

What Happened to Jephthah's Daughter?

Judges 11 records the story of Jephthah vowing to sacrifice as a burnt offering whatever came out first to meet him when he came home from battle. Because his daughter met him, and the Bible records that Jephthah kept his vow to God, some theorize that his daughter was given as a burnt offering. But this is a wrong assumption which maligns God's character of love by putting Him on the same plane as the heathen gods. The context of the whole Bible makes plain that the practice of human sacrifice actually angers God, and He calls it an abomination. Since Jephthah is listed in Hebrews 11, we can assume that he did not go outside of God's will in this situation.

God's spoken will states,

"And thou shalt not let any of thy seed pass through the fire to Molech, neither shalt thou profane the name of thy God: I am the LORD." Leviticus 18:21

"And they caused their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire, and used divination and enchantments, and sold themselves to do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger." 2 Kings 17:17

"And they built the high places of Baal, which are in the valley of the son of Hinnom, to cause their sons and their daughters to pass through the fire unto Molech; which I commanded them not, neither came it into my mind, that they should do this abomination, to cause Judah to sin." Jeremiah 32:35

So with that in mind, here is the story found in Judges 11:29-40.

- 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.*
- 30 *And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands.*
- 31 *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.*
- 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.*

The law of God does not allow for human sacrifice, but rather a living sacrifice. (Even in the case of Isaac, who was a type of Christ, God did not actually allow him to be killed, but provided a lamb/ram. Genesis 22:8,13)

Romans 12:1 states, *"I beseech you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, that ye present your bodies a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable unto God, which is your reasonable service."*

The books of Exodus and Numbers record that humans who were dedicated to God were redeemed with a sum of money, not sacrificed

Exodus 13:12-15 explains how the firstborn males were redeemed. *"That thou shalt set apart unto the LORD all that openeth the matrix, and every firstling that cometh of a beast which thou hast; the males shall be the LORD'S. And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem. And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage: And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the LORD slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem."*

Exodus 34:19,20 reiterates, *"All that openeth the matrix is mine; and every firstling among thy cattle, whether ox or sheep, that is male. But the firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb: and if thou redeem him not, then shalt thou break his neck. All the firstborn of thy sons thou shalt redeem. And none shall appear before me empty."*

Numbers 18:15-17 explains how this was done. *"Every thing that openeth the matrix in all flesh, which they bring unto the LORD, whether it be of men or beasts, shall be thine: nevertheless the firstborn of man shalt thou surely redeem, and the firstling of unclean beasts shalt thou redeem. And those that are to be redeemed from a month old shalt thou redeem, according to thine estimation, for the money of five shekels, after the shekel of the sanctuary, which is twenty gerahs. But the firstling of a cow, or the firstling of a sheep, or the firstling of a goat, thou shalt not redeem; they are holy: thou shalt sprinkle their blood upon the altar, and shalt burn their fat for an offering made by fire, for a sweet savour unto the LORD."*

However, apparently, Jephthah's daughter was still exclusively dedicated to the Lord, and therefore she remained unmarried and a virgin for the rest of her life.

(There would really be no reason to bewail her virginity if she was going to die immediately. A dead woman would not miss the joy of marrying and having children.)

1 Corinthians 7:34 tells us, *"There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband."*

This helps us to better understand Judges 11:37-40. *"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..."*

Our conclusion is that it was so commonly known that God redeemed humans instead of having them sacrificed as a burnt offering that the writer of Judges did not feel it was necessary to supply all the above information. But the end of the story is always, Jesus died in our place because God is love. *"For this is the love of God, that we keep his commandments: and his commandments are not grievous."* 1 John 5:3