

Trends

- ☛ In 2017 62% favored same-sex marriage, 32% opposed it.
- ☛ 74% of Millennials (age 18-36) support same-sex marriage, 56% of Baby Boomers (age 53-71), 41% of the Silent Generation (age 72-89).
- ☛ About 10% of LGBT Americans are in a same-sex marriage.
- ☛ Percentage in favor of same-sex marriage: religiously unaffiliated, 85%; mainline Protestants, 68%; Catholics, 67%; black Protestants, 44%; evangelical Protestants, 35%.
- ☛ 61% of same-sex cohabiting couples are married.

—via Pew Research

Matthew 19:4-5: “And He answered and said to them, ‘Have you not read that He who made them at the beginning ‘made them male and female,’ 5 and said, ‘For this reason a man shall leave his father and mother and be joined to his wife, and the two shall become one flesh?’”

Sentence Sermons

“I think a marriage is as a marriage has always been, between a man and a woman.”

—Hillary Rodham Clinton, circa 2000

News & Notes

- Please pray for those mentioned in the announcements after services and others listed on the bulletin board in the foyer of the church building.
- Please pray for my son and his wife as they seek to start a new congregation in northern Michigan. Please pray Ryan can raise enough support to do this important work. Please read his recent report I forwarded to all on my e-mail list.
- Please pray for those at Grayling who chose not to follow the truth.
- Please pray for Sandy Willis, wife of gospel preacher Mike Willis (Decatur Township). Sandy had successful heart valve replacement surgery and is now home recuperating.
- Please keep sisters Virginia Brown and Wilma Cardwell in your prayers. Their faithfulness sets such a good example and gives encouragement to all! Ditto for Al (our Barnabas!).
- Pray for Hatti and her “new life” in Texas! We wish her only the very best and will miss her “something fierce”!
- Pray for the all of our students: elementary, secondary and college. Our young people are now back to school.
- There are many needy saints, including preachers! Can you help?! Let me know.

Words of Life is published by the **Westside Church of Christ** meeting at 1301 N. Enterprise, Bloomington, IN 47404

Times of Service: Bible Study, Sunday 9:30 AM and Wednesday 7:00 PM; Worship, Sunday 10:30 AM and 5:00 PM

Editor: Craig Thomas (812-320-9569); craigthomas82000@gmail.com

Please direct questions and comments to the editor.

Words of Life

Westside
church of Christ

Dec. 31,
2017

Vol. 9,
No. 44

“Lord, to whom shall we go? You have the words of eternal life.”

John 6:68



Jephthah's Daughter

In Judges 11, Jephthah vowed to God that if he were victorious in battle, he would give to God whoever came through the doors of his house upon his return from battle. The term used in 11:31 is ‘olah,’ the normal Hebrew word for a burnt offering or sacrifice (used 286 times in the Old Testament). Did Jephthah intend to offer his daughter as a human sacrifice? Are the ethics of God and the Bible shown to be substandard by this incident?

In the first place, if, in fact, Jephthah offered a human sacrifice, he did something that was strictly forbidden by Mosaic law and that is repugnant to God (Leviticus 18:21; 20:2-5; Deuteronomy 12:31; 18:10). It would be a bit bizarre for Jephthah to think that he could elicit God’s favor in battle by promising to offer Him a human sacrifice, that is, to do something that was in direct violation of the will of God. Such a proposal would be equivalent to a person requesting God’s blessing and assistance by offering to rape women or rob banks. God certainly would not **approve** of such an offer—though He may go ahead and assist the individual (11:32). God allows people to make wrong choices, even while He works out His own higher will in the midst of their illicit actions. He can even use such people to achieve a higher good (consider, as one example, Judas). When Israel clamored for a king—in direct opposition to God’s will—He nevertheless allowed them to proceed with their intentions, and even lent His assistance in the selection (1 Samuel 8:7,18-19; 10:19; 12:19; Psalm 106:14-15; Hosea 13:11; Acts 13:21).

Second, if Jephthah offered his daughter as a human sacrifice, no indication is given in the text that God actually approved of the action. The Bible records many illicit actions carried out by numerous individuals throughout history, without an accompanying word of condemnation by the inspired writer. We must not assume that silence is evidence of divine approval. Even the commendation of Jephthah’s faith in the New Testament does not offer a blanket endorsement to **everything** Jephthah did during his lifetime. It merely commended the faith that he demonstrated when he risked going to war. Similarly, the Bible commends the faith of Samson, and Rahab the prostitute, without implying that their behavior was always in harmony with God’s will. Abraham manifested an incredible level of faith on several occasions, and is commended for such (Romans 4:20-21). Yet he clearly sinned on more than one occasion (Genesis 12:13; 16:4; 20:2ff.).

Third, Jephthah’s action may best be understood by recognizing that he was using ‘olah in a figurative sense. We use the term “sacrifice” in a similar fashion when we say, “I’ll sacrifice a few dollars for that charity.” Jephthah was offering to sacrifice a member of his extended household to permanent, religious service associated with the Tabernacle. The Bible indicates that such non-priestly service was available, particularly to women who chose to so dedicate themselves (e.g., Exodus 38:8). [Sadly, Eli’s sons were guilty of taking

sexual liberties with them (1 Samuel 2:22).] Even in the first century, Anna must have been one woman who had dedicated herself to the Lord's service, since she "did not depart from the temple" (Luke 2:37).

Several contextual indicators support this conclusion. First, the two-month period of mourning that Jephthah granted to his daughter was not for the purpose of grieving over her impending loss of life, but over the fact that **she would never be able to marry**. She bewailed her virginity (*bethulim*)—not her death (11:37). Second, the text goes out of its way to state that Jephthah had no other children: "[S]he was his only child. Besides her he had neither son nor daughter" (11:34). For his daughter to be consigned to perpetual celibacy meant **the extinction of Jephthah's family line**—an extremely serious and tragic matter to an Israelite (cf. Numbers 27:1-11; 36:1ff.). Third, the sacrifice is treated as unfortunate—again, not because of any concern over her death, but because **she would not become a mother**. After stating that Jephthah "did with her according to his vow which he had vowed," the inspired writer immediately adds, "and knew no man" (11:39). This statement would be a completely superfluous and callous remark if she had been put to death. Fourth, the declaration of Jephthah's own sorrow (11:35) follows immediately after we are informed that he had no other children (11:34). Jephthah was not upset because his daughter would **die** a virgin. He was upset because she would **live and remain** a virgin.

Hannah made a similar sacrifice when she turned her son over to the priestly direction of Eli for the rest of his life (1 Samuel 1:11). How many are willing to make such sacrifices? Actually, however, these tremendous acts of devotion were no greater than that which God requires of **all Christians: to offer ourselves as spiritual burnt-offerings** in service to God (Romans 12:1).

[Dave Miller in *Reason and Revelation* 33, 8 (Aug. 2013):95;
<http://apologeticspress.org/apcontent.aspx?category=6&article=4709>]

Did Jephthah Offer His Daughter as a Burnt Offering?

Bill Cavender

Brother Bill: Here is a question for you - "In Judges, chapter 11:30-31, 34-40, did Jephthah offer his daughter as a burnt-offering to the Lord? Thank you." (West Virginia).

No, human sacrifices and human burnt offerings were forbidden by Jehovah our God. Such could not be an acceptable sacrifice and offering to God. Only ONE human sacrifice was EVER acceptable to the Lord, ONE human life and blood offering, and that was our Saviour's offering, His death upon Calvary's cross, the shedding of His blood for the remission of our sins (Matthew 26:28; 1 Peter 1:18-19; 2 Corinthians 5:21, etc.).

Jephthah, a Gileadite (tribe of Gad), was a pious and godly man, a judge in Israel, who led the Israelites against the Ammonites in battles east of the Jordan River and the Dead Sea. He called upon the Lord for guidance and help (vs. 9-11; 21; 23-24; 27), considering that the battles were the Lord's. He is listed in God's "hall of fame" of some of the faithful and true believers in the Old Testament times (Hebrews 11:32).

As he was preparing to go into the battles, he made a vow to Jehovah, saying two parts to the vow: "If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whatever ('whoever') comes out from the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the Ammonites shall be the Lord's, and I will offer it ('him') up for a burnt offering" (Judges 11:30-31).

Had a "clean" animal, such as a sheep, lamb, ram, bullock, etc., without blemish, as defined by the law of Moses as "clean," come out of his doors upon his return

from the battles, he could have offered such. Had an "unclean" animal, such as a camel, donkey, horse, dog, etc., come out to meet him, he could NOT have offered such. Jephthah knew the Lord and knew His will well enough to know what he could offer. Had his neighbor's wife, or son, or daughter, come out of his doors upon his return from the battles, he could NOT have offered them. AND, not being a Levite and, therefore, not a priest, Jephthah would have to engage a Levitical priest to make the offering for him. A priest would have to consent to the sacrifice and offering.

But when Jephthah returned from the battles, God having given him and the Israelites the victory over the Ammonites, his daughter, his only child, his only-begotten child, came from the house to meet and greet her father (vs. 34). Jephthah was devastated. "And as soon as he saw her, he tore his clothes and said, 'Alas, my daughter, you have brought me very low, and you have become the cause of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to the Lord, and I cannot take back my vow.'" This sweet, loving, obedient daughter responded, "My father, you have opened your mouth to the Lord; do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the Lord has avenged you upon your enemies, on the Ammonites" (vs. 36).

God, in His wisdom, knowing that His people would sometimes make rash vows, quick statements and promises, later to be regretted, made provisions in His law through Moses to remedy rash vows. The vow(s) could be redeemed, rescinded, and nullified by the payment of certain levies and fees, as determined by the evaluation of a Levitical priest (Leviticus 27:1-8). Thus, Jephthah would take advantage in this provision of the law of Moses.

Jehovah forbade and prohibited idolatry, and the offering of children (humans) to the various "gods" which the Canaanite peoples and tribes believed in and practiced in the land of Canaan, which land the Israelites (under Joshua) were going to conquer, and amongst which peoples the Israelites were going to live. God said to Moses, "Any one of the people of Israel or of the strangers who sojourn in Israel who gives any of his children to Molech shall surely be put to death. The people of the land shall stone him with stones. I myself will set my face against that man and will cut off from among his people, because he has given one of his children to Molech, to make my sanctuary unclean and to profane my holy name" (Leviticus 20:2-3).

It is absurd and unthinkable that God would accept from Jephthah a sacrifice and burnt-offering of his precious child, when He had made such a death penalty for anyone who did so to false gods, which would "profane my holy name, to make my sanctuary unclean." No, Jephthah DID NOT offer his pious daughter as a burnt-offering!

BUT Jephthah did keep his vow, a vow which was acceptable. He could dedicate his daughter, with her consent, to service to God at the tabernacle (Exodus 38:8; 1 Samuel 2:22, etc.). She was dedicated to life-long, perpetual virginity, never to marry, nor to bear children. Thus, Jephthah's name and family would become extinct in Israel.

So the maiden consented to the vow, set the terms of its inception and beginning, thus: "Let this thing be done for me: leave me alone for two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains and weep for my virginity, I and my companions." This she did, and at the conclusion of the two months, she returned to her father, and the vow went into effect - "she had never known a man," and it became a custom in Israel that, as long as this pious girl (woman) lived, her friends and companions would come to see her and lament with her for four days each year (Judges 11:37-40).

She could have taken the "Nazarite Vow," under which vow she could have married and had a family (Numbers 6:1-21), but she did not take this vow. The one she did take honored God, honored her father, honored and blessed God's people, and honored herself.