



AN EXAMINING OF JEPHTHAH'S VOW ACCORDING NARRATIVE RESEARCH

Daniel Lindung Adiatma,¹ Sutrisno²

¹Trinity Evangelical Divinity School, United State

²Moriah Theological Seminary, Indonesia

Email: christdeon@gmail.com

Abstract

The book of Judges is great historiography of the Old Testament. This book is composed of many rhetorical devices in the form of narrative. Scholar, pastor, professor etc pay attention to elaborate theological issue of this book. Some of academic journal elaborate about ethical issue about Jephthah's vow. Common interpretation used topical approach to examine ethical issue. The main problem to interpret Jephthah vow is that many interpreters did not used narrative approach, so that they have lost the writer emphasis. This article aims to examine Jephthah's vow according narrative approaches. Some of interpretation book of the Old Testament, especially commentary on Judges 11:29-40 forget narrative approach as literary that writer used. Literary approach of the Judges 11:29-40 presents the properly approach to produce properly theological interpretation. This article elaborating each plot of Judges 11:29-40 to find the motive of narrator. The interpretation is according the structure of narrative text produce the precise and clear interpretation. The writer striving to consistent with an interpretation rule in examine each part of the passage. Therefore, this article is an academic writing that gives rich insights.

Article History:

Received 5 October 2020

Accepted 13 January 2021

Keywords:

Narrative;

Judges;

Literary;

Victory;

Vows.

Introduction

The most often issue raised in lectures is when discussing Jephthah's vows that is the incident of Jephthah's vows payment in the form of his only daughter. Robert B. Chrisholm is interested in the ethical challenge to the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter His writing is published in Journal *Bibliotheca Sacra* 167 in 2010 with a title *The Ethical Challenge of Jephthah's Fulfilled Vow*.¹ Focus of Chrisholm's writing is ethical challenge in lense of Christian doctrine. This issue has attracted special attention from academics in the form of a conflict between the offering of human sacrifice and the commandment of Allah which prohibits human sacrifice. In addition, several commentaries from 1615 attempted to interpret the book of Judges with the

¹Robert B. Chrisholm, "The Ethical Challenge Of Jephthah's Fulfilled Vow," *Bibliotheca Sacra*, (2010): 404–422.

lens of Hebrews 11:32.²

Many preacher or pastor preach the topic about Jephthah's vow in light the book of Hebrew 11:32. They are giving positive perspective according New Testament writing. Context the book of Hebrew 11:32 talking about faith that leading in Christian's hope.³ Hebrews 11 is conclusion of Christian doctrine that writers gave in chapter 1-10. Actually, the Hebrew's writer critique of Jews cult. That seen in Hebrews 10:4 has been described as a radical, brutal and uncompromised.⁴ According the context of Hebrew's book, some interpreter failed to interpreting Jephthah in original narrative.

In this article, the author uses the Old Testament narrative approach. Some of the stages the writer will take are as follows: *First*, we analyzes the translation of the text of the book of Judges 11: 29-40. In the percentage of translating the text from Hebrew to English translation based on grammar and syntax. We will analyze the grammatical constructs contained in the text. The purpose of this process is to gather as much information as possible regarding the narrator's writing. When we talking about grammatical interpretation, we should elaborate meaning words, lexicon, and relation each words (syntax).⁵ Douglas Stuart in *Old Testament Exegesis* say that good interpretation based on grammatical analyze. He suggesting to interpreter that they should concerning the *asyntendon*, *prostaxis*, *parataxis*, *anacoluton* and special construction of Hebrew's words.⁶ *Second*, we built the text outline and narrative writing structure. The outline is used as an interpretive framework so that the interpretation does not amiss or go beyond the written text. *Third*, we describes the interpretation based on the information obtained from the analysis of the translation, the elements of grammar and structure that have been arranged. In the process of interpretation, the author will also take advantage of tool books in the form of lexicons,⁷ handbooks on the use of Hebrew as well as writings from experts who provide information related to the topic of writing.⁸

In this article, the author tries to present a narrative approach in studying the text of Judges 11: 29-40. The narrative approach is deemed in accordance with the literature of the

²Kevin J Vanhoozer, *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*, ed. Kevin J Vanhoozer (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, n.d.). 65

³Adam G. Cooper, "Hope, A Mode of Faith: Aquinas, Luther and Benedict XVI on Hebrews 11:1," *The Heythrop Journal* III (2012): 182-190.

⁴H. Duff, Justin, "The Blood of Goats and Calves and Bulls? An Allusion of Isaiah 1:11 LXX in Hebrews 10:4," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 3 (2018): 765-783.

⁵Roy B. Zuck, *Hermeunetik: Basic Bible Interpretation* (Malang: Gandum Mas, 2014).

⁶Douglas Stuart, *Old Testament Exegesis*, Fourth. (Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009).

⁷William L. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2000).

⁸Bruce K. Waltke and M. O'Connor, *An Introduction to the Hebrew Syntax* (Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004).

book of Judges. By paying attention to the structure of literacy, this book has narrative literature. Thus, an equivalent approach to the literary genre of books is the narrative approach (narratology).⁹ So, this article not only examine the ethical issue of Jephthah's vow, but also examine the theological issue of Jephthah as judge is Israel's History according the holy scripture.

Result and Discussion

In this passage we will explain about our findings and discussion about theological insight of Jephthah's vow according Judges 11:29-40. Our findings are based on translation analyze that we did. After we describes our findings, we will continue discussing our findings with scholar writings. Therefore, our findings will be completed by scholar research.

Result

In this passage, we begin with *Exegetical Outlines* based on translation of Judges 11:29-40. The situation at the opening of the book is critical. Joshua who had taken over as leader of the people at the death of Moses, had only begun the conquest of the land.¹⁰ The structure of Judges chapter 1-3 is the social, moral and spiritual background that narrator gave to informs the reader that Israel is accepted Canaan culture.

- I Resistance to Ammonites (29-33)
 - a. The Spirit of the Lord was on Jephthah and Jephthah went to war
 - b. Jephthah Vowed
 - i. If the LORD really gave the Ammonites into Jephthah's hand.
 - ii. Come home in peace from the Ammonites
 - iii. Offering the burnt offering that (he) was the first to meet him.
 - c. The LORD handed over the Ammonites to Jephthah
- II Jephthah's Vow and His Daughter (34-39)
 - a. Jephthah returned and was greeted by his daughter (34)
 - b. Jephthah's reaction and the reaction of his daughter (35-37)
 - c. Jephthah's daughter lamented her virginity (38)
 - d. The Vow done by Jephthah (39)
- III Commemorate (40)

⁹Narratology is a branch of science or literary criticism that deals with the structure and function of narrative.

¹⁰Liliana R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges* (Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989).

The book of Judges describes the state of Israel as having a spiritually evident. To response the condition of Israel that, God gave the judges to lead the Israelites. A common pattern is as follows:¹¹

<p>^AThe Israelites sinned ^BThe nations rose against the Israelites ^CThe Israelites cried out to the LORD ^D The LORD raised up the Judge ^E The Israelites were released ^FThe Judge Dead ^G The Israelites did sin again</p>
--

Chapters 10 and 11 are part of the narrative about a judge emphasized by the author. Because the narrative about Jephthah has a bigger portion than the other judges, for example, Tola, Yair, Ebzan, Elon, and Abnon. The narrator wants to present a long story so that the reader can draw a theological conclusion from the narrative itself.

Close context

The narrative context of Judges 11: 29-40 begins with the wickedness of the Israelites (Judges 10:6).¹² They worship the gods of the nations around them. They worship and serve many gods.¹³ Their wickedness is greater before the Lord than any other nation. They left God and did not serve God. They had broken the ten commandments (Ex 20: 1-18). This is a humiliation to the Lord after the Lord saved this nation from previous oppression through the judges. This happened after the previous judge died (Judges 10: 5).

THE LORD delivered¹⁴ them into the hands of the Ammonites and Philistines. The Ammonites were oppressed for eighteen years (8). Verses 10-14 are a dialogue about acknowledging the mistakes of the Israelites with the Lord. Verse 13 is a rhetorical answer¹⁵ that was revealed by the Lord for the Israelites. This rhetorical statement asserts that there is

¹¹From this pattern, the writer draws a conclusion based on the general description of the book of Judges, that God still cares for His people and hears His people who cry out to Him. This structure explains that God does not change, even though man or His people change.

¹²יִסְּפוּ (Judg. 10:6) hiphil, waw consecutive, imperfect, 3, m, j a declarative Hiphil form that states or declares something against an object. תִּלְעֲשׂוּ עֲקָר (Judges 10:6) describes that evil acts committed by the Israelites. The verse also describes the evil acts committed by the Israelites. So the exegete sees that the emphasis in verse 6 is on the crimes committed by the Israelites.

¹³Each nation had one main god, but the Israelites worshiped many gods who were considered to be the main gods of each nation.

¹⁴מִן־יָמָּךְ (Judg. 10:7 WTT) the word used is to sell. The word is used for describes the Israelites being handed over to slavery. Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

¹⁵Verses 11 and 12 describe what the Lord did to save the Israelites from the oppression. Verse 14 describes the evil deeds of the Israelites that were done after being saved by the Lord. Verse 15 is a statement of irony that the Lord revealed to the Israelites, so that they might seek salvation from the gods they had worshiped.

no salvation for Israel apart from the Lord.

Verses 15-16 are Israel's response to the Lord's statement. They acknowledged their wrongdoing and removed idolatry from this nation. And the LORD's heart stirred¹⁶ up on Israelites. The next narrative describes Jephthah and what he did for the Israelites.

Literary Structure Judges 11: 29-40

In this narrative the literary structure is a single episode scene which can be seen through a dramatic plot. The first half was that the Spirit of the Lord was on Jephthah. Then Jephthah went to the place of the Ammonites to fight (29). Second Half (upward action) in the middle of his journey Jephthah made a promise (Vow), that he would offer burnt offerings to the Lord, if he gained victory over the Ammonites (30-31). Third Half (uphill action) Jephthah wins the victory because the LORD has delivered the Ammonites into his hands (32). Third Half (climax) Jephthah returns and is greeted by his daughter (34). The daughter's Fourth Act (Climax) invites Jephthah to carry out his promise (36). Fifth Round (Decreasing Action) his daughter goes 2 months up the mountains to lament her virginity (38). Sixth Half (declining action) his daughter is sacrificed (39). Israel women commemorate her daughter's seventh act (Resolution) (40). The literary structure is described as follows;

Background: The Spirit of the Lord was upon Jephthah (29-30)
Action Increases: *Jephthah's vow* (31)
Action Increases: The Ammonites were defeated (32-33)
Climax: *Jephthah comes home and his daughter welcomes him* (34)
Climax: *The reaction of Jephthah's daughter* (36)
Declining action: *Jephthah's daughter asked permission for two months* (37)
Declining Action: *The Daughter is sacrificed and does not know man* (39)
Resolution: *Jephthah's daughter Commemorated* (40).

From the structure above it can be seen that the climax of the narrative is when Jephthah returns and is greeted by his daughter (34) and his daughter invites Jephthah to sacrificed (36). With regard to the problem it appears that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jephthah, so Jephthah went to war (29). The context explains that the war belongs to the Lord who is helping the Israelites. Halfway through Jephthah recited the Vow¹⁷ that would sacrifice the first to come out of his doorstep to greet him. The LORD handed over the Ammonites to Jephthah. Jephthah's victory was not because of the vows he uttered, but because of God's heart, which could not stand Israel's troubles (Judg.10: 16). In the first half to the third round

¹⁶Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*.

¹⁷The vow is a spoken promise and must be kept because the Lord has done a matter, for example helping in war, etc.

the theology meaning is the Lord who releasing the Israelites and gives them victory in battle.

The turning point began with Jephthah's return and was greeted by his daughter (34). Verse 35 is Jephthah's reaction. In verses 34-36 the narrator focuses on the reaction of Jephthah and his daughter. This is a new chapter revealed by the narrator. In the previous three acts the narrator focused on the Lord's work in the battle of Jephthah, then in the fourth and fifth round the narrator emphasized the reaction of Jephthah and his daughter to the victory that the Lord gave. The narrator raises the topic of the problem is vows. Was Jephthah going to do the vows he had spoken or not?¹⁸ The meaning gained in this round is how does a person react in response to the victory that God has given? Victory is a gift from God. Jephthah could not manipulate his victory as if it were his vows.

The theme that is also important in this narrative is the level of resolution. The incident of the daughter of Jephthah served as a commemoration to the daughters of Israel. The sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter was so important that it was observed four days a year. The narrator does not explain the meaning or what part is being commemorated and lamented. Is it about her virginity or sacrifice? The narrator doesn't really mention this. But the usage of the word **לִתְנוּחַ** "lament" is the same word when his daughter and friends mourned his virginity in the mountains for two months. The theme of Jephthah's daughter's commemorate implies that a girl was sacrificed because of her father's carelessness in pronouncing vows. A father must care for his daughter and be careful in vowing.

Grammatical Structure of Judges 11:29-40

The structure of translation and preparation of an exegetical outline. There are many commentaries that outline different exegesis¹⁹ with the line of exegesis that the author has compiled.²⁰ However, the author tries to arrange based on the narrative line of the book of Judges 11:29-40.

Discussion

In this section the author describes the meanings contained in the narrative book Judges 11: 29-40. The interpretation process follows the principles of the narrative genre interpretation technique. The author is loyal to the written text, grammatical structure,

¹⁸Jephthah could have paid fifty shekels of silver in exchange for his vows (Leviticus 27:3).

¹⁹John. F Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, *Bible Knowledge Commentary Of Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995). 399-403

²⁰Kenneth L. Baker and R Kohlenberg, *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994). 351

context and narrator's motives as outlined in the narrative. In narrative interpretation, an interpreter depends entirely on the notes given by the narrator. Therefore, the resulting interpretation must be within the scope of the text being conveyed. Non-biblical sources can be used as informative references. Therefore, the result of interpretation does not go beyond the text intended by the narrative writer.

Resistance Against the Ammonites (29-33)

The Spirit of the Lord was on Jephthah and Jephthah went to war. This passage begins with “עַל יְנִיָּהוּהוּ-הַיְהוָה רוּחַ יִפְתָּח” The Spirit of the Lord on Jephthah. Spirit of the Lord that lead Jephthah and provide strength in battle.²¹ Jephthah was controlled by the Spirit of the LORD as Gideon was controlled by the Spirit of the Lord (Judg 6:34).²² The narrator emphasizes that in this text it is God who has an interest in the war. The Spirit of the Lord empowered Jephthah as a military leader to face the battles with the Ammonites. By paying attention to the previous context that the LORD could not stand the trouble of the Israelites so that He would deliver this nation. The Lord delivered deliverance for the Israelites through Jephthah. The narrator does not explain Jephthah's qualifications so that the Spirit of the Lord was upon Jephthah. This reaffirms that it is the Lord who is concerned with the deliverance of the Israelites.

The usage of ו (waw konsekutif) sequentially shows that the narrator is explaining a chronology of events.²³ After the Spirit of the Lord had been on Jephthah, Jephthah went to war with the Ammonites (29). The Spirit of the Lord intervened in Jephthah to go to war with the Ammonites. God's leadership towards someone in the Old Testament was not related to a holy way of living like the New Testament. Rather, it was to carry out His plan for the Israelites. The Spirit of the Lord was on Jephthah not immediately to make Jephthah holy living, but to lead Jephthah to release the Israelites. So in verse 29 the narrator is explaining that God intervened in Jephthah so that he went to war. This verse is also explaining Jephthah's righteous actions after the Spirit of the Lord was upon him, that is going to war.

Jephthah made a vow (30-31). The narrator starts this section with a new chapter that follows on from the previous events.²⁴ Jephthah made a vow as a form of gratitude for

²¹Waltke and O'Connor, *An Introduction to the Hebrew Syntax*. 217.

²²Herbert Woft, “Judges,” in *Expositors Bible Commentary*, ed. Frank Gaebelin, 3rd ed. (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992). 455; Casey S. Cole, “The Binding of Jephthah: Learning Orthopathy from the Daughter of Judges 11.” *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*. Vol.29, Iss.2 (2020): 144-152, DOI: 10.1163/17455251-bja10010.

²³In the context of the text Waw shows activities in chronological order.

²⁴וַיִּזְרַח the use of waw consecutive explains that these events are linear.

winning.²⁵ A Vow is used as a form of spiritual appreciation for the great work done by God. Regarding Jephthah's vows, academics have raised debates regarding the content of Jephthah's vows.²⁶

First, Jephthah made a vow to the LORD which said, "If you really give Ammonites into my hand". The word "וַיִּנָּתוּ" in the absolute infinitive form which emphasizes the verb. Jephthah was unsure that the LORD leads him and gives victory in the battle. He questioned whether God could give him victory. For the Ammonites he is going to fight are strong and have afflicted Israel for eighteen years. Jephthah did not have faith that the Spirit of the Lord was with him and would bring victory. There were two things Jephthah did not believe. This was the reason Jephthah took his vows to the Lord.

Second, "when I returned home in peace from the Ammonites" וַעֲמוּ יָמֵי בְּשָׁלוֹם in NIV translated "When I return in triumph". The translation emphasizes that the purpose of the vows is that the Lord will give victory over the Ammonites. These battles were the battles for the Israelites, but Jephthah's vows were personal. Jephthah saw the battle as his personal battle, not the Lord's battle against the Ammonites for the Israelites. Nor does the narrator explain Jephthah's interaction with the Israelites in connection with this war.

The word בְּשָׁלוֹם בְּשׂוֹב confirms that the content of Jephthah's vows was for his victory. The previous phrase אֲמֹנִיתָיו תָּתַן אֶת־בְּנֵי עַמּוֹן בְּיָדַי: that the Ammonites were handed over to his hand. And emphasized by the second phrase with the same meaning יָמֵי בְּשָׁלוֹם בְּשָׁלוֹם "I came home in victory". The main focus of Jephthah's vow is his victory, not in the Lord's plan for the Israelites.

Third, offering the burnt offering that is (he) was the first to meet him. Did Jephthah think about what came out of his house? אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא "what came out...", it was literally stated that Jephthah would make a burnt offering (הַעֲלֵה). It is the same word used in II Kings 3:27 when the king of Moab sacrificed his son as a "burnt offering".²⁷ In HALOT the word has two

²⁵ Walvoord and Zuck, *Bible Knowledge Commentary Of Old Testament*. 401; Casey S. Cole, "The Binding of Jephthah: Learning Orthopathy from the Daughter of Judges 11": 144-152.

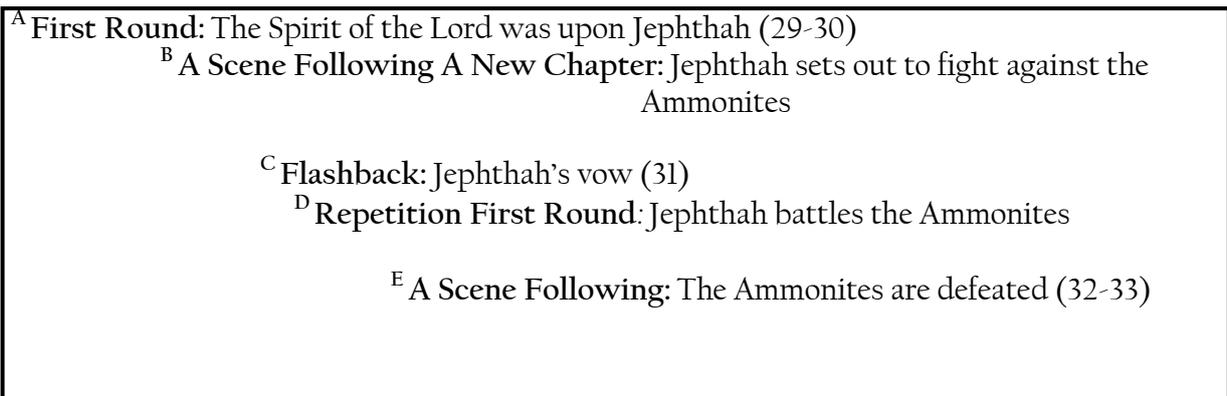
²⁶ Woelfel, "Judges." 455; Christopher Begg, "The Josephan Judge Jephthah." *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*, Vol.20, No.2 (2006): 161-188, DOI: 10.1080/09018320601049425.

²⁷ (2 King. 3:27) that context is when the king of Moab was about to go to war. However, the setting of the book of Judges is different from the historical setting of the book of Kings. So it is not certain whether Jephthah thought he would offer his daughter as a burnt offering. In II Kings 3:27 it records the firstborn son was sacrificed as a condition of war. Meanwhile in the book of Judges Jephthah will present "what came out of his door" as a

meanings, that was the offering burned on the altar (Gen. 8:20; Gen. 22: 2; I Sam. 7: 9) and the animal offered as a burnt offering (Leviticus 1: 4).²⁸ The debate that arises is whether Jephthah thought that an animal would come out to greet him when he returned from war? Did Jephthah think that someone would greet him when he came home with a victory in his hand?

The use of word “אֵיִיִּץ” as substantival adjective, singular, participle can be defined as something which is lifeless (Num. 21:13; 32:24) but can also be used to describe a human being (Jer. 5: 6; 21: 9; 38: 2). The use of word “לִקְרָאתִי” in the infinitive form means "to meet me" can also be used to describe an animal meeting one person as humans meet another human being (Judg. 14:5; Job 39:21).²⁹ The next question is whether any animal came out to greet its master after the war? It is not explained whether it was an animal or someone that Jephthah would sacrifice, but when the narrator uses *masculine* it has explained something general, whether animal or human, male or female.

The LORD handed over the Ammonites to Jephthah. Chrisholm quoted the literary analysis of Barry G. Weeb.³⁰



In the structure above, it can be seen that the chapter regarding the Jephthah's vow is an "insert" in the scene of the Spirit of the Lord upon Jephthah and Jephthah then goes to fight against the Ammonites. Verses 32 and 32 have the same scene, that is Jephthah going to fight the Ammonites. As explained earlier that the events in verse 31 are linear. After the Spirit of the Lord was on Jephthah, Jephthah went to war with the Ammonites.

In this battle the Lord gave the Ammonites into Jephthah's hand. The Ammonites

thanksgiving for his victory.

²⁸Holladay, *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*, 273; Christopher Begg, "The Josephan Judge Jephthah": 161-188

²⁹Chrisholm, "The Ethical Challenge Of Jephthah's Fulfilled Vow," 405; Casey S. Cole, "The Binding of Jephthah: Learning Orthopathy from the Daughter of Judges 11": 144-152.

³⁰Chrisholm, "The Ethical Challenge Of Jephthah's Fulfilled Vow," 410; Casey S. Cole, "The Binding of Jephthah: Learning Orthopathy from the Daughter of Judges 11": 144-152.

were defeated because the Lord was fighting through Jephthah. According to a survey in the book of Judges, the filling of the Spirit of the Lord empowers a person to face physical conflict or battle, but such fulfillment does not guarantee separating a person from his foolish action.³¹

Therefore, the meaning conveyed in this text is the LORD Himself who caused Jephthah to win the battle. “**בְּיָדוֹ, יְהוָה תִּנְמוֹנִי**” affirm that the Lord who gives the victory. It was not Jephthah's actions or strength in dealing with the Ammonites. The Webb's analysis also confirms that Jephthah's victory was not due to Jephthah's vows. Jephthah's vow did not affect the outcome of the war. It would be wrong to think that Jephthah's victory was due to his vows. Such a view feels that God can be manipulated by human prayer.

Jephthah's vow and his daughter (34-39)

In this section the narrator switches the *scene*. In the preceding *scene* it is Jephthah and the Ammonites. Verses 34-37 the scenes are Jephthah and his daughter after Jephthah finished fighting. The flow in 29-33 is fast and not very detailed. However, in verses 34-37 going more slowly, the narrator records in detail each scene.

Jephthah returns and is greeted by his daughter (34). Jephthah returned from battle and brought victory from the Lord. He returned to his house and was greeted by his daughter. In this section the narrator is showing a surprise from this narrative. The word “**הִיָּהֵב**” in HALOT is used as an emphasis which means "behold, pay attention". The narrator is taking the reader to the event of Jephthah's return and comparing it with the vows that Jephthah had uttered when they went to battle.

His daughter came to greet Jephthah. The narrator notes this as a surprise and climax in this narrative. The author of the book wants to tell what Jephthah will do with this surprise. It was customary for Israel to welcome heroes who returned to war with dances. Of course this is an event that Jephthah did not predict. This can be seen from Jephthah's reaction to tears when he saw his daughter welcoming his return (35).

There is another point that the narrator emphasizes in this verse. "And she is only a single and there is no son or daughter to come out of him." There is a "claim from the narrator" that Jephthah must sacrifice his daughter and Jephthah cannot continue the offspring. Does this part of the verse contain any allusions to the events of Abraham being commanded by the

³¹Chrisholm, "The Ethical Challenge Of Jephthah's Fulfilled Vow," 411

Lord to sacrifice Isaac (Gen. 22: 1-19)?³²

It is not explained why the narrator added the identity of Jephthah's daughter as “*only child*” and did not immediately explain the reaction of the two. “*מְלִינִי*”³³ explained that there are no other children, both boys and girls. As an only child, of course Jephthah really loved his daughter. This part of the verse prepares the reader for the next scene, namely how Jephthah and his daughter reacted to the vows that had been spoken to God. The theological message conveyed by this verse is that humans do not know situations or things that will occur in the future. Therefore, they need to be careful in thinking, speaking and acting. And always keep your mind from being careless in making a decision. The future is *a surprise* so that no one can know for sure his future except God. Every action taken in the present has an impact on the future.

Jephthah's Reaction and her daughter's reaction. Verses 35 to 37 contain the reaction of Jephthah and the reaction of his daughter. Their reaction is the second climax in this narrative. Narrator describes both reactions carefully. The plot in the scene verses 35-37 is slower than verses 29-33 which tend to be fast. The narrator has prepared a scene beforehand, that is an explanation of the identity of Princess Jephthah who is an only child to enter the peak stage of conflict in this narrative. In verses 35-37, the narrator is explaining two reactions. First, the reaction to the vows that Jephthah had made. Second, the reaction was the condition of her daughter as an only child who had to be offered as a burnt offering.

Jephthah's reaction. And when he looked, he cried on his clothes and said “oh my daughter you really caused me to bow and you brought my disaster. I have opened my mouth to the LORD, and I cannot withdraw anymore”. Jephthah's reaction was *self-centered*. Using the ending ל, נ, ה shows that the focus of Jephthah's sorrow was on himself. He felt as the loser in this matter. Why does it have to be his daughter who comes out and welcomes him and not the others. In this narrative the writer is not judging Jephthah as the party to be blamed. However, the author is describing a narrative that actually happened. The narrator does not prejudice Jephthah. But let the reader see for himself the character of Jephthah through this narrative.

Chrisholm quoted Adele Berlin as saying that there are three touches of meaning that can be applied. *First*, is the narrator's perception as a neutral party. That is observing every

³²The context for Abraham sacrificing Isaac is that God tested Abraham's loyalty. God is testing the extent of Abraham's trust in God. In Jephthah's case it was Jephthah's carelessness in pronouncing his vows. So, he was "required" to pay his vows. However, the meaning that can be learned from these two stories is that "the only child" is valuable both in the eyes of God and in the eyes of men.

³³Preposition, Suffix, OI, M, T. the use of masculine gender explains the general. Thus emphasizing that Jephthah not only regretted his daughters, but that he was no longer the successor of his descendants.

event objectively. The narrator also reports his narrative materials regarding the perceptions of Jephthah and his daughter. *Second*, perceptions about Jephthah's attitude. *Third*, the perception of someone who benefits or loses.³⁴

In this verse the narrator also sees Jephthah as someone who needs to gain sympathy. He saw that his victory had ended tragically with the death of his daughter. The victory that should have been celebrated with joy turned out to be an ironic thing. Jephthah's cry was a logical reaction because he was going to offer up his daughter. But the problem is that he feels like the loser. Of course, Jephthah could replace his vow with fifty shekels of silver and say, "I have done a foolish thing by vowing to the Lord." Jephthah thought that his daughter should be sacrificed.³⁵

Jephthah's daughter reaction. The reaction of Jephthah's daughter was to let her father go do it in the imperative sacrificed herself (36). "מִפִּיךָ יֵצֵא כְאִשֶּׁר, לִי עֲשֵׂה" put pressure on her daughter to order her father to make vows against her. "As what comes out of your mouth" asserts that her daughter invited her father to offer herself up as a burnt offering. It is believed that his daughter was actually killed and offered up as a burnt offering. Jephthah's vow was to offer burnt offerings, not offer up his daughter as a servant in the tabernacle of the Lord. So, the phrase "as what comes out of your mouth" is describing what Jephthah had to do with his daughter.

The basis for Jephthah's daughter in inviting her father to offer a sacrifice was "what the LORD had done", that is releasing Jephthah from the Ammonites. His daughter shared Jephthah's view that her father's victory was due to his vow. So that the daughter felt that her father should fulfilled his vow after what the Lord had done for Jephthah.

Jephthah's daughter saw the problem of her father. He gave up his life for her father's benefit. Two different characters are shown in one narrative. This passage is also comparing the character of Jephthah and his daughter. Jephthah is shown as someone with a selfish character and his daughter as someone who cares for the interests of her father.

The question that needs to be discussed is, why did GOD not forbid Jephthah to offer up his daughter. The emphasis in this narrative is not on GOD's response to the sacrificial events. Rather, it was an ironic event that was caused by Jephthah's carelessness in pronouncing the vows. More than that is to teach that victory given by GOD cannot be

³⁴ Chrisholm, "The Ethical Challenge Of Jephthah's Fulfilled Vow," 416

³⁵ In Israel it was forbidden to offer humans, but Jephthah had lived in the suburbs where pagan ideas prevailed. Charles P. Pfeiffer, "Hakim-Hakim," in *Tafsiran Alkitab Wyclife Volume 1*, ed. Charles P. Pfeiffer and Everett. F Harrison (Malang: Gandum Mas, 2011), 692.

manipulated by a person's vows. It is too much to think of GOD as the one who allowed this heinous event to take place. The narrative does not explain GOD's response, but focuses on Jephthah and his daughter.

Jephthah's daughter lamented her virginity (38). How does a daughter feel who had to die at the hands of her own father as a victim? This explanation is the conflict resolution stage in this narrative. Jephthah's daughter asked her father to go to the mountain and ask for the return of her virginity. She viewed her imminent death as a double tragedy: not only was she as the burnt offering offered, she also had to die as a virgin.

The daily Indonesia language Bible translation adds "for I will die while still a virgin" in the translation, although the MT does not have that sentence. The emphasis in this verse is "lamenting girlhood", because this word is repeated twice in verses 37 and 38. The daughter could not bear children for her father. The generation or descendants of Jephthah had to stop through the death of his daughter. Despite differences of opinion regarding Jephthah offering sacrifices³⁶ which causes her daughter to lament over her virginity, but what is clear is that her daughter feels sad that she cannot bear children for her father and cannot enjoy her motherhood. From this verse we can see how sad Jephthah's daughter was. It is said that she wept with her friends for two months. Jephthah released his daughter into the mountains in the belief that her daughter would return to him. It was as if it would be the last wish or will his daughter asked for. The last will or wish is usually given when a person is about to die. So, Jephthah was taking his daughter's last wish before her daughter died.

The vow was performed by Jephthah. After two months Jephthah's daughter returned to her father, and Jephthah did as he had vowed. Even though there are interpreters who claim that his daughter became an eternal virgin and became a servant of the Israelite tent, it cannot be denied that based on the text and context it states that her daughter died as a burnt sacrifice.

A Commemoration (verse 40)

Verse 40 records the girls of Israel commemorating this event four days a year. "תִּלְתְּנוּ" this word can be interpreted to commemorate in a way sing a song in memory of Jephthah's daughter.³⁷ "לְבַת-יִפְתָּח" shows that Jephthah's daughter was acting as an indirect object. Thus

³⁶ First, there is an opinion that believes that her daughter will be celibate by serving in God's camp. Second, Jephthah's daughter would die young as a virgin.

³⁷ In the KJV it is translated "lament" which the emphasis is on weeping. Perhaps the KJV is in tune with the previous incident in which Jephthah's daughter had mourned her virginity with her friends. Meanwhile in NAS, NIV, NET translated "Comemorate" which means to be remembrance and celebrated. Although there are two different translations, the interpreter sees that what is emphasized in this verse is the remembrance of Jephthah's

the narrator wants to reconfirm that at the end of the narrative it is recorded that it focuses on Jephthah's daughter. His daughter has become a commemoration to the daughters of Israel. The interpreter does not see that what is commemorated is an event of sacrifice, but that Jephthah's daughter is the focus of the warning. This is related to the previous verse which explains that his daughter died in a state of the virgin. This is certainly very heartbreaking for the Israelites.

Conclusion

Judges 11: 29-40 narrative describes an incident where a Judge did not fully believe in the work of God who led him. Jephthah didn't seem convinced that God was leading him in battle, so he made a very heavy vow. Jephthah's victory was because of the LORD who gave him the Ammonites. The victory was not the result of Jephthah's vows.

The Spirit of the Lord on a Judge does not automatically deliver the judge from being foolish. The importance of the Spirit of the Lord is to save the Israelites. The Vow that Jephthah had spoken was not from the leadership of God, but an act that was not based on faith that the Lord would give victory in the battle.

His daughter had to become a victim of Jephthah's vow. Her unbelief resulted in actions that were not in accordance with God's will, so that his daughter had to die in a state of the virgin. This is a heartbreaking tragedy. Jephthah had to lose his beloved daughter and the line of descent broke. A person who is in God's control must follow what God plans and does in his life. Not believing in God's leadership is foolishness.

Bibliography

- Baker, Kenneth L., and R Kohlenberg. *Zondervan NIV Bible Commentary*. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1994.
- Begg, Christopher. "The Josephan Judge Jephthah." *Scandinavian Journal of the Old Testament*, Vol.20, No.2 (2006): 161-188, DOI: 10.1080/09018320601049425.
- Chrisholm, Robert B. "The Ethical Challenge Of Jephthah's Fulfilled Vow." *Bibliotheca Sacra* (2010) 404-422.
- Cole, Casey S. "The Binding of Jephthah: Learning Orthopathy from the Daughter of Judges 11." *Journal of Pentecostal Theology*. Vol.29, Iss.2 (2020): 145-157. DOI: 10.1163/17455251-bja10010.
- Cooper, Adam G. "Hope, A Mode of Faith: Aquinas, Luther and Benedict XVI on Hebrews 11:1." *The Heythrop Journal* III (2012): 182-190.

daughter. In HALOT there are two meanings, namely "Celebrate in Song, Sing" and "Lament". Koehler, 392.

- Duff, Justin, H. "The Blood of Goats and Calves and Bulls? An Allusion of Isaiah 1:11 LXX in Hebrews 10:4." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 3 (2018): 765–783.
- Holladay, William L. *A Concise Hebrew and Aramaic Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Leiden: Koninklijke Brill NV, 2000.
- Klein, Liliana R. *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*. Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989.
- Pfeiffer, Charles P. "Hakim-Hakim." In *Tafsiran Alkitab Wyclife Volume 1*, edited by Charles P. Pfeiffer and Everett. F Harrison. Malang: Gandum Mas, 2011.
- Stuart, Douglas. *Old Testament Exegesis*. Fourth. Louisville: Westminster John Knox Press, 2009.
- Vanhoozer, Kevin J. *Dictionary for Theological Interpretation of the Bible*. Edited by Kevin J Vanhoozer. Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, n.d.
- Waltke, Bruce K., and M. O'Connor. *An Introduction to the Hebrew Syntax*. Winona Lake: Eisenbrauns, 2004.
- Walvoord, John. F, and Roy B. Zuck. *Bible Knowledge Commentary Of Old Testament*. Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1995.
- Woft, Herbert. "Judges." In *Expositors Bible Commentary*, edited by Frank Gaeblein. 3rd ed. Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992.
- Zuck, Roy B. *Hermeunetik: Basic Bible Interpretation*. Malang: Gandum Mas, 2014.