

חֻקֹּת

Chuqqat

(Statute)

B'midbar [Numbers] 19:1-22:1

הפטרה חקת

Haftarah Chaqqat

Shophtim [Judges] 11:1-33

The Making of Vows

Shophtim (Judges) 11:30-31

30 And Yephthah vowed a vow to YHWH, and said, "If You will indeed deliver the children of Ammon into my hand,

31 then it shall be, that whatsoever comes forth from the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, it shall be YHWH's, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering."

Scripture records for our instruction many vows made. Some of them like the one above turned out not to be so good.

Shophtim (Judges) 11:34-35

34 And Yephthah came to Mitzpah to his house; and, behold, his daughter came out to meet him with timbrels and with dances; and she was his only child; besides her he had neither son nor daughter.

35 And it came to pass, when he saw her, that he tore his clothes, and said, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low, and you are one of them that trouble me; for I have opened my mouth to YHWH, and I cannot go back."

We may never understand what it was that Yephthah was thinking when he made this vow. Like what did he expect to come out of his front door when he came home? One has difficulty imagining anything that would have been in the house that would have been an acceptable sacrifice to YHWH.

It would seem that this is one of those vows that was not well thought out in advance as to what might possibly happen, or more specifically, what all the possible things that could come out his door to greet him might be when he came home. The truth is that this vow was poorly spoken.

I suppose that it is to Yephthah's credit that he was a man of his word to YHWH and was willing to do according to what he had vowed.

B'midbar (Numbers) 30:2

When a man vows a vow to YHWH, or swears an oath to bind his soul with a bond, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

This particular vow is particularly troubling because it ends up being a human sacrifice. There are those that teach that Yephthah did not offer her up as a burnt offering. But the Scriptural text suggests that this is exactly what he did. If he did do this, then it was against the Torah.

Devarim (Deuteronomy) 18:10

"There shall not be found among you anyone that makes his son or his daughter to pass through the fire."

Please note that Yephthah specifically vowed to offer up as a burnt offering whatever came out of his door upon returning victoriously.

"... and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering."

Yephthah also told this to his daughter concerning what he had vowed to YHWH. She did not want her father to break his vow to YHWH and only requested a time of two months to mourn for her virginity. What she was actually mourning was that she would die childless, not that she was a virgin, per se. If it was only because she was a virgin, she could have easily removed her virginity within those two months. However, she did not have time to marry, become pregnant and have a child inside of those two months. This is what she was mourning: dying without having any children.

The difficulty that we find in this account is that this vow was made in the first place, and then later it was followed through with, which resulted in the death of his daughter. Would it not have been better to have broken the vow and allowed his daughter to live? To be sure, it would have been better! However, even better still would have been not to have made such a foolish vow in the first place. There is a lesson here for us, if we are willing to shema, hear and obey it.

Mishle (Proverbs) 20:25

***It is a snare to a man rashly to say, "It is holy,"
And after vowing to make inquiry.***

Before a person makes a vow of any kind for any reason he should prayerfully consider what he is about to do before he does it. For once a vow is uttered, then YHWH expects us to keep those vows. YHWH wants us to be people of honor. If we say we will do something, then we should do it.

Yeshua taught us these same things: that it is better not to vow than to vow and then break the vow.

Matithyah (Matthew) 5:33-37

33 "Again, you have heard that it was said to them of old time, 'You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to YHWH;'

34 but I say to you, make no oath not at all; neither by the heaven, for it is the throne of Elohim;

35 nor by the earth, for it is the footstool of His feet; nor by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King.

36 Neither shall you swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black.

37 But let your speech be, 'Yes, yes; No, no;,' and whatsoever is more than these is evil."

Please carefully note that Yeshua is not making a blanket statement against vows. He would not do this as He taught us to keep and obey Torah. But note that what He actually was teaching us was not to go beyond simply saying that one is going to do something or that one is not going to do something, by adding an oath to what one has said. He then gives a list of the most common oaths during His day. Now these oaths then are still around today. They have taken on various forms, but they are nonetheless still around. The most common oath is to invoke the Creator of heaven and earth to show that one is telling the truth. Yeshua states that this is evil.

Moshe called heaven and earth to witness against Israel because Israel has a great propensity to do evil in the sight of YHWH our Elohim. Calling upon heaven and earth as a witness is not evil in and of itself, but if one does this in an attempt to hide the truth of a matter, then he may in fact be placing himself under the ban and suffer great loss as a result of making such a statement, which is a type of vow.

Another common type of adding an oath to a vow is when someone adds that they "promise" to do it. This is evil according to what Yeshua taught us. He taught us to let our "yes" be "yes" and our "no" be "no." If we are not believed at this point, then adding an oath to it will not change the person's perception of what we have said. The person hearing us may verbally acquiesce at this point, but deep down inside, there will still be great doubt.

Each time that a person says that he will do something, this is a type of vow. He should then be very careful to do what is possible to follow through in accomplishing that vow. YHWH has called Israel to be a people set-apart from the world. We are not to conduct our lives the way the world conducts its life. We are to be people of integrity and honor. These traits should be taught to our children as they grow

up. If we will invest in the time to teach these things to our children, then eternal rewards will be reaped.

We all remember what Elohim commanded Avraham to go and do, right? He was commanded to go and offer up Yitzchak as a burnt offering.

B'reshit (Genesis) 22:2

And He said, "Take now your son, your only son, whom you love, even Yitzchak, and go to the land of Moryah. And offer him there for a burnt-offering upon one of the mountains which I will tell you of."

What makes this incident so vastly different from what is recorded in the Haftarah portion this week is the fact that Avraham did not initiate this, YHWH did. Furthermore, and perhaps most significantly, Avraham never stopped listening for His Voice and when he heard it, he obeyed, instantly. As a result of listening for and hearing and obeying His Voice, Yitzchak did not die that day, but YHWH commanded Avraham not to harm his son.

We have no such record of this happening in the life of Yephtah.

We have examined in recent weeks how much of what is recorded in Scripture is put there to teach us what not to do. In this portion of Scripture from Shophtim there are many things that Yephtah did that we should learn from so that we do not repeat them.

1. Do not make poorly thought out vows
2. Do not make vows that are open ended, that do not have specifics in them
3. When making a vow, be specific in every detail
4. Seek the will of YHWH, not one's own will in making a vow
5. Never stop seeking YHWH's will, guidance and direction at all times

I wonder what would have happened if Yephtah would have sought the counsel of YHWH in this matter. The Scriptural text never states that he ever did this even once!

ABBA YHWH, teach us to seek You in all matters in our lives; in the name of Yeshua our Mashiach. Amein.

Shabbat Shalom

Zerubbabel ben Emunah

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