READING THE JEPHTHAH NARRATIVE FROM AN ASIAN PERSPECTIVE

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DEDICATION

To my father,

Rev. Yong-dae Ha (1940-2010),

a faithful servant of the LORD

ABSTRACT

The aim of the present dissertation is to read the Jephthah narrative from an Asian perspective. Such an approach has until recently received little attention even among Asian scholars, who tend to adopt Western perspectives when doing biblical studies. Such has been the case in Korea for the last century of scholarship on the Hebrew Bible. In order to achieve the goal of reading a biblical texts from an Asian perspective, then, several processes should be taken into consideration. Some of these processes are informational—gathering the data, both ancient and contemporary. Some of these processes are deconstructive—pointing to problems with previous readings and clearing the way for new readings. Some of these processes are constructive—bringing Asian texts into dialogue with ancient Hebrew texts to discover how our present understandings of these texts are made more robust through that dialogue.

Chapter 1 provides a statement of the problem, review of prior scholarship, and the research methodology of the present dissertation. The main problems with earlier scholarship on the Jephthah narrative are the predominant interests in theological concerns in relation to the ritual killing of human beings, which distracts from other elements in the story, and the usual method of analyzing the characters in the narrative as individuals, overlaying a more individualistic and Western mindset on top of the biblical text. In this chapter, I suggest these problems could be corrected if one were to read the narrative through the eyes of the community in an Asian context.

Chapter 2 provides my own translation with annotated notes dealing with exegetical, syntactical, and linguistic issues.

Chapters 3 delves into Korean scholars' interpretations of the Jephthah narrative. The formation of Hebrew Bible scholarship in Korea cannot be understood apart from an understanding of the social, cultural, political, and religious (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shamanism) backgrounds of Korea and the influence of Western missionaries' interpretations for the last several decades. Korean scholars' readings of biblical narratives are indebted to Western scholarship even apart from the missionaries' influence, because many Korean Hebrew Bible scholars studied aboard in Western schools and seminaries. Recently, however, a movement in scholarship has arisen that attempts to give voice to scholarship from other perspectives. Part of this movement has suggested that reading the narratives in the Hebrew Bible within Asian contexts may help to enlighten aspects of those narratives that have remained in the dark even after centuries of reading those stories in the light of the Western sun. The Jephthah narrative specifically may prove to be a tale that is especially apt for reading within Asian contexts.

Chapter 4 provides a literary analysis of the Jephthah narrative in Asian understanding. Focusing on the communal context, I discuss Jephthah's relationships with the other characters in the narrative, including his half-brothers, the elders, the Ammonites, his only child, and the Ephraimites—who were in conflict with Jephthah. Instead of focusing on Jephthah alone, on Jephthah the individual, I read him in the context of an Asian understanding of community. In the same way, I analyze Jephthah's daughter in relation to her father and to her community in light of an Asian perspective, a

perspective that emphasizes the value of community. This chapter shows how the patriarchal (male-centered) society unfairly deals with inferior members of society and how such inferior members are used and neglected by their community.

Chapter 5 provides detailed discussions of the Jephthah narrative in comparison with Asian literature by using traditional Asian stories as the catalyst for such a reading. Since folktales in any culture are a mixture of reflections on religious and socio-political realities, comparison between Asian folktales and the biblical text will provide anthropological insights into how human societies deal with their constituents (especially social inferiors) in the midst of dire communal crises.

Chapter 6 draws together the observations and contributions that the Asian approach has made to the readings of the Jephthah narrative. Instead of viewing Jephthah as an individual offender against his daughter, and the daughter as a individual victimized by her father, I pay attention to the failure of the community—represented most poignantly by the Gileadite elders, who were tasked with the responsibility of caring for the members of their community as the heads of a patriarchal society. Even though Jephthah and his daughter worked toward the good of their neighbors and were in fact beneficial for the community, they were victimized due to their social status.

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Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1. Statement of the Problem

Modern readers of the Jephthah narrative are certain to have quite complicated evaluations of Jephthah. In spite of his triumph in battle, certain matters confound readers, such as Jephthah's making a vow even after being empowered by Yahweh's spirit, the fulfillment of the vow by sacrificing his daughter, and his display of cruelty in the massacre of the Ephraimites. Most negative interpretations of this narrative focus on how the sacrifice is inhumane and thus inconsistent with Yahweh's character and Yahwistic religion—an evaluation based primarily on the Deuteronomist's theology and modern morality. However, this approach has several issues. Because such arguments are based primarily in Deuteronomistic theology, these interpreters, for instance, are not able to formulate more well-balanced interpretations of human sacrifice, ones which account for the multiplicity of views found in the Bible.

If one's evaluative focus of the Jephthah narrative is on his sacrifice of his daughter, then one ought to note that more than twenty-five passages in the Hebrew Bible refer to human sacrifice, and these passages are not unanimous in their evaluations.[1] This fact raises several issues that complicate any evaluation of the narrative. First, within Yahwism human sacrifice itself was not regarded as totally negative, and the ritual killing

[1] There are numerous passages referring to the human sacrifice including passages in the Law (Gen 22:1-9; Exod 13:11-16; Lev 18:21; 20:2-5; Deut 12:31; 18:9-14); the Prophets (Josh 6:26; Judg 11:29-40; 1 Sam 15:32-33; 1 Kgs 11:5-8; 16:34; 2 Kgs 3:26-27; 16:3; 17:17; 21:6; 23:10; Isa 57:5; Jer 3:24; 7:31; 19:1-5; 32:35; Ezek 16:20-21; 23:36-39, Hos 13:2; Jon 1:11-16; Mic 6:1-8); and also Ps 106:37-38.

of human beings was likely practiced at certain points in the ancient Israel's history. For example, the total destruction practiced in a *herem* war can be seen as a form of human sacrifice, since *hehĕrîm* (hiphil), "to ban, devote, exterminate," designates a special act of consecration to Yahweh, which often denotes the total annihilation of a population in the context of war.[2] As R. L. Harris writes, *herem* involves consecration of the conquered cities as a permanent and definitive offering, including, "in war, the consecration of a city and its inhabitants to destruction and the carrying out of this destruction."[3] Thus, *herem* seems to be a special form of human sacrifice in ancient Israel in which the Israelites slew all the inhabitants of a city in obedience to Yahweh's command.[4]

Second, questions remain as to whether there is any absolute biblical prohibition of human sacrifice, one that would universally condemn any and all forms of such practice against any and all categories of human persons, or if there exist certain groups whose sacrifice is acceptable. For example, Exod 13:11-16 introduces legislation regarding the redemption of first-born sons, which may assume human sacrifice in its original meaning.[5] Yet, without condemning the ritual itself, this and similar laws lay claim on the first-born of all Israel, both human and animal (Exod 22:28-30; 34:19-20, Num 3:11-13; 18:13-18; Deut 15:19-23) and even plants (Lev 2:12), which belong to

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[2] Brown, Driver, and Briggs, *Hebrew and English Lexicon*, 355-56.

[3] R. Laird Harris, *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament* (Chicago, Ill.: Moody Press, 1980), 276.

[4] The practice is not exclusively Israelite since the verbal stem *hrm* is also used in the Moabite inscription of Mesha. See, E. Ullendorff, "The Moabite Stone," *Documents from Old Testament Times* (ed., D. Winton Thomas; New York, N.Y.: Harper and Brothers, 1961), 195-198.

[5] Alberto R. W. Green, *The Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1975), 173-35.

Yahweh. In the distinctive Israelite formulation of this legislation, this claim originates in a memorable event—Yahweh's redemption of the Israelites in his killing of the firstborn of the Egyptians during the night of the Passover. Notably, the redemption law is about a specific group (first-born sons).[6] And, it does not deal with other groups, such as children in general or (as in our particular case) young women. The law is specific and limited in its application. The intention of the redemption law of the firstborn is to make the future generations of Israelites remember Yahweh's redemption of his firstborn—Israel. It does not cover all possible cases of human sacrifice in ancient Israel. Other laws may also have a similar limited scope such that there would be no law universally prohibiting any and every case of the ritual killing of human beings.

Third, what is more, the Deuteronomic laws do not make clear if even the Deuteronomist prohibits human sacrifice in all its forms. Undeniably, several passages reveal Yahweh's hatred of at least certain variations of the practice. Yahweh destroyed the Canaanite population because, "They even burnt their sons and their daughters in the fire to their gods" (Deut 12:31). In this instance, the passage seems not to condemn the practice of human sacrifice itself, but rather human sacrifice *to other deities* rather than to Yahweh. Another passage commands that, "There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter *pass through the fire*" (Deut 18:10-11; cf. Lev 18:21; 20:3-5). Again, it can be argued that this passage does not condemn human sacrifice wholesale, but that it condemns a specific pagan form of the ritual—passing through the

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[6] The Exodus passage does not state how to redeem the firstborn of human beings, whereas it is explicit with the firstborn of other living creatures. For example, the firstborn donkey is supposed to be redeemed with a lamb (Exod 34:20). In Numbers, the Levites are taken in place of all the firstborn of Israel (Num 3:44-51; 18:15-16).

fire. These passages demonstrate that Israelites were forbidden in some tradition(s) from imitating certain kinds of ritual practice—probably the *Molek* ritual[7] or magic based practices.[8] If such arguments for the limited scope of the prohibitions on human sacrifice are accepted, then is would be the case that even the Deuteronomist does not universally prohibit any and every case of the ritual killing of human beings.

Fourth, not all human sacrifice narratives in the Hebrew Bible present the practice as a clear form of abomination. Even in the most famous story, Abraham's near sacrifice of Isaac (Gen 22:1-14), neither Yahweh nor Abraham are shown expressing disgust regarding offering Isaac as a burnt offering. It was, rather, Yahweh who commanded Abraham to sacrifice Isaac, and Abraham responded with immediate action in obedience to the command. Even when the angel of Yahweh stopped Abraham, no abhorrence against the sacrifice as a human sacrifice is to be found. Another famous example would be the Moabite king's sacrifice of his first-born son, which was effective enough to reverse the tide of battle and culminated in the Moabites defeating the Israelite armies (2

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[7] There is a lively debate whether the word *molek* originally refers to the name of a deity or to a form of ritual. According to the dominant interpretation, *molek* is a god to whom human sacrifice was offered, but others, representatively Eissfeldt, believe that it refers to a form of sacrifice (John Day, *Molech: A God of Human Sacrifice in the Old Testament*, 8); Wolfram von Soden, "A Review of Otto Eissfeldt: Molk als Opferbegriff im punischen und Hebräichen und das Ende des Gottes Moloch," *TLZ* 3 (1936): 45-46; Bennie H. Raynolds, "Molek: Dead or Alive? The Meaning and Derivation of mlk," *Human Sacrifice in Jewish and Christian Tradition* [ed., Karin Finsterbusch, Armin Lange, and K. F. Diethard Römheld; Leiden; Boston: Brill, 2007], 138); Hans-Peter Müller clarifies that verbs of motion, including *hlk,* "in causative form are understood in terms of cultic offering in both Hebrew and Phoenician/ Punic" (Hans-Peter Müller, "mlk" in *TDOT* VIII [ed. G. Johannes Botterweck, Helmer Ringgren, and Heinz-Josef Fabry; trans. Douglas W. Stott; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1984], 375-88; Richard S. Tomback, *A comparative Semitic lexicon of the Phoenician and Punic languages* [Ann Arbor, Mich.: University Microfilms International, 1995], 80-81).

[8] Anthony Phillips, *Deuteronomy*, 125. Mayes comments that the prohibition is meant to warn the Israelites against imitating certain Canaanite customs. Passing a child through fire referred to a magical practice, which was designed to observe if the child goes through the fire without hurt. This prohibition, therefore, is given in order to limit certain methods of magic rather than to be a statement against human sacrifice in general (A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy* [New Century Bible Commentary; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1981], 280-81).

Kings 3:21-27).[9] Interestingly, the Hebrew Bible here testifies to the radical power of a non-Israelite king's sacrifice, which nullifies Elisha's (the Israelite prophet's) prophecy in 2 Kgs 3:18-19. [10]

Fifth, denunciations of human sacrifice in the Prophetic literature attest to its actual practice in Yahwistic religions. Numerous instances (2 Kgs 16:3, 21:6, 23:10; Jer 7:31, 19:5, 32:35; and Ezek 16:20-22, 36, 20:26, 31, 23:36-37) show that ancient Israelites did not always hold child sacrifice to be an abomination. As J. S. Tatlock observes, even though hostility to human sacrifice was the official position of Israelite religion, "they offered their children to other gods and even to Yahweh."[11] An apt example of human beings offered through ritual death to Yahweh is the passage where David let seven of Saul's sons be handed over to the Gibeonites, so they will impale them *before Yahweh* at Gibeon on the mountain of Yahweh (2 Sam 21:6). More surprisingly, when Hiel of Bethel built Jericho "[h]e laid its foundation at the cost of Abiram his firstborn and set up its gates at the cost of his youngest son Segub." Joshua spoke here according to the word of Yahweh (1 Kgs 16:34). Within the narrative world, Yahweh and the people of Israel are experientially familiar with the practice of human sacrifice.

Even though the Jephthah narrative by itself does not provide enough evidence to

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[9] L.-S. Tiemeyer, "Prophecy as a Way of Cancelling Prophecy—The Strategic Uses of Foreknowledge," *ZAW* 117, 3 (2005): 345-46.

[10] Mark S. Smith, "Child Sacrifice as the Extreme Case and Calculation" in *Not Sparing the Child: Human Sacrifice in the Ancient World and Beyond: Studies in Honor of Professor Paul G. Mosca* (eds. Vita Daphna Arbel, Paul C. Burns, J. R. C. Cousland, Richard Menkis, Dietmar Neufeld, and Paul G. Mosca. London: Bloomsbury, 2016), 15-17.

[11] Tatlock finds the probability of its practice from the influence of patriarchal society and Canaanite ritual practice (J. R. Tatlock, *New International Dictionary of the Bible* [Nashville, Tenn.: Abingdon, 2009], 5:18-19).

reconstruct the actual practice of human sacrifice in ancient Israel, it is undeniable that the Israelites practiced the ritual both inside and outside of Yahwism throughout their history.[12] Yahwistic religion did not emerge in a vacuum but co-existed with other aboriginal religions and was influenced by their practices, many of which were not uncommon in the wider ancient world.[13] While it is possible to argue that Jephthah's sacrificing his daughter may not be justifiable in Deuteronomistic religion, it does not follow that Jephthah's sacrifice would be wrong in every Israelite tradition. Given the complexity of the data, we cannot confidently conclude that the Hebrew Bible universally condemns any and every form of human sacrifice.

Larger than the singular issue of human sacrifice, those who evaluate Jephthah according to the Deuteronomistic perspective face another problem in their tendency to evaluate his actions apart from his communal context. This reflects a larger problem in discussions of the Israelite judges, namely the tendency to focus analysis on individuals while neglecting communal matters, such as political instabilities and social corruption, that frame the stories of these individuals. While the Israelite judge, Jephthah, is a representative of Israel in this period, he was clearly "othered" and victimized by his people, including his half-brothers and the elders. To correct the usual myopia in interpretation, one should ask, to what extent does Jephthah model Israel in this period, versus representing an intrusive, divergent element? The book of Judges frequently

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[12] According to H. Dewrell, it is difficult to support or deny the existence of the ritual killing of humans in ancient Israel because the reader cannot find an accurate description of Israelite sacrificial rites (Heath D. Dewrell, *Child Sacrifice in Ancient Israel* (Winona Lake, Indiana Eisenbrauns, 2017), 211.

[13] Jeong-Hye Lee, "A Research on Jephthah's Daughter: Her Han and Hanpuri in Korean Shamanism," *Christian Thought* 423 (1994): 212-13.

shows the Israelites assimilating foreign elements into their cultural, political, and religious identity. Although according to the Deuteronomist's view Jephthah cannot avoid blame for engaging in human sacrifice, in his public role as the leader of a community, such action might be justifiable. As Hubert and Mauss assert, "It is a social function" to sacrifice one person to save the whole community in the midst of a communal predicament.[14] Framing the discussion of the individual judge within the context of the community will allow for a much more detailed and nuanced understanding of the Jephthah narrative.

Moving beyond the theological issues of Jephthah's endorsement of human sacrifice, it is valuable to look at his and his daughter's life circumstances throughout the narrative. The greater portion of the Jephthah narrative is assigned to personal episodes that gain their dramatic impact by placing the main character in difficult social situations: Jephthah's youth in his father's house (Judg 11:1-3); the detailed negotiation with the elders (11:4-11); his encounter with his only child and what happens to her (11:34-40); and the Ephraimites' challenge to Jephthah (12:1-6). Jephthah—formerly an expellee—immersed himself in his own success even at the expense of his daughter's life. Recognizing her father's will, Jephthah's daughter sacrificed herself, thus showing that she possessed an abundance of filial piety (*hyo* in Korean), the most important virtue for children in a patriarchal society. Both Jephthah and his daughter are operating within the confines of their fragile social status: Jephthah as a son of a prostitute and a social outcast; his daughter as a young woman in a patriarchal society. Analyzing their

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[14] H. Hubert and M. Mauss, *Sacrifice: Its Nature and Function* (Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1964), 101-102.

circumstances in light of Asian social customs, as will be done in the chapter below, will help us better understand not only what they said and did but why. I will analyze the public and private positions of these two figures as they would be understood in the context of Asian society and culture. This will be followed by a comparative study of Asian literature which will shed further light on the Jephthah narrative in an Asian perspective.

1.2. Review of Prior Scholarship

Most earlier commentators have discussed the Jephthah narrative primarily in relation to theological issues surrounding the ritual killing of his daughter within the framework of Israelite religion specifically. Recently, scholarly focus has shifted to Jephthah's daughter, to the narrative itself, and to the socio-political context of the book of Judges. Accordingly, I will discuss Western scholars' work in four stages: theological approaches regarding Jephthah's human sacrifice, feminist approaches in relation to Jephthah's daughter, the function of the Jephthah narrative in the book of Judges as a whole, and the practice of human sacrifice within the socio-political context of ancient Israel's transitional period.[15]

1.2.1. Ritualistic Approaches in Relation to Jephthah

[15] For this classification, see K. Craig, "Judges in Recent Research," *CBR* 1.2 (2003): 159-85; for a more detailed discussion, refer to the recent Ph.D dissertation, Shin-Ho Lim, "A Study on the Rhetorical Unity of the Jephthah Story: Judg 10:6-12:7 from the Perspective of the Israelite Internal War," (Ph.D diss., Daejeon: Graduate School of Hannam University, 2016), 4-21.

Commentators have long struggled with how to understand Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter, with their conclusions often falling into one of two groups. The first group holds that Jephthah actually killed his daughter in the ritual, that this was a literal sacrifice. This group can be further divided into two more groups: those who evaluate Jephthah positively and those who evaluate him negatively. The second of the main groups concludes that Jephthah's sacrifice was only symbolic.

Scholars who believe Jephthah actually killed his daughter maintain a relatively literal interpretation based on the Hebrew text itself. The Hebrew verb used in Judg 11:31, יָצָא, implies a person as its subject. In Hebrew syntax, an infinitive construct with the verb יָצָא always indicates a person's behavior, as opposed to an animal's (Num 22:11; Gen 15:4). Also, the expression, "will be Yahweh's," in Judg 11:31 refers only to persons, such as Levites, Israelites, and those who fear Yahweh (Num 3:12, Jer 24:7, Mal 3:17).[16] Other scholars, including R. Boling, maintain a literal reading of the text, asserting that an actual sacrifice was performed, but argue that Jephthah's intention was "to sacrifice an animal rather than a human."[17] Yet, as J. D. Douglas points out, since an animal burnt offering is an ordinary sacrifice, anyone can offer it in regular situations; therefore, the vow itself would be of no great value in an urgent situation of war. Given the language

[16] Ueo-Won Kim, "The Intention of Jephthah's Vow," 57-58.

[17] Boling, *Judges* (New York: Doubleday, 1975), 170-72.

used in the tale and the narrative place of the sacrifice in the story, such scholars argue, the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter is best understood as a literal human sacrifice.[18]

For those who interpret the sacrifice literally the next question that must be answered is: given the act of human sacrifice, is Jephthah meant to be understood as a blameworthy or praiseworthy character? Early commentators, most of whom posited a literal interpretation of the sacrifice, typically placed blame upon Jephthah. Pseudo-Philo (probably before 70 C. E.) sarcastically questions Jephthah's indiscrete vow: "If a dog had come out, was Jephthah really to sacrifice it to Yahweh?"[19] Josephus (37-100 C. E.) also criticizes Jephthah's sacrifice of his child, which he maintains was not sanctioned by the Torah nor pleasing to Yahweh.[20] Most Rabbinic sources, including the Babylonian Talmud and Midrashim, blame Jephthah and regard him as a sinner.[21] Mishnah Nedarim 2:1 claims Jephthah's vow is invalid because it violates Halakha.[22] The contemporary commentators who likewise interpret the sacrifice literally tend to place blame upon Jephthah as well. Some literalists view Jephthah's vow as a calculated move and an attempt to manipulate Yahweh, while others view his action as being so far beyond the

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[18] Supporting this point is the fact that we know human sacrifice was practiced in exactly these circumstances, see Mesha in 2 Kings 3 and the reliefs of Merneptah on the West Wall of the Cour de la Cachette at Karnak. Referenced in J. D. Martine, *The Book of Judges* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), 145.

[19] D. J. Harrington, "Pseudo-Philo: First Century A.D." in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha* (Vol 2; ed. J. H. Charlesworth; New York: Doubleday, 1985), 353.

[20] Henry St. John Thackeray and Ralph Marcus, *Josephus: Books 4-6* (LCL 490; Cambridge, Mass.: Cambridge University Press, 1934), 281; Gabriele Weiler, "Jewish Views of Human Sacrifice," 167.

[21] Deborah Abecassis, "Jephthah's Daughter in the Jewish Exegetical Tradition" (M.A. thesis; McGill University, 1993), 16-20; Shulamit Valler, "The Story of Jephthah's Daughter in the Midrash," in *Judges: A Feminist Companion to the Bible* (ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1999), 48-64. Also see, Jerusalem Talmud Pesahim 9:6.

[22] Moshe Reiss, "Jephthah's Daughter," *JBQ* 37/1 (2009): 59.

pale of Israelite religious legislation that it must mean that Jephthah himself was not a Yahwist but rather a practitioner of pagan rituals.[23] Either way, from this perspective, the narrative is understood to present Jephthah as a blameworthy character.

There is, however, another group of biblical scholars that defend Jephthah's burnt offering, emphasizing his zeal to fulfill the vow in spite of great personal cost—the loss of his household and progeny.[24] Jephthah could have changed his mind and not fulfilled his vow, just as Saul was convinced by the Israelites not to follow through on his vow to have Jonathan killed (1 Sam 14:45). Jephthah, however, fulfilled his vow.[25] Still others who defend Jephthah argue that the real intention of Jephthah's vow was to sacrifice one of his servants, not his daughter.[26] Yet, these interpreters agree that Jephthah still intended to sacrifice a human being.

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[23] James A. Montgomery and Henry S. Gehman, *The Books of Kings* (ICC; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1951); Daniel I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* (NAC 6A; Nashville: B & H Publishing Group, 1999). D. Block argues that Jephthah was not serving Yahweh in his ritual, but it was an act of worshiping Baal (Daniel Block, *Judges, Ruth* [NAC 6A; Nashville: B and H Publishing Group, 1999], 188). M. Smith agrees with Block's assertion that Jephthah's vow arose from pagan influence by foreigners (Michael Smith, "The Failure of the Family in Judges, Part 1: Jephthah," *BS* 162 [2005]: 279-298); T. Davis argues that Jephthah was "not a faithful Israelite, but outrightly pagan, a product of a syncretistic religious environment" (Tamie Davis, "The Condemnation of Jephthah," 2). D. Janzen says that Jephthah's sacrificing his daughter is the quintessential symbol of the Israelites' adoption of Canaanite practice. See, David Janzen, "Why the Deuteronomist Told about the Sacrifice of Jephthah's Daughter," *JSOT* 29 (2005): 35-36.

[24] Charles F. Burney, *The Book of Judges* (New York: KTAV, 1970), 319-320. In this manner, Jephthah like Abraham testifies to his own faith by sacrificing his only child—his future.

[25] J. Havea, "Elusions of Control Biblical Law on the Words of Women: A Daughter No Man Knew," *SBL* 41 (2003): 110-125.

[26] They exclude the possibility that the daughter was inside the house because the procession of the women who praised the victory of the war was normally not within any domestic space, but on the streets and outskirts of the city (1 Sam 18: 6-7; 21:11; 29: 5). See, Pamela T. Ries, "Spoiled Child: A Fresh Look at Jephthah's Daughter," *Prooftexts* 17 (1997); 279-298; Alberto R. W. Green, *The Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1975), 162.

In contrast, other scholars take a non-ritualistic approach to Jephthah's actions, asserting that there was absolutely no ritual killing of humans in ancient Israel.[27] David Kimchi (1160-1235) maintains that Jephthah built his daughter a house where she was secluded from men for the rest of her life in order to dedicate herself to Yahweh.[28] However, it is hard to find a relevant law or custom in the Hebrew Bible that supports the claim that a virgin was looked upon as devoted to Yahweh. As A. Green comments, "It would appear, to the contrary, that perpetual virginity and childlessness were looked upon as great misfortunes."[29] Thus, it seems that unmarried seclusion totally fails to explain the tragic nature of the narrative.

1.2.2. Feminist Approaches regarding Jephthah's Daughter

Since the twentieth century, scholars have not much disputed the death of Jephthah's daughter. Instead, they have shifted their focus to the evaluation of the larger relational context of Jephthah's act and to sympathizing with Jephthah's daughter from feminist perspectives. These scholars have argued that Jephthah's act is an abominable example of faithlessness not only in relation to Jephthah and Yahweh but also in relation to Jephthah's family and the entire community, thus condemning the general morality of

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[27] Such approaches are often based on the argument that human sacrifice is only found in polemics against foreign cults. Michaela Bauks, "The Theological Implications of Child Sacrifice in and beyond the Biblical Context in Relation to Genesis 22 and Judges 11," 65.

[28] Barbara Miller, *Tell It on the Mountain: The Daughter of Jephthah in Judges 11* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2005), 74; Another possible parallel can be found in the Mesopotamian tradition, where the *naditu* priestess was dedicated as a virgin to the service of a god.

[29] Alberto Green, *The Role of Human Sacrifice in the Ancient Near East* (Missoula, Mont.: Scholars, 1975), 340.

Jephthah, the larger group that made up his community, as well as the sacrifice in particular.[30] E. Fuchs employs a resistant reading of the text to move beyond its androcentric ideology.[31] J. Exum argues that Yahweh is complicit in Jephthah's crime, because he did not appear at the moment prior to the daughter's death as he did with Isaac.[32] D. N. Fewell concludes that the absence of someone to stand with the daughter shows the total corruption of the period.[33] What unites these feminist approaches is a shift in focus, either by shifting the focus laterally away from Jephthah onto his daughter or by widening the circle of focus well beyond Jephthah the individual, pointing out, for instance, that there was no one among the elders, members of her family circle, or even her friends who made any attempt to intercede for the daughter's life (contrast this to the case of Jonathan in 1 Sam 14:24-46).

For the most part, feminist theologians have interpreted the book of Judges as part of a history of gender-related violence. T. Davis claims that it is the maltreatment of women that ultimately leads to the fall of the nation.[34] In regards to the Jephthah narrative

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[30] Tamie S. Davis, "The Condemnation of Jephthah," *TynBul* 64.1 (2013): 1-16; Phyllis Trible, *Texts of Terror: Literary-Feminist Readings of Biblical Narratives* (Overtures to Biblical Theology 13; Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1984), 129. In contrast, J. H Walton emphasizes Jephthah's pious faith (John H. Walton, *Zondervan Illustrated Bible Background Commentary*, vol. 2 [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2009], 181).

[31] Esther Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter," *JFSR* 5.1 (2004): 42-45.

[32] E. Fuchs argues that Yahweh does not care about the death of Jephthah's daughter because he is silent throughout the narrative. (Esther Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter," *JFSR* 5.1 [2004]: 35-45; Fewell, "Judges," 71; J. C. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty*, 50-68).

[33] Danna Nolan Fewell, "Judges" in Women's Bible Commentary (eds. C. A. Newsom and S. H. Ringe; Luisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1992), 71.

[34] Tamie Davis, "The Condemnation of Jephthah," 8.

in particular, M. Bal posits that the daughter, murdered in an act of religious violence, was essentially "a bribe made to the deity."[35] While feminist commentators mainly focus on how Jephthah's daughter was victimized by her father, I will focus on the community which drove her to voluntarily sacrifice herself.

1.2.3. The Jephthah Narrative in Relation to the Book of Judges

A developing trend in Biblical Studies emphasizes narrative elements in the context of whole biblical books. Such a narrative approach examines how the Jephthah narrative fits within the theme of the book of Judges as a whole: the Israelites' apostasy against Yahweh. Rather than focusing on Jephthah's individual morality, scholars using narrative approaches study how Jephthah's story relates to the stories of other judges. Such commentators thus interpret the deeds of Jephthah in comparison to the actions of Gideon and Abimelech,[36] especially as the moral degradation of both resulted from Gideon's straying by making an ephod.[37] R. O'Connel understands Jephthah's killing of

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[35] M. Bal reads Judges as a history of violence against gender (Mieke Bal, *Death and Dissymmetry* [Chicago, Ill.: University of Chicago Press, 1988], 128-129). Some examples include how Caleb announces that he will give his daughter Achsah to whoever attacks Kiriath-sepher. He gives her in marriage to Othniel without asking her (Judg 1:11-15). Another instance is the Levite who allows his concubine to be raped to death and dismembers her body (Judg 19). Also, see Mieke Bal, "Dealing with Women: Daughter in the Book of Judges," in *The Book and the Text: The Bible and Literary Theory* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1990), 16-37; Theresa M. O'Donovan, "Jephthah's Daughter: Interrogating the Text, Interrogating Our Lives," *JRA* 7 (2005): 5-17.

[36] Although Jephthah and Abimelech share several common features, the two characters eventually show more differences. Both are sons of a father who had an additional wife, which means their mothers were socially inferior women. However, whereas Abimelech goes to his mother's house for help, Jephthah has no familial place to go, so he went to Tob. Abimelech's battle was for his personal revenge without benefit for Israelites. Jephthah, on the other hand, delivered his people from the enemy's hand. In brief, Abimelech was the destroyer of his brothers; Jephthah is a judge of Israel leading the army to success.

[37] Even though Gideon refused to be a king of Israel, by making a golden ephod he made people prostrate themselves before it (Judg 8:27).

his daughter (Judg 11:34-40) as foreshadowing the massacre of the Ephraimites in the next episode (Judg 12:1-6). Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter not only fuels his fight against the Ephraimites, but leads to their annihilation and to the final national crisis for the Israelites—the extermination of Benjaminites—at the end of Judges (Judg 21:6).[38] U. Y. Kim views the major theme of the entire book of Judges as violence against the outsider, a category that fits Jephthah well.[39] B. Webb suggests that the placement of the Jephthah narrative in the middle of Judges functions as an evaluative point of reference for the entire book as a unified work.[40] Finally, the narrative fits into the theme of the deterioration of Israel: the Israelites become worse as time goes on, and the judges become "progressively less effective and less faithful."[41] As Schneider notes, "By the end of the episode Israel has become its own enemy" (12:1-6).[42] The whole community has become worse, becoming like Jephthah and doing "what is right in their own eyes."

1.2.4. Socio-Political Approaches to the Jephthah Narrative

Recent scholars have also attempted to better understand the Jephthah narrative

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[38] Robert H. O'Connell, *The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* (Brill, 1996), 182-187.

[39] U. Y. Kim views the major theme of Judges as violence against outsiders such as ethnic outsiders, gender outsiders, and tribal outsiders. The book treats them not merely as gentiles but as enemies (Uriah Y. Kim, "Postcolonial Criticism: Who is the Other in the Book of Judges?" in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* [ed., Gale A. Lee; Minneapolis, Minn.: Fortress, 2007], 174). Kim is a first-generation Korean-American scholar who reads from a post-colonial perspective.

[40] Barry G. Webb, *The Book of the Judges: An Integrated Reading* (Eugene, Oreg.: Wipf & Stock Publishers, 2008), 36-37. In a similar way, I also hold the view that the Jephthah story functions as a miniature within the book of Judges, like the story of Judah (Gen 38) within the Joseph narrative (Gen 37-50), and that it presents to the reader the development of the whole narrative in advance.

[41] David Janzen, "Why the Deuteronomist Told about the Sacrifice of Jephthah's Daughter," 343.

[42] Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000), 161-63.

by placing it within its wider social and political contexts.[43] They question what the socio-political circumstances were in which Jephthah made the vow, and they ask why, from a communal perspective, he was under obligation to fulfill it. Although some scholars identify Jephthah's sacrifice as a form of intrusive Canaanite ritual,[44] others point out that vows and sacrifices such as Jephthah's were not unusual practices during military conflict in general. Since the practice of human sacrifice was common in many parts of the ancient world, Israelite religion was not ignorant of it as it developed alongside its neighboring cultures. J. Exum maintains that Jephthah's vow should be evaluated in light of the critical situation of battle.[45] M. Bal agrees that Jephthah's vow was a kind of war ritual.[46] Such insights are important to keep in mind, yet, going further, they remind us that we will need to closely read these communal matters and apply them to our interpretation even beyond the question of the justification of human sacrifice.

1.3. Evaluation of Prior Scholarship

Throughout the history of the interpretation of the Jephthah narrative researchers have primarily focused on the individual figures in the story—Jephthah and his

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[43] Naomi Steinberg, "The Problem of Human Sacrifice in War: An Analysis of Judges 11" in *On the Way to Nineveh: Studies in Honor of George M. Landis* (ed. Stephen L. Cook and S. C. Winter; Atlanta: Scholars Press, 1999), 118; Charles F. Burney, *The Book of Judges* (New York: KTAV, 1970), 319-20.

[44] P. L. Day maintains that Jephthah was a worshiper of Baal, and thus offered his daughter as a sacrifice (P. L. Day, "From the Child is Born the Woman: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter," 69). Robert O'Connell also regards Jephthah as a non-Israelite (*The Rhetoric of the Book of Judges* [Brill, 1996], 182); D. I. Block, *Judges, Ruth* (NAC 6A; Nashville: B and H Publishing, 1999), 187-90.

[45] J. C. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 55-57.

[46] Mieke Bal, "Virginity: Toward a Feminist Philosophy," *Dispositio* 12 (1987): 67.

daughter.[47] Comments on Jephthah are mostly related to his vow, and thus Jephthah is often presented in the scholarship in a negative light, since scholars overwhelmingly view the vow as either an aberration of orthodox Israelite practice or as completely pagan, and those who attempt to see Jephthah as praiseworthy are forced to defend him against such claims. As I discussed in the "Statement of Problem," this common theological evaluation of Jephthah's vow may assume more than is justifiable, for the Hebrew Bible does not provide an absolute and universal prohibition of the ritual of human sacrifice. To be sure, there are biblical passages that claim that certain categories of human sacrifice are abominable, such as those linked to the rituals of certain foreign deities, but this, again, is not clear proof that the prohibition is meant to be absolute and universal. Nevertheless, the common assumption is that Jephthah is a blameworthy character. Jephthah's daughter, on the other hand, tends to fare very well in the eyes of interpreters, when they choose to focus on her, with her actions commonly being regarded as positive and even praiseworthy. This, however, may also be unfair. Jephthah's daughter and the actions she takes in the narrative are more complex than many interpreters have assumed, but this can only be seen when the characters are evaluated not as mere individuals, but are evaluated within the context of their covenantal community and in light of the responsibilities they have toward their society and the responsibilities their society has toward them.

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47 C. Exum blames Yahweh who did not rescue Jephthah's daughter but just kept silence, thus including the deity as an individual to be evaluated as a part of this narrative (C. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 45-69). However, Yahweh seems to have totally disappeared in Judg 11 as a whole. There is no narrative clue that one ought to include Yahweh, who was not a part of the story or actions in this chapter. The absence of Yahweh is a literary device in this chapter (Geun-Jo Ahn, "Jephthah's Vow and God's Silence: Rhetorical-Critical Reading on Judg 10:17-11:40," *Theological Forum* 83 [2016]: 225-27; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 356.

Criticism of Jephthah and praise of his daughter without consideration of the communal context is seriously incomplete. Through a community-conscious reading of the narrative it is possible to become properly sympathetic to both Jephthah and his daughter. The community failed to protect its weak members, and more widely it mishandled a major military crisis. From an early stage (11:1-2) the community failed to recognize and support the heroic warrior. In fact, Jephthah had to be aggressive to his community just to be accepted and to guarantee his position within his family (half-brothers), within his clan (Gileadites), and within his brother tribe (Ephraimites). Each of these three groups actively obstruct Jephthah and prevent him from resolving the military crisis. Beyond the community's failure to meet its responsibilities to Jephthah, it also failed to defend his daughter when she was condemned to die as a votive offering. There is no defender for the daughter as there was for Jonathan when his father, Saul, sentenced Jonathan to death (1 Sam 14:44).[48] Both Jephthah and his daughter were part of socially inferior and marginalized classes, ones which the community ought to have protected but fails to do so.

Regrettably, most of these previous approaches to the Jephthah narrative are focused on producing theological reflections, and these reflections tend to be based in evaluations of the individual characters in the stories as individuals. Instead of focusing on Jephthah or his daughter exclusively as individuals, I will focus on both figures in the context of their community, which is an approach that better reflects an Asian sensibility

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[48] Notably, in contrast to Jephthah's daughter, Jonathan was aggressive toward his father and quite deceptive during the search for the guilty party (11:43). Even though he outwardly expresses his willingness to follow the ruling, his words imply a certain unwillingness as well.

rather than modern, Western individualism. I will use this more communal perspective to answer questions such as: why did Jephthah make a vow? Why did the daughter comply with her father? And, why was Jephthah roused to massacre the Ephraimites? These questions can only be answered fully in relation to a community which was insecure and even hostile to two of its constituents. It is not coincidental that the whole Jephthah narrative shows not only the poor treatment of two people, but the self-destruction of the Israelites.

1.4. Research Methodology

In the present work, I will analyze the Jephthah narrative from an Asian perspective informed by Korean biblical interpretation and compared to Asian literature. Reading the biblical texts from an Asian perspective also means, in part, considering its multi-religious context.[49] An understanding of the social, cultural, and political backgrounds along with the traditional religions of Korea (Confucianism, Buddhism, and Shamanism) is necessary before considering the Western missionaries' and Korean scholars' interpretations of the Hebrew Bible. I will present the following after my own annotated translation of the Jephthah narrative (found in chapter 2 below):

1) General historical and cultural backgrounds of Korea needed for an Asian understanding of the Hebrew Bible: how the study of the Bible became an interest in

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[49] J. Jung argues that Asian interpretations of Scripture differ in that in most Asian cultures, various religions have long coexisted. This provides a background that counterposes the single religious view typically associated with the final, canonical form of the Hebrew Bible. (Joong-Ho Jung, *New Interpretations of the Bible: Introduction in Korean Context* [Daegu: Keimyung University Press, 2010], 42)

Korea; what impacted the growth and development of a uniquely Korean tradition of biblical interpretation; and what elements of the Korean culture create the possibility of a rich perspective on the Hebrew Bible; and, in the long run, Korean scholars' interpretations of the Jephthah narrative, tracing the development of Hebrew Bible scholarship after the Korean War, analyzing these interpreters' dependence on Western perspectives, and how the interpretive situation has changed in recent Korean scholarship (Chapter 3).[50]

2) A literary analysis of the Jephthah narrative in Asian understanding: the narrative provides many scenes concerning Jephthah's personal life, and, using these scenes, I will discuss Jephthah's relationships with the other characters in the narrative, including his half-brothers, the elders, the Ammonites, the only child, and the Ephraimites—who were in conflict with Jephthah. Instead of focusing on Jephthah alone, on Jephthah the individual, I will read him in the context of an Asian understanding of community. These other characters' treatment of Jephthah, not just Jephthah's behavior to others, must be discussed if one is to read the narrative with communal eyes. Since the narrative itself does not give an outright evaluation of Jephthah, either positive or negative, a close reading is required to see the nuance and complex relationships between the characters, both individuals and groups acting in unity, as the plot develops. In the same way, I will analyze Jephthah's daughter in relation to her father and to her community in light of an Asian perspective. Socially inferior persons, such as Jephthah

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[50] When it comes to recent methodology on Korean and Korean American Biblical interpretation, refer to Ahn, John J. "Toward a Methodology for Korean and Korean American Biblical Interpretation" in *Landscapes of Korean and Korean American Biblical Interpretation* (ed. John J. Ahn; Atlanta, Ga.: SBL Press, 2019) 1-18.

and his daughter, are by usually deeply conscious of their communities, which often expect and are even capable of silently enforcing such socially inferior members to act according to social expectation. When it comes to the daughter, it should also be noted that treatment of women and a woman's proper response to such treatment is subject to a much more strict code of conduct in Asian Culture[51] (Chapter 4).

3) Discussions on the Jephthah narrative in comparison to Asian literature: I will delve into my Asian reading of the narrative using traditional Asian stories as the catalyst for such a reading. Asian folktales are a mixture of reflections on religious and socio-political realities. Among many, I have chosen two folktales: HongGildong-jeon ("jeon" simply means a story), an epic tale dealing with a militarily skilled but neglected son (neglected due to his mother's lowly social status), who will serve as a comparison to Jephthah; and then, ShimChung-jeon, a tale of a daughter's filial piety and human sacrifice enacted because of the vow of the daughter's father made to a deity, whose main character provides a comparison to Jephthah's daughter. Comparison between the Asian folktales and the biblical text will provide anthropological insights into how human societies deal with their constituents (especially social inferiors) in the midst of dire communal crises (Chapter 5).

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[51] For a case study on an Asian reading of women in the Hebrew Bible, refer to Sun-Ah Kang, "Rereading 'a Virtuous Woman' in Proverbs 31:10-31," in *Landscapes of Korean and Korean American Biblical Interpretation* (ed. John Ahn; Atlanta, Ga.: SBL Press, 2019), 133-43). Kang interprets the virtuous woman as an androcentric ideal picture of womenness in Korean context.

Chapter 2. Annotated Translation (Judg 10:6-12:7)

10:6 The Israelites again[52] did what was evil in the eyes of Yahweh. They served the Baals and the Astartes, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the Ammonites, and the gods of the Philistines. They abandoned Yahweh and did not serve him.

7 So the anger of Yahweh was kindled against Israel, and he sold them into the hand of the Philistines[53] and into the hand of the Ammonites,

8 They shattered and crushed[54] the Israelites that year. For eighteen years they oppressed all the Israelites who were beyond the Jordan in the land of the Amorites, which is in Gilead.

9 The Ammonites also crossed the Jordan to fight against Judah and against Benjamin and against the house of Ephraim; so that Israel was greatly distressed.

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[52] "***Again***" (יָסַף): Their apostasy is habitual, as numerously repeated in 2:11, 3:7, 12; 4:1; 6:1; 10:6; 13:1.

[53] "***The Philistines***": The Jephthah narrative deals only with the struggle against the Ammonites, neglecting the Philistines. I assume that the mention of the Philistines here is meant to describe the seriousness of the military crisis both in the Transjordan (Southwest) and Cisjordan (Northeast).

[54] "***Shattered and crushed***" The narrator introduces what the enemies do with a pair of verbs. The first verb is the same term that is used to describe the oppression that the Israelites faced in Egypt (Exod 15:6), and the second verb is the same term that is used in the story of the unnamed woman who dropped the millstone from the tower on Abimelech's skull (Judg 9:53). Various other similar sounding words are used to emphasize the seriousness of sufferings. The use of רָצַץ in the polel also provides further emphasis.

10 So the Israelites cried to Yahweh, “We have sinned against you, because we have abandoned our God and have served the Baals.”[55]

11 And Yahweh said to the Israelites, “Did not (I deliver you) from the Egyptians and from the Amorites, from the Ammonites, and from the Philistines?

12 Also, the Sidonians, the Amalekites, and the Maonites[56] oppressed you; and you cried to me, and I delivered you out of their hands.

13 Yet you have abandoned me and served other gods. Therefore, I will not deliver you anymore.

14 Go and cry to the gods whom you have chosen. Let them deliver you in the time of your distress.”

15 And the Israelites said to Yahweh, “We have sinned. Do to us whatever seems good in your eyes; but please deliver us this day!”

16 So they removed the foreign gods from among them and served Yahweh. His spirit grew short with the suffering of Israel.[57]

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[55] “***The Baals***”: The confession of the Israelites in this verse confirms the narrator’s statement in verse 6. Strangely, the Israelites mention only the Baals among the seven foreign deities previously listed. Probably, Baal is the most representative deity among the list of deities, and “baalim” is also a term for a multiplicity of deities of the Baal type. According to M. Smith, the word *ba’al* displays a complex development in biblical and extrabiblical sources. The plural, “the baals,” including its use in Judg 10:6, reflects a further development in the use of the term. Biblical tradition conflated a number of different gods as “baals.”(Smith, Mark S. *The Early History of God: Yahweh and the Other Deities in Ancient Israel* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: William B. Eerdmans, 2018], 76-79). 9Alternatively, the lack of Israel’s sincerity may be a means to indicate that their repentance is simply a means to earn a favor from Yahweh, rather than a full return to an exclusive Yahwism.

[56] ***“The Maonites”*** are difficult to identify because they are almost unknown in the Hebrew Bible. Following the Gideon story, this group may best be understood to be the Midianites, as the LXX translates.

[57] ***“Grew short* (קָצַר)”**: Literally, “his soul was cut to the quick” (Soggin, 124). This describes the situation when Yahweh reaches his limit of endurance (Num 21:4-5; Job 21:4-5; Zek 11:8-9). Another example of this term appears in the scene in which Samson becomes tried to death with Delilah’s nagging and prodding him (16:16).

17 Then the Ammonites were called to arms, and they encamped in Gilead; and the Israelites came together, and they encamped at Mizpah.[58]

18 The people, chiefs of Gilead, said to one another, "Whoever[59] will begin the fight against the Ammonites? He will be head over all the inhabitants of Gilead."

11:1 Jephthah, the Gileadite was a heroic warrior,[60] but[61] he was a son of a *zônāh*.[62] Gilead[63] begat Jephthah,

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[58] There is a difference of nuance between the two armies: The Ammonites were summoned to arms (וַיִּצָּעֲקוּ) whereas the Israelites were brought together (וַיֵּאָסְפוּ).

[59] "***Whoever"***: Anyone can be the head of the Gileadites if he/she volunteers. There is no leader or plan for the impending battle. With no tactical solution available, the Gileadites hopelessly grumble to each other. Admittedly, the appointment of judges is often seen as Yahweh's right, but here the Gileadites seek a leader on their own.

[60] ***"A heroic warrior"***: This term is used in military contexts to point to mighty warriors (*NIDOTTE* 2:119), and is used of Gideon (6:12), Saul (1 Sam 9:1), David (1 Sam 16:18), and Jeroboam (1 Kgs 11:28). Sjöberg prefers to define the term more broadly as used for men whose life's purpose demands extraordinary strength or skills" (Mikael Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence: The Jephthah Narrative in Antiquity and Modernity* [Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006], 52). Also, Cundall assumes that this designation may refer to a royal general having many lands. Arthur E. Cundall, Judges (London: Tyndale Press, 1969), 104.

[61] ***"But"***: "And" is also a possible translation in this case. The conjunction may be here simply to give another important piece of background information. Rather than indicating a sharp contrast between Jephthah's status as a mighty warrior and his status at birth, this statement may be here only to indicate Jephthah's mother's social status without discriminating against her. If a contrast is intended, then that contrast may be with what follows, Jephthah's origin contra his brothers' origins, rather than with what comes before, Jephthah's status as a mighty warrior.

[62] ***"Zônāh"***: This term occurs 9 times in the Hebrew Bible (Lev 21:7, Jos 2:1, 6:22, Judg 11:1, 16:1, Prov 6:26, Jer 3:3, Ezek 16:30, 23:44), and is usually translated as "prostitute." Yet, in Southeast Asian terms, she could be a "minor wife, lover, or foreign woman" (*TDOT* 4:101). She might belong to a "different tribe" or be a "secondary wife," a "foreigner," an "outsider" (JPS), or a "stranger" (KJV) – all of which imply that she was not a highly regarded woman (Schneider, 163). According to the targumic interpretations, Jephthah's mother is a "hostess" or "innkeeper," instead of a "whore." According to the Tosefta-Targum, "Heritage in Israel should not turn around from tribe to tribe. If a woman leaves her family because she loves a man who is not from her own tribe, she leaves her family without an inheritance, and she will be called a 'hostess'" (Willem F. Smelik, *The Targum of Judges* [Leiden: Brill, 1995], 541-42). Also, the Hebrew word could apply to "a woman who had sex before or outside the confines of marriage" (E. A. Goodfriend, "Prostitution (OT)," *ABD* 5: 505).

[63] ***"Gilead"***: Gilead is a geographic designation (Gen 31:48) as well as a tribal eponym (Josh 17:1-3; Judg 5:17). The information concerning Jephthah's father is vague. It is not clear whether the use of Gilead here is meant to refer to an individual person, to the whole tribe, or to any man, generically, in Gilead. Jephthah was a Gileadite – we have no further details (Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* [Collegeville, Minn: Liturgical Press, 2000], 162). The original Gilead, the progenitor of the Gilead tribe, was the son of Machir and grandson of Manasseh (Num 26:29; 36:1).

2. and/but the wife of Gilead[64] bore to/for him sons, and the sons of the wife[65] grew up, and they drove Jephthah out, and they said to him, "You will not take possession in our father's house because you are a son of another woman."[66]

3. So Jephthah fled from his brothers, and he dwelled in the land of Tov,[67] and worthless fellows[68] gathered themselves around Jephthah, and they went out[69] with him.

4. Some days later,[70] the Ammonites fought against Israel.[71]

5. When the Ammonites attacked Israel, the elders of Gilead went to Jephthah to take him back from the land of Tov.

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64 ***"and/but the wife of Gilead"***: Given the information in this verse, I assume that Jephthah was the firstborn. Verse 2 begins with "and/then the wife of Gilead bore..." indicating a chronological order. Another interpretation is also possible: "but the wife of Gilead bore sons…" indicating a contrast to Jephthah who was sired by his father, Gilead, through a different woman.

65 For some reason, OL reads, "husband" (Niditch, *Judges*, 129)

66 ***"A son of another woman"***: OL uses the phrase "fornicating woman." Note the wordplay between *zana* ("harlot") and *zara* ("strange woman") (Niditch, *Judges*, 129). Yet, the reference to Jephthah's mother can be just "a point of clarification by the narrator" (Schneider, *Judges*, 162-163).

67 ***"The land of Tov"***: Literally, "good-land." This may be a small city-state mentioned by Thutmose III and in the Amarna letters (Trent C. Butler, *Judges* [WBC 8; Nashville: Thomas Nelson, 2009], 279-93). Geographically speaking, Jephthah did not travel far (Schneider, *Judges*, 164). Boling points out that "the reference to טוֹב is important because it is a technical term of covenantal 'amity'" (Robert G Boling, *Judges* [Garden City, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1975], 197). Previously, טוֹב was used in 10:15 where the Israelites cried out to Yahweh.

68 ***"Worthless fellows"***: Ironically, he went to a *good* (טוֹב) land, but *worthless* men (אנשׁים ריקים) gathered themselves around him. "Good-land" and "worthless men/fellows" is an interesting combination. Literally ריקים means "empty, vain." I adopted "worthless" from *BDB*; "unprincipled men" (Butler, *Judges*, 281). OL reads, "Thieves gathered to him and they dwelt with him;" an alternate image of the social bandit (Niditch, *Judges*, 129). Jephthah became a "guerrilla fighter or terrorist" (McCann, 80).

69 ***"Went out"***: Even though "to fight" is not mentioned, a military context can be inferred. (Young-Jin Min, 446)

70 ***"Some days later"***: Literally, "from days," meaning "after some time."

71 ***"The Ammonites fought against Israel"***: Notice the repetition of the formulaic language of military engagement in verses 4, 5, 8, 12, 32, and 33 in this cycle.

6. They said to Jephthah, "Come, be a commander[72] for us, so that we[73] can fight against the Ammonites."

7. Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "But did you not hate me and drive me out[74] of my father's house?[75] So, why have you come to me now when you have trouble?"

8. The elders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "Even so,[76] now we returned to you.[77] You should go with us and fight against the Ammonites. Then you will become a head to us, to all dwelling in Gilead."[78]

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[72] ***"A commander"***: The term for "chief" used here and in verse 11 is an unusual one, perhaps derived from the root "to cut off," from which comes a word for "end" (*qṣh*). Probably the leader is the one "who separates one matter from another, that is, one who decides." This is a "general term for military commanders (Josh 10:24; Judg 11:6) or leaders in general (Prov 6:7; 25:15)." Thus, ruler or chief would be less preferable in this context. Rather, "decider," as BDB proposes. The elders' offer to Jephthah is somewhat different from what was proposed previously: "headship" (10:18). The elders might think a military command would be enough to attract Jephthah for the battle.

[73] **"*We*"**: Even though they claim they will fight (in verse 8 also); they do not show up again after this point.

[74] ***"But did not you hate me and drove me out"***: LXX also reads: "you threw me out of the house of my father, and you sent me out away from you." It is possible that the elders were complicit in Jephthah's expulsion from his father's house. Butler renders this verse with emphasis on the elders: "Aren't you, yes you, the ones who hated me and threw me out of…" In so doing he identifies the elders with his brothers as participants in exiling him (Butler, *Judges*, 274-282).

[75] ***"My father's house"***: Jephthah maintains his legitimacy as an inheritor. Yet, his claim is doubtful because his mother is not a primary wife to Gilead.

[76] Hebrew לָכֵן frequently means "therefore," but this meaning does not fit in this context. Here "the phrase operates in a different connective fashion" (Niditch, *Judges*, 129). LXX reads, *lo'kēn* "certainly not" (Soggin, *Judges*, 205).

[77] "***We returned***": The elders' "repentance (שׁוּב)" is implied.

[78] Repetition of the previous verse, but with more information: Jephthah will be the leader to all Gileadites, which was the original deal (Judg 10:8).

9. Jephthah said to the elders of Gilead, "If you bring me back to fight against the Ammonites and [if] Yahweh gives them to me,[79] then I, indeed, will be your leader."[80]

10. The leaders of Gilead said to Jephthah, "Yahweh will be the listener (the judge) between us,[81] if we do not do as you say."

11. So Jephthah went with the elders of Gilead. The people made him their head[82] and commander. Jephthah spoke all his words before Yahweh in Mizpah.[83]

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[79] **"*To me*"**: Lit. ***"before me"***: Some other texts: "into my hand."

[80] ***"If you…. then I will…"*** According to Butler, this clause can be read as a question, "Will I indeed be your head?" (Butler, *Judges*, 274). Even if Butler's rendering is incorrect, Jephthah's attitude and speech shows him to be an opportunist. He takes advantage of the elders because he is fully aware of their desperate need. At the same time, he cannot fully trust the elders because of what they previously did to him, which makes him even more self-defensive. "Jephthah demanded that he be legally reinstated as a full citizen of Gilead with all the rights and privileges attached thereto" (Marcus, "Legal Dispute between Jephthah and the Elders," 110-11).

[81] ***"Yahweh will be the listener (the judge) between us"***: In relation to the idiom, "to hear between," see Deut 1:16, which reflects a judicial sense for "witness" (Marcos, Natalio Fernandez. *Judges Biblia Hebraica Quinta* [Hendrickson Pub, 2012], 84). Also, in 2 Sam 15:3 (Absalom's revolt) Absalom claims the people don't have a "listener" in king David. The statement by the leaders of Gilead takes the form of a legally binding oath, which obligates them to the terms of the agreement. "Yahweh is pictured as the witness to a vow, a legally binding transaction" (Niditch, *Judges*, 129).

[82] ***"Head"***: H. F. Van Rooy comments that "the term *roš* in the Jephthah narrative denotes more than just a military leader, maybe something like a governor" (*NIDOTTE* 3:1017-18).

[83] ***"Jephthah spoke all his words before Yahweh"***: This probably refers to the "words" recorded in verse 9. "Jephthah repeats the terms of the agreement at Yahweh's sanctuary, perhaps to ratify the contract or to emphasize the Gileadites' obligation to keep their part of the bargain. Another option is to translate this sentence as, "Jephthah conducted business before Yahweh in Mizpah." In this case, the statement is a general reference to the way Jephthah ruled. He recognized Yahweh's authority and made his decisions before him." Since Jephthah's speech is part of a solemn event, the Targum changes וידבר "and spoke" to וסדר "and declaimed" (Smelik, *The Targum of Judges*, 547). Jephthah's repeated description of Yahweh as a "judge" reveals that he uses Yahweh's name to confirm his own statements. Using higher authority, he guarantees his own position. For him, even the success in the Ammonite battle was a means to win his own success (Yoon-Kyung Lee, "Reading the Jephthah's Daughter Story with René Girard's Scapegoat Mechanism," *Old Testament Forum* 49 [2013]: 109). Likewise, the elders also use Yahweh to guarantee their negotiation with Jephthah, but Yahweh's silence reminds the reader that he had refused to let himself be used by Israel (10:10-16) (Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 356).

12. Then Jephthah sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites,[84] "What is between me and you?[85] Why have you come to battle against me, to fight in my land?"[86]

13. The king of the Ammonites said to the messengers of Jephthah, "Because Israel took my land when they came up out of Egypt – from the Arnon to the Jabbok, and as far as the Jordan. Now return them in peace!"

14. Jephthah again sent messengers to the king of the Ammonites.

15. And he said to him, "Thus says Jephthah,[87] 'Israel did not take the land of Moab and the land of the Ammonites.[88]

16. When they came up from Egypt, Israel walked through the desert as far as the Reed Sea and then entered Kadesh.

17. Then Israel sent messengers to the king of Edom, saying, '[Please] let me pass through your land.' However, the king of Edom did not listen. Also, he sent [messengers] to the king of Moab, but he was not willing. So Israel stayed at Kadesh.

18. Then he [Israel] went through the desert and went around the land of Edom and the land of Moab. They traveled east of the land of Moab and camped on the other side of

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[84] ***"The Ammonites"***: Many scholars propose that the text should read מוֹאָב here and also in verses 13, 14, 27, 28, 30 and 31 (Marcos, *Judges Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, 84) based on literary or historical evidence but without textual evidence (Butler, *Judges*, 274).

[85] ***"What is between me and you"***: This is formulaic language, indicating dispute or "repudiation" (*BDB*, 553). Literally, "What is there to me and to you." See also contexts in 2 Sam 16:10; 19:23; 1 Kgs 17:18; 2 Kgs 3:13. "This expression gives the impression that Jephthah perceives himself as an equal" (Niditch, *Judges*, 129).

[86] ***"My land"***: Jephthah is acting like a king.

[87] I believe this is a prophetic formula, which is similar to, "Thus says Yahweh."

[88] Interestingly, Moab is a geographical name whereas "the Ammonite" indicates a people group.

the Arnon River; they did not go through Moabite territory because the Arnon was Moab's border.

19. Then Israel sent messengers to Sihon, the Amorite king in Heshbon, and [Israel] said to him, 'Please let us pass through your land to my place.'

20. But Sihon did not trust Israel to pass through his territory. So he assembled his whole army, camped in Jahaz, and fought against Israel.

21. Yahweh, the God of Israel, gave Sihon and his whole army into the hand of Israel and they defeated them. So Israel took possession of all the land of the Amorites who were living in that land.

22. They took possession of all the Amorite territory from the Arnon to the Jabbok, from the desert to the Jordan.[89]

23. Now Yahweh, the God of Israel, has driven out the Amorites before his people Israel. But you, will you take possession of it?[90]

24. Will you not take possession of whatever Chemosh, your god, causes you to inherit? [Likewise], we will take possession of everything that Yahweh, our God, caused us to inherit.

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[89] The NET Bible provides an addition to help readers: "from the Arnon River *on the south* to the Jabbok River *on the north*, from the desert *in the east* to the Jordan *in the west*."

[90] As Gesenius points out, a question does not necessarily need to be introduced by a special interrogative pronoun. The context itself obviously indicates a question here (Wilhelm Gesenius, E. Kautzsch, and A. E. Cowley. *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar* [Oxford: Clarendon, 1910], 473). "[D]o you think you can just take it from them?" (NET); Do you intend to take their place? (NRSV)

25. Now, are you surely better than Balak, son of Zippor, king of Moab? Did he really quarrel with Israel? Did he really fight against them?[91]

26. Israel has been living in Heshbon and its dependency towns, in Aroer and its dependency towns, and in all the cities along the Arnon for three hundred years! Why did you not rescue them in that time?

27. I have not done wrong to you, but you are doing wrong by attacking me. May Yahweh, the Judge, judge this day[92] between the Israelites and the Ammonites!'"

28. But the Ammonite king did not listen to Jephthah's message that he sent to him.[93]

29. The spirit of Yahweh came upon Jephthah.[94] So he crossed through Gilead and Manasseh, and went to Mizpah of Gilead. From Mizpah of Gilead he crossed to the Ammonites.

30. Jephthah made a vow to Yahweh.[95] He said: "If you surely give the Ammonites into my hand,

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[91] The infinitive absolute in the three rhetorical questions indicates emphasis (Gesenius, *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 343).

[92] This is reminiscent of Gideon's statement when the Israelites tried to make him a king (Judg 8:22). "OL turns the preceding section into an oracle with the formula, 'Yahweh says who judges today…'" (Niditch, *Judges*, 130).

[93] "Jephthah's address contains features of the ancient Near Eastern *rîb* or lawsuit genre" (O'Connell, *Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 195).

[94] ***"The spirit of Yahweh came upon Jephthah"***: Jephthah does experience divine empowerment. In the case of other judges, the coming of the spirit of Yahweh was enough to make them official leaders for the Israelites. For example, when the spirit of Yahweh came upon Othniel, he defeated Cushan-Rishathaim king of Aram (3:10). Similarly, Ehud, a left-handed man, murdered Eglon king of Moab (3:15). Barak, upon listening to Yahweh's command through Deborah, resists Sisera, the commander of Jabin's army (4:6). When the spirit of Yahweh came upon Gideon, he smashed the Midianites (6:34). Yet, Jephthah's awareness of this occurrence is not clearly mentioned.

[95] ***"Jephthah made a vow to Yahweh"***: The reader might wonder if he ever realized the divine empowerment in his making the vow now, and if so, is this a Yahwistic vow or he is manipulating Yahweh.

31. then whoever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me[96] when I return safely[97] from the Ammonites—he/it will belong to Yahweh, and I will sacrifice him/it up as a burnt offering.'"[98]

32. Jephthah crossed over to the Ammonites to fight with them, and Yahweh gave them into his hand.

33. He defeated them from Aroer to the entrance of Minnith – twenty cities, as far as Abel Keramim,[99] an exceedingly hard blow. The Ammonites were humbled before the Israelites.

34. When Jephthah entered Mizpah, to his house, his daughter was just coming out to meet him with tambourines and dancing. She was (his) only child. Besides her, he had no son or daughter.

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[96] The Hebrew phrase הַיּוֹצֵא אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא emphasizes the open-endedness of the vow. It can be either a person or an animal coming out of his house; but "to meet me" implies a person.

[97] ***"Safely"*** (בְּשָׁלוֹם): in peace; "whole, not wounded or killed in battle" (JPS, NET); "in triumph" (NRSV, NIV).

[98] Sacrificing the object as a burnt offering is emphasized through the use of the same root in both its nominal and verbal forms. The conjunction could be rendered "or," indicating that Jephthah would offer the one either as a belonging to Yahweh (a transaction that could leave the one offered alive and well) or as a burnt offering (a transition that necessitates the death of the one being offered). My translation is meant to reflect the fact he intends to offer the one as a burnt offering, emphasizing how the one belongs to Yahweh.

[99] ***"Minnith… Abel Keramim"*** These sites have not been identified yet (Boling, *Judges*, 208).

35. When he saw her, he tore his clothes[100] and said, “Oh no! My daughter! You have completely ruined me! You have brought me disaster![101] I have opened my mouth[102] to Yahweh, and I cannot bring (it) back.”

36. She said to him, “My father, [since] you opened your mouth to Yahweh, do to me just what came out of your mouth after what Yahweh has done for you, avenging[103] your enemies, the Ammonites.”

37. Then she said to her father, “Please let these things be done to me: allow me two months to wander the mountains, and weep over my maidenship,[104] I and my friends.”

38. He said, “Go.” He sent her away for two months. She went with her friends and wept over her maidenship on the mountains.

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[100] OL reads “immediately” (Butler, *Judges*, 276).

[101] ***“You have completely ruined me! You have brought me disaster!”*** OL interprets, “you have tripped me up and have become deprived (of life) before my eyes” (Butler, *Judges*, 276). Strangely enough, Jephthah is blaming his daughter, who is going to die innocently. In addition, Jephthah uses עָכַר, which is “usually associated with military enemies.” The repeated root קָרַע and כָּרַע intensify phonetically the semantic meaning of “tear” and “bring low” and “troubler” (Fuchs, “Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing,” 39-40).

[102] ***“I have opened my mouth”*****:** Jephthah plays on his name. Jephthah, means “He opens.” His name implies a cultural context, in which fertility is highly regarded. Yet, it is ambiguous which deity is responsible for his birth. There is no obvious theophoric element in the name. For the synonyms, see Num 16:30; 26:10; Deut 11:6; Ezek 2:8; 3:2 (Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 351).

[103] ***“Avenging”***: the plural form is intended to intensify the idea of the stem. This is called the “plural of amplification” (Gesenius, 397).

[104] ***“Weep over my maidenship”***: The daughter might weep over her virginity, which could indicate the technical fact that she had not yet had sexual relations with a man, but in this context it is better to understand the phrase as a more general descriptor, that she is “a nubile woman, a youth, who has not yet taken on responsibilities of wife and mother” (Niditch, *Judges*, 134). All Israelite women desire to have many children. (Schneider, 181; Block, 374).

39. At the end of two months, she returned to her father, and he did to her as he had vowed.[105] She had not known a man. It became a statute[106] in Israel.

40. At a certain time, Israelite daughters go[107] to commemorate[108] the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite for four days[109] in the year.

12:1 The men of Ephraim called out their forces, crossed over to Zaphon and said to Jephthah, "Why did you go to fight the Ammonites without calling us to go with you?" We will burn down your house over your head."[110]

2. Jephthah answered, "I and my people were engaged in a great struggle with the Ammonites, and although I called, you did not save me[111] out of their hands."

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[105] "He did to her as he had vowed": This simple statement forces some interpreters into a symbolic interpretation, claiming, for example, that Jephthah made his daughter serve Yahweh's temple throughout her life (Kimhi). However, there is no other passage that would lend support to an interpretation of "burnt offering" other than literally.

[106] ***"Statute"***: The word *ḥōq* carries the normal meaning "statue," "regulation," or "law," not the extended meaning of "custom" as it is often translated (NRSV, NLT, JPS, NAB, NASB, NET).

[107] ***"Walk"*** (תֵּלַכְנָה): This imperfect tense is used to express "a customarily repeated action" on a given occasion (Gesenius, *Gesenius Hebrew Grammar*, 315-16).

[108] ***"To commemorate"***: The Hebrew *pi'el* form of the root *tnh*, often translated in this verse as "lament" (NRSV, NLT, JPS, RSV, CJB), is more accurately rendered "recite" or "commemorate" (NEB, NIV). It occurs only one other place, in 5:11, where it is used in the context of recounting "the righteous acts of Yahweh" on behalf of Israel (D. Janzen, "Why the Deuteronomist Told About the Sacrifice of Jephthah's Daughter." *JSOT* 29 [2005]: 348).

[109] ***"Four days"***: This is a quite long ritual, annually practiced. Note that there is no corresponding ritual to commemorate Jephthah.

[110] This may be phrased in this way in order to remind Jephthah of the sacrifice of his own daughter.

[111] ***"You did not save me"***: Jephthah who used to blame his daughter saying, "You ruined me," blames others again.

3. When I saw that you would not help, I took my life in my hands and crossed over to fight the Ammonites, and Yahweh gave me the victory over them. Now why have you come up today to fight me?"

4. Jephthah then called together the men of Gilead and fought against Ephraim. The Gileadites struck them down because the Ephramites had said, "You Gileadites are fugitives from Ephraim and Manasseh."

5. The Gileadites captured the fords of the Jordan leading to Ephraim, and whenever a fugitive[112] of Ephraim said, "Let me cross over," the men of Gilead asked him, "Are you an Ephraimite?" If he replied, "No,"

6. they said, "All right, say 'Shibboleth.'" If he said, "Sibboleth," because he could not pronounce the word correctly, they seized him and killed him at the fords of the Jordan. Forty-two thousand Ephraimites were killed at that time.

7. Jephthah led Israel six years. Then Jephthah the Gileadite died and was buried in a town in Gilead.

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[112] ***"Fugitive"***: Here, this term is used for a wordplay. In the previous verse the Ephramites used this word to ridicule Jephthah and the Gileadites, but now it is used to describe their own situation. They are also treated just as they previously treated the Midianites (7:24).

Chapter 3. Korean Scholars' Interpretations of the Jephthah Narrative

The arrival of Western Christian missionaries to Korea coincided with the end of Korea's policy of seclusion, which held fast between 1636 and 1886.[113] When these missionaries arrived, the peninsula was not an empty ground waiting for someone to seed the land with religion, rather, it was already home to a variety of religious backgrounds and traditions.[114] Biblical scholarship was a foreigner in the land, and it would take time for it to make a home there. Additionally, throughout the late nineteenth century and up to the middle of the twentieth century, Korea was going through a number of political changes as well as facing invasions from neighboring countries. Before delving into the major interpretations of the Jephthah narrative propounded by Korean scholars, it is worthwhile to obtain a fuller view of the general religious and political background in Korea upon the arrival of the missionaries as well as developments within Hebrew Bible scholarship in Korea after the Korean War (1950-1953).

3.1. General Backgrounds of Korea upon the Missionaries' Arrival

Because the Korean peninsula prior to the arrival of Christian missionaries had already hosted various autochthonous and imported religious traditions, those

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[113] The Protestant Christian missionaries, Horace G. Underwood and Henry G. Appenzeller, were the first official Western missionaries to enter Korea from the United States. Underwood, a Northern Presbyterian, and Appenzeller, a Northern Methodist, disembarked from the same ship together in 1885, during the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910). Seulbi Lee, "A Study on the Origin, Development, and Issues of Korean Feminist Theology," (Th.M thesis; Ehwa Womans University Graduate School, 2016), 14.

[114] Hoo-Jung Lee, "A History of Theological Thought in the Korean Church," *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 89 (2013): 109-10.

missionaries who attempted to bring about an interest in the Hebrew Bible had to operate under the already established background of the Koreans whom they attempted to convert. Here, I will discuss Korea's long-standing religious backgrounds, unstable political backgrounds, and the Western missionaries' theological backgrounds. Familiarity with these backgrounds is essential for understanding how Korean Hebrew Bible scholarship in general and the studies of the Jephthah narrative in particular have been shaped and developed.

3.1.1. Religious Backgrounds in Korea

One of the first Christian missionaries to Korea, Robert A. Hardie wrote an article in 1897 claiming that Korea did not have a religion.[115] Such a claim seemed plausible in this foreigner's eyes, who had only recently arrived in Korea, because, to him, there were no observable religious events or clearly active and dominant clergy, for at that time the influence of Buddhism was declining while Confucianism, which consisted primarily of the practice of ethical norms, and Shamanism, which is a folk religion, were predominant. Yet, there has been no period free from religions throughout the history of Korea. A more observant and sympathetic eye must be cast upon the religious landscape of Korea at this time. So, we will first survey the religious circumstances that were in place in Korea upon the Christian missionaries' arrival,[116] and then a comparison of the

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[115] R. A. Hardie, "Religion in Korea," *The Missionary Review of the World* (Dec, 1897): 926-27.

[116] Unfortunately, scholars who wish to deal with written evidence for Korean religions are forced to rely primarily on the Western missionaries' articles, since they were the only writers interested in religious matters at that time. Heung-Soo, Kim, "Horace G. Underwood's Research on Korean Religions," Christianity and History 0.25 (2006): 34.

major Korean religions (Buddhism, Confucianism, and Shamanism) will follow.

Buddhism was the most influential religion in Korea for much of its history. Its power and influence grew especially during the Three Kingdom Period (1st c. BCE – 7th c. CE).[117] The influence of Buddhism came to predominate as time passed, and during the Goryeo dynasty (918-1392 CE), Buddhism became a national religion. As Buddhism grew in power, however, so it grew in corruption. The Buddhist system reached the height of its corruption at the end of the Goryeo dynasty, and it was abandoned as an official religion during the next period, the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910 CE). Thus, Buddhism would come to have little to no official influence in Korea during the years that preceded the Christian missionaries' arrival.

After the collapse of Buddhism, Confucianism occupied the position of most influential religion in the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910 CE).[118] Confucianism had its greatest influence over Korea during the 520 years of this dynasty, and to a lesser degree it still governs people's mindset and lifestyle today. The Korean Confucianism that reached its definitive form in this period focuses on patriarchal, hierarchical, and communal values. According to this worldview, the younger members of a family and the individuals of lower status in the village ought to be loyal to their elders and superiors. Communal value always outweighs an individual's importance. Each member must

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[117] It entered the Three Kingdoms (Goguryeo, Bekjae, and Skilla) from China, first to Goguryeo through the mainland, to Shilla through the sea, and to Bekjae through Goguryeo.

[118] When it comes to Korean Confucianism, such a system would be more accurately termed Neo-Confucianism, a designation that refers to the form of Confucianism that arose and became dominant around the thirteenth and fourteenth centuries (at the end of the Goryeo Dynasty and the beginning of the Joseon Dynasty), but since understanding the fine shades of distinctions between the various forms of Confucianism is not necessary for the present dissertation I will simply call it Confucianism throughout.

follow social norms in order to belong to the society. In such a patriarchal culture, women and children, especially young girls, hold a fragile status. Children's *hyo* (filial piety) is a fundamental virtue, even if it leads them to death.[119] Filial piety is *the* preeminent virtue (a value calculation that may be comparable to the system of values that was in place in ancient Israel as well). From the Joseon Dynasty on, Korea has been under the strong influence of such Confucianism, which values *hyo* and loyalty the most.[120]

There is no way to emphasize enough the importance of Shamanism—the longest and most influential ritual and belief systems in Korea. Shamanism has been the prevailing and the only aboriginal religion from the beginning of Korean history, whereas all other religious traditions, such as Confucianism, Buddhism, and Taoism, entered Korea via political and economic connections with neighboring countries, particularly China. Regardless of the particular system of belief, every region in the Korean peninsula was under the influence of Shamanism. Yung-Han Kim demonstrates that the major Korean religious traditions, Confucianism, and Buddhism, were associated with Shamanism, as a result of which they developed into a specific Korean syncretistic religion.[121] Systems of belief and ritual among the major religious traditions were heavily influenced by Shamanistic elements—notable examples are fortune-oriented Buddhism

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[119] Samuel Cheon, "Reconsidering Jephthah's Story in an Asian Perspective," 45.

[120] Seseoria Kim, "The Meaning of Filial Piety and Ethics of Care in the Korean Family," *Review of Korean Studies* 10 (2007): 12-15; H. Kim points out that the emphasis of *hyo* in a patriarchal culture lead to a system that makes daughters—inferiors of their parents and community—the slaves of men (Heung-Soo Kim, "Horace G. Underwood's Research on Korean Religions," *Christianity and History in Korea* 25 [2006]: 34-35); A patriarchal ideology which promotes *hyo* serves to secure the younger people's obedience to authoritarian regimes ((Sung-Ae Ha, "An Invitation for Postcolonial Reading of the Prophetic Tradition Claiming Imperial Powers as God's Agents in the Context of American Colonialism in Korea," 180).

[121] Yung-Han Kim, "Christianity and Korean Culture: The Reasons for the Success of Christianity in Korea," *Exchange* 33 (2004): 133.

and Confucianism. Shamanism was deeply rooted in the religious consciousness of Korea. This is because even long before the emergence of Buddhism in the Koguryeo kingdom (37 BCE – 668 CE)—one of the three kingdoms during the Three dynastic period (1 BCE – 7 CE), Shamanism in its multi-form and various iterations had already been practiced by the Korean people for thousands of years. Shamanism held sway in ancient Korean society, and shamans often acted as rulers. Even when Shamanism seemed to gradually lose its privileged status due to the exclusive Confucian ideology of the Joseon dynasty (1392-1910 CE), it still survived. Buddhism was rejected, and Shamanism suffered a tactical persecution by the government. However, while the elites had adopted and promoted a Confucian ideology, it was Shamanism rather than Confucianism that filled the emptiness of the people.[122] This was because Confucianism is not a religion in a strict sense, so, by itself, it is not enough to answer the fundamental questions of human life, such as meaning of death and life after death. In fact, Shamanism proved to be so resilient that Taoism, the other of the three major religious system in Korea, would completely disappear in a process of gradually mixing with Shamanism.[123] Even today Shamanism continues to be influential in Korean ritual and belief.

Now I will discuss major elements of the traditional Korean religions before Christianity came to Korea. Here is a brief chart summarizing the main elements of each

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[122] The *Pyungmin* (commoners) group, who were exploited by the *Yangban* (aristocrats) group, were comforted only by Shamanism (Joong-Ho Jung, *New Interpretations of the Bible: Introduction in Korean Context* [Daegu: Keimyung University Press, 2010], 36).

[123] Sang-Hee Moon, *History of Korean Shamanism: What is Religion?* (Seoul: Bundo Publisher, 1975), 138-39.

religion, and analysis will follow.

	Shamanism	Confucianism	Buddhism
Founder	Unknown	Confucius (c. 500 BCE)	The Buddha (c. 560 BCE)
Place of Origin	From Siberia and/or aboriginal (folk religion)	From China	Through China (Originally from India)
Thriving Period	Throughout Korean history	During the Joseon Dynasty	During the Three Kingdoms Period
System	Individual	Institutional	Institutional
Clergy	Shaman (Charismatic medium)	No Clergy (Not a religion)	Priests and monks
Core Value	Blessing in this life (Fatalistic)	Moral law (Filial Piety, Loyalty)	Path to liberation
View of Deity	Polytheism (polydemonism)	No such concept (Not a religion)	Atheism
View on Life after Death	Immortality of the soul	No interest (Focused on the present life)	Reincarnation (Based on retribution)
Redemption	No such concept	No such concept	State of *Nirvana* (free from desire) by one's own gradual efforts
Goal of Worship	To decease a grudge (To prevent harm)	To honor deceased ancestors (To practice filial piety)	Nothing (To be a buddha by cultivating one's own mind)

The origin of Shamanism in Korea is controversial. Researchers are divided into two groups with regard to Shamanism as Korea's original native religion and as a religious tradition from outside the Korean peninsula.[124] The general assumption is that Siberian Shamanism is the archetypal form of shamanism. Given this assumption, many scholars conclude that Shamanism came to Korea from Siberia. Yet, the claim that the Siberian form of Shamanism is the oldest and most authentic form is far from certain. In fact, such a claim may merely be "the result of the history of the academic study of Shamanism, which started with Siberian phenomena."[125] Based on B. Walraven's research, Shamanism has no discernible historical origin because it is a universal phenomenon. Shamanistic systems can be found in any culture, even if such systems are not found in equal measure in each society."[126] Whatever its origins, it is certain that Shamanism was prevalent before Buddhism and Confucianism were introduced to Korea and that Shamanism is a foundational system for Korean religion and culture until now.

A similar point ought to be made concerning the religiosity of Confucianism. Whereas Korean scholars tend to treat Confucianism as a cultural system, underestimating its religious aspect, Hee-Sung Keel views it as the most important religious tradition in Korea, saying "Its practical influence upon Korean people, their way

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[124] Congsuh Kim, "The Concept of Korean Religion's and Religious Studies in Korea" *Journal of Korean Religions* 1(1.2) (2010): 25-26. To be strict, there are some minor distinctions between universal Shamanism and *Moogyo* (Korean Shamanism) in that the latter includes customs and manners as well as religious aspects, but, as such distinctions are beyond the bounds of this present project, I will simply use the term "Shamanism" in this dissertation.

[125] Gloria Flaherty, *Shamanism and the Eighteenth Century* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1993).

[126] Boudewijn Walraven, "Religion as a Moving Target: Keynote Address for 'International Conference on Korean Religious in Inter-Cultural and Global Contexts,'" *Journal of Korean Religions* 2.2 (2011): 12.

of life and thinking, far surpasses that of any other religion."[127] Confucianism is in many ways as foundational to the general Korean mindset as Shamanism, having become a prevalent part of culture in Korea and informing the worldview and behavioral norms of both the non-religious and those who follow any of the religious traditions with roots in the Korean peninsula.

For long periods of Korean history, the major Korean religions have been mixed one with another. Political changes by new dynasties often opened the doors to other religions. Practitioners of a particular religious tradition, and the religious leaders of those traditions in particular, had to struggle to keep their religions, and those struggles often involved compromises with the beliefs and practices of whatever religious tradition was in vogue with the ruling elite or, when the people's will proved too stubborn to be changed by the winds of new religious passions, compromises with the beliefs and practices of folk traditions. Thus, religious syncretism has become prevalent in Korea. For example, Korean Buddhists practice service to spiritual beings, and Korean Confucianists practice ancestor worship to prevent the malfeasance of evil spirits, practices that come from Shamanism rather than the original forms of Buddhism or Confucianism. Korean Shamanists, for their part, believe they will go to either Heaven or Hell, a belief that can be traced back to Korean Buddhists rather than any traditional shamanistic belief system.

Interestingly, many Christian missionaries held positive views on the Korean religions, or, at the very least, on aspects of the Korean religions. Franklin Ohlinger

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[127] Hee-Sung Keel, "What Does It Mean to Study Korean Religion(s)?" *Journal of Korean Religions* 1(1.2) (2010): 18.

praised Buddhism because it insists on the equality of everyone and emphasizes one's self-denial, emphases that Ohlinger noted were not found in Confucianism.[128] In the same way, H. Underwood admitted that Buddhism promotes the care for other creatures and that its teachings aid in the pursuit of a lifestyle of abstinence.[129] The poor but honest lifestyle that was a virtue within the Buddhism of the time was quite similar to the Puritan spirituality that the missionaries valued. At the same time, Underwood also praised Confucian ethics (filial piety, loyalty, and such), its educational enthusiasm, and its high view of sacred texts. He claimed that, since such virtues were also found in the Bible, Confucianism could be viewed as a religion that prepared the road to Christianity.[130]

All in all, the coexistence of religions in Korea and their intermingled influence in people's minds is attested in various writings. The historian R. Reuberie summarizes the religious landscape in Korea as follows: "Koreans are socially Confucian, philosophically Buddhists, and when they suffer, they are followers of Shamanism."[131] One of the earliest missionaries to Korea, Samuel Moffet, who came to Korea in 1890, just five years after the first two official Western missionaries had arrived, commented on this mixture of mindsets, saying, "Koreans placed a high value on learning, as in Confucianism, and promised a next life, as in Buddhism. They taught prayer will be answered and miracles

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[128] Franklin Ohlinger, "Buddhism in Korean History and Language," *The Korean Repository* (April 1892): 106-107.

[129] Horace Grant Underwood, *The Religions of Eastern Asia* (Seoul: Korean Christianity History Research, 1998), 215-19

[130] Heung-Soo Kim, "Horace G. Underwood's Research on Korean Religions," *Christianity and History in Korea* 25 (2006): 38-39.

[131] Roger Auguste Reuberie, *Korea and Koreans in the Eyes of Foreigners* (Seoul: MunRiSa, 1979), 87.

will happen, as in Shamanistic religion."[132] It was in this intermingled religious, philosophical, and cultural context that Korean biblical scholarship would need to find its place.

3.1.2. Political Backgrounds in Korea

In addition to working within the confines of these strong influences that formed the religious backdrop of the peninsula, Christian missionaries to Korea and early Korean biblical scholars would also have to work in a region and time of changing and often unstable politics. Korean history is called a history of oppression by foreign powers, a history which can partly be explained by Korea's geographical location, lying as it does between China and Japan. Korea was attacked more than 900 times in the north by China and Mongolia and in the south by Japan.[133] The Koreans suffered from these external intruders, but they suffered under internal aggressors as well, particularly under the corrupt officials of the Joseon dynasty.

The arrival of the first Christian missionaries coincided with a period of political instability. A number of transitions of power occurred in the late nineteenth century and the early twentieth century, transitions that upset the stability of the culture, driving many Koreans away from traditional expressions of religion and toward various new iterations

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[132] Samuel Hugh Moffet, *The Christians of Korea*, (New York: Friendship Press, 1962), 52. After arriving in Korea in 1890 Moffet remained in the country for around 46 years.

[133] Yung-Han Kim, "Christianity and Korean Church," 144. In regard to a military or political history of Korea, refer to Min-Won Lee, *Modern and Contemporary Age: Invasion, War, and Turbulent History of Korean Peninsula* (Chung-A Publishing House, 2008).

of religious belief and practice.[134] Yet, Korean biblical scholarship was not able to extensively progress during this first stage of cultural exchange with Western ideas, in part because of such continuous and devastating political turmoil exemplified by the Im-O Military Revolt (1882), the Gapsin Coup (1884), the Chinese-Japanese war (1894), the Russian-Japanese war (1904), the Japan-Korea Treaty (1905), the annexation of Japan in Korea (1910-1945), the Korean War (1950-1953, in armistice until today), and the dictatorship of Park Jung-Hee (from 1961 until he was assassinated in 1979). Under such unstable internal conditions and external turbulence, Korean biblical scholarship was not able to develop locally, but continued to rely on the missionaries' interpretations, which were taught from a Western Christian perspective.[135]

3.1.3. Theological Backgrounds of the Western Missionaries

On top of the previously discussed religious and cultural backgrounds that form the setting within which any Korean biblical scholarship takes place, the theological background of the Christian missionaries themselves played an influential role in the formation of biblical scholarship in Korea. The majority of early Christian missionaries to Korea were from fundamentalist traditions, traditions that were in reaction to the growing movement of rationalism that had been gaining ascendancy in the West toward

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[134] Those who were studying *Silhak*, the Realist School of Confucianism, for instance, were motivated to read the Bible in the latter period of the Joseon Dynasty, in an attempt to find a new hope in its pages and face up to the disappointing reality of the collapsing dynasty (Joong-Ho Jung, *New Interpretations of the Bible: Introduction in Korean Context*, 35).

[135] The primary concerns in the early period were focused on the authority of the Scripture: inspiration, inerrancy, and authorship of the Pentateuch. Tai-Il Wang, "Retrospect and Prospect of Old Testament Studies in Korea," *Korean Journal of Old Testament Studies* 37 (2010): 10-24.

the end of the nineteenth century.[136] Because of the fundamentalist ideals within which these missionaries were trained, their methods of biblical interpretation were reactionary and strict and placed a high value on a literalist interpretation of Scripture.[137] These missionaries' interpretations were primarily dogmatic. Without closely reading the texts within their ancient contexts, they extracted moralistic lessons, turning the characters of the biblical passages into examples of belief and action intended for our time as well as for biblical times.

This fundamentalist and homiletical method transferred easily to the Korean milieu because it was quite similar to the Confucian teaching style, which also utilized literal interpretations of religious texts and emphasized the moral teachings that could be extracted from these texts without contextual consideration of the texts in their original context, often making the heroes of religious tales into moral exemplars to be followed.[138] Additionally, under the constraints of constant political instability, soteriological (or redemptive historical) interpretations emphasizing an individual's salvation and also his/her afterlife were particularly prevalent. This emphasis had its parallel in the other major religion of Korea, Buddhism, which had as its aim the

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[136] Hee-Seok Moon, "History of the Korean Church's Interpretation of Hebrew Bible," *Theological Thought* 20 (1978): 143-44. Moon earned his Ph.D from Emory University in 1979 and subsequently taught at Presbyterian University & Theological Seminary in Seoul.

[137] As Arther J. Brown describes, the early missionaries to Korea were "like the Puritans" in that "they were extremely conservative, and they regard higher criticism and liberal theology as heresy." Il-Sun Jang, "Old Testament Education of the Early Missionaries in Korea," *Theological Studies* 29 (1988): 142.

[138] This tendency to have a more practical and homiletical focus in text studies began with regrets over the previously theoretical studies of the Joseon dynasty. In the late period of the dynasty, scholars, represented by Yak-Yong Jung, developed *Silhak*, the Realist School of Confucianism, which emphasized embodied and practical knowledge to reform the society. Accordingly, their studies were focused on applications to daily lives (Joong-Ho Jung, *New Interpretations of the Bible: Introduction in Korean Context*, 34-35).

redemption of the individual from the corrupted systems of this world into a glorious afterlife.[139] The missionaries' methods of fundamentalist interpretation were quite effective among Koreans because similar methods of interpretation and emphasis were already widespread in Confucianism, which emphasized moralism, and Buddhism, which emphasized life after-death.

3.2. Developments of Korean Hebrew Bible Scholarship

Summarizing a century of Korean Hebrew Bible scholarship (1900-2000), Jung-Woo Kim published an article, "The Historical-Critical Method and Twentieth Century Old Testament Studies in Korea," in which he categorizes Hebrew Bible studies in Korea into five stages: 1. The Budding Period (1900-1927); 2. The Rooting Period (1928-1956); 3. The Branching Period (1957-1972); 4. The Flowing Period (1973-1989); 5. The Fruition Period (1990-2000).[140] A brief summary of each period is as follows.

The Budding Period (1900-1927) saw the formation of the necessary infrastructure that would be the foundation for Korean biblical studies, such as the publishing of the first Korean Bible translations and the establishment of seminaries.[141]

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[139] Yong-Tae Park, "A Study of the Persian Gnostic Religions' Influence on the Formation of Mahayana Buddhism," *Journal of the Korean Association for Buddhist Studies* 88 (2018): 137-42.

[140] Jung-Woo Kim, "The Historical-Critical Method and Twentieth Century Old Testament Studies in Korea," *Chongshin Theological Journal* 5 (2000): 17. This was a cooperative work done previously by Cyrus Moon (1978) and Dong-Shik Ryu (1982). Kim earned a Ph.D. from Westminster Theological Seminary in 1989 and taught at Chongshin University and Seminary.

[141] Here the Korean Bible means the Bible translated into the Korean language. Concerning the Bible translated into Chinese, which was for the educated class of Korea, such a translation goes back to 1816 when it was brought to Korea (Joong-Ho Jung, *New Interpretations of the Bible: Introduction in Korean Context*, 25). Major seminaries established in that period are Pyungyang Theological Seminary in 1901 (Pyungyang is in North Korea), the Methodist Theological Seminary (1905), and the Holiness Theological Seminary (1911) (Jung-Woo Kim, "The Historical-Critical Method and Twentieth Century Old Testament Studies in Korea," 18).

The Rooting Period (1928-1956) was a time of development for the major denominations of the Korean church, which came to form their own identities apart from the oversight of Western missionaries and churches.[142] At the same time, this was a period of persecution, as Korean churches were forced to practice Japanese *Shinto* (Emperor) worship.[143] As J. Kim states, "Korean theological studies experienced confusion and cessation during the last period of Japanese colonialism until their liberation at the end of World War II (1945) and again afterwards during the Korean war (1950-1953)."[144]

After the Korean War, which still remains in armistice since 1953, in the Branching Period (1957-1972) biblical scholarship dramatically improved because numerous Korean scholars returned to Korea after years of study abroad.[145] Young-Jin Min observes that after the 1960s and entering the 1970s, Korean studies of the Hebrew

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[142] Jung-woo Kim, "The Historical-Critical Method and Twentieth Century Old Testament Studies in Korea," 20.

[143] Hee-Seok Moon, "History of the Korean Church's Interpretation of Hebrew Bible," *Theological Thought* 20 (1978): 146.

[144] During the persecution, the Japanese government forbid sermons from the Hebrew Bible, especially sermons which spoke of freedom from enslavement and escaping to the promised land (Jung-Woo Kim, "The Historical-Critical Method and Twentieth Century Old Testament Studies in Korea," 21-22); The Japanese prohibited Korean Christians from reading the prophetic messages of restoration of Israel and their contextual salvation history (Sung-Ae Ha, "An Invitation for Postcolonial Reading of the Prophetic Tradition Claiming Imperial Powers as God's Agents in the Context of American Colonialism in Korea," 181).

[145] There were only 4 Koreans who studied the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament abroad from the time of the arrival of the first Christian missionaries in Korea in the 1880s until the end of the 1960s; 6 Koreans studied abroad in the 1970s; 16 in the 1980s; 43 in the 1990s; 60 in the 2000s. Regarding the countries in which Korean Hebrew Bible scholars studied abroad, the United States was predominant in the early years, but the spread of countries and schools became diverse later. According to Sang-Rae Kim's research in 2011, there were 47 Koreans who studied in the U.S.; 20 in the U.K; 17 in Germany; 7 in Israel; 2 each in South Africa, Australia, and the Netherlands; and 1 in France, Switzerland, and Japan (Sang-Rae Kim, 'An Analytical Study of Academic Trends in Doctoral Dissertations in the OT Studies by Korean Scholars (1931-2010): *Korean Journal of Old Testament Studies* 17: (2011): 187-88). The fact that the predominant number of Koreans studying abroad are found in the U.S. is related to the Immigration Act of 1965 (John Ahn "Toward a Methodology for Korean and Korean American Biblical Interpretation" in *Landscapes of Korean and Korean American Biblical Interpretation* [ed. John Ahn; Atlanta, Ga.: SBL Press, [2019], 13).

Bible grew both in quality and quantity incomparably more than earlier.[146] This was a time of studying the Bible based on methods developed in Biblical Studies proper rather than on the methods and within the doctrinal constraints of Systematic Theology, as was done during the earlier periods.[147] Critical scholarship of the Hebrew Bible also came to be promoted as a way of responding to the human rights violations that were taking place under the controversial political practices of Park Jung-Hee (1961-1979). The Bible was no longer being viewed as a work which promoted a high moral standard for the individual, a standard that tended to keep the status quo, but rather as a work that spoke to the values of the disenfranchised and powerless against those with power who would use their power as a tool for oppression—if the interpreter knew how to read it with a more critical eye.[148]

During the Flowering Period (1973-1989), biblical scholars created new forms of Korean theologies. The first attempt to form a specifically Korean theology led to the development of *ToeChakHwa* theology, which was an indigenized theology popularized in the 1960s.[149] Several theologians would also try to interpret the Bible in such a way that it would be compatible with other Korean religious systems. For example, Sun-Hwan

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[146] Y. Min (1982) collected the materials published in Korean and categorized them into two: studies on the basic tools in interpreting the Hebrew Bible and studies on the individual texts in the Hebrew Bible (Young-Jin Min, "Old Testament Theology in 1970s," *Theological Thought* 38 [1982]: 5-36).

[147] Hee-Seok Moon, "History of the Korean Church's Interpretation of Hebrew Bible," *Theological Thought* 20 (1978): 149.

[148] The 1970s is also an important period in Biblical studies in the Western world. The paradigm of the biblical commentators began to regard the Scripture as a canon and as literature, focusing on the texts themselves instead of reorganizing them (Leo G. Perdue, *The Collapse of History Reconstructing Old Testament Theology* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994], 153).

[149] Joong-Ho Jung, *New Interpretations of the Bible: Introduction in Korean Context*, 26.

Byeon attempted to bring the Bible into conversation with Buddhism;[150] Sung-Bum Yoon with Confucianism;[151] Dong-Shik Ryu with Taoism as well as Confucianism and Buddhism.[152] Yet, they experienced strong opposition from other Christian groups. Byeon, for example, was dismissed from his presidency at Methodist Theological University and was even defrocked over his position on interreligious dialogue. Korea would also see the formation of its own version of liberation theology, parallel to the liberation theology that was developed in Latin America in the 1960s. This was *Minjung* theology (theology for *minjungs*—marginalized people), which appeared in Korea in the 1970s and the 1980s.[153] *Minjung* is a social term, which is also used to refer to the parallel social group in Latin America's postcolonial movement.[154] Korean history reflects a series of oppression by foreign powers, and thus every individual who can identify himself/herself with *minjung* and *han* (irresolvable internal grudge,

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[150] Sun-Hwan Byeon studied at Drew University and Universität Basel, Switzerland, where he earned his doctoral degree. He taught at Methodist Theological University, Seoul and served as the president of this school.

[151] Sung-Bum Yoon earned his doctoral degree from Universität Basel, Switzerland under Karl Barth. He became the president of Methodist Theological University, Seoul in 1977.

[152] Dong-Shik Ryu earned a Ph.D from Boston University and taught at Methodist Theological University and Yonsei University until his retirement in 1988.

[153] *Minjung* is a Korean word which consists of two Chinese characters: *min* and *jung*—meaning the mass of people. *Minjungs* were alienated from the powers of wealth, high status, and privileged positions and passively subject to social constraints by the higher class. Hee-Suk Christ Moon, "An Old Testament Understanding of Minjung," in *Minjung Theology: People as the Subjects of History* (ed. The Commission on Theological Concerns of the Christian Conference of Asia; London: Zed Press, 1983), 124.

[154] Num-Sub Lee, "Latin American Church and Postcolonial Theology Movement," 494. Yet, there is an important distinction between the two: whereas in Latin America poverty is the single biggest problem, in Korea the social and cultural issues that arise from political repression are just as important as economic oppression. Sung-A Park, "Minjung Theology: A Korean Contextual Theology," *The Indian Journal of Theology* 33 (October-December 1984): 7.

dissatisfaction) might be said to represent the nation's collective emotion.[155] *Minjung* theology has tried to resolve the *han* of *minjung* by interpreting the Scripture through *minjung*'s, marginalized people's, eyes.[156]

At the same time, numerous feminist theologians appeared during this period and were actively involved in biblical scholarship. Historically, women were socially constrained according to the precepts of hierarchical Confucian society, and they were subject to marginalization by members of the upper class. Patriarchal societies particularly result in the suffering of women. However, with the advent of *Minjung* theology, women were no longer merely "objects," but "subjects."[157] Many women in this milieu became leading voices of reform in the biblical studies and theology movement.[158]

Finally, the Fruition Period (1990-2000) saw the rise of critical and literary methods and tools for biblical interpretation, such as literary interpretation, genre analysis, the rhetorical approach, the canonical approach, inter-textuality, and the

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[155] I-Doo Chon, *A Study on the Structure of Han* (Seoul: Literature and Intelligence Press, 1993), 247.

[156] Even though *Minjung* Theology contributed to a new perspective in a Korean context, it was not widely adopted because it focused mainly on marginalized groups without covering the whole group of people. Joong-Ho Jung, *New Interpretations of the Bible: Introduction in Korean Context*, 27.

[157] The Korean women's theology movement began in the 1980s. Even though it was initially influenced by American women's theology, which began in the United States in 1960s, it has developed under Korea's distinct culture, Confucian patriarchal hierarchy, and historical background. For example, the Korean movement needed to find a place for Comfort Women, women who were forced into sexual slavery by the Imperial Japanese Army in occupied territories before and during World War II, which was a class of women that had no true parallel in America.

[158] Among the feminist Old Testament/Hebrew Bible scholars, Kyung-Sook Lee is one of the earliest and representative. She earned a D.Theol. from Göttingen in 1981 and taught at Ehwa University, where she is now an Emeritus Professor. The University is a leading school for feminist theologians. Mary Scranton (1982-1909), an American Methodist missionary, started the school in 1886, making it the first private school in Korea to educate women.

narrative approach.[159] As J. Kim summarizes, "The trends in this period show that, in a sense, the academic gap between the liberals and the conservatives had been narrowed down, and we may say that biblical studies have become democratized."[160]

Because of this general trend of adopting tools and methods developed in the Western world, there was extensive overlap between Korean Hebrew Bible scholarship and its Western counterpart. J. Kim summarizes the state of Korean biblical scholarship by saying, "There is no substantial difference between Korean biblical studies and Western biblical studies in their methodologies, general directions, and fields of studies."[161] This wholesale adoption of foreign methods has left a gap in Korean biblical scholarship, a gap that ought to have been filled with tools and methods that better fit the Asian context. The lack, for example, of postcolonial methods utilized in biblical research in Korea, a nation that has experienced endless invasion in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries, is something of an oddity and proof that Korean biblical scholarship primarily relied on Western scholarship.[162] Thus, among recent Korean biblical scholars, some have been trying to fill this gap and interpret the Bible in Korean perspectives and contexts. For example, Jong-Soo Park (1995) published a book containing contextualized

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[159] In this period, there was abundant research written using these various methods and tools, such as a work of literary interpretation by Dong-Won Lim, one of genre analysis by Sung-Soo Gwon, the rhetorical approach was used by Jung-Woo Kin, the canonical approach by Jung-Woo Kim, inter-textuality by Kwon-Suk Yang, linguistic-structural analysis by Ji-Chan Kim, and the narrative approach was utilized by Sang-Bum Shim (Jung-Woo Kim, "The Historical-Critical Method and Twentieth Century Old Testament Studies in Korea," 30).

[160] Ibid., 31.

[161] Ibid.

[162] Dong-Gu Han, "Old Testament Studies in the Korean Context," *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 98 (2015): 41. Han earned a D.Theol. from Johann Wolfgang Goethe-Universität in 1995 and teaches Old Testament at Pyeongtaek University, Pyeongtaek.

interpretations of biblical texts, comparing the biblical tales to Korean folkloric stories.[163] Several leading Korean scholars of the Hebrew Bible would follow. Joong-Ho Jung (2010) tried to interpret the Bible by showing how those texts were relevant to Asian contexts.[164] Tai-Il Wang (2012) also compared biblical stories to Asian classics. [165] Yoon-Jong Yoo (2013) argued that there is a need to develop more contextualized biblical interpretational methods, such as *Minjung* theology, *ToeChakHwa* theology (indigenized theology), Post-Colonial theology, Feminist theology, Multi-Cultural theology, and also comparative studies between Israelite history and Korean history.[166] Myung-Soo Suh (2015) has expressed regrets that Korean Hebrew Bible scholarship has been too preoccupied with Western scholars' interpretations to discover and develop Korean interpretations.[167]

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[163] J. Park shows numerous comparative connections between the stories in the Hebrew Bible and Korean folktales, such as the creation stories (Gen 1:1-2:4a) and epic creation stories in Korean traditions; flood stories (Gen 6:9-9:19) and two Korean flood stories; Sodom and Gomorah (Gen 19:1-26) and Korean geographical tales; Bethel stories (Gen 28:10-22) and the *Mireuksa* Temple story; the story of Moses' birth (Exod 2-6) and the story of Yoo Choong-Ryul; the Abraham-Isaac story (Gen 22:1-14) and the filial piety story in *The Heritage of the Three States*; Solomon's wise judgement (1 Kings 3) and the story of the wise local governor (Jong-Soo Park, *A Study on the Hebrew Narrative: Trans-cultural Understanding of the Bible and the Korean Context* [Anyang: Geulteo, 1995], 45-96). Park earned a Ph.D from Drew University in 1993 and teaches Old Testament at Kangnam University, Yongin.

[164] Joong-Ho Jung, *New Interpretations of the Bible: Introduction in Korean Context* (Daegu: Keimyung University Press, 2010). Jung earned a Ph.D from Emory University and teaches Old Testament at Keimyung University, Daegu.

[165] Tai-Il Wang, *The Study of Confucian Classics and Biblical Interpretation for Koreans*, (Seoul: Christian Literature of Society of Korea, 2012). Wang earned a Ph.D from Claremont Graduate School in 1991 and taught at Methodist Theological University, Seoul.

[166] Yoon-Jong Yoo, "The Old Testament Interpretation in the Korean Context," *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 89 (2013): 5-28. Yoo earned a Ph.D from Cornell University in 1999 and teaches at Pyeongtaek University, Pyeongtaek.

[167] Myung-Soo Suh, "An Investigation on the Possibility of Old Testament Studies in Korea," *Korean Journal of Old Testament Studies* 58 (2015): 209-31. Suh earned a Ph.D from University of Sheffield in 1998 and teaches at Hyupsung University, Hwaseong.

3.3. Interpretations of the Jephthah Narrative by Korean Scholars (Judg 10:6-12:7)

Due to the previous religious, cultural, and political backgrounds of Korea, the academic progress for critical study of the Hebrew Bible was slow for the first several decades. There were a few who studied abroad, but under the unstable socio-political situations and the missionary-led scholarship, Koreans were not able to be actively engaged. Since the missionaries were fundamentalists, the first period of scholarship was focused primarily on interpretations of the biblical texts that were theologically driven and literal.

In the beginning of Korean biblical scholarship, the primary job of the scholar was to defend the authority of the Bible (with a focus on its inerrancy and the unity between the Hebrew Bible and the Christian New Testament). On the other hand, scholars who came back to Korea from studying abroad and who were influenced by the critical theories that had gained ascendency in western schools, began to present more critical interpretations to the Korean marketplace of ideas. Working within a Deuteronomistic approach, scholars began to criticize Jephthah and even question Yahweh's indifference concerning Jephthah's daughter and to invest theological meaning to this indifference. With the advent of *Minjung* Theology, feminist scholars proposed more critical readings of the text, claiming that from a post-colonial perspective, Jephthah's daughter ought to be understood as a heroine.

I will group the interpretations of the Jephthah narrative by Korean scholars into four groups: (1) conservative readings in defense of Jephthah; (2) readings utilizing critical methods; (3) feminist readings bringing Jephthah's daughter onto the stage; (4)

contextualized readings in an Asian perspective.

3.3.1. Conservative Readings in Defense of Jephthah

The early interpretations of Korean Bible scholarship of the Jephthah narrative valued literal readings, or as Jae-Buhm Hwang describes it, "biblicism."[168] Any method of criticism in regard to the biblical texts is treated as impious and out of bounds for conservative commentators. Their theological interpretations were literal and often sought to defend leadership figures such as Abraham, Moses, and David, as men in such leadership positions were held in high regard. Jephthah, as one of the Israelite judges, was understood to have such high authority also. Their praise of Jephthah was supported, it was argued, by biblical references outside of the narrative. For example, the prophet Samuel refers to Jephthah as one of the representative judges along with Jerub-Baal and Barak (1 Sam 12:11).[169] Also, a New Testament passage refers to Jephthah in the list of the heroes of faith: Gideon, Barak, Samson, and Jephthah (Heb 11:32).[170] Like other heroes, Jephthah accomplished God's promised deliverance. Utilizing such support from far outside the immediate literary context of the Jephthah narrative was seen as a

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168 Jae-Buhm Hwang, "The Biblicism of the Korean Presbyterian Church: Its Origin and Early Development," *Studies in Religion* 71 (2013): 181-209. Hwang earned a Ph.D from Union Theological Seminary in New York, and is a professor of Systematic Theology at Keimyung University, Daegu.

169 This passage (1 Sam 12) introduces the transition from judgeship to kingship in ancient Israel. Here, Jephthah is introduced to emphasize Saul who also defeated Ammon, as narrated in the previous chapter (In-Bae Lee, "Literary Understanding of the Jephthah Narrative," 2). In the same manner, "Jephthah is remembered for his military success and his exemplary leadership qualities. In the eyes of the narrator his daughter's death is unrelated, unimportant, and better forgotten" (Deborah Abecassis, "Jephthah's Daughter in the Jewish Exegetical Tradition," 20).

170 In addition, a passage from the Apocrypha mentions the judges, "each of them famous in their own right, who never fell into idolatry and never abandoned the Lord" (Ecclesiasticus 46:11).

legitimate method of interpretation, for the unity of the whole Bible—both the Hebrew Bible and Greek New Testament—was one of the most important presuppositions of these commentators.

Here are typical examples from Yoon-Sun Park's commentary (1976): "Jephthah is an authentic believer who faithfully prays."[171] "God will exalt Jephthah, who keeps his faith in the midst of the people's contempt and persecution."[172] "The persons who used to persecute him are to bow down before him after all" (quoting a passage from Revelation 3:9). "Jephthah trusts only Yahweh, who is the true judge."[173] Park further defends Jephthah against any accusations of mistreatment of his daughter, saying a burnt offering does not necessarily mean by burning the sacrifice. In this narrative, it means an ascending offering. Since burning human beings is prohibited, Jephthah, who is well aware of the Law, must not practice the superstition.[174] According to his reasoning, if Jephthah had committed the sin, he must have been cursed and died right away (quoting Lev 20:2-5), but he judged in Israel even 6 years.[175] "Most of all, the New Testament praises Jephthah as a man of faith" (Heb 11:32).[176] In the same manner, Hong-Jeon Kim

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[171] Yoon-Sun Park, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (Seoul: YongUmSa, 1976), 269. The translation here and following are my own. Park (1905-1988) studied at Westminster Theological Seminary, Philadelphia, and taught at Chongchin University and opened Hapdong Theological Seminary in Suwon, dreaming of a better Reformed school. He was one of the most influential theologians and commentators among conservative scholars during the early stage of theological scholarship in Korea.

[172] Ibid., 269.

[173] Ibid., 271.

[174] Ibid., 273.

[175] Ibid.

[176] Ibid.

(1989) also describes Jephthah as an outstanding believer and a good example for believers.[177] Kim maintains that Jephthah's brothers' act of kicking him out reveals their fault, since Jephthah should have been eligible to receive an inheritance in his father's house based on his legal bond to his father in the patriarchal society.[178] However, Kim's interpretation is based on Korean legal practice rather than the Hebrew Bible. According to biblical evidence, such as Deut 21:15-17 and Gen 25:6, sons who can claim the legal right to inherit are limited to those who were born of a wife—either a beloved wife or even a hated wife or a maid servant wife. It is difficult to find any evidence for a legal inheritance claim in Jephthah's case, whose mother may not have been a wife in any sense.

Contemporary conservative scholars, such as Dong-Soo Lee (2012), continue to defend Jephthah as a great leader and faithful and orthodox believer, claiming,

> Jephthah is a true hero according to the precepts of his faith and other biblical passages. He was unjustly expelled, but Yahweh repaid him. The narrative clearly records his anointing with the Spirit of Yahweh (11:29), which implies at least some favor was bestowed upon him by Yahweh's spirit. Jephthah knew the Torah and the ancient practices of Israelite religion well, because in later letters to King Arnon he showed familiarity

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[177] Hong-Jeon Kim, *Judges II* (Seoul: Sung Yak Press, 1989), 93. Kim earned a Ph.D from Union Theological Seminary in Virginia and wrote numerous books on the Hebrew Bible.

[178] Hong-Jeon Kim, *Judges II*, 94.

with the events recorded in the book of Numbers.[179]

In the same manner, Gwang-Ho Lee points to Jephthah's mention of Yahweh in the negotiation with the elders, and from that data he argues that Jephthah is a faithful believer, revering and trusting Yahweh rather than human beings.[180]

Overall, conservative scholars regard Jephthah as one of the representative judges, redeeming the Israelites from oppressive enemies. There are some diversities of opinion concerning the interpretation of Jephthah's sacrifice, whether it ought to be considered literally or as symbolic. For example, Dong-Soo Lee claims that Jephthah could not have offered his daughter as a burnt offering because Jephthah was pious,[181] whereas Jong-Seok Lee supports a literal interpretation of the Hebrew word *olah*, which, he claims, is never used in the Bible other than to refer to an actual offering.[182] Despite this difference, both of them are united in their attempts to defend Jephthah as a righteous and faithful leader of Israel. This approach is not only motivated by biblical conservatism and circumscribed by Christian theological commitments, but it also rests very comfortably within the Confucian value set, which places high value on the authority of public leaders

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[179] D. Lee admits that Jephthah does have a weakness, namely, trying to build his own kingdom. However, he defends him, saying, "as the background was the era of mixture, his faith was like that" (Dong-Soo Lee, *A Redemptive Historical Reading of the Book of Judges* [Seoul: Grisim, 2012), 245-46). Translations from this work are my own. Lee earned a Ph.D from Minnesota Graduate School of Theology and is a Professor of Old Testament at Baekseok University in Seoul.

[180] Gwang-Ho Lee, *A Study on the Books of Judges and Ruth: Redemptive-Historical Exposition* (Seoul: Church and Bible Publishing House, 2014), 138. Lee earned a Ph.D from Catholic University in Daegu. He is a pastor, lecturer, and writer.

[181] Dong-Soo Lee, *A Redemptive Historical Reading of the Book of Judges*, 266-68.

[182] Jong-Seok Lee, "A Study on the Judge Jephthah's Vow (Judg 11:29-40)" (Th.M thesis; Seoul: Chongshin University Theological Seminary, 1986), 17.

and on a literal reading of texts. Noting this overlap is important for understanding the prevalence of this approach in Korea as well as for understanding some of the explicitly contextual approaches discussed further below.

3.3.2. Readings from a Critical Deuteronomistic Perspective

Another group of studies of the Jephthah narrative relates the narrative to the Deuteronomistic viewpoint and utilizes the tools of literary criticism, including Narrative and Rhetorical-Critical reading methods.[183] Still, because of the conservative tendency of Asian culture, the majority of scholars tend to avoid or hesitate to be engaged with source-historical criticism. Yet, they still use a close-reading with a theological-critical viewpoint to some degree. In this frame, scholars tend to view Jephthah as a pagan and even a vicious figure, based on the Deuteronomistic perspective.

Viewing Jephthah's vow as pagan, Gyu-Sung Kang (2006) comments that Jephthah's vow-making is a kind of Shamanistic behavior aimed at fulfilling his own ambition through a one-way negotiation with deities.[184] "In this manner, Jephthah's behavior is unjustifiable because there is no hint that Yahweh ever requires it of Jephthah. He just made an unnecessary vow at best."[185] As expressed in the title of Kang's article, "God's Pain, Unfortunate Judge Jephthah," Kang understands Jephthah as a figure whose

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[183] Sin-Ho Lim, "A Study on the Theological Unity of Jephthah's Story (Judg 10:6-12:7) from the Perspective of the Deuteronomistic Historian." *Old Testament Forum* 22 (2016): 38.

[184] Gyu-Sung Kang, "God's Pain, Unfortunate Judge Jephthah: A Literary Consideration on Judg 10:6-12:7," *Church and Culture* 17 (2006): 163. Kang earned a Ph.D from Chongshin University (under Dr. Ji-Chan Kim) and teaches at Korean Bible University in Seoul.

[185] Ibid., 153. All translations from this work are my own.

preoccupation with his own selfish desires causes pain for Yahweh and his community.

More critically, Ji-Chan Kim (2013) believes that the appointment of Jephthah, who is a son of prostitution and an expellee, reflects the society's degradation, for only a degraded society would put such a degraded figure into a position of power.[186] Kim's comment seems to me to be based on the Confucian assumption that public leaders should have exemplary and praiseworthy qualifications. However, Kim fails to consider that such qualifications are not essential when it comes to Israelite judges, whose ranks include the left-handed (Ehud), female (Deborah), and sexually addicted (Samson), all of whom were used through the empowerment of Yahweh's spirit. The qualification of an Israelite judge is not based on family line or even personal ability, but charismatic calling by the spirit of Yahweh to perform military duty. Jephthah's experiencing the charismatic presence itself is enough to qualify him for the judgeship. Although, it may be possible that the reason Jephthah had to undergo a communal vetting process before becoming a judge while the other judges do not may be that those judges did not have the experience of deportation as Jephthah did.

Regarding the Jephthah narrative as a miniature of the book of Judges, Jae-Gu Kim (2009) posits that the Gileadite community had fallen away from Yahwism and into Baalism.[187] Jephthah sacrifices his daughter not to Yahweh but to Baal, and the whole

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[186] Ji-Chan Kim, *From Jordan River to Babylon* (Seoul: Life Book, 2013), 130. Kim earned a Th.D from University of Kampen, Netherland in 1992 and teaches at Chongshin University and Seminary, Seoul.

[187] Yahweh, whom Jephthah mentions seven times (11:9, 21, 23, 24, 31, 35, 12:3), is just another name of Baal in this view (Jae-Gu Kim, "The Daughter of Jephthah, Sacrificed for Whom?" *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 64 [2009): 47]. Kim earned a Ph.D from the University of Toronto and currently runs a private academy, Haim Bible Academy, in addition to writing books.

community was complicit in the act. Such communal approval for the sacrifice is necessary, J. Kim argues, for the ritual could not be performed in a pure Yahwistic setting, as such a thing was abhorrent in Yahweh worship.[188] To prove that there had been a communal rejection of Yahweh and a communal acceptance of Baal J. Kim points to parallels between the Baal Cycle and the Jephthah narrative. For example, Kim explains that Jephthah's fighting with the Ephraimites (Judg 12:1-6) was done in order to keep his headship position just as Baal's fighting with Mot was to maintain his previous victory.[189] Even though J. Kim's interpretation of the Jephthah narrative in relation to the Baal Cycle is provocative, he is only able to support his thesis by vague thematic connections.

More recently (2016), Shin-Ho Lim discusses Jephthah's pagan vow and its fulfillment in relation to the Deuteronomistic viewpoint. He asserts that the tragic civil war (Judg 12:1-6) is a result of Jephthah's personal sin—sacrificing his daughter.[190] Lim's further criticism of Jephthah is that Jephthah made an unnecessary vow, for Yahweh's spirit had already come upon him before he made the vow.[191] However, I wonder if Jephthah can be criticized by his act of making a vow *itself*, since we can find other passages that speak of the making of a vow in a desperate circumstance, such as

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[188] Ibid., 45.

[189] Ibid., 44-46.

[190] S. Lim organizes the Jephthah narrative into three sections: 1) sins of Israelites and the Ammonites war (10:6-11:28), 2) Jephthah's victory and human sacrifice (11:29-40), and 3) Jephthah and the Ephraimites war (12:1-7), with the third part acting as a conclusion for the entire narrative (Shin-Ho Lim, "A Study of the Rhetorical Unity of the Jephthah's Story [Judg 10:6-12:7] from the Perspective of the Israelite Internal War," 141).

[191] Ibid., 153. However, it is doubtful if Jephthah ever realized the spirit had come upon him, because the text is not explicit on this point. If Jephthah is blameworthy because he made a vow even after the coming of Yahweh's spirit, Gideon, is more blameworthy because he does not trust Yahweh even after his encounter with Yahweh's spirit (6:34-35); cf. Byeong-Hyun Song, *Exposimentary Judges*, 268.

with Jacob (Gen 28:20-22) and in the imminent Israel-Arad battle (Num 21:1-3). Jephthah made the vow as a leader of the community to win the battle, a battle that was a crisis for the continuous existence of the community. Thus, even though the content of the vow remains a serious issue to be resolved, the act of making a vow is not totally blamable no matter if Jephthah is understood as a Yahwistic figure or not.

Other scholars approach the narrative from the broader context within the book of Judges. Sung-Min Yeo (2007) compares Jephthah and Abimelech, focusing on the literary similarities and interconnections between the two stories.[192] Hee-Gwon Kim (2007) uses the example of Gideon to point out his negative influences in relation to the judges Abimelech and Jephthah.[193] More broadly, Won-Jae Jung (2010) pays attention to the function of the Jephthah narrative in the context of the whole book of Judges.[194] He argues that Jephthah's vow serves as a foreshadowing of what is going to follow at the end of the book. Jephthah's daughter is placed right at the center of the book, and she is the first victim among the women, which includes a Levite's concubine (Judg 19), the Jabesh Gileadite women (Judg 21:10-12) and the Benjamite women (Judg 21:16-23), all of whom were victimized at the end of the book. In this manner, the Jephthah's daughter episode (Judg 11:34-40) functions as a preview for the conclusion of the entire book.[195]

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[192] Sung-Min Yeo, "Literary Relations between the Abimelech-Jephthah Narratives," (Th.M thesis; Seoul: Westminster Theological Seminary University), 2007.

[193] Hee-Gwon Kim, *Reading with the Kingdom of God Theology: Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (Seoul: Blessed Person, 2007), 269-91. He earned a Ph.D from Princeton Theological Seminary and teaches Old Testament at Soongsil University, Seoul.

[194] Won-Jae Jung, "Jephthah's Human Sacrifice and Yahweh's Silence" (Th.M thesis; Daejeon: Baptist Theological Seminary, 2010).

[195] Won-Jae Jung, "Jephthah's Human Sacrifice and Yahweh's Silence," 9.

Recently, Geun-Jo Ahn (2016), focused on the daughter's death utilizing a Rhetorical-Critical reading of the text in dialogue with feminist scholarship.[196] This is quite an interesting exercise in that Ahn includes Yahweh in his discussion, in contrast to those previous scholars who attempted to argue that Jephthah was a follower of Baal. Also, he focuses on the daughter, quoting feminist scholars such as Exum and Fewell. He views the responsibility for the daughter's death as lying with Yahweh because throughout the narrative Yahweh is silent.[197] Where is Yahweh who stopped Abraham when his son was at the brink of death awaiting sacrifice, Ahn asks. I, however, would argue that Ahn removes too much responsibility from Jephthah and that the comparison with the *Akedah* does not hold up in the details. The story in Gen 22, for instance, puts God and Abraham in dialogue with one another, making Yahweh an active and responsible character in the sacrifice, whereas the sacrifice in the Judges story is introduced by Jephthah's monologue. In addition to placing responsibility upon Yahweh, Ahn also attributes the death of the daughter to the people, who did nothing to prevent her death.[198] I would also emphasize the accountability of the elders in particular for not

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[196] Geun-Jo Ahn, "Jephthah's Vow and God's Silence: Rhetorical-Critical Reading on Judg 10:7-11:40" *Theological Forum* 83 (2016): 225-27. Ahn earned a Ph.D from Boston University in 2004 and teaches at Hoseo University, Choenan.

[197] J. C. Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992), 45-78.

[198] On this point Ahn is in dialogue with feminists such as D. N. Fewell, "Judges," and C. A. Newsom and S. H. Ringe, eds. *Women's Bible Commentary* (Louisville, KY: Westminster John Knox Press, 1992), 73-83.

trying to save her.[199] As was seen earlier, the Gileadite elders were responsible for mediating in the matter of Jephthah's banishment and return, yet, they disappear in the matter of the daughter's death.

3.3.3. Feminist Readings in Defense of Jephthah's Daughter

Further critical views on Jephthah were introduced by feminist scholars with the rise of the postcolonial movement. In the 1980s, numerous Korean feminist theologians emerged arguing that women ought no longer to be treated merely as "objects" but as "subjects." Many female scholars in this milieu became leading and active voices in the biblical interpretation movement.[200] With the advent of *Minjung* Theology, female theologians, a previously neglected social group, began to approach the narrative from a feminist perspective. Yoon-Kyung Lee interprets the entire book of Judges in the context of violence which is carried out by men against socially weak people, such as children and women. According to her interpretation, Jephthah made his daughter an innocent scapegoat.[201] Feminist scholars tend to shift attention away from Jephthah and instead pay close attention to the daughter. In the final analysis they view the daughter, who

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[199] Even though some Korean scholars (Won-Jae Jung, "Jephthah's Human Sacrifice and Yahweh's Silence"; Geun-Jo Ahn, "Jephthah's Vow and God's Silence: Rhetorical-Critical Reading on Judg 10:17-11:40") outspokenly blame Yahweh for not helping Jephthah's daughter (female) whereas this deity previously helped Isaac (male), in my view such accusations cannot rightly be maintained. This is so for the simple reason that Yahweh has no conversation in the Judges' tale with anyone including Jephthah, who repeatedly attempted to talk to Yahweh. In this regard, discussing any action of Yahweh when it comes to Jephthah's daughter is not an issue in Judg 11, for Yahweh is a non-player in that story.

[200] Their main question is how the patriarchal features of the Bible are to be interpreted for women. G. J. Kim suggests separating non-patriarchal content, which is universal, from patriarchal content, which is limited to ancient Israel (Gil-Ja Kim, "Women of the Old Testament" [Th.M thesis; Mokwon Theological Seminary, 2003], 1).

[201] Yoon-Kyung Lee, "Reading the Jephthah's Daughter Story with René Girard's Scapegoat Mechanism," *Old Testament Forum* 49 (2013): 96-100.

actively allowed her father to fulfill his vow to Yahweh, as the heroine of the narrative.[202]

One of the earliest and most influential of these feminist scholars, Kyung-Sook Lee, focuses on the women's solidarity on behalf of Jephthah's daughter (Judg 11: 40). She argues that the focus of the narrative is to emphasize the solidarity of women who mourn for Jephthah's daughter. The women's annual rite prevents the Israelites from repeating the ritual killing of women in Israel. Unlike other feminist scholars, K. Lee criticizes those who blame Jephthah, such as P. Trible, pointing out that their interpretation is biased and anachronistic.[203] According to Lee, "Those who blame Jephthah for his impulsive character, irresponsibility, and lack of faith are blinded by anachronistic perspectives since the text does not originally show any outright criticism of Jephthah."[204] Lee's interpretation is based in a tradition-critical reading, which assumes that Jephthah used to be a minor judge. Arguing on the basis of Judg 12:7, which gives Jephthah's rulership as only six years, Lee believes that the war-hero tradition was a later creation that made Jephthah into a major judge, whereas the previous tradition presented Jephthah as a minor one. She argues that formulaic lines like, "the spirit of Yahweh came upon him" (Judg 11:29) and, "Yahweh gave the Ammonites into his

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[202] Shin-Ho Lim, "A Study of the Rhetorical Unity of the Jephthah's Story (Judg 10:6-12:7) from the Perspective of the Israelite Internal War" (Ph.D diss.; Daejeon: Graduate School of Hannam University, 2016), 21.

[203] Kyung-Sook Lee, "Jephthah's Daughter Story Emphasizing the Solidarity of Women," *Christian Thought* 202. (1994): 210.

[204] K. Lee considers the narrative a combination of Jephthah's tragic story and an account of the women's mourning practice. Kyung-Sook Lee, "Jephthah's Daughter Story Emphasizing the Solidity of Women," 196-98 (all translations from this work are my own). G. F. Moore also argues that the story originally fit into a tradition of a war-hero narrative; thus, the text emphasizes Jephthah's career as a soldier prior to judgeship (G. F. Moore, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on the Book Judges* [ICC 4; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1951], 282-84).

hand" (11:32) are insertions to emphasize Jephthah's developing role as a major judge and that the editor of the Jephthah narrative does not offer any outright criticism of Jephthah.[205] Paying attention to Jephthah's non-Israelite characteristics, Lee says that because of Jephthah's pagan origin, there is a connection between his role as a war leader and the practice of human sacrifice, which was the noblest of pagan rituals.[206] Even though her interpretation of the Jephthah narrative is quite insightful, it is limited in its wider applicability since it focuses on only certain verses, such as Judg 11:40 (the group activity of the women) and Judg 12:7 (where she finds a clue regarding Jephthah's character as a minor judge).

3.3.4. Reading from an Asian Perspective: A Recent Trend

Several scholars attempt to read the Jephthah narrative explicitly from an Asian perspective, though even the critical and feminist readings of Jephthah discussed above have been shaped by Asian views. In the article, "Jephthah's Daughter: Her Han and Satisfying It through Korean Shamanism" (1994), J. Lee praises Jephthah as well as his daughter, whereas other feminists praise and sympathize with Jephthah's daughter only. J. Lee, though her main discussion concerns Jephthah's daughter, sympathizes with Jephthah because he suffers on account of his own birth to a prostitute and a nameless

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[205] Kyung-Sook Lee, "Jephthah's Daughter Story Emphasizing the Solidity of Women," 199. Likewise, Noth, Richter, and Wellhausen regard Jephthah as a judge who was at first a minor character, but who later became a major judge through the redaction of Judges. M. Noth, *Überlieferungsgeschichtliche Studien* (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), 47-50; W. Richter, "Überlieferungen um Jephtah, Ri 10:17-12:6," *Bibl* 47 (1966): 485-556. Regarding this complexity, Klein comments that after Abimelech the paradigms of major and minor judges are jumbled together. Lillian R. Klein, *The Triumph of Irony in the Book of Judges*, 81-99.

[206] Kyung-Sook Lee, "Jephthah's Daughter Story Emphasizing the Solidity of Women," 199.

father. According to J. Lee's reading, Jephthah manages his life successfully in a foreign land even after being driven out of his father's house. Lee further notes that when the elders seek him out as a potential leader of Gilead, he entrusts himself completely to Yahweh, and thus his vow shows his total dependence on Yahweh.[207] When Jephthah lamented, it was because he was faithful to do what he had vowed.[208] This contrasts with those readings of Jephthah discussed above that argued that at best it is unclear whether or not Jephthah is meant to be understood as a Yahwistic figure. If Jephthah is not a true Yahwist, then J. Lee's praise of Jephthah may be unwarranted. However, in either view Jephthah could rightly be understood as a religious figure who trusts supernatural power to help himself win the battle and return home safely. J. Lee's praise of Jephthah, then, subverts the praise given to the character by the traditional Korean commentators on the story, for this praise is given not because Jephthah is naturally a worthy and noble leader, but because he tried to make the best of his negative life circumstances, overcoming his life crises instead of being discouraged or seeking revenge on the ones who mistreated him. This, as will be seen below, is strikingly similar to the heroic traits praised in certain Korean tales, which are themselves subversive to the traditional Confucian worldview.

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[207] Jeong-Hye Lee, "Jephthah's Daughter: Her Han and Satisfying It through Korean Shamanism," *Christian Thought* 423 [1994]: 214. Lee studied at Mokwon University, Daejeon. The journal, *Christian Thought*, is one of the oldest and best-known academic journals of biblical and theological studies in Korea.

[208] This is in contrast to Trible, who criticizes Jephthah for blaming his daughter when she came out to welcome him. Jephthah, in this view, is the one who caused the trouble out of his own impulsive and selfish vow. In the long run, Jephthah only expresses his feelings selfishly, and does not care about his daughter (Phyllis Trible, "Theological Reflection on the Mourning for the Sacrifice of Jephthah's Daughter," [trans. Yoon-Ok Lim; Seoul: Korean Theology Research, 1988], 109-114). Lee views the sacrifice of the daughter not as an aspect of Jephthah's pagan practice, but as a sacrifice in the midst of conflict, illustrating an integration by grafting nomadic culture to agricultural culture (Jeong-Hye Lee, "Jephthah's Daughter: Her Han and Satisfying It through Korean Shamanism," 232).

At the same time, Jeong-Hye Lee finds admirable elements in Jephthah's daughter, who was doubly misfortunate, bearing deeper *han* than her father since her grandmother was a prostitute and her father was a social expellee. J. Lee views the daughter as "a voluntary self-sacrificial heroine" rather than "a scapegoat," as Yoon-Kyung Lee holds.[209] The daughter's sacrifice was not an unfair sacrifice caused by her father's distrust in Yahweh. Instead, J. Lee proposes that the sacrifice is best understood in the context of the transition from a nomadic to an agricultural culture.[210] The daughter walked through the door of death of her own accord by coming out with tambourine and dancing to celebrate her father's triumph, as noble women among the ancient Israelite tribes were accustomed to do (Exod 15:20-21; 1 Sam 18:6-7). According to Lee's reading, even when the daughter came to know that she was destined for death, she first comforted her father. This can be interpreted to mean that the daughter was not a passive or maltreated woman. Lee greatly praises the daughter for being courageous. However, I will argue that Jephthah's daughter was under immense societal pressure to sacrifice herself for her father's wellbeing—in which case there is plausible maltreatment and coercion.

More recently, Samuel Cheon (2006) interprets the story of Jephthah's daughter

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[209] Yoon-Kyung Lee, "Reading the Jephthah's Daughter Story with René Girard's Scapegoat Mechanism," *Old Testament Forum* 49 (2013): 96-100; Jeong-Hye Lee, "Jephthah's Daughter: Her Han and Satisfying It through Korean Shamanism," 226-67.

[210] J. Lee postulates that the women's mourning practice is a form of rainfall incantation to ask God's favor for their farming. She compares this mourning practice to *gut*—a Korean ritual of exorcism to release the grudge of the deceased (Jeong-Hye Lee, "Jephthah's Daughter: Her Han and Satisfying It through Korean Shamanism," 232).

from an Asian cultural perspective.[211] In his comparative study of the Jephthah story with ShimChung-jeon (the story of ShimChung—"jeon" simply means "story"), he focuses on the *hyo* (filial piety) of Jephthah's daughter, who let herself be killed in order to fulfill her father's vow to Yahweh. Jephthah's daughter is likened to ShimChung, whose act of sacrifice was done to maintain her father's social dignity and also to keep her community safe by making the deadly stormy sea calm down. This aligns well with Jeong-Se Park's comments that in Asian literature it is characteristic for women to be sacrificed to maintain their own chastity, practice filial piety to their parents, and to die for the sake of their community.[212]

Different from the previous studies of the Jephthah narrative, I read Jephthah and his daughter in the context of the community, focusing on what the community did for them and to them instead of evaluating these characters from a theological and moral perspective. The community, I argue, used them without taking care of them. The Gileadites exiled Jephthah without warranted reason (11:7). Then, even when they came to Jephthah in the midst of their urgency, they were not fair to him. The elders, who were responsible for the communal matters, did not mediate to save Jephthah's daughter. Without getting any help from her community, she was put to death. Given this, she cannot wholly be regarded as an example of filial piety or as a voluntary sacrifice, since she had no other choice but to comply in such a patriarchal culture. The Israelite

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[211] Samuel Cheon, "Reconsidering Jephthah's Story in Asian Perspective," *Journal of Asian American Theology* 6 (2006): 30-45. Cheon earned a Ph.D from Graduate Theological Union in California, USA, and is teaching at Hannam University, Daejeon.

[212] Jung-Se Park, "Human Sacrifice Folktale and Sacrifice Perspective" in *MaejiNonchong* (Seoul: Yonsei University, 1986). Park earned a D.Min from San Francisco Theological Seminary in 1990, and taught at Yonsei University, Seoul.

community—both the inner-tribal (Gileadites) and inter-tribal units (Ephraimites)—are not supportive of Jephthah, even though he holds a headship position. The bigger communal problem, however, was caused by the Ephraimites, who did not respond to Jephthah's military request. They even threatened to burn down his house, a threat that echoes the ritual killing of his daughter as a burnt offering. Their quarrel culminates in inter-tribal destruction among the Israelites. Jephthah, who had been challenged by his family and tribe, is again confronted by the wider community and responds with the massacre of his own people.

To further shed light on the Jephthah narrative, I try to read it within an Asian perspective and in light of Asian literature. Two tales are used for this task, the story of Hong-Gildong (HongGildong-jeon) and the story of Shim Chung (ShimChung-jeon). The epic tale of Hong-Gildong, who shares similar features with Jephthah (an unfortunate family background and outstanding military ability), provides the modern reader insights for reading the social inferior's life journey in an ancient traditional world. With the tale of Shim Chung, a daughter's (ShimChung's) sacrifice on behalf of her father's vow provides the modern reader with opportunities to gain an Asian perspective with regard to Jephthah's daughter story.

3.4. Chapter Summary

During the last century of Korean Hebrew Bible scholarship there has been a shift from methods and interpretations that were deeply indebted to foreign missionaries to studies that sprang from Korean scholars themselves after the Korean War (1953) and

from passive and literal readings to active and critical readings after the return of the first major wave of Korean scholars who had studied abroad (1960s-1970s). Turning away from past biblical scholarship that relied primarily on Western methods, more and more leading scholars encouraged the reading of the Hebrew Bible from an Asian perspective. In this manner, reading the Jephthah narrative from an Asian perspective, that is, in comparison to traditional Asian literature, is a meaningful study.

My reading of the Jephthah narrative in the context of the community will contribute to this greater understand of Jephthah and his daughter. Even though Jephthah is blamable from a Deuteronomistic-theological perspective and in his relationship with his daughter, the narrative reveals more complexity to Jephthah and his daughter. Given the common cultural aspects and assumptions shared between East and West Asian cultures, viewing the story from an Asian perspective is a helpful method to deepen one's understanding of these two socially inferior characters as they act within the confines of their patriarchal society. Even though they strive to survive and even succeed as a part of their society, neither one of them would achieve final success. Ultimately, they are failed heroes, as the Korean tales of *minjung* heroes would lead us to predict.[213]

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[213] Dong-Il Jo, *Korean Narrative and Awareness of Minjung* (Seoul: JeongUmSa, 1985), 121-23.

Chapter 4. The Jephthah Narrative in an Asian Understanding

Rather than evaluate Jephthah and his daughter as individual characters from a Deuteronomistic viewpoint, like many Korean scholars have done, I will read the narrative with a focus on the community context within which Jephthah and his daughter suffered. Although Jephthah is called a "mighty warrior" (Judg 11:1), because he is born to a "prostitute," Jephthah is classified in Korean studies as a *minjung* (socially inferior) hero as opposed to a noble hero, that is, one who was born to a noble family, especially as such lineage is traced through the maternal line.[214] Because of his status as *minjung*, Jephthah is helplessly alone throughout the narrative: in relating to his half-brothers (11:1-3), negotiating with the elders (11:4-11), leading the Ammonite battle (11:12-33), sacrificing his daughter (11:34-40), and facing the challenge of the Ephraimites (12:1-6). If Jephthah constantly finds himself in difficult social situations, then his daughter, in the smaller section of narrative that focuses on her, is found to be in a doubly-weak position. She is a woman in a patriarchal society with an expelled father and a prostitute grandmother who had to be sacrificed to save her father's honor and rescue her community from a crisis. Both figures are socially marginalized, and thus suffer under their socio-cultural circumstances. In the midst of their misery, they hold *han* (an internal grudge), which gradually grows to fill the social inferiors' lives as they endure mistreatment by their community. With an eye to Jephthah and his daughter's

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[214] When it comes to epic tales, there are two types based on the hero's birth: the noble hero and the *minjung* hero (Dong-Il Jo, *Korean Narrative and Awareness of Minjung* [Seoul: JeongUmSa, 1985], 121-23). I will discuss this more in the next chapter on Asian literature (Chapter 5).

membership in such a minority group, I will analyze Jephthah's story first and then his daughter's story, saving the daughter's tale (Judg 11:34-40) for the later part of this chapter.

4.1 Jephthah's Story (Judg 10:6-12:7)[215]

4.1.1. Jephthah's Era: Socio-Political-Religious Instability (10:6-18)[216]

The background of the Jephthah narrative differs from previous stories in the book of Judges. Even though the narrative begins with the typical Deuteronomistic introduction, "Again the Israelites did evil in the eyes of Yahweh" (10:6), its background (10:6-18) avoids the typical pattern of the book of Judges: sin-punishment-repentance-deliverance. Instead of moving quickly to the deliverance by Yahweh, this narrative heightens the tension between Yahweh and Israel by concentrating on Israel's sin. The narrator highlights Israel's apostasy by detailing the foreign deities that the Israelites worshipped: Baals, Ashtarots, and the gods of Syria, Sidon, Moab, Ammon, and the Philistines (10:6). Previously the Israelites were chastised for worshipping any one of

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[215] In this analysis of Jephthah, I pay attention to the titles given to him by his society and to his conflicts with others. In my other article, I read the story of Jephthah with a focus on the theme of an inferior's grudge. Kyungji Ha, "Reading the Judge Jephthah with Seoja(Inferior Son)'s Han(Grudge)," *Literature and Religion* 24.4 (2019): 59-82.

[216] I include Judg 10:6-18 in the Jephthah narrative. Note, for example, the connection made between chapters 10 and 11 through the use of the word עבר, which occurs repeatedly throughout the narrative (10:8, 9, 11:17, 18, 19, 20, 29[x3], 32, 12:1, 3, 5[x2], 6). This word includes a range of meanings from the literal "to cross over" to the theological "to transgress" (Trent C. Butler, *Judges* [WBC 8. Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 2009], 342).

these groups of gods singularly, now, however, they are described as worshipping seven groups of gods[217] (perhaps, representing the seven different ethnic groups in Canaan)!

Even though Yahweh had rescued the Israelites by sending seven previous judges (Othniel, Ehud, Shamgar, Deborah, Gideon, Tola, and Jair), he now responds to their repeated apostasy with sarcasm, "Go and cry to the gods whom you have chosen" (10:14), instead of sending them a deliverer. In fact, they are delivered into the hands of their enemies, the Philistines and the Ammonites, all at once (10:7). Israel's repentance has failed to win Yahweh's favor, and they are subject to more distressing circumstances than ever before.[218] As the book of Judges catalogs the Israelite's sins in an ever increasing crescendo of seriousness, so here too does the reader find a heightened intensity in the Israelite's pleas of repentance. While the Israelites simply cried out for deliverance in earlier passages (e.g., 3:9, 4:3, 6:7), now their repentance is in direct speech and includes a specific admission of guilt: "We have sinned because we have forsaken our God and have served the Baals" (10:10b).[219] The Jephthah narrative also notes acts of repentance that accompanied this confession: the Israelites put away the foreign gods and once again served Yahweh (10:16).

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[217] The grievousness of Israel's sins becomes more serious as the book goes on. See 2:11-13 (where the Israelites worship the Baals); 3:7 (where the Israelites worship the Baals and the Asherahs); 4:1-2 (where Yahweh sells the Israelites into the hands of Jabin, a king of Canaan, because of the seriousness of their sin); 6:1 (where Yahweh gives the Israelites into the hands of the Midianites); 8:33-34 (where the Israelites set up Baal-Berith as their god); and finally 10:6 (where the Israelites worship Baals, Ashtarots, and the gods of Syria, Sidon, Moab, Ammon, and the Philistines).

[218] Due to the introduction of the two enemies, Judg 10:6-7 seems to function as a prelude to the Jephthah narrative (10:6-12:7) and as a prelude to the Samson narrative (13:1-16:31). Possibly, the editor of the book of Judges saves the Philistines for the next story, or the two stories occur simultaneously (Young-Jin Min, *Judges, Ruth*, 435).

[219] Noteworthy in this passage is the fact that the Israelites only repent for serving the Baals but not for serving the other deities that were listed in the catalog of their apostasies (10:6). Presumably, the Baals, "lords" or "masters." are used here as representatives of the whole list of foreign deities.

This passage is unique in Yahweh's initial refusal to help the Israelites in spite of their extensive repentance. According to Judg 10:16b, Yahweh is disturbed by the misery Israel faces, not by their acts of repentance. Even when Yahweh can bear Israel's misery no longer, he still takes no action on their behalf. They fail to receive his deliverance as before (e.g., 3:9: "When they cried out to Yahweh, he raised up for them a deliverer"). Rather, Yahweh, who rebuked the Israelites indirectly through messengers (2:1-4) and prophets (6:7-10) in other stories, speaks directly and more harshly this time.[220] With no divinely sponsored solution, the people hopelessly grumble to one another: "Who will be the first to go up against the Ammonites?" (10:18). This proves to be an ironic twist on the last time this question was posed (1:1). There Israel sought to identify who would be the first to go up in conquest; now the question rhetorically marks the fact that no one is willing to face the foe.

But the Israelites' repentance, both here and throughout the book of Judges, is inauthentic, habitually performed as a means to bargain with Yahweh in order to relieve the distress caused by their enemies.[221] Continued rebellion has proven the inauthenticity of their repentance, so now Yahweh, firm and unmoved, does not deliver them even when he can bear Israel's misery no longer (10:16b). Congruent with a famous Asian saying, "Sincere devotion will touch heaven (deity)," the failure to move Yahweh to action proves the insincerity of Israel's devotion.

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[220] Jack Sassion, *Judges* (ABC; New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1990), 412.

[221] Daniel Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 349. S. Jeon also points out that their repentance is a habitual means to gain what they want from Yahweh (Sung-Min Jeon, *How to Read the Book of Judges* [Seoul: Scripture Union Korea], 2015), 180.

The absence of divine help is also a critical predicament in Asian culture. For the majority of Korean history, Shamanism has been the most significant aboriginal religion.[222] Though it has never been deemed an official religion in Korea, the powerful role of Shamanism has never been challenged, and rituals performed to win deities' favor continue to be practiced to this day. When typical rituals fail to overcome crises such as drought, stormy seas, or the threat of losing a battle, an attempt may be made to gain divine favor through human sacrifice. This suggests an answer to the question of why the Gileadites did not intervene to stop the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter (11:39). This possibility will be discussed further below in the analysis of the story of Jephthah's daughter (11:34-40).

4.1.2. Jephthah's Titles Throughout His Life (11:1-40)

Jephthah is a complicated figure who cannot be neatly described and delineated. Since the narrative itself does not provide a clear evaluation of Jephthah, refusing to explicitly state whether his actions are good or bad, the reader is forced to construct an evaluation from the details and organization that the narrative does provide. One group of such details is the description of Jephthah in the roles that he plays. He fills a variety of roles throughout the narrative: a Gileadite (11:1a), a mighty warrior (11:1b), a son of a prostitute (11:1c), an expellee from his community (11:3a), a leader in a foreign land (11:3b), a leader in the Ammonite battle (11:1-33), a practitioner of human sacrifice

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[222] Even far before the emergence of Buddhism in the Koguryeo kingdom (37 BCE – 668 CE), Shamanism in its multi-form and various iterations had already been practiced by the Korean people for thousands of years. (Yung-Han Kim, "Christianity and Korean Culture: The Reasons for the Success of Christianity in Korea," *Exchange* 33 [2004]: 133).

(11:34-40), a leader in a civil war (12:1-6), and finally an Israelite judge (12:7). First, I will describe Jephthah in these roles, Gileadite, warrior, son of a prostitute, expellee, leader, human sacrifice practitioner, and judge, then, I will explore the significance of Jephthah's constant conflicts with others, including the Gileadite elders (11:4-11), the Ammonite king (11:12-33), his only daughter (11:34-40),[223] and the Ephraimites (12:1-6).

4.1.2.1. A Gileadite, Son of Gilead (11:1a)

Jephthah is first introduced as a Gileadite with an unusual note on his descent from a prostitute before indicating his specific paternity. His description as a Gileadite suitably follows the Gileadite call for leadership: "Whoever will launch the attack against the Ammonites will be the head of all those living in Gilead" (10:18). Technically even a non-Gileadite could thus become head of Gilead, so, perhaps, the very ambiguity of the Gileadite call for leadership ("whoever") is what allows a person of somewhat questionable lineage like Jephthah to take on that role. Viewing this passage from an Asian perspective may soften this problem of credentials even further. In Asian tradition, a candidate for group leadership should be able to trace their paternity within the group, yet, as in the case of Jephthah, membership in the group is granted even if the mother is an outsider or a social inferior. Through this lens, Jephthah's credentials as a Gileadite are secure (even though certain problems ought to be expected when it comes to relationship

[223] Further detailed discussion on Jephthah's conflict with his daughter will be saved for the later section of this chapter. Even though the daughter is supportive of Jephthah, there is tension between the two characters.

dynamics between Jephthah and his half-brothers—problems such as hatred, jealousy, and slander).

Assuming that the narrator introduces Gilead's sons in chronological order in Judg 11:1-2, Jephthah is the firstborn son, and, thus, more than just a regular Gileadite in importance.[224] Through the subtle use of disjunctive clauses, the narrator further draws a contrast between Jephthah and his half-brothers—whereas Jephthah belongs to his father Gilead (11:1), his half-brothers belong to their mother ("Gilead's wife," 11:2). In keeping with the Gileadites' announcement in Judg 10:18 of the qualifications of a leader, as long as a person is a Gileadite ("whoever"), that individual can become head of the whole community. In this manner, Jephthah is an eligible candidate to lead the battle against the Ammonites and, thus, to be a head of the Gileadites accordingly.

4.1.2.2. A Mighty Warrior (11:1b)

In addition to being a "Gileadite," Jephthah is also described as a "mighty warrior," גִּבּוֹר חַיִל (literally "a warrior of strength"), which is a term that can imply more than military prowess.[225] Gideon, for instance, is described as a "mighty warrior" (Judg 6:12), but so is Boaz (Ruth 2:1), who doesn't accomplish any great feats of military might. A. Cundall suggests that this designation may refer to a noble general who possesses many lands.[226] He also argues that after Gilead's death, Jephthah's brothers

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[224] Sung-Min Yeo, "Analogies in the Abimelech-Jephthah Narratives," (ThM thesis; Yongin: Westminster Graduate School of Theology, 2006), 22.

[225] Christine Roy Yoder, "The Woman of Substance (אשת-חיל): A Socioeconomic Reading of Proverbs 31:10-31," *JBL* 122,3 (2003): 427.

[226] Arthur E. Cundall, *Judges* (London: Tyndale Press, 1969), 104.

take what belongs to Jephthah and expel him from his lands, thus putting Jephthah's claim to the title of "mighty warrior" in jeopardy.[227] M. Sjöberg also defines the title more broadly as a term used for "men whose life goal demands extraordinary strength or skills."[228] Likewise, it is generally understood in Asian culture that a leader should be manly and have military-like prowess and a greathearted personality, even if that leader will never participate in an actual military conflict. Whatever the nuances of this term, one thing is made clear by the term's use in Judg 11:1: Jephthah is more than an ordinary Gileadite; he is a strong, beyond-eligible candidate for leadership under the urgent military circumstances of Judges 10-11.

4.1.2.3. A Son of a Prostitute (11:1c)

Although Jephthah, "a Gileadite" and "a mighty warrior," is eligible to become a leader in the midst of a communal crisis, such as that which sets the backdrop to his tale, because of his mother's status his social standing would not necessarily be guaranteed in normal times. Jephthah is a בֶּן־אִשָּׁה זוֹנָה, a "son of a prostitute." Jephthah belongs under the category of what, in Korean, is termed a *seoja* (non-primary wife's son). Even though Asian society is patriarchal and androcentric, the status of children under the same father is largely dependent on the status of the mother. Thus, Jephthah's being "a son of a

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[227] Even though this interpretation is plausible in an Asian context, it is difficult to find proper ground for this interpretation in the Hebrew Bible, because there is no mention of the inheritance of prostitutes' children. Presumably, Jephthah had no right to inherit, since his mother was not a "wife" in any sense. This would be in contrast to even a concubine, such as Abimelech's mother, who had a place in Shechem (Judg 9:1).

[228] Mikael Sjöberg, *Wrestling with Textual Violence: The Jephthah Narrative in Antiquity and Modernity* (Sheffield: Sheffield Phoenix Press, 2006), 52.

prostitute" is a liability to his standing in the community.[229] Although Israelite society does not appear to have an established social class system, its negative disposition toward prohibited social groups, such as prostitutes, seems clear. Jephthah thus suffers due to the fact that he is a son of a prostitute. Some scholars assume that Jephthah's mother may be doubly ostracized in regards to her societal standing in Israel, claiming that she must also be a foreigner, because Israelite women were not allowed to be prostitutes (Lev 19:29) and Israelite men were not permitted to take prostitutes as wives (Lev 21:7).[230] Even though Israelite society did not have systemized social classes, the social status of Jephthah's mother would make it impossible for him to be highly regarded or well-treated.[231]

In addition to Jephthah's lowered status because of his mother, Jephthah also has to contend with his half-brothers, who do not share his birth mother. Since Jephthah's mother is "another woman" (11:2), different than his half-brothers' mother, Jephthah's position is secondary in his family. The brothers' attitude toward him, therefore, is not necessarily based on the status of Jephthah's mother as a prostitute. Rather, they refer to the fact that Jephthah's mother is "another," and not necessarily a "contemptible,"

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[229] Moreover, since Jephthah's mother is a prostitute, she does not have a place in Gilead's house.

[230] Schneider notes that Jephthah's mother may have been a Canaanite, which becomes clearer in the following section when Jephthah makes a vow. She views Jephthah's vow as a Canaanite one (Schneider, *Judges*, 162-63). However, it is difficult to be sure that every law in the Torah was well-respected and well-kept in Israel, such that no Israelite woman would ever become a prostitute. Furthermore, it is uncertain that these laws were known to them at that time, and, thus, we cannot assume that these laws were kept in the time periods in which these stories took place. Such prohibitions may, in fact, point to the opposite conclusion. If something is against the law, then it is almost a guarantee that it *did* happen, and that the law was created to stop the practice.

[231] On this point for Israelite society, namely, the impact of a lower-status mother on her children's standing in the family and society, refer to Cynthia Chapman's book*, The House of the Mother: The Social Roles of Maternal Kin in Biblical Hebrew Narrative and Poetry* (Yale University Press, 2016).

woman. Their focus may be on the difference in marital status between the two mothers rather than on contempt for the status of Jephthah's mother viewed in and of itself. T. Schneider describes the reference to Jephthah's mother as "a point of clarification by the narrator."[232]

Since a person's social class matters a great deal throughout one's entire life, it is almost impossible for "lowly" people to have successful lives in traditional Asian societies.[233] One's social rank, based on family background, is much more important than the individual's personal capability. Thus, Jephthah's excellent military skill does not guarantee a successful life as long as his social rank is low. Instead, Jephthah's capability inspires hatred from the brothers who unify against him and expel him from the family. This makes his situation all the worse because he is alone, whereas the other party — his half-brothers — form a group. All in all, since Jephthah is a mighty warrior, his half-brothers are jealous and even afraid of him, and since he alone is another woman's son, they collaborate against him.

4.1.2.4. An Expellee (11:3a)

Even though Jephthah was Yahweh's answer to the Gileadites' urgent request for a hero to lead the battle against the Ammonites, the Gileadites, absurdly, removed him. Jephthah was equipped with excellent military skills and was eligible, by the specific measures given, to become a Gileadite leader (11:2). But, as D. Jo explains, *minjung*

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[232] Tammi J. Schneider, *Judges* (Collegeville, Minn.: Liturgical Press, 2000), 163.

[233] According to the traditional Asian view, every person's destiny is already determined when s/he is born (Sang-Hee Moon, Shamanism and Korean Church, Seoul: New Life Press, 1969, 7: 20).

heroes, heroes of a lowly birth as opposed to noble heroes, are always in danger of banishment from the very people with whom they live and serve.[234] In Jephthah's case, his humble background matters more to his community than his great ability. Unfortunately, getting rid of Jephthah, the great warrior, is tantamount to removing the deliverer of the Gileadites who was sent by Yahweh to guarantee the Gileadites' victory. Thus, removing Jephthah from the society reveals the Israelites' spiritual blindness (in the very concrete sense in that they cannot see how and through whom their deity is working) and implies the Gileadites' tactical stupidity. The expelling of Jephthah only worsens the community's desperate situation.

4.1.2.5. A Leader of a Foreign Land (11:3b)

Jephthah's situation in 11:3b contrasts starkly with his position in 11:2-3a. He was expelled previously by his own people (11:2-3a), but now he is recognized as a person of skill and character and even granted acceptance by the foreign people of the land of Tov (11:3b). Strangely, Jephthah, who was abandoned by the elders — the honorable people of his community — is now welcomed by so-called "unprincipled fellows," אֲנָשִׁים רֵיקִים.[235] Moreover, his military skills that went unused by the Gileadites in his own land

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[234] Dong-Il Jo, *Korean Narrative and Awareness of Minjung* (Seoul: JeongUmSa, 1985), 122.

[235] The "unprincipled men" and the "land of Tov" inspire the reader to compare Jephthah with Abimelech. Both are sons of socially inferior women, have conflict with their brothers, have "empty men" around them, and have ceremonies in religious places: e.g. in Shechem (9:6) and in Mizpah (11:11). On the other hand, there are significant differences between Abimelech and Jephthah. Jephthah does not himself gather or hire people, nor does he intend to rebel against his half-brothers, whereas Abimelech uses funds from Shechem's temple to hire "rootless and reckless men" (9:4). In Jephthah's case, the men are just rootless. Probably, they are people like Jephthah who had lost their places in their communities. The Gileadites just came to him for help. Abimelech was killed by an unnamed woman (9:53), whereas Jephthah was welcomed by an unnamed woman (11:34). Finally, Jephthah is a *deliverer* of his people whereas Abimelech is nothing more than a *destroyer* (Sasson, *Judges*, 421; Block, *Judges, Ruth*, 235).

are well utilized by these unprincipled people in a foreign land. It is ironic that, although the Gileadites were the ones who needed a military leader, they do not recognize his ability. It seems logical to assume that the Gileadite elders recognized Jephthah's skill only after they heard of his reputation in Tov.[236] In this sense, his experience in the foreign land eventually works well for him.

This period in the land of Tov is the only time in the entire narrative during which Jephthah faces no existential trouble—that is, until the Gileadite elders come to him. Even though Jephthah seems to manage a successful life in the foreign land, in a traditional Asian understanding, this would not be considered a blessing. Living in a foreign land is not a blessing in Asian tradition, where the highest human virtue is the practice of *hyo* (filial piety) according to the Confucian understanding. A male's primary duty is to support his parents and take care of his family, including practicing ancestor worship by visiting their tombs on a regular basis and performing rituals on each of their memorial days.[237] The responsibility becomes heavier if he is a firstborn—which Jephthah likely was. Through this lens, success in a foreign land does not provide sufficient comfort to Jephthah, and as a result he is eager to return to Gilead and to assume the headship of his community.

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[236] Jeong-Hye Lee, "A Research on Jephthah's Daughter: Her Han and Hanpuri in Korean Shamanism," 212-13. Similarities exist between Jephthah and David. As mentioned in the Psalms, David is an outcast to his brothers and an alien to his own mother's sons (Ps. 69:7-9). Also, his four hundred mighty men are those who are in distress, in debt, or discontented (1 Sam 22:2). Some of his mercenaries are from Tob (2 Sam 10:6-8). Women sing and dance for David upon his return from military victory (1 Sam 18:7). By contrast, Jephthah was welcomed by a woman (only one) with singing and dancing for him upon his return from victory (Judg 11:34).

[237] According to the Confucian worldview, part of the deceased parent's spirit stayed at his/her own tomb. On the memorial days, the children perform an inviting ritual, and the deceased one comes to have the meal and bless their descendants. Heung-Soo Kim, "Horace G. Underwood's Research on Korean Religions," *Christianity and History in Korea* 25 (2006): 34-36.

4.1.2.6 A Leader of the Ammonite Battle

The battle scene with the Ammonites, which the reader would be forgiven if she thought that it would be the ultimate focus of the narrative, is mentioned only in brief (11:32-33). The two verses that make up the entirety of the description of the battle are composed of a series of simple and triumphant statements: "Jephthah crossed over to fight," "Yahweh gave them into his hand," "He struck them," "The Ammonites were subdued." The simplicity and triumphalist tone of these statements may be intended to emphasize the role of Yahweh and the might of his divine help. As the narrative continues, however, Jephthah's divinely ensured success does not last. Chapter twelve chronicles the fallout after the battle as Jephthah comes into conflict with the Ephraimites (12:1-6). Jephthah seems to have failed in recruiting troops. He claims to have called the Ephraimites in his hour of need, but they did not respond (12:2). Even in Jephthah's great act of heroic valor, the communities around him find a way to remain unsupportive and even antagonistic toward this *minjung* hero.

4.1.2.7 A Practitioner of Human Sacrifice (11:34-40)

Jephthah is undeniably an assailant in the death of his daughter. This fact has caused many commentators to view Jephthah as a wholly negative character, as a cruel perpetrator of violence, particularly violence against women. Such black and white pronouncements, however, are out of place in this narrative. Jephthah himself cries out for the audience to view him as a victim even as he consigns himself to play the role of

the aggressor, claiming that he is the one who has been made "miserable and wretched" (11:35) He is the one who is now in danger of losing not just a child but his one and only child, as the narrator is at pains to emphasize, adding the additional note that "Except for her he had neither son nor daughter" (11:34). A traditional Korean proverb expresses well the *pathos* of the scene: "Parents who have lost their child bury him/her in their hearts."

The heights that Jephthah had attained in the battle with the Ammonites are shown in the present scene (11:34) and the following scene (12:1-6) to lead to depths worse than those Jephthah faced at the beginning of the narrative. Jephthah had been deserted by his family, and now he is the one who casts out family from his house. Jephthah had been the one who saved his people from their aggressors, and now he is the one who drives his relation to her death. His killing of his child foreshadows the much larger scale killing of his people in the next scene. Narratively, Jephthah is the catalyst for the continuing death reports and misfortunes of the Israelite community in the rest of book of Judges. This *minjung* hero, for all his positive qualities, can only bring death to his community.

4.1.2.8 A Leader of a Civil War (12:1-6)

Even though the challenge of the Ephraimites might seem a sudden action, it is, in fact, a fitting continuation of the previous action narrated in the Ammonite battle (12:2). This scene, in conjunction with the previous scene involving Jephthah's daughter has led some scholars to regard Jephthah as an unrepentantly violent character, as someone

willing and able to massacre his people.[238] These commentators criticize Jephthah for his aggressiveness and contrast him with Gideon, who was able to diplomatically assuage the Ephraimites instead of going to war with them (Judg 8:1-3). Viewed from Jephthah's perspective, however, he is not the aggressor, rather it is the Ephraimites who are willing and ready to massacre their own countrymen. Jephthah, for his part, attempts to argue that he had asked the Ephraimites for help before the Ammonite battle, and was always willing to share the glory of conquest (which is a statement that cannot as easily be said about Gideon). Neither Jephthah's words nor his leadership roles are accepted by the Ephraimites, however, and the tribes engage in a civil war. Jephthah's rage can be understood in relation to their uncooperative and deriding attitude toward him. Throughout the tale Jephthah cannot rely on the support of his community—whether from his half-brothers, tribal elders, or neighboring tribe.

4.1.2.9 An Israelite Judge (12:7)

Judges 12:7 is not an explicitly positive final statement of evaluation for an Israelite judge. Compared to other judges, six years is too short a period of judgeship. What is more, the narrator fails to give a clear, accompanying evaluation of Jephthah's leadership. Up to this point in the book, every single judge has received a positive final evaluation. In Othniel's case the statement, "the land had peace for forty years," is an introduction to a catalogue of his accomplishments (3:11). In Ehud's, "Moab submitted to

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[238] For example, Assis views Jephthah as identical to Abimelech in every aspect, except in the fact that Jephthah achieves deliverance for his people from their enemy (Elie Assis, *Self-Interest or Communal Interest: An Ideology of Leadership in the Gideon, Abimelech, and Jephthah Narratives [Judg 6-12]* [Leiden; Boston: Brill], 2005, 237).

Israel, and the land was tranquil for eighty years" (3:30). Shamgar was "a champion of Israel" (3:31). Under Deborah, "the land was tranquil forty years" (5:31). In Gideon's case, the narrator provides detailed information such as his father's name and the place he was buried (8:32). For Tola, the narrator describes 23 years of leadership and his burial place (10:2), and for Jair, 22 years of leadership and his burial place (10:4-5). Yet, in Jephthah's case, his rulership lasts only six years and his burial place is uncertain: "he was buried in one of the towns of Gilead" (12:7). The six-year period is too short to be called a significant period of time for a "heroic warrior" to rule his land, and the summary of Jephthah's judgeship is not celebrated with a distinct final evaluation describing a period of peace. In spite of his ambitions and his willingness to struggle through the many difficulties of his life, Jephthah is not an unambiguously successful figure in the final pages of his story.

4.1.3. Jephthah's Constant Conflicts with Others (11:2-12:6)

As I noted earlier, Jephthah and his daughter are best understood in the context of their larger communities. Considering the unstable political-social circumstances as well as the religious apostasy against Yahweh (10:6-18), it is little wonder that Jephthah's life was filled with instability. Jephthah's life begins in conflict in the early years in his father's house where he had conflict with his half-brothers and was banished by them (11:1-3). His life of constant conflicts continues with the other characters in the narrative, with Jephthah coming into conflict with the Gileadites (11:4-11), the Ammonite king (11:12-28), his daughter (11:29-40) to some extent, and, most aggressively, with the

Ephraimites (12:1-6).

4.1.3.1. Jephthah's Conflict with the Gileadites (11:2, 4-11)

Soon after Jephthah is introduced, he is expelled from his paternal home and driven out from among the Gileadites. The narrator notes quickly that Jephthah spent many years living as an expellee in the land of Tov. He was apart from his people, but he was not totally forgotten. For, when the Gileadites found themselves under attack from the Ammonites, they sent their elders to Jephthah to ask if he would be their savior. Jephthah seizes on this opportunity not only to come home and so remove the shame of his expulsion but also to attain power and success in Gilead.[239] Here the audience sees Jephthah with characteristics he did not have before. Whereas he used to be passive and silent, being driven out by his half-brothers without a word of protest (11:2), now he actively argues with the elders (11:4-11).[240] The negotiation scene reveals a tension

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[239] The dialogue of Jephthah and the elders (11:4) mirrors that of Israel and Yahweh in the midst of the Ammonite oppression (10:7-9). As Israel appeals to Yahweh (10:10), the Gileadite elders appeal to Jephthah (11:5-6). As Yahweh retorts sarcastically (10:11-14), Jephthah does also (11:7). As Israel repeats the appeal (10:15-16a), Gilead does also (11:8). However, the difference between the two scenes is that Yahweh refuses to be used (10:16b) while Jephthah tries to seize the moment through tough negotiation in order to earn rulership and headship (11:9-11) (Daniel Isaac Block, *Judges, Ruth* [Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1999], 354).

[240] The elders' complicity in Jephthah's exile is presumed. Even though the story narrates that it was the half-brothers who kicked Jephthah out of his father's house (11:2), as the representatives of the community, the elders were involved in that decision. As is well-known, archaeological evidence from Israel reflecting the biblical text, and ancient Near Eastern politics gleaned from texts, the elders are often the ones who deal with legal issues at the city gate. See, Deut 21:19, 22:15; Amos 5:12; Ruth 4:1-11. As Amihai Mazar discusses, one of the functions of the gates is as "a place of judgment by the elders" as well as a market, a general assembly area, and a place of cultic practice (Amihai Mazar, *Archaeology of the Land of the Bible, 10,000-586 B.C.E.* New York, N.Y.: Doubleday, 1992). Therefore, the elders likely played some role in the brothers' hostile actions against Jephthah. K. Younger views this as "a complex legal case." His assumption is that Gilead had officially made him a legal heir, but, at the father's death, the brothers went to the city gate before the elders, who denied Jephthah's claim as an heir (K. Lawson Younger, *Judges and Ruth* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Zondervan, 2002], 248-49). This is a probable scenario based on Jephthah's rebuke of the elders and their lack of defense (11:7), but hard to prove since the Law does not provide an inheritance case for the children of a prostitute.

between the two parties with conflicting agendas. In this scene, Jephthah strives hard to guarantee his position in Gilead, because he does not trust the elders. This mistrust may be rightly placed, for the Gileadites elders first offer Jephthah a less advantageous deal than they had previously advertised. Even though they had offered a "headship (רֹאשׁ)" position in Gilead in 10:18, here they merely propose a "commandership (קָצִין)," a position that is active only during periods of battle. Jephthah refuses to play the victim this time, but because he does not have any socially designated protector, he must take care of himself and plead his own case.[241] Thus, he is aggressively persistent in his request for the headship and will not be satisfied with the commandership only. Seemingly with no other options available to them, the Gileadites elders accept Jephthah's counteroffer, and he is established in both positions and welcomed back into his community.

It is interesting that Jephthah is eager to go back to the people who previously abandoned him. He had lived in his paternal household in disgrace and was kicked out of his ancestral land. Once he was exiled, though, he managed a successful life in Tov. Why would he desire to leave his hard-earned successes in order to return to the land of his failure? If we evaluate this scene from the perspective of Asian culture, then Jephthah's actions make sense. In the traditional Asian system of values success in one's homeland, rather than in a foreign land, is immensely more meaningful. Correspondingly, Jephthah persists and uses his people's desperation to his advantage. He is aggressive and even rude. It is not permissible for a young person to talk back to elders in Asian culture, but

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[241] Sung-Min Jeon, *How to Read the Book of Judges*, 178-80.

Jephthah harshly rebukes them. Yet, the Gileadite elders are so desperate for a champion to lead them in battle that, in spite of Jephthah's impertinence, they do not scold him. Instead, they remain silent.

It is difficult for elderly people to admit and confess their faults in patriarchal cultures because elders are symbols of wisdom and authority. Thus, instead of admitting their past fault against Jephthah, they present a better deal, which implicitly means admitting their previous wrongs. By offering Jephthah both the headship along with the commandership (11:11), they ultimately go beyond the terms of the original offer. This negotiation process implies that Jephthah is a skilled negotiator who knows that the elders are desperate for his help.[242] At the same time, the narrator shows that Jephthah is also desperate to return to his homeland with a leadership position. By leveraging his people's urgent military needs, Jephthah successfully takes up his new position in Gilead. Hereafter, he becomes even more desperate to win the battle to guarantee his position in Gilead.

4.1.3.2. Jephthah's Conflict with the Ammonite King (11:12-33)

In spite of Jephthah's artful verbal skills, as shown above, the negotiation with Ammon fails (11:28). At first, Jephthah tries to negotiate through a diplomatic conversation, as the narrator displays Jephthah's exhaustive knowledge of Israelite

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[242] The process of Jephthah's becoming a judge by the elders' appointment confirms the legitimacy of Jephthah rather than degrades his candidacy to be a judge. He is an official leader who successfully maneuvers through an unfavorable negotiation. Interestingly, the narrator writes that the elders "returned" (שׁוּב) to Jephthah (11:8) which also means "repent," likely on purpose. S/he seems to point out that the elders' previous action against Jephthah is wrong.

history.[243] His speech follows the "lawsuit" format common in Israel and the ancient Near East.[244] This scene can also be understood in the context of ancient Near Eastern treaties. Here, Jephthah includes the "oath of office." Any victory he gains will thus be seen as divine affirmation of his position of leadership.[245] Moreover, Jephthah "speaks and acts like a king" by calling the territory of Israel "my land" (11:12); this language raises him to a position equivalent to the king of Ammon.[246] His speech reveals the Israelite theological perspective, which is Yahweh-centered and not necessarily supported by accurate historical facts.

Even though the reader may be led to believe that the primary concern of the Jephthah narrative (Judg 10:6-12:7) is the battle with the Ammonites, only a few verses directly deal with the battle itself (11:29-33).[247] Among these five verses, the first three (11:29-31) describe Jephthah's making a vow after being empowered by Yahweh's spirit, and only two verses (11:32-33) describe the battle proper. The three verses dealing with Jephthah's vow may at first glance give the reader hope that Jephthah is on his way to

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[243] In the process, Jephthah seems to be aware of some historical details that differ from other biblical references. For example, Jephthah does not note that the "Amorites had captured his territory up to the Arnon" (Num 21:26) (Butler, *Judges*, 285). Yet, the purpose of the story of Jephthah is primarily to present a Yahweh-oriented history, which may not depend on exact presentations. It is not possible for us to trace these alleged events that reflect two similar yet not identical traditions. Apparently, each narrator uses them in their own way (Sasson, *Judges*, 428-30).

[244] O'Connell, *Rhetoric of the Book of Judges*, 195.

[245] Victor Harold Matthews, *Judges and Ruth* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 119.

[246] H. Lee interprets Jephthah's sayings and deeds as his attempts to be a king in Israel (Hee-Hak Lee, "Attempts to Build a Kingdom in the Era of Judges," *Old Testament Forum* 12 [2002]: 27-52).

[247] The fact that the Ammonites battle takes only 4 verses out of 59 verses shows that the battle is not the primary concern of the Jephthah narrative. Rather, the narrative provides abundant descriptions and hints for its reader with socio-political and cultural viewpoints.

ultimate success. Yahweh empowers Jephthah at the beginning of these verses, seeming to indicate that the deity's rescuing power will be with Jephthah, that the Israelites are going to receive Yahweh's help after all. On closer inspection, however, there is a major oddity with the sequencing of the verses, for Jephthah makes the vow and asks for Yahweh's help even though he had already experienced the coming of the spirit.[248] Why does Jephthah need to make a request tied to such a strong vow if he has already received what he is asking for? Already, in the midst of the battle, that narrator is preparing the reader for another conflict, one springing from this ill-timed vow.

4.1.3.3. Jephthah's Conflict with His Daughter (11:34-40)

When the narrative transitions out of the battle with the Ammonites, the audience is introduced to an, up to this point, unknown character: Jephthah's only daughter.[249] This scene lays bare the narrative weight of the oddly-timed vow in the previous episode, the fulfillment of which has engendered arguably the most intriguing interpretive issue in the Jephthah narrative and, perhaps, in the whole of the Hebrew Bible. Narratively, what should be Jephthah's greatest moment of triumph, his successful return after the victory over the Ammonites, suddenly becomes the most tragic. The vow that made him appear

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[248] Some scholars criticize Jephthah's act of making a vow even after the coming of the Yahweh's spirit. Trible treats the act as a disbelief of Yahweh; Bal treats the vow as an unnecessary one (Trible, Texts of Terror, 110-15; Mieke Bal, "Virginity: Toward a Feminist Philosophy," *Dispositio* 12 [1987]: 65-68). On the other hand, R. Boling asserts that the narrator is more interested in Jephthah's fulfilling his own vow, and the main focus of the narrative is the fulfillment of the vow rather than the tragic result of the vow (Boling, *Judges*, 210). It is not certain if Jephthah was aware of the spirit's presence with him. The narrator tells the reader of the narrative that Jephthah is filled with Yahweh's spirit, but this does not mean that Jephthah is aware of it.

[249] Further detailed discussion on Jephthah's daughter story (11:34-40) from her viewpoint can be found later in this chapter.

to be a man of faith in favor with Yahweh, now requires him to commit an abominable act. There is much argument concerning the perceived acceptability of Jephthah's act of human sacrifice (see above). Whether or not the Deuteronomist or the biblical canon taken as a whole categorically disapprove of such a rite, Jephthah probably included (or, at least, did not exclude) his daughter among the possible candidates for the burnt offering at the very moment he took the vow (11:31).[250] Linguistic analysis of *ašer* (אֲשֶׁר), the word that introduces the further clarification of the object of the sacrifice (אֲשֶׁר יֵצֵא מִדַּלְתֵי בֵיתִי לִקְרָאתִי), is not able to decisively determine whether the expected object of sacrifice should, in this context, be rendered as "whoever" (and thus include the possibility of a human person) or "whatever" (and thus make the expectation to be that of an animal sacrifice). But, the fact that someone or something should come out (היוצא) of the door of his house probably implies a human being, because the phrase implies a will and intentionality on the part of the one coming out to meet (לִקְרָאתוֹ) Jephthah.[251] What is more, the repetition of vocabulary between Judg 11:31 and 34 are striking—my house/his house, to meet me/to meet him, and the one coming out/she was coming out—such that Jephthah's daughter is presented as fitting perfectly within the parameters of the vow. At

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[250] A woman would be the most likely candidate to greet Jephthah because, as other texts mention, it was the women in Israel who sang the victory songs for the returning warriors. See also: 1 Sam 18:3 and, among the Philistines, 2 Sam 1:20 (Jo Ann Hackett, "There Was No King in Israel," in *The Oxford History of the Biblical World* [ed. Michael David Coogan; New York: Oxford University Press, 1998], 144). In the monarchic period, women came out to meet Saul upon his return from battle (David Marcus, *Jephthah and His Vow* [Lubbock, Tex.: Texas Tech Press, 1986], 14). Miriam plays a timbrel and dances after the victory at the Sea of Reeds (Exod 15:20-21). Thus, it is probable that Jephthah did not exclude his daughter from the vow, even though he could have imagined other options for the burnt offering, such as animals.

[251] M. Reiss notes that "animals were not kept inside houses, so Jephthah should have expected it to be a human being" (Moshe Reiss, "Jephthah's Daughter," *JBQ* 37 [2009]: 57). However, in this context, animals can reasonably be presumed to come out from the inside of his house since Israelite four-roomed houses could accommodate animals in the courtyard. (Philip J. King and Lawrence E. Stager. *Life in Biblical Israel* [Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 2001], 28-29). Nevertheless, an animal is not enough for the special purpose of the vow, considering the desperate circumstance in which it was made.

the same time, it/she/he should be suitable to "belong to Yahweh." Not just anything that happened to be around the home at the time would do; for the sacrifice to have meaning the thing sacrificed would need to be the most precious one in Jephthah's "house." Moreover, although there might be other human beings, such as slaves or one of their children, in Jephthah's house, it is noteworthy that the narrator intentionally emphasizes that the daughter "was his only child. Besides her, Jephthah had no son or daughter (וְרַק הִיא יְחִידָה אֵין־לוֹ מִמֶּנּוּ בֵּן אוֹ־בַת)" (11:34), implying that there was no other option in his mind besides his daughter as the candidate for the burnt offering when he made the vow.[252] Also, Jephthah's unhesitant and conclusive talk with his daughter (11:35) implies that she was always assumed to be included among the potential candidates for the sacrifice.

Upon seeing his daughter, Jephthah makes a show of public grief, but he is too self-centered to display genuine parental concern for her destiny.[253] Rather, he blames his daughter for this outcome and focuses on his own personal loss rather than on what the loss of her life would mean for her, harshly saying to her, "*You* have completely ruined *me*! *You* have brought *me* disaster!" (11:35). The emphasis in his reference to his vow to Yahweh, "Since *I* made this vow to Yahweh *I* cannot turn it back," further displays his unwillingness to place his daughter's wellbeing above his own. He has made the vow and

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[252] Strangely, there is no mention of Jephthah's wife throughout the cycle. Jephthah might have slaves in his house. Other than the daughter, Jephthah could not have come up with any other object for the burnt offering.

[253] Tearing his/her own clothes is a common gesture to show grief and embarrassment in Israel. For more examples, refer to Gen 37:29, 34; 44:13; Num 14:6; Josh 7:6; Judg 11:35; 2 Sam 1:2, 11; 3:31; 4:12; 13:19, 31; 15:32; 1 Kgs 21:27; 2 Kgs 2:12; 5:7-8; 6:30; 11:14; 18:37; 19:1; 22:11, 19; 2 Chron 23:13; 34:19, 27; Ezra 9:3, 5; job 1:20; 2:12; Isa 36:22; 37:1; Jer 36:24; 41:5; Joel 2:13 (Butler, *Judges*, 290).

he will not nullify it even if doing so could save his daughter's life.[254] Regardless of whether such a vow would have been perceived to be capable of nullification, Jephthah shows a clear lack of sympathy toward his daughter, who is now to be sacrificed for his sake.

The above analysis rings true if one is doing the analysis from a modern Western perspective, but if one attempts to look at the scene from an Asian perspective, then things are not quite so clear cut. Jephthah and his daughter ought to be analyzed, as has been said, in relation to their communities and not simply as individuals. In Asian traditions, and especially in those societies that are influenced by Confucianism, a person does not act apart from the customs that his/her community allows, since the social norms and expectations dominate and dictate individual preferences and actions. In this regards it must be noted that the making and fulfilling of this vow are public events. In Asian traditions a leader's vow, which will always have a public dimension to it, and its fulfillment are both a matter of honor, both for the leader and for the people who are being led. Although it is not clear whether Jephthah made the vow in the context of a Yahwistic or pagan faith, interpreters who approach the text from an Asian perspective would, on either account, feel an extra weight of expectation that the vow ought to be fulfilled, because such a vow is tied to the public leader's honor, and thus to the honor of

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[254] Smelik notes that the Hebrew Bible "makes no provision for withdrawing or annulling a vow made to God." On the other hand, many rabbinic views on this sacrifice assume that the vow could easily have been absolved, although there is some variation (Smelik, *The Targum of Judges*, 555). This indicates that, contrary to Jephthah's statement, he could have canceled his vow. Israelite law opens that possibility under special circumstances. For example, Num 30 discusses canceling a vow. I am aware that Num 30:13, which describes nullifying a vow, is in a different context from Jephthah's vow. Nonetheless, my argument is that a Yahwistic vow can be canceled if one cannot perform it. As an example, Saul did not carry out his vow to take the life of Jonathan (1 Sam 14:45).

the people as whole. A Korean folkloric saying exemplifies this: “A male should keep the word that comes out of his mouth.” This would be especially true in the case that the vow was made in public by a community leader. If this is the case, the vow's fulfillment becomes not only a matter of a sacred promise to a deity but also a matter of a man’s and a community’s honor, which was a serious concern in ancient Asian cultures.

Additionally, from a traditional Asian perspective, the ritual killing of human beings is a most honorable act in the face of national disasters, especially when communities are exposed to insurmountable crises.[255] Such an act is viewed from the lens of the survival of the community rather than from the lens of an affront to an individual’s right to life. In traditional Asian thinking, it is most critical for the people to win favor from deities, who are considered the originators of all predicaments. Deities become furious when people do not honor them properly and sufficiently. In order to assuage their anger or gain divine blessings, people offer the deities the most valuable sacrifice, young virgins in most cases. For this reason, many Asian folktales detail the sacrifice of young virgins to resolve a community crisis.[256] From this perspective, Jephthah's willingness to fulfill his vow, even though it means the killing of his daughter, is not a dereliction of his paternal duty but the proper fulfillment of his duty to his community.

Seen from this angle, Jephthah is a truly tragic figure, and his cries that he has

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[255] Such an action was ritually performed and only done in exceptional circumstances in order to overcome a communal crisis and manage the continuity of the community (Mircea Eliade, *Patterns in Comparative Religion* [trans. Eun-Bong Lee; HanGilSa: Seoul, 1997], 446-54); Shin-Ho Lim, “A Study of the Rhetorical Unity of the Jephthah’s Story (Judg 10:6-12:7) from the Perspective of the Israelite Internal War” (Ph.D diss.; Daejeon: Graduate School of Hannam University, 2016), 21.

[256] I will analyze one of the most famous examples of this phenomenon in the next chapter on Asian literature in comparison to the Jephthah narrative.

been ruined by his daughter are not the cries of one who is essentially self-centered or unconcerned with the wellbeing of those around him. Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter carries with it a poetic tragedy. Jephthah was once removed from his household by his family members, but now he is the one removing a family member from this world. Since there is no mention of other members of Jephthah's family, including his wife, the reader is led to imagine that the daughter is the only family member left to him. By sacrificing his only daughter, he is once again alone, as he was alone when he was exiled from his family. This is not merely a tragedy for the present, but for the future as well. The sacrifice of his daughter means that no future generation will be left to carry on Jephthah's lineage, for she was his one and only child. Ironically, Jephthah had saved all of the Gileadites except the one Gileadite who meant the most to him. He saved all the families in his clan except his own family. Unfortunately for Jephthah and for those around him, this was only a preview of the greater and more cruel tragedy which would come upon the Israelites, even beyond the borders of the Gileadites (12:1-6).

4.1.3.4. Jephthah's Conflict with the Ephraimites (12:1-6)

In this passage, Jephthah once again finds himself in conflict, and, once again, he attempts to place the responsibility for the conflict on others rather than on himself, blaming the Ephraimites as he had previously blamed the elders and his daughter. In his speech with the Ephraimites Jephthah makes frequent use of the first-person singular pronoun: "You didn't save *me* out of their hands" (12:2); "*I* took *my* life in *my* hand" (12:3a); "Yahweh gave *me* the victory" (12:3b); and, finally, "Why have you come

up today to fight *me*?" (12:3c). This continuous usage of the first-person singular pronoun shows Jephthah to be alone—as he was previously alone in his father's house and in the negotiation with the Gileadite elders. Jephthah's story is one of constant ostracization and antagonism as more and more people have opposed Jephthah up to the present scene. Out of fury Jephthah calls together the men of Gilead to fight against the Ephraimites. This leads to the massacre of the Ephraimites, with the narrator recording 42,000 Ephraimite deaths. This act of slaughter is the culmination of Jephthah's fury.

In a cursory reading, Jephthah could be regarded as a cruel person who massacres his neighboring tribesmen out of his abrupt anger. For this reason, some commentators blame Jephthah for killing his people by initiating an unnecessary civil war.[257] They describe Jephthah as a violent and destructive person who has killed his own family, namely, his only daughter, and now kills his own people, the Ephraimites. Yet, the narrator also leaves open the possibility that Jephthah's blame-shifting is justified, that this conflict was, in fact, primarily the fault of the Ephraimites, who had also initiated a dispute with Gideon earlier in the book of Judges.

A close reading of the scene reveals that, however much blame can be attributed to Jephthah, the Ephraimites were themselves in the wrong.[258] When the previous battle against the Ammonites had begun, Jephthah had asked them for help, but they did not

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257 Ji-Chan Kim, *From Jordan to Babylon River* (Seoul: Life Book, 2013), 66; Nam-Il Kim, "A Research on the Possibility for Biblical Interpretation through the Contextual Understanding (Judg 11: Human Offering of Jephthah)," *Reform and Revival* 21 (2018): 221.

258 In fact, the Ephraimites are in the wrong throughout the book of Judges. Given their previous dispute with Gideon (8:1-3) as well as in the present narrative, an attentive reader is prepared to expect that they would not help others unless they are honored.

respond (12:1-2).[259] The Ephraimites cannot avoid Jephthah's blame because Ammon attacked the "Israelites" (11:5), not just the Gileadites. It can be assumed that the Ephraimites had a responsibility to help other Israelites; after all, their brother tribe was in need. The Ephraimites do not deny Jephthah's harsh rebuke (12:2), which further confirms their fault. Jephthah describes the battle circumstances in detail: the Ephraimites did not help him, and he fought at the risk of his life. Just as the elders did not reply to Jephthah's rebuke, the Ephraimites also do not attempt to justify their past misdeeds. Finally, the narrator appears to confirm Jephthah's righteousness, leaving the blame on the Ephraimites. They did not help Jephthah because they were not included in a leadership position.[260] Throughout the tenures of the Israelite judges and also during the history of Israel's kingdom period, the Ephraimites are troublemakers.[261]

The Ephraimites' degradation of the Gileadites results in their own destruction. The Ephraimites insult the Gileadites by calling them "renegades" from Ephraim and Manasseh (12:4). Jephthah, who once was a fugitive, likely feels personally humiliated by this. They also threaten to burn down Jephthah's "house," a term which can denote his

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[259] If we pay close attention to what Jephthah said to the Ephraimites in 12:2, the Ephraimites' refusal to fulfill Jephthah's request may have been the reason he made the vow. He was embarrassed because the Ephraimites — another Israelite tribe — were not willing to help him (John Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* [Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986], 318). In this scenario, it is difficult to regard Jephthah's vow as an abrupt or unnecessary one.

[260] Shin-Ho Lim, "A Study of the Rhetorical Unity of the Jephthah's Story (Judg 10:6-12:7) from the Perspective of the Israelite Internal War," 155.

[261] The Ephraimites appear several times in the Book of Judges. Each of these stories takes place on the Jordan River. Each time, the narrator seems to ask whether they are brothers of Israelites or enemies (David Jobling, "Structuralist Criticism: The Text's World of Meaning" in *Judges and Method: New Approaches in Biblical Studies* [ed. Gale A. Yee; Minneapolis: Augsburg Fortress, 1995], 113-15).

physical domicile *and* also his lineage.[262] Jephthah also uses the term "house" when he makes his vow. Thus, the expression "house" might refer to the place from where he was kicked out in his early years, and the place from where his daughter came out (11:34) to greet him.[263] The terms used by the Ephraimites are intended to remind Jephthah of painful moments in his past and to insult him personally. In a twist of poetic justice, the Ephraimites, who derided Jephthah as "a fugitive" (12:4), become fugitives themselves (12:5-6).

In Asian understanding, the Ephraimites' challenge against Jephthah would be understood as serious immoral behavior. As Il-Sun Jang describes it, resistance against a public leader is an unforgivable behavior.[264] Jephthah, who is an official leader of the Gileadites after his victory against the Ammonites, has official authority. Furthermore, loyalty in Confucian culture is viewed as a must in military settings, comparable with the view of *hyo* (filial piety) in familial settings.[265] However, the Ephraimites do not respect Jephthah's authority. What is more, their fault is not a new behavior, but it traces back to the moment of the battle with the Ammonites when they had ignored Jephthah's original request for aid in that battle (12:2).

Notably, this episode presents not only Jephthah the individual as a person

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[262] For domestic space and patrimonial lineage, refer to King and Stager, *Life in Biblical Israel* on the "House of the Father" (Chapter 2).

[263] Exum discusses the danger of women going out of the house in the Hebrew Bible such as Jephthah's daughter (Judg 11:34) and Michal (2 Sam 6:20). Exum, *Fragmented Women*, 44 (Kor).

[264] Il-Sun S. Jang, *Historical Story of Davidic Royal Family* (Seoul: The Christian Literature Society of Korea, 1997), 181.

[265] Boudewijn Walraven, "Religion as a Moving Target: Keynote Address for 'International Conference on Korean Religious in Inter-Cultural and Global Contexts,'" *Journal of Korean Religions* 2.2 (2011): 18.

struggling in a fragile position, but it also presents the tribe of the Gileadites as a whole in continuing fragile positions. From the beginning of the narrative, they were threatened by a neighboring state, the Ammonites. Their fundamental fragility is caused by the non-response of Yahweh, their primary deliverer (Judg 10:17-18). They were ignored even by their brother tribe, the Ephramites: "You Gileadites are renegades from Ephraim and Manasseh" (Judg 12:4b). Thus, the community to which Jephthah belongs is precarious in its relationship to their deity, neighboring ethnic group—the Ammonites, and neighboring tribe—the Ephramites.

4.1.4. Summary of Jephthah

Even though Jephthah was a great warrior whom the Gileadites urgently needed, due to the humble status of his maternal lineage, Jephthah lived a painful life. He strove to attain success through the use of his military capabilities. Yet, his community did not favor him and kicked him out, either out of ignorance or jealousy. He was, thus, in constant struggle with others in his attempts to be accepted by his people and to establish his own position in his home country. Jephthah's self-centered, calculated, and shrewd character should not be understood as merely a personal flaw. Instead, the reader should also consider the dysfunctional Israelite society: The Gileadites failed to recognize and drove away their military hero, underestimated him, and intended only to take advantage of his military skills in their predicament; then the Ephraimites were unsupportive during their brother tribe's perilous battle and even challenged the official leader of the Gileadites. Jephthah's flaws are a reflection of the flaws of his community.

4.2. Jephthah's Daughter (11:34-40)

Jephthah is the most miserable and ostracized character in this narrative, that is, until his daughter enters the story. Compared to Jephthah, the daughter is in a doubly alienated position due to her unfortunate family background: her grandmother is a prostitute; her father is an outcast, unprotected by his father; and her mother is non-existent within the narrative.[266] While Jephthah's family shame goes back one generation her shame goes back two generations. Moreover, she is a female in a patriarchal society. She does not, and likely cannot, contribute to her community, which needs military leaders like her father. She is a minority of minorities, and thus she does not have rights or power to resist those who would commit acts of violence against either her father or her social group. Social norms pressure her to lower her voice and comply with her destiny as dictated by her father.[267] Unfortunately, she does not have any powerful person to defend her. Her female friends, who are also in fragile social positions, cannot raise their voices in her defense. Although they became courageous enough to be with her for two months after she surrenders to her fate, they were nowhere to be found when Jephthah's daughter went out to welcome the returning soldiers. These observations form the basis of an examination of Jephthah's daughter in relation to her community, beyond even her relation to her father. It is beneficial to analyze Jephthah's daughter's story in relation to her two primary positions within the narrative: her personal standing in

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[266] V. C. Cooper, "Some Place to Cry: Jephthah's Daughter and the Double Dilemma of Black Women in America," *SBL* 44 (2003): 181-191.

[267] In-Bae Lee, "Literary Understanding of the Jephthah Narrative," 70.

relation to her father and her public standing in relation to her community. By widening the scope of analysis in this way, the interpreter will also be able to gain a better understanding of the meanings of the women's annual rite for Jephthah's daughter in 11:40.

4.2.1. The Personal Standing of Jephthah's Daughter

A frequent criticism of Jephthah raised by modern feminist commentators concerns male violence toward females. In this sense, Tapp argues that "virgin daughters, as the property of their fathers, are sacrificially offered to protect male honor and status."[268] Even though Jephthah's daughter played no causal role in the making of her father's vow, Jephthah expects her to comply, which, at least in a modern Western view, is unfair to her. In this sense, she is made to support, however willingly or unwillingly, the "male honor" of the one who spoke a vow without her consent in an ancient patriarchal culture. Using such a framework, it is little wonder that many modern scholars find this story problematic.

Approaching this story from a traditional Asian perspective, however, allows for a different analysis. According to general Confucian understanding, children's dedication to their parents, even to the point of sacrificial death, is praiseworthy.[269] Since children belong to their parents, laying down their lives for their parents is often viewed as a kind of beatitude. A child's right to decide is always secondary to the right of the elderly to

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[268] Tapp, "An Ideology of Expendability: Virgin Daughter Sacrifice in Genesis 19:1-11, Judges 11:30-39, and 19:22-26," *JSOTSS* 81 (1989): 173.

[269] Samuel Cheon, "Reconsidering Jephthah's Story in an Asian Perspective," 45.

decide, and this persists in modern Asian culture. Jephthah's daughter's seemingly complacent reaction can be attributed to such a custom in a patriarchal society,[270] in which *hyo* — honoring the parents — is the foremost duty for children.

It is significant that the daughter's attitude denotes more than mere submission to higher authority. Jephthah's daughter is, in fact, more than compliant; she seems surprisingly supportive of her father. First of all, by coming out to meet Jephthah when no one else did, she shows her free will. In doing so, she shows that she is not simply an object, allowing her father to do with her as he pleases. Also, her later decision to follow her father's lead does more than indicate her submission to parental authority. Jeong-Hye Lee describes how an understanding of the daughter as merely a poor and unfortunate woman, who was passively sacrificed for the impromptu and indiscreet pledge of her father to selfishly fulfill his desires, is inappropriate, because this daughter is actually (contrary to those who view the daughter as passive) brave enough to face her impending destiny.[271] The daughter even urges her father, "Do to me just as you promised" (11:36). She appears aware that the vows that come out of a public leader's mouth ought to be kept and that, without her consent, people would have regarded her father as a cruel assailant. By consenting to the terms of the vow, she helps her father avoid public shame. Overall, Jephthah's daughter helped her father save face before the public, and as a result she became, what in Korean is called, a *hyo-nye* (filial daughter).

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[270] Exum insists on listening to the voice in this story that pleads for those marginalized in a male-dominated society (J. Cheryl Exum, *Tragedy and Biblical Narrative: Arrows of the Almighty* [New York: Cambridge University Press, 1992], 65-9).

[271] Jeong-Hye Lee, "Jephthah's Daughter: Her Han and Satisfying It through Korean Shamanism," 220.

The daughter's sacrificial death is voluntary, to an extent. She may even have been aware of her father's vow, performed in public, because the rumor about the vow likely spread among the Gileadites. If such was the case, then it makes sense that there were no other women beside her to greet the soldiers on the street even though it was the custom for groups of women to welcome their returning soldiers home, such as Miriam (Exod 15:20-21) and the women singing for Saul and David do (1 Sam 18:7). In this sense, Gil-Ja Kim's supposition that Jephthah's daughter could have come out of the house without knowing of her father's vow is not supported by the context.[272] Admittedly, the daughter's words to Jephthah indicate that she views him as the principle actor: "*You* have given *your* word to Yahweh… Yahweh has avenged *you* of *your* enemies, the Ammonites" (Judg 11:36). Yet, considering how the daughter encourages her father to do as he wishes without hesitation, she probably was aware of her father's vow and decided, apart from any active force of will from her father, to support him. If this was the case, then from the beginning when she came out upon Jephthah's return, she came by her own will and intention and in support of her relationship with her father.[273]

4.2.2. Public Standing of Jephthah's Daughter

If one zooms out and takes stock of the wider community, however, then one will discover that an act of willful force is not the only way to coerce someone. Even though the community does not actively confront Jephthah's daughter, it still exercises a passive

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[272] Gil-Ja Kim, "Women of the Old Testament," 22.

[273] In-Bae Lee, "Literary Understanding of the Jephthah Narrative," 69.

force, as it were, that places social pressure on the daughter and compels her to fulfill her father's vow. In Asian moral conduct, women must be quiet and serene, chaste and disciplined.[274] She lived within a culture where children and women were expected to obey their parents within the confines of the family and to obey the elders when engaging with the larger society (an expectation that could legally be enforced through physical violence). If Jephthah's daughter was to remain a member of her society in good standing, then she did not truly have any option other than to practice filial piety according to the social customs. Jephthah's daughter, like Jephthah himself, is best understood in the context of the community. Jephthah and his daughter are not without an audience when they speak with one another, rather, the daughter is placed in the presence of the people when their confrontation takes place. Their meeting is a public event. Her public response to her father had the potential of undoing his public word, and rebellion against such an authority figure would be a public shame in the ancient world.[275] Given the culture, there was no legitimate choice imaginable for the daughter other than to obey. If she resisted, her father will be greatly ashamed, which is a point that interpreters from Asian cultures would find familiar, since Asian cultures tend to place blame on the parents when the children do wrong or do not meet the community's expectation. Her resolution to follow through with Jephthah's vow is not simply a matter of her choosing, or even simply a matter of her submission to her father's will and honor, but it is a matter

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[274] Martina Deuchler, *Confucian Transformation of Korea: A Study of Society and Ideology* (Cambridge: Harvard Ukrain Res Inst, 1995), 255-57.

[275] A similar scene can be seen in 2 Sam 6:20-23 where Michal came out to meet David and confronted him in public. In respond to her public confrontation, David insulted her more. In the same sense, there must be a power imbalance between Jephthah and his daughter in the society.

of public pressure applied to a socially marginalized group, such as the woman in a patriarchal setting.

The physical death of Jephthah's daughter is preceded by her social death in the minds and hearts of her Israelite community. Without the consent of the community, whether explicit or implicit, Jephthah would not have been able to perform the human sacrifice.[276] Before her father could place her on the altar, her community needed to abandon her to her fate, which they do. The community members, including the elders who remained engaged and talkative during the military predicament, keep silent when the daughter is faced with the predicament of her sacrificial death. No one steps up to defend her. No one gives aid to her voice or provides her with the power to say, "No," to her father. Without a rescuer, she cannot survive in this patriarchal society, even if she resists her father's will. The Gileadite community puts her to death by refusing to acknowledge that her death is undeserved.

Jephthah's daughter operates from a weak and marginalized position, yet that very position allows her to obtain a kind of greatness. The greatness of the daughter is that she sacrifices herself on behalf of her community. The death of Jephthah's daughter eventually brings benefit to the community beyond the act of saving her father's honor. She is resolute on behalf of her community's benefit. Even though there is no clarity as to what will happen if the vow is not fulfilled, in an Asian understanding, this breach of promise might be expected to cause a deity to create another, even worse, disaster. From this perspective, the daughter is far braver than her father, who takes care of only himself;

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[276] Jae-Gu Kim, "The Daughter of Jephthah, Sacrificed for Whom?" *Korean Journal of Christian Studies* 64 (2009): 47.

she is not, from this perspective, a passive victim of repression; nor did she come out to resist her father as Il-Sun Jang interprets.[277] Rather, she uses her position of weakness to become one of the main benefactors to her community.

Furthermore, Jephthah's daughter acts on behalf of Yahweh. In her dialogue with her father, she mentions Yahweh two times: "You have given your word to Yahweh. Do to me just as you promised, now that Yahweh has avenged you of your enemies" (11:36). Unlike the elders of her community and unlike her father, she recognizes when Yahweh is at work and she takes up what means she has to join Yahweh in that work. She is the only character of whom it can confidently be said that she cares about others— about Jephthah and his honor, about the community and its safety, and about Yahweh and his deeds— while none of the other characters can be said to truly care about her.

Jephthah's daughter, then, functions as a mediator in this story, and she does so in two ways. First, she is a link between the insiders (the Gileadites) and the outsider (Jephthah). Without her consent, Jephthah's honor would have been defamed in public, as fulfilling a vow is a matter of honor for a public figure in ancient society. Thus, Jephthah's fulfillment of the vow was for him a primary duty because of his public position. Thanks to his daughter's willingness, Jephthah fulfills his vow to Yahweh and, thus, he moves closer to being granted acceptance as an insider in his community. Secondly, Jephthah's daughter serves as a link between the people (represented by her father) and their deity. As an unmarried daughter she is qualified to fulfill her father's

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[277] I. Jang says that her coming out of the house was an act of resistance toward her father, who bought a victory at the expense of another's life (Il-Sun Jang, *Historical Story of Davidic Royal Family*, 278).

vow and represent his household to the deity, whereas, if she was married, then she might have had a *goel* who could have defended her and who could have claimed to have authority over her.[278] In Asian human sacrifice stories, the victim serves as a mediator between the deity and the people whose purpose is to protect the community from disasters such as drought and battle.[279] In Asian understanding, such disasters are caused by deities who were not treated well enough. Granted, this concept is somewhat different than ancient Israel's understanding of the reason for their predicament as told in the narrative, namely that its origin was their unfaithfulness in their covenantal relationship with Yahweh. Nevertheless, in either understanding the deity needs to pleased, and one means of pleasing the deity is by making the proper sacrifice. In Asia, young virgin women are the best gift to please deities. From this perspective, the daughter would be assumed to be an effective sacrifice to win favor from deities, to save her father's public honor, and to overcome the communal crisis.[280]

Finally, through this sacrificial death, Jephthah's daughter also becomes, herself, an insider of her society.[281] When she celebrated her father's returning from the

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[278] Exum comments that if she had been married, then she might not have been eligible to be sacrificed (J. Cheryl Exum, "On Judges 11," in *A Feminist Companion to Judges* [ed. Athalya Brenner; Sheffield: Sheffield Academic Press, 1993], 142). According to Tapp, the daughter is eligible because she belongs to her father in the patriarchal culture (Tapp, "An Ideology of Expendability: Virgin Daughter Sacrifice in Genesis 19:1-11, Judges 11:30-39, and 19:22-26," 172).

[279] Young-Soo Lee, "The Types and Meaning of Human Sacrifice in Korean Stories," *Journal of Korean Studies* 13, 83-84. A similar theme in Asian literature will be presented in the following chapter.

[280] As Logan points out, in the face of such a predicament, kings of the ancient world offered their children for the benefit of the whole community. Two Judean kings offered their sons in the face of war: Ahaz during the Syria-Ephraimite war (2 Kgs 16:3) and Manasseh during the Assyrian invasion (2 Chron 33:6) (Alice Logan, "Rehabilitating Jephthah," *JBL* 128 [2009]: 665-85).

[281] "A Buddhist view interprets that death is the perfect stage of prayer, which is a gateway to the ultimate spiritual world." In this manner, she became an insider through death (Hye-Jin Choi, "The Literature Therapeutic Approach of Shimchung-Jeon," *Journal of Literary Therapy* 4 [2006]: 112).

Ammonite battle, no one was with her; she welcomed him alone. Yet, when she prepared for her unfortunate destiny, her female friends were on her side (11:38). Their presence would have been a great comfort for her, who was about to accept her destiny. For the final two months of her life she is with her female friends in a community of mutual fellowship. Unlike her father, she does not spend the entire narrative alone, striving to move from the outside in. Jephthah's daughter's sacrifice allows for her acceptance into her society.

4.2.3. Women's Solidarity for Jephthah's Daughter (11:39c-40)

The note at the end of Jephthah's Daughter's tale concerning the female-practiced statute in Israel further serves to amplify the honorable place of Jephthah's daughter in and for the community. After the daughter's death, these groups of women perform acts of greater respect and honor toward Jephthah's daughter than anyone had performed while she was alive. One of the representative Korean feminist scholars, Kyung-Sook Lee, argues that the Jephthah narrative is a combination of Jephthah's personal story and the women's ritual mourning. For Lee this ritual is the real point of the story and the culmination of the narrative.[282] Lee asserts that the editor of the narrative includes elements of a pagan hero-story within the story of Jephthah as a way both to portray

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[282] Lee argues that the narrative combines women's ritual mourning with the account of Jephthah's personal story (Kyung-Sook Lee, "Jephthah's Daughter Story Emphasizing the Solidarity of Women," *Christian Thought* 4 [1994]: 197-201; Alberto Soggin, *Judges*, 308-309; H. W. Hertzberg, *Die Bücher Josua, Richter, Ruth* [ATD 9; Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1985], 213-18). P. Day goes even further in making Jephthah's story secondary to his daughter's story, arguing that Jephthah's story was a later insertion into the narrative itself, which was only placed there to help fill out the true focus of these chapters, namely, the explanation of why Israelite women mourn every year for Jephthah's daughter (Judg 11:40) (P. L. Day, "From the Child is Born the Woman: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter," in *Gender and Difference in Ancient Israel* [Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989], 58-74). See also John Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (NCBC; Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1986), 319).

Jephthah as a major judge and to indirectly criticize human sacrifice in Yahwistic religion.[283] The editor of Judges places the role of Israelite women within the culmination of the narrative (11:40), and this position lends credence to arguments about the narrative's stance against human sacrifice through the solidarity of women.[284]

It is noteworthy that the editor of the Jephthah narrative amplifies the active role of women in cooperation, which is quite unique in the book of Judges.[285] While it is true that there are voiceless victims in Judges, there are also highly active female characters such as Deborah and Yael (Judg 4-5) and Delilah (Judg 16). Yet, only the story of Jephthah's daughter displays the solidarity of a women's group in action. This level of participation by women contrasts with the first story in Judges, where Achsah was given to Othniel for his victory in battle, without being asked for her consent (Judg 1:12-13).[286] Achsah has no chance to express her opinion in the matter. The silence of women reaches

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[283] Judg 11:1-12:6 introduces Jephthah as a war hero and a major judge. On the other hand, 12:7 reports him as a minor judge, an insignificant figure, without any connection to war. Therefore, many scholars point out that the contents of Judg 11:1-12:6 have many contradictions and gaps. Scholars question whether the Jephthah tradition was originally the account of a war hero, or originally the account of a minor war hero later transformed and magnified. M. Noth and W. Richter accept the latter view, and J. Soggin; and and G. F. Moore accept the former (Kyung-Sook Lee, "Jephthah's Daughter Story Emphasizing the Solidarity of Women," 197-201).

[284] K. Lee criticizes Trible, whose denunciation of Jephthah's vow is anachronistic and fails in seeing that the coming of the spirit of Yahweh (11:29) was a later insertion to Jephthah's successful fight (11:32-33). Also, Lee disagrees with other feminists' approaches that emphasize Yahweh's partiality for Isaac, who is a son, but who was silent at Jephthah's daughter's death. The offering of burnt offerings to a specified deity was typical for ancient generals, who prayed for victory in battle (2 Kgs 3:26-27) (Kyung-Sook Lee, "Jephthah's Daughter Story Emphasizing the Solidarity of Women," 199).

[285] On women's agency in Judges, refer to Susan Ackerman's *Warrior, Dancer, Seductress, Queen: Women in Judges and Biblical Israel,* (New York: Doubleday, 1998).

[286] In brief: "Caleb said, 'I will give my daughter Achsah in marriage to the man who attacks and captures Kiriath Sepher.' Caleb gave his daughter Achsah to him in marriage" (Judg 1:13). In the next verses, Achsah exercises agency in demanding land with water from her father (Judg 1:14-15). Yet, it is noteworthy that the LXX renders that "Othniel urges her" assigning the woman the "plucky role" (Niditch, *Judges*, 33).

an extreme in one of the later narratives of Judges, in which the Levite's concubine is gang raped to death (Judg 19:22-28). This passage contains no voices of women at all. The Jephthah narrative, on the contrary, records their active voices through their action. Jephthah's daughter expresses herself in a male-centered culture that dictates that women should be inexpressive, and she is even able to successfully requests what it is that she desires. After her death, the women's mourning ritual serves an important purpose: to ensure that future generations remember Jephthah's daughter. Without the women's mourning activity, the daughter was likely to be forgotten, erased from the people's memory. Even though Jephthah, who saved his people, did not save his daughter, the women's annual ritual made it possible for the Israelites to commemorate her.

It is interesting that the Israelites commemorate the daughter, who does not have a name, instead of the hero Jephthah. A person's anonymity does not necessarily imply a person's unimportance, but a lack of lineage does in ancient society.[287] The daughter's anonymity was not due to her unimportance as a female; rather, she lacked a son to carry on a name. In Asian culture, a woman can have her place in a lineage by having sons.[288] A woman having a child is called so-on-so's mother instead of being called by her own name, so having no child is a shame to her. Jephthah's daughter might have been

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[287] According to Korean filial piety stories, daughters are lowly beings since they cannot continue their father's lineage and they belong to their husbands' lineage after marriage. Young-Ran Jang, "The Repression Mechanism of Sacrifice and Philosophy of Self-Realization in the Korean Heroine Epic." *Korean Women Philosophy* 9 (2008): 14.

[288] Exum interprets that the daughter's having no name is a way to avoid viewing her as an individual. The daughter represents all Israelite women, and thus her death implies a murder against the women in general (Exum, Fragmented Women [trans. Sang-Rae Kim et al.; Seoul: Handl Publishing House, 2001], 229).

forgotten by her people, but the annual commemoration for her, which is a form of ritual, makes the Israelite community remember the daughter.[289]

In a more aggressive sense, the eventual purpose of this mourning-ritual is to put a stop to women's sacrifice in Israel. Although the commemoration of Jephthah's daughter in the people's memory bears a positive connotation, the mourning-ritual itself bears a negative one.[290] Traditional Asian culture took women's sacrifice for granted,[291] and the same may be true for the ancient Israelite audience. Thus, the narrative's editor delicately implies that the daughter's sacrifice must not be repeated even though the people should commemorate what happened. The editor records the women's collective mourning activity as a warning against any such recurrence of a sacrificial ritual. The editor indirectly, though conspicuously, criticizes the practice of human sacrifice. If there had been no mourning ritual, the daughter might have been forgotten, and ritual killing, in turn, might have recurred, if not for the women's annual mourning ritual.

Narratives from other traditions bear the same human sacrifice motif and serve to explain how such sacrifice was brought to an end. For example, a Korean folktale, "Centipede Marketplace Story," relates a story about a virgin and a toad. The virgin

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[289] This celebration might also be associated with the rites of deities such as Tammuz (Ezek 8:14) and Hadad Rimmon (Zech 12:11). According to this line of argument, the editor of the Jephthah narrative historicized the ritual of commemorating a certain deity's death and related it to the daughter's sacrificial death.

[290] K. Lee warns against praise of the woman's bold sacrifice, because it can unconsciously incite another woman's sacrifice. Kyung-Sook Lee, "Jephthah's Daughter Story Emphasizing the Solidarity of Women," 201.

[291] K. Lee warns not to regard the daughter's death as a noble act because people might take for granted women's sacrifice. More human sacrifice stories related to women in history is due to a persistent cultural belief that female sacrifice is natural and plausible. A male-centered culture is the source for this way of thinking (Kyung-Sook Lee, "Jephthah's Daughter Story Emphasizing the Solidarity of Women," 198-99; Kyung-Sook Lee, *Women of Old Testament*, 72-73).

rescues the toad from danger. One day, when she is to be sacrificed to a snake, the toad fights the snake, kills it, and afterwards no virgin sacrifice happens. Likewise, K. Lee argues that after the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter, human sacrifice is no longer practiced in Israel.[292] Instead, a new statue was introduced: "From this comes the Israelite custom to go out for four days to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite" (11:40). This female led group activity conveys a strong message against the male-dominant society which expects women to be victimized and takes women's sacrifice for granted. And, if it can be argued that the women in this narrative represent Yahweh better than the men, then through the women's ritual performance, Yahweh criticizes the ritual killing of humans in Israel.[293]

4.2.4. Summary on Jephthah's Daughter

Throughout the narrative, Jephthah's daughter is the only person who supports Jephthah and cares about her community and recognizes when and where Yahweh is working (11:36). She proves herself to be truly self-sacrificial on behalf of others. All others, including the Gileadites (Jephthah's own people) and the Ephraimites (Gileadties' brother tribe) fail to take care of those around them, particularly those who are on the margins of society. Jephthah, although he is a somewhat sympathetic character, also proves to be a self-centered and calloused character. Although Jephthah is harsh to his daughter and shows a lack of fatherly love and Yahweh remains silent, doing nothing for

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[292] Ibid., 198-99.

[293] Ibid., 200.

her, the daughter does not blame anyone or act with hostility toward anyone, but, rather, takes her father's side. Her community does not take care of her, but she takes care of the community. She becomes a heroine in that she saves her father's honor by practicing *hyo* (filial piety) for the benefit of her community. It is justly ironic that through her sacrificial death she is recognized by her people and continues to live in her people's memory through the annual commemoration of her death that prevents the recurrence of women's unethical sacrifices.

4.3. Chapter Summary

Jephthah and his daughter are both *minjungs* (members of marginalized social groups) who are wronged and neglected by their people due to their social status, not their flaws nor inabilities. This treatment exposes the society's irresponsibility toward their own people. The Gileadite community uses a *seoja* (son of a non-primary woman), Jephthah, to overcome a serious military predicament without treating him fairly. Then the community fails to stand up for and champion a woman whose father's rashness has condemned her to death. Because of the community's treatment of these two *minjungs*, Jephthah's daughter as well as Jephthah bear a personal *han* (grudge) as inferior social group members. The daughter's *han*, however, is much bigger and deeper than her father's, because she is in a much more fragile position. From a Korean perspective, it takes the collective action of the women in the community, ritually mourning the daughter's death, to alleviate her *han*.

Despite the parallels in their unfortunate lives, there is a significant contrast

between Jephthah and his daughter. Although Jephthah seems to live for public benefit, he is preoccupied with his own personal desire for success. On the other hand, his daughter, who seems to have been unfairly sacrificed, ultimately resolves, through her death, the danger that her father and the community at large faced. The annual rite at the end of the Judg 11 is telling in that the Israelite community remembers the daughter and not her father, the judge, who was the military hero who defeated their enemy, the Ammonite army.

Chapter 5. Reading the Jephthah Narrative with Asian Literature

Although the narratives in the Hebrew Bible express distinctive Israelite ideologies, they share common motifs and themes with other literary traditions found throughout the ancient world. Given the cultural and technological overlap between these ancient societies, it should not be surprising that these literary traditions share many common features, including parallels in their methods of composition and production. Like other literatures of the ancient Near East, many biblical narratives were created, transmitted, and preserved in oral tradition for long periods of time before they were set down in writing. Many of the creative changes or alterations to these stories can best be understood as having occurred during such oral periods. This is not to say that such stories are wholly imaginative, subject only to the whims of the oral storytellers. Rather, they are grounded in the shared experiences and values of the group. According to Jong-Soo Park, such oral traditions are not fabricated stories. Rather, they reflect the reality of the group, even when they play loosely with historical facts.[294]

In this chapter, I will highlight key similarities and distinctions between the Jephthah narrative and certain Asian folktales. The Jephthah narrative (Judg 10:6-12:7) consists of several episodes: a catalog of the Israelite failures in keeping the covenant with their divine suzerain, Yahweh (10:6-18); Jephthah's biography, with a focus on his military exploits and grasp for power (11:1-12:7); and the story of Jephthah's daughter (11:34-40), who was sacrificed in fulfillment of her father's vow. Two Asian tales in particular can be

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[294] Jong-Soo Park, *Trans-cultural Understanding of the Bible and the Korean Context* (Anyang: Geulteo, 1995), 35-38.

productively compared to the Jephthah narrative: HongGildong-jeon (which parallels the story of Jephthah, the social inferior's persistent struggle for power), and ShimChung-jeon (which parallels the story of Jephthah's daughter, who gave herself as a human sacrifice in fulfillment of her father's vow).[295] I will take these tales in order, discussing first the parallels of Asian folktales with the story of Jephthah the military hero (Judg 11:1-12:7) and saving the parallels with the story of Jephthah's daughter (Judg 11:34-40) for later.

5.1. HongGildong-jeon and the Jephthah Story, Epic Tales

In many ancient cultures, stories were told in which the capabilities of a heroic figure become crucial for the survival of a whole society. A community falls into an existential predicament of one kind or another and can only be saved when a hero arises and strives for the safety of the community. Individual heroes must give up or shift focus away from their individual values and lay aside their individual lives for the sake of the community. Thus, such stories may come to represent or reflect the community's values.[296] Because these hero stories are communal, they transmit valuable cultural knowledge from generation to generation, such as a hero's great accomplishments, which often function as models for current accomplishments or contemporary methods and attitudes toward problem-solving. Ancient societies remembered their heroes in regard to

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[295] "Jeon" simply means "story" in Korean. "Gildong" is the main character's first name, and "Hong" is his last name. Unlike in English, the surname is written first in Korean. I will write "HongGildong" or simply "Gildong"; "HongPanSeo" for Gildong's father; and "HeoGyn" for the author of the story, following the Korean convention.

[296] Deok-Soon Jang, *Narrative Literature* (Seoul: Bando, 1994), 31-35.

how they overcame crises. The stories reflect the hope of ancient peoples in the midst of historic (and, thus, current or future) predicaments. However, unlike modern histories, the authenticity of epic tales is not based on their objective, historical evidence, but on the authenticity and acceptability of the authors' viewpoints concerning community, cultural knowledge, and communal solidarity that such story-tellers are trying to promote.[297] HongGildong-jeon, a famous Korean epic tale, functions in this way, and the heroic character of this story can be productively compared to Jephthah's heroic character.

5.1.1. HongGildong-jeon

HongGildong-jeon is the very first novel written in the Korean language[298] and also the oldest Korean epic tale dealing with a hero's biography. It tells the classic story of a hero's rise to power, but it also exposes the corruptions of the society in which it was composed. In particular, it speaks against discrimination based on a person's birth in relation to his/her parents during the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910). This period is famous for its nickname, "*yangban* (aristocrat) society," which placed a high value on one's social rank.[299] The story explores the issue of discrimination against illegitimate children and also the issue of how corruption extends throughout society.[300] Throughout the story,

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[297] Jong-Soo Park, *Trans-cultural Understanding of the Bible and the Korean Context*, 76.

[298] Even though Korean was already in use when HongGildong-jeon was written, the Chinese language was still used for literature because it was the language of the learned.

[299] Hyo-Jeong Kim, "The Epic of Self from the HongGildong-jeon from the Viewpoint of Self-Actualization," *Journal of Literary Therapy* 9 (Aug, 2008): 171.

[300] Discrimination against illegitimate children began in the early fifteenth century, was supported by law in the late fifteenth century, and was strengthened in the sixteenth century. Won-Soo Lee, "Logic and Meaning of HongGildong-jeon," *Literature and Language* 17 (May 1996): 185.

the author, HeoGyun, reveals his desire to reform the corruptions found in feudal society.[301] He tries to overcome the social restrictions of the lower classes through the main character's, Gildong's, own life-long struggles.[302]

By telling the story of Gildong's life, HongGildong-jeon reflects the political chaos that existed during the transitional period of the Joseon Dynasty. Admittedly, there was a strong Confucian influence during the time of this Dynasty, and thus discrimination based on a person's birth and social rank is taken for granted. However, as such discrimination grew harsher and drew harder and more impassible borders between social groups, the resistance of *seoja* (non-primary wives' children) became a serious issue on the national level. Taking advantage of the disorder caused by the Japanese invasion of Korea in 1592 CE, many socially neglected people would try to become *yangban* (aristocrats), thus transgressing societal boundaries.[303] HongGildong is a character who tries to earn the *yangban* status as a result of his persistent efforts, but he ends up failing.

5.1.2. A Brief Summary of HongGildong-jeon

In my summary of HongGildong-jeon, I will divide Gildong's life journey into three stages: life within his family during his early years (in his hometown), life within the larger society (in the domestic world), and then life in the virtual world (outside his

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[301] Byung-Hwan You, "The Formation Background of HongGildong-jeon," *Society of Korean Ancient Novel* 20 (Dec, 2005): 57.

[302] Dong-Hyub Kim, "A Study on Hong-Gil-Dong-Jeon in Relation to the Mediator of Desire," (M.Ed thesis; Graduate School of Kyungpook National University, 1981), 5.

[303] Kyung-Seon Jang, "Comparative Study on HongGildong-jeon and Chunyang-jeon: Centered on Upgrading Social Status," (M.Ed Thesis; Korea University Graduate School of Education, 1993), 26.

society).[304] The story begins with Gildong's birth into an aristocratic family. His father was a member of the elite, but his mother is a *chub* (concubine) of his father.[305] Although Gildong was gifted with great martial art skills from a young age, his half-brothers discriminate against him because he does not belong to their mother. From childhood he was not allowed to call his father, "father," nor his brothers, "brother." As the story progresses the burden of his familial shame becomes increasingly onerous. There was even a murder scheme hatched against him, at one point, in which his father and brothers were tacitly involved.[306] Finally, Gildong was not able to stay in his father's house any longer, and thus he decides to leave home.

After leaving his family and hometown, Gildong begins to make use of his special military capabilities. With a group of bandits, he forms the *HwalBinDang*, an army consisting of thieves, to loot the corrupt officials' properties.[307] These activities soon raise the ire of those who officially hold power over the people and the land. After plundering *HaeInSa*, a famous Buddhist temple, with his throng, in order to take the money of the rich and distribute it to the poor and lowly, the king sends government officials to arrest

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[304] Won-Young Song, "A Research on the Education on the Themes of HongGildong-jeon," (Master of Education Thesis; Changwon University Graduate School, 2002), 33.

[305] HongPan-Seo, Gildong's father, had a revelatory dream that he will have an extraordinary son. Since his wife refused to sleep with him, he slept with ChunSum, a female slave. As was expected, an extraordinary son, Gildong, was born (Hyun-Sook Kim, "The Structure and Meaning of HongGildong-jeon in terms of the Satisfaction of Grudge," [M.A. thesis; Kyungnam University, 2003], 7-8).

[306] Hyun-Sook Kim, "The Structure and Meaning of HongGildong-jeon in terms of the Satisfaction of Grudge," (M.A. thesis; Kyungnam University, 2003), 11.

[307] Ibid., 18-21.

Gildong.[308] The king's men fail, however, due to Gildong's outstanding military skills. Being unable to out fight Gildong, the king is eventually forced to admit that Gildong is the more righteous party and a hero to the people.

Even though he was recognized by the king, Gildong leaves the country with three thousand soldiers to found his own kingdom, called *YoolDoGook*, in a virtual world, which exists only in the realm of imagination. After three years under Gildong's rulership, his kingdom becomes so strong that no one dares to attack it.[309] Within his kingdom Gildong works tirelessly to rid society of the kind of corruption he had experienced in his youth. Because of his righteous rulership, his land was carefree. The story ends with the death of Gildong, happy and peaceful within the virtual kingdom.[310]

5.1.3. Analysis of HongGildong-jeon

As in other epic tales, the narrative progresses through descriptions of the obstacles Gildong faced and the actions he undertook to overcome them. Gildong's life-long pain began in his early childhood within his family. His half-brothers, because they were born to the primary wife of Gildong's father, refused to accept Gildong as a full member of the family and discriminated against him as a member of an inferior social class. Yet, Gildong refused to fight with his half-brothers for fear of breaking the moral laws of

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[308] Won-Soo Lee, "Logic and Meaning of HongGildong-jeon," *Literature and Language* 17 (May 1996): 199.

[309] Mi-Jeong Kang, "Saga of King Tonmyung in the Perspective of the Nationalistic View of History for the Future and the Epic, Honggildongjeon in View of Leadership Epic," *Journal of Literary Therapy* 9 (Feb 2007): 222.

[310] Ibid., 223.

family. He greatly valued the Confucian social virtue, *hyo* (filial piety), the promotion of which was widespread during the Joseon Dynasty, and thus instead of giving in to outbursts of anger, he suppressed his *han* (irresolvable internal anger, a grudge). He learned persistence in adversity and cultivated an ethic of hard work in order to overcome his limits. Whenever he was filled with *han* beyond what he could control, he turned away from the source of his *han* and towards the development of his martial skills as a way to fight off depression. He tried to overcome his sorrow by perfecting his martial arts on a daily basis.[311]

Beyond familial hatred, the strict feudal system of the Joseon Dynasty was also a great obstacle for Gildong. Because of his mother's social status, Gildong seemed destined to be treated unfairly by his wider society as well as by his smaller familial unit. As long as the *yangban* (aristocrat) culture continued to dominate, he was sure to remain unsuccessful in life. Yet, his method of coping with discrimination through intense practice of martial skills turned out to be a preparation for his future heroic exploits, which allowed Gildong to transcend his seemingly unconquerable obstacles. His hard work revealed his leadership qualities, and his training developed skills that would consistently breakthrough in times of crisis.[312]

Thus, after he moved away from his family and into the wider society, he was able to use his military skills to lead a group. Social outcasts came to him requesting that he

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[311] Realizing his inability to become a public official because of his low status, Gildong developed martial skills. Even though he was not aware of it, this was preparation for him to be a military leader in the future. Ibid., 221.

[312] Ibid., 223-30

join them and even lead them. He was pleased to take part in their community, but he was not satisfied with leaving them outside of the ruling society.[313] He struggled against the corruptions of the ruling society and against society's power brokers by forming his own army, *HwalBinDang*.[314] Before Gildong formed this army their society was full of disorder. Even though the nobles derided Gildong, calling him a leader of thieves, the people knew that he worked for a good cause. When the king and his officials failed to stop and silence Gildong and his band, they too had to recognize his earned authority. Those who were once unfavorable to him and the class he represented, ultimately had to give deference to this son of a *chub* (concubine).

Gildong became a good example of how one overcomes personal injury and influences society in order to make the world a better and more equal place.[315] Individually, he released his *han* to some degree by acquiring the title and prestige of a leader who takes charge of military and national defense.[316] However, Gildong was not satisfied with the promotion of his own status. Thus, when the king appointed Gildong to an official position, he rejected it. This was because, even though his personal *han* was resolved, the social *han* still remained. Ultimately, Gildong was interested in changing the society. As long as societal structures functioned to maintain what had become the

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[313] Won-Soo Lee, "Logic and Meaning of HongGildong-jeon," *Literature and Language* 17 (May 1996): 199.

[314] Hyun-Sook Kim, "The Structure and Meaning of HongGildong-jeon in terms of the Satisfaction of Grudge," 18-21.

[315] Mi-Jeong Kang, "Saga of King Tonmyung in the Perspective of the Nationalistic View of History for the Future and the Epic, Honggildongjeon in View of Leadership Epic," *Journal of Literary Therapy* 9 (Feb 2007): 225.

[316] Byung-Hwan You, "The Formation Background of *Honggildongjeon*," *Society of Korean Ancient Novel* 20 (Dec, 2005): 43.

status quo of a corrupted feudal system, discrimination based on a person's social status was sure to remain.[317] Gildong's only recourse would be to get outside these structures.

The final scenes of the story occur in a virtual world, a world that only existed in the realm of imagination. Gildong left this earthly society for a world that he could shape according to his own vision. Later in his life, he understood that the ideal world he dreamed of could not be realized in this world. As he had left behind his family, so he left behind his society. He gave up life in the Joseon Dynasty, even life at the top of *yangban* society, in order to build an ideal world where no discrimination against a person's social status exists. By limiting Gildong's final success to this imaginative world, the author of the story, HeoGyun, shows that the complete eradication of social discrimination is not possible in this world. The setting turns to fantasy, and the audience is forced to admit that the corruption of the Joseon Dynasty will not, in this world, meet a full and complete judgment.[318] In this regard, even though Gildong ends his life in happiness, the story does not possess a genuinely happy ending.

5.1.4. Comparisons between HongGildong-jeon and the Jephthah Story

Jephthah and Gildong both belong to the category of *minjung* heroes, heroes

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[317] Hyun-Sook Kim, "The Structure and Meaning of HongGildong-jeon in terms of the Satisfaction of Grudge," 1.

[318] Byung-Hwan You, "The Formation Background of *Honggildongjeon*," *The Research of Old Korean Novel* 20 (Dec, 2005): 42.

whose mothers are part of a socially inferior group.[319] *Minjung* heroes can be understood to ultimately fail because they cannot overcome, despite their many seeming successes throughout their stories, the fundamental limit they are born with. In order to better understand our two heroes, one ought to pay close attention to each of their communities, including each hero's wider family and village, those communities who do not take care of their heroes but neglected them. Gildong's *han* is not simply a matter of family strife; it also originated from his community, which neglected him based on his birth status. The Jephthah story, which is also set within an unstable political system and contains scenes of social discrimination toward marginalized people, can be read in this way as well.

The societies of these two *minjung* heroes share several features, including parallels between their basic social structures—both stories taking place within patriarchal cultures. Also, both heroes lived during times of politically unstable circumstances—both stories taking place during transitional periods. The Jephthah narrative places defenseless Israelites against threatening nations and neighboring tribes sometime between the Judges and the Monarchic periods.[320] Gildong's story is set among

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[319] According to Dong-Il Jo, there are two types of heroes in epic tales: the noble hero and the *minjung* hero. The major differences between these two types are based primarily on the difference between the heroes' births. Whereas noble heroes are born to aristocratic families, *minjung* heroes always have some ignoble aspect to their lineage, especially in their maternal lines, such as being born to secondary wives or to women without legal marital status. Despite these differences in birth, both types of hero are born with special abilities or possess outstanding skill, which is usually developed early in their childhood. Both types of hero must also face crises, which allow them to employ their special abilities, often for the salvation of their communities. Yet, for the *minjung* heroes, because of their birth status, such crises usually spring from their own people, whereas the challenges that face noble heroes come from outside their communities. Both types of hero overcome the initial crises. Noble heroes, however, are able to achieve ultimate victory, whereas *minjung* heroes, for all of their successes in the body of their stories, fail to achieve ultimate success in the end. Dong-Il Jo, *Korean Narrative and Awareness of Minjung* (Seoul: JeongUmSa, 1985), 121-23.

[320] The book of Judges assumes the need of kingship by repeatedly mentioning "in those days Israel had no king; everyone did as he saw fit" (17:6; 21:25).

the political disorders caused by Japan's invasion of Korea in 1592, during the Joseon Dynasty.

I will compare these two heroes in three categories: within family, outside family (in the larger society or foreign land), and in the final storyline. These three areas are the main settings for these two heroes' stories. After Gildong left his smaller familial unit, he moved out into the larger society, and the final stage of his story takes place in a virtual world, where he ended his life in peace. In Jephthah's case, after he left his original familial unit (11;1-3a), he moved to a foreign land (11:3b), and then he returned to his birth community (11:4-12:6), and finally he died and was buried in his hometown (12:7).

5.1.4.1. Within Family

Gildong and Jephthah can be productively compared as *minjung* heroes because both of their stories are set in motion through actions of ostracism by their families, which is the quintessential beginning of *minjung* hero tales. Here I will deal with the two heroes within their family, how they relate in regard to their paternal lines, their maternal lines, and their relationships with their half-brothers.

It is possible that the two heroes share a comparable status when evaluated through their paternal lines. HongPanSeo, Gildong's father is *yangban* (an aristocrat) in the Joseon Dynasty, and he is a socially well-known figure. The Gildong narrative makes the social status of Gildong's father explicit, but in Jephthah's case the hero's paternal status is harder to ascertain. Because biblical narratives frequently relate personal names

with place names,[321] M. Wilcock assumes that Jephthah's father, Gilead, may be a highly regarded person.[322] However, if "Gilead" in Judg 11:1 is just a geographic designation (Gen 31:48) as well as a tribal eponym (Josh 17:1-3; Judg 5:17), or if it refers to any man generically in Gilead, then Jephthah's father remains as nameless as his mother. Yet, the reference to the inheritance, which caused Jephthah's half-brothers to banish him in cooperation with the elders, may imply that Jephthah's father owned a sizable property.

The status of the mothers is much clearer—the two heroes come from socially inferior maternal lines. Neither hero is born of the primary wife, and this is a key factor in setting the action of the stories. It must be noted, however, that the maternal lines of these two heroes have some differences in detail. Jephthah's mother is a prostitute (אשה זונה), whereas Gildong's mother is a *chub* (concubine). In both Hebrew and Korean there is a distinction between a prostitute and a concubine. The term "prostitute" should be clarified first. In Korean the term used for such a person is "*gisaeng*." The job of a *gisaeng* may include sexual intercourse, but it primarily refers to women who sing and dance to please male guests (similar to a *geisha* in Japan). The sons of a *gisaeng* may be treated as full members of a family as long as the father allows, although some conflicts and hatred among the children are to be expected.

Concubines (*chub*) in Korean tradition are secondary wives who may reside in their husbands' house with other wives. A similar system may also have been in place in

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[321] For example, "Canaan" in Gen 9:18 could designate Noah's son as well as being a place name; Shechem, which is a place name, can also in 33:18-34:2 designate the son of Hamor the Hivite, the ruler of an area.

[322] Michael Wilcock, The Message of Judges (Leicester, U.K.: Inter-Varsity Press, 1996), 96.

ancient Israel. In the book of Judges, concubines may dwell within the houses of their husbands. For instance, a Levite, who lived in a remote area in the hill country of Ephraim, left for his father-in-law's house to bring his concubine (אשה פילגש) back, which implies she resided with him (19:1). On the other hand, in the case of Abimelech's mother (who is also referred to as a פילגש), her house was in Shechem, away from the house of Abimelech's father (9:1). Jephthah's mother is called a prostitute (אשה זונה) and not a concubine, that is, she does not rise to the status of a secondary wife (אשה פילגש). She most likely dwelt within her father's house or had her own house rather than residing in the house of the father of her children, and thus she was most likely not with Jephthah in his father's residence, which is a different system than what is found in Asian tradition.

In addition to having socially inferior mothers, and somewhat in contrast to the powerlessness of their inherited social class, the two heroes, Gildong and Jephthah, possess outstanding, innate military talent and skill. Such superior skill likely contributed to their half-brother's hatred. The half-brothers can be understood to be jealous of the heroes, and in the long run, in order to compete with their more talented half-brothers, the sons of the primary wives conspired against them. In Gildong's case, both his brothers and even his father are involved in the scheme to kill him, and the house slaves ignored him.[323] Likewise, Jephthah's excellent military ability serves to worsen his position in his family. His half-brothers were jealous or even afraid of him, and thus they schemed to drive him out with the cooperation of the Gileadites—especially the elders, who were the

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[323] Dong-Hyeob Kim, "A Study on Honggildong-jeon in Relation to the Mediator of Desire," (M.A. thesis; Kyungpook National University, 1981), 15-16.

ones responsible for communal problem-solving processes in the ancient world (11:7).[324] The narrator seems to correlate Jephthah's great warriorship to his half-brother's hatred in 11:1-2. Both stories, then, present their audience with a hero who is on one level powerless but on another level powerful enough to be feared. These heroes are weak when seen through their maternally inherited social status, yet they are strong and even fearful to their competitors when evaluated on their own merits.

Recognizing this juxtaposition of weakness and strength allows one to see the deeper family dynamics at play in the stories. In Asian perspective, socially weak women without their sons become even more fragile. The conversation between Gildong and his mother gives us some hints at the tensions caused by the separation of a mother and her son. When Gildong reveals his desire to leave home, his mother strongly attempts to dissuade him.[325] For a woman the presence of her son in the household is crucial, because having a son guarantees her social standing, even if that social standing is less than other women in the household. A concubine, an already socially weak woman, would face even more difficulties without a son. These stories, then, are, on one level, about a cycle in which socially inferior women (mothers) could not protect their men (sons) and men ultimately could not protect their women.

5.1.4.2. Outside Family (In the Larger Society)

Obviously, leaving home was a big challenge for the two heroes. Leaving behind

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[324] Barry G. Webb, *The Book of Judges*, 50-51; John Gray, *Joshua, Judges, Ruth* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1986), 314.

[325] Dong-Hyeob Kim, "A Study on Honggildong-jeon in Relation to the Mediator of Desire," 18.

his family and neighbors, Gildong must have gone through new struggles without any protection, including what little protection his mother could have offered him within his father's house.[326] Likewise, Jephthah went through great pain when he was driven by his own people into a foreign land. The two heroes are the scapegoats of their societies. They did no wrong to be hated by their families and communities. Gildong was simply born into a restrictive feudal system with no place for the child of a secondary wife. For Jephthah, although the hierarchical system in ancient Israel may not have been as inflexible as the hierarchal system in Joseon Korea, there still existed discrimination against prostitution and the children born of prostitution. Given the Bible's position on prostitution (Deut 22:21; 23:18), it makes sense that the wider community was hostile to Jephthah. In both stories the heroes represent for their communities what is less-than or other. They are the undesirable elements in their worlds. At the same time, the inferior sons have superior ability which made them more hateful, so both *minjung* heroes were neglected and deserted by their families and societies, actions which do not happen to noble heroes. The very same status that made these heroes unsuccessful within their families make them unsuccessful in the wider community as well.

It must be noted in relation to HongGildong-jeon in particular, that the act of departing from family, even though it was because the story's hero had been victimized by his people, would remain unjustifiable in Asian culture. Such abandonment of filial duties is the biggest act of dishonor that a child could perpetuate against parents in

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[326] Ibid., 18.

Confucian society, where supporting one's parents is the foremost virtue of children.[327] The hero's first great act of independence and defiance against a corrupt society would not always be read in a positive light, since a Confucian society's system of values is community-based.

After leaving paternal houses and hometowns, Jephthah and Gildong meet supporters from outside their initial communities. Gildong wonders aimlessly, but, by chance, he meets a group of social bandits and joins them. Having all been neglected by their normative social structures, this group of outcasts created an alternative society of their own, a society in which Gildong is able to find space to exercise his leadership qualities.[328] Similarly with Jephthah, after being expelled, a group of adventurers gathers around him and follows him (Judg 11:3). For these two heroes this is an unexpected boon, as neither one of them had planned in advance to leave their original community in order to form an alternative society.

Yet, both Jephthah and Gildong show themselves to be unconstrained by social restrictions and willing to work hard to overcome the calumnies of life and culture, not just for their own benefits but also for the very societies that had antagonized them. As their stories progress, they seemingly solve the major crises of their respective plot lines and managed to become recognized by their people in the long run. Although they began as social outcasts, they did good for their societies. Gildong reformed social corruption. He was not satisfied simply with his own promotion by the king, but rather, he kept

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[327] Sung-Ae Ha "An Invitation for Post-Colonial Reading of the Prophetic," 180.

[328] Won-Soo Lee, "Logic and Meaning of HongGildong-jeon," *Literature and Language* 17 (May 1996): 198-99.

fighting for social reformation (in this sense, Gildong is different from Jephthah, who cared primarily about his own promotion in his community). Jephthah, for his part, led the battle with the Gileadites' enemy, the Ammonites, successfully. These two proved to be not only individual heroes, but also communal heroes. They became the means of rescue for their societies.

5.1.4.3. Final Storyline

As Dong-Il Jo keenly describes, *minjung* heroes will eventually fail because their social status impedes their ultimate success. [329] Both Jephthah and Gildong have a strong desire for success and also possess the capabilities to achieve their goals, but they ultimately failed because of their lowly birth status. Keeping in mind that the main worldview during the time of the Joseon Dynasty was grounded in Confucianism which is hierarchical based on social status, Gildong's failure is predictable.[330] For this reason, he left for the virtual world,[331] whose social system, being fundamentally different than the one that he was born into, was the only hope of final success for Gildong.

For Jephthah, on the other hand, the system he was born into would not necessarily be hostile to his success. Israelite judges, after all, were regular people during ordinary times, who became military heroes by the charismatic power of the spirit of

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[329] Dong-Il Jo, *Korean Narrative and Awareness of Minjung* (Seoul: JeongUmSa, 1985), 121-23.

[330] Confucianism is established as a national ideology in this period, whereas Buddhism and Taoism decreased in influence because of the strong impact of Confucianism (Jae-Hyung, Koh, "A Study on the Religious Thoughts Reflected in HyeGyun's Honggildong-jean," [M.Ed. thesis; Kyunghee University Graduate School of Education, 2001], 6).

[331] This world is a deviant version of reality, which does not exist in the realm of the actual or in concrete human reality. Rather, it exists in a more mythical, abstract, and ideal space.

Yahweh.[332] In the period of Judges, anyone could conceivably become a military deliverer, even if they were left-handed (Ehud),[333] a woman (Deborah), or, perhaps, even if they were born from the wrong kind of woman. Jephthah, the son of a prostitute, is a charismatic deliverer empowered by a deity. Jephthah was a known skilled warrior (11:1) whose military acumen allowed him to acquire some measure of social standing. Yet, in the end, even his story does not allow for complete success. Although it is conceivable that within Jephthah's society one might have been able to see that it was unfair for Jephthah to be mistreated as he was, as portrayed in the story, ancient culture could not allow for someone like Jephthah and Gildong to rise to the top. Even though they tried hard to make their life successful, they failed in the long run not because of their lack of ability but because of their birth status, as the *minjung* hero theory would have predicted.

5.1.5. Summary on the Discussion of the Jephthah Story and HongGildong-jeon

When Gildong and Jephthah are compared with one another and placed within the three stations discussed above, then productive avenues for better understanding each story come to light. In an Asian understanding, Jephthah should be evaluated within the context of the community which hated and abandoned him in his early life and neglected him afterwards as well. It is critical for a robust reading of the Jephthah narrative to highlight Jephthah's treatment by his family and community.

Here is a summary comparison of what has been discussed thus far between

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[332] Joong-Ho Jeong, *Israelite History*, 57-61.

[333] Concerning Edud's left-handedness, it is uncertain if there is any implied negative attitude toward Ehud because of this characteristic.

Gildong and Jephthah:

	HongGildong	Jephthah
Paternal Line	Superior	Possibly superior
Maternal Line	Inferior	Far Inferior
Social Status	Concubine's son	Prostitute's son
Superior Ability	Military skills	Military skills
In Family	Unwelcomed	Unwelcomed
In Society	Unwelcomed first but finally recognized	Unwelcomed first but finally recognized
Overcomes Crisis	Yes	Yes
Eventual Triumph	No (or, yes, but only in a virtual world)	No (died and receives no unambiguous positive comments by the narrator)

(1) Paternal line: Gildong's father is clearly in a superior position as a high-ranking member of the Joseon Dynasty; the status of Jephthah's father is not conclusive, as commentators note, since "Gilead" can indicate a personal name, a geographical eponym, or any person belonging to the tribe. (2) Maternal line: both of these heroes' mothers are secondary wives. Gildong's mother is a *chub*, a woman who pleases male guests with singing and dancing, which may include sexual acts, although this is not necessarily always the case. (3) Birth status: both of the heroes hold a less than optimal birth status, and are thus ignored by their people. In Asian culture, Jephthah would be understood as being able to inherit as long as he belongs to his father, and Gildong has

his place in his family. Yet, neither of these characters hold a stable status in their respective houses, and both are eventually removed from their paternal dwelling. Gildong takes the initiative and leaves by his own choice, whereas Jephthah is kicked out by his half-brothers. (4) The hero's superior ability: both heroes have outstanding skill, particularly when it comes to military endeavors. (5) Treatment of the heroes in their family: both were unwelcomed and unwanted, especially by their half-brothers. In Gildong's case, his father was not favorable to him, while in Jephthah's case the father is not mentioned in connection to his expulsion. It seems that the half-brothers expelled him after their father passed away, since at that point the inheritance is mentioned. (6) The societies' treatment of the heroes: the societies were not favorable toward them until the heroes' excellent military abilities were recognized and used. (7) The heroes' overcome their crisis: both of them were persistent to overcome their obstacles. Gildong tries to get rid of social corruption and practice social justice, and finally he is recognized by the king and his people. Jephthah tries to establish his headship position in Gilead, and finally he earns it by negotiation with the elders, who previously drove him out, and by leading the Ammonite battle to success. (8) The heroes' ultimate triumph: both fail in the long run. HongGildong-jeon seems on the surface to be a story with a happy ending, however the happy kingdom under Gildong's rule at the end of the story only exists in a virtual world, which implies that Gildong's dream is possible only in the realm of imagination. The Jephthah story ends with a note that his rulership lasted only six years without providing further comment.

5.2. ShimChung-jeon and Jephthah's Daughter Story, *Hyo* (Filial Piety) Tales

In the middle of the Jephthah narrative, the narrator suddenly introduces a new figure— Jephthah's daughter (11:34-40). To the reader having no information on Jephthah's family, this introduction is quite abrupt. Even more shocking to the reader than her sudden appearance is her final destiny—a ritual death in fulfillment of her father's vow. From the perspective of our contemporary world, the daughter's death is tremendously cruel. It is male violence against a woman who, due to her gender, belonged to one of the many outsider groups found within the pages of the book of Judges.[334]

The story of Jephthah and the sacrifice of his daughter may remind the reader of other stories of human sacrifice found in other cultures and societies, so that, although the narrative in Judges is shocking, it is not uniquely so. Many stories have been told about the women and children who were sacrificed in the midst of national crises, such as war, drought, famine, and other natural and human-made disasters. For instance, in the epic traditions of the Hellenic world, there is the myth of Idomeneus, who, upon his return from the Trojan War, vowed to sacrifice the first one he met once he came ashore. The first person he met was, tragically, his own son (Homer, *Odyssey*, Book 3). Another similar myth is that of Meander, who vowed to sacrifice the first person who congratulated him on his victorious return from war, which turned out to be his son, daughter, and mother. In Korea, likewise, ShimChung-jeon and other legends are readily

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[334] Y. Lee points out that there are several groups of outsiders such as certain tribes (Ephramites), gentiles, and women in the book of Judges. She discusses Jephthah's daughter as a scapegoat in the Gileadite community (Yoon-Kyung Lee, "Reading the Jephthah's Daughter Story with René Girard's Scapegoat Mechanism," *Old Testament Forum* 49 [2013]: 96)

comparable to the narrative of Jephthah's daughter.

The traditional Asian perspective provides an alternative viewpoint on such sacrifice tales to the modern Western perspective, and thus may help to shine a different light with which to understand the story of the sacrifice of Jephthah's daughter. According to the general, traditional Asian perspective, the male-dominated group would have killed or would have allowed the killing of the daughter not because they had enmity against her but because they had to save the community from total destruction. When the ancient community faced an existential crisis, one option for procuring the favor of the gods and securing the survival of the community was to sacrifice one's children. Although such ritual killing would be unjustifiable from the Deuteronomistic perspective, whose primary concern is Yahwistic religion, from the ancient Asian approach there is an element not only of necessity but also of virtue in the performance of such an action. The one making the sacrifice gives up something of great personal value in order to ensure the continuity of values on the higher plain of the community. The larger society comes before the smaller family and certainly before the individual. The one being sacrificed is also understood as being virtuous, for that person has engaged in the ultimate expression of honor to one's parent. The willing child demonstrates *hyo* (filial piety).

In a broad sense, the story of Jephthah's daughter can be read as a story of *hyo*. Samuel Cheon attempts to read the story this way. According to the way of *hyo*, children should sacrifice their personal interests for the sake of their parents, even to the point of

physical death, because the bodies of the children belong to their parents.[335] In Asian literature, the summit of *hyo* is to sacrifice one's life on behalf of one's parents. The children who are sacrificed are praised, and their sacrifice is beatified. In ancient Israel also, to honor parents is prioritized. Such honor even appears in the Decalogue as the first commandment in relation to other human beings (fifth-tenth), and the person who dishonors his father or his mother is to be cursed (Deut 27:16). In certain ways there is greater similarity between ancient Israelite culture and traditional Asian culture than there is between ancient Israelite culture and modern Western culture. How far those similarities go and how helpful adopting such a perspective is for understanding the book of Judges remains to be seen.

In what follows, I will discuss Jephthah's daughter in light of filial piety (*hyo*) and human sacrifice. The story, in a broad sense, is a story about filial piety, while in the narrow sense it is a story about human sacrifice. In order to understand the story of Jephthah's daughter in an Asian perspective as it touches on both the role of children with respect to their parents and on human sacrifice I will examine ShimChung-jeon, a representative story of human sacrifice in classical Korean literature, and then compare that story to the one found in the book of Judges.

5.2.1. Introduction of ShimChung-jeon

ShimChung-jeon was originally of oral tradition, and different versions came to

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[335] Samuel Cheon, "Reconsidering Jephthah's Story in Asian Perspective," 31-35.

exist through the process of transmission.[336] The sources of the story are fables concerned with precognitive dreams about the birth of a child, filial behavior, human sacrifice, rebirth, and the opening of one's eyes.[337] ShimChung-jeon was most likely written during the transitionary period between the Goryeo Dynasty (918-1392) and the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1897), and its various editions were published in the late 19th and early 20th centuries. There are four primary characters in the story: ShimChung (ShimHyun's daughter);[338] ShimHyun (ShimChung's father); Ms. Gwak (ShimChung's mother); and Ms. Jang (ShimChung's neighbor). A group of sailors and the Dragon King of the Sea fill out the cast of characters.

5.2.2. Summary of ShimChung-jeon

The story begins with the introduction of ShimChung's mother, Ms. Gwak, who had been unable to bear a child. After making a great sacrifice to Buddha, however, she gives birth to ShimChung. Soon after the birth, Ms. Gwak dies from birth complications, and ShimHyun raises ShimChung by himself despite his own blindness. Once ShimChung reaches seven years of age, she would go begging by herself. One day,

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[336] Shimchung-jeon is a representative classic, constantly recreated in the love of millions of people, creating more than 100 versions, and revealing its vitality through repeated genres (Han-Goo Yeo, "Psychological Understanding about Shimchung-jeon," *Gukjae Sinhak* 17 [2015]: 284).

[337] Young-Ho Jung, "A Study on the Filial Piety Shown in Shimchung-jeon" (M.Ed. thesis, Kyungsang University, 1988), 28.

[338] Strangely, only ShimChung has a full name in the early versions of the story; the other characters have only their last names. For some reason, the narrator calls ShimChung's father just "ShimBongsa" (Blind Shim). Whereas in the Jephthah narrative the daughter has no name, the father has no name in Shimchung-jeon. In other versions, ShimChung's father appears as ShimHyun or ShimHakgyu. I will use ShimHyun for his name in this paper. The conversations between ShimChung and ShimHyun are the main focus, while Ms. Gwak and Ms. Jang appear only few times throughout the story.

ShimHyun comes to know that he could heal his blindness by offering three hundred *seoms* (measurements) of rice to Buddha, and he immediately makes a vow to do so. Wanting to help her father, ShimChung attempts to earn the rice to open her father's eyes. Ms. Jang, ShimChung's neighbor, encourages ShimChung to be her adoptee in exchange for the rice offering, but ShimChung refuses. Instead, when she hears that sailors are looking for a virgin to sacrifice to the sea, she volunteers at the expense of three hundred *seoms* (measurements) of rice. The sailors accept the offer and throw her into the sea. When the Dragon King hears about ShimChung's filial piety, he uses his power to bring about her rebirth inside a lotus.

5.2.3. Analysis of Shim-Chung-jeon

Even though the primary characters in this story are ShimChung and her father, I will also pay attention to her community in order to examine her in relationship with the community, as was done with Jephthah and Gildong. In this chapter, I will examine ShimChung-jeon by focusing on three aspects of the story: 1) ShimChung in relation to her father. That is, I will examine the dynamics within her nuclear family, especially her thought process in her conversation with her father. 2) ShimChung in relation to her community, namely, the socio-cultural background that may have helped to shape and guide her decision making. 3) Religious features in relation to her sacrificial death. After analyzing ShimChung-jeon in itself, I will compare it to the Jephthah's daughter story with respect to these same three aspects. Although the two stories are separated by a large amount of time and distance, such a comparison ought to be productive since both stories

overlap in their broad and narrow topics. In addition to this topical overlap, both stories contain a conversation between a father and a daughter concerning the father's vow. These conversations between the fathers and the daughters reflect the customs and ideologies of each particular society.

5.2.3.1. ShimChung in Relation to Her Father

As the timeframe for the composition of ShimChung-jeon was sometime between the Goryeo Dynasty (918-1352 CE), whose main religion was Buddhism, and the Joseon Dynasty (1392-1910), whose main religion was Confucianism, themes of the mixture of two religions appear in the story. When seen as a story with a Confucian lesson, ShimChung's death for her father is taken for granted because children are supposed to make sacrifices of themselves for their parents, even to the point of death. From a Buddhist perspective, which came to Korea earlier than Confucianism, the summit of prayer is death, of which ShimChung was not afraid. Death is a gateway to the pain-free world. ShimChung's self-sacrificial death for her father is an important theme in both Buddhist and Confucian senses.

ShimChung's early years should be considered when evaluating her decision to die for her father. From a very early stage, ShimChung was filled with pain. Her parents abandoned her in turn. First, her mother did not rejoice in her birth, but rather lamented because the only child born to her in her old age was, disappointingly, a daughter (not a son). After losing her mother, ShimChung's father blames the young ShimChung, calling her the destroyer of his comfortable life, for she had, to his mind, driven his wife to

death.[339]

Given ShimChung's early relationship with her parents, it is no surprise that she struggled with feelings of guilt. Rather than becoming angry at her father and pushing the blame back on him, however, ShimChung clung to her father.[340] She felt a strong responsibility to take care of her father. This, however, led to further feelings of guilt for not taking better care of him.[341] The scholar of Korean literature, In-Sun Yoon, in a study on the account of this narrative, described the situation as that of a daughter who felt compelled to sacrifice herself rather than cause any malediction or blame to affect her father.[342]

As the young ShimChung's need to cling to her father increased she would become something of a surrogate parent to her father. Even though traditional customs dictated that ShimHyun ought to have played the role of the protector for his young daughter, ShimChung protected him instead.[343] She put aside her needs in order to meet the needs of her father. She became like the children Soo-Yeon Cho describes, who do

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[339] Hye-Jin Choi, "The Literature Therapeutic Approach of Shimchung-Jeon" *Journal of Literary Therapy* 4 (2006): 112; Soo-Yeon Cho, "The Influences of Guilty Feelings and Scapegoat Complex on Individuation in Shimchung-jeon," (Ph.D diss., Pyeongtaek University, 2013), 7.

[340] Hyun-Joo Choi, "Shimchung-jeon through Psychological Analysis of Characters," *The Research of the Korean Classic* (1999): 45.

[341] Dong-Hee Lee, "The Significance of Literary Therapy for Parental Children on Shimcheong-ga" *Journal of Korean Oral Literature* 30 (2010): 249.

[342] "Daughters, threatened by their fathers with their lives, give up their own lives and try to save that of their fathers (In-Sun Yoon, "Abandoned Daughters in Myth and Literature 2-2: Sacrificial Filial Piety-Bypassed Suicide" *Revus D`Etudes Franco-Coreennes* 18 [2000): 18).

[343] D. Lee, in an important study on the topic, pointed out that ShimHyun was not free from his daughter; rather he became her child, as he was a child to his wife (Dong-Hee Lee, "The Significance of Literary Therapy for Parental Children on Shimcheong-ga" *Journal of Korean Oral Literature* 30 [2010]: 249).

not allow themselves to express a variety of emotions under the strong influence of feelings of filial piety. The difficulty for them in recognizing their own desires and emotions comes from being too sensitive to the emotions of other people around them.[344] ShimChung prioritized the desires of her blind father over her own right to live her life, identifying her life-purpose with that of her father's. ShimChung could not focus on meeting her own needs, for she was preoccupied with fulfilling her duties of filial piety, with meeting ShimHyun's desires. In this way, ShimChung's attitude and actions emphasize the honor attached to traditional values rather than her individual life. Sang-Il Lee interprets this story by saying that the desires of the parents were transferred to the desires of the immature child.[345] Thus, whether she wanted it or not, her father's desires were indirectly but inextricably linked with her own desires.[346]

5.2.3.2. ShimChung in Relation to Her Community

Beyond the more personal issues between ShimChung and her father, her actions and character need to be analyzed within the larger socio-cultural contexts in which she finds herself. In the late Joseon period, a certain class of people—elderly males in the *yangban* (aristocrat) group— became the absolute holders of societal power, and they could wield that power as a tool for maintaining control over female members of the

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[344] Their common reaction is to feel guilty when they cannot meet the expectations of others. The anxiety that comes from the conflict seems to be resolved by self-punishment. More guilt leads to more self-punishment (Soo-Yeon Cho, "The Influences of Guilty Feelings and Scapegoat Complex on Individuation in Shimchung-jeon," 16).

[345] Sang-Il Lee, "The Analysis of Elements and Structures of Conflicts in Shimchung-jeon," *Journal of Literary Therapy* 37 (2015): 119.

[346] Ibid., 122.

society. Such female oppression was worsened by sudden changes in the Confucian society of that period, which led to an increase of destitute men. In the social order men held more power than ever before, but many men of that period lacked the material means to act as the primary providers for their families. Accordingly, it often fell to women to support their families. As a result, the servitude and sacrifice of women deepened. Dong-Hyun Choi concludes that ShimChung-jeon is a story concerned with how such feudal ethics of the Confucian society drove women to death.[347]

ShimChung's adherence to filial piety is grounded in conventional notions of such a patriarchal society.[348] Her seemingly voluntary behavior is a concrete expression of the social norms of her society, and thus it is actually an involuntary act, imposed on her from the outside.[349] When ShimHyun made it known to ShimChung that he would go to the Buddhist temple to cancel his initially impulsive vow, which he had made in the hope of curing his blindness, she withdrew from him and experienced feelings of guilt rather than joy, even though the cancelling of the vow would remove a danger from her life. By expressing his plan, he stimulated her filial piety more, and so she resolved to put her father's health above her own. Her behavior reflects the value of being a mature child as judged by her Confucian, patriarchal society. The father in the ancient world is, after all, more than a mere family member. He is the symbol of authority and power in the social structure.

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[347] Dong-Hyun Choi, "About the Subject of Shimchung-jeon: In Feminist Perspective," *Gookeo Moonhak* 31 (1996): 70-71.

[348] Ibid., 71.

[349] Young-Ran Jang, "The Repression Mechanism of Sacrifice and Philosophy of Self-Realization in the Korean Heroine Epic." *Korean Women Philosophy* 9 (2008): 10.

ShimChung's sacrifice fits within the societal construct of traditional patriarchy inasmuch as it supports the establishment of her own identity as a socially accepted woman. What if she let her father cancel the vow? She might have become a bad example of the practice of *hyo*. Her neighbors might blame her for making her father cancel the vow. And what if she accepted Ms. Jang's suggestion to be her adoptee in order to obtain the rice for the vow offering? How could ShimChung live in the village as Jang's adoptee without taking care of her father? She was not capable of isolating herself from the social expectations of that era. The social pressure placed on her was to practice filial piety even if that meant the loss of her own personal wellbeing.[350] Thus, it was socio-cultural values that caused ShimChung to meet her people's, as well as her father's, desire.

Furthermore, ShimChung's sacrificial death was more than an act that saved face for herself and her father in a society that would have judged her and her family for any lack of filial piety on her part. It was an act of rescue for the whole community, saving them from calamities within the story and preserving the identity of the society. If she had not volunteered to die, the sailors would not have overcome the crisis they faced. The crisis, if lengthened, would have threatened the life of the whole community. Thus, her death had an impact on the life of the villagers as well by calming the life-threatening storms. By sacrificing herself, she saved her community as well as her father.

Even though ShimChung is quoted as a representative figure of one who becomes a victim of the practice of filial duty, S. Perera describes her as a scapegoat— an

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[350] Soo-Yeon Cho, "The Influences of Guilty Feelings and Scapegoat Complex on Individuation in Shimchung-jeon," 17.

individual who is charged with responsibility for a community's problem.[351] Her sacrifice works in the long run to meet society's ideology of that time. As every society has a collective consciousness, or ideology, ShimChung's society does also. ShimChung's society enforced heavy social demands on one such as ShimChung, who was not in the privileged position of being elderly or male. Thus, ShimChung lived and died not by her own internal desires, but by choosing a thoroughly sacrificial—or victimized—life, laying aside herself for the sake of those higher up on the societal scale. The values held by her society pre-determined the value judgment of her act.

5.2.3.3. Religious Features in ShimChung's Death

In the Buddhist worldview, death is a gateway to paradise. ShimChung's life was full of pain, but her death had the possibility of being something different. For ShimChung, death functions in two ways. 1) It gives her freedom. There is no more pain in paradise. Only in life-after-death would she have no more *han*. The life of a young woman having a blind father must be filled with pain in a male dominant culture as the people place upon her heavy duties to serve her father well and meet the people's expectations. 2) Through her death her father can recover his eyesight. In this way, he can satisfy his *han,* and she can have her father's *han* satisfied. In addition to providing this boon for her father, she could also meet the expectations of her society, becoming a pious child. Furthermore, in a Confucian worldview, a person is deified after his/her death, which is the only religious aspect of Confucianism.

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[351] Sylbia B. Perera, "The Scapegoat Complex – Toward a Mythology of Shadow and Guilt," 9.

In many ancient worldviews, the sea was a place where deities threaten peoples' lives. The sea typically symbolizes death in literature. The raging sea means a life-threatening crisis. Yet, surprisingly, ShimChung was ultimately able to survive the sea. This was because ShimChung's *hyo* impressed the Dragon King of the Sea. This atypical survival makes her a special being, and the fact that she was reborn inside a lotus on a pond makes her divine, the lotus being a symbol of light and life in Buddhism. Even today, a lotus on a pond reminds many people of the rebirth of ShimChung, who is a representation of *hyo*. Many still praise her virtues and quote her story, holding her up as a model of filial piety.

5.2.4. Comparisons of ShimChung-jeon and Jephthah's Daughter Story

Whether ShimChung-jeon is seen as the story of ShimChung or of her father remains a point of contention among scholars.[352] Both her filial piety and the opening of his eyes are undeniably major issues in the story, but it is difficult to determine whether the daughter or the father is the main character. Several scholars (Dong-Il Cho, Leo-Ok Choi, I-Du Cheon, and Jung-Hwan Seol) do not confine the main character to either ShimChung or ShimHyun. The story, they argue, is not primarily about this character or that character, instead they see the story as focused primarily on the theme of *han* (grudge, dissatisfaction). Even though ShimChung's sacrifice seems voluntary, it is also involuntary. She followed the only path available to her; she could only do those actions

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[352] In a story version, ShimChung is the main character; in a *pansori* (a form of folk music that developed during the mid-to-late Joseon Dynasty), ShimHyun is placed at the center. Han-Goo Yeo, "Psychological Understanding about Shimchung-jeon," 284.

that the society expected of women. ShimChung-jeon, then, is about the process of satisfying ShimChung's *han* through death and also the process of satisfying ShimHyun's *han* through the recovery of his eyesight.[353]

Likewise, it is difficult to determine who the main character of the Jephthah narrative is. Even though it is obvious that Jephthah, the judge, is the main character of the first part of the narrative, Jephthah's daughter is at the center of the story and is the character on which the final action of the story turns. The narrative does not simply talk about her sacrificial death but also about the memorial ritual to commemorate her (Judg 11:40). Thus, instead of simply designating either Jephthah or his daughter as the main character, I will discuss the narrative in the comparative light of the main theme of ShimChung-jeon, that is, the *han* of Jephthah and Jephthah's daughter in relation to her father and also to her community. Jephthah's *han* is related to his social status—son of a prostitute (*seoja*), as I discussed in the previous chapter—and the daughter's *han* is also related to her social status—woman in a patriarchal society. In addition to their society's discrimination against these two characters, based on their status, I will also draw attention to the social conditions that make up the setting of the story and are important for understanding the narrative as a story about *han*.

5.2.4.1. The Two Daughters in Relation to Their Fathers

Notable in the two stories, the Jephthah's daughter story and ShimChung-jeon, is

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[353] I-Doo Cheon, *Study on Structure of Han*. (Seoul: Moonhakgwa Jishungsa, 1993), 154-56; Everyone has *han* in their hearts, and all humans live in the world of *han*. Because humans are weak, they are hurt by others, and they are trapped by *han*. At the same time, depending on each person's situations that he/she faces, the depth of *han* is different. Thus, it is more like a subjective feeling.

that the roles and societal functions of adults and children are reversed. Even though a father is supposed to protect his child, in these stories the child plays the father's role, and each father acts as a child to their daughters. Jephthah's daughter takes an active role in her relationship with her father. She acts and speaks in defense of her father, coming out of the house with singing and dancing for her father and urging him to fulfill the vow he made. She is presented as being an active protector of her father rather than playing the role of the passive victim.[354] Likewise, when ShimChung dissuades her father, who told her to cancel the vow, she functions like a guide and protector to her father.

In contrast, the two fathers take care of themselves rather than seek the well-being of their daughters. Jephthah takes no steps to protect his daughter nor does he struggle with how to solve the problem on his own. In that circumstance, he does not ask for help from Yahweh, whom he called upon earlier in the narrative. There is no active paternal struggle to protect the innocent daughter. Rather, he blames his daughter for making his life miserable (11:35). Jephthah lacks fatherly love toward his daughter. ShimHyun also accepts ShimChung's death. His affections toward her throughout the story were not those of fatherly love, rather, he views ShimChung as the source of his problems, blaming her for making his life unfortunate when she was young.

The two innocent daughters' miserable deaths were because of their fathers' fatal and seemingly careless vows. These vows may seem abruptly made at first glance, but upon further investigation one can see that they were calculated. Jephthah was probably aware that he would be offering up his daughter as a sacrifice even while he first spoke

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[354] Jeong-Hye Lee, "Jephthah's Daughter: Her Han and Satisfying It through Korean Shamanism," 232.

the words of the vow. As the narrator emphasizes, he has only one child. "Except for her he had neither son nor daughter" (Judg 11:34). There was nothing else of great sacrificial worth in his household other than his daughter. The same kind of intentionality is applicable for ShimChung's father, who also has only one daughter in his family. Both daughters lived as the social weaker in patriarchal cultures in which a father's authority is absolute. Even though the daughters acquiesced to the wills of their fathers, it was the fathers' irresponsible desires that drove the innocent daughters to death. The responses of the daughters may not entirely be out of filial piety; their actions seem at one and the same time voluntary and involuntary given the demands of their robust patriarchal societies.

Both stories contain a scene wherein the fathers' give voice to their lamentation upon learning that their daughters are to die. These lamentation scenes help to give the reader insight into the internal states of the fathers, and, although on the surface each father is attempting to express grief that would indicate love for the child, these scenes may further expose the ambivalence that the fathers feel toward their daughters. Jephthah's lament is short and aggressive. He harshly says to her, "*You* have completely ruined *me*! *You* have brought *me* disaster!" (11:35, emphasis added). The focus of Jephthah's grief is on himself and not on his daughter. The same is true for ShimChung's father, who also laments over his own personal loss instead of focusing on the loss from his daughter's perspective. Also, as with Jephthah, there is very little narrative volume given to the father's lamentation. In contrast, the *pansori* version of ShimChung-jeon

describes the father's sadness much more fully than in the story (*jeon*) version.[355]

> "Alas! What is this? Look, ShimChung! What did you say? What did I hear? I prayed in famous mountains and Buddhist temples to have you. Sacrificing to a god of tree when I saw a tree, and sacrificing to a god of stone when I saw a stone, with my wholeheartedness, I prayed to all sorts of gods for your birth, and finally I had you. When you were seven days old, I begged for milk from door to door and I fed you. Now you have grown up like this. I was able to overcome the grief of your mother's death because you were growing up. But what is this? What is my fortune? Why did my wife die? How can I lose my daughter? Whom shall I depend on now? How could I live on without my daughter? You cannot leave! You cannot leave! You cannot leave me! Alas! Woe to me! My wife died and now I am about to lose my child!"[356]

We can imagine what Jephthah's words would be if they were expressed in *pansori*, too.[357] The short expression, "You have made me miserable and

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[355] "*Pansori*" is a Korean genre of musical storytelling. "*Pan*" means a place where people gathered; "*Sori*" means music. It is performed by two people: a singer and a drummer, similar to a monodrama.

[356] This is S. Cheon's English translation from Youngok, et al., *Modern Translation of ShimChung-ga and Heungbo-ga* (Pansori Series 8; Seoul: Minsokwon, 2005), 46-47. Samuel Cheon, "Reconsidering Jephthah's Story in Asian Perspective," 38-39.

[357] A similar scene in the Hebrew Bible is also imaginable from the wailing of Jacob who lost three sons (Gen 42:36).

wretched!" (Judg 11:35), is not enough for the reader to fully clarify the actual feelings of Jephthah. It is conceivable that another storyteller could take those lines and spin them out into a larger expression of grief, as in the *pansori* version of ShimChung-jeon (which also ends with the focus of the lamentation being on the father himself). Even though Jephthah seems to recklessly blame his daughter, the brevity of his statement and the narrative's lack of focus on Jephthah in these final scenes leaves open the possibility that Jephthah is not cursing his daughter but, rather, is indirectly blaming his destiny, grieving the fate that leads him to the loss of his only child. Any sensitive audience member would assume that a father who is about the lose his child must feel desperately miserable as expressed in the *pansori.* Such a scene and such a speech are not, however, given to Jephthah in the story as it stands.

5.2.4.2. The Two Daughters in Relation to Their Communities

Jephthah's daughter, like ShimChung, tried to live up to her community's values. When faced with the exposure that accompanied their movements outside their fathers' houses and the subsequent public attention that this exposure entailed, both ShimChung and Jephthah's daughter were driven to meet the expectations of their people, including parents and villagers. The daughters are the weaker members of the social hierarchy. For them the decision they made was the only option they could have chosen. What else could they have done other than bear their fathers' demands as they were placed under the public scrutiny of their wider patriarchal societies as well as under the private authority of their fathers? For such daughters, who were socially underprivileged, whether to comply

or to refuse was not an option but a must.

The two societies allowed the two young women to be put to death. None of the Gileadite elders expressed opposition to the ritual killing of Jephthah's daughter, and the whole of the Gileadite community acquiesced to the practice in silence.[358] It was the same for ShimChung. Ms. Jang offered to take ShimChung in as her adoptee for the price of the rice-offering, but this was in order that Ms. Jang could satisfy her own desires and not as a free-gift to take care of ShimChung. In fact, if ShimChung had become someone's adoptee, then this would have been seen as an act that was dishonoring to her father. Under strong cultural pressure the right function of the self was paralyzed in ShimChung and Jephthah's daughter. In this sense, the two daughters were abandoned by their communities as well as their fathers.

5.2.4.3. Religious Features concerning the Two Daughters' Death

Both women's deaths have religious implications. In Asian culture, every deceased person is worshipped through ancestor ritual. This is especially so if the person lived a heroic life; he/she is deified and receives worship. The deification of the deceased one often depends on the type of death one experiences, specifically in our context on whether or not a sacrificial death was voluntary.[359] The annual mourning ritual for Jephthah's daughter can be understood in this manner (11:40). At the end of the story of

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[358] Jae-Gu Kim, "The Daughter of Jephthah, Sacrificed for Whom?" 47.

[359] In this manner, Jephthah and ShimChung are eligible to be deified since they came to death through their own will, although the degree of the willingness is still controversial. On the other hand, the death of Iphigeneia is different because her death is unavoidable, as her fate comes from the oracle through the prophet Kalchas. Young-Ran Jang, "The Repression Mechanism of Sacrifice and Philosophy of Self-Realization in the Korean Heroine Epic." *Korean Women Philosophy* 9 (2008): 18.

Jephthah's daughter, the Israelite women commemorate Jephthah's daughter rather than Jephthah, the heroic leader who saved Israel from the hand of the Ammonites. Jephthah's daughter could be understood to have become a special being because she died to save her people from their crisis, even rescuing her father, who had made the vow that was responsible for her death.

In a similar manner to the exaltation and preservation of the memory of Jephthah's daughter, ShimChung comes back to life in a lotus, the symbol of rebirth, which makes her a special being. Her *hyo* (filial piety) so impresses the Dragon King Under the Sea that he brings back her to life. Her death saves the sailors' lives, who were threatened by the raging waves, and also saves the entire village. Both Jephthah's daughter and ShimChung not only practiced filial piety (*hyo-nye*) but also rescue their people from crises. They are active heroines worthy of the audiences' respect. At the same time, they are tragic characters whose positive qualities contribute to their own suffering.

Jeong-Hye Lee relates the Israelite women's commemoration for Jephthah's daughter (Judg 11:40) to the Korean *gut* (exorcism) ritual, which is done to propitiate the dead's *han* (irresolvable grudge) and relieve his/her grudge. [360] In the same manner, the ancient Israelite women's annual ritual was done to solve the *han* of the unnamed dead one as well as to commemorate the sacrificial-heroic death of Jephthah's daughter.

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[360] J. Lee links the *hanpuri-gut* (a kind of exorcism ceremony ["*gut*"] to propitiate one's grudge ["*hanpuri*"]) in the Korean shamanistic faith to the ritual for Jephthah's daughter (Jeong-Hye Lee, "A Research on Jephthah's Daughter: Her Han and Hanpuri in Korean Shamanism," 212-20).

5.2.5. Summary on the Discussion of the Stories of Jephthah's Daughter and ShimChung

The two stories contain similar features particularly in the use of the triple motif: 1) A father's intentional vow is made. Even though the vow seems abrupt in the eyes of the reader, it may be pre-calculated by the fathers. 2) An innocent daughter is sacrificed, which resolves the national crisis as well as her father's vow. The sacrifice is not just the daughters' act of complying with their fathers but also with the will of the larger community. The sacrifice is intended to save the community from the irresolvable predicament, which, if left unresolved, may bring a worse crisis to the community. 3) Religious features are included after the daughters' death, a death that is remembered nationwide.

The comparative studies between Jephthah's daughter and ShimChung reveal that women in the ancient world lived in fragile situations in various cultures (West Asia and East Asia) and periods (first millennium BCE; first millennium CE) as long as they lived in a patriarchal system. Instead of resisting, women had to obey and honor their fathers in the home and their elders in the larger unit of the society. In such cultures, they had to support their males voluntarily because such willing support was the only avenue open for women's success in life in such cultures. To act in direct defiance to the social order and against social values was not likely to lead to the good life. At a cursory level of reading, Jephthah's daughter and ShimChung are models for filial piety (*hyo*). Yet, a closer reading shows more than that. The two daughters' filial piety was both enforced from the outside as well as a voluntary act. To be a true self-sacrificial death the person

being sacrificed should not be forced by others. However, societal expectations had an undue influence on the daughters' decisions. The stories show that when society idealizes certain values, such as *hyo* (filial piety), it marginalizes certain groups, such as women.

5.3. Chapter Summary

It is imaginable from the discussions in this chapter that there are elements in these stories that would make both Israelite and Asian audiences uncomfortable. With regard to the stories of Jephthah and HongGildong, the traditional Asian audience might have been bothered by the half-brothers of Jephthah in their banishment of Jephthah, particularly when they said, "because you are the son of another woman" (Judg 11:2), since, from an Asian perspective, Jephthah ought to be an eligible son as long as he belongs to his father. By denying Jephthah's inheritance, Jephthah's half-brothers ironically reveal that there was, in fact, a possible portion for him.

Also, with regard to the stories of Jephthah's daughter and ShimChung, the traditional Asian audience might have been bothered by Jephthah's lack of sympathy and his harsh blame toward the daughter. The aforementioned *pansori* version of ShimChung-jeon describes ShimHyun's feeling of loss. Similar feelings for Jephthah are also imaginable, but the story as it is presented in Judges does not provide positive evidence for such feelings. Even though the daughter might decide to follow her father's vow voluntarily, an honorable father is not supposed to so directly push her. On the other hand, the Israelite audience might be bothered when ShimChung refused to receive the amount of rice from Ms. Jang, since in that way the problem—ShimHyun's recovering

his eyesight—can be resolved and ShimChung did not have to sacrifice her life. However, the concept of *hyo* (filial piety), even to the point of dying for one's parents, is of the foremost importance when it comes to Asian children in a Confucian culture. Such a death may be even more positive from a Buddhist understanding, as death in that system is a gateway to release from the pains of the world, and it is the path to paradise. All in all, comparisons of the stories of Jephthah and HongGildong and Jephthah's daughter and ShimChung discussed in this chapter can reveal much more about those stories if there is a greater focus on the circumstances of the communities as well as on the individuals' personal issues. As HongGildong-jeon and ShimChung-jeon satirize the incompetence, corruption, and the suffering of the people in Asian society and culture caused by the ruling class as a collective, the story of Jephthah and his daughter also criticizes the spiritual corruption during the socio-political transition in the Promised Land.[361]

[361] Sung-Min Kim "Analysis of Psychological Interpretation on Korean Society and Shimchung-jeon" *Social Theory* 20.

Chapter 6. Conclusion

In the history of the interpretation of the Jephthah narrative, most discussions of that narrative have been concerned with evaluating Jephthah as an individual. Commentators in this tradition have tended to focus on Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter with the goal of giving a theological and moral judgement based on the Deuteronomistic perspective. Focusing on a certain scene, Jephthah's fulfillment of the vow, this methodology overlooks or ignores important details in the story, such as what happened to Jephthah as well as what Jephthah did. Because of the need for an expanded focus, I raise afresh the question of the Hebrew Bible's criticism of human sacrifice itself, arguing based on such passages as the Abraham-Isaac story (Gen 22) and the action of the Moabite king (2 Kgs 3) that the perspective of the larger text is complex, prohibiting certain forms of human sacrifice but not necessarily prohibiting the ritual absolutely. Even though it is difficult to be fully persuasive in the matter of Jephthah's ritual killing of his daughter, whether that specific instance of the act is justifiable or not, it is worthwhile to discuss the factors that may have contributed to his motivation for making and completing the vow, particularly with the added illumination provided by Asian understandings of community responsibility. In this manner, the motivation of Jephthah's daughter to submit to death as seen from an Asian perspective provides fresh insights for the interpretation of the Jephthah narrative.

Recognizing that one must avoid evaluating Jephthah and the Jephthah narrative based only on this particular action—sacrificing his only child—other approaches, most

notably feminist, literary, and socio-political approaches, have been consulted to shine a light on other characters and details within the story. Feminist approaches attempt to rehabilitate Jephthah's daughter, emphasizing both her autonomy and her victimization at the hands of her father and a male dominated society. Literary approaches attempt to understand the Jephthah narrative in the wider context of the book of Judges as a whole, comparing and contrasting the role Jephthah plays in his story to that of other judges in their stories as well as trying to explain the role the story as a whole plays in the formation of the themes and movements of the entire book of Judges. Socio-political approaches to the Jephthah narrative have expanded the focus from the individual judge to the wider context of tribal and military conflict that creates the backdrop to the story, claiming that in order to better understand the story one must evaluate the characters and actions within the context of those unique circumstances. All of these expansions of focus are needed for a fuller understanding of the narrative. What is more, the additional illumination provided by Asian perspectives on these matters allows for further fresh insights.

In Chapter 3, I have examined interpretations of the Jephthah narrative by Korean scholars during the last century. A fully Korean interpretation of the story is not attempted until the 1970s. Because Korea had gone through unstable socio-political situations, such as annexation by Japan (1910-1945), the Korean War (1950-1953), and the dictatorship by Park Jung-Hee (1963-1979), Korean biblical scholarship had to wait until more stable conditions were present before establishing itself as a distinct entity from the Western missionaries and their methods of biblical interpretation. Since the western missionaries'

biblical interpretation was conservative and the literal reading of texts was the default in Confucian educational systems, early stages of Korean interpretation of the Jephthah narrative were quite literal. After this first wave of Korean scholars, however, another wave of Korean scholars returned home to Korea after studying abroad, and they brought back with them methods and interpretations that would upend the older, conservative interpretations. This later wave of Korean scholars included feminist scholars who criticized Jephthah while praising his daughter. My reading of the Jephthah narrative expands the focus of interpretation even further, broadening the focus of interpretation to include the context of community in which Jephthah and his daughter were placed and suffered throughout their lives.

In Chapter 4, I have tried to closely read Jephthah and his daughter in relation to what happened to them rather than evaluating Jephthah and sympathizing with his daughter purely as individual characters. In my analysis of Jephthah, he had a total of six roles: 1) a Gileadite, having a relationship to his father; 2) a mighty warrior, whom the Gileadites were looking for in Judg 10:18; 3) a son of a prostitute, for which he had to suffer due to the people's prejudice; 4) an expellee through the hatred of his people; 5) a leader of a foreign land, which both emphasized his misfortune but also became an opportunity to prove his military skills to his people; 6) an Israelite judge (but ultimately a judge whose legacy is ambiguous at best). In addition, Jephthah has constant conflicts with others in each stage—in his early years, before the battle, after the battle, and even after the sacrifice of his daughter: 1) with the elders; 2) with the Ammonite king; 3) with his daughter, where he plays the role of the dominant aggressor; 4) with the Ephraimites.

His life is filled with pains. He suffered, and he also made others suffer, including his daughter and his neighboring tribe—the Ephraimites.

In the same manner, I have analyzed Jephthah's daughter in two aspects: in relation to her father and in relation to her community. She was not just a passive victim of her father's vow in that she urged her father to fulfill the vow. Even though her blame on her father is implied in her conversation, she mostly supports her father. At the same time, she was a victim of social death. She was to die not just because of her father but also of her community, who would not defend their member. The great reversal of the story of Jephthah's daughter takes place in the women's active role in Judg 11:39-40. Commemoration by the Israelite women in their annual ritual in memory of Jephthah's daughter gives a powerful voice to the daughter in her sacrificial death.

In Chapter 5, I have attempted to read the Jephthah narrative with an expanded focus and with the aid of an Asian perspective as seen in the parallels between the Jephthah narrative and HongGildong-jeon and ShimChung-jeon. Through the lens of Asian literature, I read Jephthah and his daughter as social inferiors in the midst of an unstable political system and social discrimination. My primary focus was on what happened to them and how they were treated in their community as well as what they did. Their circumstances placed social restrictions upon them, and thus they were treated according to social expectations.

I regard Jephthah as a social inferior person mistreated by his own society. Despite his great military ability, he was hated and banished, even though he was the one who had the means to resolve the military crisis that the community faced, a fact which

exposes the community's blindness in recognizing their hero. As a *minjung* hero, as opposed to a noble hero, he was treated unfairly, once again, in the negotiations with the Gileadite elders. Jephthah's excessive desire for success led him to make a vow which, while not unpermissible for the leader of battle, was unnecessary because the spirit of Yahweh was already with him to guarantee success, as happened with other leaders throughout the book of Judges.[362] As a result of the vow, Jephthah lost his only daughter. Jephthah who had been deserted by his family becomes the one who deserts his family in turn. The unfortunate destiny of the *minjung* hero culminated in his encounter with the Ephraimites, a scene which highlights an even greater level of the Israelites' self-destruction.

In the same manner, I have discussed Jephthah's daughter in relation to her community as well as in relation to her father, mainly focusing on the two questions: 1) Who was responsible for the sacrifice of the daughter? While not denying the role of Jephthah nor the seriousness of the vow he made to Yahweh, I concluded that the absence of the Gileadite elders reveals their responsibility and unjustified disregard of the daughter—a member of their community in need of a champion. These elders had previously played an active role in driving Jephthah out and in taking him back, but they disappear in this scene, failing to act on what should be their duty. At first glance, she was victimized by a powerful male, her father, but upon further reflection it can be argued that hers was a social death, one which was approved by her community, even in their silence. 2) Is her sacrifice voluntary or involuntary? Her sacrifice might be voluntary in that she

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[362] The same phenomenon happens to Othniel (3:10), Gideon (6:34), and Samson in repetition (14:6, 19, 15:14).

urged her father to do to her as he had vowed. At the same time, a circumstantial understanding leads us to an assumption that the daughter's acceptance of her fate was done under immense social pressure, which implies it was involuntary also. There was no other option she could choose in the midst of her patriarchal world. As in the case of ShimChung, Jephthah's daughter's death resolved her father's crisis and her community's crisis at the same time. Their sacrificial deaths benefited their societies and caused them to be remembered by their people.

All in all, the present dissertation has argued that Jephthah and his daughter are both *minjungs* (marginalized social inferiors) who were wronged and mistreated by their people. Even though they worked and were beneficial for the community, they were victimized due to their social status. Their stories conclude with each one's death report (Judg 11:39 for Jephthah's daughter; 12:7 for Jephthah), the heroes and their communities having failed to resolve the *han* of these two social inferiors.

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