

JEPHTHAH

Judges, Chapter 10

6 The Israelites continued to do evil in the eyes of YHVH, and served the Baalim and the Ashtarot, and the gods of Aram, Sidon, Moab, the Ammonites and the Philistines; they abandoned YHVH and did not serve Him.

Hamlin: Amongst others, Solomon worshipped to the gods of Sidon, Moab and Ammon. Sidon is particularly associated with Jezebel who influenced her husband Ahab. Amos castigates Aram (three verses), Phoenicia (two), Moab (three), Ammon (three), and Philistia (three) within the first 18 verses of his book.

Hamlin: Serving the gods of others meant accepting their values as norms for behaviour. Serving the gods of oppressors meant surrendering Israelite political and religious independence and conscription of Israelite manpower into their armies. It would also weaken or dissolve Israelite social institutions and impoverish the Israelite population [Gottwald].

7 And the anger of YHVH was kindled against Israel, and He sold them into the hand of the Philistines and the hand of the Ammonites.

JSB: The subjugation is more severe – the Israelites are caught in a pincer by the Philistines in the west and Ammon in the east.

8 They shattered and crushed the Israelites that year; [for] 18 years all the Israelites that were beyond the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead.

JSB: From 11:22, this is southern Gilead, the territory between the Rivers Arnon and Jabbok. **Me:** The land allocated to the tribe of Gad.

Hamlin: The verb, ratzatz, to crush, recalls Moses's warning to the Israelites not to break the covenant with God [Deut. 28:33]. **DS:** They were crushed, physically and mentally.

9 The Ammonites passed over the Jordan to fight against Judah, Benjamin, and the house of Ephraim, and Israel was very distressed.

Hamlin: Warfare, past and present, dominates this story. The verb, lacham, to fight/battle/wage war, occurs 15 times in this story – more frequently than in the entire book up to this point.

10 And the Israelites cried out to YHVH, saying: “We have sinned against You, in that we have forsaken our God and served the Baalim.”

JSB: This is the only explicit reference to repentance in the Book of Judges.

11 And YHVH said to the Israelites: “Was it not from the Egyptians, Amorites, Ammonites, and Philistines,

12 Sidonians, Amalekites and Maonites, that you were oppressed; and you cried out to Me, and I saved you from their hand?

JSB: The Maonites were a nomadic tribe in the southwest of Judah [1 Sam. 23:24]. Therefore, their inclusion here is surprising.

13 Yet you have forsaken Me, and served other gods; therefore, I will not continue to save you.

14 Go and cry to the gods that you have chosen; they will save you in your time of distress.”

15 And the Israelites said to YHVH: “We have sinned; do to us all that is good in Your eyes; only deliver us, we pray You, this day.”

Polzin: This is desperate, self-serving repentance, using God to ensure their peace and tranquillity. **Trad:** Repentance involves the acceptance of divine judgment besides the realisation of one's sin

16 And they removed the strange gods from their midst and served YHVH; and His soul grieved for the misery of Israel.

Me: End of Negotiation No. 1 – successful or unsuccessful? God does not appoint a saviour. The elders do.

Me'am Loez: Just as Jephthah was exiled but Israel would turn to him in its time of distress and humble itself, so must it act before God to gain his assistance. It must humble its heart and repent.

17 Then the Ammonites were summoned and encamped in Gilead. And the Israelites assembled and encamped in Mizpah.

18 And the people, the princes of Gilead, said to each other: “Who is the man that will begin to fight against the Ammonites? He will be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead.”

JSB: The phrasing emphasises their despair. The leadership is promised to whoever will dare to fight, and not necessarily to the one who achieves victory.

Matthews: “Who will begin” is hauntingly reminiscent of Judges 1:1, where the Israelites inquired of God “who shall go up first” since they no longer had Joshua to lead them. There, they sought divine direction but here they seek their own counsel, not God's.

Drazin: Yehezkel Kaufmann stresses that the Jephthah tale is a realistic, natural event. There are no interventions by God, angels or prophets. There are no miracles or unusual events.

Judges Chapter 11 – haftarah for Parashat Hukat

1 Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour and the son of a prostitute; and Gilead begot Jephthah.

Me: Same description as that given to Gideon by the angel of God. **Plaut:** Jephthah means “he [BDB: God] opens.” **Boling:** Short form of the Valley of Yiphtach-el – God opens [Josh. 19:14 + 27].

2 And Gilead's wife bore him sons; and when his wife's sons grew up, they drove Jephthah out, and said to him: “You will not inherit in our father's house; for you are the son of another woman.”

Me: Jephthah is the Other. **JSB:** He is the outsider. **Fishbane:** He becomes an outcast and an outlaw. **Me:** That should remind us of what happened to David.

Radak: depriving Jephthah of his share of the inheritance is unjust and against halacha.

Plaut: Modern psychology would predict that Jephthah's early years would make him the kind of person he grew up to be.

3 Jephthah fled from his brothers and dwelt in the land of Tov; there gathered empty men to Jephthah, and they went out with him.

Hamlin: Tov, located near the sources of the R. Yarmuk, was on the border separating Aram (Syrian), Ammon and Gilead. It remained outside Saul's kingdom. It allied with Ammon in a war against David and was later incorporated into his kingdom. **Wikipedia:** The Yarmuk forms a natural border between the plains to the north - Hauran, Bashan and Golan - and the Gilead mountains to the south. Thus, it has often served as a boundary line between political entities. The Yarmuk is the largest tributary of the Jordan River and flows into it south of Lake Kinneret.

JSB: Tov was in the NE of Gilead; presumably a border district which attracted low life. The mercenaries who followed Avimelech were also “empty” [Judg. 9:4].

Alter: “Empty” probably refers to men without property, on the margins of society, who have nothing to lose and readily join a band of guerrillas or bandits.

Hamlin: The man of the hour, the outsider, was quietly biding his time in exile, like Moses in Midian, David in Ziklag and Jeroboam in Egypt.

Plaut: **Rabbi** thinks the band of outlaws went out to raid settlements and must have given their leader a reputation as a successful fighter.

4 And it came to pass sometime later, that the Ammonites made war against Israel.

5 And it was, when the Ammonites made war against Israel, the elders of Gilead went to take Jephthah from the land of Tov.

JSB: The elders are so desperate that they come in person rather than sending messengers. **Plaut:** “The crises of experience often reveal the true leaders of a people. Unseen and disregarded in placid times, they seem to attract attention like a magnet and men move toward them with a sure instinct” [Interpreter's Bible]. **Me:** Sounds like what happened to W S Churchill in 1940.

6 And they said to Jephthah: “Come and be our chief, and we will wage war against the Ammonites.”

Michael Walzer: The elders functioned as a search committee. **JSB:** A katzin is a chief, a military leader, whose authority is less than a rosh, the head.

7 And Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead: “Did you not hate me and drive me out from my father's house? Why have you come to me now when you are in distress?”

JSB: From Jephthah's viewpoint, the elders are responsible for his expulsion because they did not stop his half-brothers.

Pirkei Avot 4:3: Ben Azzai used to say: “do not despise anybody...for there is no man that has not his hour...” **Sefaria:** Since all of us are created in God's image, no one should despise another; to do so would be to despise God. Even someone who seems worthless and a total detriment to society has his hour and place. We never know when that hour or place might come.

8 The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah: “Thus, we have returned to you now, that you may go with us and fight the Ammonites, and you will be head for us over all the inhabitants of Gilead.”

9 Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead: “If you bring me back to fight Ammon and YHVH delivers them before me, I will be your head.”

Matthews: Jephthah is a clever negotiator. He is willing to stipulate that he will only acquire the title of Rosh if God provides him with the victory. In this way, he adds the inclusion of the deity as witness to these terms. Any victory he gains will then be seen as divine affirmation of his position as leader. **Boling:** The Rosh had administrative as well as military responsibilities.

10 And the elders of Gilead said to Jephthah: “YHVH will listen between us if we do not do according to your word.”

Fishbane: “God will listen between us” means “God will be witness between us”, i.e., God has heard the terms of the treaty. “Doing as you have said” is part of the operative language of the agreement. Pairing “doing” and “hearing” shed light on the famous formula of compliance made by the Israelites at the conclusion of the covenant at Mt Sinai: *na’aseh v’nishma* [Ex. 24:7]. That phrase would seem to have a more precise legal sense. Apparently, the formula attests to an agreement both to fulfil the covenant and to be responsible for the terms heard.

Matthews: The elders are willing to give up a large measure of their authority in exchange for security. If their champion falls, they are in no more danger than they had been from the first.

Hamlin: Having secured a permanent post and his own property [11:31], it’s time for Jephthah to redress the wrongs of the past and restore full rights to the Israelites to live on the land in safety

11 Jephthah went with Gilead’s elders and the people made him head and chief; Jephthah spoke all his words before YHVH in Mizpah.

Me: *End of Negotiation No. 2* – successful for both parties.

Hertz: Gideon spoke before God as a solemn confirmation of the terms of the arrangement between the elders and him. **Me:** See the laws of war – *Deuteronomy 20:10*.

Matthews: Ancient Near Eastern literature has a tradition of a hero driven out by his brothers who ultimately triumphs over them. **Me:** The classic example in the Tenach is Joseph.

Charles Simon: Given how the elders had behaved towards him in the past, Jephthah did not fully trust them. He only agreed if the elders and the people of Gilead went to the holy place of Mizpah and swore in front of God that they would honour the terms of the agreement. In those days, vows, both private and public, were considered to be binding. One could not retract a vow.

12 Jephthah sent messengers to the king of Ammon: ‘What is there between you and me, that you have come to wage war in my land?’

Boling: *This is the only narrative account in the Book of Judges of Israelite diplomacy toward a nation-state.*

13 And the king of the Ammonites answered the messengers of Jephthah: “Because Israel took away my land, when he came up out of Egypt, from the Arnon to the Jabbok, and to the Jordan; now restore them peacefully.”

Plaut: *The River Arnon empties into the Dead Sea from the east. The River Yabbok flows into the Jordan from the east, roughly halfway between Lake Kinneret and the Dead Sea.*

14 And Jephthah sent messengers again to the king of the Ammonites,

15 and said to him: “Thus says Jephthah: Israel did not take the land of Moab or the land of the Ammonites,

16 For when they came up from Egypt, and Israel walked through the wilderness to the Reed Sea, and came to Kadesh,

17 And Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying: Let me, I pray you, pass through your land; but the king of Edom did not listen. And in like manner he sent to the king of Moab; but he would not; and Israel dwelt in Kadesh.

Me: *Messengers to King of Edom and outcome – Num. 20: 14-21; Plaut and Drazin:* *There is no account in the Torah of messengers being sent to the King of Moab.*

18 Then it walked through the wilderness and circumnavigated the land of Edom and Moab, and came from the rising sun to the land of Moab, and pitched beyond the Arnon; but they did not come within the border of Moab, for the Arnon was the border of Moab.

19 Israel sent messengers to Sihon, king of the Amorites, king of Heshbon: ‘Let us pass, we pray you, through your land to my place.’

Me: *Messengers sent to Sihon, King of Amorites and outcome - Num. 21: 21-31.*

20 But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his border; but Sihon gathered all his people, pitched in Jahaz and fought with Israel.

21 YHVH, God of Israel, gave Sihon and all his people into Israel’s hand, and they smote them; so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that land.

22 And they possessed all the border of the Amorites, from the Arnon to the Jabbok, and from the wilderness to the Jordan.

Hertz: *It would appear that Sihon had recently wrested from Moab the territory north of the Arnon [Num. 21:26]. Therefore, it belonged neither to Moab nor Ammon.*

23 So now YHVH, the God of Israel, has dispossessed the Amorites from before His people Israel, and you would possess it?

24 Won't you possess that which Chemosh your god gives you to possess? All that YHVH our God has dispossessed for us, we'll possess.

Radak and Ralbag: *Jephthah is being sarcastic. Chemosh (the principal god of Moab) could not save Moab from losing Gilead to Sihon, King of the Amorites, who then lost everything to Israel.*

25 Now, are you better than Balak the son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he ever strive against Israel? Did he **wage war** against them?

26 While Israel dwelt in Heshbon ..and in all the cities that are by the Arnon for 300 years, why did you not recover them within that time?

My spreadsheet: 28 (Joshua) + 40 (Othniel) + 80 (Ehud) + 40 (Deborah) + 7 (Midian) + 40 (Gideon) + 3 (Avimelech) + 23 (Tola) + 22 (Yair) + 18 (Ammon) = 301 years.

27 I have not sinned against you, but you wrong me to **fight** me; YHVH the Judge, be judge today between Israel and the Ammonites."

Hertz: *Jephthah seeks by diplomatic means to arrive at a peaceable settlement – see Deut.20:10.*

28 But the king of the Ammonites did not listen to the words of Jephthah which he sent him.

Me: *End of Negotiation No. 3 – unsuccessful for both parties.*

29 Then the **spirit of YHVH** came on Jephthah and he passed over Gilead and Manasseh, and passed over Mizpeh of Gilead, and from Mizpeh of Gilead he passed over to the Ammonites.

Alter: *Only now, when Jephthah leads his troops into battle, is he invested with the divine spirit, the leader's charisma.* **Me:** *Neither God nor any of his angels ever communicate with him.*

30 And Jephthah vowed a vow to YHVH, and said: "If You will surely give the Ammonites into my hand,

David Gunn: *The vow encapsulates one of the great themes of Judges, namely the tension between human craving for security and the insecurity risked by allegiance and obedience to an image-less and unfathomable divinity. Perhaps it is the insecurity of the rejected "son of Gilead" that goads him to play hostage to fortune in order to secure the victory and headship over the rejecters.*

Hamlin: *Why did he feel compelled to make such a vow? This "mighty warrior" was not able to trust the Israelite God who had maintained an awful silence. This only exacerbated his deep sense of personal insecurity, which had been revealed in the encounters with his half-brothers and the elders.*

Fishbane: "vowed a vow" – same Hebrew as that used by the Israelites before their battle with the king of Arad [Num.21:2].

Hamlin: *Jephthah's vow was the type of bargain made by Jacob [Gen. 28:20-22], the Israelites [Num. 21:1-3], Hannah [1 Sam. 1:11] and Absalom [2 Sam. 15: 7-8].*

Boling: *It is surprising that the man who was so careful in his negotiations with the elders should be so hasty and careless with his vow to God.*

31 then it shall be, that whatever comes forth from the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the Ammonites, it shall be for YHVH, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering."

Me: *Negotiation No. 4 – Jephthah is successful in his confrontation with Ammon but pays a terrible price.*

Alter: *It is a rash vow. Midrash Tanhuma shrewdly notes that the first creature out of the house could have been a dog, pig or camel, animals unfit for sacrifice.*

Drazin: *Jephthah's rash vow was not unique. Caleb swore he would give his daughter in marriage to the man who captured a town. He had no idea who that might be. Saul made a similar vow if anybody killed Goliath. He had already vowed that anybody who ate food before the victory over the Philistines would be cursed, unaware that his son Jonathan would do so.*

32 So Jephthah passed over to the Ammonites to **wage war** against them; and YHVH gave them into his hand.

Exum: *The vow interferes with the logical progression of cause and effect; its position between the coming of the Spirit of YHVH on Jephthah and the subsequent victory renders it impossible to determine whether victory comes as the result of the spirit, or the vow, or both.* **Me:** *Ambiguity reigns.*

33 And he smote them 20 cities, a very great slaughter. The Ammonites were subdued before the Israelites.

Exum: *For Jephthah, success will come at a great price. Because of his vow, his victory over Ammon is Pyrrhic.*

34 And Jephthah came to Mizpah to his house and behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and dancing; and she was his only child; besides her he had no son or daughter.

Women's Haftarah Commentary: Isaac is Abraham's only son – yechid. Jephthah's only daughter is a yechida. Both are children of fathers willing to sacrifice them to prove their loyalty to God.

Drazin: Women customarily celebrated a victory, e.g., Miriam and other women playing timbrels and dancing at the Reed Sea [Ex. 15:20]. **Daat Mikra:** Greeting the hero David [1 Sam. 18:6].

JSB: Genealogically, Jephthah is a marginal person both in his ancestry [Me: son of a harlot] and in his progeny [Me: sacrifices his only daughter, thereby ensuring his extinction].

35 And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said: "Alas, my daughter! you have surely driven me to my knees and you have become my troubler; for I have opened my mouth to YHVH, and I cannot go back."

Boling: She gave him trouble?! Remarkable, one-sided self-pity voiced by the father who blames his daughter for the tragedy.

Me: According to the **BDB**, the Hebrew for **troubler**, achar, is closely related to Achan, the man who was responsible for Joshua and the people being defeated by the people of Ai.

Alter: This is a crucial pun. The verb used here, patsah, is slightly different from the verb, patah – to open, on which Jephthah's name is based, but it is a close phonetic and semantic cousin.

Me'am Loez: I spoke hastily, without proper contemplation. **Gunn:** He is a prisoner of i) his own words; ii) his understanding of the immutability of the vow and God; and iii) his own creation.

Hertz: The Rabbis severely blame Jephthah for not having his entirely invalid vow annulled. Pinchas, who the Rabbis assume was still the High Priest, could have absolved him from his criminal vow, and but for the rivalry between them would have done so. Pinchas said, "I, the High Priest, should go to that ignoramus! Let him come to ME!" And Jephthah said, "I, the Prince of the land, should humiliate myself before one of my subjects!" [Midrash Tanhuma Bechukotai 7]. **JSB:** Vows were taken very seriously in the biblical period [Deut. 23:22-23; Prov. 20:25; Eccl. 5:3-4].

Alter: "I cannot go back" – a locution heavy with ironic resonances in light of Jephthah's attempt to come back to the house from which he was driven.

JSB: The Tenach struggles with offering human sacrifices, which was practised in the 1st Temple period [2 Kings 21:6 – King Ahaz of Judah + 23:10 King Manasseh of Judah; Jer. 7:31].

Drazin: Child sacrifice is prohibited: Lev. 18:21 and 20: 2-5; Deut. 12:31 and 18:10; Jer. 7:31.

Drazin: Jephthah had no choice but to carry out his vow. Oath nullification by men did not exist in the biblical period. The Torah forbade it: "When a man vows a vow to YHVH or swears an oath to bind himself with a bond, he may not break his word; according to everything that came out of his mouth he shall do" [Num.30:3].

Boling: Jephthah is portrayed throughout as having integrity. His word is his bond.

36 And she said to him: 'My father, you have opened your mouth to YHVH; do to me that which came out of your mouth; since YHVH has taken vengeance for you of your enemies, from the Ammonites.'

Alter: Father and daughter believe that vows to God are irrevocable and non-negotiable; **MD:** His daughter told him, "As the conditions were fulfilled, you are obligated to fulfil your vow."

37 And she said to her father: 'Let this thing be done for me: let me alone for two months, that I may depart and weep on the mountains, and I shall cry over my virginity, I and my companions.'

38 He said: 'Go.' And he sent her away for two months, she and her companions, and she wept over her virginity on the mountains.

Matthews: She proves to be her father's daughter, matching him as a negotiator. **Me:** End of Negotiation No. 5 – successful for both parties.

39 And it was at the end of two months, that she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed; and she had not known man. And it became a practice in Israel,

Me: There has been so much blood spilt in Judges and some deaths have been extremely graphic. And now the narrator is coy?! Why be so squeamish and not reveal what happened?

Plaut: The narrator, who neglected to reveal the daughter's name, is concerned to tell us that she had never known a man, as if this makes her end more tragic. A woman reader might reply that she had known men, at least one all too well, and that is the heart of her tragedy [The Women's Bible Commentary].

40 that the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days each year.

BDB: The verb, **tanah**, which here means to mourn, is found in only one other place in the Tenach – Deborah's song [Judges 5:11], where it means to recount the righteous acts of God.

Matthews: In death, she acquires a name for herself, something that Jephthah will lose as his family line dies with her.

Hamlin: With her death, he will be unable to maintain his inheritance, which he had won back from his half-brothers.

Exum: Wherein does the tragedy of Jephthah lie? In the final analysis, in the divine silence, the refusal of God to take a position. Silent transcendence raises questions about divine benevolence.

Judges Chapter 12

1 And the men of Ephraim were summoned, and passed to Zaphon; and they said to Jephthah: 'Why did you pass over to **wage war** against the Ammonites, and did not call us to go with you? **We will burn your house upon you with fire.**'

Matthews: Ephraim will burn Jephthah's house, but he has already done that by sacrificing his only child. **JSB:** This Zaphon may be the settlement located in the territory of Gad near Succot.

JSB: This conflict mirrors Gideon's conflict with Ephraim [Judg. 8: 1-3] and presents Ephraim negatively in a struggle for inter-tribal hegemony.

JSB: Within the broader book of Judges, this fits the pro-Judean, anti-northern ideology of the editor. Ephraim is used elsewhere in the Tenach to refer to the Northern Kingdom.

2 Jephthah said: 'I and my people were at great strife with the Ammonites; I cried out to you, but you didn't save me from their hand.

3 When I saw that you did not save me, I put my life in my **palm** and crossed over to the Ammonites, and YHWH gave them into my hand; why do you come up to me this day, to **make war** against me?'

Me: The elders of Succot ridiculed Gideon that the kings of Midian were not in his palm [Judg. 8:6]. **Me:** End of Negotiation No. 6 – unsuccessful for both parties.

Drazin: Unlike Gideon, Jephthah did not appease Ephraim with words. He tried to avoid war with Ammon by negotiating, but not with Ephraim. **Me:** He saw Ephraim as a threat to his rule.

Malbim: Ephraim threatened because they resented that a man of Manasseh pursued the leadership, inasmuch as it had been blessed with the leadership of the house of Joseph [Gen.48:14-20].

DS: Jephthah's statements are full of egocentric comments – cf. 12:3 with 11:12, 15 + 27. This contributed towards inciting the wrath of Ephraim. **Me:** But Ephraim addressed Jephthah personally.

4 Jephthah gathered all the men of Gilead and **made war** with Ephraim; the men of Gilead smote Ephraim, because even the lowest of Ephraim had said: 'You are nothing but fugitives of Ephraim; of what importance are you, Gilead, in Ephraim and Manasseh?'

Exum: Jephthah went home contaminated by violence (Rene Girard's sacrificial theory), which he unleashed on his daughter and Ephraim. A cleansing rite was needed but something went amiss.

5 And Gilead captured the fords of the Jordan from Ephraim; and it was when any of the fugitives of Ephraim said: 'Let me cross,' the men of Gilead said to him: 'Are you an Ephraimite?' If he said: 'No',

Me: This is ironic. In the Gideon tale, it had been Ephraim who had captured all the river crossings [Judg. 7:24].

6 then they said to him: 'Say Shibbolet'; and he said 'Sibbolet'; for he was unable to speak it correctly; then they seized him, and slew him at the fords of the Jordan; and 42,000 of Ephraim fell at that time.

Me: Jephthah had been a fugitive at the mercy of his half-brothers. Now the Ephraimite fugitives from the civil war are at his mercy.

Hamlin: Chapter 12 is an ironic replay of the liberation struggle against Ammon. Specific echoes are the call to arms (12:1 v. 10:17), the negotiations (12:3 v. 11:12-28), Jephthah's questions to his adversaries (12:3 v. 11:12), and the great slaughter (12:6 v. 11:33). The restoration of land and freedom won by victory over the oppressors merely plunges Israel into a bitter, internecine war.

BDB: Shibbolet is a flowing stream; Sibbolet is an ear of wheat/grain. **JSB:** Like Avimelech, Jephthah made war on his own people. He's unfit to lead. **Me:** This is the 2nd of three civil wars in Judges

Matthews: Is this a parody or spoof? Is it designed to make the Ephraimites look stupid?

Matthews: The ruthlessness of Jephthah's forces could be an extension of their leader's determination to win at all costs, a fatal flaw for him and his people.

Me: Jephthah was merciless to Ammon, his daughter + Ephraim. **Exum:** Uttering the wrong words destroyed Jephthah; for Ephraim, one letter of one word held the power over life and death.

7 And Jephthah judged Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in one of the cities of Gilead.

JSB: The final burial notice is odd. Why was Jephthah not buried in his own town of Mizpah [Judg. 11:36]? **Me:** Did the elders have the final word or did his half-brothers have their revenge?

Exum: Contrast the deaths of father and daughter. She was not alone. She had her friends. After her death, the women of Israel commemorated her in a yearly ritual. They mourned her passing and recounted her story. They made her live again through words. Their communal act mitigated the wrong done by her father. Their words prevented memory of her being extinguished. She found life through communal recollection. The pernicious power of her father's words killed her but the recounting of her courage and the women's refusal to forget transcended the tragedy of her death. Words can heal. Cruel words cut Jephthah off from Israelite society and his unfortunate words cut him off from his only child. As in Greek tragedy, Jephthah faced alone a fickle world, a world where seemingly unrelated events conspire to overwhelm, where a victorious warrior returning from battle can meet tragedy at the threshold of his house. Words can kill.