no doubt affected with infirmities, faults, and sins of many kinds, so that they could fall to a very great depth; but nowhere is it stated that the Spirit of God came upon a worshipper of Moloch and endowed him with His own power, that he might be the helper and saviour of Israel.<sup>38</sup>

An interesting side-note: how much did Israel actually know about the Law? Jephthah's knowledge was quite extensive, at least in the area of chain of title of the land in question, indicating that he had access to Scripture and possibly even indicating that it was indexed somehow. In any case, the Israelites received God's Word more often than a public reading of the Law at the feast of Tabernacles during the Sabbath year (Deut. 31:10–13). It is obvious that the Israelite nation was not completely saturated with God's Word, as they fell repeatedly into heathenism, although we have no recorded instances of child sacrifice or human sacrifice in the book of the Judges, which is one of the lowest points in the history of Israel. However, Jephthah seems to indicate that if someone needed to know God's Word, it was available to him (and recall that Jephthah did not live near Shiloh, but on the other side of the Jordan, he and his mother being shod to the outskirts of Israel).

In our time, finding a church where God's Word is taught verse-by-verse is almost impossible, but that does not mean that it cannot be found. When I lived in California, I looked all over for such a church. I ended up attending a church, which I at first did not even identify as a church, as we fellowshiped around a tape recorder. For whatever reason, I thought that I had to have a blood and flesh pastor standing right there. What I am saying is that for anyone who wants to know the truth, it is available. And, even though almost every house has a Bible in it (or, at least access to a Bible), this does not mean that we have reached some spiritual peak, as finding a church where God's Word is taught verse-by-verse is difficult to locate in any city. Then, as now, if someone desired to know the truth, God saw to it that it was available.

**And so he said, “Go.” And so he sent her away two months and so she went—she and her companions—and so they bewailed on her virginity on the mountains.**

Judges  
11:38

**So he said, “Go.” Therefore he sent her away two months and she departed, she and her companions. Then they wept because of her virginity upon the mountains.**

**So he said, “Go.” He sent her away for two months and she departed with her friends. They wept because of her virginity upon the mountains.**

As in the previous verse, we have the preposition 'al (אֶל) [pronounced *ahl*], which means *upon, on, against, above, over, by, beside*. It can also mean *on the ground of (or upon the basis)* something is done (Deut. 17:11 Psalm 94:20) or, similarly, where the basis conveyed involves the ground; i.e., it involves the cause or the reason or the grounds for something, and is then translated *on account of, because of*. Strong's #5920, #5921 BDB #752. We find it used twice at the end of this verse, with very different meanings.

What she mourned or wept over was the feminine plural of bēthūwlîym (בְּתֻהּוּלִים) [pronounced *b<sup>e</sup>thoo-LEEM*], which means *virginity, tokens of virginity*. Strong's #1331 BDB #144. With regards to whether or not she was offered as a human sacrifice, Edersheim writes: *She bewails not her “maiden age,” but her “maidenhood”—not that she dies so young, but that she is to die unmarried. The Hebrew expression for the former would have been quite different from that used in Scripture, which only signifies the latter* [Edersheim here footnotes that, according to Keil,

<sup>38</sup> Keil & Delitzsch's Commentary on the Old Testament; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 282.

*the Hebrew word neurim would have been used rather than bethulim, had that been the case]. But for an only child to die unmarried, and so to leave a light and name extinguished in Israel, was indeed a bitter and heavy judgment, viewed in the light of pre-Messianic times. Compare in this respect especially such passages as Lev. 20:20 and Psalm 78:53. The trial appears all the more withering when we realise, how it must have come upon Jephthah and his only child in the hour of their highest glory, when all earthly prosperity seemed at their command. The greatest and happiest man in Israel becomes in a moment the poorest and the most stricken. Surely, in this vow and sacrifice was the lesson of vows and sacrifices taught to victorious Israel in a manner the most solemn.<sup>39</sup>*

Keil and Delitzsch: “It would be altogether opposed to human nature, that a child who had so soon to die should make use of a temporary respite to forsake her father altogether. It would no doubt be a reasonable thing that she should ask permission to enjoy life for two months longer before she was put to death; but that she should only think of bewailing her virginity, when a sacrificial death was in prospect, which would rob her father of his only child, would be contrary to all the ordinary feelings of the human heart...if life had been in question, the same tears might have been shed at home. But her lamentations were devoted to her virginity, and such lamentations could not be uttered in the town, and in the presence of men. Modesty required the solitude of the mountains for these.” [Furthermore] to mourn one’s virginity does not mean to mourn because one has to die a virgin, but because one has to live and remain a virgin.<sup>40</sup>

**And so he was from an end of two months and so she returned unto her father and so he did to her his vow which he made and she did not know a man. And so she was a custom in Israel.**

Judges  
11:39

**And it was, at the end of two months that she returned to her father. Then he did to her his vow which he made and she did not know a man. Then she became a custom in Israel.**

**Finally, at the end of two months, she returned to her father and his vow to God was done, and she did not know a man. Her weeping upon the mountain became a custom in Israel.**

Often, when the writer of Scripture wanted to indicate what eventually came to pass, he used the verb *to be* and the least likely gender to hook up with anything nearby. This one was almost arbitrary because we have both actions by Jephthah and his daughter.

We have a prepositional phrase which begins with the *mîn* preposition, which is followed by the masculine singular construct of *qêts* (קֵץ) [pronounced *kayts*], which means *end* (usually of time). Strong’s #7093 BDB #893.

What Jephthah *did* was the masculine singular noun *nêder* (נֵדֶר) [pronounced *NAY-der*], which means *vow, the giving of one’s word of assurance, a personal guarantee, a promise, a commitment*. Strong’s #5088 BDB #623. It is interesting that Jephthah is filled with the Spirit (v. 29) when he makes the vow (v. 30). What we are seeing is something which is allowable but not necessarily commendable, required or suggested. When under the Holy Spirit, Jephthah still had free will and he was still able to make choices. Note that after the mention of the fulfillment of his vow, note what it was: ...*and she did not know a man*. This would be a perfectly ridiculous thing to say of a woman who was executed by her father in her youth. If the vow was fulfilled by human sacrifice, this would have been the place to plainly state such a thing; however, it was not fulfilled that way—it was fulfilled by her remaining a virgin.

Keil and Delitzsch: ...*the still further clause in the account of the fulfilment of the vow, “and she knew no man,” is ot in harmony with the assumption of a sacrificial death. This clause would add nothing to the description in that case, since it was already known that she was a virgin. The words only gain their proper sense if we connect them with the previous clause, he “did with her according to the vow which he had vowed,” and understand them as*

<sup>39</sup> Alfred Edersheim, *Bible History Old Testament*; ©1995 by Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; p. 379.

<sup>40</sup> Keil & Delitzsch’s *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 283. All but that last line was a quote from P. Cassel, p. 473 and 476 by Keil and Delitzsch. I don’t know who Cassel is nor the name of his book. So like I’m thinking he’s some old, dead guy.

*describing what the daughter did in fulfilment of the vow. The father fulfilled his vow upon her, and she knew no man; i.e., he fulfilled the vow through the fact that she knew no man, but dedicated her life to the Lord, as a spiritual burnt-offering, in a lifelong chastity.<sup>41</sup>*

Keil and Delitzsch continue with a different argument: ...*bleeding burnt-offerings, in which the victim was slaughtered and burnt upon the altar, could only be offered upon the lawful altar at the tabernacle, or before the ark, through the medium of the Levitical priests, unless the sacrifice itself had been occasioned by some extraordinary manifestation of God; and that we cannot for a moment think of here. But is it credible that a priest or the priesthood should have consented to offer a sacrifice upon the altar of Jehovah which was denounced in the law as the greatest abomination of the heathen? This difficulty cannot be set aside by assuming that Jephthah put his daughter to death, and burned her upon some secret altar, without the assistance and mediation of a priest; for such an act would not have been described by the prophetic historian as a fulfilment of the vow that he would offer a burnt-offering to the Lord, simply because it would not have been a sacrifice offered to Jehovah at all, but a sacrifice slaughtered to Moloch.*<sup>42</sup>

We do not know who composed the book of the Judges, although my best guess thus far is that it was compiled from several manuscripts and accounts of the time. The author of Judges 8 had no problem condemning Gideon's mistake of manufacturing an ephod (Judges 8:27); surely, if Jephthah had sacrificed his only daughter as a human sacrifice, the editor of this book might say one or two words in condemnation of that as well.

Now, some of you think way too much and you are now wondering, *did she eventually get married, but just remain a virgin?* And, believe it or not, there is some discussion on this. If you happen to be thinking that, then you obviously do not understand human nature and the normal desires of any young person. Jephthah's daughter did not get married and remain a virgin. She remained a virgin and she never married. She was wed to Jesus Christ for the remainder of her life. Therefore, it would have been a sham for her to marry anyone, regardless of whatever agreements could have been arranged.

The end result is that Jephthah's daughter was presented to God as a living sacrifice—for the remainder of her life, she did not marry and she did not know a man. Paul later wrote: **I urge you therefore, brothers, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God—your spiritual service of worship (Rom. 12:1).**

The verse ends with a focus on Jephthah's unnamed daughter. What she was, was the masculine singular of chôq (חוֹק) [pronounced *khone*], which is rendered in the KJV *something prescribed, a statute, due, portion, law, task, ordinance, statute*—and those were just the first six occurrences in Scripture. From thereon in, it is almost consistently translated *statutes* with an occasional rendering of *decree, law, ordinance, custom, commandment*. Strong's #2706 BDB #349. My concern immediately is that all the women in Israel decided to go celibate, but that was not the custom. The custom was that many of the women in Israel would go to the mountains and weep over her virginity. Again, note the emphasis of Scripture is continually upon her virginity. Nothing is ever said of taking her life in Sacrifice. That is a misunderstanding of the disjunctive use of wâw conjunction as found in v. 31 (or assuming that Jephthah was going to offer in sacrifice whatever or whoever came out of his house to meet him). This custom of going to the mountain and weeping over her virginity was likely a very local custom which continued for a few decades. It is never mentioned again in Scripture.

**From days [and] days went daughters of Israel to celebrate for a daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.**

Judges  
11:40

**From year to year [lit., days to days], the daughters of Israel went to celebrate for the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite [for] four days in the year.**

<sup>41</sup> Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 283.

<sup>42</sup> Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 284.

**For several years, it became a custom of the young women of Israel to go and lament on behalf of the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days during each year.**

Before we get into the meaning of this verse, there is a very interesting Hebraism known as antanaclasis [pronounced *ANT-an-a-KLA-sis*], wherein we have the same word in the same verse, but used in two different ways. *From days to days* actually refers to *from year to year*, and is translated similarly by Owen, the REB, NAB, NJB and Rotherham, the and ignored (i.e., not even translated by the KJV, NASB, NKJV, NRSV and the NIV). Even Young renders this *from time to time*. Probably the best modern rendering might be *yearly*. The third time *days* appears, it essentially means 24-hour time periods. Apart from my rendering here, or a little research into Bullinger or into the Hebrew itself, you might have never known this.

This final verse describes the result of Jephthah's vow. His daughter remained celibate, spending four days in the mountains with her friends weeping over this. The women of Israel in subsequent years also went to the mountains and wept over her virginity. The verb often rendered *lament* is *tānâh* (תָּנַה) [pronounced *taw-NAW*], which means *to recount, to celebrate*. The use of this word is rather ironic. You see, this is the word which is a homonym—it also means *to procure a prostitute* (recall that Jephthah's mother was a prostitute). Strong's #8567 [and Strong's #8566] BDB #1072 [and BDB #1071].

Keil and Delitzsch quote Auberlen<sup>43</sup>: *The history of Jephthah's daughter would hardly have been thought worth preserving in the Scriptures if the maiden had been really offered in sacrifice; for, in that case, the event would have been reduced, at the best, into a mere family history, without any theocratic significance, thought in truth it would rather have been an anti-theocratic abomination, according to Deut. 12:31 (cf. ch. 18:9, Lev. 18:21; 20:1–5). Jephthah's action would in that case have stood upon the same platform as the incest of Lot (Gen. 19:30ff)...but the very opposite of the case here; and if, from the conclusion of the whole narrative in ch. 1:39, 40, the object of it is supposed to be simply to explain the origin of the feast that was held in honour of Jephthah's daughter, even this would tell against the ordinary view. In the eye of the law the whole thing would still remain an abomination, and the canonical scriptures would not stoop to relate and beautify an institution so directly opposed to the law."*<sup>44</sup>

*Hard Sayings of the Bible* presents a similar argument against the Jephthah offering his daughter as if she were an animal in sacrifice: *If Jephthah's daughter was immolated, in contradiction to the Mosaic law, why would her decease be the occasion for an annual celebration or memorial in Holy Writ? Would not the people in revulsion have silently tried to forget it as best they could?*<sup>45</sup>

Now, I want you to fully understand something else: you may feel as though I have beat you over the head with argument after argument concerning what Jephthah did or didn't do; however, if you read this chapter as a part of your little daily devotional in your little NIV Study Bible, that you might have even thought, after reading one of their footnotes about how *Jephthah probably offered his daughter as a human sacrifice*,<sup>46</sup> that Jephthah did offer his daughter as a human sacrifice, and then you would have just moved on to the next chapter. You were not designed to dig these things out for yourself. God wants you to know His Word and God has provided for you. I did not go from being a believer in Jesus Christ to being an exegete in a couple of months or a couple of years. I spent over twenty years under the ministry of R.B. Thieme III; and then I hesitatingly moved into a period of self-study. And the first couple years of this I look back upon as bordering on pathetic. Therefore, you probably know what I think of your little Bible study or your little Bible reading for 15–30 minutes a day. God designed for us to be taught by a pastor-teacher; He did not choose for us to dig this out for ourselves. When you point to the Bereans who constantly checked the Scriptures to see if what Paul was teaching was true (Acts 17:10–11), and tell me that here God is ordering you to study His Word apart from the direction of a pastor-teacher, then you have twisted this passage way out of whack in order to make it mean what you want it to mean. Let me put this as plainly as I can: if you think that is what the meaning of that passage is, then you are an damned idiot. And I don't care if your dear

<sup>43</sup> Auberlen is some old dead German guy.

<sup>44</sup> Keil & Delitzsch's *Commentary on the Old Testament*; ©1966 Hendrickson Publishers, Inc.; Vol. 2, p. 284.

<sup>45</sup> *Hard Sayings of the Bible*; Walter Kaiser Jr., Peter Davids, F.F. Bruce, Manfred Brauch; InterVarsity Press; ©1996; p. 195.

<sup>46</sup> Taken directly from a footnote in *The NIV Study Bible*; ©1995 by The Zondervan Corporation; p. 345.

pastor whom you love and respect has encouraged you to study and investigate the Scriptures and to develop a study program of your own. He is just telling you that he is too damned lazy to do his job, which is to instruct you in God's Word. God knew what He was doing when he set up the office of pastor-teacher—just because you and your pastor are too lame to grasp that does not nullify what God has prescribed. And it does not matter if every pastor and every church in the United States tells you that you are supposed to study God's Word on your own. We go by the teaching of God's Word, not by the traditions of the fundamentalist church. God's Word is far too important to be put into the hands of an amateur for interpretation, and that is why He has given you a pastor-teacher. If you're interested, God will put you and that pastor-teacher together.

What we should never do is get this confused with the willingness of Abraham to sacrifice Isaac on the mountain. This was done before the Law and it was done in response to a direct order from God. Abraham did not know in advance the mechanics of how God would do it, but he knew in advance that both he and his son would return from the sacrifice of his son together (this is well hidden by some translators in Gen. 22:5, where it should be translated "...**I** and the **lad** will go yonder; and **we** will worship and **we** will return to you." And, as we know, at the last moment, God provided a ram to be offered up instead of Isaac. And, most importantly, this beautifully foreshadowed the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, being offered up as the only-born Son of God the Father in our stead.

Unfortunately, some believers, since their pastor teacher does not do his job, begin reading the Bible at Genesis and then become confused over such things as making vows before God. We have already covered the **Doctrine of Vows and Oaths** back in Num. 30:15.

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