

CHAPTER 11

INTRODUCTION TO JUDGES 11

This chapter gives an account of another judge of Israel, Jephthah, of his descent and character, (^{<0710>}Judges 11:1-3) of the call the elders of Gilead gave him to be their captain general, and lead out their forces against the Ammonites, and the agreement he made with them, (^{<07104>}Judges 11:4-11) of the message he sent to the children of Ammon, which brought on a dispute between him and them about the land Israel possessed on that side Jordan the Ammonites claimed; Israel's right to which Jephthah defended, and made it clearly to appear, hoping thereby to put an end to the quarrel without shedding of blood, (^{<07112>}Judges 11:12-27) but the children of Ammon not attending to what he said, he prepared to give them battle, and previous to it he made a vow, and then set forward and fought them, and got the victory over them, (^{<07128>}Judges 11:28-33) and the chapter concludes with the difficulties Jephthah was embarrassed with upon his return home, on account of his vow, and the performance of it, (^{<07134>}Judges 11:34-40).

Ver. 1. *Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour*, etc.] Jephthah had his name of Gileadite either from his father, whose name was Gilead, or from the city and country in which he was born, which is most likely, and so was of the same country with the preceding judge; and he was a man of great strength and valour, and which perhaps became known by his successful excursions on parties of the enemies of Israel, the Ammonites, being at the head of a band of men, who lived by the booty they got from them:

and he was the son of an harlot; the Targum says, an innkeeper; and, according to Kimchi, she was a concubine, which some reckoned no better than an harlot, but such are not usually called so; some Jewish writers will have her to be one of another tribe his father ought not to have married; and others, that she was of another nation, a Gentile, so Josephus ^{f224}; and, according to Patricides ^{f225}, he was the son of a Saracen woman; but neither of these are sufficient to denominate her a harlot:

and Gilead begat Jephthah; he was his son; this was a descendant of Gilead the son of Machir, the son of Manasseh, called after the name of his great ancestor.

Ver. 2. *And Gilead's wife bare him sons*, etc.] It seems that, after the birth of Jephthah, Gilead took him a lawful wife, who bore him sons:

and his wife's sons grew up; to the estate of men:

and they thrust out Jephthah: out of his father's house, his father in all likelihood being dead, or he would not have suffered it, and what follows confirms it that he was dead:

and said unto him, thou shalt not inherit in our father's house: as he might not, if the son of an harlot, or of a woman of another tribe, or of a concubine; though as Kimchi, from their Rabbins, observes, the son of such an one might, provided his mother was not an handmaid nor a stranger. And it looks as if this was not rightly done, but that Jephthah was injuriously dealt with by his brethren, of which he complains:

for thou art the son of a strange woman: or of another "woman"^{f226}, that was not their father's lawful wife; or of a woman of another tribe, as the Targum; or of another nation, as others, prostitutes being used to go into foreign countries to get a livelihood, and hide the shame of their families; hence a strange woman, and a harlot, signified the same^{f227}, (see <07100> Judges 11:1).

Ver. 3. *Then Jephthah fled from his brethren*, etc.] Being ill used by them, and a man of spirit and courage, and could not bear to be treated with contempt, nor to live in a dependence on others, and therefore sought to make himself another way:

and dwelt in the land of Tob; which Kimchi and Ben Gersom think was the name of the lord and owner of the land; Abarbinel interprets it, a good land, as Tob signifies, so the Targum; but others the name of a city or country, and conjecture it may be the same with Ishtob, and which was not far from the children of Ammon, since they sent thither for assistance, (<0006>2 Samuel 10:6). Jerom^{f228} takes it for a country, in which Jephthah dwelt, but says no more of it. Junius says it was on the entrance of Arabia Deserta, in the Apocrypha:

“Yea, all our brethren that were in the places of Tobie are put to death: their wives and their children also they have carried away captives, and borne away their stuff; and they have destroyed there about a thousand men.” (1 Maccabees 5:13)

“Then departed they from thence seven hundred and fifty furlongs, and came to Characa unto the Jews that are called Tubieni.” (2 Maccabees 12:17)

where the inhabitants of it are called Tobienians or Tubienians:

and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah; not wicked men, but empty men, whose pockets were empty; men without money, as Abarbinel interprets it, had nothing to live upon, no more than Jephthah, and he being a valiant man, they enlisted themselves under him:

and went out with him; not on any bad design, as to rob and plunder, but to get their living by hunting; or rather by making excursions into the enemy’s country, and carrying off booty, on which they lived. Josephus ^{f229} says he maintained them at his own expense, and paid them wages.

Ver. 4. *And it came to pass in process of time*, etc.] Some time after Jephthah had been expelled from his father’s house, and he was become famous for his martial genius, and military exploits; or at the close of the eighteen years’ oppression of the children of Israel by the Ammonites, or some few days after the children of Israel were gathered together at Mizpeh, that the people and princes of Gilead were preparing for war with Ammon, and were thinking of a proper person to be their general:

that the children of Ammon made war against Israel; not only passed over Jordan again, and encamped in Gilead, but began to attack them in some place or another, at least threatened them with it, and made motions towards it.

Ver. 5. *And it was so, that when the children of Ammon made war against Israel*, etc.] Were preparing for it, and had assembled their forces near them, and had begun to make some efforts against them:

the elders of Gilead went to fetch Jephthah out of the land of Tob; they did not send messengers to him, but went themselves, partly to show greater respect to him, and partly in hopes of better success, being aware of

objections he would make, which they could better answer themselves than a deputation.

Ver. 6. *And they said unto Jephthah, come and be our captain*, etc.] The general of their army, to conduct and lead on their forces; they did not propose him to be their king, being convinced by Abimelech's conduct that such a step would be wrong; nor did they say anything of his being their judge, having no other view than to serve their present exigence; besides, a judge was not one chosen by the people, but raised up of God, and which honour was conferred on Jephthah afterwards:

that we may fight with the children of Ammon; with judgment, courage, and success; they did not make this proposal to him to save themselves from being engaged in the war, but that they might have one skilful in military affairs at the head of them, to instruct them in the art of war, and lead them on in a regular manner, and animate them by his brave example.

Ver. 7. *And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead*, etc.] In answer to their request; who though not backward to engage in the war with them, yet thought it proper to take this opportunity to upbraid them with their former unkindness to him:

did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? for it seems some of these elders at least were his brethren; for who else could be thought to hate him, and through hatred to thrust him out of his father's house, but they? nor is it at all improbable that they were among the elders of Gilead, considering what family they were of: though indeed the magistrates of the city might be assisting to Jephthah's brethren in the expulsion of him, or however connived at it, when they should, as he thought, have protected him, and taken care that he had justice done him; for even though illegitimate, a maintenance was due to him:

and why are ye come unto me now, when ye are in distress? intimating, that it was not love and respect to him, but necessity, that brought them to him with this request; and that since they used him so ill, they could not reasonably expect he should have any regard unto them.

Ver. 8. *And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah*, etc.] In reply to his objection:

therefore we turn again unto thee now; being sensible of the injury they had done him, and repenting of it, of which their return to him was an

evidence; it being with this view to remove the disgrace and dishonour that had been cast upon him, by conferring such honour on him, as to be their chief ruler:

that thou mayest go with us, and fight against the children of Ammon, and be our head over all the inhabitants of Gilead; the end of their coming to him was not only to bring him back with them to his own country, and to fight against the Ammonites, and the defence of it, but to be the sole governor of it; not of all Israel, but of the tribes beyond Jordan, which inhabited the land of Gilead: more than this they could not promise, though he afterwards was judge over all Israel, notwithstanding there was a law in Israel, that no spurious person should enter into the congregation, or bear any public office; so it was a law with the Athenians ^{f230}, that unless a man was born of both parents citizens, he should be reckoned spurious, and have no share in the government, (see ^{<07102>}Judges 11:2 ^{<6210>}Deuteronomy 23:2).

Ver. 9. *And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead*, etc.] Considering the former usage he had met with from them, and the character which he himself bore, and the fickleness of men, when their turn is served, was willing to make a sure bargain with them:

if ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon; that is, should he consent to go along with them, and fight their battle for them:

and the Lord deliver them before me; or into his hands, on whom he depended for success, and not on his own courage and valour, and military skill:

shall I be your head? not only captain general of their forces during the war, but the chief ruler of them when that was ended.

Ver. 10. *And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah*, etc.] Assenting to his proposal, and not only giving their word for it, but their oath:

the Lord be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words; that is, make him head over them; they appealed to the omniscient God, and called on him to be a witness of their agreement to it, and swore by him they would fulfil it; or if they did not, that the Lord would take vengeance on them for it, and punish the breach of this covenant and oath in some way or another; the Targum of Jonathan is,

“the Word of the Lord be a witness between us, etc.”

Ver. 11. *Then Jephthah went with the elders of Israel,* etc.] From the land of Tob into the land of Gilead, his native country:

and the people made him head and captain over them; ratified and confirmed what the elders had promised, and by a general unanimous vote appointed him both to be the captain of their forces, and to be the chief ruler and governor of them. And this they did, though he was the son of an harlot; and according to the law in (⁽⁴⁷¹²⁾Deuteronomy 23:2), such an one was not to be a civil magistrate; but this was a case of necessity, and in which, no doubt, they were directed by the Lord, who could dispense with his own law: besides, they had come to such an agreement before they had pitched on any particular person, that who should begin to fight with the children of Ammon should be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead so that they were obliged to it by their vote and decree, when they assembled at Mizpeh, where it is probable they consulted the Lord, and acted under his direction, (⁽⁴⁷¹⁷⁾Judges 10:17,18) and where this was confirmed, as seems from the following clause:

and Jephthah uttered all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh; where the congregation of Israel were assembled, and in which the Shechinah, or divine Majesty, dwelt, as is observed by Jarchi and Kimchi, and not Mizpeh in (⁽⁴⁸¹⁸⁾Joshua 11:3,8), as the latter says, but this was on the other side Jordan, in the land of Gilead; however, as it was a solemn meeting, the Lord was there, and, as in his presence, Jephthah rehearsed all that passed between him and the elders of Gilead; and, no doubt, in prayer to God, desired he would signify his approbation and ratification of their agreement, and would give him success in his undertakings against the children of Ammon.

Ver. 12. *And Jephthah sent messengers unto the king of the children of Ammon,* etc.] Being now declared chief and sole governor of the tribes on the other side Jordan, he acted in character, and as such sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites, to know the reason of his invading the land that belonged to Israel, being desirous of adjusting things in an amicable way, and to prevent the shedding of blood; in which he behaved as a good man, and not at all inconsistent with a man of valour and courage:

saying, what hast thou to do with me; to invade my land, and disturb my people, what have I or they done to give occasion for it?

that thou art come against me to fight in my land? he speaks in the language of a governor, and as a man of spirit concerned for the good of his country, and determined to defend the rights and liberties of it.

Ver. 13. *And the king of the children of Ammon answered unto the messengers of Jephthah,* etc.] Who this king of Ammon was is not said, however he returned an answer to Jephthah's messengers, which they brought to him, and it was to this purpose; that the reason of his invading the land, and bringing war into it, was,

because Israel took away my land when they came out of Egypt; not as soon as they came out of Egypt, for it was thirty nine years afterwards, and upwards, even a little before they entered into the land of Canaan; and the land they took was not theirs, but in the possession of Sihon and Og, kings of the Amorites; though indeed, before their conquest of it, it had been in the hands of the Moabites and Ammonites, and who being confederates, or subjects of the same king, is here claimed by the king of the children of Ammon:

from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and unto Jordan; the river Arnon was the border between Moab and the Amorites, and the river Jabbok was the border of the children of Ammon, (⁴⁰²¹³Numbers 21:13,24), the one was to the south of the country claimed, and the other to the north and to the west, which was Jordan, and the wilderness to the east, (⁴⁰¹¹²Judges 11:22),

now therefore restore these lands again peaceably; this is demanded or proposed as terms or conditions of peace, and what would prevent a war, and nothing short of this would do it.

Ver. 14. *And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon.*] Being willing to give him all the satisfaction he could, and if possible live peaceably with him, and prevent the effusion of blood.

Ver. 15. *And said unto him,* etc.] By his messengers:

thus saith Jephthah; in a majestic style, as governor of Israel:

Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon; they were charged not to take any, nor did they take any that belonged to any of these countries, or that was then in the possession of either of them, (⁴⁰⁸¹⁹Deuteronomy 2:9,19) what they did take was in the

hands of Sihon and Og, and they had obtained it by conquest, and so no more belonging to either of these.

Ver. 16. *But when Israel came up from Egypt*, etc.] In order to go to the land of Canaan, which was higher than the land of Egypt, which lay low ^{f231}.

and walked through the wilderness unto the Red sea; which is to be understood not of their walking to it; when they first came out of Egypt, they indeed then came to the edge of the wilderness of Etham, and so to the Red sea, and walked through it as on dry land, and came into the wilderness of Shur, Sin, and Sinai; and after their departure from Mount Sinai they came into the wilderness of Paran, in which they were thirty eight years; and this is the wilderness meant they walked through, and came to Eziongaber, on the shore of the Red sea, (^{ORIS}Numbers 33:35)

and came to Kadesh; not Kadeshbarnea, from whence the spies were sent, but Kadesh on the borders of Edom, from whence messengers were sent to the king of it, as follows.

Ver. 17. *Then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom*, etc.] The history of which may be read in (^{ORIS}Numbers 20:14), etc.

saying, let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land; the land of Edom, from the south to the north of it, according to Jarchi, which was the nearest and shortest way to the land of Canaan; so far were the Israelites from invading and seizing upon the properties of others, that they would not attempt to set their foot in another's country without leave; which they asked in an humble manner, promising to do no injury to any, but pay for whatever they ate and drank in their passage:

but the king of Edom would not hearken thereto; or grant their request, but refused them passage through his country:

and in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab, but he would not consent; that they should pass through his country, which lay, as Jarchi says, at the end of the land of Edom, to the west of it, and to the south of Canaan; and though we nowhere else read of their sending messengers to the king of Moab, and of the denial he made them, it is not at all to be doubted of, and the Jewish commentators observe, that it is clearly intimated by Moses, (^{ORIS}Deuteronomy 2:29)

as the children of Esau, who dwelt in Seir, and the Moabites which dwelt in Ar, did unto me; which they interpret thus, as the children of Esau would not suffer Israel to pass through their land, when desired of them, so neither would the Moabites, when the same request was made to them:

and Israel abode in Kadesh; quietly and peaceably, and did not attempt to force their way through either country, but continued in Kadesh some little time to consider what way they should take, and to wait for divine direction.

Ver. 18. *Then they went along the wilderness,* etc.] The wilderness of Paran, which lay along the borders of Edom; they went, according to Jarchi, from the west to the east on the south border of Edom and Moab:

and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab; all the south of the land of Edom, and all the south of the land of Moab; towards the sunrising, as in (^{4021B}Numbers 21:11)

and pitched on the other side of Arnon; the river Arnon, which, according to Jarchi, was at the east end of the land of Moab, where began the country of Sihon and Og:

but came not within the border of Moab; so far were they from attempting to take away any part of that land from the king of it, though ill treated by him:

for Arnon was the border of Moab; which divided between Moab and the Amorites, (^{4021B}Numbers 21:13).

Ver. 19. *And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon,* etc.] Which was his royal city, where he had his palace, and kept his court, and is therefore particularly mentioned; and the rather, because he had taken it from the Moabites, and was part of that land now in dispute; and this Sihon was not only in possession of, when Israel sent messengers to him, but it was his royal seat, the metropolis of his kingdom, and he was called king of it:

and Israel said unto him, let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land unto my place; the land of Canaan, prepared and reserved for them when the Most High divided to the nations their inheritance, promised by the Lord to their ancestors and to them, and given unto them, who is sovereign Lord of all; and all that Israel desired of Sihon was only a passage through his land

to that, promising the same as to the king of Edom; see the history of it in (⁴⁰²¹³Numbers 21:21-35).

Ver. 20. *But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through, his coast,* etc.] For fear they should seize upon his dominions, and retain them; and the more fearful he might be, as he knew that his people were one of the seven nations of the Canaanites, whose land they were going to possess, and whom they were to destroy:

but Sihon gathered all his people together; in some certain place, and armed them, and went out in an hostile manner against Israel in the wilderness, to attack them; whereby it appears that he was the aggressor, and therefore Israel was not to be blamed, as not for fending themselves, so neither for seizing and possessing his country when they had conquered him:

and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel; there was a battle between them at the place mentioned, and the victory was on Israel's side, (see ⁴⁰²¹³Numbers 21:23-35).

Ver. 21. *And the Lord God of Israel delivered Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel,* etc.] So that as Sihon, his people, and his country, fell into the hands of Israel through the victory the Lord gave them over him, they had a divine right to the land now in dispute:

and they smote them: destroyed him and all his people, as they were ordered to destroy the seven nations of Canaan, of which the Amorites were one, (⁴⁸⁰⁰¹Deuteronomy 7:1),

so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country; by means of the above victory they came into the lawful and rightful possession of all the land that belonged to the Amorites, who were at that time, and none else, the inhabitants of it; and therefore the Ammonites could have no claim to it, nor was any made till now.

Ver. 22. *And they possessed all the coasts of the Amorites,* etc.] Peaceably and quietly, nor did any pretend to call their right in question, or dispute their title, or give them any disturbance:

from Arnon unto Jabbok: which was the length of the country, and the direction was from south to north, and reached from the river Arnon, the

border of Moab, to the river Jabbok, the border of Ammon; so that it included no part of what was at this time in the possession of either:

and from the wilderness even unto Jordan; which was the breadth of it, and its direction was from the west to the east, reaching from the wilderness of Arabia to the river Jordan.

Ver. 23. *So now the Lord God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel*, etc.] It is his doing, and not the work of the Israelites; it is he that dispossessed the Amorites, and put the Israelites into the possession of their land, and therefore they enjoy it by a good tenure:

and shouldest thou possess it? what through the blessing of God on their arms they have obtained by conquest, and he has settled them in; did they conquer, that thou should possess what they conquered? did their God put it into their hands to deliver it into thine? did they fight to recover for thee what thou hadst lost, and to put thee into the possession of it? did not they fight in their own defence, and their enemies and their land fell into their hands, and by the laws and right of nations became theirs? and canst thou expect to possess it? what reason is there for it?

Ver. 24. *Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess?* etc.] Chemosh was the idol of the Moabites, (see ⁽¹⁰²⁾Numbers 21:29), which has led some to think, that the present king of Ammon was also king of Moab, and who insisted on that part of the country, which formerly belonged to Moab, to be delivered to him, as well as that which had belonged to Ammon. Now since the land, which they now inhabited, as well as what they had lost, they had taken away from others, (⁽¹²⁰⁾Deuteronomy 2:10,11,20,21), having conquered them, and which they ascribed to the help and assistance they had from their idol, and possessed as his gift; Jephthah argues with them “ad hominem”, from the less to the greater:

so whomsoever the Lord our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess; we have surely as good a claim to what the Lord our God gives to us in a way of conquest, as you have, or can think you have, to what your idol, as you suppose, has given you: however, what we have got, or get this way, we are determined to possess, and keep possession of.

Ver. 25. *And now art thou anything better than Balak the son of Zippor king of Moab?* etc.] This argument seems to strengthen the conjecture, that this king was king of Moab at this time, and so Balak was one of his

predecessors. Now he is asked, whether he thought he was a wiser and more knowing prince than he, as to what was his right and due; or whether he had a better claim, or any additional one to the land in dispute the other had not; or whether he judged he was more able to regain what belonged to him:

did he ever strive against Israel? for the land they took away from Sihon formerly in the possession of the Moabites? did he ever lay any claim to it, or enter into any dispute, or litigate with Israel about it? not at all:

or did he ever fight against Israel? that is, on that account; no, he sent for Balaam to curse Israel, and sought to defend and secure his own country he was in possession of, which he thought was in danger by the Israelites being so near him; but he never made war with them under any such pretence, that they had done him any injury by inheriting the land they had taken from Sihon and Og, kings of the Amorites.

Ver. 26. *While Israel dwelt in Heshbon and her towns*, etc.] This was the principal city, which formerly belonged to the Moabites, and was taken from them by Sihon; who being conquered by Israel, it fell into their hands, and they inhabited it, and the towns adjacent to it, from that time to the present; (see ^{<0425>}Numbers 21:25)

and in Aroer and her towns; another city with its villages, taken at the same time, and ever since inhabited by the Israelites, even by the tribe of Gad, who rebuilt it; it lay near the river Arnon; (see ^{<0424>}Numbers 32:34 ^{<0412>}Deuteronomy 3:12)

and in all the cities that be along by the coasts of Arnon; which lay along by the side of that river, which divided Moab from the kingdom of the Amorites; these Israel had dwelt in three hundred years; and during this time, neither Balak king of Moab, nor any of his successors, had ever disputed Israel's title to those cities, or commenced a war with them on account of them; but they had continued in the peaceable enjoyment of them so long as three hundred years; which are thus reckoned in the Jewish chronology ^{f2.32}; Joshua governed Israel twenty eight years, Othniel forty, Ehud eighty, Deborah forty, Gideon forty, Abimelech three, Tola twenty three, Jair twenty two, and eighteen years Israel was oppressed by the children of Ammon, which with the six years of Jephthah make just three hundred; so that, according to this computation, there were six years short of it; but being so near, the round number is given:

why therefore did ye not recover them within that time? signifying they ought to have put in their claim sooner, and endeavoured to have recovered them long before this time, if they had any right unto them; wherefore Jephthah pleads prescription, and which in a course of time ought to take place; or otherwise the world would be full of endless contentions and controversies, and kingdoms and states would never be at peace, nor each one know and enjoy for certainty its proper domains.

Ver. 27. *Wherefore I have not sinned against thee*, etc.] Had done him no injury, not wronged him of anything, nor had taken away any part of his country from him; this Jephthah said in the name of all Israel, of whom he was governor:

but thou doest me wrong to war against me; meaning that he had no just cause to commence a war against Israel, but acted an injurious part; and seeing things could not be adjusted in an amicable way, but must be decided by the sword, he leaves the affair with the Lord, and appeals to him:

the Lord the Judge; the Judge of the whole earth, the omniscient God, that knows all things, the right and wrong of every cause, on which side truth and justice lie:

be Judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon; not that he expected a decision of the controversy between them would be made that precise and exact day; but that from henceforward the Lord would appear, by giving success to that party which was in the right in this contest.

Ver. 28. *Howbeit, the king of the children of Ammon hearkened not unto the words of Jephthah which he sent him.*] He attended not to the arguments Jephthah made use of, and did not choose to seem at least to be convinced by them, nor to regard the awful appeal he had made to the great Jehovah.

Ver. 29. *Then the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah*, etc.] The spirit of strength, as the Targum; of fortitude of mind, of uncommon valour and courage, and of zeal for God and Israel, and against their enemies; such a spirit as used to be given to men, when they were in an extraordinary manner raised up by the Lord, to be judges, saviours, and deliverers of his people; so that as Jephthah was before chosen by the people to be the general and head of the tribes beyond Jordan, he was raised up and

qualified by the Lord now to be the judge of all Israel; of which the Spirit of the Lord coming on him was a sufficient proof and evidence:

and he passed over Gilead and Manasseh; the countries that belonged to Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh; however, all that part of it which lay from the place where he was, to the land of the children of Ammon:

and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead; which lay to the north of the land of Gilead, or tribe of Gad:

and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over to the children of Ammon; did not stay for them, to bring on the war in the land of Gilead, but prevented it by carrying it into the land of the children of Ammon. It seems by this, that though the children of Ammon had encamped in Gilead some time before, (⁴⁰⁰⁰⁷Judges 10:17), yet for some reason or another they had decamped, and had retired into their own country; but yet threatening Israel with a war, and preparing for it.

Ver. 30. *And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the Lord*, etc.] Before he set out for the land of the children of Ammon, and to fight with them; hoping that such a religious disposition of mind would be regarded by the Lord, and be acceptable to him, and he should be blessed with success in his enterprise:

and said, if thou shall without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands; though he was assured of the justness of his cause, and of his call to engage in it, he seems to have some little diffidence in his mind about the success of it; at least, was not fully certain of it.

Ver. 31. *Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me*, etc.] If this phrase, “to meet me”, is meant intentionally, then no other than an human creature can be meant; a child, or servant, or any other of mankind; for none else could come forth with a design to meet him: but if this is to be understood eventually, of what might meet him, though not with design, then any other creature may be intended; and it must be meant what came forth first, as the Vulgate Latin version expresses it, or otherwise many might come forth at such a time:

when I return in peace from the children of Ammon: safe in his own person, and having conquered the Ammonites, and restored peace to Israel:

shall surely be the Lord's; be devoted to him, and made use of, or the price of it, with which it is redeemed, in his service: and I will offer it for a burnt offering; that is, if it is what according to the law may be offered up, as an ox, sheep, ram, or lamb; some read the words disjunctively, “or I will offer it”, etc. it shall either be devoted to the Lord in the manner that persons or things, according to the law, are directed to be; or it shall be offered up for a burnt offering, if fit and proper for the service; so Joseph and David Kimchi, Ben Melech, and Abarbinel, with others, interpret it; but such a disjunction is objected to as improper and ridiculous, to distinguish two sentences, when the one is more general, and the other more special.

Ver. 32. *So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon, to fight against them*, etc.] As in (^{<07129>}Judges 11:29), after he had made the above vow:

and the Lord delivered them into his hands; when both armies met and engaged, victory was on the side of Jephthah; the Lord being with him, and giving him success, to where all is justly ascribed.

Ver. 33. *And he smote them from Aroer*, etc.] A city which lay near the river Arnon, on the borders of Moab, (^{<0812>}Deuteronomy 3:12)

even till thou come to Minnith; which seems to have been a place famous for wheat, (^{<0607>}Ezekiel 27:17) so David de Pomis ^{f233} says it was a place where the best wheat grew. Jerom says ^{f234} in his time was shown a village called Mannith, four miles from Esbus (or Heshbon), as you go to Philadelphia. Josephus ^{f235} calls it Maniathe, and it is thought by some to be the Anitha of Ptolemy ^{f236}, which he places in Arabia Petraea even “twenty cities”; which he pursued them through and took:

and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter; or, Abel Ceramim. Jerom says ^{f237} in his time was seen a village called Abela, planted with vineyards, seven miles from Philadelphia:

thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel; so that they were not able to oppress them any more.

Ver. 34. *And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house*, etc.] Where he had uttered his words before the Lord, which had passed between him and the elders of Gilead, and from whence he set out to fight the children of Ammon, and whither he returned after he had got the victory over them,

(^{<0711>}Judges 11:11,29) and where it seems he had a house, and his family dwelt; for upon his being fetched from the land of Tab, he brought what family he had with him, and settled them at Mizpeh, while he went on the expedition against the children of Ammon:

and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him, with timbrels, and with dances; accompanied with young women, having timbrels in their hands, and playing upon them, and dancing as they came along; expressing their joy at, and congratulating him upon, the victory he had obtained over the children of Ammon:

and she [was his] only child: and so dear unto him, and upon whom all his hopes and expectations of a posterity from him depended:

besides her he had neither son nor daughter: some read it, “of her” ^{f238}; that is, she had neither son nor daughter; and so by this vow, be it understood in which way it may be, if fulfilled, she must die without any issue; though the phrase in the Hebrew text is, “of himself” ^{f239}; he had none, though his wife whom he married might have sons and daughters by an husband she had before him, and so these were brought up in Jephthah’s house as his children; yet they were not begotten by him, they were not of his body, not his own children; he had none but this daughter, which made the trial the more grievous to him; her name, according to Philo, was Seila.

Ver. 35. *And it came to pass, when he saw her*, etc.] She being the first person that presented to his view, as she was at the head of the virgins with their timbrels and dances:

that he rent his clothes; as was the usual manner, when anything calamitous and distressing happened; (see ^{<0157>}Genesis 37:34 ^{<1802>}Job 1:20)

and said, alas, my daughter, thou hast brought me very low; damped his spirits, sunk him very low, so that he was ready to drop into the earth, as we say; he that was now returning in triumph, amidst the acclamations of the people, in the height of his glory, and extolled to the skies, and perhaps elated in his own mind; on a sudden, at the sight of his daughter, was so depressed in his spirits, that he could not bear up; but was ready to sink and die away, all his honour being as it were laid in the dust, and nothing to him:

and thou art one of them that trouble me: or among his troublers, and the greatest he ever met with; he had been in trouble from his brethren, when

they drove him from his father's house, and he had had trouble with the children of Ammon to subdue them; but this was the greatest trouble of all, that his daughter should be the first that should meet him; of whom, according to his vow, he was to be deprived, and so all his future comforts, hopes, and expectations from her gone; and therefore ranks her among, and at the head of, his troublers:

for I have opened my mouth unto the Lord; in a vow; not only had purposed it in his heart, but had expressed it with his lips:

and I cannot go back; or retract it; looking upon himself under an indispensable obligation to perform it; of which, be it as it may, he seems to have had mistaken notions and apprehensions; for if his vow was to sacrifice her, as some think, he was not obliged to do it, since it was contrary to the law of God, and abominable in his sight; and besides, what was vowed to be the Lord's, or devoted to him, might be redeemed according to the law, a female for thirty pieces of silver, (^(LEVITICUS 27:2-4)) and if the vow was to separate his daughter from the company of men, and oblige her never to marry, such a power as this parents had not allowed them over their children, according to the laws of God or of men, in the Jewish nation; and therefore, be it which it will, what he had to do was to repent of this rash vow, and humble himself before God for making it, and not add sin to sin by performing it.

Ver. 36. *And she said unto him, my father, [if] thou hast opened thy mouth unto the Lord*, etc.] The conditional word "if" may be left out, as it is not in the original text; for her father had told her that he had opened his mouth, or made a vow to the Lord, and had no doubt explained it to her what it was, though it is not expressed; she knew it respected her, as it had issued, and was concerning her, as appears by her later request:

do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; which is a remarkable instance of filial subjection and obedience to a parent, and which perhaps was strengthened by a like mistaken notion as that of her father concerning the vow, that it could not be dispensed with; and therefore was moved under a sense of religion, as well as filial duty, to express herself in this manner, as well as by what follows:

forasmuch as the Lord hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, even of the children of Ammon: such was her public spirit, and the grateful sense she had of the divine goodness, in giving victory over Israel's

enemies, and delivering them from them, with vengeance on them, she cared not what was done to her; yea, desired that what was vowed might be performed.

Ver. 37. *And she said unto her father, let this thing be done for me*, etc.] She had but one favour to ask of him, which she thought might be granted, without any breach of the vow:

let me alone two months she desired such a space of time might be allowed her before the vow took place; and the rather she might be encouraged to expect that her request would be granted, since no time was fixed by the vow for the accomplishment of it, and since the time she asked was not very long, and the end to be answered not unreasonable

that I may go up and down upon the mountains; or, “ascend upon the mountains”^{f240}; Jephthah’s house in Mizpeh being higher than the mountains; or there might be, as Kimchi and Ben Melech note, a valley between that and the mountains, to which she descended in order to go up to the mountains; (see ~~1005~~ Judges 9:25) these she chose to make her abode, and take her walks in, during the time she asked, as being most fit for retirement and solitude; where she might give up herself to meditation and prayer, and conversation with her fellow virgins she would take with her, and so be wrought up to a greater degree of resignation and submission to her father’s will, and to the will of God in it, as she might suppose:

and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows; the virgins her companions; this she proposed to be the subject that she and her associates would dwell upon, during this time of solitude; and the rather, as this may be thought to be the thing contained in the vow, that as she was a virgin, so she should continue; by which means she would not be the happy instrument of increasing the number of the children of Israel, nor of being the progenitor of the Messiah; upon which accounts it was reckoned in those times to be very grievous and reproachful to live and die without issue, and so matter of lamentation and weeping.

Ver. 38. *And he said, go*, etc.] He granted her request at once:

and he sent her away for two months; as she desired:

and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains; for the space of two months: the Jewish commentators make mention of an allegorical exposition of a writer^{f241} of theirs, who by

mountains understands the sanhedrim, to whom she proposed to go, who perhaps might find a way for the loosing of the vow; but it is a question whether there was such a court then in Israel; and had there been one, and either she or her father had applied to it, in this case the priests would have pointed out what was to be done, and especially if the vow had any regard to the sacrifice of his daughter; and even to her virginity, which he had no power to oblige her to; but the literal sense is no doubt to be followed.

Ver. 39. *And it came to pass at the end of two months she returned to her father,* etc.] For the request she made was not a pretence to make her escape out of his hands; but having done what she proposed to do, and the time fixed for it being come, she returned to her father's house, and delivered herself to him:

who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: but what he did is a question, and which is not easily resolved; some think he really sacrificed her, through a mistaken sense of (^{<18729>}Leviticus 27:29) and which his action are accounted for through his living a military life, and in a distant part of the country, and at a time when idolatry had greatly prevailed in Israel, and to such a degree as it had not before, and no doubt that branch of it, sacrificing children to Molech; and Jephthah might think that though that was sinful, yet such a sacrifice might be acceptable to the Lord; and especially since his vow, as he thought, bound him to it; and how far the instance of Abraham offering up his son Isaac might encourage him to it, cannot be said: of this mind were Josephus^{f242}, Jonathan Ben Uziah the Targumist, and some other Jewish writers^{f243}; and many of the ancient Christian fathers, and many modern authors of every name among Christians; and it has been thought that the story of Iphigenia, who Capellus^{f244} thinks is the same with Jephthengia, that is, the daughter of Jephthah, and was slain by her father Agamemnon, having several circumstances in it similar to this, is taken from hence: and there is much such a case as this related^{f245} of Idomeneus, a king of the Cretians, who upon his return after the destruction of Troy, being in a tempest, vowed, should he be saved, that he would sacrifice the first he met with to the gods; and as it was his son he first met with, he sacrificed him; or, as others say, would have done it, but was prevented by the citizens, and who on this account drove him from his kingdom. But others are of opinion that what Jephthah did according to his vow was, that he shut up his daughter, and separated her from the company of men, and obliged her to live unmarried all her days, and therefore she is said to bewail her virginity. Kimchi and

Ben Melech say, he built a house for her without the city, where she dwelt alone, and knew no man; and where her father supported her, and obliged her to live all her days; and Abarbinel thinks, that the Romanists from hence learnt to build their cloisters to put their nuns in; and so Ben Gersom interprets this vow of her being separated from men, and devoted to the service of God; and which is the sense of many Christian interpreters. Now though Jephthah had no such power over his daughter, as to oblige her to perpetual virginity, nor did his vow bind him to it; for persons devoted to the Lord were not obliged to abstain from marriage, nor have we any instances of a monastic life in those times, nor among the Jews at any time; yet as he did something not right, which he thought his vow obliged him to, one would be rather tempted to think, in charity to him, that of the two evils he did the least; for if she was put to death, it must be done either by the magistrates, or by the priests, or by Jephthah himself; neither of which is probable:

and she knew no man; never married, but lived and died a virgin: “and it was a custom in Israel”; the Targum adds,

“that a man might not offer his son or his daughter for a burnt offering, as Jephthah the Gileadite did, and did not consult Phinehas the priest; for had he consulted Phinehas the priest, he would have redeemed her with a price;”

so Jarchi, according to (^{<RB704>}Leviticus 27:4) but each stood upon their honour, as the Jews say ^{f246}; Jephthah being a king would not go to Phinehas, and Phinehas being an high priest; and the son of an high priest, would not go to a plebeian; and so, between them both, the maiden was lost: but the custom refers to what follows.

Ver. 40. *That the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite*, etc.] Either the death of her, as some, or her virginity, as others; though the word ^{f247} used may signify to talk and discourse with her, to hold a confabulation with her, and comfort her, as Kimchi and Ben Melech interpret it; to bring her some news, and tell her some diverting stories, to cheer and refresh her in her solitude. De Dieu observes, that the word signifies in the Arabic language to “praise”, or speak in commendation of a person or thing; and indeed in this sense it seems to be used in this book, (^{<RB51>}Judges 5:11), “they shall rehearse”, that is, with praise and thanksgiving, “the righteous acts of the Lord”; and so the daughters of Israel went every year to the place where the daughter of

Jephthah was, to speak in the praise of her, of her heroism, in so cheerfully submitting to her father's vow, and expressing such gratitude and joy at the same time for victory over the enemies of Israel; and this they did in her presence and while she lived, to keep up her spirits; or it may be, in some public place, and even after her death, in memory of her, and to celebrate her praise. Epiphanius says ^{f248}, that in his time, at Sebaste, formerly called Samaria, they deified the daughter of Jephthah, and kept a feast for her every year. The meeting of the daughters of Israel, so long as the custom lasted, which perhaps was only during the life of Jephthah's daughter, was four days in a year; but whether they were four days running, or once in a quarter of a year, is not certain; the latter seems most probable.