

QUESTION AND ANSWER

Did Jephthah actually sacrifice his daughter ? (Judges 11.30-40).

To some questions there can be a simple answer, a plain "yes" or "no;" but those concerning a difficulty in Scripture require a much more careful and considered reply. The word "sacrifice," though its actual meaning is based upon the act of slaying, has also, in the Scriptures, a spiritual significance. A life given up wholly to God can be regarded as such.

Jephthah had vowed that, if God gave him victory, he would offer to the LORD, as a burnt offering, that which first came forth from his house, when he returned from the battle with Ammon. His vow has been called "rash," and doubtless it was uttered without due thought, for it was his only daughter who first met him.

If it be asked, Did he offer her as a burnt-offering to the LORD, the answer must be a categorical "No," for the following reasons.

- (a) A burnt-offering must be perfect to be acceptable to God. No person, however virtuous is without sin, and so could not be such a sacrifice.
- (b) It is plain from Scripture that human sacrifices were forbidden by God. (Lev. 18.21 ; Ezek. 23.37 and other places).
- (c) In Numbers 30 are given Divine regulations regarding vows. In certain circumstances (vv. 5.8) vows could be made "of none effect." If God permitted to men the annulment of a vow, it may be assumed that He could reserve such a right to Himself, and therefore could disallow Jephthah's vow. Leviticus 27 also deals with laws concerning vows, which could be met by the payment of money.
- (d) Abraham was commanded by God to offer his only son as a burnt-offering, which he proceeded to do, even to the uplifting of his knife, but God prevented, and provided a substitute. In Hebrews 11, however, he is said to have 'offered up Isaac,' "offered up his only-begotten son." Thus, his readiness to obey is described in terms of the act of obedience. Similarly, it may have been so with Jephthah, for his "faith" is also mentioned in Hebrews 11.

Although his daughter was not slain, it would appear she was devoted to a life of

virginity and separation to God. The word "lament" in Judges 11.40 is shewn in the margin as "talk with."

There is a lovely trait in her character manifest in the answer to her father's distressful act and words. "My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth." She realized what it meant to him and to her, yet graciously submitted. Would that young people had a like reverence for God and a like respect for parents.