

"במהולות בנות תצאנה... קול חתן וקול כלה...
לי לא שרו ולא שרתי לבתי האמולה"
Shaul Tchernichovsky, "Jephthah's Daughter"

THE SACRIFICE OF JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER (JUDGES 11) AS A REFLECTION STORY OF THE REBECCA'S BETROTHAL AND MARRIAGE (GENESIS 24)

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The story in Judges 11 of Jephthah offering of his daughter as a sacrifice to the Lord, in fulfillment of his vow, focuses on the tragedy of Jephthah himself who, in slaying his only daughter, severed his family line with his own hand and thereby caused the elimination of his name from Israel.¹ Alongside the father's tragedy, however, the story also highlights the tragedy of his daughter, a young woman whose life is cut off prematurely before she can marry and establish a family. The Judges narrative underlines the tragedy of Jephthah's daughter in various ways: through foregrounding how she and her young female companions mourned her virginity (Judg. 11:37-38); through the narrator's (echoing) comment that "she had never known a man" (v. 39); and then in the narrative's concluding verses: "it became a custom in Israel that the daughters of Israel went year by year to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in the year" (vv. 39-40). The wailing and dirges are for Jephthah's daughter, not for her father, whose rash vow was responsible for her fate.²

In a previous article I noted the intertextual links between Judges 11 and several chapters in Genesis, links that set up parallels between Jephthah and four characters in that book: Abraham, Lot, Ishmael, and Isaac.³ One of the primary

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¹ On the placement of Jephthah's tragedy as the focal point of the story see E. Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter", in A. Brenner (ed.), *A Feminist Companion to Judges* (Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993), pp. 116-130; D.W. Rooke, "Sex and Death, Or, the Death of Sex: Three Versions of Jephthah's Daughter (Judges 11:29-40)", in C. Hempel and J.M. Lieu (eds.), *Biblical Traditions in Transmission: Essays in Honour of Michael A. Knibb* (Leiden: Brill, 2006), pp. 249-271 (251).

² On the tragic dimension of the story—both from Jephthah's perspective and his daughter's—see J.C. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1992), pp. 45-69.

³ Yael Shemesh, "Jephthah—Victimizer and Victim: A Comparison of Jephthah and Characters in Genesis", *JANES* 32 (2011), pp. 112-131.

objectives of these connections, as I argued, is to emphasize Jephthah's lack of descendants, a consequence of the sacrifice of his daughter. The Genesis account emphasizes God's involvement in the protagonists' lives, frequently intruding as a sort of *deus ex machina*, to provide all four with the blessing of many offspring. The Lord, however, does not intervene in Jephthah's life to prevent the cruel atrocity of a daughter's sacrifice by her own father, thereby extinguishing his family line.⁴ The Lord's silence and distance from Jephthah emerges more clearly in light of the judge's unique character: Jephthah, the only judge elevated to his leadership role by human agency—the elders of Gilead (Judg. 11:5-11)—rather than by the Lord, is a “disappointing judge”;⁵ consequently the divine response to him is ambivalent and incomplete. Although the Lord grants Jephthah a glorious victory over the Ammonites, as he had entreated, that very same national triumph leads to his personal catastrophe, with the Lord not releasing him from his depraved vow.⁶

In the present article I add another level to the analogy between Judges 11 and the stories of the Patriarchs. This link, too, highlights the tragic nature of the extinction of Jephthah's family in Judges 11, but from an unexpected perspective, one that focuses on the female characters. I compare the story of Jephthah's daughter, sacrificed while still a virgin, with that of Rebecca's betrothal and marriage to Isaac (Genesis 24)—a parallel previously unremarked upon by scholars. As we shall see, the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter is a “reflection story”—a term coined by Yair Zakovitch—of Rebecca's betrothal and marriage. A “reflection story,” according to Zakovitch, involves an implicit

⁴ This same phenomenon of the *deus ex machina* in Genesis, as opposed to God's silence and acquiescence to atrocity in Judges, is reinforced by a comparison of the two very similar stories—that of Sodom (Genesis 19) and that of the concubine of Gibeah (Judges 19). Lot's daughters are saved from “gang rape” by the angels' miraculous intervention. But neither the Lord nor angels intervene to save the Levite's ill-fated concubine. See Yael Shemesh, “Biblical Stories of Rape: Common Traits and Unique Features”, *Studies in Bible and Exegesis* 6 (2002), pp. 315-344 (esp. pp. 319-321, 323, 338-339) [Hebrew]. On God's silence and His absence in the story of Jephthah as the source of its tragic dimension see Exum, *Tragedy*, pp. 45-69 (esp. 46-47, 59).

⁵ The term comes from Yairah Amit, *The Book of Judges: The Art of Editing* (trans. from the Hebrew by J. Chipman; Biblical Interpretation Series 38; Leiden: Brill, 1999), pp. 85-92. Elie Assis (*Self-Interest or Communal Interest: An Ideology of Leadership in the Gideon, Abimelech and Jephthah Narratives [Judg 6–12]* [VTSup 106; Leiden: Brill, 2005], pp. 175-237), also emphasizes Jephthah's egocentricity, that he was always motivated by personal rather than national interests. J. C. Exum (“The Centre Cannot Hold: Thematic and Textual Instabilities in Judges”, *CBQ* 52 [1990], pp. 410-431 [421 n. 22]) believes that Jephthah was the worst of all the judges—in polar opposition to Robert Boling's assertion (*Judges: Introduction, Translation and Commentary* [AB 6A; Garden City, New York: Doubleday 1975], p. 214) that “Jephthah was a good judge, the best since Othniel”.

⁶ For a discussion of the nature of this vow, see Shemesh, “Jephthah—Victimizer and Victim” p. 117, n. 1. The Lord's response to the cries of the Israelites: “Do to us as You see fit; only save us this day!” (Judg. 10:15)—is similarly ambivalent and incomplete. Although the Lord indeed delivers them from the Ammonites, he does not save them from the judge they have chosen for themselves, who instigates a bloody civil war with the Ephraimites (Judg. 12:1-6). Cf. Exum, *Tragedy*, p. 47.

allusion to a separate biblical account familiar to both narrator and audience.⁷ The similarities between the two stories frequently serve to set off the differences between them. As a result, Zakovitch writes, “the relationship between the new narrative and its source is like that between an image and its mirrored reflection: the reflection inverts the story line of the original narrative”.⁸ In his examples, however, Zakovitch primarily focuses on the differences in the characters' personalities and activities, whereas I call attention to the differences in their fates—Jephthah and his daughter on the one hand, Isaac and Rebecca on the other. At the same time, however, I also remark on the differences in their actions, and how those actions ultimately inform their fates.

First, however, we should consider the seemingly universal cultural links between the death of a young and unmarried person and wedding festivities—links that clarify the basis for a comparison of the stories of Rebecca and Jephthah's daughter, two young women whose destinies are so dissimilar. Indeed, it is only natural that the death of an unmarried girl or boy arouses immediate associations with the wedding that never took place, along with thoughts and even overt expressions of grief that we—as audience—are accompanying the deceased to the grave instead of to his or her wedding. There are many such examples in both ancient and modern literature, primary among them, the dirge that pseudo-Philo places in the mouth of Jephthah's daughter, whom in his account he calls Seila:

I have not been satisfied by marriage chamber nor have I been sated with the garlands of my wedding. ... O mother, in vain have you borne your only daughter, since the underworld has become my bridal chamber (40,6).⁹

Similarly, for a modern instance, in *Hamlet*, Queen Gertrude mourns Ophelia while scattering flowers on her grave:

Sweets to the sweet. Farewell!

⁷ Y. Zakovitch, “Through the Looking Glass: Reflections/Inversions of Genesis Stories in the Bible”, *Biblical Interpretation* 1 (1993), pp. 139-152; idem, *Through the Looking Glass: Reflection Stories in the Bible* (Tel Aviv: Hakibbutz Hameuchad, 1995 [Hebrew]). The examples of reflection stories that he relates (pp. 72-74) include the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter as a reflection of the Binding of Isaac (Genesis 22).

⁸ Zakovitch, “Through the Looking Glass”, p. 139.

⁹ H. Jacobson, *A Commentary on Pseudo-Philo's Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum with Latin Text and English Translation* (Leiden: Brill, 1996), 1:161. On the lament that Pseudo-Philo assigns to Jephthah's daughter and the theme of the death-wedding there and in ancient Greek literature in general, see: M. Alexious and P. Dronke, “The Lament of Jephthah's Daughter: Themes, Traditions, Originality”, *Studi Medievali*, 3rd series, 12 (1971), pp. 819-863; C. Baker, “Pseudo-Philo and the Transformation of Jephthah's Daughter”, in M. Bal (ed.), *Anti-Covenant: Counter-Reading Women's Lives in the Hebrew Bible* (JSOTSup 81; Sheffield: Almond Press, 1989), pp. 195-209. See also Rehm's comprehensive study of the strong link between weddings and funeral rituals in Greek tragedy: R. Rehm, *Marriage to Death: The Conflation of Wedding and Funeral Rituals in Greek Tragedy* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994).

I hoped thou shouldst have been my Hamlet's wife.
I thought thy bride-bed to have decked, sweet maid,
And not have strewed thy grave. (5.1, lines 213-216)¹⁰

There are also anthropological and sociological expressions of the link between a young person's premature death and wedding festivities. In many cultures it was (and may still be) the custom to employ wedding rites at the funerals of the unmarried: dressing the body of an unmarried young woman in a bridal gown; placing a wedding crown on her head;¹¹ singing wedding songs;¹² or chanting dirges in which the deceased is referred to as "bride" or "groom" and the funeral as a "wedding"¹³—such that the obsequies become the deceased person's symbolic nuptials.¹⁴

Can the story of Jephthah's daughter, who died tragically in her youth, before marriage, be taken as manifesting the extremely widespread cultural link between death and weddings? I believe the answer is in the affirmative. Nevertheless, the connection is not evident from the narrative taken alone, but rather from the intertextual links with other biblical narratives of marriage.

Mieke Bal briefly notes the contrasts between the story of Jephthah's daughter and the two other marriage tales in the book of Judges: one, the marriage of Othniel son of Kenaz to Achsah, the daughter of Caleb, following the latter's promise to bestow her to the man who conquers Kiryath Sepher (Judg. 1:12-15); the second, the Benjaminites' abduction of the dancing maidens from the festival at Shiloh so that they could marry them (Judg. 21:16-23).¹⁵ These contrasting

¹⁰ William Shakespeare, *Hamlet* (ed. C. Hoy; Norton Critical Edition; 2nd ed.; New York and London: W.W. Norton & Company, 1992), p. 89.

¹¹ See: L.M. Danforth, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1982), pp. 13, 80, and plate 2; G. Kligman, *The Wedding of the Dead: Ritual, Poetics, and Popular Culture in Transylvania* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1988), pp. 220-221, 241.

¹² Danforth, *The Death Rituals of Rural Greece*, pp. 74-78, 86-89.

¹³ Kligman, *The Wedding of the Dead*, pp. 222-236, 241.

¹⁴ S. Glick (*Light Has Dawned: The Relation Between Marriage and Morning Customs in Jewish Tradition* [Efrat: (Uri Foundation), 1997] pp. 169-173 [Hebrew]) amasses evidence for the existence of the tradition in Judaism from the eighth through the early nineteenth centuries. The book is devoted to the general resemblance between wedding customs and burial customs in Jewish tradition. In a confessional mode, the author reveals his personal motivation for conducting his research (see his introduction, p. 15): his son's death while serving in the Israeli army. This heartrending autobiographical detail offers additional (albeit anecdotal) evidence that the deaths of young people before they wed inspires associations with the marriage ceremony. Danforth (*The Death Rituals of Rural Greece*) provides manifold examples of the use of wedding motifs at the funerals of the unmarried in modern Greece. Kligman (*The Wedding of the Dead*, pp. 215-248) documents the existence of similar customs in Transylvania, also providing a bibliography of the existence of the phenomenon elsewhere in the world (p. 350 n. 8).

¹⁵ See M. Bal, "Between Altar and Wondering Rock: Toward a Feminist Philology", *Anti-Covenant*, pp. 211-31 (esp. pp. 213 and 224). For a more detailed analysis of the parallels between the stories of Jephthah's daughter and of Achsah, see my "Achsah, from Object to Subject: A Story about a Wise Woman, a Field, and Water (Judges 1:10-15)", *Studies in Bible and Exegesis* 10 (2011), pp. 23-48 [Heb.].

analogies are certainly compelling; but I believe that the contrasts between the story of Jephthah's daughter and the marriage of Rebecca and Isaac are even more so.

Before I turn to demonstrate this, however, I should briefly address the diachronic aspect—the question of the historical relationship between Genesis and Judges. The implication of my remarks thus far is that the author of the story of Jephthah and his daughter (Judges 11) was familiar with that of the marriage of Isaac and Rebecca (Genesis 24) and drew upon it. This assumption is compatible with the view, formerly the consensus, that the betrothal of Isaac and Rebecca is a very old tale and should be assigned to J. It runs into difficulty, however, if one accepts a late-dating for Genesis 24 itself. Many have now adopted the view of Alexander Rofé who, citing content but especially style and vocabulary, proposed that the story of Genesis 24 was composed in the Persian period.¹⁶ In rebuttal to Rofé, Gary Rendsburg has demonstrated, on the basis of various linguistic criteria, that the chapter is in fact very old, pre-dating the Judges account.¹⁷ Indeed, Rendsburg was already anticipated by Garciá López, who argued, based on the vocabulary of Genesis 24, that the story took shape between the ninth and seventh centuries BCE.¹⁸

I would like to approach this diachronic issue from another perspective. Even if we were to ignore the question of when they were composed, the striking parallels between the story of Rebecca's betrothal (Genesis 24) and Jephthah's daughter (Judges 11), which I substantiate below, presupposes not mere coincidence, but rather that one story drew from the other. If so, the only question is of historical precedence, that is, which of the texts came first. Given that the Jephthah story has strong links with the literary milieu of Genesis 24 as well as other chapters in Genesis—Lot and his daughters (ch. 19), the expulsion of Ishmael (ch. 21), the binding of Isaac (ch. 22), and the covenant between Abimelech and Isaac (ch. 26)¹⁹—it is more plausible to argue that the author of the Jephthah pericope drew on them rather than the inverse. The claim that all those stories “correspond” with and refer to the Jephthah saga seems to be asking too much. What is more, the correspondence between the account of the slaying of an unwed virgin daughter and a tale of marriage is understandable in light of what I have already identified as the universal tie between wedding festivities and the death of a young person before marriage. It makes sense, therefore, to assume that the Judges account, emphasizing the tragic fate of the daughter who dies unfulfilled, produced this link. It is more difficult to argue, however, that the author of Rebecca's betrothal and marriage, the story of a young bride with

¹⁶A. Rofé, “An Inquiry into the Betrothal of Rebekah”, in E. Blum, C. Macholz, and E.W. Stegemann (eds.), *Die Hebräische Bibel und ihre zweifache Nachgeschichte: Festschrift für Rolf Rendtorff zum 65 Geburtstag* (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag 1990), pp. 27–39.

¹⁷G. Rendsburg, “Some False Leads in the Identification of Late Biblical Hebrew Texts: The Case of Genesis 24 and 1 Samuel 2:27-36”, *JBL* 121 (2002), pp. 23-35.

¹⁸F. Garciá López, Del “‘Yahvista’ al ‘Deuteronomista’ Estudio Critico de Genesis 24”, *Revue Biblique* 87 (1980), pp. 242–273, 350–393, 514–559.

¹⁹See above, n. 3.

her future before her, would have intentionally drawn analogies with the tragic story of Jephthah's daughter, sacrificed by her father while still a virgin.

Now that I have elaborated my position on the issue of the diachronic relationship between texts, I enumerate a list of parallels between the two stories.

Points of Similarity

1. Abraham's servant chooses Rebecca from among all the young women who come out to draw water because she fulfilled the condition he had set in his colloquy with the Lord. Jephthah's daughter is "chosen" by her father, from all who came out to welcome him home from his victory, because she had fulfilled the condition he set in his vow.²⁰ In both cases the stipulated condition has a religious dimension: Abraham's servant entreats the Lord to lead him to encounter the woman best suited for his master's son, framing a sign by which he might recognize the chosen girl (Gen. 24:12-14); Jephthah similarly makes a vow to the Lord, defining the sacrifice he will offer Him (Judg. 11:30-31).
2. The descriptions of how the two women fulfill their destinies—one to her wedding with Abraham's son, the other to her death—employ similar phrasing: "Behold, Rebecca came out (והנה רבקה יצאת)" (Gen. 24:15); "behold, his daughter came out (והנה בתו יצאת) to meet him with timbrels and with dances" (Judg. 11:34).
3. Both stories emphasize the virginity of their respective young women protagonists. Regarding Rebecca, the narrator says that she was "a virgin, whom no man had known" (Gen. 24:16), while the virginity of Jephthah's daughter is highlighted both in her own words, "[let me] bewail my virginity" (Judg. 11:37) and in the narrative report that she "bewailed her virginity upon the hills" (v. 38), as well as the further narrative comment that "she had never known a man" (v. 39).
4. Following Abraham's servant's account to Rebecca's family of the sequence of events at the well, they consent to his request, invoking the Lord and using the root א"צ: "Then Laban and Bethuel answered, 'The thing comes from (א"צ) the Lord; we cannot speak to you bad or good'" (Gen. 24:50). After Jephthah's physical and verbal reaction to the sight of his daughter, she accepts her fate, also invoking the Lord and employing the root א"צ: "And she said to him, 'My father, if you have opened your mouth to the Lord, do to me according to what has gone forth (א"צ) from your mouth, now that the Lord has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites'" (Judg. 11:36).

²⁰ A midrashic account associates Abraham's servant's prayer with Jephthah's vow by listing the two men among the four who made an inappropriate request (the other two are Caleb, who promised his daughter to the man who would conquer Kiryath Sepher, and Saul, who promised his daughter to the man who could defeat Goliath). Of the four, only Jephthah receives an inappropriate response, "what was asked was not given in a proper way", and his unfortunate request brings down disaster on his head (*Genesis Rabbah* 60:3; *Leviticus Rabbah* 37:4). For this link, see Shulamit Valler, "The Story of Jephthah's Daughter in the Midrash", in A. Brenner (ed.), *Judges: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (second series; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), pp. 48-66 (51-52).

5. Both Rebecca and Jephthah's daughter consent to their destiny: Rebecca agrees to accompany Abraham's servant without delay (Gen. 24:58); so similarly, Jephthah's daughter acquiesces to being offered as a sacrifice (Judg. 11:36).
6. Both Rebecca and Jephthah's daughter leave their homes and families escorted by young women: "Then Rebecca and her maids arose, and rode upon the camels and followed the man" (Gen. 24:61); in Judges, Jephthah's daughter and "her companions went and bewailed her virginity upon the hills" (Judg. 11:38).
7. In both stories, בית, "house, household, family" is a prominent word. In Genesis 24 it occurs chiefly in the context of Abraham's injunction that his servant take a wife for his son from his "father's house" (i.e., family; vv. 7, 27, 38, and 40). In Judges 11 it is used in association with Jephthah's expulsion from his father's house (his family and estate; vv. 2 and 7), and again in Jephthah's vow (in this context employing the literal sense of a building or dwelling compound; vv. 31 and 34).
8. In both stories the protagonist falls to the ground (literally or figuratively) in reaction to what he hears or sees. When Abraham's servant receives the family's consent for Rebecca to marry Isaac, "he bowed low to the ground before the Lord" (Gen. 24:52; see also v. 26). When he sees his daughter coming out to greet him, Jephthah, in what may be a tragic parody of the servant's prostration, "rent his clothes, and said, 'Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low'" (הִכְרַעַתְּ אֶת־כַּנְּפֵי; 'brought me to my knees') (Judg. 11:35)—that is, you caused me to sink down or collapse under the blow.²¹

The similarities between the two stories sharpen the substantial differences between them, most markedly seen in the antithetical fates of the two young women and of their corresponding male characters—Isaac and Jephthah. In fact, various aspects of the differences emerge from the similarities which have been enumerated. These difference, more prominent than the similarities upon which they are based, come to stress the tragic nature of the story of Jephthah's virgin and unmarried daughter.

Points of Difference

1. Rebecca was chosen to be Isaac's bride, whereas Jephthah's daughter is "chosen" to be a burnt offering to the Lord.
2. Rebecca's virginity is one of her virtues, a quality introduced by the narrator as soon as she appears on the scene, making her an appropriate candidate for marriage to Isaac. By contrast, the virginity of Jephthah's daughter reinforces both her tragedy and her father's: slain before marriage, she could not provide Jephthah with descendents to continue his line. Her request that she be allowed to "bewail my virginity" (Judg. 11:37) poignantly highlights the difference.

²¹ See, for example: G.F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Judges* (ICC 7; Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1966 [1895]), p. 303; J. Gray, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth* (NCB; London: Nelson, 1967), p. 18.

3. Rebecca's relatives (and later Rebecca herself) consent to the joyful event—her marriage to her illustrious and wealthy kinsman (Gen. 24:1, 35-36). In stark contrast, Jephthah's daughter's consent is to her own sacrifice.
4. Laban and Bethuel's response to Abraham's servant—"The thing comes (אֵצֶר) *from the Lord*" (Gen. 24:50)—expresses their recognition that it is the Lord who has set the chain of events in motion that will lead to Rebecca becoming Isaac's wife. But in her reply to her father—"you have opened your mouth to the Lord, do to me according to what has gone forth (אֵצֶר) *from your mouth*, now that the Lord has avenged you on your enemies, on the Ammonites" (Judg. 11:36)—Jephthah's daughter implies that only her father's victory in battle was achieved through divine intervention, but not that the Lord is responsible for the set of circumstances that demand her death. The tragedy does not come from Him, but from her father, who rashly opened his mouth to the Lord with a vow that entails catastrophe for both himself and his daughter.
5. Rebecca's maids²² accompany her to her wedding and future life (Gen. 24:61); Jephthah's daughter's companions go with her to the hills, but only to join her in lamentation over her bitter fate and her anticipated death while still unmarried (Judg. 11:38).
6. On her parting, Rebecca's family offers her the blessing that she may have many descendants (Gen. 24:60). Jephthah, however, sacrifices his only daughter in her virginity, thereby severing his own line.
7. In Genesis 24, the word בית has a positive connotation—home and family—in the context of Isaac's marriage to Rebecca, who is a member of his father's "house". In Judges 11, by contrast, the contexts for this word are negative: the sibling rivalry that led to Jephthah's expulsion from his father's house (both family and estate) and the reckless vow that led to a daughter's death by the hand of her father and the destruction of his house (lineage).
8. As suggested above (similarity 8), Abraham's servant bows to the Lord in joy and thanksgiving when he realizes that his mission has been successful and he has found a suitable wife for his master's son (Gen. 24:26 and 52). Jephthah, by contrast, when he realizes the magnitude of his calamity, complains that his daughter has brought him to his knees (Judg. 11:35).
9. The gifts that Abraham's servant gives Rebecca include clothing (Gen. 24:53). Jephthah, in another obvious contrast, rends his clothing when he sees his daughter (Judg. 11:35).
10. When Abraham's servant meets Rebecca, he blesses the Lord and thanks Him for the "steadfast faithfulness" that He had shown his master: "Blessed be the Lord, the God of my master Abraham, who has not withheld His steadfast faithfulness from my master. For I have been guided on my errand by the Lord, to the house of my master's kinsmen" (Gen. 24:27). When Jephthah encounters his daughter, he blames her for causing *his* catastrophe: "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you have become my troubler" (Judg. 11:35). This classic example of blaming the victim emerges as a consequence of

²² The reference is evidently to the servant women she received from her family as part of her dowry (cf. Gen. 29:24 and 29). See G.J. Wenham, *Genesis 16–50* (WBC 2; Dallas: Word Books, 1994), p. 151.

Jephthah's narcissism, leading him to focus on his personal tragedy and not on the calamity he has brought upon his daughter.²³

11. Rebecca's character is fleshed out more fully than that of Jephthah's daughter. With Rebecca's initial appearance in the biblical narrative, the narrator tells us her name (Gen. 24:15), the means by which she is identified throughout by not only the narrator,²⁴ but by Abraham's servant (v. 45), and by her own family (v. 51). The first mention of her name also includes her lineage: "Rebecca, who was born to Bethuel the son of Milcah, the wife of Nahor, Abraham's brother" (v. 15). Rebecca thus introduces herself to the stranger, Abraham's servant: "I am the daughter of Bethuel the son of Milcah, whom she bore to Nahor" (v. 24). The servant, for his part, in his accounts, emphasizes that she is "the daughter of my master's kinsman" (v. 48). She is also referred to as נַעֲרָה ("maiden"),²⁵ עלמה ("young woman"),²⁶ בת ("daughter"),²⁷ and אחות ("sister").²⁸ The story concludes with her new status as Isaac's wife (v. 67), which is the fulfillment of Abraham's request that his servant find his son a wife (repeated several times at the start of the story; vv. 3-7). But Jephthah's daughter remains anonymous, referred to exclusively in terms of her relationship with her father—as "his/my daughter"²⁹ or as "Jephthah's daughter" (Judg. 11:40).³⁰

12. The events have opposite repercussions for the male characters associated with their corresponding female protagonists. The last verse of Genesis 24 describes the change that Rebecca brings to Isaac's life: "Isaac then brought her into the tent of his mother Sarah, and he took Rebecca as his wife. Isaac loved her, and thus found comfort after his mother's death" (Gen. 24:67). That is, Isaac's marriage to Rebecca represents his emotional recovery and the continuity of his family.³¹ Jephthah, however, finds himself with neither heir nor biological future, as emphasized both in the narrator's remark that his daughter is his only child (Judg. 11:34), as well as in Jephthah's harsh reaction when she comes out to greet him (v. 35). The story concludes with the laconic "he did to her as he had vowed" (v. 39), followed by a reference to the custom of how the Israelite

²³ On Jephthah's casting the blame on his daughter, see P. Tribble, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), p. 102 (and many others since her).

²⁴ Gen. 24:29, 30, 53, 58, 59, 60, 61 (twice), 64, and 67.

²⁵ By the narrator: Gen. 24:16 and 28; by Abraham's servant: v. 14; by Rebecca's family: vv. 55 and 57.

²⁶ By Abraham's servant: Gen. 24:43.

²⁷ By Abraham's servant: Gen 24:23, 47, 48; by Rebecca: Gen. 24:24.

²⁸ By the narrator: Gen. 24:30 (twice) and 59; by Rebecca's family: v. 60.

²⁹ By the narrator (Judg. 11:34) and by Jephthah (v. 35).

³⁰ Her lack of a name disturbed Mieke Bal ("Between Altar and Wondering Rock", pp. 211-231 [esp. 212]) and led her to give her the name "Bat" (Hebrew for daughter). But even this cognomen expresses the girl's dependence on her father and the one-dimensional depiction of the character: she is Jephthah's daughter and no more. A similar argument was put forth by B. Gerstein, "A Ritual Processed: A Look at Judges 11.40", *Anti-Covenant*, pp. 175-193.

³¹ Rebecca fills Sarah's place both physically (Isaac gives her Sarah's tent in which to live) and emotionally (after his marriage Isaac is consoled for his mother's death). See D.N. Fewell and D.M. Gunn, *Gender, Power & Promise: The Subject of the Bible's First Story* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1993), p. 73.

maidens mourn Jephthah's daughter four days a year (v. 40). Whereas Isaac was consoled for his mother's death by his marriage to Rebecca, who served as a sort of mother substitute for him,³² there can be no consolation for the tragic and untimely death of an only daughter, slain on the altar by her father before she could establish a family.

In conclusion, the account in Genesis 24 is an optimistic and forward-looking story about Isaac's marriage to the appropriate bride, who demonstrated her qualifications by passing the test that Abraham's servant set for her. The marriage has meaning both on the personal level—Isaac's consolation for the death of his mother—and the national level—the continuation of Abraham's line. The story takes for granted that the Lord is involved behind the scenes and is responsible for the successful match between Isaac and his cousin Rebecca. Judges 11, however, is a tragic story about a daughter whose father offers her as a burnt offering instead of leading her to the wedding canopy. Because she is his only daughter, and because she dies a virgin, before she could marry and bear children, her sacrifice entails the extinction of Jephthah's family. The Lord neither intervenes to prevent this catastrophe nor does He act to save Jephthah from himself.

The parallels between Judges 11 and Genesis 24 highlight the tragic fate of Jephthah's daughter, her life cut short in her youth, before she could marry. These parallels are of a piece with the links, both literary and anthropological, that cultures world over make between the deaths of unmarried boys and girls and the wedding ceremony.

³² Ibid.