

CHAPTER 11

This chapter gives as the history of Jephthah, another of Israel's judges, and numbered among the worthies of the Old Testament, that by faith did great things (~~88112~~ Hebrews 11:32), though he had not such an extraordinary call as the rest there mentioned had. Here we have,

- I.** The disadvantages of his origin (v. 1-3).
- II.** The Gileadites' choice of him to be commander-in-chief against the Ammonites, and the terms he made with them (v. 4-11).
- III.** His treaty with the king of Ammon about the rights of the two nations, that the matter might be determined, if possible, without bloodshed (v. 12-28).
- IV.** His war with the Ammonites, which he enters upon with a solemn vow (v. 29-31), prosecutes with bravery (v. 32), and ends with a glorious victory (v. 33).
- V.** The straits he was brought into at his return to his own house by the vow he had made (v. 34-40).

~~07101~~ JUDGES 11:1-3

JEPHTHAH'S PROMOTION

The princes and people of Gilead we left, in the close of the foregoing chapter, consulting about the choice of a general, having come to this resolve, that whoever would undertake to lead their forces against the children of Ammon should by common consent be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead. The enterprise was difficult, and it was fit that so great an encouragement as this should be proposed to him that would undertake it. Now all agreed that Jephthah, the Gileadite, was a mighty man of valour, and very fit for that purpose, none so fit as he, but he lay under three disadvantages: —

1. He was *the son of a harlot* (v. 1), of a *strange woman* (v. 2), one that was neither a wife nor a concubine; some think his mother was a Gentile;

so Josephus, who calls him *a stranger by the mother's side*. An Ishmaelite, say the Jews. If his mother was a harlot, that was not his fault, however it was his disgrace. Men ought not to be reproached with any of the infelicities of their parentage or extraction, so long as they are endeavouring by their personal merits to roll away the reproach. The son of a harlot, if born again, born from above, shall be accepted of God, and be as welcome as any other to the glorious liberties of his children. Jephthah could not read in the law the brand there put on the Ammonites, the enemies he was to grapple with, that they should *not enter into the congregation of the Lord*, but in the same paragraph he met with that which looked black upon himself, that a bastard should be in like manner excluded, ⁽⁶²¹⁾Deuteronomy 23:2, 3. But if that law means, as most probably it does, only those that are born of incest, not of fornication, he was not within the reach of it.

2. He had been driven from his country by his brethren. His father's legitimate children, insisting upon the rigour of the law, thrust him out from having any inheritance with them, without any consideration of his extraordinary qualifications, which merited a dispensation, and would have made him a mighty strength and ornament of their family, if they had overlooked his being illegitimate and admitted him to a child's part, v. 2. One would not have thought this abandoned youth was intended to be Israel's deliverer and judge, but God often humbles those whom he designs to exalt, and makes that *stone the head of the corner which the builders refused*; so Joseph, Moses, and David, the three most eminent of the shepherds of Israel, were all thrust out by men, before they were called of God to their great offices.

3. He had, in his exile, headed a rabble, v. 3. Being driven out by his brethren, his great soul would not suffer him either to dig or beg, but by his sword he must live; and, being soon noted for his bravery, those that were reduced to such straits, and animated by such a spirit, enlisted themselves under him. *Vain men* they are here called, that is, men that had run through their estates and had to seek for a livelihood. These went out with him, not to rob or plunder, but to hunt wild beasts, and perhaps to make incursions upon those countries which Israel was entitled to, but had not as yet come to the possession of, or were some way or other injured by. This is the man that must save Israel. That people had by their idolatry made themselves children of whoredoms, and aliens from God and his covenant, and therefore, though God upon their repentance will deliver them, yet, to

mortify them and remind them of their sin, he chooses to do it by a bastard and an exile.

JUDGES 11:4-11

JEPHTHAH'S PROMOTION

Here is,

I. The distress which the children of Israel were in upon the Ammonites' invasion of their country, v. 4. Probably this was the same invasion with that mentioned, Judges 10:17, when *the children of Ammon were gathered together and encamped in or against Gilead*. And those words, *in process of time*, refer to what goes immediately before of the expulsion of Jephthah; many days after he had been thus thrust out in disgrace was he fetched back again with honour.

II. The court which the elders made to Jephthah hereupon to come and help them. They did not write or send a messenger to him, but went themselves to fetch him, resolving to have no denial, and the exigence of the case was such as would admit no delay. Their errand to him was, *Come, and be our captain*, v. 6. They knew none among themselves that was able to undertake that great trust, but in effect confessed themselves unfit for it; they know him to be a bold man, and inured to the sword, and therefore he must be the man. See how God prepared men for the service he designs them for, and makes their troubles work for their advancement. If Jephthah had not been put to his shifts by his brethren's unkindness, he would not have had such occasion as this gave him to exercise and improve his martial genius, and so to signalize himself and become famous. *Out of the eater comes forth meat*. The children of Israel were assembled and encamped, Judges 10:17. But an army without a general is like a body without a head; therefore *Come, say they, and be our captain, that we may fight*. See the necessity of government; though they were hearty enough in the cause, yet they owned they could not fight without a captain to command them. So necessary is it to all societies that there be a *pars imperans* and a *pars subdita*, *some to rule and others to obey*, that any community would humbly beg the favour of being commanded rather than

that every man should be his own master. Blessed be God for government, for a good government.

III. The objections Jephthah makes against accepting their offer: *Did you not hate me, and expel me?* v. 7. It should seem that his brethren were some of these elders, or these elders by suffering his brethren to abuse him, and not righting him as they ought to have done (for their business is to *defend the poor and fatherless*, ~~Psalm~~ Psalm 82:3, 4), had made themselves guilty of his expulsion, and he might justly charge them with it. Magistrates, that have power to protect those that are injured, if they neglect to redress their grievances are really guilty of inflicting them. “You hated me and expelled me, and therefore how can I believe that you are sincere in this proposal, and how can you expect that I should do you any service?” Not but that Jephthah was very willing to serve his country, but he thought fit to give them a hint of their former unkindness to him, that they might repent of their sin in using him so ill, and might for the future be the more sensible of their obligations. Thus Joseph humbled his brethren before he made himself known to them. The particular case between the Gileadites and Jephthah was a resemblance of the general state of the case between Israel and God at this time. They had thrust God out by their idolatries, yet in their distress begged his help; he told them how justly he might have rejected them, and yet graciously delivered them. So did Jephthah. Many slight God and good men till they come to be in distress, and then they are desirous of God's mercy and good men's prayers.

IV. Their urgency with him to accept the government they offer him, v. 8. “Therefore because we formerly did thee that wrong, and to show thee that we repent of it and would gladly atone for it, *we turn again to thee now*, to put such an honour upon thee as shall balance that indignity.” Let this instance be,

1. A caution to us not to despise or trample upon any because they are mean, nor to be injurious to any that we have advantage against, because, whatever we think of them now, the time may come when we may have need of them, and may be glad to be beholden to them. It is our wisdom to make no man our enemy, because we know not how soon our distresses may be such as that we may be highly concerned to make him our friend.

2. An encouragement to men of worth that are slighted or ill-treated. Let them bear it with meekness and cheerfulness, and leave it to God to make

their light shine out of obscurity. Fuller's remark on this story, in his "Pisgah Sight," is this: "Virtue once in an age will work her own advancement, and, when such as hate it chance to need it, they will be forced to prefer it," and then the honour will appear the brighter.

V. The bargain he makes with them. He had mentioned the injuries they had formerly done him, but, perceiving their repentance, his spirit was too great and generous to mention them any more. God had forgiven Israel the affronts they had put upon him (^{<071016>}Judges 10:16), and therefore Jephthah will forgive. Only he thinks it prudent to make his bargain wisely for the future, since he deals with men that he had reason to distrust.

1. He puts to them a fair question, v. 9. He speaks not with too much confidence of his success, knowing how justly God might suffer the Ammonites to prevail for the further punishment of Israel; but puts an *if* upon it. Nor does he speak with any confidence at all in himself; if he do succeed, it is *the Lord that delivers them into his hand*, intending hereby to remind his countrymen to look up to God, as arbitrator of the controversy and the giver of victory, for so *he* did. "Now if, by the blessing of God, I come home a conqueror, tell me plainly *shall I be your head?* If I deliver you, under God, shall I, under him, reform you?" The same question is put to those who desire salvation by Christ. "If he save you, will you be willing that he shall rule you? for on no other terms will he save you. If he make you happy, shall he make you holy? If he be your helper, shall he be your head?"

2. They immediately give him a positive answer (v. 10): "We will *do according to thy words*; command us in war, and thou shalt command us in peace." They do not take time to consider of it. The case was too plain to need a debate, and the necessity too pressing to admit a delay. They knew they had power to conclude a treaty for those whom they represented, and therefore bound it with an oath, *The Lord be witness between us*. They appeal to God's omniscience as the judge of their present sincerity, and to his justice as an avenger if afterwards they should prove false. *The Lord be a hearer*, so the word is. Whatever we speak, it concerns us to remember that God is a hearer, and to speak accordingly. Thus was the original contract ratified between Jephthah and the Gileadites, which all Israel, it should seem, agreed to afterwards, for it is said (^{<07127>}Judges 12:7), *he judged Israel*. He hereupon went with them (v. 11) to the place where they were all assembled (^{<071017>}Judges 10:17), and there by common consent they

made him head and captain, and so ratified the bargain their representatives had made with him, that he should be not only captain now, but head for life. Jephthah, to obtain this little honour, was willing to expose his life for them (^{<0723>}Judges 12:3), and shall we be discouraged in our Christian warfare by any of the difficulties we may meet with in it, when Christ himself has promised *a crown of life to him that overcometh*?

VI. Jephthah's pious acknowledgment of God in this great affair (v. 11): *He uttered all his words before the Lord in Mizpeh*, that is, upon his elevation, he immediately retired to his devotions, and in prayer spread the whole matter before God, both his choice to the office and his execution of the office, as one that had his eye ever towards the Lord, and would do nothing without him, that leaned not to his own understanding or courage, but depended on God and his favour. He utters before God all his thoughts and cares in this matter; for God gives us leave to be free with him.

1. “Lord, the people have made me their head; wilt thou confirm the choice, and own me as thy people's head under thee and for thee?” God justly complains of Israel (^{<2804>}Hosea 8:4), *they have set up kings, but not by me*. “Lord,” said Jephthah, “I will be no head of their making without thee. I will not accept the government unless thou give me leave.” Had Abimelech done this, he might have prospered.

2. “Lord, they have made me their captain, to go before them in this war with the Ammonites; shall I have thy presence? Wilt thou go before me? If not, carry me not up hence. Lord, satisfy me in the justice of the cause. Assure me of success in the enterprise.” This is a rare example, to be imitated by all, particularly by great ones; in all our ways let us acknowledge God, seek his favour, ask counsel at his mouth, and take him along with us; so shall we make our way prosperous. Thus Jephthah opened the campaign with prayer. That was likely to end gloriously which began thus piously.

^{<07112>}JUDGES 11:12-28

THE WAR WITH THE AMMONITES

We have here the treaty between Jephthah, now judge of Israel, and the king of the Ammonites (who is not named), that the controversy between

the two nations might, if possible, be accommodated without the effusion of blood.

I. Jephthah, as one having authority, sent to the king of Ammon, who in this war was the aggressor, to demand his reasons for invading the land of Israel: “*Why hast thou come to fight against me in my land?*” v. 12. Had I come first into thy land to disturb thee in thy possession, this would have been reason enough for fighting against me, for how must force be repelled but by force? but what hast thou to do to come thus in a hostile manner into *my land?*” so he calls it, in the name both of God and Israel. Now this fair demand shows,

1. That Jephthah did not delight in war, though he was a mighty man of valour, but was willing to prevent it by a peaceable accommodation. If he could by reason persuade the invaders to retire, he would not compel them to do it by the sword. War should be the last remedy, not to be used till all other methods of ending matters in variance have been tried in vain, *ratio ultima regum — the last resource of kings*. This rule should be observed in going to law. The sword of justice, as well as the sword of war, must not be appealed to till the contending parties have first endeavoured by gentler means to understand one another, and to accommodate matters in variance, ~~<K1>~~ 1 Corinthians 6:1.

2. That Jephthah did delight in equity, and designed no other than to do justice. If the children of Ammon could convince him that Israel had done them wrong, he was ready to restore the rights of the Ammonites. If not, it was plain by their invasion that they did Israel wrong, and he was ready to maintain the rights of the Israelites. A sense of justice should guide and govern us in all our undertakings.

II. The king of the Ammonites now gives in his demand, which he should have published before he had invaded Israel, v. 13. His pretence is, “Israel took away my lands long since; now therefore restore those lands.” We have reason to think the Ammonites, when they made this descent upon Israel, meant no other than to spoil and plunder the country, and enrich themselves with the prey, as they had done formerly under Eglon (~~<K13>~~ Judges 3:13) when no such demand as this was made, though the matter was then fresh; but when Jephthah demanded the cause of their quarrel, and they could not for shame own what was their true intent and meaning, some old musty records were searched, or some ancient

traditions enquired into, and from them this reason was drawn to serve the present turn, for a colourable pretence of equity in the invasion. Even those that do the greatest wrong yet have such a conviction in their consciences of justice that they would seem to do right. *Restore those lands.* See upon what uncertain terms we hold our worldly possessions; what we think we have the surest hold of may be challenged from us, and wrested out of our hands. Those that have got to the heavenly Canaan need not fear having their titles questioned.

III. Jephthah gives in a very full and satisfactory answer to this demand, showing it to be altogether unjust and unreasonable, and that the Ammonites had no title to this country that lay between the rivers Arnon and Jabbok, now in the possession of the tribes of Reuben and Gad. As one very well versed in the history of his country, he shows,

1. That Israel never took any land away either from the Moabites or Ammonites. He puts them together because they were brethren, the children of Lot, near neighbours, and of united interests, having the same god, Chemosh, and perhaps sometimes the same king. The lands in question Israel took away, not from the Moabites or Ammonites (they had particular orders from God not to meddle with them nor any thing they had, ^{<0215>}Deuteronomy 2:9, 19, and religiously observed their orders), but they found them in the possession of Sihon king of the Amorites, and out of his hand they took them justly and honourably, as he will show afterwards. If the Amorites, before Israel came into that country, had taken these lands from the Moabites or Ammonites, as it should seem they had (^{<0215>}Numbers 21:26; ^{<0325>}Joshua 13:25), Israel was not concerned to enquire into that or answer for it. If the Ammonites had lost these lands and their title to them, the children of Israel were under no obligation to recover the possession for them. Their business was to conquer for themselves, not for other people. This is his first plea, “Not guilty of the trespass.”

2. That they were so far from invading the property of any other nations than the devoted posterity of cursed Canaan (one of the branches of which the Amorites were, ^{<0106>}Genesis 10:16) that they would not so much as force a passage through the country either of the Edomites, the seed of Esau, or of the Moabites, the seed of Lot; but even after a very tedious march through the wilderness, with which they were sadly tired (v. 16), when the king of Edom first, and afterwards the king of Moab, denied them the courtesy of a way through their country (v. 17), rather than give

them any offence or annoyance, weary as they were, they put themselves to the further fatigue of compassing both the land of Edom and that of Moab, and came not within the border of either, v. 18. Note, Those that behave themselves inoffensively may take the comfort of it, and plead it against those that charge them with injustice and wrong doing. Our *righteousness will answer for us in time to come* (^{<0133>}Genesis 30:33) and will *put to silence the ignorance of foolish men*, ^{<0125>}1 Peter 2:15.

3. That in that war in which they took this land out of the hands of Sihon king of the Amorites he was the aggressor, and not they, v. 19, 20. They sent a humble petition to him for leave to go through his land, willing to give him any security for their good behaviour in their march. “*Let us pass* (say they) *unto our place*, that is, to the land of Canaan, which is the only place we call ours, and to which we are pressing forward, not designing a settlement here.” But Sihon not only denied them this courtesy, as Edom and Moab had done (had he only done so, who knows but Israel might have gone about some other way?) but he mustered all his forces, and fought against Israel (v. 20), not only shut them out of his own land, but would have cut them off from the face of the earth (^{<0223>}Numbers 21:23, 24), aimed at nothing less than their ruin, v. 20. Israel therefore, in their war with him, stood in their own just and necessary defence, and therefore, having routed his army, might justly, in further revenge of the injury, seize his country as forfeited. Thus Israel came to the possession of this country, and doubted not to make good their title to it; and it is very unreasonable for the Ammonites to question their title, for the Amorites were the inhabitants of that country, and it was purely their land and their coasts that the Israelites then made themselves masters of, v. 21, 22.

4. He pleads a grant from the crown, and claims under that, v. 23, 24. It was not Israel (they were fatigued with their long march, and were not fit for action so soon), but it was the Lord God of Israel, who is King of nations, whose the earth is and the fulness thereof, he it was that dispossessed the Amorites and planted Israel in their room. God gave them the land by an express and particular conveyance, such as vested the title in them, which they might make good against all the world. ^{<0124>}Deuteronomy 2:24, *I have given into thy hand Sihon and his land*; he gave it to them, by giving them a complete victory over the present occupants, notwithstanding the great disadvantages they were under. “Can you think that God gave it to us in such an extraordinary manner with design that we should return it to the Moabites or Ammonites again? No, we put a higher

value upon God's favours than to part with them so easily.” To corroborate this plea, he urges an argument *ad hominem* — directed to the man: *Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee?* He not only appeals to the common resolutions of men to hold their own against all the world, but to the common religion of the nations, which, they thought, obliged them to make much of that which their gods gave them. Not that Jephthah thought Chemosh a god, only he is *thy god*, and the worshippers even of those dunghill deities that could do neither good nor evil yet thought themselves beholden to them for all they had (^{<B12>}Hosea 2:12, *These are my rewards which my lovers have given me;* and see ^{<B13>}Judges 16:24) and made this a reason why they would hold it fast, that their gods gave it to them. “This thou thinkest a good title, and shall not we?” The Ammonites had dispossessed those that dwelt in their land before them; they thought they did it by the help of Chemosh their god, but really it was Jehovah the God of Israel that did it for them, as is expressly said, ^{<B14>}Deuteronomy 2:19, 21. “Now,” says Jephthah, “we have as good a title to our country as you have to yours.” Note, One instance of the honour and respect we owe to God, as our God, is rightly to possess that which he gives us to possess, receive it from him, use it for him, keep it for his sake, and part with it when he calls for it. He has given it to us to possess, not to enjoy. He himself only must be enjoyed.

5. He pleads prescription.

(1.) Their title had not been disputed when they first entered upon it, v. 25. “Balak who was then king of Moab, from whom the greatest part of these lands had been taken by the Amorites, and who was most concerned and best able to oppose us, if he had had any thing to object against our settlement there, yet sat still, and never offered to strive against Israel.” He knew that for his own part he had fairly lost it to the Amorites and was not able to recover it, and could not but acknowledge that Israel had fairly won it of the Amorites, and therefore all his care was to secure what was left: he never pretended a title to what was lost. See ^{<B15>}Numbers 22:2, 3. “He then acquiesced in God's way of disposing of kingdoms, and wilt not thou now?”

(2.) Their possession had never yet been disturbed, v. 26. He pleads that they had kept this country as their own now about 300 years, and the Ammonites in all that time had never attempted to take it from them, no, not when they had it in their power to oppress them, ^{<B16>}Judges 3:13, 14.

So that, supposing their title had not been clear at the first (which yet he had proved it was), yet, no claim having been made for so many generations, the entry of the children of Ammon, without doubt, was barred for ever. A title so long unquestioned shall be presumed unquestionable.

6. By these arguments Jephthah justifies himself and his own cause (“I have not sinned against thee in taking or keeping what I have no right to; if I had, I would instantly make restitution”), and condemns the Ammonites: “*Thou doest me wrong to war against me, and must expect to speed accordingly,*” v. 27. It seems to me an evidence that the children of Israel, in the days of their prosperity and power (for some such days they had in the times of the judges) had conducted themselves very inoffensively to all their neighbours and had not been vexatious or oppressing to them (either by way of reprisal or under colour of propagating their religion), that the king of the Ammonites, when he would seek an occasion of quarrelling with them, was forced to look 300 years back for a pretence. It becomes the people of God thus to be blameless and harmless, and without rebuke.

7. For the deciding of the controversy, he puts himself upon God and his sword, and the king of Ammon joins issue with him (v. 27, 28): *The Lord the Judge be judge this day.* With this solemn reference of the matter to the Judge of heaven and earth he designs either to deter the Ammonites from proceeding and oblige them to retire, when they saw the right of the cause was against them, or to justify himself in subduing them if they should go on. Note, War is an appeal to heaven, to God the Judge of all, to whom the issues of it belong. If doubtful rights be disputed, he is hereby requested to determine them. If manifest rights be invaded or denied, he is hereby applied to for the vindicating of what is just and the punishing of wrong. As the sword of justice was made for lawless and disobedient persons (^{<500>}1 Timothy 1:9), so was the sword of war made for lawless and disobedient princes and nations. In war therefore the eye must be ever up to God, and it must always be thought a dangerous thing to desire or expect that God should patronise unrighteousness.

Neither Jephthah's apology, nor his appeal, wrought upon the king of the children of Ammon; they had found the sweets of the spoil of Israel, in the eighteen years wherein they had oppressed them (^{<0708>}Judges 10:8), and hoped now to make themselves masters of the tree with the fruit of which

they had so often enriched themselves. He hearkened not to the words of Jephthah, his heart being hardened to his destruction.

<0712> JUDGES 11:29-40

JEPHTHAH'S VOW

We have here Jephthah triumphing in a glorious victory, but, as an alloy to his joy, troubled and distressed by an unadvised vow.

I. Jephthah's victory was clear, and shines very brightly, both to his honour and to the honour of God, his in pleading and God's in owning a righteous cause.

1. God gave him an excellent spirit, and he improved it bravely, v. 29. When it appeared by the people's unanimous choice of him for their leader that he had so clear a call to engage, and by the obstinate deafness of the king of Ammon to the proposals of accommodation that he had so just a cause to engage in, then the Spirit of the Lord came upon him, and very much advanced his natural faculties, enduing him with power from on high, and making him more bold and more wise than ever he had been, and more fired with a holy zeal against the enemies of his people. Hereby God confirmed him in his office, and assured him of success in his undertaking. Thus animated, he loses no time, but with an undaunted resolution takes the field. Particular notice is taken of the way by which he advanced towards the enemy's camp, probably because the choice of it was an instance of that extraordinary discretion with which the Spirit of the Lord had furnished him; for those who sincerely walk after the Spirit shall be led forth the right way.

2. God gave him eminent success, and he bravely improved that too (v. 32): *The Lord delivered the Ammonites into his hand*, and so gave judgment upon the appeal in favour of the righteous cause, and made those feel the force of war that would not yield to the force of reason; for he *sits in the throne, judging right*. Jephthah lost not the advantages given him, but pursued and completed his victory. Having routed their forces in the field, he pursued them to their cities, where he put to the sword all he found in arms, so as utterly to disable them from giving Israel any molestation, v. 33. But it does not appear that he utterly destroyed the

people, as Joshua had destroyed the devoted nations, nor that he offered to make himself master of the country, though their pretensions to the land of Israel might have given him colour to do so: only he took care that they should be effectually subdued. Though others' attempting wrong to us will justify us in the defence of our own right, yet it will not authorize us to do them wrong.

II. Jephthah's vow is dark, and much in the clouds. When he was going out from his own house upon this hazardous undertaking, in prayer to God for his presence with him he makes a secret but solemn vow or religious promise to God, that, if God would graciously bring him back a conqueror, whosoever or whatsoever should first come out of his house to meet him it should be devoted to God, and offered up for a burnt-offering. At his return, tidings of his victory coming home before him, his own and only daughter meets him with the seasonable expressions of joy. This puts him into a great confusion; but there was no remedy: after she had taken some time to lament her own infelicity, she cheerfully submitted to the performance of his vow. Now,

1. There are several good lessons to be learnt out of this story.

(1.) That there may be remainders of distrust and doubting even in the hearts of true and great believers. Jephthah had reason enough to be confident of success, especially when he found *the Spirit of the Lord come upon him*, and yet, now that it comes to the settling, he seems to hesitate (v. 30): *If thou wilt without fail deliver them into my hand*, then I will do so and so. And perhaps the snare into which his vow brought him was designed to correct the weakness of his faith, and a fond conceit he had that he could not promise himself a victory unless he proffered something considerable to be given to God in lieu of it.

(2.) That yet it is very good, when we are in the pursuit or expectation of any mercy, to make vows to God of some instance of acceptable service to him, not as a purchase of the favour we desire, but as an expression of our gratitude to him and the deep sense we have of our obligations to render according to the benefit done to us. The matter of such a singular vow (~~REXP~~ Leviticus 27:2) must be something that has a plain and direct tendency either to the advancement of God's glory, and the interests of his kingdom among men, or to the furtherance of ourselves in his service, and in that which is antecedently our duty.

(3.) That we have great need to be very cautious and well advised in the making of such vows, lest, by indulging a present emotion even of pious zeal, we entangle our own consciences, involve ourselves in perplexities, and are forced at last to *say before the angel that it was an error*, ^{<218P>}Ecclesiastes 5:2-6. *It is a snare to a man hastily to devour that which is holy*, without due consideration *quid valeant humeri, quid ferre recusent* — *what we are able or unable to effect*, and without inserting the needful provisos and limitations which might prevent the entanglement, and then after vows to make the enquiry which should have been made before, ^{<218P>}Proverbs 20:25. Let Jephthah's harm be our warning in this matter. See ^{<1622>}Deuteronomy 23:22.

(4.) That what we have solemnly vowed to God we must conscientiously perform, if it be possible and lawful, though it be ever so difficult and grievous to us. Jephthah's sense of the powerful obligation of his vow must always be ours (v. 35): *"I have opened my mouth unto the Lord in a solemn vow, and I cannot go back,"* that is, "I cannot recall the vow myself, it is too late, nor can any power on earth dispense with it, or give me up my bond." The thing was my own, and *in my own power* (^{<4814>}Acts 5:4), but now it is not. *Vow and pay*, ^{<1961>}Psalms 76:11. We deceive ourselves if we think to mock God. If we apply this to the consent we have solemnly given, in our sacramental vows, to the covenant of grace made with poor sinners in Christ, what a powerful argument will it be against the sins we have by those vows bound ourselves out from, what a strong inducement to the duties we have hereby bound ourselves up to, and what a ready answer to every temptation! *"I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot go back; I must therefore go forward. I have sworn, and I must, I will, perform it. Let me not dare to play fast and loose with God."*

(5.) That it well becomes children obediently and cheerfully to submit to their parents in the Lord, and particularly to comply with their pious resolutions for the honour of God and the keeping up of religion in their families, though they be harsh and severe, as the Rechabites, who for many generations religiously observed the commands of Jonadab their father in forbearing wine, and Jephthah's daughter here, who, for the satisfying of her father's conscience, and for the honour of God and her country, yielded herself as one devoted (v. 36): *"Do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth; I know I am dear to thee, but am well content that God should be dearer."* The father might disallow any vow made by the daughter (^{<9415>}Numbers 30:5), but the daughter could not disallow or

disannul, no, not such a vow as this, made by the father. This magnifies the law of the fifth commandment.

(6.) That our friends' grievances should be our griefs. Where she went to bewail her hard fate the virgins, her companions, joined with her in her lamentations, v. 38. With those of her own sex and age she used to associate, who no doubt, now that her father had on a sudden grown so great, expected, shortly after his return, to dance at her wedding, but were heavily disappointed when they were called to retire to the mountains with her and share in her griefs. Those are unworthy the name of friends that will only rejoice with us, and not weep with us.

(7.) That heroic zeal for the honour of God and Israel, though alloyed with infirmity and indiscretion, is worthy to be had in perpetual remembrance. It well became the daughters of Israel by an annual solemnity to preserve the honourable memory of Jephthah's daughter, who made light even of her own life like a noble heroine, when God had taken vengeance on Israel's enemies, v. 36. Such a rare instance of one that preferred the public interest before life itself was never to be forgotten. Her sex forbade her to follow to the war, and so to expose her life in battle, in lieu of which she hazards it much more (and perhaps apprehended that she did so, having some intimation of his vow, and did it designedly; for he tells her, v. 35, *Thou hast brought me very low*) to grace his triumphs. So transported was she with the victory as a common benefit that she was willing to be herself offered up as a thank-offering for it, and would think her life well bestowed when laid down on so great an occasion. She thinks it an honour to die, not as a sacrifice of atonement for the people's sins (that honour was reserved for Christ only), but as a sacrifice of acknowledgment for the people's mercies.

(8.) From Jephthah's concern on this occasion, we must learn not to think it strange if the day of our triumphs in this world prove upon some account or other the day of our griefs, and therefore must always rejoice with trembling; we hope for a day of triumph hereafter which will have no alloy.

2. Yet there are some difficult questions that do arise upon this story which have very much employed the pens of learned men. I will say but little respecting them, because Mr. Poole has discussed them very fully in his English annotations.

(1.) It is hard to say what Jephthah did to his daughter in performance of his vow.

[1.] Some think he only shut her up for a nun, and that it being unlawful, according to one part of his vow (for they make it disjunctive), to offer her up for a burnt-offering, he thus, according to the other part, engaged her to *be the Lord's*, that is, totally to sequester herself from all the affairs of this life, and consequently from marriage, and to employ herself wholly in the acts of devotion all her days. That which countenances this opinion is that she is *said to bewail her virginity* (v. 37, 38) and that *she knew no man*, v. 39. But, if he sacrificed her, it was proper enough for her to bewail, not her death, because that was intended to be for the honour of God, and she would undergo it cheerfully, but that unhappy circumstance of it which made it more grievous to her than any other, because she was her father's only child, in whom he hoped his name and family would be built up, that she was unmarried, and so left no issue to inherit her father's honour and estate; therefore it is particularly taken notice of (v. 34) that besides her he had neither son nor daughter. But that which makes me think Jephthah did not go about thus to satisfy his vow, or evade it rather, is that we do not find any law, usage, or custom, in all the Old Testament, which does in the least intimate that a single life was any branch or article of religion, or that any person, man or woman, was looked upon as the more holy, more the Lord's, or devoted to him, for living unmarried: it was no part of the law either of the priests or of the Nazarites. Deborah and Huldah, both prophetesses, are both of them particularly recorded to have been married women. Besides, had she only been confined to a single life, she needed not to have desired these two months to bewail it in: she had her whole life before her to do that, if she saw cause. Nor needed she to take such a sad leave of her companions; for those that are of that opinion understand what is said in 5:40 of their coming to *talk with her*, as our margin reads it, four days in a year. Therefore,

[2.] It seems more probable that he offered her up for a sacrifice, according to the letter of his vow, misunderstanding that law which spoke of persons devoted by the curse of God as if it were to be applied to such as were devoted by men's vows (⁽¹⁸⁷²⁾Leviticus 27:29, *None devoted shall be redeemed, but shall surely be put to death*), and wanting to be better informed of the power the law gave him in this case to redeem her. Abraham's attempt to offer up Isaac perhaps encouraged him, and made him think, if God would not accept this sacrifice which he had vowed, he

would send an angel to stay his hand, as he did Abraham's. If she came out designedly to be made a sacrifice, as who knows but she might? perhaps he thought that would make the case the plainer. *Volenti non sit injuria* — *No injury is done to a person by that to which he himself consents*. He imagined, it may be, that where there was neither anger nor malice there was no murder, and that his good intention would sanctify this bad action; and, since he had made such a vow, he thought better to kill his daughter than break his vow, and let Providence bear the blame, that brought her forth to meet him.

(2.) But, supposing that Jephthah did sacrifice his daughter, the question is whether he did well.

[1.] Some justify him in it, and think he did well, and as became one that preferred the honour of God before that which was dearest to him in this world. He is mentioned among the eminent believers who by faith did great things, ³¹¹² Hebrews 11:32. And this was one of the great things he did. It was done deliberately, and upon two months' consideration and consultation. He is never blamed for it by any inspired writer. Though it highly exalts the paternal authority, yet it cannot justify any in doing the like. He was an extraordinary person. *The Spirit of the Lord came upon him*. Many circumstances, now unknown to us, might make this altogether extraordinary, and justify it, yet not so as that it might justify the like. Some learned men have made this sacrifice a figure of Christ the great sacrifice: he was of unspotted purity and innocency, as she a chaste virgin; he was devoted to death by his Father, and so made a curse, or an anathema, for us; he submitted himself, as she did, to his Father's will: *Not as I will, but as thou wilt*. But,

[2.] Most condemn Jephthah; he did ill to make so rash a vow, and worse to perform it. He could not be bound by his vow to that which God had forbidden by the letter of the sixth commandment: *Thou shalt not kill*. God had forbidden human sacrifices, so that it was (says Dr. Lightfoot) in effect a sacrifice to Moloch. And, probably, the reason why it is left dubious by the inspired penman whether he sacrificed her or no was that those who did afterwards offer their children might not take any encouragement from this instance. Concerning this and some other such passages in the sacred story, which learned men are in the dark, divided, and in doubt about, we need not much perplex ourselves; what is necessary to our salvation, thanks be to God, is plain enough.