
JUDGES 11: 1 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valor, and he was the son of a prostitute: and Gilead became the father of Jephthah.

The history of Jephthah, and his covenant with the Gileadites, Jdg 11:1-10. He is elected by the people, Jdg 11:11. Sends an embassy to the king of the Ammonites, to inquire why they invaded Israel; and receives an answer, to which he sends back a spirited reply, vv. 12-27. This is disregarded by the Ammonites, and Jephthah prepares for battle, Jdg 11:28, Jdg 11:29. His vow, Jdg 11:30, Jdg 11:31. He attacks and defeats them, Jdg 11:32, Jdg 11:33. On his return to Mizpeh he is met by his daughter, whom, according to his vow, he dedicates to the Lord, Jdg 11:34-40.

Verse 1

Now Jephthah - was the son of a harlot - I think the word זונה zonah, which we here render harlot, should be translated, as is contended for on Jos 2:1 (note), viz. a hostess, keeper of an inn or tavern for the accommodation of travelers; and thus it is understood by the Targum of Jonathan on this place: אתתא פונדקיתא והוא בר vehu bar ittetha pundekitha, "and he was the son of a woman, a tavern keeper." She was very probably a Canaanite, as she is called, Jdg 11:2, a strange woman, אשה אחרת ishshah achereth, a woman of another race; and on this account his brethren drove him from the family, as he could not have a full right to the inheritance, his mother not being an Israelite.

JUDGES 11:2 Gilead's wife bore him sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove out Jephthah, and said to him, "You shall not inherit in our father's house; for you are the son of another woman."

JUDGES 11:3 Then Jephthah fled from his brothers, and lived in the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain fellows to Jephthah, and they went out with him.

Verse 3

There were gathered vain men to Jephthah - אנשים ריקים anashim reykim, empty men - persons destitute of good sense, and profligate in their manners. The word may, however, mean in this place poor persons, without property, and without employment. The versions in general consider them as plunderers.

JUDGES 11:4 After a while, the children of Ammon made war against Israel.

Verse 4

The children of Ammon made war - They had invaded the land of Israel, and were now encamped in Gilead. See Jdg 10:17.

JUDGES 11:5 It was so, that when the children of Ammon made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to get Jephthah out of the land of Tob;

JUDGES 11:6 and they said to Jephthah, "Come and be our chief, that we may fight with the children of Ammon."

Verse 6

Come, and be our captain - The Israelites were assembled in Mizpeh, but were without a captain to lead them against the Ammonites. And we find, from the conclusion of the preceding chapter, that they offered the command to any that would accept it.

JUDGES 11:7 Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "Didn't you hate me, and drive me out of my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?"

JUDGES 11:8 The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "Therefore we have turned again to you now, that you may go with us, and fight with the children of Ammon; and you shall be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

Verse 8

Therefore we turn again to thee now - We are convinced that we have dealt unjustly by thee, and we wish now to repair our fault, and give thee this sincere proof of our regret for having acted unjustly, and of our confidence in thee.

JUDGES 11:9 Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you bring me home again to fight with the children of Ammon, and the LORD deliver them before me, shall I be your head?"

JUDGES 11:10 The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "The LORD shall be witness between us; surely according to your word so will we do."

JUDGES 11:11 Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and chief over them: and Jephthah spoke all his words before the LORD in Mizpah.

Verse 11

Jephthah went with the elders - The elders had chosen him for their head; but, to be valid, this choice must be confirmed by the people; therefore, it is said, the people made him head. But even this did not complete the business; God must be brought in as a party to this transaction; and therefore Jephthah uttered all his words before the Lord - the terms made with the elders and the people on which he had accepted the command of the army; and, being sure of the Divine approbation, he entered on the work with confidence.

JUDGES 11:12 Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the children of Ammon, saying, "What have you to do with me, that you have come to me to fight against my land?"

Verse 12

Jephthah sent messengers - He wished the Ammonites to explain their own motives for undertaking a war against Israel; as then the justice of his cause would appear more forcibly to the people.

JUDGES 11:13 The king of the children of Ammon answered to the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Israel took away my land, when he came up out of Egypt, from the Arnon even to the Jabbok, and to the Jordan: now therefore restore that territory again peaceably."

Verse 13

From Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan - That is, all the land that had formerly belonged to the Amorites, and to the Moabites, who it seems were confederates on this occasion.

JUDGES 11:14 Jephthah sent messengers again to the king of the children of Ammon;

JUDGES 11:15 and he said to him, "Thus says Jephthah: Israel didn't take away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon,

JUDGES 11:16 but when they came up from Egypt, and Israel went through the wilderness to the Red Sea, and came to Kadesh;

JUDGES 11:17 then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, 'Please let me pass through your land;' but the king of Edom didn't listen. In the same way, he sent to the king of Moab; but he would not: and Israel stayed in Kadesh.

JUDGES 11:18 Then they went through the wilderness, and went around the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and they encamped on the other side of the Arnon; but they didn't come within the border of Moab, for the Arnon was the border of Moab.

JUDGES 11:19 Israel sent messengers to Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said to him, 'Please let us pass through your land to my place.'

JUDGES 11:20 But Sihon didn't trust Israel to pass through his border; but Sihon gathered all his people together, and encamped in Jahaz, and fought against Israel.

JUDGES 11:21 The LORD, the God of Israel, delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they struck them: so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country.

JUDGES 11:22 They possessed all the border of the Amorites, from the Arnon even to the Jabbok, and from the wilderness even to the Jordan.

Verse 22

From the wilderness even unto Jordan - From Arabia Deserta on the east to Jordan on the west.

JUDGES 11:23 So now the LORD, the God of Israel, has dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel, and should you possess them?

Verse 23

The Lord God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites - Jephthah shows that the Israelites did not take the land of the Moabites or Ammonites, but that of the Amorites, which they had conquered from Sihon their king, who had, without cause or provocation, attacked them; and although the Amorites had taken the lands in question from the Ammonites, yet the title by which Israel held them was good, because they took them not from the Ammonites, but conquered them from the Amorites. So now the Lord - hath dispossessed the Amorites. - The circumstances in which the Israelites were when they were attacked by the Amorites, plainly proved, that, unless Jehovah had helped them, they must have been overcome. God defeated the Amorites, and made a grant of their lands to the Israelites; and they had, in consequence, possessed them for three hundred years, Jdg 11:26.

JUDGES 11:24 Won't you possess that which Chemosh your god gives you to possess? So whoever the LORD our God has dispossessed from before us, them will we possess.

Verse 24

Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee - As if he had said: "It is a maxim with you, as it is among all nations, that the lands which they conceive to be given them by their gods, they have an absolute right to, and should not relinquish them to any kind of claimant. You suppose that the land which you possess was given you by your god Chemosh and therefore you will not relinquish what you believe you hold by a Divine right. Now, we know that Jehovah, our God, who is the Lord of heaven and earth, has given the Israelites the land of the Amorites; and therefore we will not give it up." The ground of Jephthah's remonstrance was sound and good.

1. The Ammonites had lost their lands in their contests with the Amorites.
2. The Israelites conquered these lands from the Amorites, who had waged a most unprincipled war against them.
3. God, who is the Maker of heaven and earth had given those very lands as a Divine grant to the Israelites.
4. In consequence of this they had possession of them for upwards of three hundred years.
5. These lands were never reclaimed by the Ammonites, though they had repeated opportunities of doing it, whilst the Israelites dwelt in Heshbon, in Aroer, and in the coasts of Arnon; but they did not reclaim them because they knew that the Israelites held them legally. The present pretensions of Ammon were unsupported and unjustifiable.

JUDGES 11:25 Now are you anything better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive against Israel, or did he ever fight against them?

JUDGES 11:26 While Israel lived in Heshbon and its towns, and in Aroer and its towns, and in all the cities that are along by the side of the Arnon, three hundred years; why didn't you recover them within that time?

JUDGES 11:27 I therefore have not sinned against you, but you do me wrong to war against me. The LORD, the Judge, be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon."

Verse 27

The Lord the Judge be judge - between the children of Israel - If you be right, and we be wrong, then Jehovah, who is the sovereign and incorruptible Judge, shall determine in your favor; and to Him I submit the righteousness of my cause.

JUDGES 11:28 However the king of the children of Ammon didn't listen to the words of Jephthah which he sent him.

JUDGES 11:29 Then the Spirit of the LORD came on Jephthah, and he passed over Gilead and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he passed over to the children of Ammon.

Verse 29

Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah - The Lord qualified him for the work he had called him to do, and thus gave him the most convincing testimony that his cause was good.

JUDGES 11:30 Jephthah vowed a vow to the LORD, and said, "If you will indeed deliver the children of Ammon into my hand,

JUDGES 11:31 then it shall be, that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, it shall be the LORD's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering."

Verse 31

Shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering - The text is והיה ליהוה והעליתיהו והיה עולה vehayah layhovah, vemaalithihu olah; the translation of which, according to the most accurate Hebrew scholars, is this: I will consecrate it to the Lord, or I will offer it for a burnt-offering; that is, "If it be a thing fit for a burnt-offering, it shall be made one; if fit for the service of God, it shall be consecrated to him." That conditions of this kind must have been implied in the vow, is evident enough; to have been made without them, it must have been the vow of a heathen, or a madman. If a dog had met him, this could not have been made a burnt-offering; and if his neighbor or friend's

wife, son, or daughter, etc., had been returning from a visit to his family, his vow gave him no right over them. Besides, human sacrifices were ever an abomination to the Lord; and this was one of the grand reasons why God drove out the Canaanites, etc., because they offered their sons and daughters to Molech in the fire, i.e., made burnt-offerings of them, as is generally supposed. That Jephthah was a deeply pious man, appears in the whole of his conduct; and that he was well acquainted with the law of Moses, which prohibited all such sacrifices, and stated what was to be offered in sacrifice, is evident enough from his expostulation with the king and people of Ammon, Jdg 11:14-27. Therefore it must be granted that he never made that rash vow which several suppose he did; nor was he capable, if he had, of executing it in that most shocking manner which some Christian writers ("tell it not in Gath") have contended for. He could not commit a crime which himself had just now been an executor of God's justice to punish in others.

It has been supposed that "the text itself might have been read differently in former times; if instead of the words *והעליתיהו עולה*, I will offer It a burnt-offering, we read *והעליתי הוא עולה*, I will offer Him (i.e., the Lord) a burnt-offering: this will make a widely different sense, more consistent with everything that is sacred; and it is formed by the addition of only a single letter, (*א* aleph), and the separation of the pronoun from the verb. Now the letter *א* aleph is so like the letter *ע* ain, which immediately follows it in the word *עולה* olah, that the one might easily have been lost in the other, and thus the pronoun be joined to the verb as at present, where it expresses the thing to be sacrificed instead of the person to whom the sacrifice was to be made. With this emendation the passage will read thus: "Whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me - shall be the Lord's; and I will offer Him a burnt-offering." For this criticism there is no absolute need, because the pronoun *הו* hu, in the above verse, may with as much propriety be translated him as it. The latter part of the verse is, literally, "And I will offer him a burnt-offering, *עולה* olah, not *לעולה* leolah, For a burnt-offering, which is the common Hebrew form when for is intended to be expressed. This is strong presumption that the text should be thus understood: and this avoids the very disputable construction which is put on the *ו* vau, in *והעליתיהו* veehaalithihu, Or I will offer It up, instead of "And I will offer Him a burnt-offering." From Jdg 11:39 it appears evident that Jephthah's daughter was not Sacrificed to God, but consecrated to him in a state of perpetual virginity; for the text says, "She knew no man, for this was a statute in Israel. *וְתֵהִי חֹק בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל* vattehi chok beyishrael; viz., that persons thus dedicated or consecrated to God, should live in a state of unchangeable celibacy. Thus this celebrated place is, without violence to any part of the text, or to any proper rule of construction, cleared of all difficulty, and caused to speak a language consistent with itself, and with the nature of God."

Those who assert that Jephthah did sacrifice his daughter, attempt to justify the opinion from the barbarous usages of those times: but in answer to this it may be justly observed, that Jephthah was now under the influence of the Spirit of God, Jdg 11:29; and that Spirit could not permit him to imbrue his hands in the blood of his own child; and especially under the pretense of offering a pleasing sacrifice to that God who is the Father of mankind, and the Fountain of love, mercy, and compassion.

The versions give us but little assistance in clearing the difficulties of the text. In the Targum of Jonathan there is a remarkable gloss which should be mentioned, and from which it will appear that the Targumist supposed that the daughter of Jephthah was actually sacrificed: "And he fulfilled the vow which he had vowed upon her; and she knew no man: and it was made a statute in Israel, that no man should offer his son or his daughter for a burnt-offering, as did Jephthah the Gileadite, who did not consult Phinehas the priest; for if he had consulted Phinehas the priest, he would have redeemed her with money."

The Targumist refers here to the law, Lev 27:1-5, where the Lord prescribes the price at which either males or females, who had been vowed to the Lord, might be redeemed. "When a man shall make a singular vow, the persons shall be for the Lord at thy estimation: the male from twenty years old even unto sixty, shall be fifty shekels of silver; and if it be a female, then thy estimation shall be thirty shekels; and from five years old unto twenty years, the male twenty shekels, and for the female ten." This also is an argument that the daughter of Jephthah was not sacrificed; as the father had it in his power, at a very moderate price, to have redeemed her: and surely the blood of his daughter must have been of more value in his sight than thirty shekels of silver.

Dr. Hales has entered largely into the subject: his observations may be seen at the end of this chapter.

JUDGES 11:32 So Jephthah passed over to the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hand.

JUDGES 11:33 He struck them from Aroer until you come to Minnith, even twenty cities, and to Abelcheramim, with a very great slaughter. So the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.

Verse 33

Twenty cities - That is, he either took or destroyed twenty cities of the Ammonites, and completely routed their whole army.

JUDGES 11:34 Jephthah came to Mizpah to his house; and behold, his daughter came out to meet him with tambourines and with dances: and she was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter.

Verse 34

With timbrels and with dances - From this instance we find it was an ancient custom for women to go out to meet returning conquerors with musical instruments, songs, and dances; and that it was continued afterwards is evident from the instance given 1Sam 18:6, where David was met, on his return from the defeat of Goliath and the Philistines, by women from all the cities of Israel, with singing and dancing, and various instruments of music.

JUDGES 11:35 When he saw her, he tore his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you are one of those who trouble me; for I have opened my mouth to the LORD, and I can't go back."

Verse 35

Thou hast brought me very low - He was greatly distressed to think that his daughter, who was his only child, should be, in consequence of his vow, prevented from continuing his family in Israel; for it is evident that he had not any other child, for besides her, says the text, he had neither son nor daughter, Jdg 11:34. He might, therefore, well be grieved that thus his family was to become extinct in Israel.

JUDGES 11:36 She said to him, "My father, you have opened your mouth to the LORD; do to me according to that which has proceeded out of your mouth, because the LORD has taken vengeance for you on your enemies, even on the children of Ammon."

Verse 36

And she said unto him - What a pattern of filial piety and obedience! She was at once obedient, pious, and patriotic. A woman to have no offspring was considered to be in a state of the utmost degradation among the Hebrews; but she is regardless of all this, seeing her father is in safety, and her country delivered.

JUDGES 11:37 She said to her father, "Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may depart and go down on the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my companions."

Verse 37

I and my fellows - Whether she meant the young women of her own acquaintance, or those who had been consecrated to God in the same way, though on different accounts, is not quite clear; but it is likely she means her own companions: and her going up and down upon the mountains may signify no more than her paying each of them a visit at their own houses, previously to her being shut up at the tabernacle; and this visiting of each at their own home might require the space of two months. This I am inclined to think is the meaning of this difficult clause.

JUDGES 11:38 He said, "Go." He sent her away for two months: and she departed, she and her companions, and mourned her virginity on the mountains.

JUDGES 11:39 At the end of two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed. She was a virgin. It was a custom in Israel,

Verse 39

And she knew no man - She continued a virgin all the days of her life.

JUDGES 11:40 that the daughters of Israel went yearly to celebrate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

Verse 40

To lament the daughter of Jephthah - I am satisfied that this is not a correct translation of the original יפתח לבת לתנוח lethannoth lebath yiphtach. Houbigant translates the whole verse thus: Sed iste mos apud Israel invaluit, ut virgines Israel, temporibus diversis, irent ad filiam Jepthe-ut eam quotannis dies quatuor consolarentur; "But this custom prevailed in Israel that the virgins of Israel went at different times, four days in the year, to the daughter of Jephthah, that they might comfort her." This verse also gives evidence that the daughter of Jephthah was not sacrificed: nor does it appear that the custom or statute referred to here lasted after the death of Jephthah's daughter.

The following is Dr. Hales' exposition of Jephthah's vow: - "When Jephthah went forth to battle against the Ammonites, he vowed a vow unto the Lord, and said, 'If thou wilt surely give the children of Ammon into my hand, then it shall be that whatsoever cometh out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall either be the Lord's, or I will offer it up (for) a burnt-offering,' Jdg 11:30, Jdg 11:31. According to this rendering of the two conjunctions, I vau in the last clause 'either,' 'or,' (which is justified by the Hebrew idiom thus, 'He that curseth his father and his mother,' Exo 21:17, is necessarily rendered disjunctively, 'His father or his mother,' by the Septuagint, Vulgate, Chaldee, and English, confirmed by Mat 15:4, the paucity of connecting particles in that language making it necessary that this conjunction should often be understood disjunctively), the vow consisted of two parts:

1. That what person soever met him should be the Lord's or be dedicated to his service; and,
2. That what beast soever met him, if clean, should be offered up for a burnt-offering unto the Lord. "This rendering and this interpretation is warranted by the Levitical law about vows. "The נדר neder, or vow, in general, included either persons, beasts, or things dedicated to the Lord for pious uses; which, if it was a simple vow, was redeemable at certain prices, if the person repented of his vow, and wished to commute it for money, according to the age or sex of the person, Lev 27:1-8 : this was a wise regulation to remedy rash vows. But if the vow was accompanied with חרם cherem, devotement, it was irredeemable, as in the following case, Lev 27:28. "Notwithstanding, no devotement which a man shall devote unto the Lord, (either) of man, or beast, or of land of his own property, shall be sold or redeemed. Every thing devoted is most holy to the Lord. "Here the three I vau in the original should necessarily be rendered disjunctively, or as the last actually is in our translation, because there are three distinct subjects of devotement to be applied to distinct uses, the man to be dedicated to the service of the Lord, as Samuel by his mother Hannah, 1Sam 1:11; the cattle, if clean, such as oxen, sheep, goats, turtle-doves, or pigeons, to be sacrificed; and if unclean, as camels, horses, asses, to be employed for carrying burdens in the service of the tabernacle or temple; and the lands, to be sacred property. "This law therefore expressly applied in its first branch to Jephthah's case, who had devoted his daughter to the Lord, or opened his mouth to the Lord, and therefore could not go back, as he declared in his grief at seeing his daughter and only child coming to meet him with timbrels and dances: she was, therefore necessarily devoted, but with her own consent to perpetual virginity in the service of the tabernacle, Jdg 11:36, Jdg 11:37; and such service was customary, for in the division of the spoils taken in the first Midianitish war, of the whole number of captive virgins the Lord's tribute was thirty-two persons, Numbers 31:15-40. This instance appears to be decisive of the nature of her devotement. "Her father's extreme grief on the occasion and her requisition of a respite for two months to bewail her virginity, are both perfectly natural. Having no other issue, he could only look forward to the extinction of his name or family; and a state of celibacy, which is reproachful among women everywhere, was peculiarly so among the Israelites,

and was therefore no ordinary sacrifice on her part; who, though she generously gave up, could not but regret the loss of, becoming 'a mother in Israel.' And he did with her according to his vow which he had vowed, and she knew no man, or remained a virgin, all her life, Jdg 11:34-39. "There was also another case of devotement which was irredeemable, and follows the former, Lev 27:29. This case differs materially from the former. "1. It is confined to Persons devoted, omitting beasts and lands.

2. It does not relate to private property, as in the foregoing. And,

3. The subject of it was to be utterly destroyed, instead of being most holy unto the Lord.

This law, therefore, related to aliens, or public enemies devoted to destruction either by God, the people, or by the magistrate. Of all these we have instances in Scripture. "1. The Amalekites and Canaanites were devoted by God himself. Saul was, therefore, guilty of a breach of the law for sparing Agag the king of the Amalekites, as Samuel reproached him, 1Sam 15:33 : 'And Samuel hewed Agag in pieces before the Lord;' not as a sacrifice, according to Voltaire, but as a criminal, whose sword had made many women childless. By this law the Midianitish women who had been spared in battle were slain, Num 31:14-17. "2. In Mount Hor, when the Israelites were attacked by Arad, king of the southern Canaanites, who took some of them prisoners, they vowed a vow unto the Lord that they would utterly destroy the Canaanites and their cities, if the Lord should deliver them into their hand, which the Lord ratified; whence the place was called Hormah, because the vow was accompanied by cherem, or devotement to destruction, Num 21:1-3; and the vow was accomplished, Jdg 1:17. "3. In the Philistine war Saul adjured the people, and cursed any one who should taste food till the evening. His own son Jonathan inadvertently ate a honey-comb, not knowing his father's oath, for which Saul sentenced him to die. But the people interposed, and rescued him for his public services; thus assuming the power of dispensing, in their collective capacity, with an unreasonable oath. This latter case, therefore, is utterly irrelative to Jephthah's vow, which did not regard a foreign enemy or a domestic transgressor devoted to destruction, but on the contrary was a vow of thanksgiving, and therefore properly came under the former case.

And that Jephthah could not possibly have sacrificed his daughter, (according to the vulgar opinion), may appear from the following considerations: - "1. The sacrifice of children to Molech was an abomination to the Lord, of which in numberless passages he expresses his detestation, and it was prohibited by an express law, under pain of death, as a defilement of God's sanctuary, and a profanation of his holy name, Lev 20:2, Lev 20:3. Such a sacrifice, therefore, unto the Lord himself, must be a still higher abomination, and there is no precedent of any such under the law in the Old Testament. "2. The case of Isaac before the law is irrelevant, for Isaac was not sacrificed, and it was only proposed for a trial of Abraham's faith. "3. No father, merely by his own authority, could put an offending, much less an innocent, child to death upon any account, without the sentence of the magistrate, (Deu 21:18-21), and the consent of the people, as in Jonathan's case. "4. The Mischna, or traditional law of the Jews is pointedly against it; ver. 212. 'If a Jew should devote his son or daughter, his man or maid servant, who are Hebrews, the devotement would be void, because no man can devote what is not his own, or whose life he has not the absolute disposal of.' These arguments appear to be decisive against the sacrifice; and that Jephthah could not have devoted his daughter to celibacy against her will is evident from the history, and from the high estimation in which she was always held by the daughters of Israel for her filial duty and her hapless fate, which they celebrated by a regular anniversary commemoration four days in the year; Jdg 11:40." - *New Analysis of Chronology*, vol. iii., p. 319.

The celebrated sacrifice of Iphigenia has been supposed by many learned men to be a fable founded on this account of Jephthah's daughter; and M. De Lavour, *Conference de la Fable avec l'Histoire*

Sainte, has thus traced the parallel: - "The fable of Iphigenia, offered in sacrifice by Agamemnon her father, sung by so many poets, related after them by so many historians, and celebrated in the Greek and French theatres, has been acknowledged by all those who knew the sacred writings, and who have paid a particular attention to them, as a changed copy of the history of the daughter of Jephthah, offered in sacrifice by her father. Let us consider the several parts particularly, and begin with an exposition of the original, taken from the eleventh chapter of the book of Judges. "The sacred historian informs us that Jephthah, the son of Gilead, was a great and valiant captain. The Israelites, against whom God was irritated, being forced to go to war with the Ammonites, (nearly about the time of the siege of Troy), assembled themselves together to oblige Jephthah to come to their succor, and chose him for their captain against the Ammonites. He accepted the command on conditions that, if God should give him the victory, they would acknowledge him for their prince. This they promised by oath; and all the people elected him in the city of Mizpeh, in the tribe of Judah. He first sent ambassadors to the king of the Ammonites to know the reason why he had committed so many acts of injustice, and so many ravages on the coast of Israel. The other made a pretext of some ancient damages his people had suffered by the primitive Israelites, to countenance the ravages he committed, and would not accord with the reasonable propositions made by the ambassadors of Jephthah. Having now supplicated the Lord and being filled with his Spirit, he marched against the Ammonites, and being zealously desirous to acquit himself nobly, and to ensure the success of so important a war, he made a vow to the Lord to offer in sacrifice or as a burnt-offering the first thing that should come out of the house to meet him at his return from victory. "He then fought with and utterly discomfited the Ammonites; and returning victorious to his house, God so permitted it that his only daughter was the first who met him. Jephthah was struck with terror at the sight of her, and tearing his garments, he exclaimed, Alas! alas! my daughter, thou dost exceedingly trouble me; for I have opened my mouth against thee, unto the Lord, and I cannot go back. His daughter, full of courage and piety, understanding the purport of his vow, exhorted him to accomplish what he had vowed to the Lord, which to her would be exceedingly agreeable, seeing the Lord had avenged him of his and his country's enemies; desiring liberty only to go on the mountains with her companions, and to bewail the dishonor with which sterility was accompanied in Israel, because each hoped to see the Messiah born of his or her family. Jephthah could not deny her this request. She accordingly went, and at the end of two months returned, and put herself into the hands of her father, who did with her according to his vow. "Several of the rabbins, and many very learned Christian expositors, believe that Jephthah's daughter was not really sacrificed, but that her virginity was consecrated to God, and that she separated from all connection with the world; which indeed seems to be implied in the sacred historian's account: And she knew no man. This was a kind of mysterious death, because it caused her to lose all hope of the glory of a posterity from which the Messiah might descend. From this originated the custom, observed afterwards in Israel, that on a certain season in the year the virgins assembled themselves on the mountains to bewail the daughter of Jephthah for the space of four days. Let us now consider the leading characters of the fable of Iphigenia. According to good chronological reckonings, the time of the one and of the other very nearly agree. The opinion that the name of Iphigenia is taken from the daughter of Jephthah, appears well founded; yea, the conformity is palpable. By a very inconsiderable change Iphigenia makes Iphthygenia, which signifies literally, the daughter of Jephthah. Agamemnon, who is described as a valiant warrior and admirable captain, was chosen by the Greeks for their prince and general against the Trojans, by the united consent of all Greece, assembled together at Aulis in Baeotia. "As soon as he had accepted the command, he sent ambassadors to Priam, king of Troy, to demand satisfaction for the rape of Helen, of which the Greeks complained. The Trojans refusing to grant this, Agamemnon, to gain over to his side the gods, who appeared irritated against the Greeks and opposed to the success of their enterprise, after having sacrificed to them went to consult their

interpreter, Chalcas, who declared that the gods, and particularly Diana, would not be appeased but by the sacrifice of Iphigenia, the daughter of Agamemnon. "Cicero, in his Offices, says that Agamemnon, in order to engage the protection of the gods in his war against the Trojans, vowed to sacrifice to them the most beautiful of all that should be born in his kingdom; and as it was found that his daughter Iphigenia surpassed all the rest in beauty, he believed himself bound by his vow to sacrifice her. Cicero condemns this, rightly judging that it would have been a less evil to have falsified his vow than to have committed parricide. This account of Cicero renders the fable entirely conformable to the history. "Agamemnon was at first struck with and troubled at this order, nevertheless consented to it: but he afterwards regretted the loss of his daughter. He is represented by the poets as deliberating, and being in doubt whether the gods could require such a parricide; but at last a sense of his duty and honor overcame his paternal affection, and his daughter, who had warmly exhorted him to fulfill his vow to the gods, was led to the altar amidst the lamentations of her companions; as Ovid and Euripides relate, see *Met.*, lib. 13. "Some authors have thought she really was sacrificed; but others, more humane, say she was caught up in a cloud by the gods, who, contented with the intended sacrifice, substituted a hind in her place, with which the sacrifice was completed. Dictys Cretensis says that this animal was substituted to save Iphigenia. "The chronology of times so remote cannot, in many respects, but be uncertain. Both the Greeks and Romans grant that there was nothing else than fables before the first Olympiad, the beginning of which was at least four hundred and fifty years after the destruction of Troy, and two hundred and forty years after Solomon. As to the time of Solomon, nothing can be more certain than what is related in the sixth chapter of the first book of Kings, that from the going out of Egypt, under Moses, till the time in which he began to build the temple, was four hundred and eighty years. "According to the common opinion, the taking of Troy is placed one hundred and eighty years before the reign of Solomon; but his reign preceded Homer three centuries, according to some learned men, and always at least one century by those who related it lowest. Indeed, there is much uncertainty in fixing the express time in which Homer flourished. "Pausanias found so much difference concerning this in authors, that he was at a loss how to judge of it. However, it is sufficient for us that it was granted that Solomon was at least a century before Homer, who wrote more than two centuries after the taking of Troy and who is the most ancient historian of this famous siege."