

## Knowing, Praying, Living the Holy Scriptures

"How I have loved thy law, O Lord! The whole day it is my meditation." (Ps 118:97)

### Judges 11:29-30

"And Jephthah made a vow to the Lord and said, 'If You deliver the sons of Ammon into my hand, then it shall be that whoever first comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return in peace from the children of Ammon, he shall be the Lord's. I will offer him up for a whole burnt offering.'" (OSB)

After the judging of Gideon, and the 40-year reprieve he provided (Judg 8:28), Israel's downward spiral continues and accelerates. Family rivalries consume both Gideon's family and the whole house of Israel. Gideon's 70 (!) sons are all murdered by one son, Abimelech, with the one exception of the youngest son, Jotham, who prophecies his brother's downfall in a riddle (Judg 9:6-21). Even though king over only the city of Shechem, Abimelech's ruthless ambition to be king—an honor his father had refused (Judg 8:22-23), though ironically Abimelech's name means "my father is king"—quickly turns his subjects sour, and insurrection breaks out. Like all tyrants, Abimelech perpetrates brutal acts of violence against his own people to retain his power (Judg 9:42-49). But he is finally bested by a woman who from the wall of a besieged city drops a millstone on him and breaks his skull (Judg 9:50-57).

In the story of Abimelech, we hear a cautionary tale about kingship in Israel that foreshadows the tension that will come into clearer focus when Israel asks for a king: Israel *needs* a human king to stave off societal chaos, but they *shouldn't* because God is their King, and with a human king will come a host of problems.

The judges Tola and Jair, together covering 45 years, are briefly mentioned (Judg 10:1-5), after which Israel returns to its evil ways and is oppressed by the Ammonites (descendants of Abraham's nephew, Lot [Gen 19:38]) and the Philistines.

Jephthah the Gileadite, son of a harlot and leader of a ragtag band, is enlisted by the family that expelled him, to lead the people of Gilead (Gad) to victory over the Ammonites (Judg 11:1-10). After an abortive attempt to avoid conflict (Judg 11:11-27), Jephthah prepares for war and utters his infamous vow (cf. above). God grants the victory, and upon return, tragically, Jephthah's only daughter runs out first to meet him. In what feels like a parody of Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac, Jephthah's virgin daughter willingly hands herself over to being sacrificed so that her father may keep his vow to the Lord (Judg 11:33-39).

While the event on its own is troubling, what is even more perplexing is that **the biblical narrator doesn't seem to condemn Jephthah's action!** This is a challenge that several Fathers explore and seek to answer. St. Augustine says that God has given us this story "so that our mind might be put to work to pass judgment on this matter" (ACC, 138). Indeed, we must think about the narrator's purpose—could it be that the mere *telling* of the story is condemnation itself, much the way the Book of Judges functions as a whole? For there to be no explicit judgment in the story itself is to mirror the "backwards" or "upside-down" nature of Israel at this time; that such a thing could even *happen* is all that need be said.

Foreshadowed with Gideon in Judg 8:1-3, Jephthah's story concludes with a civil war between his tribe of Gad and that of Ephraim, leaving 42,000 dead (Judg 12:1-7). Certainly this is not the way things are supposed to be.



The Sacrifice of Jephthah's Daughter in an encaustic painting on marble decorating the right pilaster of the sanctuary apse in the main church at the Monastery of St. Catherine. It dates to the 6th century. (<http://www.touregypt.net/featurestories/catherines2-3.htm>)



## ST. PHILIP ORTHODOX CHURCH

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March 1, 2020

EXPULSION FROM PARADISE &  
SUNDAY OF FORGIVENESS  
(CHEESEFARE)

### COMMEMORATIONS:

THE HOLY RIGHTEOUS MARTYR EUDOCIA THE  
SAMARITAN  
ANDONINA THE NEW MARTYR  
DAVID THE ARCHBISHOP

Tone 4 - Eothinon 4

Orthros Gospel: St. Luke 24:1-12  
Epistle: Romans 13:11-14:4  
Liturgy Gospel: St. Matthew 6:14-21

RESURRECTION TROPARION - Tone 4 - Having learned the joyful message of the resurrection from the angel, the women disciples of the Lord cast from them their parental condemnation, and proudly broke the news to the disciples saying, Death hath been spoiled. Christ God is risen, granting the world great mercy!

KONTAKION FOR FORGIVENESS SUNDAY - Tone 6 - O Thou Who guidest to wisdom, and givest understanding and intelligence, the Instructor of the ignorant, and Helper of the poor, strengthen my heart and grant it understanding, O Master. Give me word, O Word of the Father; for behold, I shall not refrain my lips from crying to Thee, O merciful One, have mercy upon me who am fallen.

**TODAY:** ORTHROS & Confession 8:45 a.m.  
Divine LITURGY 10 a.m.  
Memorial Trisagion (Habib & Ibrahim families)  
Coffee Hour, Catechism, SS, & Teens 11:45 a.m.  
Women of St. Mariamne, 12:30 p.m.  
Forgiveness Vespers, 1 p.m.

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Fr Noah & Fr James are available for hospital visits. If you or anyone you know is in the hospital or homebound and would like a visit, please call the church office.

