

JEPHTHAH . . . who made a vow and kept it
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(Judges 11:30-39)

Jephthah was a Gileadite, and fire ran in his veins. He belonged to Elijah's country. The keen hillside winds blew upon his face; his eyes reflected the blue of God's heaven; his spirit was as formidable as the mountains upon which he roamed. He possessed great strength and glorious restraint-a rare combination indeed. His birth certificate was non-existent, and his illegitimate entry into the family circle constantly grieved his sensitive soul. When his brethren drove him away from home, the mighty warrior went without a protest. He was conquered not by their strength, but by his own shame. He was a rare bloom which had arisen from the muddy depths of human depravity-but he was a rare bloom for all that.

A Great Vow

Somewhere in the land of Tob, this valiant fighter built his new home, and commenced life all over again. He missed his kinsfolk; he yearned for the open hills of Gilead: but it was better to live alone than to live in strife. Besides, he had his daughter-a princess in his simple palace. And then one day a deputation arrived from Gilead. The anxious elders acquainted Jephthah with their tale of woe, and earnestly solicited his help. The Ammonites were threatening war, and Israel had no leader. Jephthah, please come and help us! "And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? and why are ye come to me now when ye are in distress?" (Judges 11:7). Responding to their appeal for help, and accepting their offer of leadership, he went forth to battle. "And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the Lord, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into my hands, then it shall be that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer it up for a burnt offering" (vv. 30, 31).

A Glorious Victory

He went forth in the name of the Lord, and his enemies were subdued before him. Flushed with a glorious triumph, he returned to his home, "and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and dances: and she was his only child; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. And it came to pass when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! He had been fighting battles all day, but the greatest conflict was fought in that evening hour. The conquest of the Ammonites had been child's play compared with the conquest of self. Perhaps we shall never realize what it cost this poor man before he succeeded in "crucifying the flesh with the affections thereof." Various explanations have been given in regard to the fulfilment of this vow. Some maintain that the girl was offered a living sacrifice upon the altar; others have stressed the fact that in this case it was more an offering or a vow of celibacy-that the girl's life was surrendered for exclusive service in the sanctuary. Yet, whichever interpretation may be correct, the fact remains that the sacrifice hurt. Nevertheless, although sorrow ravaged his heart, Jephthah honoured his obligations, It is easy to criticize the

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apparent rashness of his vow, for if we are in the habit
of breaking our vows, the story of his faithfulness will
be a thorn in our rebellious flesh.

A Girl's Virtue

"And she said unto him . . . do to me according to
that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth" (vv. 36-39).
Like father-like daughter. Surely she was a princess of
heaven. The only way to assess her greatness is to place
her alongside modern people. Utterly selfless, she recog-
nized that the supreme achievement in life was to do the
will of God. If she died in sacrifice, then her eyes reflected
the glow of hidden fires of devotion. If her remaining
days were spent in the exclusive service of the house of
God, then her presence graced the sanctuary. Her father
was left alone-pitifully alone; and within six years he
was dead. Probably he broke his heart. He was a man
of iron; a man of flame; undaunted, unselfish, completely
reliable and trustworthy. What might God do today if
His servants were men and women of this calibre?

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