

**BOOK OF JUDGES**  
**JEPHTHAH FULFILLING HIS VOW**  
**JUDGES 11:30-31, 34-40**

**Introduction**

What we saw last week was a **HASTY, UNNECESSARY, UNWISE, and even UNTHINKABLY VILE VOW** made by **JEPHTHAH** just prior to his going into battle against the **AMMONITES**. (*Vs 30-31*)

It was **HASTY**, because it doesn't appear he thought out too well! On its surface, it appears that he just blurted it out without giving it much thought!

It was **UNNECESSARY**, because the **LORD** was going to accomplish **HIS PURPOSES** with or without **JEPHTHAH** making a **DEAL** with **HIM!**

It was **UNWISE**, because of its ramifications that we will see tonight! No matter what **JEPHTHAH** did with his daughter to fulfill his **VOW**, it was **UNWISE** to make such a **VOW!**

It was **UNTHINKABLY VILE**, if he did indeed intend a **HUMAN SACRIFICE** when he made the **VOW!**

As we left last week, the battle was over, the **VICTORY** on the battlefield had been won (with that **VICTORY** having been assured because it was the **LORD's** battle that the **SPIRIT OF GOD** came on **JEPHTHAH** for!)

**JEPHTHAH** got back home and what we "*behold*" in *verse 34* caused a dilemma for both **JEPHTHAH** and his only child, his daughter! (And, let me say, it causes a dilemma for us too as we go along here!)

I'll say right off that one of the dilemmas for us is that **JEPHTHAH** should have **predicted** either this terrible tragedy or a similarly horrible tragedy coming out of his **VOW** because of how **VILE** his **VOW** was! It leaves us puzzled quite frankly and thinking to ourselves! "*What was he thinking?!*"

So, let's begin tonight in *Verse 35*...

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**I. WE SEE JEPHTHAH'S REPULSIVE REALIZATION! (*Vs 35*)**  
It is very possible that up to this point he had not given much thought to his **VOW** as there was so much else he was caught up in:

**There Would Be The AFTERMATH Of The Battle!**  
*(Tending to the wounded, dividing the spoils, feeding the famished men, dispersing the army, then the journey home!)*

**There Would Be The JOY And JUBILATION Of VICTORY!**  
*(There is nothing quite like being on the winning side and being able to celebrate with your comrades in arms!)*

**There Possibly Would Have Been A Euphoric Sense Of PEACE From Having Broken The OPPRESSION Of The Enemy!**  
*(18 years of oppression were now behind them!)*

These and any other positives from the **VICTORY** were shattered in a brief moment as he arrived home and **his only child, his daughter, was the first one through the door of his house coming out to greet him with timbrels and dance!**

If you have ever had something happen that just totally changed your demeanor from ecstatic **JOY** to a **GRIEVING SADNESS** (especially with something that was the result of your own words or actions), then you might know a little about what **JEPHTHAH** felt.

There was a **complete transformation** from **JUBILATION** to **HEARTBREAK!** There was the **sickening and devastating REALITY** of what he had done that hit him full force here!

At this miserable moment, nothing else mattered or had any meaning to him at all, not even his **VICTORY!** The only thing that was of any importance to him whatsoever was his daughter and what was about to happen to her because of his **VOW!**

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He communicated his misery to her here by accusing her of bringing him very low and troubling him! Wait! What? She was just rejoicing in dear old dad's **VICTORY** which was not unheard of!

Seeing her reminded him of how senseless his **VOW** was!  
And at that point his entire being was in complete and utter agony!

Now after seeming to blame her for this, he explained to her the reason she had brought grief to him was because of his own words!  
***"I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back."***

It is strange that **JEPHTHAH** is perfectly aware of the fact that his **VOW** made to the **LORD** is **NOT** to be broken, but if he truly intended to make a **HUMAN SACRIFICE** here, was he unaware that **HUMAN SACRIFICE** is a **SIN** of most **VILE** proportions!  
(We saw *Deuteronomy 18:9-12* shows it to be an **ABOMINATION to the LORD that is right up there with witchcraft and the like!**)

**II. WE SEE JEPHTHAH'S DUTIFUL DAUGHTER! (Vs 36)**

His daughter dutifully accepting her father's predicament before she even found out what he had **VOWED** is odd but it is also admirable in some respects.

She didn't seem concerned about the details of her father's **VOW**.  
And we see that rather than seeking **COMFORT** for herself on the front end here, she sought to **COMFORT** her father instead.

We would expect to see some **questioning** by her of her father.  
*"What did you do? What kind of vow did you make that concerns me?"* But there is no indication of that!

We might expect **GRIEF, BITTERNESS, and MOURNING** here if she knew all of the details! But we're not told what she knew here but rather that she just went ahead and submitted herself to whatever her father has **VOWED** that was going to affect her.

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***"Dad, you do whatever it is you have to do to me, after all the LORD gave you the victory!"***

**Let's first look at this assuming that JEPHTHAH was going to offer her up as a BURNT OFFERING:  
How could she be so cavalier WITHOUT KNOWING WHAT or even WITH KNOWING WHAT his VOW was?**

Consider that she grew up living in the same house with her father.

Remember us saying last week that both **GILEAD** and **TOB**, the two places where **JEPHTHAH** had lived were both closer to the **PAGAN RELIGIOUS CENTERS** than **ISRAEL'S**. So, if both he and she have some strange **DOCTRINES** and **WAYS** those very well could have come from their proximity to the **PAGAN** influences of **AMMON** and **MOAB**!

Now to us, **HUMAN SACRIFICES** are **ABHORRENT, PITIABLE, and INTOLERABLE!** But **HUMAN SACRIFICES** were a "**NORMAL**" part of what **AMMON** and **MOAB** did and don't forget that **INFLUENCE** had rubbed off on **ISRAEL** and so there was nothing shocking about it for the times they lived in! **It is possible they had become desensitized to the wrongness of it!**  
***Leviticus 18:3—"...after the doings of the land of Canaan, whither I bring you, shall ye not do: neither shall ye walk in their ordinances."***

***Leviticus 20:23—"And ye shall not walk in the manners of the nation, which I cast out before you: for they committed all these things, and therefore I abhorred them."***

Also consider, that the fulfillment of **VOWS** was a universal practice at that time. She most likely believed that the failure of her father to fulfill his **VOW** (even as **VILE** as it was) would result in great retribution toward him and the nation of **ISRAEL** that he had just been used of the **LORD** to **DELIVER!** She didn't want that!

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We'll consider the other possibility in the next two verses:

**III. WE SEE JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER BEWAIL HER VIRGINITY FOR TWO MONTHS! (Vs 37-38)**

What we see happen here is why many scholars and students believe that **JEPHTHAH'S** daughter was **NOT SACRIFICED**.

They believe instead that the **LORD** allowed **JEPHTHAH** to redeem the **BURNT SACRIFICE** portion of the **VOW** according to what is written in *Leviticus 27:1ff* and instead allowed **JEPHTHAH'S** daughter to spend the rest of her life as a **VIRGIN** and given in service for the **LORD**.

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We see in *Leviticus 27:1ff* that the **ISRAELITES** were required to give or dedicate certain things to the **LORD** such as *firstborn animals, their firstborn sons, a tithe of their increase*.

Many wished to go beyond that and dedicate themselves or another family member, additional animals, a house, or a field to **GOD**. In these cases, it was possible to donate money instead of the actual person, animal, or property.

So, this is a possibility even though the *Judges 11* does not give details suggesting that this took place. We definitely find it more palatable than the alternative—i.e. That he offered his daughter as a burnt sacrifice.

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But, let's consider her **BEWAILING**. What is she **BEWAILING**? The fact that she will either die as a **VIRGIN** or be required to live as a **VIRGIN** and never having children!

Understand that to be a childless woman in **BIBLICAL ISRAEL** was not only seen as **HUMILIATING**, but as a **CURSE** by **GOD**! It was a **STAIN** not on just the woman, but on her entire family!

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(This also takes us back to *verse 34* where we learned she was **JEPHTHAH'S** only daughter and only child! There would be none to carry on the family name!)

**IV. WE SEE JEPHTHAH FULFILLED HIS VOW! (Vs 39-40)**

Those who argue that **JEPHTHAH** did **SACRIFICE** his daughter as a burnt offering point out that this verse is **DIRECT** and to the point! They say to try to make this say anything else other than what it says doesn't make any sense.

It says very clearly that he "*did with her according to his vow which he had vowed.*" And they point back to the **VOW** in *Vs 31* to prove their conclusion!

But those on the opposite side of the argument say, **JEPHTHAH** carrying out his **VOW** as it was made doesn't make any sense either because the **LORD** strictly forbade **HUMAN SACRIFICES** and the **LAW** would require **JEPHTHAH** to be stoned to death for carrying out such a thing! And **SCRIPTURE** supports that statement as well. So, what truly happened here is puzzling any way you choose to believe that it happened!

So how has this been viewed historically speaking? The view according to the historian, **JOSEPHUS**, which generally prevailed in the earlier times among both **RABBIS** and fathers of the **CHURCH**—Is that **JEPHTHAH** put his daughter to death and burned her upon the altar as a bleeding **SACRIFICE** to **JEHOVAH**.

It was not until the middle ages that **RABBIS** endeavored to establish the view, that **JEPHTHAH** merely dedicated his daughter to the service of the sanctuary of **JEHOVAH** in a lifelong virginity.

But this is a **HISTORIAN** writing **HISTORY** and not a man of **GOD** writing **SCRIPTURE**!

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What about that last phrase of *Vs. 39 and verse 40*.

Why did it become a custom for the daughters of **ISRAEL** to go yearly to lament the daughter of **JEPHTHAH** for four days in the year if her life wasn't taken? (*Vs. 40*)

Was it because they lamented the fact that she would never marry, remain a virgin, and remain childless as her life was dedicated to the service of the **LORD**? Maybe so!

Whatever happened, it had a profound effect upon **JEPHTHAH**!  
It appears his grief was genuine in *verse 35*.

Also in *Judges 12:7* we find that **JEPHTHAH** only  
**JUDGED ISRAEL** for six years before he died.

**All I can definitively tell you is that we will understand it better  
by and by!**

That's our study for this evening. Next week, **LORD** willing we will see a confrontation that **JEPHTHAH** had with some of his countrymen, the **EPHRAIMITES**.