

Scriptures and Doctrine :: Jephthah and his daughter

Jephthah and his daughter - posted by riki (), on: 2004/12/4 6:51

Quote:

Jephthah's Vow and Victory

29 Then the Spirit of the LORD came upon Jephthah, and he passed through Gilead and Manasseh, and passed through Mizpah of Gilead; and from Mizpah of Gilead he advanced toward the people of Ammon. 30 And Jephthah made a vow to the LORD, and said, "If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, 31 then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering."

32So Jephthah advanced toward the people of Ammon to fight against them, and the LORD delivered them into his hands. 33And he defeated them from Aroer as far as Minnith--twenty cities--and to Abel Keramim, with a very great slaughter. Thus the people of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.

Jephthah's Daughter

34 When Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, there was his daughter, coming out to meet him with timbrels and dancing; and she was his only child. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter. 35 And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he tore his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low! You are among those who trouble me! For I have given my word to the LORD, and I cannot go back on it."

36So she said to him, "My father, if you have given your word to the LORD, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, because the LORD has avenged you of your enemies, the people of Ammon." 37Then she said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me: let me alone for two months, that I may go and wander on the mountains and bewail my virginity, my friends and I."

38So he said, "Go." And he sent her away for two months; and she went with her friends, and bewailed her virginity on the mountains. 39And it was so at the end of two months that she returned to her father, and he carried out his vow with her which he had vowed. She knew no man.

And it became a custom in Israel 40that the daughters of Israel went four days each year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite.

I read this passage today and find it very disturbing. I don't know what to make of it. Perhaps it's a classic when it comes to hard-to-understand Bible passages, I don't know. I haven't heard anyone explain it, anyway... So, I'm thankful for any help on what to make of it. Comments, anyone?

/Rikard

Re: Jephthah and his daughter - posted by CJaKfOrEsT (), on: 2004/12/4 7:46

All I can say, at the risk of stating the obvious, is be careful what you promise to God.

Re: Jephthah and his daughter - posted by crsschk (), on: 2004/12/4 9:27

Hi Riki,

A bit long, but may be helpful here. Taken from Adam Clarke's Commentary via (<http://www.e-sword.net/>) <http://www.e-sword.net/> a most helpful Bible software program and it's free.

"Jdg 11:31 -

Shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering - The text is והיהליהוה והעליתיהועולה 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 in 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. That Jephthah was a deeply pious man, appears in the whole of his conduct; and that he was well acquainted with the law of Moses, which prohibited all such sacrifices, and stated what was to be

offered in sacrifice, is evident enough from his expostulation with the king and people of Ammon, Jdg_11:14-27. Therefore it must be granted that he never made that rash vow which several suppose he did; nor was he capable, if he had, of executing it in that most shocking manner which some Christian writers (Ä“tell it not in GathÄ“) have contended for. He could not commit a crime which himself had just now been an executor of GodÄ’s justice to punish in others.

It has been supposed that Ä“the text itself might have been read differently in former times; if instead of the words והעליתיהו עולה, I will offer It a burnt-offering, we read והעליתי הוא עולה, I will offer Him (i.e., the Lord) a burnt-offering: this will make a widely different sense, more consistent with everything that is sacred; and it is formed by the addition of only a single letter, (א aleph), and the separation of the pronoun from the verb. Now the letter א aleph is so like the letter ע ain, which immediately follows it in the word עולה olah, that the one might easily have been lost in the other, and thus the pronoun be joined to the verb as at present, where it expresses the thing to be sacrificed instead of the person to whom the sacrifice was to be made. With this emendation the passage will read thus: Whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me - shall be the LordÄ’s; and I will offer Him a burnt-offering.Ä” For this criticism there is no absolute need, because the pronoun הו hu, in the above verse, may with as much propriety be translated him as it. The latter part of the verse is, literally, And I will offer him a burnt-offering, עולה olah, not לעולה leolah, For a burnt-offering, which is the common Hebrew form when for is intended to be expressed. This is strong presumption that the text should be thus understood: and this avoids the very disputable construction which is put on the ו vau, in והעליתיהו vemaalithihu, Or I will offer It up, instead of And I will offer Him a burnt-offering.

Ä“From Jdg_11:39 it appears evident that JephthahÄ’s daughter was not Sacrificed to God, but consecrated to him in a state of perpetual virginity; for the text says, She knew no man, for this was a statute in Israel. ותה י חק בישראל vattehi chok beyishrael; viz., that persons thus dedicated or consecrated to God, should live in a state of unchangeable celibacy. Thus this celebrated place is, without violence to any part of the text, or to any proper rule of construction, cleared of all difficulty, and caused to speak a language consistent with itself, and with the nature of God.Ä”

Those who assert that Jephthah did sacrifice his daughter, attempt to justify the opinion from the barbarous usages of those times: but in answer to this it may be justly observed, that Jephthah was now under the influence of the Spirit of God, Jdg_11:29; and that Spirit could not permit him to imbrue his hands in the blood of his own child; and especially under the pretense of offering a pleasing sacrifice to that God who is the Father of mankind, and the Fountain of love, mercy, and compassion.

The versions give us but little assistance in clearing the difficulties of the text. In the Targum of Jonathan there is a remarkable gloss which should be mentioned, and from which it will appear that the Targumist supposed that the daughter of Jephthah was actually sacrificed: Ä“And he fulfilled the vow which he had vowed upon her; and she knew no man: and it was made a statute in Israel, that no man should offer his son or his daughter for a burnt-offering, as did Jephthah the Gileadite, who did not consult Phinehas the priest; for if he had consulted Phinehas the priest, he would have redeemed her with money.Ä”

The Targumist refers here to the law, Lev_27:1-5, where the Lord prescribes the price at which either males or females, who had been vowed to the Lord, might be redeemed. Ä“When a man shall make a singular vow, the persons shall be for the Lord at thy estimation: the male from twenty years old even unto sixty, shall be fifty shekels of silver; and if it be a female, then thy estimation shall be thirty shekels; and from five years old unto twenty years, the male twenty shekels, and for the female ten.Ä” This also is an argument that the daughter of Jephthah was not sacrificed; as the father had it in his power, at a very moderate price, to have redeemed her: and surely the blood of his daughter must have been of more value in his sight than thirty shekels of silver."

Re: Jephthah and his daughter - posted by KingJimmy (), on: 2004/12/4 10:49

Quote:

I read this passage today and find it very disturbing. I don't know what to make of it. Perhaps it's a classic when it comes to hard-to-understand Bible passages, I don't know. I haven't heard anyone explain it, anyway... So, I'm thankful for any help on what to make of it. Comments, anyone?

Jephthah's vow was carried out improperly, and perhaps could even be called a careless vow under the Old Testament laws. Christ said in the gospels that justice, mercy, and faithfulness are the weightier matters of the law, and serve as the hinge upon which its interpretation swings. We must also remember to love God and love our neighbor, and do unto others as we would have done unto us. When using this method of interpretation, one will arrive at the spirit of the law. Without it, one only arrives at the letter. The letter kills but the spirit gives life. Jephthah would have been fully obedient to God by carrying out his vow had he sacrificed something other than his daughter. By sacrificing his daughter, he did something clearly forbidden in the law, and is guilty of child sacrifice.

Re: Jephthah's faith was commendable; his sacrifice was folly. - posted by philologos (), on: 2004/12/4 15:25

The period of the Judges was Israel's equivalent of the 'wild west'. Law enforcement was patchy to say the least. If you haven't listened to it recently listen to 10 shekels and a shirt and follow the story of the young Levite. In this time of civil disorder and chaos there were people whose lives could be commended for certain virtues. Jephthah was commended for his faith not his wisdom and certainly not for the incident with his daughter. Samson's faith is also commended but not his life-style. Gideon is commended for his faith but not for his moral character; Israel's first (illegal) king was an illegitimate son of Gideon.

I appreciate and respect Adam Clark and am always ready to hear what he has to say, but I feel on this occasion that he is trying too hard. I think it most likely that Jephthah did do this monstrous thing. It is a measure of the honesty of the record that as it became as famous as his victory the scriptures maintain the record.

He should never have made the vow and his victory should not have been taken as evidence that God had agreed to the bargain. This is the great danger of 'vows' and 'fleeces'; they are sporadic and impulsive. Martin Luther is quoted as saying 'Haste and violence, betray a lack of confidence in God'. **To the law and to the testimony: if they speak not according to this word, it is because there is no light in them.** (Isa 8:20 KJV) He seems to have known Israel's history well enough from but to have ignored God's plain directives. **Take heed to thyself that thou be not snared by following them, after that they be destroyed from before thee; and that thou enquire not after their gods, saying, How did these nations serve their gods? even so will I do likewise. Thou shalt not do so unto the LORD thy God: for every abomination to the LORD, which he hateth, have they done unto their gods; for even their sons and their daughters they have burnt in the fire to their gods.** (Deu 12:30-31 KJV) We cannot go against God's plain directives, no matter how heroic it may seem.

Jephthah's birth and homelife were chaotic. (Judges 11:1-3) He was ruthlessly ambitious and prepared to use any means in order to achieve his supremacy over others. As we might say today 'he had them over a barrel'. (Judges 11:4-11) He made his bargain with the elders of Gilead at Mizpeh where Jacob and Laban had made their vow of mutual suspicion. (Judges 11:11) His partisan leadership ultimately resulted in Israel's first civil war. (Judges 12:1-6) He subsequently 'judged' Israel for six years (Judges 12:7), the shortest period of office of all the judges.

The Spirit of the Lord came on Jephthah (Judges 11:29) before he made his foolish vow and the Spirit's anointing was all the guarantee he should have required. It is remarkable that through this chapter there is never any communication between God and Jephthah. The Spirit of God came on him and thoroughly equipped him to deliver Israel. His vow was an attempt to bind God to Jephthah's actions. We should never take God's silences as agreement. God never agreed to these terms; it was Jephthah's folly not God's will.

His vow relates to 'that which comes out of the doors of my house'; i.e. he intended to sacrifice a family member. As he had no other children we might ask who was he hoping would be first out of the house?

Even in his resolution to carry out his folly there is no 'communication' with God. This is not prayer, it is arrogance. He presumes that he can set a price on God's cooperation. I can't help but wonder how many other Jephthahs have

made presumptuous sacrifices to further their own ambitions. Some have sacrificed their families 'for the ministry'; were these God ordained sacrifices or will-worship. **And Samuel said, Hath the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to hearken than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because thou hast rejected the word of the LORD, he hath also rejected thee from being king.** (1Sa 15:22-23 KJV) We cannot choose what is 'acceptable' to God in sacrifice. My feeling is that Jephthah's stubbornness was iniquity and idolatry. Was this his own 'resolute' self-image that his daughter was sacrificed to?

Unasked sacrifices are not evidence of devotion but of independence. **And the LORD spake unto Moses after the death of the two sons of Aaron, when they offered before the LORD, and died;** (Lev 16:1 KJV)

The scripture says plainly that God equipped Jephthah against the Ammonites; **So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands.** (Jdg 11:32 KJV) but there is no equivalent statement to endorse his slaughter of 42000 Ephraimites. (Jdg 12:6)

Out of the whole mess of Jephthah's illegal headship of Gilead, his foolish attempts to bind God, and his wilful stubbornness in sacrificing his daughter for his reputation, the book of Hebrews simply selects a single virtue his 'faith' by which he 'subdued kingdom'. (Heb 11:32,33) Later the writer speaks of current leaders and says 'imitate their faith'. By all means follow Jephthah's faith, but not his fanatic folly.