

Judges 11: JEPHTHAH and his DAUGHTER

Part One

Judges chapters 11-12 tells us the story of an Israelite names Jephthah, who won great victories over other nations. In his pleas with the Lord for victory he covenanted to offer as a sacrifice that which was first out the door of his home to greet his return. The first out the door was his daughter.

The Christian world understands this passage to say that he offered her as a human sacrifice as one would have offered a sheep or other burnt offering. I have never felt this to be a correct interpretation, especially in light of Leviticus 27, which gives instructions on dedicating a person to the service of the Lord.

Let's visit my fictional Primary teacher from an upcoming series of childrens' stories I am readying for publication. The old, white-haired teacher, a Brother Smith, is teaching the children the Old Testament and have come to this story. Let's see what light Brother Smith can shed on this story:

Translating Jephthah's Sacrifice Correctly

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“There is nothing more deceptive than an obvious fact. . . .
The truth is in the details.”
(Sherlock Holmes)

When Brother Smith arrived for church, he was wearing one of those weird Sherlock Holmes hats¹ – a brim in the front to shade your eyes and a brim on the back to keep the rain from going down the back of your shirt. And it had ear flaps that tied open on the top. He took it off and pushed it down through the slit in the canvas top of his wagon as he parked it in the foyer and entered the chapel for Sacrament Meeting, but several of us had seen the hat, and we were guessing Primary was going to involve a mystery and a certain amount of detective work.

“We have a mystery to solve,” Brother Smith explained as soon as we'd entered the Cultural Hall and walked alongside the huge Old Testament timeline, reciting all the names as we always did. “Sometimes the truth is in the details, and this story has some details in need of discovering.”

¹ Properly called a Deerstalker hat, Mister Holmes never actually wore one until artists and movie makers chose it for him, and it has been a trademark of the famous character ever since.

“What story?” Michelle asked.

“The story of Jephthah and his daughter.” Brother Smith had reached inside the wagon cover and had pulled out his detective hat.

“Who's he?” asked Yoshii as we all took our seats.

“He was a man of Gilead,” and he had the hat back on his head.

“Where's that?”

“Map ten in your Bibles,”² the teacher replied. “See, on the east side of the Jordan River? It's labeled Gilead. Map three shows it was in the tribal lands of Gad and Manasseh.

“Jephthah was a righteous man whose brothers had thrown him out of the house. He had a different mother than his brothers, and they hated him. He moved into an area called Tob – and no silly animal sounds!”

But we were already saying 'T-o-o-o-b' as if we were sheep. It was just too fun.

“He gathered other outcasts like himself and built a small army to defend those who needed defending. And one day the Ammonites decided to make war against Israel for land they lost to Joshua two-hundred years before. They were attacking Gilead, and can you guess who came to Jephthah for help?”

“His brothers who threw him out?” asked David.

“The Bible says the elders of the people came, but listen to Jephthah's reply: 'Did not ye hate me, and expel me out of my father's house? and why are ye come unto me now when ye are in distress?’”³

“So his brothers were the leaders?” asked Sue.

“The scriptures sound like it,” and Brother Smith nodded. “Jephthah made them vow that if he won the battle for them they would make him their leader.”

“Did they?” asked Daniel.

“They vowed to do so right there on the spot, and they did it again at Mizpah – a hill overlooking where the battle would probably begin.”⁴

“So being a vow, they had to do it, right?” asked Jared.

Brother Smith nodded. “It was a promise they made publicly and before the Lord.” He paused. “After exchanging letters with the king of the Ammonites, and realizing there was no way to prevent war, Jephthah turned to the Lord in prayer and made a vow of his own:

If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine 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.”⁵

“That's awful!” exclaimed Jenny. “The Lord couldn't hold him to that!”

“And so,” whispered Brother Smith, “the game is afoot.”

“Huh?” we all said at once.

² All map and picture references are to those bound with the LDS Edition of the King James Bible since 1999.

³ Judges 11:7

⁴ F. N. Peloubet, Peloubet's Bible Dictionary (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing house, 1947) pg 414

⁵ Judges 11:30-31

“That's how we detectives say that it's time to find the clues that tell us the truth.” With that, the teacher looked down at his wagon. “Mister Brutus? The packages from Shelf Twelve!”

We all heard a growl from the wagon, and a clawed paw pushed a box too big to fit in the little red wagon out through the canvas top.

“It's not a bug, is it?” asked Michelle jumping behind her chair. She hates bugs, and yet she lives on a farm.

Brother Smith opened the box and pulled out eight Sherlock Holmes hats and passed them out – and everyone's hat fit perfectly! How'd he do that? Mister Brutus pushed another box up to the teacher, and Brother Smith passed a magnifying glass to each of us, keeping a large one with little LED lights for himself.

“Jephthah led an army that defeated the Ammonites,” Brother Smith explained. “The Spirit of the Lord was with him and fought for him, and he defeated twenty cities.” He paused again. “And when he returned in victory, his daughter and only child was the first out of the house to greet him with a hero's greeting.”

“But he can't!” exclaimed Yoshii . . . while I exclaimed: “The Lord didn't allow human sacrifice!”

“Clues! Clues!” our teacher called out. “Give me details to support what you're telling me!”

We'd been in Primary long enough to know that when a grown-up said *clues* we knew there was going to be pieces of paper taped to the walls where even little kids could see them, so we all turned this way and that, but none of us could see anything taped to the walls. We all turned back to our teacher, and we saw him holding up his magnifying glass, his face looking huge in it, and he was smiling like he knew a secret. We all held up our magnifying glasses and looked through them. Hey! There were clues taped on the walls! Eight of them! Naturally, we all took off running.

“No stepping on the timeline!” shouted our teacher. “It's older than your parents!”

I came to a stop and turned to face the teacher. “It is?” I asked.

Brother Smith smiled. “I used it to teach your *grandmother*.”

By the time I was done being shocked, there was only one clue left hanging on the wall, and I had to walk very carefully around the timeline to get it.

“Who has Number One?” Brother Smith asked, and I held up my clue as I reached the rest of the class, who was gathered around a small table the teacher had pulled up to himself.

“Read it to us,” the teacher said.

I held my clue up, but it was blank! No writing! I looked up, surprised, and saw the entire class looking at me through their magnifying glasses. I pulled mine up, and words appeared on my clue:

1. Jephthah had great faith in the Lord, even when his brothers threw him out.
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“Yes,” said the teacher. “The Apostle Paul even included him in a list of those who did great things because of their faith.⁶ Not the sort of man to be sacrificing little girls on altars, was

⁶ Hebrews 11:32 (using the Greek spelling of his name)

he?”

“No!” we all shouted.

“Who has Number Two?”

“Wait,” I asked. “Why can we only see the clues through the glass?”

“The Lord has given us something to learn through and to find truths that might otherwise be hidden.” We all nodded. “And what's it called?”

“The Holy Spirit,” I answered.

“Very good. Don't *ever* forget that. Now, Number Two?”

“Me!” shouted David:

2. The Spirit of the Lord was with Jephthah. Would this have happened if he was the sort who would have committed human sacrifice?”

“No!” we all shouted in answer to the question.

“Number Three,” the teacher called out.

Daniel read:

3. The Lord would not honor an unrighteous vow.

“Does that mean He understands when a vow is wrong?” asked David after he'd read his clue.

“Yes!” we all shouted for the fun of shouting, and I was hoping it was the right answer.

“Exactly,” nodded Brother Smith. “And He does *not* honor an unrighteous vow. Under the Law of Moses a man can nullify a vow made by his wife or daughter⁷ – certainly the Lord could nullify one as well.” Our teacher paused. “Number Four?”

Jared waved his clue in front of us and then read it:

4. The Lord would *not* have accepted a sacrifice unless it was done as He commanded.

“Yes!” we all shouted. It was a good day for shouting in the Cultural Hall.

“And sacrificing humans was *not* a sacrifice the Lord had commanded,” Brother Smith stated. “Number Five?”

Jenny smiled and read:

5. The Lord would have understood Jephthah's intent, even if the words were unclear.

“Yes!” we shouted even louder.

“Well, Junior Detectives,” Brother Smith began, “who votes that the King James translation, as precious and wonderful as it is, might have missed the mark with this story?”

⁷ Numbers 30:1-16

“Me!” we all screamed as every hand went up.

“Who thinks we should look for a better translation?”

“Me!” we all screamed again. Primary kids are good at screaming; I don't know if you know that.

Brother Smith carefully laid out some cards on the table in front of him. “One Latter-day Saint scholar taught that three of the words in this story have been translated in several different ways in the King James Bible. After the phrase 'whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me . . . shall surely be the LORD's,' let's figure out that last part from all the translation choices:⁸

AND		OFFER		OFFERING
ALSO		GIVE		GIFT
BUT	I WILL	DEDICATE	IT AS AN	ASCENT
THEREFORE		RAISE		LIFTING
THEN		LIFT		SACRIFICE
OR		CARRY		

“It could have said a lot of things different than how it's in the Bible,” Jenny observed.

“Yes. And while you're looking at these,” the teacher continued, “let's look at how someone else translated this phrase about sacrificing the poor girl,” suggested the teacher as he laid another paper on the table:

<p>“I will consecrate it to the Lord, <i>or</i> I will offer it for a burnt-offering”, or, “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.”⁹</p>
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“This seem truer to me,” I mumbled.

“When Jephthah's daughter understood the vow her father had made, she asked only that she have two months in the mountains with her friends to 'bemoan my virginity.’”¹⁰

“What does that mean?” I asked.

“In ancient Israel it was a shame to be childless, and she knew that, because of her father's vow, she would live without being married and having children.” He paused. “Note that I said she knew she would *live*.” He paused but we stayed silent, listening. “She returned after those two months, and her father offered her as his vow required, and she remained without a husband or children.”¹¹

“Hey!” exclaimed Michelle. “That's what my clue says!”

⁸ Victor L. Ludlow, 'Unlocking the Old Testament' (Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981) pg 69

⁹ Read Adam Clarke's Bible Commentary at <http://www.godrules.net/library/clarke/clarkejud11.htm> .

¹⁰ Judges 11:37-38

¹¹ Judges 11:38-39

“You better read it, then,” smiled the teacher.
Michelle lifted her magnifying glass and read:

6. She mourned over not having children; *not* over dying.

Sue cleared her throat and read:

7. She had no husband or child – *after* the sacrifice.
This means she *lived* after the sacrifice.

“Mine's last,” said Yoshii, holding his clue up. The teacher nodded, so he read it aloud while looking through his magnifying glass:

8. A Burnt Offering is something that shows a person is committed to the Lord.
The phrase could simply mean that the offering of his daughter showed he was committed to the Lord.

Yoshii paused and then asked: “So what *did* she do?”

“She was *consecrated* or *dedicated* by vow into the service of the Lord, to sacrifice the rest of her life in His service. The Law of Moses outlines the consecrating of someone to the Lord's service.¹² She might have become a nurse or midwife. She might have worked with orphaned children. She might have become a servant in the house of the high priest or some other priest. As you can see, the scriptures don't specify.”

“She honored her father by honoring his vow,” Jenny realized.

“That was love,” said Brother Smith as tenderly as a grandfather. “Now, what did Jesus say about making vows?” None of us knew. “Let's read.”

Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.¹³

But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.¹⁴

¹² Leviticus chapter 27 is the process of making a vow that consecrates a person, and animal, or even land to the service of the LORD.

¹³ Matthew 5:33-37

¹⁴ James 5:12

“I think,” I said, looking at the teacher, “I’ll just stick with the covenants God gave and leave vow-making to others.”

“That sounds very smart,” Brother Smith said, smiling.

Part Two

Let's read what's been written by people smarter than me:

Although a social outcast, Jephthah was recognized for his leadership abilities. As he confronted the Ammonites, he reviewed the biblical history of how the Israelites had conquered the Transjordan area from the Amorites, thus disproving the Ammonite claims to the land. The Ammonites still desired to control that area, and Jephthah gathered an Israelite army to repel the invasion. Before going into battle with the Spirit of the Lord upon him, Jephthah vowed that if he returned victorious he would dedicate to the Lord whatever came first out of his house to meet him. Then he added, "and I will offer it up for a burnt offering" (11:31). This promise and its fulfillment have disturbed Bible readers and confused Bible scholars for centuries.

When Jephthah returned victorious, his only child, a daughter, came out to meet him. He told her of his promise and she was willing to abide by it. She asked for a two-month period of fellowship and mourning with her friends. Then she returned to her father "who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man" (11:39).

Scholars agree that she was dedicated to the Lord and that she left Jephthah's home. They disagree as to whether her dedication to the Lord comprised a lifetime of religious service (probably at the tabernacle) without the opportunity of raising a family (like being a fulltime,

lifelong welfare or proselyting missionary), or the taking of her life as a burnt offering or human sacrifice.

Joseph Smith apparently did not question the Lord about this dilemma, because he made no changes in the text of his inspired translation. The story as contained in the original Hebrew is, however, ambiguous as to how the vow was to be fulfilled. The phrase "and I will offer it up for a burnt offering" (11:31) could be translated a number of ways: "and / also / but / therefore / then / or I will offer / give / rise / lift / carry it as an offering / gift / ascent / lifting / sacrifice." It is perhaps significant that the fulfillment of this vow as recorded in verse 39 concludes with the phrase "and she knew no man." This phrase could be another way of saying "she died childless (as she was sacrificed as a burnt offering)." But it seems to mean that "she did not marry and raise a family (as she served the Lord the rest of her natural life)."

With the limited material available, and lacking revealed commentary, the answer to this dilemma is left to the individual reader. Regardless of what type of sacrifice Jephthah's daughter became, there are some positive objectives to be derived from this story:

1. Be precise and sincere when you enter any covenants with the Lord.
2. Be willing to give what is most precious to

the Lord.

3. Children will be blessed eternally if they will honor and obey their parents in righteousness.

4. Absolutely fulfill any vow you make with

the Lord.

(Victor L. Ludlow, *Unlocking the Old Testament* [Salt Lake City: Deseret Book Co., 1981], 69.)

In his BIBLE HISTORY: OLD TESTAMENT, Alfred Edersheim gives great insight to this event:

We are now approaching what to many will appear the most difficult part in the history of Jephthah - perhaps among the most difficult narratives in the Bible. It appears that, before actually going to war, Jephthah solemnly registered this vow: "If thou indeed givest the children of Ammon into mine hand - and it shall be, the outcoming (one), that shall come out from the door of my house to meet me on my returning in peace from the children of Ammon, shall be to Jehovah, and I will offer that a burnt offering." We know that the vow was paid. The defeat of the Ammonites was thorough and crushing. But on Jephthah's return to his house the first to welcome him was his only daughter - his only child - who at the head of the maidens came to greet the victor. There is a terrible irony about those "timbrels and dances," with which Jephthah's daughter went, as it were, to celebrate her own funeral obsequies, while the fond father's heart was well-nigh breaking. But the noble maiden was the first to urge his observance of the vow unto Jehovah. Only two months did she ask to bewail her maidenhood with her companions upon the mountains. But ever after was it a custom for the maidens in Israel to go out every year for four days, "to praise the daughter of Jephthah."

Such is the story; but what is its meaning? What did Jephthah really intend by the language of his vow; and did he feel himself

bound by it in the literal sense to offer up his daughter as a burnt sacrifice? Assuredly, we shall make no attempt either to explain away the facts of the case, or to disguise the importance of the questions at issue. At the outset we are here met by these two facts: that up to that period Jephthah had both acted and spoken as a true worshipper of Jehovah, and that his name stands emblazoned in that roll of the heroes of the faith which is handed down to us in the Epistle to the Hebrews (11:32). But it is well-nigh impossible to believe that a true worshipper of Jehovah could have either vowed or actually offered a human sacrifice - not to speak of the sacrifice being that of his own and only child. Such sacrifices were the most abhorrent and opposed to the whole spirit and letter of the Law of God (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5; Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:10), nor do we find any mention of them till the reigns of the wicked Ahaz and Manasseh. Not even Jezebel had ventured to introduce them; and we know what thrill of horror ran through the onlookers, when the heathen king of Moab offered his son an expiatory sacrifice on the walls of his capital (2 Kings 3:26 etc.). But the difficulty becomes well-nigh insuperable, when we find the name of Jephthah recorded in the New Testament among the heroes of the faith. Surely, no one guilty of such a crime could have found a place there! Still, these are considerations which, though most important,

are outside the narrative itself, and in any truthful investigation the latter should, in the first place, be studied by itself.

In so doing we must dismiss, as irrelevant and untruthful, such pleas as the roughness of those times, the imperfectness of religious development, or that of religious ignorance on the part of the outlaw Jephthah, who had spent most of his life far from Israel. The Scripture sketch of Jephthah leaves, indeed, on the mind the impression of a genuine, wild, and daring Gilead mountaineer - a sort of warrior-Elijah. But, on the other hand, he acts and speaks throughout as a true worshipper of Jehovah. And his vow, which in the Old Testament always expresses the highest religious feeling (Genesis 28:20; 1 Samuel 1:11; Psalm 116:14; Isaiah 19:21), is so sacred because it is made to Jehovah. Again, in his embassy to the king of Ammon, Jephthah displays the most intimate acquaintance with the Pentateuch, his language being repeatedly almost a literal quotation from Numbers 20. He who knew so well the details of Scripture history could not have been ignorant of its fundamental principles. Having thus cleared the way, we observe:

1. That the language of Jephthah's vow implied, from the first, at least the possibility of some human being coming out from the door of his house, to meet him on his return. The original conveys this, and the evident probabilities of the case were strongly in favor of such an eventuality. Indeed, Jephthah's language seems to have been designedly chosen in such general terms as to cover all cases. But it is impossible to suppose that Jephthah would have deliberately made a vow in which he contemplated human sacrifice; still more so, that Jehovah would have connected victory and deliverance with such a horrible crime.

2. In another particular, also, the language of Jephthah's vow is remarkable. It is, that "the

outcoming (whether man or beast) shall be to Jehovah, and I will offer that a burnt-offering." The great Jewish commentators of the Middle Ages have, in opposition to the Talmud, pointed out that these two last clauses are not identical. It is never said of an animal burnt-offering, that it "shall be to Jehovah" - for the simple reason that, as a burnt-offering, it is such. But where human beings are offered to Jehovah, there the expression is used, as in the case of the first-born among Israel and of Levi (Numbers 3:12, 13). But in these cases it has never been suggested that there was actual human sacrifice.

3. It was a principle of the Mosaic law, that burnt sacrifices were to be exclusively males (Leviticus 1:3).

4. If the loving daughter had devoted herself to death, it is next to incredible that she should have wished to spend the two months of life conceded to her, not with her broken-hearted father, but in the mountains with her companions.

5. She bewails not her "maiden age," but her "maidenhood" - not that she dies so young, but that she is to die unmarried. The Hebrew expression for the former would have been quite different from that used in Scripture, which only signifies the latter. But for an only child to die unmarried, and so to leave a light and name extinguished in Israel, was indeed a bitter and heavy judgment, viewed in the light of pre-Messianic times. Compare in this respect especially such passages as Leviticus 20:20 and Psalm 78:63. The trial appears all the more withering when we realize, how it must have come upon Jephthah and his only child in the hour of their highest glory, when all earthly prosperity seemed at their command. The greatest and happiest man in Israel becomes in a moment the poorest and the most stricken. Surely, in this vow and sacrifice

was the lesson of vows and sacrifices taught to victorious Israel in a manner the most solemn.

6. It is very significant that in 11:39 it is only said, that Jephthah "did with her according to his vow" - not that he actually offered her in sacrifice, while in the latter case the added clause, "and she knew no man," would be utterly needless and unmeaning. Lastly, we may ask, Who would have been the priest by whom, and where the altar on which, such a sacrifice could have been offered unto Jehovah?

On all these grounds - its utter contrariety to the whole Old Testament, the known piety of Jephthah, the blessing following upon his vow, his mention in the Epistle to the Hebrews, but especially the language of the

narrative itself - we feel bound to reject the idea of any human sacrifice. In what special manner, besides remaining unmarried, 11 the vow of her dedication to God was carried out, we do not feel bound to suggest. Here the principle, long ago expressed by Clericus, holds true: "We are not to imagine that, in so small a volume as the Old Testament, all the customs of the Hebrews are recorded, or the full history of all that had taken place among them. Hence there are necessarily allusions to many things which cannot be fully followed out, because there is no mention of them elsewhere." (BIBLE HISTORY: OLD TESTAMENT, Alfred Edersheim (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson Publications, 1995) Book 3 Chapter 18 pgs 377-379)

Edersheim points out several significant things. One, he quotes verse 31 differently than in the King James Versions, leaning on his own Hebrew background: "If thou indeed givest the children of Ammon into mine hand — and it shall be, the outcoming (one), that shall come out from the door of my house to meet me on my returning in peace from the children of Ammon, shall be to Jehovah, and I will offer that a burnt offering." This translation clearly show that whomever came out of the door first would be given, or dedicated, to the Lord, AND he would offer a burnt offering - the father actually covenanted to do two separate things; not one as rendered in the King James Versions two separate events.

Second, he points out the King James mistranslation of the mistranslation of the custom for the maidens in Israel to go out every year for four days, "lament" the daughter of Jephthah - he points out that a correct rendering is that they went out "to praise the daughter of Jephthah." Surely a daughter who was obedient to her father's vow and lived a life in service - perhaps at the tabernacle or in some other endeavor - would have been worthy of such praise!

Now, let's read from the LDS Institute of Religion Manual:

(22-28) Judges 11:29–40. How Did Jephthah Offer His Daughter As a Sacrifice?

Many have supposed that Jephthah offered his daughter as a human sacrifice, and a literal reading of the text may support that view. But if that is true, some difficult ques-

tions are raised. Jephthah was regarded as a great hero and deliverer of Israel, and even his sacrifice of his daughter is treated in a way that suggests the author of Judges viewed it as a commendable act. In Hebrews 11:32–35 Jephthah is used as one of the examples of great faith. Would this case be true if he had engaged

in human sacrifice, an act viewed as one of the greatest of abominations in ancient Israel? Why does Jephthah's daughter "bewail her virginity" (Judges 11:37) rather than mourn the approaching loss of her life? After Jephthah had fulfilled his vow of sacrificing his daughter, the text states that "she knew no man" (v. 39). Bible scholars have suggested an explanation that adequately answers these questions.

"Jephthah was compelled by his vow to dedicate his daughter to Jehovah in a lifelong virginity. . . . The entreaty of the daughter, that he would grant her two months' time, in order that she might lament her virginity upon the mountains with her friends, would have been marvellously out of keeping with the account that she was to be put to death as a sacrifice. To mourn one's virginity does not mean to mourn because one has to die a virgin, but because one has to live and remain a virgin. But even if we were to assume that mourning her virginity was equivalent to mourning on account of her youth. . . . 'it would be impossible to understand why this should take place upon the mountains. It would be altogether opposed to human nature, that a child who had so soon to die should make use of a temporary respite to forsake her father altogether. It would no doubt be a reasonable thing that she should ask permission to enjoy life for two months longer before she was put to death; but that she should only think of bewailing her virginity, when a sacrificial death was in prospect, which would rob her father of his only child, would be contrary to all the ordinary feelings of the human heart. Yet, inasmuch as the history lays special emphasis upon her bewailing her virginity, this must have stood in some peculiar relation to the nature of the vow. . . .' (P. Cassel, p. 473). And this is confirmed by the expression, to bewail her virginity 'upon the mountains.' 'If life had been in question, the same tears might have

been shed at home. But her lamentations were devoted to her virginity, and such lamentations could not be uttered in the town, and in the presence of men. Modesty required the solitude of the mountains for these. . . .' (P. Cassel, p. 476). And so, again, the still further clause in the account of the fulfilment of the vow, 'and she knew no man,' is not in harmony with the assumption of a sacrificial death. This clause would add nothing to the description in that case, since it was already known that she was a virgin. The words only gain their proper sense if we connect them with the previous clause, he 'did with her according to the vow which he had vowed,' and understand them as describing what the daughter did in fulfilment of the vow. The father fulfilled his vow upon her, and she knew no man; i.e. he fulfilled the vow through the fact that she knew no man, but dedicated her life to the Lord, as a spiritual burnt-offering, in a lifelong chastity. . . . And the idea of a spiritual sacrifice is supported not only by the words, but also most decisively by the fact that the historian describes the fulfilment of the vow in the words 'he did to her according to his vow,' in such a manner as to lead to the conclusion that he regarded the act itself as laudable and good. But a prophetic historian could never have approved of a human sacrifice." (Keil and Delitzsch, Commentary, 2:1:392-93.)

Compare the wording of Jephthah's vow (see vv. 30-31) to Hannah's vow (see 1 Samuel 1:11).

(Old Testament Student Manual: Genesis – 2 Samuel [Salt Lake City, UT: Church of Jesus Christ of Latter-day Saints, 2003] pgs 256-257 . . . this is the official LDS Institute of Religion manual, carrying the approval of the First Presidency of the Church. It is available to read online at <https://www.lds.org/manual/old-testament-student-manual-genesis-2-samuel?lang=eng> .