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## Judges 11

(2020)

Bible House of Grace contains an easy to read New and Old Testament commentary full of spiritual treasures and pearls, complete with an insightful resource guide illuminating God's love and grace.



Although I believe my aim is pure and God's will perfect this document is still the product of a human man, as to such I neither claim perfect knowledge or perfect understanding.

## Judges 11.

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### Topics.

- Jephthah sons drive him out of their house.
- The Ammonites make war against Israel.
- Gilead, makes Jephthah leader over them.
- Jephthah sends messengers to the Ammonites.
- Jephthah makes a horrific vow, and defeats the Ammonites.
- Jephthah daughter asks for two months to weep for her virginity.
- Year by year the daughters of Israel lament the daughter of Jephthah.

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE BOOK OF JUDGES

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The Israelites forgot the LORD, and worshipped false gods, so the LORD removed His protection and blessings from them, which resulted in them being oppressed by their enemies and crying to the LORD for deliverance. In answer to their prayer the LORD raised up twelve Judges to deliver them, but not Judges as we think of Judges today or preachers of righteousness, but rather military leaders and fighters, that led Israel to triumph over their enemies and delivered them from their wicked behaviour. Most suppose that Samuel (considered by some to be the last Judge) wrote some parts of the book, while other parts were written at a later time by someone of his generation or a later generation. The primary purpose of the Judges is best articulated in the following words, "The LORD raised up Judges, who saved them out of the hand of those who plundered them. (Judges 2:16). For an overview of the entire book see the title:

- Overview of the Book of Judges (at the beginning of the index).

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## THE PREVIOUS CHAPTER

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Tola judged Israel twenty-three years and died, then Jair judged Israel twenty-two years and he died. Israel did evil in the sight of the LORD, so God gave them over to the Philistines and the Ammonites. The Ammonites fight against Judah and Benjamin, and then cross the River Jordan and camp in Gilead, while the tribes of Gad, Rueben and the half tribe of Manasseh camp at Mizpah ready to defend their land.

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## JEPHTHAH SONS DRIVE HIM OUT

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### JUDGES 11:1-3

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- **Judges 11:1-2:** Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty warrior, but he was the son of a prostitute. Gilead was the father of Jephthah (Gilead begat Jephthah in KJV). <sup>2</sup> And Gilead's wife also bore him sons. And when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out and said to him, "You shall not have an inheritance in our father's house, for you are the son of another woman." <sup>3</sup>Then Jephthah fled from his brothers and lived in the land of Tob, and worthless fellows collected around Jephthah and went out with him.

Jephthah the Gileadite, called the Gileadite, either from his great ancestor Gilead, or from the mountain or city of Gilead, the place of his birth or his dwelling place. (Num. 32:1) (Josh. 17:1-2)

**The son of a prostitute (harlot in KJV):** these words are translated in all the versions in this way, which means it's very unlikely that it has any other meaning. However, some feel it carries the following ideas:

- An inferior wife, a concubine, a Gentile woman who his father should not to have married.
- It is used in a harsh degrading sense to imply an inferior type of marriage or whatever dishonour might attach to his birth.

But none of these are sufficient to designate her a harlot, which means its best to take the words, "the son of a prostitute" literally.

It seems that Gilead fathered Jephthah by a prostitute woman, then sometime after Jephthah birth, Gilead took a lawful wife, who bore him sons. When these sons grew up, they ganged up against Jephthah and cast him out, which according to the following law they were entitled to do.

- No one born of a forbidden union may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of his descendants may enter the assembly of the LORD. <sup>3</sup> "No Ammonite or Moabite may enter the assembly of the LORD. Even to the tenth generation, none of them may enter the assembly of the LORD forever. (Deut. 23:2-3).

It was their father's house, which means that the sons could not have cast him out prior to his father's death, for he would not have allowed it. They were within the law, in denying Jephthah the rights to their fathers' inheritance, for under the law, anyone that was the son of a harlot, or of a woman of another tribe, or of a concubine, or Gentile woman, or of a woman that was not their father's lawful wife only the children of the husband's legitimate wife were entitled to their fathers' inheritance, while the son of the secondary wife was not entitled to any share of the inheritance.

**Jephthah fled to the land of Tob:** the name Tob refers to the name of the land or territory, or to the man who was the owner or ruler of the land. This place was in or near Gilead, as appears by the speedy communication between Jephthah and the Israelites.

**Jephthah gathered worthless (vain in KJV) fellows:** (v3), worthless men here carry the idea of ruthless mercenaries, men who were had nothing to live on, so they got their living from making frequent raids on the Ammonites and other neighbouring people, and by the spoil and plunder they gathered they sustained themselves.

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## THE AMMONITES MAKE WAR AGAINST ISRAEL

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### JUDGES 11:3-8

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- **Judges 11:4-8:** After a time the Ammonites made war against Israel. <sup>5</sup> And when the Ammonites made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to bring Jephthah from the land of Tob. <sup>6</sup> And they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our leader, that we may fight against the Ammonites." <sup>7</sup> But Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Did you not hate me and drive me out of my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?" <sup>8</sup> And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "That is why we have turned to you now, that you may go with us and fight against the Ammonites and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

After the ill treatment Jephthah, received from his brothers, and being a valiant man and great warrior (v1), he was able to gather to himself a large strong force of ruthless mercenaries, that followed him as a military chief, and who fought against the enemies of Israel that camped on their borders, and especially, against parties of the Ammonites. This is why the Israelites were keen to choose him for their ruler in this war against the Ammonites.

**After a time:** (v4) refers to the following three time periods:

1. Sometime after Jephthah brothers had cast him out of their father's house and he had become renowned for his military skills and his exploits in war.
2. Near the close of Israel's eighteen years of Ammonite oppression.
3. When the Ammonites were gathered together in Gilead, and Israel was gathered together in Mizpah ready to defend themselves against the Ammonites, during their eighteenth year of Ammonite oppression, at which time Israel was looking for a man to lead them in battle. (Judges 10:8, 17-18). Supporting this, is the fact that after the elders had promised Jephthah, if he leads them in the battle, and he agreed to go, we are told that he spoke all that the elders had promised him to the people at Mizpah. (Judges 11:11).

**The elders of Gilead ask Jephthah to be their leader:** (v6) fearing the might of the Ammonites Israel send their elders to ask Jephthah to come to their aid, because by this time he had made himself a great name as a brave and successful chief of marauders, who would doubtless come with him to lead them into battle against powerful forces of the Ammonites, and at this present time the only person suitable for this purpose. Remember verse one tells us he was "a mighty man of valour," meaning highly skilled in warfare, and had now become even more so.

**Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead:** (v7), Jephthah's first response was a cold rebuke, "did not you hate me and deprive me of my share of my father's inheritance," which shows that the elders of Gilead must have supported Jephthah's brothers in these things. Considering the renown of his fathers' family it is very likely that some of Jephthah's brothers were elders. He points out to them that they are not coming to him in love, but because they are in distress?

The elders being aware of the harm they had done to him and desiring to win his favour promise, if he joins his forces with them, they will make him the head and chief ruler over all Israel, not the entire nation, but all the tribes beyond the Jordan river that inhabited the land of Gilead. They could not promise more than this, however, even though Israel's law at this time states, "the son of a prostitute, and the son of another woman," of which Jephthah was (Judges 11:1-2), should have no place in the government, he did go on to become a judge over Israel for six years.

- Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in his city in Gilead. (Judges 12:7)

Though a son of a prostitute, and the son of another woman was to have no place in the government, God's law at this time was not enforced, for there were no kings to enforce it and, in these days, everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes. (Judges 21:25).

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## GILEAD, MAKES JEPHTHAH LEADER OVER THEM

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### JUDGES 11:9-11

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- **Judges 11:9-11:** Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you bring me home again to fight against the Ammonites, and the LORD gives them over to me, I will be your head (shall I be your head in KJV)." <sup>10</sup> And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The LORD will be witness between us, if we do not do as you say." <sup>11</sup> So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and leader over them. And Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD at Mizpah.

**I will be your head(shall I be your head in KJV):** (v9) having been treated so badly by them, Jephthah would have no reason to trust them now. He is basically saying, "if I return with you from the land of Tob that I am now settled in, to Gilead, the place that you cast me out of, will you really make me your head, will you really keep your promise."

**The LORD be witness:** (v10) meaning, all that we have spoken to you, God hears it, and we speak it as though He was standing here with us acting as our witness. It means that their promise made to Jephthah was made by the most solemn oath and Israelite could make. The elders are saying, "if we do as we have said, before the omniscient God, calling on Him to be a witness of our agreement which we have sworn before Him let the LORD take vengeance on us, for breaking this oath we have made with you. Jephthah being assured they would keep their promise, goes with them from the land of Tob into the land of Gilead, his native country.

**The people made him head and captain:** (v11), upon arriving at Mizpah, where all the forces of Israel were gathered and ready for battle against the Ammonites, (Judges 10:17-18).), the people confirmed the promise the elders had made and make Jephthah their military leader and head of their tribes. However, to make certain the elders would keep their promise and that all the people were in agreement with what they had spoken, Jephthah, repeated before the people all that the elders had promised, calling on God as a witness so that the people would look upon their agreement with the elders in a far more solemn and serious manner, so that there would be no disputes after the battle concerning their promise to make him their head.

No doubt he finished his speech with a public prayer before the people and before God, that the LORD would give them victory in the battle and be witness to all that had been spoken.

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## JEPHTHAH SENDS MESSENGERS TO THE AMMONITES

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### JUDGES 11:12-14

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- **Judges 11:12-13:** Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites and said, "What do you have against me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?"  
<sup>13</sup> And the king of the Ammonites answered the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Israel on coming up from Egypt took away my land, from the Arnon to the Jabbok and to the Jordan; now therefore restore it peaceably."

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**NOTE:** the words "when they came out of Egypt," does not mean as soon as they came out of Egypt, for it was at least forty years later, and a little before crossing the river Jordan and entering into the land of Canaan. The land Israel took at this time was not in the hands of the Ammonites, but the possession of Sihon and Og, kings of the Amorites. Though the land was in the hands of the Moabites and Ammonites prior to these two kings taking possession if it.

**Jephthah sent messengers:** (v12) to prevent the war and the shedding of bloodshed Jephthah sent ambassadors, to the king of the Ammonites in the hope of making peace. This first act of Jephthah as head of the tribes manifests his good and wise character. Though Jephthah was a mighty man of valour, (v1), courageous and a skilled warrior he preferred to avoid a war, which was in accordance to God's word.

- When you draw near to a city to fight against it, offer terms of peace to it. <sup>11</sup> And if it responds to you peaceably and it opens to you, then all the people who are found in it shall do forced labor for you and shall serve you. <sup>12</sup> But if it makes no peace with you, but makes war against you, then you shall besiege it. (Deut. 20:10-18).

Jephthah desired to know the reason the king of the Ammonites intended to invade the land that belonged to Israel.

**The king of the Ammonites answered Jephthah messengers:** (v15) telling them that when Israel came up from Egypt, they took away the Ammonites land. He then like Jephthah prefers peace, rather than war, and tells Jephthah to return the land peaceably to him.

The kings reply sounds believable, but it was not in accordance with the facts for the following reasons:

God had strongly forbidden the Israelites to go to war against the Moabites and Ammonites, and told them that He would not give them any of the Ammonites land for a possession. (Deut. 2:9) (Deut. 2:19). It is true, this land, that the Ammonites are now claiming, did previously belong to them and the Moabites, but Sihon, king of the Amorites, had made a conquest of the land and driven the Ammonites out and taken possession of the land for themselves (Num. 21:26).

Sometime later, Israel needed to pass through the land, but Sihon the king of the Amorites not only refused to let them pass through his territory, but gathered his own forces against Israel, but Israel defeated him and took possession of his land. This means that the land was not the Ammonites when the Israelites conquered it, but the land of Sihon, king of the Amorites. (Num. 21:21-30).

**From Arnon to Jabbok:** refers to the land bounded by the Arnon river on the south, by the river Jabbok on the north, by the Jordan river on the west, and by the wilderness on the east. It was, the old kingdom of Sihon, but became the territory of the tribes of Reuben and Gad.

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## JEPHTHAH AGAIN SENDS MESSENGERS TO THE AMMONITES

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### JUDGES 11:12-27

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- **Judges 11:14-27:** Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites <sup>15</sup> and said to him, “Thus says Jephthah: Israel did not take away the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites, <sup>16</sup> but when they came up from Egypt, Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh. <sup>16</sup> Israel then sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, ‘Please let us pass through your land,’ but the king of Edom would not listen. And they sent also to the king of Moab, but he would not consent. So Israel remained at Kadesh. <sup>18</sup> “Then they journeyed through the wilderness and went around the land of Edom and the land of Moab and arrived on the east side of the land of Moab and camped on the other side of the Arnon. But they did not enter the territory of Moab, for the Arnon was the boundary of Moab. <sup>18</sup> Israel then sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, king of Heshbon, and Israel said to him, ‘Please let us pass through your land to our country,’ <sup>20</sup> but Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory, so Sihon gathered all his people together and encamped at Jahaz and fought with Israel. <sup>21</sup> And the LORD, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they defeated them. So Israel took possession of all the land of the Amorites, who inhabited that country. <sup>22</sup> And they took possession of all the territory of the Amorites from the Arnon to the Jabbok and from the wilderness to the Jordan. <sup>22</sup> So then the LORD, the God of Israel, dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel; and are you to take possession of them? <sup>24</sup> Will you not possess what Chemosh your god gives you to possess? And all that the LORD our God has dispossessed before us, we will possess. <sup>25</sup> Now are you any better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever contend against Israel, or did he ever go to war with them? <sup>26</sup> While Israel lived in Heshbon and its villages, and in Aroer and its villages, and in all the cities that are on the banks of the Arnon, 300 years, why did you not deliver them within that time? <sup>27</sup> I therefore have not sinned against you, and you do me wrong by making war on me. The LORD, the Judge, decide this day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon.”

In this conversation Jephthah explains to the king of the Ammonites why it is not right to say that when Israel came out from Egypt, that they took away the land of the Ammonites and Moab, and why Israel is not bound to give the land back to them:

- When Israel came up from Egypt, they went through the wilderness to the Red Sea and came to Kadesh.
- Then asked the king of Edom and king of Moab to let them pass through their land, but they denied them access.
- Then Israel journeyed around the land of Edom and of Moab and did not enter their territory.



- Then Israel asked Sihon king of the Amorites to let them pass through their land to Israel's country,' but Sihon fought against Israel, so the God of Israel, gave Sihon into the hand of Israel, which resulted in Israel taking possession of all the land of the Amorites. Therefore, it was the LORD, the God of Israel who dispossessed the Amorites from their land.
- Jephthah then challenges the king of the Ammonites, basically saying, "you should take possession of the land that Chemosh your god gives you, and Israel should take possession of the land their God gives them.
- While Israel lived for 300 years, in Heshbon, Aroer and all the cities on the banks of the river Arnon, Balak the king of Moab never fought against them.
- Jephthah then asks, the king of the Ammonites, why didn't he deliver Moab during those 300 years, then says, he has not sinned against him, and accuses him of doing him wrong by making war on him, so let the LORD, the Judge, decide between Israel and Ammon.

#### **Jephthah's reply was clear:**

1. First, the lands mentioned were not in the hands of the Ammonites when Israel got possession of them, and that Israel had acquired the land by conquering the Amorites. (Judges 11:21).
2. Secondly, by this time the Israelites had possession of these lands for three hundred years and therefore had established an authoritative right to the possession them. (Judges 11:22).
3. Thirdly, having received possession of this territory from the LORD, Israel had a right to maintain their ownership of it, in the same way that the Ammonites had a right to claim ownership of the territory they occupied and believed their god Chemosh gave them. (Judges 11:24).

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Jephthah speech, manifest his great knowledge of Israel's history and his great wisdom, especially his final words,

- I therefore have not sinned against you, and you do me wrong by making war on me. The LORD, the Judge, decide this day between the people of Israel and the people of Ammon. (Judges 11:27).

For it leaves no response for the king of the Ammonites to respond to, except to agree, choose peace, or go to war.

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### **JEPHTHAH MAKES A HORRIFIC VOW**

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#### **JUDGES 11:28-30**

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- **Judges 11:28-30:** But the king of the Ammonites did not listen to the words of Jephthah that he sent to him. <sup>29</sup> Then the Spirit of the LORD was upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh and passed on to Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed on to the Ammonites. <sup>30</sup> And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, "If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, <sup>31</sup> then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering."

The king of the Ammonites was not swayed by Jephthah's argument

**The Spirit of the LORD was upon Jephthah:** (v29) carries the idea that he was filled with the courage and the wisdom that he needed to work out his battle tactics that would give him victory, without which success would have been impossible, and a spirit of zeal for God and to see Israel's enemies defeated. The LORD would give men such a spirit

when He raised them up to face impossible odds. It should also be noted, in this context, the expression, "the Spirit of the LORD was upon Jephthah" does not mean that Jephthah was completely filled with Gods Spirit of inspiration, any more than it does in the case of Samson, nor does it mean that Jephthah following actions had God's approval. To hold characters like Jephthah and Samson up as godly religious examples, is to do harm to the whole spirit of Scripture. It is true, Jephthah and Samson are mentioned in Hebrews chapter eleven:

- What more shall I say? For time would fail me to tell of Gideon, Barak, Samson, Jephthah, of David and Samuel and the prophets. (Hebrews 11:32).

But this is for their faith, not their character, for though their faith was to be commended, their character was not.

**He passed through Gilead Manasseh Mizpah:** (v29) meaning, he went through those parts of the territories, that belonged to Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh that lay from the place where he was, to the land of the children of Ammon to collect levies to finance the war, rouse up the tribes for war and gather troops. After sweeping through these territories, he returned at the head of his new forces to his own camp at Mizpeh to join the troops he had left there. From here he led the whole army against the Ammonites, who occupied the southern parts of Gilead.

**Jephthah made a vow to the LORD:** (v30) prior to going to battle Jephthah makes a vow at Mizpeh. It was a common ancient custom for pagan commanders of armies on the eve of a battle, to promise the god they worshipped a valued gift, or from the spoil of the enemy, if the god they worshipped gave them victory. The following verses show that vows were also a common practice amongst the Israelites, to gain God's favour.

- Then Jacob made a vow, saying, "If God will be with me and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear,<sup>21</sup> so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the LORD shall be my God,<sup>22</sup> and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house. And of all that you give me I will give a full tenth to you." (Gen. 28:20-22).
- She vowed a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if you will indeed look on the affliction of your servant and remember me and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and no razor shall touch his head." (1 Sam. 1:11).
- For your servant vowed a vow while I lived at Geshur in Aram, saying, "If the LORD will indeed bring me back to Jerusalem, then I will offer worship to the LORD." (2 Samuel 15:8).
- I will come into your house with burnt offerings; I will perform my vows to you. (Psalm 66:13).

Though Jephthah was assured of the justness of his cause, and of his call to engage in it, his mind seems to have some doubt, or at least was not fully certain of success, and therefore made this foolish and rash vow in the hope that God would bless his army with success in the battle. It is equally certain that this vow, did not stem from the Spirit of God, nor was it in the will of God.

Some teach that when Jephthah said, "whatever comes out from the doors of my house" (v31), he had in mind animals, even if this was true, it is an extremely foolish oath, because it is far more likely a family member would come out to greet him, especially since he was returning as a hero commander who led the armies of Israel to a great victory. When we consider Jephthah Syrian birth and the long period of time he dwelt in a Syrian city, it should not surprise us that he made such a foolish oath, for the Syrians and Phoenicians were well-known among the ancient pagan nations for human sacrifices. With this in mind, it is not difficult to see how Jephthah could use this same principle and apply it not to pagan gods, but to the LORD. The important thing here to note, is that though



verse twenty-nine states, "the Spirit of the LORD was upon Jephthah," it does not mean this oath was motivated in anyway by the Spirit of the LORD, but only that God Spirit gave him supernatural courage, zeal and wisdom to defeat the powerful forces of the Ammonites.

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## JEPHTHAH DEFEATS THE AMMONITES

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### JUDGES 11:32-33

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- **Judges 11:32-33:** So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them, and the LORD gave them into his hand. <sup>33</sup> And he struck them from Aroer to the neighborhood of Minnith, twenty cities, and as far as Abel-keramim (the plain of the vineyards in KJV), with a great blow. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel.

**Aroer:** (v33), a city which lay near the river Arnon, on the borders of Moab (Deut. 3:12).

**Minnith:** (v33) a place not far from Rabbah, the chief city of the Ammonites, which seems to have been a place famous for wheat (Ezekiel 27:17).

**Abel-keramim (the plain of the vineyards in KJV):** (v33), in Jephthah time was a village called Abela, planted with vineyards, seven miles from Philadelphia, or another Abela, twelve miles from Gadara.

After Jephthah had finished speaking his vow, he met and fought the Ammonite's at Aroer (a town in the tribe of Gad) on the Arnon river. The LORD being with Jephthah delivered them into his hands and he continued his pursuit to Abel, from south to north, over an area of about sixty miles, so that they were not able to oppress them anymore.

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## JEPHTHAH DAUGHTER COMES OUT TO MEET HIM

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### JUDGES 11:34-35

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- **Judges 11:34-35:** Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah. And behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances. She was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter. <sup>35</sup> And as soon as he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to the LORD, and I cannot take back my vow."

After the battle, Jephthah returned to Mizpeh where he had uttered his vow before the LORD, as he came to his house in Mizpeh, his daughter came out to meet her father with the same excitement and joy that Miriam went to meet Moses:

- Then Miriam the prophetess, the sister of Aaron, took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing. (Exodus 15:20-22).

And the women went out to meet David:

- As they were coming home, when David returned from striking down the Philistine, the women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing, to meet King Saul, with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments. <sup>7</sup> And the women sang to one another as they celebrated, "Saul has struck down his thousands, and David his ten thousands." (1 Sam. 18:6-7).

It was common practise for victors to be hailed upon their return by the joyous acclaim of a young female band (1 Sam 18:6). The leader of this joyous group with their timbrels and dances was naturally the daughter of the victor being celebrated.

**The words, “she was his only child** besides her he had neither son nor daughter” (v34), this shows the enormity and the full tragedy of Jephthah foolish vow and the extreme anguish and despair it brought upon him.

**As soon as he saw her, he tore his clothes:** (v35), which was the usual manner of expressing anything calamitous and distressing. When Jacob was told his son, Joseph had been devoured by an animal.

- He tore his garments and put sackcloth on his loins and mourned for his son many days. (Genesis 37:34).

When the hearts of the people of Israel melted because of their enemies.

- Joshua tore his clothes and fell to the earth on his face before the ark of the LORD until the evening, he and the elders of Israel. And they put dust on their heads. (Joshua 7:6).

**You have become the cause of great trouble to me:** (v35), prior to seeing his daughter, Jephthah’s greatest troubles had been from his brothers driving him from his father’s house, and the troubles he had in subduing the Ammonites, but now superseding these troubles was the fact his daughter was the first that came out to meet him, and being fully aware of his vow, he was so greatly distressed and grieved, that all the honour he had gained and joy his great victory brought him, now, brings him nothing but overwhelming grief and pain. The cry of his irrepressible grief, evidences the fact, her life was to be sacrificed (something totally abhorrent to the character of God).

**I have opened my mouth to the LORD:** (v35), he has made a vow before the LORD, that he must now perform. This ungodly vow involved devoting his daughter to death. Since this vow and Jephthah’s fulfilment of it has caused much confusion, we will begin, by looking at what it means to devote a person to destruction (i.e., put them to death).

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## **ALL THINGS FROM MANKIND DEVOTED FOR DESTRUCTION SHALL BE PUT TO DEATH**

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Following is an overview of what the scriptures mean when they state that, “all things devoted to the LORD, whether man or beast shall be put to death.”

In the book of Leviticus, we read:

- No devoted thing that a man devotes to the LORD, of anything that he has, whether man or beast, or of his inherited field, shall be sold or redeemed; every devoted thing is most holy to the LORD. <sup>29</sup> No one devoted, who is to be devoted for destruction from mankind, shall be ransomed; he shall surely be put to death. (Lev. 27:28-29).

In these verses the Hebrew word devoted means “devoted” and “ban,” and carry the following ideas:

- Devoted to God and exterminate.
- What is banned and devoted for destruction
- You shall utterly and completely destroy.

In this context, the word “devoted” applies to whatever the LORD had doomed to destruction, but when applied to man, it only applies to those rightly doomed to death and, in this sense, they are given up to God. When man is the focus, it never applies to human sacrifices, for the Bible never teaches human sacrifice, for such is an abomination to the LORD.

Those who are doomed to destruction refer to:

- Enemies of Israel, such as those nations in the land of Canaan who the LORD told Israel to devote to destruction.

- Guilty murders and such like that have been by a court of law sentenced to death.

Those who go to battle against enemies of Israel are counted as God's servant delivering up a life to the justice of God.

- For he is God's servant for your good. But if you do wrong, be afraid, for he does not bear the sword in vain. For he is the servant of God, an avenger who carries out God's wrath on the wrongdoer. (Romans 13:4).

It was in this way that Israel was required to destroy the Canaanites at Hormah.

- Israel vowed a vow to the LORD and said, "If you will indeed give this people into my hand, then I will devote their cities to destruction."<sup>3</sup> And the LORD heeded the voice of Israel and gave over the Canaanites, and they devoted them and their cities to destruction. So the name of the place was called Hormah. (Num. 21:2-3).

If the inhabitants of a city that the LORD gave to Israel turned to serve other gods, Israel was to put the inhabitants of that city to death, and devote the city to destruction, as a whole burnt offering to the LORD. (Deut. 13:12-18).

In all such cases, there is a moral obligation for the man whose office of justice it is to take the life of another, for it is his duty to administer the justice of the LORD, and as such should see himself as administering God's justice on earth. In cases such as these, there can be no redemption or substitution.

With these facts in mind, it is easy to see that the words, "devote to destruction," do not apply to Japheth's rash and foolish vow, for it is clear that the righteousness of God's law has no part in the sin of rash and foolish vows, such as Saul's:

- And the men of Israel had been hard pressed that day, so Saul had laid an oath on the people, saying, "Cursed be the man who eats food until it is evening and I am avenged on my enemies." So none of the people had tasted food. (1 Sam. 14:24).

And Jephthah's horrific vow:

- Jephthah made a vow to the LORD and said, "If you will give the Ammonites into my hand,<sup>31</sup> then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering." (Judges 11:30-31).
- <sup>34</sup> Then Jephthah came to his home at Mizpah. And behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances. She was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter. (Judges 11:34).

A lawful sacrifice in the Old Testament was very different to a person or person's that had been devoted to destruction, for sacrifices were always the offering up of the innocent life of an animal chosen, approved, and without spot or blemish.

Jephthah took upon himself the obligation to fulfil his vow, for carrying out such a vow, would bring no pleasure to God, since it was totally contrary to the law of God, and abominable in his sight. However, since we are told that during these days everyone was doing what was right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25), which maybe a reason Jephthah did not consider whether his vow was lawful or not.

It also appears that Jephthah had not communicated his vow to anyone, which was another foolish act, for if he had others would have counselled him to take a better path, or at the very least taken precautions to make sure a person of far less value or an animal was first to come out of his house. It is clear that now that Jephthah is faced with putting his own daughter to death, he had not comprehended the horror of human

sacrifice. When it is remembered that prior to these times and afterwards whole cities, men, women, children, livestock and goods had been devoted to utter destruction as spoken of in the following verses:

- Israel vowed a vow to the LORD and said, “If you will indeed give this people into my hand, then I will devote their cities to destruction.”<sup>3</sup> And the LORD heeded the voice of Israel and gave over the Canaanites, and they devoted them and their cities to destruction. So the name of the place was called Hormah. (Num. 21:2-3).

It gives us a little more understanding how a person living during these times could be tempted to make such a rash and foolish vow. Some says that Jephthah was right in not being deterred from keeping his vow, because he would personally suffer great loss and sorrow, in the same way that Abraham was right in not withholding his son, his only son, from God, but this is not a good analogy, for God told Abraham to sacrifice his Son, and God knew He would not allow him to go through with it, whereas, Jephthah’s vow, was rash and foolish and certainly not from the Spirit to God or God’s will.

Rather Jephthah was wholly wrong in entertaining the thought, God would be pleased with such a vow, for it was totally contrary to God’s character. We would be standing on far safer ground to say that Jephthah would have done right before the LORD had he not slain his child, and instead humble himself before the LORD, repented of making such a rash and foolish vow, and not made such a horrific sacrifice to the LORD, for such sacrifices are not and never have been sanctioned by the Mosaic law, and are certainly not acceptable to God.

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## LET ME WEEP FOR MY VIRGINITY

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### JUDGES 11:36-37

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- **Judges 11:36-37:** And she said to him, “My father, you have opened your mouth to the LORD; do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the LORD has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites.”<sup>37</sup> So she said to her father, “Let this thing be done for me: leave me alone two months, that I may go up and down on the mountains and weep for my virginity, I and my companions.”

Jephthah’s daughters’ words, “do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth,” manifests her beautiful submission and devotion, and her total lack of selfishness for she not only put the spiritual well-being of her father before her own life, but her words, “the LORD has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites,” shows that she also put the well-being of Israel before her own well-being. Her response was a remarkable moment of subjection and obedience to a parent, that may have been strengthened by the following two mistaken ideas:

1. Her father’s rash and ungodly vow could not be repented of and terminated, and therefore she was moved by an unenlightened sense of religion, as well as a family duty to her father.
2. Since many of the surrounding pagan nations were deeply rooted in human sacrifices at this time, she being a teenage daughter may have believed that by sacrificing herself to God she would be greatly honoured in the world beyond.

**Leave me alone two months:** (v37) the only favour she asks was for two months to bewail her virginity, which Jephthah’s could grant without any breach of the vow for no time was fixed for it to be fulfilled. It is very clear she wanted this space of time to bewail her virginity, but she may also have thought it would give her father time for reflection, and reconsider if there was another path he could take, for even though it seems he was driven by a righteous sense of duty, what he was about to do was totally unlawful and an offense to God.

**I may go up and down on the mountains:** (v37), most likely meaning she would walk up the mountains with her companions to comfort her, so she could weep and lament her virginity and her approaching death with them in a solitary place and then return down to their home for the night. For an Israelite woman to die childless, was esteemed a shame and disgrace for it was counted a great privilege to increase the holy seed of Israel, and a curse to die without giving birth, because it meant they had no part in contributing to the birth of the Messiah.

- Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb. <sup>23</sup> She conceived and bore a son and said, “God has taken away my reproach.” (Gen. 30:22-23).
- But to Hannah he gave a double portion, because he (Elkanah) loved her, though the LORD had closed her womb. <sup>6</sup> And her rival (Peninnah) used to provoke her grievously to irritate her, because the LORD had closed her womb. <sup>7</sup> So it went on year by year. As often as she went up to the house of the LORD, she used to provoke her. Therefore Hannah wept and would not eat. (1 Samuel 1:5-7).
- And seven women shall take hold of one man in that day, saying, “We will eat our own bread and wear our own clothes, only let us be called by your name; take away our reproach.” (Isaiah 4:1).

The goal of all Israelite maidens was to become a wife and a mother, this is why the premature death of Jephthah's daughter was so distressing. For an Israelite woman to go to the grave without bearing children was a great sadness and sorrow, for it meant there was no offspring added to the nation of Israel.

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## YEAR BY YEAR ISRAEL LAMENTS THE DAUGHTER OF JEPHTHAH

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### JUDGES 11:38-40

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- **Judges 11:38-40:** So he said, “Go.” Then he sent her away for two months, and she departed, she and her companions, and wept for her virginity on the mountains. <sup>39</sup> And at the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow that he had made. She had never known a man, and it became a custom in Israel <sup>40</sup> that the daughters of Israel went year by year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year.

Based upon the fact the chief cause of Jephthah daughter's lamentation and bewailing was her virginity and not her death (v37-38), and that at the end of her two months, it is written, “she had never known a man, and it became a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went year by year to lament the daughter of Jephthah four days in the year.” (v39-40). There are modern writers that teach Jephthah's daughter was not sacrificed, but only devoted to perpetual virginity, which was at this time considered a great shame and disgrace and esteemed as a reproach amongst women.

Following maybe some reasons she did not bewail her death:

- She had graciously accepted it for her father's sake and honour. (Judges 11:36).
- She viewed it as a type of martyrdom, perhaps believing by her selfless sacrifice God would give her greater honour in the world above.
- She having had no husband to take away her reproach, (Isaiah 4:1), and leaving no offspring to increase of God's people, like most barren woman of her time, was for her a greater concern and sadness than her death.

We know Jephthah did not have in mind “perpetual virginity” when he made the vow, because he said to the LORD:

- If you will give the Ammonites into my hand,<sup>31</sup> then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering." (Judges 11:30-31).

It is difficult to comprehend how a man like Jephthah zealous for the LORD and for Israel could comprehend doing something so monstrousness, perhaps the following will give some insight and understanding:

1. These were times of great and widespread ignorance and corruption of the Israelites religion, in that the Israelites had apostatized from God, and learnt and followed the practices and worships of the heathen nations:
  - The people of Israel again did what was evil in the sight of the LORD and served the Baals and the Ashtaroath, the gods of Syria, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. And they forsook the LORD and did not serve him. (Judges 10:6).
2. During this time human sacrifices were offered up to Moloch, and even though Israel seems to have repented and forsaken their idols:
  - So they put away the foreign gods from among them and served the LORD, and he became impatient over the misery of Israel. (Judges 10:16).

However, this does not necessarily mean that they were not at some level still influenced by their past beliefs and practices, though it is certain they would not offer human sacrifices to Moloch, but they may offer them to the LORD.

3. Even though Jephthah was a good man, he did grow up in a barbarous society, especially after being cast out from his father's house and gathering together a band of raiders to plunder the surrounding nations to survive.
4. It is likely many of the priests and people did not resist Jephthah in sacrificing his daughter because many of them may have been under the same mistaking ignorance that Jephthah was, and because they were afraid to oppose Jephthah because he was so resolute in the path he was taking and therefore feared he would rise up against them.
5. It is also possible that Jephthah and of the people of this age, misunderstood the following scriptures:
  - No devoted thing that a man devotes to the LORD, of anything that he has, whether man or beast, or of his inherited field, shall be sold or redeemed; every devoted thing is most holy to the LORD. <sup>29</sup> No one devoted, who is to be devoted for destruction from mankind, shall be ransomed; he shall surely be put to death. (Lev. 27:28-29).

Here it is clearly stated, that every devoted thing, whether man or beast, should surely be put to death, though these verses have nothing to do with sacrifices, it should not surprise us that people during this age of everyone doing what was right in their own eyes (Judges 21:25) could mistake its meaning, especially since there are some learned commentators today, that still misinterpret them.

For a complete understanding of what the scriptures mean when they state that, "all things devoted to the LORD, whether man or beast shall be put to death," see the title:

- All things from Mankind Devoted for Destruction shall be put to Death, following (Judges 11:34-35) (above).

**The daughters of Israel went yearly to lament:** (v40) after Jephthah's daughter had been offered up for a burnt offering" (v30-31), the daughters of Israel went four days in a year to some public place appointed for their meeting, most likely to the place where she was sacrificed. Whether this was four continuous days or one day every



quarter of the year, is not known, since some may have travelled some distance four continuous days seems more likely. Here they gathered together not only to lament and express their sorrow for her death and her virginity according to the manner of Hebrew tradition, but also to honour her, for willingly yielding herself up for a sacrifice, for, though this was not God's will and she was clearly unenlightened, it is most certain that she believed she was laying her life down as a token of thankfulness, because the LORD had given Israel victory over the fierce and mighty armies of the Ammonites.

There is no existing poem or song, mentioned in Scripture or any other mention of this annual lamentation of the daughters of Israel, this most likely is because Jephthah's rash and ungodly vow was not of God, and the sacrifice of his daughter rather than please God, was totally contrary to His law and an extreme offense.

**Following are four important lessons that can be learned from Jephthah's vow:**

1. Even though a believer may have strong faith in some areas, they are still capable of making rash and ungodly decisions and choices.
2. Anything we say that we will do before God in prayer, should be carefully considered, and not just rash impulsive statements.
3. We need to be very careful in what we say, for though God won't forsake us for making wrong decisions and choices, we will suffer the consequences.
4. If we do say we will do something (i.e., lawful and according to God's will), we should be sure to do it when possible, regardless of how difficult it may be or how grievous, or what loss we may suffer.

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*As the founder of Bible House of Grace, I would like to thank the many Christian scholars, commentators and theologians who have gone before me, and the many today, who have freely made available their works to enhance the knowledge of the Bible to all people worldwide. It is only with the help of these faithful writers that much of Bible House of Grace exists as it does today.*