

said enough however, to show that there is a philosophy of language, not included in our idea of grammar, and that the subject opens out into rich and inexhaustible fields of vast extent, inviting to all truly philosophical minds, whether linguists, historians, or natural philosophers.

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## ARTICLE II.

### JEPHTHAH'S VOW.

BY SAMUEL WARREN, M.D., BOSTON.

A vow is a promise made to God, to do or to give something in the future, most commonly for success in an undertaking, or for deliverance from danger. The occasions of vows are given us in many places of scripture. They are always voluntary; no one being ever called upon to make a vow if he does not so incline. But having made one, the Bible is very strict to hold him to the performance of his vow, because God is always a party to a vow, and no inconsiderate conduct is to be allowed in dealing with God.

As it is of the first importance that our intercourse with God be regulated according to a prescribed manner, and as God foresaw that men might often find themselves inclined to make vows to do or to give something if God would encourage them that he would do something for them which they could not do for themselves, therefore he condescended to give directions concerning the making of vows, and regulations for the due and proper execution of them. We find several kinds of vows spoken of in the Bible, which are called by different names. The most ancient, as well as the most common, kind of vow was made when persons were in quest of success in an undertaking, as by Jacob when he went into Mesopotamia; or when earnestly seeking deliverance from danger, as by the ship's crew on board the vessel with the

prophet Jonah. Of this kind of vow we have many instances in the Bible. Another kind of vow is called *cherem*, by which persons and things are devoted to utter destruction. One of the earliest instances of this kind of vow is found in Ex. xvii., where Jehovah declared to Moses that he would put out the remembrance of Amalek from under heaven for making an attack on the rear of the camp of Israel, among the defenceless women and children. In Numbers Israel makes a vow of this sort to destroy Atad, one of the kings of Canaan, and all his people; but they were authorized to do so by Jehovah, who had promised to deliver the Canaanites into the hand of Israel. So Jehovah pointed out Achan to Joshua, and commanded him to destroy Achan and all that belonged to him, for his deliberate transgression. No person had a right to make a vow of this sort unless authorized to do so by Jehovah himself, who is proprietor of all things and persons. A third kind of vow we find in Lev. xxvii., which in this place alone is called a *singular* vow, by which a person devoted himself or his child or some part of his property to the service of Jehovah. This vow, called singular, differs from the vow of a Nazarite, in that a person gave up another, it might be, to the service of the Lord, instead of, or as well as, himself. It is here to be observed that Moses did not encourage the making of vows, but when made, he urged a scrupulous fulfilment of them. We may conclude, from the many and greater other follies into which the Israelites often fell, that persons not unfrequently made vows inconsiderately, improvidently, and under an impulse of zeal, and subsequently, on more sober reflection, wished themselves rid of them. Therefore Moses gave directions whereby such persons might redeem their vows, adding a fifth to the valuation of whatever might have been devoted in the vow, by way of fine for their rashness.

We may now ask, which of these vows did Jephthah make, and what did he purpose in his heart to do in fulfilment of his vow? We think he made a great mistake, and did not know himself very definitely what he engaged to do. If he

had carefully studied what is contained in the law of Moses on the subject of vows, he need not have fallen into a mistake on so important a subject, a mistake which probably embittered the remainder of his life, and that of his daughter too. Perhaps this may be said in justification of Jephthah, if he made a mistake, as is here assumed: From the time of Joshua to the time of Jephthah, something more than two centuries, we find but little said about vows, compared with what we find in the time of Saul, David, and Solomon, and onward to the captivity. So Jephthah had not the opportunity and advantage of seeing on what occasions others had made vows, and how they kept them.

We find vows made in scripture by almost every sort of characters, from the humble and devout Hannah to the ambitious and corrupt Absalom. By having many instances of vows made by others before one, with their results, one might be guided when and how to make a vow for himself, and how to fulfil it. Jephthah had no such advantage, and therefore had to be guided by his own interpretation of the law concerning vows, and in view of the trouble he got himself into by making a vow, we may conclude he did not very thoroughly understand the subject. We think he made a mixture of the vow called *singular*, and the one called *cherem*, which devotes to utter destruction. Very likely he had in his eye Lev. xxvii., more especially verses 28, 29. Perhaps it should for another reason not seem strange to us that Jephthah should make a mistake in such an important matter, for we are told how he was banished from his paternal home, and what his manner of life was from that time to the time he was invited to become leader of his own people in delivering them from their oppressors. We may well ask, what opportunity he had to be instructed in things of a religious nature? Indeed we may ask: Did he have a manuscript copy of the law in his possession, which he might read at his leisure? We know that in his day copies of the law were scarce and not a little expensive. We are to bear in mind that there was nothing in the form of print in the

days of Jephthah, nor any writing except the law of Moses ; at least none that we know of, which would be reliable and safe for giving religious instruction. As Jephthah seems, however, to have been well acquainted with the book of Moses, as shown by the message he sent to the king of Ammon, we must conclude he had seen and read, or at least had heard, what is contained in the law concerning vows, and the fulfilment of them. But the commentators agree in saying that he seems better acquainted with the historical parts of Moses than with the preceptive. Let us, then, proceed to look at the record in the book of Judges (xi.), and see how this narrative of Jephthah and his vow is presented to us. When Jephthah had been duly chosen by his people to become their leader in the work of delivering them from their oppressors (vs. 4-11), when Jehovah had confirmed the choice by giving of his spirit to qualify and encourage him for the undertaking (vs. 29), and moreover when Jephthah had humbly and sincerely sought guidance and success from the Lord (vs. 11, 27), then he paused very unnecessarily to make this vow which cost him so much trouble, and has perplexed the world ever since to know what he really meant. He makes his vow and says: "If Jehovah will give success, then the comer-forth out of my house to meet me on my return in peace shall surely be the Lord's, and I will offer a burnt-offering." Thus the vow stands while he is gone on his expedition, which probably did not occupy many days. He returns, having had great success. The daughter meets him with the liveliest expressions of joy. The father rends his clothes, and says: "Alas, my daughter!" Who shall account for the entirely opposite feelings expressed by them on such an occasion? Can we suppose the daughter knew anything of the vow of the father? Did not the father know what he had purposed in his heart from the first to do? Had he not had time to think of the possibility that his daughter might meet him first? Why, then, is he so agitated and sad? Why should he be shaken in his purpose if it was a good one? What can he mean when he says concerning the

daughter, thou hast brought me very low? He cannot mean that he was brought low by being overpowered and subdued by his enemies. Such a meaning the word has in some places, as in Deborah's song. Was he not thinking of being brought low by having his name cut off in the earth by leaving no posterity? Was not this considered a being brought low in his day by every one, and dreaded as a great misfortune? What can Jephthah mean by saying of his daughter thou art one of them that trouble me? She surely meant no such thing, but manifestly the opposite. Was Jephthah thinking of having the hope of happiness with his daughter dashed as in a moment when he thought of his vow? The Hebrew word here used to express trouble is not the one Job used when he said trouble came to him though he was trying to live religiously in the sight of his Maker, nor like that used when it is said: "man is of few days and full of trouble." It is a word expressive of trouble arising from sin on our part, as when Achan proved a trouble to Israel by what he did in bold transgression of what had been expressly forbidden; and as Saul troubled Israel and endangered the life of his son Jonathan by his rash words. Jephthah says he had opened his mouth to the Lord, and he could not go back. He had indeed opened his mouth, but was it done wisely? Moses opened his mouth at one time, and it went very ill with him in consequence of what he said. Elihu charges Job with opening his mouth in folly, and uttering words without knowledge. The word here used by Jephthah is the same as used by Elihu in speaking of Job's opening his mouth in folly

Perhaps Jephthah began to be conscious that he had not been wise and considerate in what he had said, and used one of the words commonly used to express hasty and forbidden speech. There are three such words in Hebrew, occurring a few times only. The daughter seems not to know what the father had said in opening his mouth to the Lord, until this point of time. It is probable the father now informed the daughter of the substance of his vow. How he explained

the vow and how she understood it, is not very clear to us. The fact that the daughter demanded two months for consideration before anything further was done, would seem to show that she was not absolutely at the father's disposal. Did the daughter expect that at the end of two months her life would be sacrificed, and did she spend those two months in composing her mind to peace in view of that great and most solemn event; or was her purpose to consider whether to submit to the vow or not? At the end of the specified time the daughter returns with her mind made up; but what was done next is the important thing to decide. It is said the father fulfilled the vow which he had made concerning the daughter; but the question is, what had he vowed to do with her? All the commentators agree in saying, she was an amiable, dutiful, and pious daughter. We accept the statement as true. Such being the fact, what lawful right had the father to take the life of such a character? We should bear in mind that the vow devoting to destruction, applied only to the wicked. Such a vow was designed only for the most wicked, who were thereby made an example to others not to transgress, and fall victims to such utter destruction. Is there an instance in all the Bible of an intelligent Israelite, a true and sincere worshipper of God, such as Jephthah in the chapter before us seems to have been, doing such a thing as to make a vow of this destructive sort? Long after this we read of king Manasseh doing something like this, but he is strongly reprov'd in the Bible for what he did. We read also of a king of Moab who offered his oldest son a sacrifice on the city wall; but this was not done to Jephthah's God, and it excites in us no other feeling than horror and disgust at the cruelty and the sin of the unnatural deed. Milman, speaking of Jephthah, calls him a barbarous and fierce freebooter. Professor Palfrey, speaking of Sampson, calls him a wild compound of the buffoon and the profligate. Perhaps it is not well to speak thus of scripture characters, after we have the decision of the Most High (see Heb. xi. 32) that he accepted them at last, notwith-

standing all their faults and follies. In the scripture record, Jephthah stands between Gideon and Sampson; and their most prominent and public acts seem to be under divine direction and guidance. Why may we not conclude the same of Jephthah, and that he would not be left to do a thing often forbidden in scripture? Milman, John Scott, the Comprehensive Commentary, yea, the stream of interpreters say, that *if* Jephthah sacrificed his daughter, it is a solitary instance in the Bible. On the supposition that Jephthah made a sacrifice of his daughter, will the commentators tell us with some definiteness when it was done, and by whose hand it was done? Did he go to Shiloh, as Elkanah did, and make his offering at the tabernacle, as the law prescribed to all who would fulfil their vows acceptably? Did he engage a priest to make the offering for him, or did he do the thing himself? We know what was done to king Saul for assuming the office of priest, and also to king Uzziah; but Jephthah did not know of these unlawful acts, and so could not be warned by them. But if this transaction was done at the tabernacle, and Jephthah engaged a priest to make his offering, the priest would have known how an offering should be made in order to be acceptable to God. The question is: Would an intelligent and devout Hebrew priest make an offering to God of such a person as we suppose the daughter of Jephthah to have been? Can one show us anything approaching to it in all the Bible? If this was not done at the tabernacle as the law prescribed, but in some irregular and unprescribed way, then how can we suppose that it met with any favorable regard from God? Is it said, in reply, that the patriarchs erected altars on their own premises, and made offerings to God, and that he signified his acceptance of them? The answer is: Jephthah was not a patriarch, nor did he live in the patriarchal age, but under the Mosaic dispensation, according to which offerings to God were to be made at the tabernacle and temple, and by a priest, in order to be accepted. Milman lays stress on the fact that Jephthah would not be likely to go to the tabernacle then at

Shiloh to consecrate his daughter to the service of the high priest, because he was at that time in deadly hostility with the tribe of Ephraim; but he would be equally unlikely to go there to offer her as a burnt-offering, so that the objection proves nothing against the supposition that she was thus consecrated. Moses, on the other hand, lays stress on the fact that no one could lawfully make an offering to God in any other place except at the tabernacle (see Deut. xii. 6, where offerings in fulfilment of vows are specified among others). As Jephthah had recently gained a signal victory over the Ephraimites, is it any more unlikely that he should go among them, if he wished to make a religious offering, than it is to suppose that he would find at the tabernacle a Hebrew priest who would make an offering to Jehovah of a human being of such character as we all suppose Jephthah's daughter to have been? We are therefore forced to the conclusion that she was sacrificed, a burnt-offering, neither by Jephthah nor by a priest at the tabernacle.

But again, it is said the father fulfilled the vow which he had made concerning his daughter; but does the scripture decide that Jephthah's daughter was to be the offering which he purposes in his heart to make in fulfilment of his vow? We think not. Most of the commentators hitherto have relied on the last clause of verse 31, on verse 39, where it is said Jephthah kept his vow, and on verse 40, the mourning of the daughters over her, for the view they take of this vow, and the way it was kept. We, on the other hand, rely on the same passages for the view we take, with only a slight alteration in the translation, which we feel justified in making, in addition to what we have already offered. We feel justified in saying that there is an ellipsis of the preposition in the last clause of verse 31, which if supplied would free the passage from its present uncertain meaning. Whoever will read the Hebrew Bible, with paper and pencil in hand, will find many instances of ellipses of the preposition, where we cannot translate without supplying one in English. For instance, Job says: "Thy terrors array themselves me;"

“against” is not in the Hebrew. Again Job says: “I would shake my head them.” We must supply “at” in our idiom. So Isa. xlii. 16: “I will do them;” “for” them we must say. So here, “I will offer to him (Jehovah) a burnt-offering as the law everywhere prescribes.” It is taking no ungrammatical or unauthorized liberty with the text thus to translate (see Louth’s Isaiah, p. 367, where may be found a valuable note on this very text about Jephthah’s vow; also another relating to the subject of ellipsis, p. 421). Further, on the supposition that Jephthah took the life of his daughter and made an offering of her, why is the short phrase introduced, “And she knew no man?” Is this said in her favor or to her disadvantage? If it had been untrue, would it not make her an unfit subject to offer to God? Again if it had been true, then it seems like an attempt to justify her from suspicion which might rest on her; which at best is to her disadvantage. On the other hand, if we suppose it was the purpose of Jephthah to devote his daughter to the service of God at the tabernacle, then this clause has great significance, and shows that she submitted to live a single life without hope of leaving a name behind in the earth. This no good person desires to do. The closing verse of the narrative tells us that it was a custom in Israel for some of the daughters of Israel to go yearly to do—what? Our version says to lament; but the word here used nowhere means to lament. In Deborah’s song the word is used to express the joyful rehearsing of the mighty doings of Jehovah in delivering his people from oppression; and in Proverbs it is used to express praise to the virtuous woman for her many virtuous deeds. Such a meaning well suits the connection in this story of Jephthah and his daughter. We may well suppose that the same companions who roamed with the daughter of Jephthah on the hills for two months, came yearly to her to express sympathy, and to praise her for the life she was living. Did some of the daughters of Israel go yearly to lament over one of their number who was passed away from the earth, or to rejoice with one who was alive and not leading an unhappy

life? We need not suppose that the number who thus gathered was large, or that it continued for a long series of years. We said above that there is often found an ellipsis of a preposition in Hebrew where we cannot translate without supplying one; so, on the other hand, there is often found a preposition in Hebrew which is suppressed in our version, and which, if brought out, would contribute to the clearness of the meaning. It is so in this last verse of the narrative. To offer praise to the daughter of Jephthah, is the way we understand the verse. To lament over would require different words from what are found in the text. Finally, if we conclude that Jephthah sacrificed his daughter, then it seems to make him a heathen as to religious knowledge, no better than the king of Moab, who sacrificed his oldest son on the city wall. This is placing Jephthah in an attitude where we do not like to leave him. Nor does Paul thus believe him. In Heb. xi. Jephthah is accounted worthy of mention, by name, along with Jacob, Joseph, and Moses, as well as Gideon and Sampson, among the ancient worthies who wrought righteousness and obtained a good report. This, in addition to what has already been said, seems clearly to prohibit the opinion that Jephthah in person offered *his daughter*, a *human* sacrifice, to Jehovah, at a time when *any* sacrifice was forbidden, except at the tabernacle and by the hand of a priest. On the other hand, if we suppose him mistaken as to the nature and obligation of a vow, this need seem no strange thing, for even Aaron made a mistake in performing his duties soon after the tabernacle was set up, and on one occasion the whole congregation made a mistake, and had to offer a trespass-offering, as directed by Moses. The daughter, too, shows herself but poorly acquainted with the law of Moses if she submitted to the vow of her father, as commonly interpreted. If she was so worthy and so pious as the commentators make her, we see not how she could be so ignorant of the revealed religion of her nation. Those who are willing to do right in matters of religion are commonly guided and kept from making great mistakes. Such is the divine promise to

us all. We therefore conclude that Jephthah and his daughter were kept from doing anything which would disgrace either their religion or their characters in the estimation of the righteous of their day. This belief we shall hold till we are shown that we cannot scripturally hold it.

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### ARTICLE · III.

#### THE GREAT CREVASSE OF THE JORDAN AND OF THE RED SEA.

BY REV. LYMAN COLEMAN, D.D., EASTON, PA.

IN the Researches of Dr. Robinson a letter is inserted from the "distinguished geologist," Leopold Von Buch, "whose researches have been particularly directed to the phenomena of volcanoes." This letter is, in part, as follows :

"The valley of the Jordan is a fissure, a *crevasse* which extends from Mount Lebanon to the Red Sea without interruption. Such, it seems to me, is the result of your researches, as well as those of M. de Bertou, and of Callien, who nevertheless finds fault with Ritter for having said the same thing. These long fissures, especially frequent among limestone mountains, give the configuration to our continents. If they are very large and deep they afford passage for the primitive mountains, which, for that reason, form *chains* in the direction which the fissure prescribes. We might therefore expect a greater development of the volcanic agents at the bottom of this fissure than upon the heights."<sup>1</sup> To the same effect is also the opinion of the late Dr. Hitchcock: "The valley of the Jordan, extending from the Red Sea to Mount Lebanon, was probably a fissure, along which volcanic agency may have been more or less exerted from time to time."<sup>2</sup>

<sup>1</sup> Vol. ii., p. 606 (1st edition).

<sup>2</sup> Geology of the Globe, p. 51.