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### **Jephthah's Answer and Vow**

Definitions in **bold letters** are from **Strong's** Exhaustive Concordance  
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or Roget's Thesaurus – **June 18, 2017**

## **Judges 11:4-11; 29-31**

**Introduction:** This chapter gives as the history of **Jephthah**, another of **Israel's judges**, and numbered among the **worthies** of the Old Testament, that **BY FAITH** did GREAT things (Hebrews 11:32), though he had NOT such an extraordinary call as the rest there mentioned had. Here we have, **I.** The disadvantages of his origin, Judges 11:1-3. **II.** The Gileadites' choice of him to be commander-in-chief against the Ammonites, and the terms he made with them, Judges 11:4-11. **III.** His treaty with the king of Ammon about the rights of the two nations, that the matter might be determined, if possible, without bloodshed, Judges 11:12-28. **IV.** His war with the Ammonites, which he enters upon with a solemn vow (Judges 11:29-31), prosecutes with bravery (Judges 11:32), and ends with a glorious victory, Judges 11:33. **V.** The straits he was brought into at his return to his own house by the vow he had made, Judges 11:34-40. (Source: <https://www.studyight.org/commentaries/mhm/judges-11.html>)

**Judges 11:1-3**, Now **Jephthah** the Gileadite was a mighty man of **valour** (strength of mind in regard to danger), and he was the **son** of an **harlot (adulteress)**: and **Gilead** *begat* **Jephthah**. And **Gilead's WIFE** bare him sons; and his wife's sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt **NOT inherit** in **OUR father's house**; for thou art the **son** of a **strange (other [different]) woman**. Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in the land of Tob: and there were gathered **vain (worthless)** men to Jephthah, and went out with him.

**NOTE:** The princes and people of Gilead we left, in the close of the foregoing chapter, consulting about the choice of a **general**, having come to this resolve, that whoever would undertake to lead their forces against the children of Ammon should by common consent be **head** over all the inhabitants of **Gilead**. The enterprise was difficult, and it was fit that so great an encouragement as this should be proposed to him that would undertake it. Now, all agreed that **Jephthah**, the **Gileadite**, was a mighty man of valour, and very fit for that purpose, none so fit as he, but he lay under **three disadvantages**:-- **1.** He was the son of a harlot (Judges 11:1), of a strange woman (Judges 11:2), one that was neither a wife NOR a concubine some think his mother was a Gentile so Josephus, who calls him a stranger by the mother's side. An **Ishmaelite**, say the Jews. If **his mother** was a **harlot**, that was **NOT his fault, however** it was **his disgrace**. Men ought NOT to be reproached with any of the infelicities (inappropriateness) of their parentage or extraction, so long as they are endeavouring by their **personal MERITS** (goodness or excellence which entitles one to honor or regard [respect]) to roll away the reproach. **2.** He had been **driven from** his country by his brethren. **3.** He had, in his exile, headed a rabble (mob [lower classes of a community]). (Source: <https://www.studyight.org/commentaries/mhm/judges-11.html>)

**Judges 11:4-6**, And it came to pass in **process of time**, that the children of **Ammon** made war

against **Israel**. And it was so, that when the children of **Ammon** made war against **Israel**, the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob: And they said unto Jephthah, Come, and **be our captain**, that **we may fight** with the children of **Ammon**.

**NOTE: ...in process of time**,.... Some time after Jephthah had been expelled from his father's house, and he was become famous for his **martial genius**, and **military exploits**; or at the close of the eighteen years' oppression of the children of Israel by the Ammonites, OR some few days after the children of Israel were gathered together at Mizpeh, that the people and princes of Gilead were preparing for war with Ammon, and were thinking of a proper person to be their general:

**that the children of Ammon made war against Israel**; NOT only passed over Jordan again, and encamped in Gilead, but began to attack them in some place or another, at least threatened them with it, and made motions towards it.

**the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob**; they did NOT send messengers to him, but went themselves, partly to SHOW greater RESPECT to him, and partly in hopes of better success, being aware of objections he would make, which they could better answer themselves than a deputation (delegation).

**And they said unto Jephthah, come and be our captain**,.... **The general** of their army, to conduct and lead on their forces;

**that we may fight with the children of Ammon**; with judgment, courage, and success; they did NOT make this proposal to him to save themselves from being engaged in the war, but that they might have one **SKILFUL** in **military affairs** at the head of them, to instruct them in the art of war, and lead them on in a regular manner, and animate them by his **brave example**. (Source: <https://www.studyight.org/commentaries/geb/judges-11.html>)

**Proverbs 12:8**, A man shall be **commended** (**praise [VALUE]**) according to his **wisdom**: but he that is of a **perverse** (turned away from the right; wicked) **heart** shall be **despised** (undervalue [treat as of little worth]).

**Judges 11:7**, And **Jephthah** said unto the **elders** of **Gilead**, Did NOT **ye HATE me**, and **expel me OUT** of my father's house? and **WHY** are ye come unto me **now** when ye are in **DISTRESS**?

**NOTE: And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead**,.... In answer to their request; who though NOT backward to engage in the war with them, yet thought it proper to take this opportunity to upbraid (REBUKE) them with their former unkindness to him:

**did not ye HATE me, and expel me out of my father's house?** for it seems some of these elders at least were his brethren; for who else could be thought to HATE him, and through **HATRED** to **thrust him out** of his father's house, but they? nor is it at all improbable that they were among the elders of Gilead, considering what family they were of: though indeed the magistrates of the city might be assisting to Jephthah's brethren in the expulsion of him, OR however connived (pretend NOT to see, WINKED) at it, when they should, as he thought, have protected him, and **taken care that he had justice done him**; for even though illegitimate, a maintenance (support; protection) was DUE to him:

**and why are ye come unto me now, when ye are in distress?** intimating, that it was NOT LOVE and RESPECT to him, but NECESSITY, that brought them to him with this request; and that since they used him so ill, they could NOT reasonably expect he should have any regard (RESPECT) unto them.

(Source: <https://www.studyight.org/commentaries/geb/judges-11.html>)

**Thought 1.** I'm reminded of a time when Paul spoke similar words to people who did NOT see value IN him, nor his words, when he gave them godly counsel.

**Acts 27:20-21**, And when neither sun nor stars in many days appeared, and no small tempest lay on us, all hope that we should be saved **was then taken away**. But after long abstinence **Paul** stood forth in the midst of them, and said,

**Sirs, ye SHOULD HAVE hearkened unto ME,** and NOT have loosed from Crete, and to have gained this HARM and LOSS.

**Judges 11:8-9,** And the **elders of Gilead** said unto **Jephthah**, Therefore we **TURN AGAIN** to thee now, that thou mayest go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, and be our **head (ruler) over all the inhabitants of Gilead**. And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, *IF ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the LORD deliver them before me, shall I be your head (ruler)?*

**NOTE:** "Therefore because we formerly did thee that WRONG, and to SHOW thee that we REPENT of it and would **gladly atone for it, we turn again to thee now,** to put such an **honour** upon thee as shall balance that indignity." Let this instance be, 1. A caution to us NOT to DESPISE or trample upon any because they are mean (low in rank or birth), nor to be injurious to any that we have advantage against, because, whatever we THINK of them **now, the TIME may come** when we may have NEED of them, and may be glad to be beholden to them.

He puts to them a fair question, Judges 11:9. He speaks not with too much confidence of his success, knowing how justly God might suffer the Ammonites to prevail for the further punishment of Israel but puts an if upon it. Nor does he speak with any **confidence at all in himself** IF he do succeed, it is the Lord that delivers them into his hand, intending hereby to remind his countrymen to look up to God, as **arbitrator** (one who has the power of deciding) of the controversy and the giver of victory, for so he did. "Now if, by the blessing of God, I come home a conqueror, tell me plainly shall I be your head? If I deliver you, under God, shall I, **under him**, reform you?"

(Source: <https://www.studyight.org/commentaries/mhm/judges-11.html>)

**Judges 11:10-11,** And the **elders of Gilead** said unto **Jephthah**, The LORD (Yahweh) be witness between us, if we do NOT so according to thy words. Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the **people made him head (RULER) and captain** over them: and **Jephthah uttered** all his words BEFORE the LORD in Mizpeh.

**NOTE:** "We will do according to thy words command us in war, and thou shalt command us in peace." They do NOT take time to consider of it. The case was too plain to need a debate, and the necessity too pressing to admit a delay. They knew they had power to conclude a treaty for those whom they represented, and therefore **bound** it with an **oath**, The Lord be witness between us. They appeal to God's omniscience as the judge of their present sincerity, and to his justice as an avenger if afterwards they should prove false. The Lord be a hearer, so the word is. Whatever we speak, it concerns us to remember that God is a hearer, and to speak accordingly. Thus was the original contract ratified (made valid) between Jephthah and the Gileadites, which **ALL Israel**, it should seem, **AGREED to AFTERWARDS**, for it is said (Judges 12:7), **he JUDGED Israel**.

**He uttered all his words before the Lord...** that is, upon his elevation (exaltation), he immediately retired to his devotions, and in prayer spread the whole matter before God, both his choice to the office and his execution of the office, as one that had his eye ever towards the Lord, and would do nothing without him, that leaned not to his own understanding or courage, but depended on God and his favour. He utters before God all his thoughts and cares in this matter for God gives us leave to be free with him. 1. "Lord, the people have made me their head wilt thou confirm the choice, and **own me as thy people's head under thee** and **for thee?**" God justly complains of Israel (Hosea 8:4), *they have set up kings, but not by me*. "Lord," said Jephthah, "I will be no head of their making without thee." (Source: <https://www.studyight.org/commentaries/mhm/judges-11.html>)

**Judges 11:12-13,** And **Jephthah** sent messengers unto the **king** of the children of **Ammon**, saying, What hast thou to do with me, that thou art come against me to fight in my land? And the **king** of the children of **Ammon** answered unto the messengers of Jephthah, Because

Israel **took away my land**, when they came up **out of Egypt**, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan: now therefore **restore** those lands again peaceably.

**NOTE:** The king of Ammon made it quite clear in this reply that nothing short of Israel's giving up the disputed lands could avert the impending war. It is to **Jephthah's great credit** that he **effectively defended Israel's right** to the disputed territory. He did this with FOUR very brilliant and truthful arguments.

This argument was simply that Israel had NOT taken the disputed land away from the Ammonites; **they had defeated the Amorites** and had **taken it** away FROM THEM, **not** from the **Ammonites**, who did NOT originally own the land. This point was elaborated by Jephthah in Judges 11:14-22.

(Source: <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bcc/judges-11.html>)

**Judges 11:14-22, And Jephthah sent messengers** again unto the **king** of the children of **Ammon**: And said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah, Israel took NOT away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon: But when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red sea, and came to Kadesh; Then Israel sent messengers unto the **king** of **Edom**, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land: but the king of Edom would NOT hearken thereto. And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab: but he would NOT consent: and Israel abode in Kadesh. Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, but came NOT within the border of Moab: for Arnon was the border of Moab. And Israel sent messengers unto **Sihon king** of the **Amorites**, the **king** of **Heshbon**; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place. But Sihon trusted NOT Israel to pass through his coast: but **Sihon** gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and **fought against Israel**. And the LORD God of Israel **delivered Sihon** and all his people into the **hand** of **Israel**, and they **smote them**: so Israel possessed all the land of the **Amorites**, the inhabitants of that country. And **they possessed** all the coasts of the **Amorites**, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto Jordan.

**NOTE:** This is a very important paragraph, a great deal of it being a repetition, much of it verbatim, of what is written in the **Books of Moses**, namely in Numbers 13:26; 14:25; 20:1; 18-21; 21:21-24-42. This fact establishes every word of what Jephthah stated here as absolutely accurate and is also a glorious proof of the fact that the **Pentateuch** (The first five books of the Old Testament) existed many, many years **before** the **Book of Judges**.

(Source: <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bcc/judges-11.html>)

**Judges 11:23-28, So now the LORD God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites** from before his people Israel, and shouldst thou possess it? Wilt NOT thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? **So whomsoever the LORD our God shall drive out from before us, THEM will we possess.**

And now art thou any thing better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? did he ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against them, While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns, and in Aroer and her towns, and in all the cities that be along by the coasts of Arnon, **three hundred years?** why therefore did ye NOT recover them within that time? Wherefore I have NOT sinned against thee, but thou doest me wrong to war against me: the LORD **the Judge** be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon. Howbeit the king of the children of **Ammon hearkened NOT** unto the **words of Jephthah** which he sent him.

**NOTE:** This concluded Jephthah's efforts to avoid the war by diplomatic activity. The king of the children of Ammon could NOT answer the arguments of Jephthah and therefore made no reply whatever to Jephthah's arguments.

(Source: <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bcc/judges-11.html>)

**Judges 11:29**, Then the **Spirit of the LORD** came upon **Jephthah**, and he passed over Gilead, and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over unto the children of Ammon.

**NOTE: ...the Spirit of Jehovah came upon Jephthah.**" Thus, Jephthah entered the lists of the great charismatic (pertaining to a charism [miraculously given power]) **leaders** of Israel. This made all the difference. With Jephthah led by God's Spirit, the victory of Israel was assured.

As Yates noted, "Jephthah here made a series of journeys,"<sup>[16]</sup> and the implication is clear enough that **Jephthah did so** under the **direction of the Spirit of God**. We are NOT told exactly what the purpose of those trips was, but, in all likelihood, it was to enlist as many as possible in the army with which Jephthah would meet the foe.  
(Source: <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/bcc/judges-11.html>)

**Judges 11:30-31**, And **Jephthah vowed (made) a VOW (promise)** unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, Then it shall be, that whatsoever **cometh** forth of the doors of my house to **meet me**, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, **shall surely BE the LORD'S**, and I will **offer it up** for a **burnt offering**.

**NOTE: ...offer it up for a burnt-offering** - The text is ...vehayah layhovah, vemaalithihu olah ; the translation of which, according to the **most accurate Hebrew scholars**, is this: I will consecrate it to the Lord, OR I will offer it for a burnt-offering; **THAT IS, "If it be a thing FIT for a burnt-offering, it shall be made one; if FIT for the service of God, it shall be consecrated to him."** That conditions of this kind must have been implied in the vow, is evident enough; to have been made without them, it must have been the vow of a heathen, or a madman. If a dog had met him, this could NOT have been made a burnt-offering; and if his neighbor or friend's wife, son, or daughter, etc., had been returning from a visit to his family, **his vow gave him no right over them**. Besides, human sacrifices were ever an abomination to the Lord; and this was one of the grand reasons why God drove out the Canaanites, etc., because they offered their sons and daughters to Molech in the fire, i.e., made burnt-offerings of them, as is generally supposed. (Source: <https://www.studylight.org/commentaries/acc/judges-11.html>)

**Judges 11:32-40**, So **Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands**. And he **smote them** from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great **slaughter**. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel. And **Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him** with timbrels and with dances: and she was his **ONLY child**; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. And it came to pass, when he saw her, that **he rent his clothes**, and said, **Alas, my daughter!** thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and **I cannot go back**. And **she said** unto him, My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, **DO to me** according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; forasmuch as the LORD hath **taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies**, even of the children of Ammon. And she said unto her father, Let this thing be done for me: let me alone **two months**, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and **bewail my virginity**, I and my fellows. And he said, Go. And he sent her away for **TWO MONTHS**: and she went with her companions, and **bewailed her virginity upon the mountains**. And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, **who DID with her according to his vow** which **he had vowed**: and she knew **NO man**. And it was a custom in Israel, That the daughters of Israel **went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite** FOUR DAYS in a year.

**NOTE:** We are very aware of the dogmatic assertions of many commentators that Jephthah offered his daughter as a burnt-offering, but we simply cannot accept such assertions as

TRUTH. We shall NOT bother to cite that type of comments. Those who prefer that interpretation are welcome to seek out those comments for themselves. We shall be content with stating **our reasons** for the **conviction** that **Jephthah's fulfillment of his vow was NOT that of offering her up as a burnt-offering, BUT a dedication of her to the service of God** in the **tabernacle** located in those days at **Shiloh**.

(1) Jephthah was a man who had the Spirit of God, and that alone would NEVER have allowed him to offer his daughter as a burnt-offering.

(2) Jephthah was thoroughly familiar with the **Book** of the **Law of Moses** and the laws governing sacrifices. In that Law, the first-born, who were required to be "offered" to Jehovah, were **never offered as a burnt-offering**, but they were **"redeemed"** by the offering of a lamb instead. This applied even to the first-born of a donkey! It is simply inconceivable that Jephthah would have been ignorant of this principle, or that he would have failed to take advantage of it on behalf of his daughter.

(3) **"It shall be Jehovah's"** (Judges 11:31). "This should be understood in terms of what Hannah meant when she said of her unborn child, "I will give him unto the Lord all the days of his life (1 Samuel 1:11)."<sup>[17]</sup> **Hannah gave up Samuel for temple services** under **Eli** the High Priest.

(4) "The Hebrew word for burnt-offering does not carry with it the idea of death, but of something offered completely unto God. Of course, this was carried out in animal sacrifice, but the word would also accurately describe a young woman **giving herself completely** to the Lord as a **temple servant**."<sup>[18]</sup>

(5) **"Let me alone for two months ... that I may bewail my virginity"** (Judges 11:37). This cannot mean, "Let me bewail my untimely death." It was her dedication to the tabernacle as a life-long servant, during which **she would NOT be permitted to marry**. That is what she bewailed, not her death. Those who want to affirm that she was offered as a burnt-offering will have to find it somewhere else; it is not in the text.

(6) **"He did with her according to his vow"** (Judges 11:39). And what was that? The same verses tell us what it was:

**"And she knew not a man."** Does that mean that she became a burnt-offering? Certainly not. She was dedicated as a **perpetual virgin** servant of the tabernacle.

(7) **...daughters of Israel went yearly to celebrate the daughter of Jephthah...** (Judges 11:40). WHERE did those daughters of Israel go? To the TABERNACLE, of course. Why? That is where Jephthah's daughter was. If she had become a burnt-offering, the yearly celebration would NOT have involved any "going" at all.

(8) We have already noted that Jephthah's name is listed in the roster of the heroes of faith in Hebrews 11, along with David and Samuel, and due to the fact of human sacrifice having been forever and always an abomination to the Lord, it is impossible to believe that Jephthah would have been so favorably mentioned in the N.T. if indeed he had offered up a human sacrifice in the person of his daughter.

(9) Let it be supposed, for a moment, that Jephthah would have attempted to offer his daughter as a burnt-offering. **No priest would have allowed it**; the people of Israel would simply not have tolerated it.

(10) There is **NOT a word** in this narrative that **declares** any **"burnt-offering"** to have been OFFERED. Furthermore, if Jephthah had actually intended to offer up a human being as a burnt-offering, as a number of commentators affirm, can we believe that God would have allowed the victory to go to a man thus in open rebellion against what is everywhere revealed in the Bible as **God's will**?

This writer is fully convinced that Jephthah's loving daughter was dedicated to a **LIFE of service** in the tabernacle and that that ACTION was indeed the **complete fulfillment of his VOW**.

The grief of Jephthah was NOT because his daughter would become a burnt-offering, but because ... as she was his **only child**, it was the **END of his posterity** (DESCENDANTS) upon the earth. In the thinking of the people of his day, this was more than enough to **break his heart**. (Source: <https://www.studyight.org/commentaries/bcc/judges-11.html>)