

JEPHTHAH'S VOW, MURDER OR SACRIFICE?

The Question: Does Jephthah burn his daughter on an altar as he would a burnt offering?

- * **Jephthah vowed a vow 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.**
- Judges 11.30,31

Judges 11.32-40

32 So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands. 33 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.

34 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. 35 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. 36 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. 37 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.

38 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. 39 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, 40 That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

5 clear statements using the Common Sense principle of interpretation

- A. Jephthah is cited as an elite example of faith in Hebrews 11.32.
 - * He is named among 17 notable Old Testament people in the chapter.
 - * 4 judges are mentioned in Hebrews 11.
- B. Jephthah knew that a member of his household family would be his “offering,” not a sheep.
 - “(out) of the doors of my house to meet me,” Judges 11.30
 - * His decision was to honor God. A sign of faith in God’s victory.
- C. There is no explicit statement that his daughter died.
 - * She faced deep sadness about her permanent virginity, Judges 11.37.
 - * She went away for two months, Judges 11.38
 - No one evidently tried to talk her out of it. She wanted to cry with her friends.
 - This was her fulfillment of her dad’s vow.
 - An annual 4-day ritual began as the Jewish women set aside time to lament for her.
- D. There is no biblical rebuke or negative consequences from God.
 - * Neither from making the vow nor carrying it out.
 - * Neighbors would have stopped him. He remained as a judge (Judges 12.1-8).
 - * God’s blessing is obviously on his victory [*away for several months*]
- E. Rabbis and Christian Bible students have been divided on two interpretations for 2,000 years.
 - The predominant view from both camps adheres to the understanding that she did not die. The vow was only a decision to set apart a virgin to God’s service. She accepted this consequence as her lifestyle.