

Title:       **I CANNOT GO BACK**

Text:       Judges 11:1-40

Subject:    *Perseverance*

### **Introduction:**

Our great God delights to use weak, insignificant, despised instruments to accomplish his greatest works in this world (1 Cor. 1:26-29). One great example of that fact is vividly set before us in Judges chapter 11. The man of whom this chapter speaks is Jephthah. His name means, “one that will open.” And truly the things here recorded by the pen of inspiration about this man open to our eyes God’s wonders of grace in Christ Jesus.

1. **Jephthah was born in shame**, the bastard son of a harlot (Judges 11:1-2). — **Me too!**

(Psalms 51:5) “Behold, I was shapen in iniquity, and in sin did my mother conceive me.”

(Judges 11:1-2) “Now Jephthah the Gileadite was a mighty man of valour, and he *was* the son of an harlot: and Gilead begat Jephthah. (2) And Gilead’s wife bare him sons; and his wife’s sons grew up, and they thrust out Jephthah, and said unto him, Thou shalt not inherit in our father’s house; for thou *art* the son of a strange woman.”

2. As such, he bore all his life the pain and shame of his mother’s base, bestial immorality. **He was cast out from his brethren and by his brethren.** — **Me too!** — “*Aliens from the commonwealth of Israel!*” — “*Strangers to the covenants of promise!*” — “*Having no hope!*” — “*Without God in the world!*”
3. Following the example of his mother, **Jephthah lived as a rebel, leading a band of vain men.**

(Judges 11:3) “Then Jephthah fled from his brethren, and dwelt in

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Readings:   *Bob Poncer and Larry Criss*

the land of Tob: and there were gathered vain men to Jephthah, and went out with him.”

**Me too!** — “Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: — Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others.”

(Psalms 58:3) “The wicked are estranged from the womb: they go astray as soon as they be born, speaking lies.”

4. He was, by law **excluded from the congregation of the Israel**. — “A bastard shall not enter into the congregation of the LORD; even to his tenth generation shall he not enter into the congregation of the LORD” (Deut. 23:2). — **Me too!**

5. But Jephthah was **beloved of God**, chosen in Christ, and ordained as an instrument by whose hand he would save his people. — **Me too!**

(Jeremiah 31:3) “The LORD hath appeared of old unto me, *saying*, Yea, I have loved thee with an everlasting love: therefore with lovingkindness have I drawn thee.”

(Jeremiah 1:5) “Before I formed thee in the belly I knew thee; and before thou camest forth out of the womb I sanctified thee, *and* I ordained thee a prophet unto the nations.”

6. **At God’s appointed time “the Spirit of the Lord came upon Jephthah”** (Judges 11:29). — **Me too!**

(Ezekiel 16:8) “Now when I passed by thee, and looked upon thee, behold, thy time *was* the time of love; and I spread my skirt over thee, and covered thy nakedness: yea, I swore unto thee, and entered into a covenant with thee, saith the Lord GOD, and thou becamest mine.”

(Ephesians 2:1-9) “And you *hath he quickened*, who were dead in trespasses and sins: (2) Wherein in time past ye walked according to the course of this world, according to the prince of the power of the

air, the spirit that now worketh in the children of disobedience: (3) Among whom also we all had our conversation in times past in the lusts of our flesh, fulfilling the desires of the flesh and of the mind; and were by nature the children of wrath, even as others. (4) But God, who is rich in mercy, for his great love wherewith he loved us, (5) Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) (6) And hath raised *us* up together, and made *us* sit together in heavenly *places* in Christ Jesus: (7) That in the ages to come he might show the exceeding riches of his grace in *his* kindness toward us through Christ Jesus. (8) For by grace are ye saved through faith; and that not of yourselves: *it is* the gift of God: (9) Not of works, lest any man should boast.”

**The Lord God poured out his Spirit upon Jephthah and exalted him to the highest dignity and usefulness among his people. — Jephthah was one of God’s. As such, he was prospered in all that he did.** Jephthah’s name is recorded among the honorable men of Israel. — **Me too!** (Rev. 13:8; 17:8).

7. By the grace of God bestowed upon him and by the faith in Christ that was wrought in him, Jephthah “**subdued kingdoms**” and “**wrought righteousness**” (Heb. 11:32). — Me too!

No outward condition, be it ever so base,  
Can hinder God’s purpose, or thwart his free grace”

8. **Jephthah feared God** (Judges 11:9-11) **and believed his Word** (Judges 11:14-27). — **Me too.**

(Judges 11:9-11) “And Jephthah said unto the elders of Gilead, If ye bring me home again to fight against the children of Ammon, and the LORD deliver them before me, shall I be your head? (10) And the elders of Gilead said unto Jephthah, The LORD be witness between us, if we do not so according to thy words. (11) Then Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead, and the people made him head and captain over them: and **Jephthah uttered all his words before the LORD** in Mizpeh.”

- **Jephthah’s faith was evident in ascribing Israel’s conquests to the Lord** (verses 21-24).

(Judges 11:14-24) “And Jephthah sent messengers again unto the king of the children of Ammon: (15) And said unto him, Thus saith Jephthah, Israel took not away the land of Moab, nor the land of the children of Ammon: (16) But when Israel came up from Egypt, and walked through the wilderness unto the Red sea, and came to Kadesh; (17) Then Israel sent messengers unto the king of Edom, saying, Let me, I pray thee, pass through thy land: but the king of Edom would not hearken *thereto*. And in like manner they sent unto the king of Moab: but he would not *consent*: and Israel abode in Kadesh. (18) Then they went along through the wilderness, and compassed the land of Edom, and the land of Moab, and came by the east side of the land of Moab, and pitched on the other side of Arnon, but came not within the border of Moab: for Arnon *was* the border of Moab. (19) And Israel sent messengers unto Sihon king of the Amorites, the king of Heshbon; and Israel said unto him, Let us pass, we pray thee, through thy land into my place. (20) But Sihon trusted not Israel to pass through his coast: but Sihon gathered all his people together, and pitched in Jahaz, and fought against Israel. (21) And **the LORD God of Israel delivered** Sihon and all his people into the hand of Israel, and they smote them: so Israel possessed all the land of the Amorites, the inhabitants of that country. (22) And they possessed all the coasts of the Amorites, from Arnon even unto Jabbok, and from the wilderness even unto Jordan. (23) **So now the LORD God of Israel hath dispossessed the Amorites from before his people Israel,** and shouldest thou possess it? (24) Wilt not thou possess that which Chemosh thy god giveth thee to possess? So whomsoever the LORD our God shall drive out from before us, them will we possess.”

- **Jephthah called upon the God of all truth to judge between Israel and Ammon.** — “*The LORD the Judge be judge this day between the children of Israel and the children of Ammon*” (verse 27).

(1 Corinthians 4:1-5) “Let a man so account of us, as of the ministers of Christ, and stewards of the mysteries of God. (2) Moreover it is required in stewards, that a man be found faithful. (3) But with me it is a very small thing that I should be judged of you, or of man’s judgment: yea, I judge not mine own self. (4) For I know nothing by myself; yet am I not hereby justified: but he that judgeth me is the Lord. (5) Therefore judge nothing before the time, until the Lord come, who both will bring to light the hidden things

of darkness, and will make manifest the counsels of the hearts: and then shall every man have praise of God.”

9. **The Lord God honored the faith that honored him by delivering the Ammonites into his hand** .(vv. 32-33). — **Me too**.

(Judges 11:32-33) “So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands. (33) And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, *even* twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel.”

(1 Samuel 2:30) “Wherefore the LORD God of Israel saith, I said indeed *that* thy house, and the house of thy father, should walk before me for ever: but now the LORD saith, Be it far from me; for them that honour me I will honour, and they that despise me shall be lightly esteemed.”

10. **Jephthah opened his mouth to God and declared, “I cannot go back”** (v. 35). — **Me too**.

That for which Jephthah is most commonly known is his vow to God, and the fact that he conscientiously kept it, though it was terribly painful for him to do so, and even more painful for his cherished daughter, his only child (Judges 11:30-40).

Most look upon his vow as a weakness, and consider his keeping of the vow a matter of greater weakness still. **The fact that Jephthah’s name is mentioned, and that he is held before us as an example of faith in Hebrews 11:32, convinces me that this is the very thing for which this remarkable man is commended to us. You cannot separate Jephthah’s vow from his victory over the Ammonites.** Let’s look at this for just a minute.

(Judges 11:30-40) “And Jephthah vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, (31) Then it shall be, that whatsoever cometh forth of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, shall surely be the LORD’S, and I will offer

it up for a burnt offering. (32) So Jephthah passed over unto the children of Ammon to fight against them; and the LORD delivered them into his hands. (33) And he smote them from Aroer, even till thou come to Minnith, *even* twenty cities, and unto the plain of the vineyards, with a very great slaughter. Thus the children of Ammon were subdued before the children of Israel. (34) And Jephthah came to Mizpeh unto his house, and, **behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances**: and **she was his only child**; beside her he had neither son nor daughter. (35) And it came to pass, **when he saw her, that he rent his clothes, and said, Alas, my daughter! thou hast brought me very low, and thou art one of them that trouble me: for I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back**. (36) And she said unto him, **My father, if thou hast opened thy mouth unto the LORD, do to me according to that which hath proceeded out of thy mouth**; forasmuch as the LORD hath taken vengeance for thee of thine enemies, *even* of the children of Ammon. (37) And she said unto her father, **Let this thing be done for me: let me alone two months, that I may go up and down upon the mountains, and bewail my virginity, I and my fellows**. (38) And he said, Go. And he sent her away *for* two months: and she went with her companions, and bewailed her virginity upon the mountains. (39) And it came to pass at the end of two months, that **she returned unto her father, who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed: and she knew no man**. And it was a custom in Israel, (40) *That* the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.”

**Jephthah’s fidelity and perseverance in the faith is seen in the keeping of his vow by keeping his daughter in continual virginity.** — “*I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back*” (Judges 11:35).

If Jephthah’s dog had come out to meet him, no one would ever imagine that he would have offered his dog on God’s altar, polluting it with the blood of a dog. Yet, many who insist that Jephthah killed his daughter to keep his vow to the Lord. That simply was not, and could not have been the case.

A more literal translation of Jephthah’s vow would be, “It shall belong to Jehovah; and I will offer it instead of a burnt offering.” This is the way **Young’s Literal Translation** reads. — “I have offered up for it—a burnt-

offering.” The **Modern King James Version** reads, — “Surely it shall belong to the LORD.”

I am certain that Jephthah did not kill his daughter for several reasons.

- **First, this was a personal vow, a vow Jephthah made to God, a vow that Jephthah alone could fulfil.**

In fulfilling the vow, he could not take that which did not belong to him and offer it to the Lord; and his daughter’s life was not his to sacrifice (Ezek. 18:4).

(Ezekiel 18:4) “Behold, all souls are mine; as the soul of the father, so also the soul of the son is mine: the soul that sinneth, it shall die.”

As her father, it was Jephthah’s right in those days to give her to another in marriage, or not, as he saw fit (1 Cor. 7:36-38).

- **Second, throughout the Scriptures, human sacrifices are set before us as abominations before the Lord our God and were strictly forbidden by Mosaic law.**

In order for Jephthah to have killed his daughter and offered as a sacrifice, he would have had to intrude upon the office of God’s priest (No priest of God would have made such a sacrifice!), and would have polluted God’s altar. Both acts of that kind were always punished by violent and immediate death.

- In addition to those things, the Scriptures tell us plainly that **there was no need for Jephthah to literally sacrifice his daughter’s life, because God provided redemption for the child** or even the unclean beast that was dedicated to the Lord (Lev. 27:1-5, 11-12).

(Leviticus 27:1-5) “And the LORD spake unto Moses, saying, (2) Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When a man shall make a singular vow, the persons *shall be* for the LORD by thy estimation. (3) And thy estimation shall be of the male from twenty years old even unto sixty years old, even thy estimation shall be fifty shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary. (4) And if it *be* a female, then thy estimation shall be thirty shekels. (5) And if *it be* from five years old even unto twenty years old, then thy estimation

shall be of the male twenty shekels, and for the female ten shekels.”

(Leviticus 27:11-12) “And if *it be* any unclean beast, of which they do not offer a sacrifice unto the LORD, then he shall present the beast before the priest: (12) And the priest shall value it, whether it be good or bad: as thou valuest it, *who art* the priest, so shall it be.”

Jephthah’s vow was precisely the same as the vow by which Hannah devoted Samuel to the Lord. He said, “I will offer up the first thing that comes out of my house, ‘*shall surely be the Lord’s.*’ I will offer it up for a burnt offering by redemption, according to the law of redemptions” (1 Sam. 1:11, 28).

(1 Samuel 1:11) “And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.”

(1 Samuel 1:28) “Therefore also I have lent him to the LORD; as long as he liveth he shall be lent to the LORD. And he worshipped the LORD there.”

**Jephthah said exactly what we are taught to say to our God because of his marvellous deliverances of grace in saving our souls** (Ps. 66:5-10, 13-16)

(Psalms 66:5-10) “Come and see the works of God: *he is terrible in his* doing toward the children of men. (6) He turned the sea into dry *land*: they went through the flood on foot: there did we rejoice in him. (7) He ruleth by his power for ever; his eyes behold the nations: let not the rebellious exalt themselves. Selah. (8) O bless our God, ye people, and make the voice of his praise to be heard: (9) Which holdeth our soul in life, and suffereth not our feet to be moved. (10) For thou, O God, hast proved us: thou hast tried us, as silver is tried.”

(Psalms 66:13-16) “I will go into thy house with burnt offerings: I will pay thee my vows, (14) Which my lips have uttered, and my mouth hath spoken, when I was in trouble. (15) I will offer unto thee burnt sacrifices of fatlings, with the incense of rams; I will offer

bullocks with goats. Selah. (16) Come *and* hear, all ye that fear God, and I will declare what he hath done for my soul.”

- *Fourth*, the ordinance kept in Israel every year tells us that **Jephthah’s daughter lived for quite some time after bewailing her virginity upon the mountains.**

Among the ancient, believing Hebrew women, no lamentations equaled that of being kept unmarried, single and celibate, in perpetual virginity. Every believing daughter of Israel (as Jephthah’s daughter clearly was) looked to coming of the promised Seed, the Messiah, the Redeemer, hoping that she might be the woman through whom the woman’s Seed should come into the world. To be devoted to an unmarried life, in perpetual virginity, precluded that hope.

And **in verse 40**, after Jephthah had kept his vow, we read that “*the daughters of Israel went yearly to lament the daughter of Jephthah*” for four days. Once more, I call your attention to the very important note in the marginal reference of your Bible. The word “*lament*” might be better translated “rehearse with” as it is Judges 5:11, or “talk to” (Young’s Literal Translation). Every year, the daughters of Israel spent four days with Jephthah’s daughter talking to her about her devotion and her consecration to God because of his goodness.

11. **Jephthah said, “I have opened my mouth unto the LORD, and I cannot go back”** (v. 35). — **Me too!**

How blessed it is to be reminded once more that in this Gospel day God’s Israel is now, freed from vows and sacrifices, burnt-offerings and redemption offerings in and by Christ and his one great sacrifice. — “*For by one offering he hath perfected forever them that are sanctified*” (Heb. 10:14). Yet, we who have opened our mouths unto the Lord in heart faith, confessing him as our Lord and Savior, have a vow to pay; and we cannot go back.

(Romans 10:9-10) “That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. (10) For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.”

(Romans 6:4-6) “Therefore we are buried with him by baptism into death: that like as Christ was raised up from the dead by the glory of the Father, even so we also should walk in newness of life. (5) For if we have been planted together in the likeness of his death, we shall be also *in the likeness of his* resurrection: (6) Knowing this, that our old man is crucified with *him*, that the body of sin might be destroyed, that henceforth we should not serve sin.”

(Psalms 116:12-15) “What shall I render unto the LORD *for* all his benefits toward me? (13) I will take the cup of salvation, and call upon the name of the LORD. (14) I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people. (15) Precious in the sight of the LORD *is* the death of his saints.”

(1 Peter 2:1-5) “Wherefore laying aside all malice, and all guile, and hypocrisies, and envies, and all evil speakings, (2) As newborn babes, desire the sincere milk of the word, that ye may grow thereby: (3) If so be ye have tasted that the Lord *is* gracious. (4) To whom coming, *as unto* a living stone, disallowed indeed of men, but chosen of God, *and* precious, (5) Ye also, as lively stones, are built up a spiritual house, an holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.”

**The word translated “cannot” in Judges 11:35 is very instructive.** It means...

- **I am not able to go back.** — I am not able to go back because my God has sworn that he will not allow it.
- **I have no power to go back.** — I have no power to go back because, as powerful as my wicked heart is to do evil, it has no power to overcome God’s purpose, God’s grace, Christ’s blood, Christ’s intercession, and the Spirit’s seal (Rom. 8:28-39).

(Romans 8:28-39) “And we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to *his* purpose. (29) For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate *to be* conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (30) Moreover whom he did predestinate, them he also called: and whom he called, them he also justified: and whom he justified, them he also glorified. (31) What

shall we then say to these things? If God *be* for us, who *can be* against us? (32) He that spared not his own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how shall he not with him also freely give us all things? (33) Who shall lay any thing to the charge of God's elect? *It is* God that justifieth. (34) Who *is* he that condemneth? *It is* Christ that died, yea rather, that is risen again, who is even at the right hand of God, who also maketh intercession for us. (35) Who shall separate us from the love of Christ? *shall* tribulation, or distress, or persecution, or famine, or nakedness, or peril, or sword? (36) As it is written, For thy sake we are killed all the day long; we are accounted as sheep for the slaughter. (37) Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us. (38) For I am persuaded, that neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, (39) Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord."

(Psalms 89:27-37) "Also I will make him *my* firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. (28) My mercy will I keep for him for evermore, and my covenant shall stand fast with him. (29) His seed also will I make *to endure* for ever, and his throne as the days of heaven. (30) If his children forsake my law, and walk not in my judgments; (31) If they break my statutes, and keep not my commandments; (32) Then will I visit their transgression with the rod, and their iniquity with stripes. (33) Nevertheless my lovingkindness will I not utterly take from him, nor suffer my faithfulness to fail. (34) My covenant will I not break, nor alter the thing that is gone out of my lips. (35) Once have I sworn by my holiness that I will not lie unto David. (36) His seed shall endure for ever, and his throne as the sun before me. (37) It shall be established for ever as the moon, and *as* a faithful witness in heaven. Selah."

• **I cannot be prevailed upon, or forced by any means, or influence, to go back.** — I cannot be prevailed upon by any means, I cannot be forced by any means to go back, because Satan has no power to harm me. — No evil shall befall me. My God has promised, "*It shall be will with the righteous.*"

• **I will not go back.** — I will not go back because I cannot go back.

(John 10:28-30) "And I give unto them eternal life; and they shall never perish, neither shall any *man* pluck them out of my hand. (29)

My Father, which gave *them* me, is greater than all; and no *man* is able to pluck *them* out of my Father's hand. (30) I and my Father are one."

**And I will not go back, because I know that I have nowhere to go** (John 6:66-69).

(John 6:66-69) "From that *time* many of his disciples went back, and walked no more with him. (67) Then said Jesus unto the twelve, Will ye also go away? (68) Then Simon Peter answered him, Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life. (69) And we believe and are sure that thou art that Christ, the Son of the living God."

“When any turn from Zion’s way,  
(Alas! what numbers do!)  
Methinks I hear my Savior say,  
‘Wilt thou forsake me too?’

Ah Lord! with such a heart as mine,  
Unless thou hold me fast;  
I feel I must, I shall decline,  
And prove like them at last.

Yet thou alone hast pow’r, I know,  
To save a wretch like me;  
To whom, or whither, could I go,  
If I should turn from thee?

Beyond a doubt I rest assured  
Thou art the CHRIST of God;  
Who hast eternal life secured  
By promise and by blood.

The help of men and angels joined,  
Could never reach my case;  
Nor can I hope relief to find,  
But in thy boundless grace.

No voice but thine can give me rest,  
And bid my fears depart;

No love but thine can make me blest,  
And satisfy my heart.

What anguish has that question stirred,  
If I will also go?  
Yet, LORD, relying on thy word,  
I humbly answer, No!”

— John Newton

Amen.