

Judges 08-05-30b

Let's resume our study now in the book of Judges. We're looking at Jephthah and we are at the point where he is about to engage in battle with the Ammonites and he has decided to make a vow. Dan brought up a good point at the end of the first lesson.

If you look at verse 29 and it says, Now the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah. What is the result of that event? Why does the Spirit come upon Jephthah? He's not in battle yet. It apparently is still several days away.

This is a large country. He's not yet made the vow. We talked about the fact that the presence of the Spirit does not prevent him from making what I think most would concede is a rash vow.

So what is the purpose of the Spirit coming upon Jephthah at this point? What does it accomplish? The Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah so that he passed through Gilead and Manasseh and passed through Mizpah of Gilead and from Mizpah of Gilead he went on to the sons of Ammon. When the Spirit of the Lord comes upon Jephthah, it causes him to pass through the land and as he passes through, obviously he is gathering troops. He is amassing his forces to go down and engage the Ammonites.

This isn't just a sightseeing trip. He's not stopping to smell the flowers along the way, so to speak. He's on a mission.

And evidently the implication here is that when the Spirit of God came upon him, he galvanizes the men of the region, the men of Gilead. He suddenly is a charismatic and compelling leader. And despite his history, despite his origins, despite his previous reputation, when he passes through the land and people see him and hear him speak, the presence of the Spirit of the Lord causes them to be motivated to follow him and to serve in this armed conflict, which is going to be God's way of delivering Israel from this Ammonite oppression.

So there is a very specific ministry of the Spirit in making Jephthah into the kind of leader that men want to follow. And it reminds me of what Jesus told the disciples. He said, you don't have to worry about what you're going to say or what you're going to do in the days that lie ahead.

When you are going to be witnesses unto me, when Jesus had departed the area and the disciples are now his representatives and are the ones who will foretell the gospel, Jesus said, do not worry in that day about what you will say or what you will do. God, the Holy Spirit, will lead you into the truth. He will be with you.

It will be given to you in that hour what you should say. And it is going to be a word fitly spoken, like apples of gold and pictures of silver. It is going to be the right thing at the right time.

And there is a great application in that for us. If we concentrate on being who we should be, if

we are a fit dwelling place for God's Holy Spirit, we will be thoroughly equipped for every good work because he will take the word of God that is resident in our souls and that will condition our thinking, that will guide our perceptions, that will inform our decision-making process, will help us establish our priorities and pursue our goals and maintain our values and enable us to function with integrity and with character. And if we need charisma, God will give us charisma.

If we need a compelling personal presence, God will grant it. If we need insight and wisdom, it will be available to us. God, the Holy Spirit, makes us better than ourselves.

The carnal mind cannot understand the things of the Spirit because they are spiritually discerned. We have the Spirit of God. It is available to us.

And what is required is willingness, readiness to receive that ministry and to live in the light of it. It is not a fail-safe, it is not a proof, it is not a guarantee that we are going to do the right thing, but it is an opportunity afforded to us to partake of God's power, to partake of God's grace, to implement God's plan and purpose in the light of his word through that enabling. Here is a principle, and it is not unique to me.

I was taught this as a young man, and I have seen the truth of it through the pages of Scripture and throughout my life. The plan of God is never accomplished in human strength. God's plan is accomplished by God's grace, in God's power, through God's provision, lest any man should boast.

The plan of God is never going to require us to implement our own inherent strength, our fleshly abilities on our own. God provides everything we need to fulfill his plan. It is all of grace.

Now think about it. That is a nice little abstract thing to say, but think about it. As we move from day to day, from hour to hour, and from circumstance to circumstance, challenge to challenge, sometimes we think, well, here is a task, and I need to get this thing done.

I am a computer guy. I do computer things, and I am reasonably good at it. I have a lot of experience.

I have a lot of knowledge. I can generally at least think of a way to start tackling a problem and fix something that is going wrong, or implement something that needs to be done on a computer. That is my area of expertise.

So can't I just do that and fulfill the plan and purpose of God? The answer is no. It is not by might. It is not by power.

God says it is by his Spirit that meaningful things are accomplished. Now, I might fix a computer, and I might do it all by myself. I might be having a completely bad attitude.

I might be thinking evil thoughts. I might be out of the will of God, out of the plan of God, completely separate and distinct from anything related to the Spirit or the Word of God. Then I

can still fix a computer.

And I say, look, I did that. It is fixed. It works.

Maybe this is a computer that belongs to a ministry. Maybe it is a computer that belongs to a believer who needs it, or whatever. We have to think beyond the immediate and beyond the short term.

God raised up Pharaoh in Egypt to reflect his glory and accomplish his purpose. Pharaoh became the means by which God executed judgment on the nation of Egypt for enslaving the Israelites and abusing them, and killing their firstborn male children, and so on. That doesn't mean that what Pharaoh did was right, or that it was God glorifying, or that it was anything other than a manifestation of the hardness and rebellion of his own heart.

God can incorporate human failure, human sin, human weakness, human error into his plan and still work it together for good. That is the amazing thing about God. If I was going to try to do God-like things, I would have to try to make everything as perfect as I could.

I would just get a set of people who were all positive and growing and doing good things, and I would try to just take the good and weave that and build a pyramid, so that at the top I would have a couple of really good things. God is incredibly extraordinary in that he incorporates failures and foibles and evils and sinfulness and all kinds of wicked and perverse actions on the part of men, and it doesn't stop his plan. He works all things together for good to those who love him, to those who are called according to his purpose, and I can live in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation as a tiny point of light, and God can make my life blessed and meaningful and productive, fruitful, a blessing to me and a blessing to others, not because of me, but because of him.

And in spite of whatever darkness and in spite of whatever failures of mine or anyone else's, because God is God, and if you think about it, it is a miracle to rival the creation of the earth, it is a miracle to rival the parting of the Red Sea or the quaking of the ground at Sinai or any other great physical miracle of the Bible, that on a daily basis God weaves together huge failures and arrives at good. Judas, as I said before, did one of the most heinous things that's ever been done in betraying the Lord Jesus, and yet God worked that together for good. Joseph's brothers sold him to the Ishmaelites as a slave.

God worked it together for good. It became the means of deliverance of what is going to become the nation of Israel that has existed now for three and a half thousand years, all because God worked an evil action into the perfection of his plan. It's just an amazing thing.

So here the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah and it enables him, it empowers him, it fits him for the task at hand. It doesn't necessarily say a great deal about Jephthah's natural leadership abilities that this army amasses and is ready to go fight the Ammonites in an effective and successful way, but it says a lot about the Spirit of God. Now, the fact that God is

doing a work in and through an individual doesn't mean that every part of that individual's life is golden and blessed and extraordinary.

We can be succeeding and doing really well in one area and be egregiously failing in another. David was a great king in Israel at the same time that he had some terrible personal failures as a father, as a husband, as a general for his troops. I don't think Uriah would have voted David number one on the top military commander's list after he ends up getting murdered by proxy.

And yet God didn't cease to bless the nation through David's overall kingship and administration. And here, Jephthah, even though he is doing a great thing under the ministry of the Spirit, it doesn't prevent him from making a serious mistake. And that's what happens here in verse 30.

It says, Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said. Jephthah is a man who thinks and plans. Now, I think most people would agree that this is a rash vow.

We know that he's going to promise that the first thing that comes out is going to be an olah, a whole burnt offering to the Lord. But notice, Jephthah is not in the thick of battle. He's not surrounded by Ammonites swinging a sword.

The battle is not hot against him and he's not perspiring and surrounded by bleeding and dying troops and saying, oh God, if you get me out of this mess, I'll... This is not a spur of the moment, impulsive vow. He is in the calm days before the conflict is engaged. He is perhaps in the camp, in the cool of the evening.

The campfires are burning, the troops are assembled and they're cooking their dinner and there's lots of conversation and talk about what's going to happen in the next few days when they engage the Ammonite armies. And Jephthah might have strolled out to a low hilltop and looked up at the stars and contemplating what's going to happen and anticipating what the possible outcomes could be. He's got plenty of time to think and to contemplate and to carefully phrase.

He is addressing himself to the Lord God of Israel, whom he well knows. He has already pledged a vow of fealty to the elders of Gilead and has had them affirm their promise before the Lord in Mizpah. He has affirmed that the Lord is God in Israel to the king of the Ammonites.

He knows who he's talking to. And he's not under pressure in terms of some sort of immediacy where he would say, Oh God, if you'll deliver me from this sinking ship, I promise I will do X, Y, and Z. He's not in that situation. Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, If you will indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand, then it shall be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon.

And really, when it says whatever, this is an interpretive translation. The normal translation of the Hebrew here is whoever. These verbs and this construction are used exclusively of people, never of animals.

It's the gender here. I won't go into all the details of the Hebrew. Trust me on this.

You can look it up in any of the old gray hairs. Look it up in Kylin, Dalich, or anybody else. Everybody who knows Hebrew will affirm that this grammatical construction is only ever exclusively used of human beings.

And think about it. Animals that are qualified to be an olah under the laws of Levitical offering, do they live in your house? Do you keep an ox in the bait so it can come out the dalet? No. Do you keep it in your house so it's going to come out the door to meet you? Do people have pet calves or pet sheep or pet doves, the legitimate, clean, sacrificial animals? Are they going to come out the doors of your house to greet you? Well, look, there's a lamb coming out to greet me.

I mean, it's unthinkable. Jephthah is consciously thinking of some person in his household. There is no other legitimate way to understand the grammatical construction here.

He is envisioning a person coming out the door of his house. Whether he considered the possibility that it might be his only daughter, it's impossible to say. But what I can say with great confidence is that anybody who knows Hebrew will tell you that the only proper way to understand this is he is talking about a human being.

He said, If you will indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand, then it shall be that whomever, whoever, who, this is a person, whoever comes out of the doors of my house, who dwells in an Israelite house, can you think, well, maybe he had a pet poodle, or maybe he had a pet cat, maybe he had a tame rabbit. No, these weren't even clean animals. Do you think Israelites kept dogs in their houses? The answer is no.

They didn't have house dogs in Israel. The dogs were outside eating scraps. They were semi-wild, semi-domestic.

There's no record of anybody having a collie, or a German shepherd, or a Great Dane, or any such thing in Israel. Dog is a term of derision. Not so much today.

Remember what Goliath says a few years after this? Am I a dog? It was a term of derision. Israelites didn't keep dogs. And as I think I mentioned a week or two ago, you know that even today, if you're out on the trails, if you do have a pet dog, or you're walking in the neighborhood, be careful, because dogs are still considered to have that same standing, and that same status in Islam.

And no practicing Muslim will have a pet dog. The Koran forbids them to touch a dog. And you want to be careful.

If you're walking your animal, and you're passing somebody who appears to be of that particular persuasion, be courteous. Get your dog on the far side of the path, and don't force them off the road, because they continue to practice what has been an ancient, long-standing

prejudice against dogs. And Mohammed and his faqtotai, his writers, his prophets, the imams, the guys that came after him that wrote up the Koran, you know, Mohammed didn't write the Koran.

His followers. Kind of like people say, well, Jesus didn't write the New Testament. His disciples did.

Mohammed didn't write any part of the Koran. His generals and his associates wrote it after he was long gone. He was busy hacking up the infidels.

He didn't have time to write anything. But suffice it to say, the Koran preserves this ancient prejudice against dogs. So, what's my point? Jephthah's not expecting Rover to come bounding out of the house and saying, well, I'm going to tie Rover up to the altar.

I mean, it would be unthinkable to offer a dog to God. The only animals qualified to be an olah are given in Leviticus, and you know what they are. We've studied Levitical offerings.

You know the qualified animals. Oxen, sheep, goats, birds. That's pretty much it.

So, when he says, whoever comes out the doors of my house, he's not expecting an animal. He is probably expecting a trusted servant. In the same way that Abraham had a trusted servant that he dispatches to go find a wife for his son Isaac.

In the same way that you find trusted servants. Joseph was a trusted servant in the house of Potiphar. And you would expect that somebody who's in charge of the house might emerge.

And if I had to speculate, I would think that Jephthah is probably envisioning one of his senior trusted servants, his house manager or someone would be coming out. I really don't think he anticipated his daughter based on his reaction when she is in fact the first one to come out. It's something he apparently hadn't thought of.

Maybe it wasn't her custom. Maybe she was kind of ashamed of her dad for being a fugitive and a vagabond and a kind of a rascal and a rake and a robber and a man of ill repute, so to speak. And she didn't typically come out and greet him when he came back from a successful robbing excursion.

And he had taken everything from a caravan or something. She probably thought, Oh, Dad. She didn't want to see him.

So, he just didn't expect this. When's the last time Jephthah was a successful national hero? Well, never. When's the last time he was a legitimate victor in a pitched battle? Never.

He's always been a maneuverer, kind of a pirate. So, there's never been an occasion like this and he just didn't anticipate it. So, I would suggest that he's probably expecting a trusted servant.

Now, the next question is, What sort of Olah are we talking about here? Because Olah, as you well know from our study in Leviticus, means whole burnt offering. The Olah is always and ever in the law of Moses a whole burnt offering. Well, what are we to make of this? We've established, first of all, that it is highly probable that Jephthah has a human being in mind here.

I see no other way to take this that makes any sense at all. Now, secondly, Jephthah is facing one of the biggest challenges, probably the biggest challenge of his entire life. What kind of sense would it make for him to say, Well, I'll sacrifice a sheep or an ox or a goat if I win this battle.

If you make a vow, because you want God on your side, this would have to be a pretty big deal, right? Anybody who was victorious after battle would typically sacrifice to God. That was a commonplace. What's God got to gain? What does the vow have to do with anything? It was a commonplace.

It was a tradition in Israel that after a victory, they would celebrate and offer sacrifices in praise. So why would Jephthah say, Well, I'll do what is customarily done if I win the... That isn't going to convince God of anything. This had to have been an extraordinary offer, an extraordinary pledge.

And with a human being in mind, what would the nature of it be? Well, we have two choices. It's either I'm going to burn somebody as an olah, or the other common view is, I will dedicate this person wholly to your service in the line of what Hannah does with her son Samuel. And you'll remember the vow.

I reviewed it in the first lesson tonight in 1 Samuel 1. I think it's verse 11. Hannah vows a vow. She says, Lord, if you will give me a son, I will dedicate him entirely to your service.

He will be a Nazirite. No razor will ever touch the hair of his head. And she makes a vow like unto this that essentially dedicates someone else's life to God's service.

It's kind of an interesting way to do a vow. I mean, think about it. What if Jephthah said, Lord, if you will give me this victory over the Ammonites, I will make myself an olah.

I will dedicate myself to your service for the rest of my life. Now, that to me would be an impressive vow. It seems to me a little bit cheesy to say, well, you give me the victory, I'll dedicate that guy as either a burnt offering or a pledged servant for the rest of his life.

I mean, you just think, well, you have to kind of scratch your head and think, well, how bad do you really want this? I mean, obviously it's not so much self-sacrificial as I'll sacrifice this other guy. It's kind of like Patton telling his troops, I'd much prefer that instead of you dying for your country, you make the other opposing soldier die for his country, shall we say. Anyway, he says, If you will indeed give the sons of Ammon into my hand, it shall be whatever comes out of the door of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the sons of Ammon, it shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it up as an olah.

I will olah it, I will olah it as an olah. I will offer it as an offering. Now, keep in mind here that we're establishing a chain of logic.

Olah always means whole burnt offering in Leviticus. However, comma, olah is always applied to animals in Leviticus. We have no previous example of the word olah applied to a person.

What we do have is a lot of explicit language in the law prohibiting human sacrifice, right? We have a clear prohibition, first of all, against murder. We have the explicit prohibition. Remember, even the Canaanites at this time do not engage in human sacrifice.

We have no evidence of human sacrifice. Chemosh worshippers, Dagon worshippers, Ashtar, Baal, El in Canaan, both in scripture, in extra-biblical histories, and in the archaeological record, we find virtually no evidence of human sacrifice. Human sacrifice does not really enter in and become an issue in this region until much, much later, down in the 700s B.C., well after the time of David and Solomon in the divided kingdom, when you get down to the time of Ahaz.

And remember, there's an episode in Kings where they're going and attacking and they get to the gates of the city and the Moabite king sacrifices his son up on the city wall, and it so shocks and disgusts the Israelite troops that they turn around and go home. Even 400 years after this time, that the idea of human sacrifice is so heinous and so disgusting, even in the depraved and degenerate days of Ahaz, that it is shocking enough to turn an army around and send them home, shaking their heads. So how likely is it that a man on whom God has put his spirit, and before this battle, he has pledged himself twice before God and mentioned God, is going to suggest that in order to win God's favor, he's going to do a human sacrifice? Very unlikely.

If he knows the law well enough to rehearse all of this history of Ammon and Moab and Sihon and Og king of Bashan and everything else, how likely is it that he doesn't know that God is going to be deeply offended by a human sacrifice? I think the only possible understanding of this is that Ola, when it is used specifically in reference to a human being, does not refer to whole burnt offering. How can you fully dedicate an animal to God? Well, you send it to him in the smoke, in the sweet savor aroma of a whole burnt offering. You can't use a sheep to serve God in the tabernacle or in the temple.

There is no plowing or hauling of any significance that needs to be done in the temple precincts that you could dedicate a bullock to living service before God. Animals serve God in the whole sense by becoming an Ola. Human beings serve God in the whole sense in a far different way.

It makes no sense to take a human being who is created in the image of God and after his likeness and God's plan and purpose is to restore him to the fullness of that model. It makes no sense to incinerate a human being. You think about Romans 12, 1 and 2. Present yourselves essentially as an Ola.

Present yourself a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God. This is reasonable service. God expects reasonable service.

I think Jephthah understands that this is a God of reasonableness. The other thing that would be very interesting is if you take the other tack and say this is a whole burnt offering thing, the last time such a thing was even contemplated is Abraham on Mount Moriah. Remember? Who suggested that? Who mandated that? Did Abraham say, Lord, if you will make of me a great nation and cause all the nations of the earth to be blessed for me, I will sacrifice the first son to come forth for my loins or for my wife's womb or whatever.

Did Abraham think that up? God put Abraham to the test and God refused to accept a human sacrifice. He stops that action and says, look in the thicket. God stayed Abraham's hand and he said that's the attitude of total dedication that I was looking for.

And God substitutes the ram for Isaac. Why would God not stay Jephthah's hand if he is about to sacrifice his daughter here? You would think that if this is pleasing in God's sight, if Jephthah is genuinely pleasing God through the fulfillment of his vow in the way that Abraham was pleasing to God and credited with righteousness. And by the way, Jephthah is mentioned with approval, with approbation twice in the later pages of Scripture.

He is mentioned once in 1 Samuel, I believe it's chapter 11, by Samuel himself as an example of faith. And he's mentioned in Hebrews chapter 11 as a hero of the faith. He is mentioned with approval, not with shock and dismay and horror.

And I hardly think that if he murdered his daughter in an act of human sacrifice, in a corruption... Remember what Antiochus Epiphanes did to desecrate the altar? Do you not think that human sacrifice of this nature would desecrate any presentation to God? Let me just offer you a couple of other quick thoughts because I want to move forward. If this was truly a burnt offering, what is the procedure in Leviticus for offering a burnt offering? Can just anybody offer the whole burnt offering? Who actually implements the whole burnt offering in Israel? Is it the offerer? It is not. Go back and read Leviticus.

The whole burnt offering is offered on behalf of the offerer by whom? By the priest. Do you seriously think a Levitical priest in Israel is going to say, well, you've got a fine-looking daughter there, truss her up, let's get this over with. And it would actually have been a Levitical priest who would have had to slay her, dismember her, and incinerate her on an altar.

It makes him complicit in this, by anybody's standard, rather heinous act. I don't think you're going to find any Levite in Israel willing to sacrifice a human being on the altar before the Lord. And Jephthah cannot do this himself under the law.

It would have had to have been a completely strange and illegal kind of sacrifice anyway. And it seems to run counter. His whole idea in fulfilling his vow is he doesn't want to displease God.

If he's a man who doesn't care about the law of God, why does he bother to keep the vow? That would be a strange thing. He realizes that he has made an oath before the Lord, and he intends to be faithful. Not everybody kept their vow.

You remember in Ecclesiastes? Solomon talks about Ecclesiastes 5, verses 1 and following. Guard your steps as you go to the house of God and draw near to listen, rather than to offer the sacrifice of fools, for they do not know they are doing evil. Do not be hasty in word or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter in the presence of God.

God is in heaven. You are on earth. Therefore, let your words be few.

A fool's voice is known by many words. This is Ecclesiastes 5, verse 4. When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it, for he has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed.

Better not to vow than to vow and not pay. Why would Solomon even bring this up, except that there were people who made vows and then recanted? They said, well, I was just kidding, or I'll do that later. It is inconsistent with the whole level of faithfulness that Jephthah seems to be exhibiting in paying his vow at any cost, and yet, at the same time, breaching the law of Moses in four or five different ways in the doing of it.

It's irreconcilably conflicting to be so dedicated to keeping his vow and yet break the law in so many ways, if that were what he was doing. It just doesn't make any sense. Jephthah is clearly a man who wants to please God by fulfilling his vow.

Why would he horrify God by human sacrifice, which is unknown in Canaan, much less in Israel at this time. Molech is the god of human sacrifice, and Molech worship has not yet become ubiquitous or even known in this area. This is going to be a few centuries later.

So, those are a few observations, and I am going to suggest and conclude and go forward on the assumption that this is a dedication. Now, because it is described as an *ola*, an *ola* is total offering, total dedication, no part remaining. The whole burnt offering, the idea of it was nothing is left.

We don't eat one of the legs. We don't keep the hide and give it to the priests. Everything goes to God.

It's all dedicated to God. It is a whole burnt offering. That's the idea of the *ola*.

And you remember the significance of it, that the offering of that bullock to God is a symbolic expression of loving the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, and with all your strength. You offer the animal in the place of yourself, but the symbolism is I dedicate myself wholly and entirely to God. But it's symbolic.

The animal takes our place in that ascension to God. So, *ola*, as applied here to Jephthah's daughter, is going to be entire dedication to God. So, Jephthah crosses over to the sons of Ammon in verse 32, and the Lord does give them into his hand.

He struck them with a very great slaughter from Aror to the entrance of Minoth, twenty cities as far as Adel, Cherimim. The sons of Ammon were subdued before the sons of Israel. When

Jephthah came to his house at Mizpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dancing.

And I'm sure that this is unprecedented. Her old dad has always been a rascal. He's always been an outlaw.

Now, suddenly, he's a national hero. And she says, finally, a father I can be proud of. I can publicly claim him and welcome him.

And now, instead of being the daughter of the son of a prostitute, I am the daughter of a national hero who is being feeded and welcomed and praised all through the land. Well, Jephthah, in his imagination, just never realized that she would be so happy and that she would be the one to come out and have this celebration. She's always been ashamed of him probably.

Who's your daddy? I can't tell you. Jephthah's my father. Hooray for dad! And she comes out and she's waving the timbrels and doing the dance.

But she's his only child. Beside her, he had neither son nor daughter. And it came to pass when he saw her that he tore his clothes and he said, Alas, my daughter, you have brought me very low.

And of course, this is the classic response of somebody who has made a mistake and the first thing you want to do is blame somebody else. Jephthah has made a rash vow. He has caused a horrible problem.

And he says, well, daughter, you messed up. You've brought me very low. You are among those who trouble me.

You're a pestilence. You've really messed this up. Just when I was going to be a national hero, just when I was going to be the big man on campus here and everybody was going to... Now, you've taken away my hope for the future because she is his only offspring.

This is going to be the end of the line for his branch of the Gileadite clan in the tribe of Manasseh. He's the last gasp. He's not going to have any grandkids.

You've brought me very low. You've troubled me. I have given my word to the Lord and I cannot go back on it.

Now once again, just think about it. How odd would it be if he's actually contemplating a human sacrifice here? But this is a dedication much like Hannah does with Samuel. I dedicate him entirely, O Lord, to your service.

The Nazarites were not forbidden to marry. And you know, Samuel is going to have sons and they are going to essentially follow in the footsteps of Eli's sons. It seems like you have a lot of good guys that can't seem to raise up a generation behind them.

David has trouble with several of his sons. Eli certainly has trouble with his sons. Samuel has trouble with his sons.

It's tough to raise up offspring sometimes that are going to follow in your spiritual footsteps, these heroes of the faith in the Bible. She says to him, My father, if you have given your word to the Lord, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth because the Lord has avenged you of your enemies, the people of Ammon. And you get the idea that she also recognizes that there is a responsibility to the Lord to keep commitments made to Him.

She doesn't say, But Dad, that's illegal. But Dad, that's heinous abomination before the Lord. That's forbidden in the law of Moses.

You can't fulfill a promise that's against the law. It's self-contradictory. What's the point of doing something prohibited by the law in some misguided attempt to honor God and keep His law? It makes no sense.

She says, Do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth. She said to her father, and obviously there is some part of the dialogue that's not included here because she obviously didn't know what her father had promised her. She wouldn't have come dancing in the tambourine playing out the door to begin with.

She would have said, Anybody see Dad coming? Well, let's hide in the inner room. She didn't know until she came out. And he explains, he says, This is what I promised to the Lord, that whoever came out to greet me, I would dedicate entirely.

Now, a woman dedicated entirely to the service of God, what does that mean? What is the role of a woman in Israel? She is a daughter to her father and serves in that household until there is a dowry exchanged and she is given to another of the sons of Israel and that man leaves his father and mother and cleaves to his wife. They two become one flesh. And she is his helpmate.

She now is a part of and is dedicated to her husband. You can't serve two masters. Remember what Sarah says to Abraham? Sarah calls Abraham Lord.

Because dutiful wives, as politically incorrect as it may sound, have a responsibility and an obligation before the Lord to be a partner and a helpmate for their husband. And if you need illumination of that point, the Bible compares the relationship of a wife to her husband, the wife is to the husband, as the church is to Jesus Christ. Now, how equal and how complementary is the church to Jesus Christ? Well, we are as equal as Christ is formed in us, right? And to the extent that we share His mind, let this mind be in you, which also is in Christ Jesus.

Be of one mind. Think not only of your own interests, but also of the interests of others. Look out for one another.

Encourage one another unto love and good works. Pray for one another. There are fifty-odd one-anothers in the New Testament.

All of that conspires to tell us that a woman cannot be wholly dedicated to the service of God and ever get married, because she is required in a marriage to dedicate herself to that partnership with her husband. So this Olah dedication to God finishes her prospects for ever getting married. She will have to remain unwed, unmarried, and that's why the text emphasizes in two or three different ways that she is a virgin and has never known a man and is never going to know a man.

She says, Let this thing be done for me. Let me alone for two months that I may go and wander on the mountains and bewail my virginity, my friends and I. And I think it's Kyle in the Kyle and Dalich commentary that points this out, and it's a good point. Why does she have to go to the mountains to bewail this? If she were about to be immolated, if she were about to be incinerated, why would she need to go away to the mountains? You'd think, well, if she's her father's only daughter, she'd want to stick around the house and spend her last time with her father and with her servants and with those who are closest to her.

Why does she go to the mountains to bewail her virginity with her friends? Why would she do that? And the point is made, and I think it's a good one, that the issue here is that she is never going to participate in a marriage, she's never going to have children, and this is not a thing that she can mourn around men. She needs solitude. She needs the company of none other but a few of her close maidenly friends to commiserate with her on the fact that she is going to remain unmarried and childless for the rest of her life.

This, of course, is one of the most dismal fates. You look at the barren women that are mentioned in the Bible, and they are always depressed and upset and sad about it. You know, it was a different time, it was a different culture, and there was a whole different ethos back then.

Nothing attaches to that now like it did in those days, but in Israel there was a whole different perception. And so she wants solitude to bewail this, and this is a girl thing. This is a womanly thing.

And so she can only do it in the company of other women, and she can do it in the solitude of the mountains of Gilead. And so she does this for two months, and at the end of two months she returned to her father, and he carried out his vow with her, which he had vowed she knew no man. And the implication of this is she never knew a man.

From then on this was her perpetual virginity. If you want to find a perpetual virgin in the Bible, it's not Mary the mother of Jesus, it is the unnamed daughter of Jephthah. It became a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went four days each year to... And the word here is translated lament, but it is actually better translated either commemorate or praise.

It's actually sort of a positive thing. Now I don't seriously think that they would have a four-day holiday celebrating a human sacrifice in Israel. It was a horrifying prospect even hundreds of years later.

But this lady who dedicated... You think about Mother Teresa. How many people have lauded and praised and extolled the virtues of Mother Teresa? You ask people even today. She's been dead for I don't know how many years.

You say, well, who do you think was probably the best person that's ever lived in the last 50 years? Many, many people say, well, it was probably Mother Teresa. They celebrate her, they praise her, and she's a nun. She never got married, never had kids, dedicated herself ostensibly to the work of the Lord, to the service of other people certainly.

And she's praised and extolled. And this is what the daughters of Israel did, that she sacrificed her normal function as a potential bride, wife, and mother in Israel for the good of the nation. She fulfilled the vow that her father had made.

She voluntarily entered into this in the same way that the Lord Jesus Christ voluntarily sacrificed himself to fulfill the Father's plan. And it is celebrated by the daughters of Israel. So I think this is a proper understanding of this passage.

And there is a fruitful set of conclusions that we can draw from it that we'll have to save for next time. We're out of time for tonight, so we'll close in a word of prayer. Father, thank you for the truth of your word.

Thank you for the powerful examples that impress the truths that we need to remember so firmly upon our hearts. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will find us ready students and believers who are ready and able to apply your word in the day-to-day events and circumstances of life. We ask it in Jesus' name, amen.