

Jephthah's Awful Vow .. NOT

In Judges chapter 11, Jephthah the Gileadite walks onto the pages of God's Holy Word to reveal to us truths, that God would have us know for certain. “The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law.” (Deut 29:29)

It is shallow to dismiss these truths because some scholar who precedes us has curiously but improperly analyzed them and given them a label. Jephthah's awful vow is not awful, nor is it just Jephthah's vow.

Consider in his short walk across the pages of Scripture, that Jephthah was a might man of valor; but because of his lowly birth he was rejected of his brethren: rejected and driven out into the land of Tob, where a few vain men gathered to him. There he remained, forgotten, until his people had a great need because the children of Ammon rose up against them. Now they called for Jephthah to come and deliver them.

I contend in this essay, that Jephthah's walk across a page of ... His-Story, is intended to reveal to us ... His Heart. One chapter previous, in context, we read:

“Jud 10:9 Moreover the children of Ammon passed over Jordan to fight also against Judah, and against Benjamin,

and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was sore distressed.

10 ¶ And the children of Israel cried unto the LORD, saying, We have sinned against thee, both because we have forsaken our God, and also served Baalim.

11 And the LORD said unto the children of Israel, Did not I deliver you from the Egyptians, and from the Amorites, from the children of Ammon, and from the Philistines?

12 The Zidonians also, and the Amalekites, and the Maonites, did oppress you; and ye cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hand.

13 Yet ye have forsaken me, and served other gods: wherefore I will deliver you no more.

14 Go and cry unto the gods which ye have chosen; let them deliver you in the time of your tribulation.

15 And the children of Israel said unto the LORD, We have sinned: do thou unto us whatsoever seemeth good unto thee; deliver us only, we pray thee, this day.”

It is no small coincidence that God chose the rejected and exiled Gileadite to deliver his people from the oppression of the Ammonite. Isaiah 53 puts it:

“3 He is despised and rejected of men; a man of sorrows, and acquainted with grief: and we hid as it were our faces

from him; he was despised, and we esteemed him not.

4 Surely he hath borne our griefs, and carried our sorrows: yet we did esteem him stricken, smitten of God, and afflicted.”

So what of Jephthah's awful vow? Consider that in Lev 1 a burnt sacrifice is an offering wholly and completely given unto the Lord; in Numbers 8:11 Aaron shall offer the Levites before the LORD for an offering unto the LORD, vr 15 and thou shalt cleanse them, and offer them for an offering; vr 21 and Aaron offered them as an offering before the LORD. No Levite died in these offerings. Consider Romans 12 dictates that you offer yourself as that offering. Not in death, in living. Consider that there is only one human sacrifice that is themed in this book. Consider that God made a vow before the foundation of the world that He would be offered. Consider that once it repented the LORD that he had made man on the earth, and it grieved him at his heart. Now consider that Jephthah's vow was not awful, but a revelation of God's vow. For God so loved the world, that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life.

God's Word is God's revelation to man. He is a God who reveals himself, and he does not waste words. In this book God reveals all we know of his personality and all we need to know

of mans depravity. When Jephthah walks across a page or two of God's book it is not to leave us wondering about vows being good or bad, nor to show us a valiant man with an awful vow. The story of Jephthah recorded here, clearly portrays a God, who is outcast by man, but, at the same time, their only salvation. A valiant, but spurned, Creator, who vowed to give his only begotten son, and then did. He is man's only way into God's presence.

My soul in sad exile was out on life's sea,
So burdened with sin and distress,
Till I heard a sweet voice
saying "Make me your choice!"
And I entered the Haven of Rest.

I've anchored my soul in the Haven of Rest,
I'll sail the wide seas no more;
The tempest may sweep o'er the wild, stormy deep
– In Jesus I'm safe ever-more.