

A Response to Esther Fuchs

An Evangelical appraisal of her article “Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing: The Story of Jephthah’s Daughter”

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1 Introduction

Judges has the story of Jephthah who vows to Yahweh to sacrifice anything that comes out of his house to meet him when returns in triumph. When he actually returns home it was his one and only daughter that comes to meet him. Jephthah ‘does to her as he had vowed’. This has sparked many debates as to the possibility of a human sacrifice in OT Judaism.

In this assignment I review Esther Fuchs article,

1. Summarizing her theses and arguments
2. Engaging with her arguments
3. Summarising the text vis-à-vis Fuchs reading

I intend to show that while the article has a lot of insights and some of her arguments are actually correct, her feminist conclusions are unwarranted.

2 Fuchs Thesis

Her central thesis is that the biblical narrative places importance on the father rather than the daughter and the daughter is silenced and marginalised (Fuchs, 1989:36). The text *portrays* Jephthah as a victim rather than *exposing* him as a selfish coward (ibid:41). The text refrains from emphasizing the fact that Jephthah is directly responsible his daughters demise; rather it even expresses the sense that the daughter has become the cause for her father's demise (ibid:41). She says that *ambiguity* and *Silence* has been used as tools to mitigate or lessen the horror of the sacrifice and to some extent justify Jephthah's actions. She states 'literary strategies work here in the interests of patriarchal ideology – the ideology of male supremacy' (ibid:45). She concludes that

This understanding calls for a *resistant* reading of the biblical text...A reading above all resists the tendency in biblical narrative to focus on the father at the daughters expense. (ibid:45)

If I were to summarize her thesis : "Jephthah was a selfish coward, the Bible should have exposed him for what he was. But the bible goes to great lengths to show that he himself was a victim, using tools like ambiguity and silence. We must resist this bible."

As a self-identified Feminist Fuchs reads the Bible as a feminist and takes great offence at these texts. Her writing has the same flavor as the non-Christian writers such as Dan Brown – who accuse the bible of having a very low view of women and being sexist.

If we want to fully understand and appreciate Fuchs point of view we need to look at a related and important book by the same author, *Sexual Politics in the Biblical Narrative*. There she compares the sacrifice of Isaac and Jephthah's unnamed daughter. She concludes that sex makes all the difference. In Jephthah's *daughters* case Yahweh is 'conspicuously silent' but in Isaac's case he 'intervenes energetically'. Although both are called only children sex seals her (Jephthah's daughter's) fate. As a female she is sacrificable, 'her elimination from the text would not entail a serious disruption', but since Isaac was a male he is not sacrificable. (Fuchs, 2000)

3. Fuchs Arguments and Evaluations

The arguments she uses to demonstrate her thesis are mostly from narrative/literary criticism.

“..the construction of point of view, word selection, omissions, and certain repetitions and above all the narrative’s much-discussed ambiguity understate the fathers culpability at the expense of his daughter”

It must be noted that from a narrative criticism point of view Fuchs has a lot of things to teach us. Her observations are excellent. Her remarks and explanation are fantastic. But her conclusions are pathetic. It is with her conclusions that I find myself disagreeing.

We look at main arguments below:

Her character is not developed/ She is not characterized

Fuchs complains that Jephthah’ daughters is not characterized fully. And wherever an information is given about her it is given for in relation to her father than to characterize her. Fuchs complains that her name is not mentioned, her mother’s name is not mentioned (ibid,37).

The phrase ‘only child’ is repeated twice to emphasize what the loss will mean to him and her importance to him. That is without her Jephthah’s lineage will stop.

“that the daughter is only child tells us more about her importance for him than about her....

“this presentation does less to characterize the daughter than to clarify what the daughter represents for the father”

(please note my response to this and the use of the term virginity under the virginity section)

While appreciating her observations we must remember that her character is still represented with quite some detail that could be afforded to a short narrative placed in between two other narratives of national or regional significance.

1. She is portrayed as a girl who takes part in the national victory

She was at the head of the company of women who welcomed the conqueror with music and songs (typical way to welcome war heroes)¹

2. She is a girl who takes initiatives

She is coming with this dance troop

When her father tells her about the vow she doesn't silently accept it. She herself asks for the two months of mourning. The narrator makes sure that his readers understand that this is not something that has been put to indict the male protagonist and generate too much sympathy for the female character (Fuchs,1989:41). Her refers to a custom that his readers are very familiar with. And says 'see you know the custom, now you here is how it originated'.

3. She is faithful

She comes back as promised

4. She is faithful to Yahweh

She realises that Jephthah has given his word to the Lord

So she is described as a girl having a good character. While I cannot agree with Reis (Reis,nd) on the fact that she was a spoilt child I cannot overlook her attempts to show that Jephthah's daughter was a strong character and is portrayed as such in the text. She appeals to her coming out of the house leading the dance and her request for two months.

Fuch's whole point is not simply that the narrator is suppressing information (silence) to suppress sympathy towards Jephthah' daughter - which I could appreciate - but Fuchs' point of view is that the narrator is doing it purposely because she is a woman! This is true regardless of ones sex because the more detail you get to know of a person –be it in narration or real life – the more you tend to relate to that person. The more you relate the more you tend to take his side and thus more you will sympathize. It must be remembered even in the Abraham-Isaac sacrifice narrative – the information about how Isaac felt is not described in detail.

Isaac for all his being named is not a particularly vital character even in the grand narrative of which gen 22 forms one part-certainly not compared with either his father Abraham or his son Jacob. If anything Jephthah's daughter who acts speaks negotiates for spending two months with her friends and makes the decision to submit to the vow is a more vivid character than Isaac is in Gen 22. Both children however are depicted as secondary figures though neither is thereby rendered insignificant (Stiebert, 2013:96).

¹ I am reminded of this and the incident where the ark of the covenant fell and Uzzah (2 Sam 6.8) went to hold it. While the intentions were good proper protocols should have been followed.

Moreover while the father is passive in Gen 22, In Judges 11 here is active – he is shocked at the prospect that he has to sacrifice his own daughter and his response is full of emotional intensity. (ibid:96).

There is yet another reference in the OT for a human sacrifice in II Kings 3.27. This time Mesha the king of Moab sacrifices his son because he has lost the battle big time to the Israelites. Then he goes on to sacrifice his own offspring. The narrator presents some important information to qualify the Mesha's offspring. That

1. it was A son - a male
2. that he was the first born
3. the one who was to succeed him as king

the next piece of information the narrator has chosen to present – the 'narrators text' (fokkleman, 1999) is important – the fury against Israel was great. Even if I die childless I will not be defeated by the Israelites King of Moab thought. The fight was so severe. Maybe the Israelites went back because they knew that the king would die without a successor.

Fuchs and other feminists should realise that the son's – male offspring – name is not mentioned in the text. Neither is king Mesha's wife's name.

Yet another story is that of Manasseh the Judean king who sacrificed his own son in fire. II Kings 21.6. His name is also not mentioned in the text.

So nameless sons are mentioned more often as human sacrifice in the bible – I don't think that the feminists like Fuchs are going to conclude that the bible presents sons as expendable.

Point of View Switching

Fuchs says that by using words like 'behold' the point of switches from the omniscient authoritative narrator to the subjective point of view of Jephthah (ibid,37). This is a good analysis. (As I said in the introduction read from a narrative perspective this article has a lot to teach us. It is her feminist conclusions that I cannot agree with.)

The point of view again switches back to narrators point of view when he inserts the narrators text in verse 39 esp. the latter part of 39 and 40. He talks about a custom in Israel. This happened yearly he comments. Here the narrator takes a bird's eye view and goes several hundred feet above from the Jephthah story. He jumps several years and may be centuries and says to his current readers look you know the custom here is the story behind the custom.

The Vow

Fuchs claims that Jephthah's vow is 'foolish', 'rash' and 'faithless'² (Fuchs,1989:1,2). However Logan's sees this vow in conformity with Jephthah's character and the narrative's point. She claims that Jephthah has always been a negotiator. We see this clearly in his negotiations with the elders of Gilead (successful), the Ammonite king (failed), and the Benjamites (failed). Logan's view is important because she explains that the 'ambiguity' is not a sign of stupidity but an astute piece of negotiation:

What if we look at Jephthah's vow making from a different perspective? What if we turn the traditional interpretation upside down and consider the vow's ambiguity not as a sign of stupidity but as an astute piece of negotiation? In this way a far better fit develops between the Jephthah of this story and the Jephthah of the rest of the narrative. Now Jephthah becomes the same shrewd bargainer who bested the elders of Gilead and so stoutly defended his country's interests against Ammon and Ephraim.... *What if the vow's ambiguity was intended to be interpreted as a well-conceived, calculated offer to leave the choice to God, in the (desperate) hope that against expectation Yhwh would surprise Jephthah and not demand his due?* To Israelites who believed that their God appreciated the massacre of an enemy population in his name, who recognized the sacrifice of firstborn children as legitimate offerings, and who were receptive to a metaphor portraying Yhwh as someone who would light an enemy's funeral pyre as a sacrifice to himself, would it not have seemed reasonable that the deity would be appreciative of an offer to choose his own victim? (Logan,2009:677)

There is much to be commended in this view. As a matter of fact from a literary-critical perspective the Jephthah narrative –according to Jerome Walsh (Logan,2009:674) - can be seen as a series of negotiations; arranged ABA'B': The elders accept Jephthah's terms (A); Ammon rejects Jephthah and there is war (B); Jephthah (and daughter) accept Yahweh's terms (A'); Ephraim rejects Jephthah and there is war (B').

I like her view not only because it makes perfect sense but also because she sees ambiguity not as a sexist technique but as a tool to make a point that is in conformity and in connection with the rest of the narrative.

² People also have questioned why should Jephthah make a vow after he is endowed with the spirit. Augustine has seen a parallel between him and Gideon, who after called by God still tested God twice with his fleece, and Jephthah similarly made a vow to test God (Thomson,2001:127)

In the next section below the vow is again examined from a different point of view – citing Niditch (1995) and Logan (2009) the herem texts should be understood as a vow.

Jephthah's Words

The words Jephthah utters in response to seeing his daughter come dancing have been analysed carefully by Fuchs.

“Apparently, "you have brought me to my knees" (kr*) and "you have been among my enemies" (kr) is a selfish accusation. Instead of considering his daughters fate, Jephthah accuses her of collaborating with his enemies (kr is usually associated with military enemies)” (Fuchs,1989:39).

These words are a befitting description of a military defeat (ibid). Now Jephthah uses on his daughter. Jephthah selfishly accuses his daughter and makes her partly responsible for her fate. He was expecting to be elevated through military victory but now he has been brought low. So claims Fuchs.

But Logan (Logan,2009:679) sees a connection with the term used for trouble (KJV) in verse 35 and with Josh 7.24-26. She points out that the word used for trouble is - in its proper noun form - the same as the word used for the valley of Achor in Josh 7.24. That is where the treaty between Yahweh and Israel was broken. Yahweh had promised victory and in return the Israelites had to put the entire city with its inhabitants and wealth to the ban. But Achan took things that must be put to the ban i.e. *heremed*. So Israel lost the battle and the conquest stopped temporarily. It stopped until the herem vow was reinstated by killing Achan and all that belonged to him. The valley of Achor was where he was heremed. So for the ancient Israelite audience the word for trouble would have reminded them of what happened at the valley of Achor, and the consequence of not keeping war vows. So Jephthah and through him the narrator is reminding of the fact that if a war vow is made and not kept, it will bring disaster upon the nation.

“The assonance would have reverberated throughout Jephthah’s lament—a constant reminder of the serious consequences of not keeping a war vow, and a serious portent of what would happen if Jephthah did not keep his” (Logan,2009:679).

One question that may be coming to our mind could be the difference between Jephthah’s vow and a herem. But striking similarities exist. Both are made during war times. And Num 21.1-3 explicitly relates herem as a vow. Even in the Achan story there is a *covenant* Josh 7.11. They have to destroy the people for which they are guaranteed victory at Ai. Susan Niditch has argued that the ban texts must be understood as a vow (Niditch, 1995:34-35).

Understanding Jephthah's vow as a war vow – and importantly as a herem vow clarifies why Lev 27:1-8 about redeeming something that has dedicated to the Lord cannot be applied to Jephthah's situation. Jephthah's and Israel's vows are the same, because they both involve the devotion of human lives in sacrifice to Yhwh. Thus like the Arad war vow, Jephthah's war vow comes under the Priestly laws governing herem. Jephthah's daughter could not be ransomed because she now, as the apodosis makes clear, "belongs to Yhwh". Thus, Lev 27:29 applies: "Any human being who has been put under hiērem cannot be redeemed, but must be put to death." (Logan, 2009, 682).

Moreover Jephthah doesn't blame his daughter, but he names her as the source of his personal disaster (Logan, 2009:679). Fuchs fails to give the attention to the second part as the attention she has given to the first. In the second part of his speech Jephthah takes at least partial responsibility for this - *I have opened my mouth* (Webb, 2012:332). It is because of his words that this trouble has befallen them both.

It must also be understood that the narrator tries to show Jephthah values or even loved his daughter. Actually he values her more much more now after the war than before (Webb, 2012:332). He tore his clothes – a sign of extreme distress and sadness. He was actually sad to see his daughter come out. If it had been a sheep – no questions asked. If it had been one of his slaves – maybe it wouldn't have brought this much of sorrow to Jephthah. But now that he has seen his own daughter he is shocked and highly distressed.

Daughters Response

Jephthah's unnamed daughter came out of the house unknowingly to meet him. Fuchs notices a connection between 'whatever come out of' Jephthah's house with whatever that came out of Jephthah's mouth. "It is what ever came out of Jephthah's mouth that clinches the fate of Jephthah's daughter. It is the fathers word that determines the daughters verdict." (Fuchs,1989:38). Here Fuchs is starting to become self-contradictory. Because her main argument is that the text shows Jephthah as a victim (maybe of his own words) and not as a selfish coward who takes responsibility for his daughter's death. But at his line at page 38 she says that it was her father's words that determines the daughters verdict. Maybe Fuchs herself is using ambiguity as a tool to convey some hidden messages!

Fuchs goes onto explain that the daughter is responsible for her own death. However she fails to give reasons (as shown below) to sustain her arguments.

"She is responsible for her death just as much as her father is, if not more, for after all Jephthah is not shown to instruct her to come out of the house to greet him...by portraying the daughter as

coming out to meet her father of her own accord, the verse introducing the daughter establishes that she too is responsible however innocently and tragically for her end” (Fuchs,1989:39).

This is absurd. The narrator doesn’t make the daughter responsible for her death simply by showing that Jephthah didn’t instruct her to come out and she came out of her own free will. This argument would have worked if the daughter knew about the vow and still decided to come out to meet Jephthah. But as per the data given in the text daughter doesn’t know about the vow yet (Although Reis (Reis,nd) argues for her knowledge of the vow it is not conclusive). So based on the simple fact that she came out without Jephthah asking her to do so doesn’t make her responsible for her death. Fuchs needs to prove that on other grounds. If Jephthah had instructed her not to come and if she came out of her own free will against Jephthah’s instructions then and only then Fuchs can say that the text is making her responsible for her own death.

Fuchs observes that that the daughter owes as much obedience to her father as her father does to Yahweh (Fuchs,1989:42). “It reflects the hierarchical structure placing father above daughter and Yahweh above the human father. The text doesn’t present her as the tragic obedient servant of Yahweh, but as the obedient daughter of her father” (ibid,42).

While what Fuchs says is here is correct, it must also be remembered that the daughter is conscious of Yahweh. In her short speech she mentions Yahweh twice. She is well acquainted with Yahweh. She proclaims Yahweh as Israel’s Gods who gives victory, and a God who demands that his vows be kept. In short what the Lord provides and what he expects – In her speech one sees a trace of the covenant relationship between Israel and Yahweh.

Fuchs is correct in saying about the hierarchical structure and that to obey ones father is to obey God. As it is one of the primary commandments in the Old Testament – part of the 10 commandments Ex 20-for that matter the Bible Itself.

However one must note that in his speech Jephthah doesn’t command her to obey he simply relates his plight and his pathetic situation (this point is overlooked by Fuchs and many others). She herself comes forward by volunteering in her speech. It is in this way – if one wants – you can argue that the text makes her responsible at least partially for her own death.

So she out of the respect she had for Yahweh and her father and the Israelite nation in general offers to be a sacrifice. In this way she not only obeys and honours her father but also Yahweh.³

³ One also wonders how much of the fact that Jephthah was a son of a harlot and they were excommunicated from the main land and their relatives would have contributed to her yielding to her father to be a sacrifice. IT would have created a very close bond between her and her father – they were hated by the outsiders so there is a close inside bond.

Although Fuchs claims that her response was one that of submissions, an alternate reading has been suggested by Reis, who has concluded that it is actually the daughter who is blaming her father (Reis, 287).

“And she said to him, My father, *you* have opened *your* mouth to the Lord; (*you*) do to me according to that which has come out of *your* mouth, because Jehovah has taken vengeance for *you* upon *your* enemies, even of the sons of Ammon (11.36 MKJV)

She uses the word you or your several times thereby shifting the blame where it actually belongs. To Jephthah.

Daughter's Knowledge

The text doesn't say whether Jephthah actually told her about the vow. But she seems to have understood it after Jephthah's initial words.

Fuchs goes on to argue her case from ambiguity and silence:

“...but the narrator refrains from being explicit. The text is ambiguous both about how much the daughter knows and about the precise consequence of the vow namely whether or how she was sacrificed. *One possible explanation is that the narrator avoids explicitness and repetition that might indict the male protagonist and generate too much sympathy for the female character...repetition is a hallmark of biblical prose just as much informational omissions are; it is valid to question both phenomena whenever they occur.* (Fuchs,1989:40-41).

Now this is a very important point. Just because the text refrains from ‘being explicit’ about

1. how much daughter knows
2. whether she was sacrificed
3. how she was sacrificed

Fuchs comes to the conclusion that it is done so as to indict the male protagonist and not generate too much sympathy for the female character.

At the outset I want to point out that the text is not completely silent about the above three points. Twice it states that he did to her as he had vowed. One through the daughters' own words v36 second in verse v39 through the narrator's text. While I don't want to enter into the discussion about whether she actually was sacrificed or not, what is given in the text is suffice for someone to conclude that what Jephthah vowed was done to her.

While the text doesn't say that Jephthah repeated his vow to his daughter, it shows how quickly the daughter understood what he meant. The fact that she responds by saying ‘do to me just as you

promised', and asks for two months to roam the hills shows that she has understood what the vow was about. This could be due to the following facts:

1. As people like Susan Niditch (Niditch,1995,1,2) has argued human sacrifice could have been part of the Israelite religion during this period – may even be due to pagan influences.
2. As shown above War vows – specially herem kind of vows were also common.
3. Since Jephthah referred to his daughter in his initial response and to his vow and said that he has been brought low – the daughter (so should the reader) would have connected the dots.

Reis in her essay 'Spoiled Child' argues that the daughter may well be aware of Jephthah's Vow. As it was made in Mizpah v29 and the text says in v34 that he returned to his house in *Mizpah* (Reis). And a war vow like that would have been proclaimed everywhere specially in Mizpah. Some parallels like Saul's giving of his daughter and other benefits to the guy who kills Goliath, in Judges itself Caleb's proclamation that he will give his daughter to anyone who captures Kiriath Sephir were proclaimed and people got to know about it. ⁴ However there is not enough data to conclude that the daughter knew about the vow and still choose to come out.

Fuchs also doesn't allow us to explain it away by saying that the vow was referred to previously in v30-31. (Fuchs,1989:41). Let's take Fuchs on her own argument, below I have modified the biblical text as per Fuchs' argument and let's see whether it has the same effect that Fuchs argues for:

Jdg. 11:35 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. I vowed unto the Lord saying "If thou shalt without fail deliver the children of Ammon into mine hands, 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 (v30,31)"

Jdg. 11:36 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. (KJV)

(words in red are inserted by me from v30,31)

⁴ Then why did his daughter come out? Reis argues that she was a spoiled child and that she ignored her father's vow. While we cannot agree with that conclusion there is some merit in the idea that the vow would have been proclaimed.

As you can see from the above even if Jephthah had repeated his vow it wouldn't have generated sympathy for the female character or would indict the male protagonist. As a matter of fact if the vow had been repeated as it is done above it would have even taken Jephthah off the hook. It would become obvious to the readers that Jephthah didn't vow to sacrifice his own daughter. He simply wanted victory and negotiated with Yahweh that anything that comes out of the house will be sacrificed. So his daughter coming out of the house was above everyone's control. Except Yahweh!

While it is not a good practice to argue from the silence of the scriptures, if we are to do that we should seek support from other means.

Details about the sacrifice –whether or how – are not given in detail because it doesn't fall in line with the point of the story. "There is no free motif". (Alter,1981). In other words the details that the narrator chooses to include in his narration helps him to make his point. Other details are omitted. So in this case if the narrator had said:

And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father,
And Jephthah rose up early in the next morning, and saddled his ass, and took two of his young men with him, and Isaac his son, and clave the wood for the burnt offering, and rose up, and went unto the place of which God had told him.
Then on the third day Jephthah lifted up his eyes, and saw the place afar off.
And Jephthah took the wood of the burnt offering, and laid it upon his daughter; and he took the fire in his hand, and a knife; and they went both of them together.
And they came to the place which God had told him of; and Jephthah built an altar there, and laid the wood in order, and bound his daughter, and laid her on the altar upon the wood.
And Jephthah stretched forth his hand, and took the knife and slew his daughter. After she died Jephthah poured oil on her body and the wood and set it on fire.

As the readers would observe this is a mix of Judges 11 and Genesis 22. There it made point to go into each of the motifs and details. For example the knife – God told him not to slay; the whole journey – to show that Abraham obeyed and God honoured his obedience. But here one of the purposes is to show how this custom came into being. And if he had gone into too much details it would have become an interruption to the next story about the war with the Ephraimites. Above all it serves no purpose. It would have become a free i.e. pointless motif. The whole reason why the Abraham-Isaac story is described in details is – not because Isaac is a male as Fuchs might argue! – that Yahweh intervened and each details serves to build up to that climax. Here the

only climax is the death. So details are omitted. Even in the other human sacrifice incidents in the Bible already quoted in this essay there is no such detail given except this Gen 22 incident. So there is no free motif.

Moreover in Judges you find places where after the initial reference the text is ‘not explicit’. Here are a few instances:

1. Samson told the riddle in verse 14 in chapter 14 but there after several references are there (v16,17) but the riddle as it is – is not repeated.
2. 16.16 with such nagging she prodded him day after day – this doesn’t refer to the content of her nagging as it was stated before.

Jephthah’s Daughters Virginit

The text refers to her virginity several times. Fuchs again reads it from a feminist perspective and argues that “The emphasis on the daughter s virginity implies that she has not yet produced children (the loss to Jephthah’s genealogy). Like the note on her being an only child, the emphasis on her virginity indicates what her loss means to Jephthah. It tells us little about her” (Fuchs,1989:44).

“The fact that the daughter goes off to the mountains with her female friends does not help us understand her as much as it helps us appreciate the tragedy of the father” (Fuchs,1989:43).

But maybe the mention of her virginity is there to remind the readers that she was so valuable. Not only as a human sacrifice, but also as someone who hasn’t known any man. Stiebert surveys old testament stories and concludes that there is high value placed on female virginity. So the Jephthah story makes best sense if the daughter is not expendable but instead highly valuable – a sacrifice only worth making to a God, to whom devotion is owed (because this God granted victory over the Ammonites) (Stiebert, 2013:89). The virgin daughter sacrifice in judges 11 too, stresses not inconsequentiality but its opposite the high value and possibly also love for the daughter (Stiebert, 2013:94)⁵.

⁵ Exum says that the mention of virginity is necessary because of sacrificial purity. The human sacrifices that are made as burnt offering must be pure. (Stiebert, 2013:89). However I doubt whether this is biblical.

The repeated mention of the word Virgin makes the sacrifice so much more graphic and horrible.

Since she was a virgin she is under the only man who is allowed to and should care for and protect her: her father. In this case it is the same man who is going to kill her and burn her.

Finally here is a question that I like to ask all the feminists: How will a daughter help to carry Jephthah's name? Genealogy is carried forward by sons not by daughters. "Like the note on her being an only child, the emphasis on her virginity indicates what her loss means to Jephthah" (Fuchs,1989:44). As a matter of fact her loss means nothing to Jephthah as far as his genealogy is concerned. Because Jephthah never had any son to carry on his name. The example of David's son Absalom is apt here. Although he had daughters, he erected the pillar in 2 Sam 18.18 because he said "I have no son to carry on my name".⁶ So having daughter would not have helped Jephthah to continue his line.

So the words only daughter and virgin are put there to arouse sympathy for the daughter. So against the feminist's opinion there is enough in the text to arouse sympathy for 'female character'. One is also reminded of the parallel between these verses and Nathan's parable to David⁷,

'but the poor man had nothing except *one little ewe lamb* that he had bought.' – the equivalent to *only child* in Jephthah's story.

'It was like a daughter to him' the equivalent to stating she was a virgin.

These notes are put to arouse sympathy and show how difficult it was for Jephthah to sacrifice her.

Moreover in ancient Israel as it is now in some parts of the world (esp. Asia and middle east) the fulfilment of a woman is to get married and have children. If she died as a virgin she is dying unfulfilled.

The Custom⁸

While Fuchs goes to great heights to show that the narrator makes Jephthah a victim and that it he that is in the focus she ignores one important part of the story. The postscript in 39b-40. The custom was not to celebrate Jephthah's victory. It was to mourn a Israelite girl. 'the postscript

⁶ Commentators generally (Baldwin, Hertzberg ,Anderson) take this to mean that the sons in other references (2 Sam 15.27) had died by now.

⁷ There has been comparisons between David and Jephthah see Logan (2009).

⁸ Although there is no reference to this custom in anywhere else in the bible In his anti-heretical *Panarion* (c. 377 CE), the Christian writer Ephiphanius of Salamis mentions Palestinian cults associated with Jephthah's daughter, presumably practiced in his day (Beavis,2004:12)

shifts the focus from the vow to the victim and draws our sympathy even more firmly away from the father and toward the daughter' (Webb, 2012:334).

The text exonerates the daughter so much so that it has opted some to comment that while Jephthah had a short career as a judge and his burial vaguely narrated as taking place in the towns of Gilead (12.7) the death of his daughter is commemorated annually (Stiebert, 2013:80). While people like Fuchs have accused the text of anti-feminist flavour and said that it downplays the daughters role, people like Johanna Stiebert writing in 2013, have read the same text and concluded that it actually exonerates the daughter more than the father.

And by remembering Jephthah's daughter Jephthah is also being remembered although he died without any offspring to carry his name. that's why Jephthah the Gileadite. This also could be one reason why the narrator choose not to mention the daughters name. The girl who was commemorated was not *Seila*⁹ but Jephthah's daughter. Jephthah is the man was committed to Yahweh so as to sacrifice his own only daughter – whose daughter we commemorate.

4. Summary of My Reading vis-à-vis with Fuch's

The text shows Jephthah as a negotiator. In a sense it runs in the family the daughter also negotiates 2 months mountain stay with her father. His vow is very much in line with other war vows. The text doesn't make her responsible for her own death just because Jephthah doesn't instruct her to come out. Fuchs keeps says that the text tries to blame the daughter. This is one area where Fuchs herself are becoming ambiguous! She comes out to celebrate. Fuchs says that Jephthah accuses her of bringing disaster upon himself. But there is a reference to the valley of Achor, which Fuchs misses completely. And Jephthah takes responsibility at least partially. Again Fuchs doesn't notice that. Daughters response might also be taken to hint at blaming Jephthah. As she uses the word you or your many times. There is solid characterization of his daughter. Which Fuch's misses completely. Since Jephthah is committed to Yahweh and keeps his vow Yahweh rewards him by making his name to be remembered forever. Not only by recording his name and deeds in the scriptures but also by creating a custom. This customer although it was to celebrate the daughter would still have made the people remember her as *Jephthah's* daughter. He regains his position which he lost to his brothers in chapter 11. At the end this narrative he is remembered as Jephthah the gileadite – not the Jephthah the son of a harlot living in the land of Tob.

⁹ Beavis quotes Pseudo-Philo who names Jephthah's daughter as Seilia (Beavis, 2004:12). There has been attempts to argue that her name and Samuel has the same roots thereby implying an allusion to Hannah's vow of dedicating Samuel to the temple (Stiebert, 2013:81 note 43). My own observation is that Samuel never married – not according to the data in the text – but was in the temple (tabernacle) service so this could be one line of reasoning to argue that Jephthah's vow was also one that of similar nature.

Since Fuchs is reading through feminist eyes even the descriptions that are put there (virgin, only child) she sees as something that is put to show Jephthah as a victim. As I pointed out while most of her observations are noteworthy her conclusion i.e. that all silence and ambiguity are used as tools because it was a female character is wrong. There is nothing in the text or for that matter in the bible to support such a view.

5. Conclusion

Maybe the advice given by Cundall in his commentary (Cundall and Morris, 1968) is well worth repeating here:

This incident witnesses to the sacredness of a vow undertaken before the Lord (Num 30.1, Dt. 23.21,23) and we must at least respect this man and his daughter who were loyal at such a cost to their limited beliefs....the modern reader whose knowledge of God is much greater than that of Jephthah of offer Him a comparable but enlightened loyalty.” (Cundall and Morris, 1968:149)

Being loyal to God is being loyal and faithful to his word. A faithfulness which commands not a resistant reading as Fuchs would propose but an obedient and submissive reading not because the reader is a woman but because she -just like the man- is a creation which stands in awe before the creator.

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