

## Week 4

### **Jephthah's Daughter** (Judges 11:29-40)

In this series, we're looking at several little-known people in the Bible that God used for His glory. We're learning that God most often uses everyday people who are behind-the-scenes.

And tonight, we're going back to the OT to focus on another female hidden hero – Jephthah's daughter. In fact, she's such a hidden hero, we're never even told her name, but she teaches us some great lessons about walking with God! So, let's jump right into her story...

***Judges 11:29–35 “Then the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jephthah...<sup>30</sup> And [he] made a vow to the Lord and said, “If you will give the Ammonites into my hand,<sup>31</sup> then whatever comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.”<sup>32</sup> So Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight against them, and the Lord gave them into his hand.<sup>33</sup> And he struck them... with a great blow. So the Ammonites were subdued before the people of Israel.<sup>34</sup> Then Jephthah came to his home... and behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances. She was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter.<sup>35</sup> And as soon as he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow.”***

Let's stop for a second and think about what is happening here. Jephthah, a leader in Israel, was going to war so he made an oath to the Lord. He told God that if He would give him victory over the Ammonites; he would return home and “whatever comes out the doors of my house to meet me when I return shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering.”

First of all, that's an extremely foolish promise to make. God didn't require this oath from Jephthah. In fact, God often warned His people about making half-hearted vows and promises to the Lord (we'll talk more about that in a moment).

But, God *did* give Jephthah victory over the Ammonites and when he arrived back at his house he was horrified to see his daughter – “his only child” – coming out the door to greet him! Verse 35 says, “As soon as he saw her, he tore his clothes (in regret) and said, “I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow.”



**How would you respond if you were her?**

Notice how she responds...

***Judges 11:36-40 “And she said to him, “My father, you have opened your mouth to the Lord; do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the Lord has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites.”<sup>37</sup> So she said to her father, “Let this thing be done for me: leave me alone two months, that I may go up and down on the mountains and weep for my virginity, I and my companions.” [weeping for the fact that she would die before having children/family of her own]<sup>38</sup> So he said, “Go.” Then he sent her away for two months, and she departed, she and her companions, and wept for her virginity on the mountains.<sup>39</sup> And at the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow that he had made. She had never known a man, and it became a custom in Israel<sup>40</sup> that the daughters of Israel went year by year to lament the daughter of Jephthah...”***

Now, there’s a lot going on in this passage so let’s walk through it one step at a time and see what we can learn about this girl.

### **1. She wasn’t insecure about openly worshipping God.**

**Verse 34** says she “came out to meet [her father] with tambourines and with dances” because the Lord had allowed them to defeat the enemies of God. She openly worshipped God and celebrated the victories in her life, and she didn’t care who saw it!

Throughout Scripture, we see other Israelite women celebrating God’s victories like this. For example...

- **When God parted the Red Sea for the Israelites:**

***Exodus 15:20 “Miriam [the sister of Aaron and Moses] took a tambourine in her hand, and all the women went out after her with tambourines and dancing.”***

- **When David returned from killing Goliath:**

**1 Samuel 18:6** *“The women came out of all the cities of Israel, singing and dancing...with tambourines, with songs of joy, and with musical instruments.”*

But if you remember, David’s wife refused to celebrate with the other women. In fact, she was upset with David and told him that he was acting “undignified” in his worship. But David said...

**2 Samuel 6:21-22** *“And David said to Michal [his wife], “It was before the Lord, who chose me above your father and above all his house...and I will celebrate before the Lord. <sup>22</sup> I will make myself yet more contemptible [undignified] than this...”*

You see, David wasn’t insecure about people seeing him worship God. And Jephthah’s daughter wasn’t either. She openly celebrated God’s victories in her life, and she didn’t care what others thought when they saw her worship!



**Are you insecure about openly worshipping God in front of others?**

While many of us worry about *appearances* when we worship, Jephthah’s daughter was doing a victory dance because God’s enemies had been defeated.

## **2. She was courageous and fearless in the face of death.**

In **verse 36** she said, “Father, you have opened your mouth to the Lord; do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth.” Even though she knew it would cost her life, she told her father that he needed to follow through on his promise to God.

There was nothing unusual about people making vows to God in the Old Testament, but God was very clear that no one should make a half-hearted promise to Him...

**Deuteronomy 23:21–25** *“If you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay fulfilling it, for the Lord your God will surely require it of you, and you will be guilty of sin. <sup>22</sup> But if you refrain from vowing, you will not be guilty of sin. <sup>23</sup> You shall be careful to do what has passed*

***your lips, for you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God what you have promised with your mouth."***

So, think about the vow that this young girl was agreeing to. She was agreeing to be offered up as a "burnt offering" to the Lord. BUT, God had already told the Israelites NOT to kill their own children as a "sacrifice" to *any* god. You see, the pagan nations around them practiced child sacrifice to a false god named Molech, but God had told His people not to do such a wicked thing..

***Deuteronomy 12:31 "You shall not worship the Lord your God in that way, for every abominable thing that the Lord hates they have done for their gods, for they even burn their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods."***

***Deuteronomy 18:10a "There shall not be found among you anyone who burns his son or his daughter as an offering..."***

Remember: Just because the Bible *records* something that happened, it doesn't mean that God is *recommending* or approving it. For example...

- Jephthah made a foolish choice to declare a vow that directly violated God's command – don't participate in child sacrifice. So, God was not responsible for Jephthah's foolish vow, and neither was his daughter. The Bible is simply *recording* what Jephthah did; it's not *recommending* what he did.
- And even though his daughter showed great courage by voluntarily laying down her life to obey Deuteronomy 23 (fulfill your vow), she simultaneously disobeyed Deuteronomy 12 (don't participate in child sacrifice). Again, the Bible is not *recommending* what she did; it's simply *recording* what she did.

After all, she had a better option. She could have said, "Dad, you made a vow that violates God's clear command. And now *you* will have to deal with the consequences of your actions. But I'm not going to also violate God's command by participating in child sacrifice."

So, Jephthah's daughter teaches us some positive and negative lessons – what we *should* do and also what we *shouldn't* do.

- **Positive lesson #1: Confidently celebrate the Lord's victories in your life and unashamedly worship Him.**

- **Positive lesson #2: Live for the Lord with fearless courage, even if it cost your life.**
- **Negative lesson #1: Choosing certain Scriptures to obey yet deliberately disobeying others can cost you dearly.**

You see, even though she courageously obeyed Deuteronomy 23 (fulfill your vow), she deliberately disobeyed Deuteronomy 12 (don't participate in child sacrifice).

- **Negative lesson #2: We don't get to disobey God's Word even when we have good intentions.**

God's commands are not like a buffet where we can choose what we like and reject what we don't. Our courage and passion for God must be guided by obedience to ALL of Scripture. And God will never tell us to do something that violates or contradicts His other commands.

But Jephthah teaches us a great lesson as well:

- **Because of God's grace, we don't have to be defined by a past sin(s).**

Even though Jephthah famously made this foolish vow, he wasn't ultimately defined by this incident. And we know this because Jephthah's name is mentioned in Hebrews 11 (vs.32) which is often called the "hall of faith." It proves that, in the end, Jephthah's life wasn't defined by this terrible sin in his past. Apparently, he repented of his sin and moved forward in faith and obedience.

And then there's an important lesson that they *both* teach us:

- **We are ALL in desperate need of a Savior.**

Jephthah's daughter was courageous and fearless in the face of death, but like every other courageous leader in the book of Judges, she was a flawed human being. And that's why we ALL needed the perfect Hero (Jesus) to come and rescue us!

**One important question we need to answer before we're done. If God is against child sacrifice, isn't it hypocritical to sacrifice His own Son on the Cross?**

**First of all, Christ was not a child.** In ancient Israel, children were sacrificed to false gods (like Molech), but those were babies and infants. Although Jesus is given the title “*Son of God*,” he was crucified in His early 30’s.

**Christ’s sacrifice was voluntary.** Small children did not consent to being sacrificed to false gods. Their death was forced upon them. Jesus did not die against His will...

***John 10:17–18 “For this reason the Father loves me, because I lay down my life that I may take it up again. <sup>18</sup> No one takes it from me, but I lay it down of my own accord. I have authority to lay it down, and I have authority to take it up again. This charge I have received from my Father.”***

Jesus makes it clear that, unlike Jephthah’s daughter, He has authority to lay down His life *and* “take it up again.” It wasn’t because His Father had made a foolish vow. Make no mistake, Jesus’s death on the cross *was* a sacrifice, but it’s dishonest to characterize it as “child sacrifice.” Christ went willingly to the cross—out of His love for us—to atone for *our* sin. And then He got back up from the grave!

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### **Small Groups**