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Jephthah's Daughter: A Hebrew Foreground for Jesus' Passion in Matthew

Hanna Elizabeth Seariac

A thesis submitted to the faculty of
Brigham Young University
in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Cecilia Peek, Chair
Stephen Bay
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ABSTRACT

Jephthah's Daughter: A Hebrew Foreground for Jesus' Passion in Matthew

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Master of Arts

While there are key differences between Jephthah's daughter's story and that of Jesus, not least the difference in gender of the sacrificial victims, this thesis posits that both the similarities and differences between these two accounts can enrich readings of Jesus' death in the gospel of Matthew. A careful comparison of the narrative of Jephthah's daughter with Jesus' Passion narrative in the gospel of Matthew leads to the conclusion that Jesus' death should be interpreted as a human sacrifice. Reading Jesus' death as a human sacrifice and locating it in that socio-religious context makes his death indicative of a transactional, covenantal relationship between him and the Father. These two accounts also share archetypes that come from the Hebrew Bible. Foregrounding Jesus' narrative with Jephthah's daughter's narrative intricately reveals Jesus' connections with the Hebrew Bible, shedding light on the interpretation of his Passion.

Keywords: Jephthah's daughter, Judges, Matthew, Jesus, sacrifice, human sacrifice, atonement, messiah, Isaiah, Genesis, sin offering, intertextuality

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INTRODUCTION

Constructing an imagined conversation between God, the Father, and Jesus, Demetrius of Antioch writes, “Remember, my Son, that the time hath arrived for thee to complete the sacrifice of Isaac, which was insufficient to save the world. The daughter of Jephthah was offered up, but her blood saved only herself [...] it awaiteth Thee to go down in the world and to shed Thy Blood.”¹ This nod to Jephthah’s daughter is more atypical than typical.² In discussions about literary forerunners to Jesus’ passion narrative, Abraham’s halted sacrifice of Isaac overwhelmingly dominates the conversation.³ In Gen. 22, Abraham is commanded to take his son, Isaac, and offer him as a burnt offering. The patriarch submits to this order and travels with two servants and Isaac to the location designated by God. On the third day of travel, he advances with Isaac alone, taking, among other things, wood for the sacrifice, which Isaac carries. Isaac asks his father where the lamb is that they will sacrifice. Abraham responds that God will provide the lamb. Unsurprisingly,

¹ Gertrud Von Loon, “Iconography of Jephthah,” *Art et Archeologie* 40, (1988): 119, translating from E. A. Wallis Budge, ed., *Miscellaneous Coptic Texts in the Dialect of Upper Egypt*, London, 1915, 81, 659.

² One example of a Christian writer who took early notice of Jephthah’s daughter is the medieval Christian commentator Peter Abelard. He wrote a lament *Planctus virginum Israel super filia Jephthe* where he refers to her as Selia (as Pseudo-Philo does) and establishes her as a heroine figure. He notes, “Sing, daughters of Israel, remember that glorious girl, sing the peerless girl of our people—we are greatly ennobled through her!” See Peter Dronke, “Medieval Poetry 1: Abelard,” *The Listener* 74 (November 25, 1965): 843. Abelard also writes about Jephthah’s daughter in his “The Origin of Nuns.” He argues that she is a consecrated virgin, “Wherefore deservedly this fortitude of a girl’s courage by a special privilege was entitled to obtain this, that the daughters of Israel yearly assemble together to celebrate the obsequies of this virgin with solemn hymns and compassionately deplore her suffering with pious tears.” See, *Letters of Abelard and Helois*, trans. C. S. Moncrieff (New York, 1974), 158-59.

³ There are numerous scholarly works on this connection. For example, Pesthy-Simon writes, “The sacrifice of Isaac therefore constitutes a clear link between the death of Jesus and human sacrifice, just as in Judaism it was the link between martyrdom and human sacrifice.” Monika Pesthy-Simon, *Isaac, Iphigeneia, Ignatius: Martyrdom and Human Sacrifice*, (Budapest: Hungary, Central European University Press, 2017), 108. Walsh observes that this link is prevalent in Christian interpretation. See Carey Walsh, “Christianity: Traditional Christian Interpretation of Genesis 22.” in *Interpreting Abraham: Journeys to Moriah*, ed. by Bradley Beach and Matthew T. Powell, 27–56. See also Roy A. Rosenberg, “Jesus, Isaac, and the ‘Suffering Servant.’” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 84, no. 4 (1965): 381–88 and Wineman, Aryeh, “Overtones of Isaac and Jesus in Modern Hebrew Narrative.” *Hebrew Studies* 56 (2015): 377–84.

Christian thinkers see in this a type of Jesus, the lamb of God, who is offered up as a sacrifice. There are, of course, numerous points of comparison: Isaac is called Abraham's "only son," whom he loves; he is the heir; he carries the wood for his own sacrifice, etc.⁴ Although Isaac might provide a natural point of comparison to Jesus, Abraham does not actually sacrifice him. An angel of the Lord terminates the process and Isaac lives a long life afterwards. But there is another narrative, largely overlooked by scholars of Christianity, that proves fruitful for comparative analysis: the tale of Jephthah's daughter, to which Demetrius refers.⁵ In this account, found in Judges 11, Jephthah vows to God that he will sacrifice whoever walks through his door when he returns from his victory over the Ammonites. As it happens, this is his daughter. This narrative, unlike the Isaac narrative, ends with a *completed* human sacrifice of the unnamed daughter, but also contains other points of similarity to the death of Jesus, such as her status as the only child of Jephthah and her willing submission to her father.

Certainly, some scholars have detected and addressed connections between the story of Jephthah's daughter and the story of Jesus. Pesthy-Simon, for example, determines that the death of Jephthah's daughter constitutes a human sacrifice in an Israelite tradition that can be traced back to Isaac, claiming that Yahweh sometimes tolerated and even ordained human sacrifice.⁶ She does not, however, read Jesus' death as a human sacrifice. Reis, for her part, also treats the narrative of

⁴ The many points of comparisons have been treated in Jon Levenson, *Death of the Beloved Son: The Transformation of Child Sacrifice in Judaism and Christianity*, Yale University Press, 1995 and more recently in Carey Walsh, "Christianity: Traditional Christian Interpretation of Genesis 22," 27–56.

⁵ Not all scholars of Christianity overlook Jephthah's daughter. My assertion that many authors overlook the narrative of Jephthah's daughter is to say that male types of Christ, such as Isaac, have received disproportionate attention compared with Jephthah's daughter as such a type. This is true of both scholarship and devotional literature. See discussion below.

⁶ Monika Pesthy-Simon, *Isaac, Iphigenia, Ignatius*, 15-20. Pesthy-Simon, 15, cites Mic. 6:7, which reads "Would the Lord be placated with thousands of rams? With multitudes of streams of oil? Should I give my first-born for my transgression, the fruit of my body for my sins?" While most scholars take this text to assert the absurdity of child sacrifice, Pesthy-Simon reads it as support for the practice, suggesting that it frames "child sacrifice as the most valuable of all offerings."

Jephthah's daughter but concludes that the daughter was not actually killed.⁷ Instead, she lives a life of celibacy: "She manipulates her father, gets him to permit her even what is most offensive, and ultimately ruinous, to him, and secures for herself a life of comfortable independence."⁸ Reis, however, takes no notice of any parallel to Jesus. Bal likewise omits any reference to Jesus and specifically emphasizes Jephthah's daughter's namelessness and virginity, arguing that she becomes an exclusive possession of her father and is only remembered for her submission to him.⁹ Brown Tkacz ties together the narrative of Jephthah's daughter and that of Isaac, but also acknowledges its intertextual ties to the account of Jesus.¹⁰ She argues that Jephthah's daughter and Isaac are sexually balanced types, whose accounts share "verbal echoes."¹¹ The gospel stories of Jesus' death share verbal echoes with both, with Jephthah's daughter serving as a formal type of Jesus.¹²

While others, as noted, from Demetrius on have sometimes acknowledged connections between Jephthah's daughter and Jesus, the account of Jesus' death in the gospel of Matthew affords an especially interesting comparison to Judges 11. Written for a Jewish audience, the gospel of Matthew consistently demonstrates awareness of and engagement with the Hebrew Bible.¹³ While there are key differences between Jephthah's daughter's story and that of Jesus, not least the difference in gender of the sacrificial victims, this thesis posits that both the similarities and differences between these two accounts can enrich readings of Jesus' death in the gospel of Matthew. A careful comparison of the narrative of Jephthah's daughter with Jesus' Passion

⁷ Pamela Tamarkin Reis, "Spoiled Child: A Fresh Look at Jephthah's Daughter." *Prooftexts* 17, no. 3 (1997): 279-298. Reis is not alone in this conclusion. See, among others, David Marcus, *Jephthah and His Vow*, (Lubbock, Texas: Texas Tech University, 1982): 52.

⁸ Reis, "Spoiled Child: A Fresh Look at Jephthah's Daughter," 293.

⁹ Mieke Bal, "Virginity: Toward a Feminist Philology," *Dispositio* 12, no. 30/32 (1987): 82.

¹⁰ Catherine Brown Tkacz, "Women a Types of Christ: Susanna and Jephthah's Daughter." *Gregorianum* 85, no. 2 (2004): 278-311.

¹¹ Brown Tkacz, "Women a Types of Christ," 294.

¹² This is her central thesis, but it is first asserted at Brown Tkacz, "Women a Types of Christ," 278. These several scholars are just a few examples of those who examine the story of Jephthah's daughter. Others will be referenced in the body of this discussion.

¹³ The author's awareness of the Hebrew Bible can be seen through their continuous citation of it.

narrative in the gospel of Matthew leads to the conclusion that Jesus' death should be interpreted as a human sacrifice. Reading Jesus' death as a human sacrifice and locating it in that socio-religious context makes his death indicative of a transactional, covenantal relationship between him and the Father.

This thesis is divided into four sections: a discussion of the death of Jephthah's daughter, an analysis of the death of Jesus as a similar act of human sacrifice, an analysis of what that reading means for the death of Jesus, and a conclusion. First, background information is presented to explain the role of human sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible. This includes glosses of several of the mentions of human sacrifice within the Pentateuch and describes more fully the precedent that Abraham's attempted sacrifice of Isaac offers. Then, the details of Jephthah's daughter's narrative is examined. Following this discussion, the Passion narrative as contained in the gospel of Matthew is investigated, with frequent reference back to Jephthah's daughter, arguing that the similarities between Jesus' death and the death of Jephthah's daughter lead the reader to see Jesus' end as a human sacrifice and that those similarities (and the dissimilarities) provide unique insight into how Jesus' sacrificial narrative should be interpreted.

The analyses rely primarily on intertextual and philological arguments, providing a thoroughly contextualized view of each narrative. In terms of intertextuality, this thesis takes a broad approach influenced by Hinds.¹⁴ While philological arguments often provide the basis for drawing direct parallels, this broad approach allows for the comparison of accounts from different language traditions, allowing for discussion of situative, and not just philological, parallels. All translations are my own.

¹⁴ Stephen Hinds, *Allusion and Intertext*, (Seattle, Washington: University of Washington Press, 1998).

ANALYSIS OF JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER'S SACRIFICE

To understand the account of Jephthah's sacrifice of his daughter in Judges 11, it will be useful to outline briefly the earlier and only other narrative of a human sacrifice designated for Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible: Abraham's intended sacrifice of Isaac.¹⁵ The divine order for Abraham to sacrifice his son seems to function as a test of the patriarch's commitment to God, with whom a covenant had recently been established and from whom certain blessings had already come. Abraham's obedience to that order might serve as an expression of his gratitude for the covenant, for promised future blessings, and for blessings already realized, especially the birth of his son, Isaac. His obedience communicates that Abraham recognizes his absolute obligation to God. God effectively owns him, and he is not his own. Genesis 17 establishes God's covenant with Abraham, affirming that God will make him "very fruitful," "make nations of" him, and make "kings come from" him. This covenant is to persist between God and Abraham's offspring "throughout their generations" (Genesis 17:2-9). God assures Abraham that he will give him a son by his wife, Sarah (Gen. 17:16). That declaration is finally realized in Genesis 21 with the birth of Isaac: "Sarah conceived and bore a son to Abraham in his old age, when God had spoken to him." (Gen. 21:2). In Genesis 22, Abraham is commanded to offer up Isaac as a sacrifice. This son was the promised and the only offspring of the union of Abraham and Sarah. This gives Isaac a critically important role within the Israelite cosmology, which especially heightens the emotional impact of the narrative of Gen. 22. Isaac, as the first-born child, recalls the earliest known animal sacrifice in the Hebrew Bible and the subsequent practice of sacrificing the firstlings of a flock.¹⁶ As the intended sacrificial victim, the firstborn Isaac fits this pattern.

¹⁵ Yahweh commands the sacrifice of Isaac in Gen. 22:2 but does not actually have Abraham perform the sacrifice. While other human sacrifices do occur in the Hebrew Bible, these sacrifices are not commissioned by or promised to Yahweh. Later in the body of the thesis, I gloss instances of human sacrifice.

¹⁶ In Gen. 4, Cain and Abel both offer sacrifices to God: Cain offers the first fruits and Abel offers the firstlings of his flock. God accepts Abel's sacrifice not Cain's. Subsequently, God required

The text explicitly frames this command as a test: “After these things God tested Abraham. He said to him, "Abraham!" And he said, "Here I am” (Gen. 22:1). The author employs the verb נִסָּה ,¹⁷ which is the same word used in Exod. 16:4 when God tells Moses he will provide the Israelites “manna from heaven” to “*test* them, whether or not they will follow his teaching.” This verb also appears in Deut. 13:3 when the Israelites are warned that other prophets might arise and tell the Israelites to follow other gods, but they are not to “hark to the words of those prophets...because the Lord your God is *testing* you.”¹⁸ By treating the sacrifice of Isaac as a test, Abraham’s righteousness becomes contingent upon whether or not he performs the ordered action: “Take your son, your only son, Isaac, whom you love and go to the land of Moriah, and sacrifice him there as a burnt offering on one of the mountains that I will show you.” (Gen. 22:2). Abraham’s relationship with God depends on whether or not he performs this sacrifice. Since it is a test, if Abraham does not perform the sacrifice, he would, we must assume, fall out of favor with God. By framing the ordered offering as a test, the author of Genesis shows the transactional nature of that sacrifice. While God tests Abraham’s righteousness, Abraham tests God’s purpose in having him sacrifice Isaac. Yahweh demands that Abraham demonstrate his righteousness by giving up his dearest blessing from Yahweh himself while Abraham evaluates whether or not Yahweh will bless him more for his sacrifice. Isaac’s passivity reinforces how this sacrifice is transactional between Yahweh and Abraham.¹⁹

animal sacrifice from among the firstborn. Curtiss writes that the Israelites have sacrificed the firstlings of the flock to Yahweh since before the time of Moses, citing Gen. 4. See S. I. Curtiss, “Firstlings and Other Sacrifices,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 22, no. 1 (1903): 46.

¹⁷ s.v., נִסָּה Francis, Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles A. Briggs. *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament*. Oxford: Clarendon, 1907.

¹⁸ The context of this verse in Deuteronomy is that the author describes how to identify false prophets. The author indicates in this verse that Yahweh could test the Israelites through having the Israelites have to identify who is and who is not a false prophet.

¹⁹ See Robert J. Daly, “The Soteriological Significance of the Sacrifice of Isaac,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 39, no. 1 (1977): 46. Daly writes, “By considering all subsequent sacrifices to be effective because of the virtue of Isaac’s fully voluntary offering of himself, this weakness can be obviated.” Daly argues that Isaac’s submission and passivity contribute to the soteriological depiction of his sacrifice.

Even though God commands this sacrifice, an angel prevents Abraham from carrying it out. Elsewhere, the Pentateuch prohibits human sacrifice. Deut. 12:31 warns against it, saying, “Don’t you worship the Lord your God in this way because for their gods they perform every abomination that the Lord hates.” Here, the author connects human sacrifice to the Canaanites and, in so doing, portrays it explicitly as a practice not approved by Yahweh and performed by people outside of his covenant with Israel. By not participating in human sacrifice, the Israelites would distance themselves from the Canaanites. Later, in Deut. 18:10, the author makes an oblique reference to the Canaanites and others practicing human sacrifice, “Among you there will not be found anyone who forces their son or daughter to pass through the fire or who uses divination or who keep dates, or an enchanter or a witch.” This reference clarifies how the Israelites should distinguish themselves. Similarly, in Lev. 18:21, among other injunctions Moses is to give to Israel, the people are told that they should not sacrifice their children to the Canaanite god Molech.

The Pentateuch contains no other record of an attempted or actual human sacrifice to Yahweh by the Israelites, which is unsurprising given the condemnation of it in Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Elsewhere in the Hebrew Bible, there are occasional references to human sacrifice, but these references underscore how the practice is condemned among the Israelites.²⁰ There is only one account of a human sacrifice promised to Yahweh, carried out, and not explicitly condemned: Jephthah’s sacrifice of his daughter in Judges 11.

The narrative begins with Jephthah’s illegitimate birth in Judg. 11:2: “Jephthah the Gileadite was a strong warrior. His father was Gilead, his mother was a prostitute.” Jephthah’s mother’s

²⁰ For example, 2 Kings 3:27 details how the king of Moab sacrifices his son, because the Israelites had encroached on a Moabite stronghold: “Then he took his firstborn son who was to succeed him and offered him as a burnt offering on the wall. And great wrath came upon Israel, so they withdrew from him and returned to their own land.” The Moabites worshipped the pagan god Chemosh (Num. 21:29) and, while the text does not specify to whom this firstborn son was sacrificed, it would not have been to Yahweh. In 2 Chron. 33:6, Manasseh is said to have sacrificed children in the fire, but the text frames his practices (including this one) as evil and as typical of those nations whom Yahweh rejects (2 Chron. 33:2).

status as a prostitute causes his family, more specifically his half-brothers by Gilead's legitimate wife, to reject and expel him, warning him that he will not have any inheritance (Judges 11:2). This means that Jephthah resulted from a sexual indiscretion on the part of Gilead. After Jephthah flees, the Ammonites wage war against Israel, and the elders of Gilead invite Jephthah to be their commander. Despite recalling their former rejection of him, he agrees, aspiring to become their ruler. Initially, Jephthah attempts to resolve the dispute between the Israelites and the Ammonites peacefully. When this proves unsuccessful, he makes a covenant with God: "Then the spirit of the Lord fell on Jephthah, and he traversed through Gilead and Manasseh. He continued on to Mizpah of Gilead and from Mizpah of Gilead he continued on to the Ammonites. And Jephthah made a covenant to the Lord and said, 'If you will deliver the Ammonites into my hand, then whoever comes out of my door to greet me, when I return in victory from the Ammonites, will be the Lord's that I will sacrifice as a burnt offering'" (Judges 11:29-31). Who comes to meet him is, tragically, his own daughter: "When Jephthah came back home to Mizpah, who should come out to greet him except his daughter, dancing to the sound of timbrels! She was an only child. Except for her, he did not have son or daughter" (Judges 11:34). Jephthah is horrified at the sight, tears his clothes, and proclaims, "Alas, my daughter! You have brought me down much, you have become the cause of great stress for me. Because I have opened my mouth to the Lord and I cannot retract my vow." (Judges 11:35). His daughter, in turn, submissively replies, "My father, if you have opened your mouth to the Lord, do to me according to what has proceeded from your mouth, now that the Lord has avenged your enemies, the Ammonites" (Judges 11:36). She asks only that she be allowed two months to wander in the mountains and bewail her virginity (Judges 11:37). After this time, she returns to her father and Jephthah "did with her according to the vow he had made" (Judges 11:39).

The offering up of Jephthah's daughter parallels the sacrifice of Isaac in certain particulars, but it also departs from that story in significant ways. Abraham is stopped from performing the sacrifice and many prohibitions *against* human sacrifice follow this story in the Pentateuch. In

Jephthah's experience, by contrast, not only is this human sacrifice not condemned, but it is actively and explicitly endorsed by Jephthah's daughter herself. This makes for a peculiar narrative. While scholars have correctly demonstrated that Isaac's story impacts the canonical gospels' depictions of Jesus' death, far less attention has been paid to Jephthah. As the sole instance of a human sacrifice carried out for Yahweh and not denounced in the text, the account in Judges 11 is perhaps the more compelling narrative to examine as an intertext for the passion narrative, specifically the one in Matthew. Elements of Jephthah's and his daughter's story can now be discussed, laying the groundwork for the consideration of precisely how the Jesus narrative in Matthew is informed by this unique tale of human sacrifice.

First of all, Yahweh's approval or disapproval of Jephthah's deed remains ambiguous. The phrase "Then, the Spirit of the Lord fell on him" appears in a verse that precedes Jephthah making his vow, and it describes Jephthah's inspiration from Yahweh to go to various places. Hebrew syntax does allow that this phrase could also indicate that the "spirit of the Lord" was "on him" when he made his vow, providing Jephthah's inspiration to offer a sacrifice, but the text could be read either way.

The account in Judges 11 uses *עֹלָה* (*olah*) to describe the promised sacrifice, which is the same term employed in Gen. 22. This term refers to a sacrifice that would take place on the altar and seems to describe a burnt offering that would be entirely consumed by fire.²¹ Used 288 times throughout the Hebrew Bible, *עֹלָה* can refer to sacrifices that serve a variety of purposes. In Jephthah's case, the sacrifice constitutes an expression of thanks and a repayment to God for allowing the Israelites to be victorious over the Ammonites. The matter is inherently martial: a battle between the Israelites and the Ammonites. But this type of sacrifice also has profound religious implications. In Exod. 20:24, the term appears as a form of peace offering, while in Exod. 29:42 this burnt offering may be said to represent and encompass a type of communion with God:

²¹ s.v., *עֹלָה*, BDB.

“It will be a burnt offering throughout your generations at the foot of the tent of the meeting before the Lord, where I will meet with you to speak with you there.”²² Taken in this sense, such an offering would presumably break down a barrier between man and God. The sacrifice in Lev. 4:3 is carried out because of sin: “If the anointed priest sins and gives guilt to the people, he must offer as a sin offering for his sins, an unblemished young bull.” Lev. 9:7 illustrates a sacrifice that is offered to make reconciliation or atonement: “Then Moses said to Aaron, ‘Come near to the altar and sacrifice your sin offering and also your burnt offering and make an atonement for yourself and the people [of Israel].’”²³ Indeed, it is frequently used in both Leviticus and Numbers to refer to an atonement.²⁴ Num. 6 signifies a purification offering. Here the Lord instructs Moses as to how those who have made “a special covenant, the covenant of the Nazirite,” can establish and maintain ritual purity. At the end of their dedicatory period, they “are to show their offerings to the Lord, a year-old unblemished male for a burnt offering, a year-old unblemished ewe lamb for a sin offering, an unblemished ram for an associative offering” (Num. 6:14).

While this specific word for sacrifice has a broad semantic range and is used multiple times in the Hebrew Bible, it is interesting to note its usage in Judg. 11. Jephthah vows to sacrifice “*whoever* comes out of [his] *doors* to meet [him],” recalling several other burnt offerings that are made at doors and entryways. For example, in Lev. 4, for the sacrifice which is to be carried out because of sin, the priest offers a portion of that sacrifice at the door of the tabernacle: ‘He should place some of the blood on the altar’s horns which is before the Lord the tent of the meeting. The rest of the blood he will pour out at the foundation of the altar for burnt offering at the entrance to

²² In Exod. 29, Yahweh indicates that the tabernacle needs to be consecrated and that Aaron and his sons need to be anointed. These anointings make it possible for a person to bring an animal to the tabernacle as Yahweh has established means of communication with him through the tabernacle.

²³ Lev. 9:7 describes what is known as Yom Kippur. This ritual of forgiveness was connected to the sacrifice.

²⁴ Examples include Lev. 5:10, 6:7, 19:22, and Num. 8:10 and 15:22-28. The animal acts as a substitute for the guilt that is created by the Israelites through their sins. Lev. 5:10 specifically indicates that the sacrifice is how the Israelites receive forgiveness.

the tent of the meeting” (Lev. 4:18). While Jephthah’s declaration evokes the connection between doorways and this type of sacrifice, his vow adds a peculiar twist. In virtually all instances of Yahweh commanding sacrifice, Yahweh specifies what animal should be sacrificed or there is an existing ritual precedent for which animal should be sacrificed. Here Jephthah sets the terms of who or what will be offered and this condition, which he himself constructs, leads to the human sacrifice. Jephthah employs the word אֲשֶׁר (*asher*) to describe what he will offer: “*whoever* comes out of [his] doors to meet [him].” אֲשֶׁר is a relative particle that can mean whoever or whatever. Pesthy-Simon writes, “Scholarly opinions diverge on this point and several solutions have been proposed: 1. Jephthah intended to sacrifice an animal, 2. The gravity of the situation and the expression “to meet [him]” suggest that he had in mind a human being, probably a household servant; 3. Jephthah’s language is intentionally left ambivalent by the narrator, so that we cannot know what his real intentions were. The wording of verse 11:31 (“whoever/whatever [אֲשֶׁר]”) permits any of the three solutions, but the majority of scholars now opt for the second possibility.”²⁵ While it is possible that an animal could come to meet Jephthah outside, it does seem more likely that when making that vow, Jephthah had some awareness that it would be, or at least could be, a human sacrifice.

After Jephthah is introduced, the reader meets his daughter. She remains unnamed throughout this particular narrative.²⁶ Monroe argues that by not naming her, the author portrays her as an archetypal figure.²⁷ In our first encounter with Jephthah’s daughter, she comes out to meet her father “with timbrels and with dancing” (Judg. 11:34). This detail seems to allude to Exod. 15:20-27, in which “the prophetess Miriam, Aaron’s sister, grabbed a tambourine in her hand, and all the

²⁵ Pesthy-Simon, *Isaac, Iphigenia, and Ignatius*, 19.

²⁶ She is never named in Judges. While no Hebrew Bible author names her, Pseudo-Philo identifies her later as Selia. Others have named her as Isis. Elisheva Baumgarten, “Remember That Glorious Girl’: Jephthah’s Daughter in Medieval Jewish Culture.” *The Jewish Quarterly Review* 97, no. 2 (2007): 180–209.

²⁷ See Miek Bal, “Virginité: Toward a Feminist Philology,” 82.

women followed out after her with tambourines and with dancing” (Exod. 15:20) to celebrate the Israelites’ successful escape from the Egyptians.²⁸ This type of dancing was seen as a praise to God (see Psalm 1:50). This setting mirrors what occurs in Judges 11. Jephthah’s daughter’s dance acts as a praise to the Lord for delivering the Israelites from the Ammonites.²⁹

Although Miriam is the first woman that the Hebrew Bible refers to as a prophet, she is not the only one. Deborah is also described as a prophet: “Now at that time, Deborah, prophetess, wife of Lappidoth was leading Israel” (Judg. 4:4). As the only female judge in the Hebrew Bible, she successfully leads the Israelites in battle. In celebration of her victory, she sings a victory hymn with Barak son of Abinoam (Judg. 5:1). After Deborah sings, the author writes, “Then the land was at peace for forty years” (Judg. 5:31). Deborah’s hymn recalls Miriam’s hymn, but her narrative also has unique parallels to Jephthah’s daughter. While Deborah courageously leads the Israelites in battle and peace ensues following her singing of the hymn, Jephthah’s daughter’s victory hymn becomes darkly ironic as it precedes her death. Even though Jephthah’s daughter recalls Miriam and Deborah, her outcome differs drastically. These parallels contribute to Jephthah’s daughter’s powerful, lingering presence, but also act as a grim reminder of the gravity of her death.

Jephthah’s daughter evokes other archetypal patterns, besides that of the woman celebrating a victory with song and dance. She is a type of the first-born, of the obedient daughter, of the virgin, and of the prophet.

She is, in fact, Jephthah’s first-born and only child. Firstborn offspring, both human and animal, have special standing in Israelite religion and society. First-born sons are “chosen” and are

²⁸ Miriam appears earlier in Exodus when she helps deliver Moses at the Nile River (Exod. 2:1-10). Although she is unnamed in this earlier passage, Num. 26:59 and 1 Chr. 6:3 indicate that Moses and Aaron only have one sister: Miriam.

²⁹ Miriam’s dancing might be the most famous account about her, but her story continued. In Num. 12:1-2, she questioned Moses’ authority, because Moses married a Cushite woman and because she believed that the Lord spoke through her and Aaron as well. For speaking against Moses, Miriam is punished in Num. 12:10. Her punishment is recalled in Deut. 24:8-9 as a warning to the Israelites to follow what the Levitical priests say.

the recognized heirs of their fathers.³⁰ First-born animals are considered worthy offerings. These facts help account for Isaac having qualified as a possible sacrifice. Jephthah's daughter, as a first-born child, may match the ritual convention of sacrificing from among the "firstlings of the flock,"³¹ but her story is otherwise quite unlike that of Isaac, and her gender complicates the narrative. The Lord had certainly previously commanded that Abraham sacrifice his first-born, Isaac (Gen. 22:2), but Abraham's determination to offer up his son in obedience to the divine order results in an angel of God preventing the realization of that order and making a promise to the patriarch: "Certainly I will bless you and will bestow [on you] your descendants as many as stars in the sky and grains of sand on the seashore. Your descendants will possess the cities of their enemies, and through your children all nations on earth will be blessed because you have obeyed me" (Gen. 22:17). God chooses not only to save Isaac from death, but also to bless Abraham's willingness to sacrifice his only son with the opposite blessing: giving Abraham many sons. Jephthah's promise to God in exchange for victory over the Ammonites does not result in the continuation (and expansion) of his seed. Indeed, since Jephthah actually carries out the promised sacrifice of his only child, with no angelic intervention stopping it, he is left with no offspring and no hope of descendants.

In Judg. 11:36, Jephthah's daughter announces, "My father, if you have opened your mouth to the Lord, do to me according to what has gone out of your mouth, now that the Lord has given you vengeance against your enemies, the Ammonites." Here the author depicts Jephthah's daughter as consenting to her own sacrifice, but also frames her as seeing the sacrifice as a necessity. Since her father made a vow to Yahweh, she fulfils her archetypal role as obedient daughter and aids him

³⁰ Carol Bakhos, "Firstborn Son," in *The Family of Abraham* (Cambridge, Massachusetts: Harvard University Press, 2014), 155. Bakhos describes how just because a son is chosen, that does not mean that there existed a rivalry between himself and other sons; it was a mere designation.

³¹ See Exod. 13:12 and Num. 3:41, which indicate that the firstlings of the flock should be sacrificed, likely drawing from Gen. 4:4 where Abel brought the firstlings of the flock to God as a sacrifice.

in fulfilling his vow. She would rather die than have her father transgress by breaking his promise to Yahweh. Her obedience is, therefore, both mortal in that it relates to her father, but also divine in that it comprehends the God, to whom this vow was made.

Before Jephthah actually carries out this sacrifice, Jephthah's daughter leaves for two months to mourn her virginity, another feature in her archetypal depiction: "And she said to her father, 'May this thing be done to me: Give me two months that I, my companions and I, might go and wander in the mountains and mourn my *virginity*'" (Judg. 11:37). Her father consents: "'Go,' he said and let her go away for two months. So she, she and her companions, left and mourned her *virginity* on the mountains" (Judg. 11:38). Her virginal state is highlighted still further when she returns from her absence to face her death: "After two months, she returned to her father, who did with her according to the covenant he had made. *She had never known a man*" (Judg. 11:39). The emphatic focus on her virginity—it is mentioned three times in as many verses—suggests that this is an important aspect of the sacrifice narrative.³²

One likely purpose of this emphasis is to signal that Jephthah's daughter's virginity, along with her position as first-born, qualifies her as a potential sacrificial victim.³³ The term used for virginity here is *בְּתוּלִים* (*b'tulim*), which is the technical term for sexual virginity in the Hebrew Bible. This word appears in Deut. 22:13-19, where the author gives instructions for offering proof of virginity if a man slanders his wife by claiming that she was not a virgin when he married her. The author indicates that the young woman's parents should display the cloth (presumably the sheet

³² Esther Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing: The Story of Jephthah's Daughter," *Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion* 5, no. 1 (1989): 44; Fuchs makes the additional point that the daughter of Jephthah's virginity and her return to be sacrificed make it appear that she returned of her volition to be sacrificed and that her virginity becomes a prize for Jephthah.

³³ The narrative in Gen. 22 makes no mention of Isaac's sexual status. Of course, the fact that Isaac is a firstborn male entirely aligns with the expectation of Israelite animal sacrifices as those often, but not exclusively, involved offering up the firstborn male animal. While there is no explicit reference to Isaac's virginity, he is definitely still unmarried when Abraham takes him to be sacrificed; his marriage to Rebecca does not occur until Gen. 24:67.

upon which the man and woman had sex) as proof that she bled as a result of losing her virginity. Unlike other ambiguous terms in the Hebrew Bible, this term explicitly refers to whether or not a woman has had sexual relations. In 1. Sam. 21:4-5, devotion to sexual purity is required for a person to be considered ritually clean. The virginity attributed to Jephthah's daughter marks her as "unblemished," which is one of the traditional stipulations for sacrificial animals. Her sexual innocence effectively becomes the equivalent of this requirement. In the case of animals, this would have involved some kind of inspection or examination to determine their suitability.³⁴ The prominence given to her virginity and, by extension, to her position as an "unblemished" offering to Yahweh, underscores the ritual nature of the sacrifice. The possibility of a person being ceremonially treated as an animal sacrifice is likewise noted by Sutskov: "From a literary-linguistic perspective I wish to indicate the possibility of a more generalized view in which...the human body is treated as a sacrificial object, or as an animal to be sacrificed."³⁵ She cites three examples of this from Judges: Jephthah's daughter, the Levite's concubine, and Samson's bride. Her observation that the episode of Jephthah's daughter treats violence towards the human body as an animal sacrifice³⁶ suggests that Jephthah's daughter's body may even have been subjected to the same ritual tests as animals before the sacrifice was formally performed.

As to Jephthah's daughter's request that she be granted time and opportunity to mourn that virginity, it is the only favor she asks after finding out about the impending sacrifice. She does not ask her father to spare her; to the contrary, she stresses how he must keep his covenant.³⁷ This insistence and her equally important insistence on creating space for herself to exist autonomously,

³⁴ Include references for the requirement of being unblemished and for animals being inspected.

³⁵ Talia Sutskov, "The Frame of Sacrificing in Judges." *Vetus Testamentum* 64, no. 2 (2014): 273.

³⁶ Talia Sutskov, "The Framing of Sacrifice in Judges," 277.

³⁷ See Esther Fuchs, "Marginalization, Ambiguity, Silencing," 38. Fuchs points out that the daughter of Jephthah's response to her father is written as "a most welcome characteristic from a patriarchal point of view." She does not make the covenant herself and is entirely dependent on the covenant of her father. Later, Fuchs claims that the text attempts to exonerate the father from having to carry out this terrible vow through depicting the daughter's consent to it. This exoneration again is symptomatic of the patriarchal worldview within the text.

even if it is only for two months, advance her in a powerful way. While customary for women to live as virgins in their father's home until engagement or marriage, here Jephthah's daughter lives as a virgin in the mountains until she is offered as a sacrifice. In a sense, the narrative replaces marriage with human sacrifice, but Jephthah's daughter exercises at least as much control over her sacrifice as any dependent daughter could over a marriage. Even though Jephthah sets the conditions of the vow, his daughter orchestrates the timing and the execution of her own sacrifice. Her delaying the sacrifice and her determination that the sacrifice be realized give her substantial control in the narrative. Ironically, she uses the very virginity that makes her a victim to gain some measure of autonomy and independent leadership before her death.

Another vital aspect of Jephthah's daughter's sexual purity is that she will have no offspring, and, as noted above, this leaves Jephthah without any legitimate heir (or heiress). By killing his virginal daughter, he is ironically imposing on himself the mirror image of the threat made to him by his half-brothers. Just as they declared he would not inherit his own father's estate, he is left without anyone to inherit his own name and property.

Several scholars have argued that the text's emphasis on Jephthah's daughter's virginity should instead be interpreted as an indication that she was not killed as a sacrifice but confined to a life of celibacy.³⁸ Marcus argues that the evidence for Jephthah not sacrificing his daughter is stronger than the evidence for him carrying out the sacrifice.³⁹ One of his main pieces of evidence for this is Jephthah's daughter's virginity. Reis has this same perspective and writes, "To figurativists, this clause means that Jephthah cloisters her in a separate establishment where she remains an isolated virgin for life. The text dictates enduring virginity; solitary confinement is a

³⁸ Pesthy-Simon, *Isaac, Iphigeneia, and Ignatius*, 19-20, Pesthy-Simon glosses the various objections to the idea that she was sacrificed. For example, she cites Marcus who argues that the text's emphasis on virginity meant that she lived as a virgin for a long period of time and was secluded from society.

³⁹ Marcus, *Jephthah and His Vow*, 52.

requisite imposed by the exegetes.”⁴⁰ “This clause,” to which Reis refers is the statement that Jephthah “did with [his daughter] according to the covenant he had made” (Judg. 11:39). Part of Reis’s reasoning relies on the idea that virginity as a notion of sacrificial purity is unattested in the Hebrew Bible.⁴¹ While it is true that virginity is not a prerequisite for sacrifice, the Hebrew Bible does not contain any other instance of a human sacrifice promised to Yahweh and Reis’s reading does not account for gendered norms with respect to purity. As noted earlier, virginity and/or sexual purity, was required for particular religious rituals within Israelite culture, making it plausible that virginity would be the feminine prerequisite for sacrificial victims as it is comparable to other distinctively masculine ritual purity requirements. Jephthah’s daughter’s virginity certainly seems to qualify her as a type of pure offering, akin to an unblemished lamb, when one accounts for gendered norms. Furthermore, neither Reis nor Marcus fully account for interpreting the narrative’s description, “After two months, she went back to her father, and he did to her as he had covenanted.” Jephthah’s vow was to sacrifice her as a burnt offering, not to compel her to be a virgin. She and, indeed, the account, lose significant impact if she survives. Her poignant heroism is most compelling if Jephthah fulfils his vow to God and ends his daughter’s life.

Returning to the connections to the famous female predecessors of Jephthah’s daughter, both Miriam and Deborah are called “prophet.” While it is unclear exactly what is meant by this title, it may be the authors’ way of designating their role as leaders. Miriam is followed by “all the women” (Exod. 15:20) when she goes out dancing with tambourine in hand. Deborah is described as leading Israel to victory through her prophetic advice to Barak, son of Abinoam (Judg. 4:4-16). While the term prophet is not specifically applied to Jephthah’s daughter, she also may be said to lead. She is not a military commander or advisor, but her death is closely linked to Israel’s triumph in the war with the Ammonites. Indeed, a causal link is suggested by the order of events. Jephthah’s

⁴⁰ Reis, “Spoiled Child,” 288.

⁴¹ Reis, “Spoiled Child,” 289.

success in the conflict immediately follows his vow to God to offer up whoever comes through his doors to meet him in exchange for victory over the Ammonites. This offering is, of course, Jephthah's daughter herself. Furthermore, Jephthah's daughter leads her female companions into the mountains for two months of freedom before she is sacrificed. She also leads the way to the creation of a new commemorative custom among Israelite women: "Thus an Israelite custom arose that for four days each year, the daughters of Israel would go out to lament the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite" (Judg. 11:39-40). Apparently modeled on her excursion into the wilderness, where she and her companions seem to have existed independently and during which time she (and they) seem to have assumed a surprising degree of autonomy, the custom that arose comes to exist in the cultural consciousness and not just in a literary text. The memorialization of her death becomes more prominent and important because the custom is acted out for four days every year. Through her death and the commemoration of her death, Israelite women get a taste of autonomous life and of heroic death.

ANALYSIS OF JESUS' PASSION IN MATTHEW

Compared to the story of Jephthah and his daughter, Jesus' sacrifice narrative is far more extensive. Nevertheless, there are critical connections between the two accounts that inform, sometimes ironically, readings of Jesus in Matthew. For Jesus, Matthew seems to adopt and adapt several of the same archetypal patterns that appear in Judges 11. From the question of Jephthah's legitimacy to the identification of Jephthah's daughter as a prophet-leader, there are notable similarities between her story and Matthew's Jesus.

Preceding the account of Jephthah's daughter in Judges 11 is the history of Jephthah himself. A prominent feature of that history is Jephthah's illegitimacy. The story of Jesus also includes what might have been considered an illegitimate birth. While the circumstances are certainly not identical, they do present interesting parallels. For Jephthah, his birth from a prostitute

means that he was considered an outsider with no rightful claim on his father's estate.⁴² He was actually driven off by his half-brothers, fleeing to the land of Tob and surrounding himself with outlaws. Jephthah uses the occasion of the Israelite conflict with the Ammonites and their request for him to become their commander in this fight to negotiate reentry into his family's community and a position of leadership within that community (Judg. 11:1-10). He must defeat the Ammonites, killing them in battle and, ultimately, killing his own daughter to guarantee this place of honor and power among his people.

Even before the facts of Mary's pregnancy are detailed,⁴³ the gospel provides a genealogy specifically designed to authenticate Jesus' connection to the Davidic line.⁴⁴ This is relevant, because it establishes Jesus' legitimate claim to a position within the family of Joseph and Mary and verifies his ancestral connection to King David, which will be discussed more fully later. This is useful, because the gospel's description of Jesus' birth is problematic: "The birth of Jesus the Messiah happened in this way, his mother Mary was promised to be married to Joseph, but before

⁴² Jephthah father's dalliance is not the only one in the accounts of interest. Clements describes the inclusion of certain women in Matthew's genealogy, "More positively, their unions may appear scandalous but are nevertheless used by God to further his purposes." Clements previously summarized why these women were often considered sexually scandalous (including because of prostitution). Those illegitimate or scandalous unions notwithstanding, Jesus still is considered a Son of David. Clements does draw a parallel between these unions and Mary, but a further parallel could be drawn to the narrative of Jephthah's daughter's sacrifice. See, Anne E. Clements, *Mothers on the Margin: The Significance of the Women in Matthew's Genealogy*, (Eugene, Oregon: Pickwick Publications, 2014), 33.

⁴³ Gerald O'Collins, "The Virginal Conception and Its Meanings." *New Blackfriars* 89, no. 1022 (2008): 434. He compares Mary's conception of Jesus to three other accounts and shows how Mary's child comes about through a covenant with God rather than a marital covenant, similar to how Hannah's child comes about through her covenant with God. Mary is situated with powerful women like Hannah, who are also arguably connected to Miriam and Deborah.

⁴⁴ After describing the fourteen generations that fall after David, Moore writes, "This next great change, according to common Jewish expectations, was the coming of the Messiah; and precisely at this critical moment in history was born, as the title of our genealogy emphasizes, "Jesus Christ (the Messiah), the son of David, the son of Abraham" 9 (Matt. 1, 1)." Moore's remarks here add additional context to the discussion of lineage. By demarcating Jesus as messiah through the genealogical structure, Jesus' genealogy becomes evidence of why he should be considered both a Davidic figure and a messiah. See George F. Moore, "Fourteen Generations: 490 Years: An Explanation of the Genealogy of Jesus." *The Harvard Theological Review* 14, no. 1 (1921): 98.

they knew each other, she was discovered pregnant by the Holy Spirit” (Matt. 1:18). This sets Jesus up as a kind of illegitimate child within their social framework. Joseph and Mary did not have sexual relations and, since Mary was pregnant, Joseph thought that he should divorce her.⁴⁵ The text has two pertinent features. The first is the emphasis on the law: “Since her husband Joseph was dedicated to law and did not want to even expose her to public shame, he considered divorcing her quietly” (Matt. 1:19). Joseph’s fidelity to Jewish law underscores the idea that the author of Matthew had a special concern with the Jewish people.⁴⁶ Furthermore, the text has subtle but significant connections to Jephthah’s narrative. Jesus is also rejected by his own. For example, he offends the Jewish Pharisees, so much so that they plot to kill him (Matt. 12:14). The background for this conspiratorial plotting is that Jesus picked grain and healed a man with a withered hand on the Sabbath (Matt. 12:1-14). When challenged by the Pharisees for picking grain, Jesus actually points to what David did to feed himself and his companions, alluding again to his familial tie to that famous king. Elsewhere, the people in his hometown, Nazareth, have difficulty accepting him and take offense at him, ironically because they know his family members. So, while admitting his legitimate family ties, they believe those very ties are what make him unworthy of honor.

A more subtle point, but one well worth making, is that Jesus, like Jephthah, can only return to his (heavenly) father’s household and achieve the highest position of honor and power through

⁴⁵ Even though Joseph thought that he should divorce her, Joseph as adopted father of Jesus matters theologically within Matthew’s gospel. Waetjen makes this point when he says, “No Christological titles are designated in 1:18-25, but two are implied. Jesus is both the Son of Man and the Son of David. In terms of his origin by creative activity of the Spirit and the disjunction which his birth introduces, the end of Israel’s history and the beginning of a new creation, he is first and foremost the Son of Man. On the other hand, he is also the Son of David on the basis of his adoption by Joseph.” See Herman C. Waetjen, “The Genealogy as the Key to the Gospel According to Matthew.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 95, no. 2 (1976): 224. This renders Joseph’s choosing to remain married to Mary even more important.

⁴⁶ While scholars may disagree on the extent to which the gospel of Matthew addresses a Jewish audience, there is a consensus on the fact that it does address a Jewish audience. See Douglas Hare, “How Jewish Is the Gospel of Matthew?” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 62, no. 2 (2000): 264–77. See also footnote in introduction.

death and victory. In his case, the death is his own, rather than that of a family member, as with Jephthah's daughter, and the victory is over unearthly enemies: sin and death.

Just as there is only one narrative of human sacrifice for Yahweh in the Hebrew Bible, there is only one fully described instance of human sacrifice in the New Testament: Jesus' death.⁴⁷ Excluding this, the only other reference to human sacrifice occurs in Luke 13:1, "Now some around at that time told Jesus about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mixed with their sacrifices." Here, the author employs the noun *θυσία* (*thusia*), which in the New Testament usually refers to a sacrifice ordained by God. In this particular verse, the sacrifice is not demanded by the God of Israel as it occurs in a Roman religious context. Shirock's reading of this passage is not specific enough; he writes about Luke 13:1 and Luke 13:31, "Both reports focus on the hostility of a civil ruler. Pilate has killed Galilean worshipers. Herod wishes to kill Jesus."⁴⁸ His terminology is too limited here: what Pilate engaged in was human sacrifice not the mere killing of worshipers. Shirock makes no mention of this death as sacrifice, but it is a critical point.⁴⁹ The word used in Luke 13:1 *θυσία* differs from the word the LXX uses to translate *olah* in Genesis 22 and Judges 11, where the LXX employs *ὀλοκαύτωμα* (*holokautoma*), which means "entirely burnt," but the LXX does sometimes use *θυσία* to translate *olah*, as in Num. 6:15 (Num. 6:14 in Hebrew Bible).⁵⁰ *Olah*, it will be recalled, is the term used to describe the sacrifice that Jephthah promises to God. While *ὀλοκαύτωμα* specifically refers to a burnt offering, *θυσία*, like *olah*, has a broader semantic range

⁴⁷ While some description of Jesus' death can be found in all the gospel narratives, Matthew's account is the focus of this thesis.

⁴⁸ Robert J. Shirock, "The Growth of the Kingdom in Light of Israel's Rejection of Jesus: Structure and Theology in Luke 13:1-35." *Novum Testamentum* 35, no. 1 (1993): 19.

⁴⁹ By mentioning this instance of human sacrifice and bookending the chapter with a clear instance of human sacrifice and the impending death of Jesus, the author of Luke illustrates his view on how Jesus' death should be read as a human sacrifice using a rhetorical technique. For a specific treatment on the Lukan Passion narrative, see Peter J. Scaer, *The Lukan Passion and the Praiseworthy Death* (Sheffield, Phoenix, New Testament Monographs Sheffield, 2005). For a broad overview on this issue generally, see Brian J. Tabb, "Is the Lucan Jesus a 'Martyr'? A Critical Assessment of a Scholarly Consensus." *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 77, no. 2 (2015): 280–301.

⁵⁰ In Num. 6:14, the Nazirite is supposed to bring an unblemished male lamb as a burnt offering and an unblemished female lamb as a sin offering. The LXX uses *θυσία* to refer to the burnt offering.

and encompasses various types of sacrifices.⁵¹ Θυσία appears twice in the gospel of Matthew, but neither occurrence refers to human sacrifice. The word is not employed in the gospel to characterize the death of Jesus,⁵² but it may be argued that his death is understood by the author to be a sacrifice, but one of a completely new type.

Looking to the occasions when the term is used in Matthew provides useful insight. In Matt. 9:13 Jesus, sitting with tax collectors and sinners, responds to a question from the Pharisees by quoting Hosea 6:6 and advising them: “But go and learn what this means, ‘I desire compassion, not sacrifice.’” The author makes use of this quote again in Matthew 12:7, “If you had understood what these words mean, ‘I desire compassion, not sacrifice,’ you would not have condemned the innocent.” The full verse from Hosea 6:6 reads, “Indeed I desire compassion, not sacrifice, and acknowledgment of God instead of burnt sacrifices.”⁵³ Hosea uses the word זָבַח (*zebach*), a sacrifice of bread, for what is translated in English as sacrifice and *olah* for what is translated as burnt offerings. Both instances of the gospel writer quoting Hosea feature Jesus speaking these words and contextually seem to refer to Jesus arguing that mercy and compassion are more important than the performance of animal sacrifice. This might strike the reader as peculiar, because animal sacrifices played a vital role in Mosaic Law, but in Matthew, Jesus says, “Don’t think that I have come to get rid of the Law or the Prophets. I have not come to get rid of them, but to complete them. Because truly I tell you, until heaven and earth pass away, not an iota, not a dot, will pass from the Law until all is complete” (Matt. 5:17-18). Jesus establishes himself in the narrative as fulfilling both the Law

⁵¹ c.v., θυσία, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, William F. Arndt, and F. Wilbur Gingrich. *Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature*. 3rd ed. Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000.

⁵² Heb. 9:9 does, however, use the term θυσία (*thusia*) to describe Jesus’ death. For a discussion of this verse, see James W. Thompson, “Hebrews 9 and Hellenistic Concepts of Sacrifice.” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 98, no. 4 (1979): 567–78.

⁵³ About the use of this Hosea quotation in Matthew, Powell writes, “The realization that certain concerns (love, mercy, justice, faith) are primary holds the key to discerning how the law must be taught and obeyed in ways that will be truly pleasing to God.” See Mark Allan Powell, “The Gospel of Matthew” in *Fortress Introduction to the Gospels, Second Edition*, (Philadelphia, Pennsylvania, Fortress Press, 2014), 122.

and the Prophets, although it was probably unclear to his contemporary audience what precisely this involved.

One aspect of this fulfillment does seem to be shifting the focus of his disciples away from traditional Mosaic ritual, such as animal sacrifice, and toward other qualities of character and behavior—“the weightier matters of the law—justice, compassion, and faithfulness” (Matt. 23:23).⁵⁴ While he does not explicitly connect his predicted death to the fulfillment of “the Law” and “the Prophets,” that death is the culminating event of his mortal ministry and may be seen as the moment when “all is accomplished.”⁵⁵ This foregrounds Jesus’ death narrative, which becomes more significant, because it is the only sacrifice narrative in the New Testament; no other sacrifices to God are included, not even of an animal. Even though the author of Matthew does not specifically characterize Jesus as a sacrifice, he does apply certain passages from the Hebrew Bible to Jesus, which, when taken in the context of their larger Biblical framework, do suggest that the gospel writer thinks of him as equivalent to a traditional animal sacrifice. In Matt. 18 Isaiah 53:4 is cited: “Surely he undertook our pain and bore our suffering, but we still considered him punished by God, hurt by him, and burned.” While the author does not directly quote the verses that follow this, he must have been aware of how this selection continues: “ But he was pierced for our sins, he was crushed for our iniquities. The punishment, the one which brought us peace, was on him and through his wounds, we are healed. Like we sheep, we all have gone astray, each one of us has gone our own way and the Lord has put on him all our iniquity. He was oppressed and afflicted, yet he did not open his mouth, led like a lamb to the slaughter, and as a sheep before its shearers is silent, so he did not open his mouth” (Isa. 53:5-7). This intertext reveals that the author regards Jesus as

⁵⁴ Throughout his ministry, Jesus basically reframes his disciples’ perspective on the law, urging them to embrace a less legalistic conception of the divine commandments, focusing instead on the law of love: “Love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and with all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment,” he tells them, “And the second is like it: ‘Love your neighbor as yourself’” (Matt. 22:37-39).

⁵⁵ Jesus predicts his own death three times in Matthew: in 16: 21, in 17:22-23, and in 20:17-19.

the fulfilment of this larger passage.⁵⁶ In other words, Jesus typifies a lamb or a sheep, animals that were commonly offered as sacrifices,⁵⁷ and as a human type of a sacrificial animal, he embodies and recalls the narrative of Jephthah's daughter.

In the same way that Jephthah's daughter embodies a number of archetypal patterns, Jesus can be said to do likewise and to communicate significant meaning through those archetypes. In Jephthah's daughter there were indications of multiple models: the type of Miriam and Deborah, the type of the first-born child, the type of the obedient child, the type of the virgin, and the type of the prophet-leader.

Jesus' identity in the gospel of Matthew merits discussion, as his connection to King David may be said to correlate to Jephthah's daughter's connection to Miriam and Deborah. Miriam and Deborah are, of course, not exactly equivalent to David, but they, like David, are both special cases. David is the iconic king of Israel. Miriam and Deborah are the only women in the Hebrew Bible who are explicitly characterized and framed as prophets. These two women are also both associated with musical performance, which is one of the most famous skills of David. Writing for a Jewish audience, the author of Matthew emphasizes Jesus' lineage, "This is the genealogy of Jesus the Messiah the son of David, the son of Abraham." (Matt. 1:1). The author underscores that Jesus has the appropriate lineage for the Hebrew Bible's foretold Messiah, because he descends from David and Abraham. The Davidic references are especially frequent in this gospel. Jesus is called "the Son of Man," which is David's title in Psalms.⁵⁸ Just as Jephthah's daughter is written as a Miriam and Deborah figure, Jesus derives meaning from his connection to David. David, as the paradigmatic king of Israel, creates an expectation for the reader, namely, that Jesus will occupy that same space.

⁵⁶ See Matt. 8:16-17. Also see Maarten J. J. Menken. "The Source of the Quotation from Isaiah 53:4 in Matthew 8:17." *Novum Testamentum* 39, no. 4 (1997): 313–27.

⁵⁷ Not unlike the ram that the messenger of God substituted for Isaac (Gen, 22:13-14).

⁵⁸ The Son of Man is a messianic title in Psalms. It appears, among other verses, in Psalm 8:4 and Psalm 80:17; it is generally understood to refer to David. Christian readers often maintain that this phrase has a dual function, referring to both David and Jesus.

When Jesus is framed as a Davidic figure in the gospel of Matthew, the reader keeps in mind not only how David was written in the Hebrew Bible, but also how he existed in the cultural atmosphere. In a similar way to how specific archetypal notions are attached to Jephthah's daughter from the associations with Miriam and Deborah, Jesus inherits from David the archetypes of kingship and messianic expectations. For David, this epithet suggests that he has the rightful kingship in Israel. To call Jesus by this name implies that he, like David, has a claim on that same position. In other words, Jesus is entitled to be the anointed king of Israel. However, Jesus subverts messianic expectations by prioritizing heavenly, covenant kingship over earthly kingship, by emphasizing the kingdom of God over the kingdoms of men.⁵⁹

Jesus' titles "Son of God," "Son of Man," and "Son of David" all contribute to reading him as a Davidic figure. Psalm 2 records the first instance of Yahweh calling David his son, "I will tell you of the decree, the Lord told me, 'You are my Son, today I have begotten you'" (Psalm 2:7). This situates David as a divine son, and, in addition to this, he is sometimes associated with specifically messianic language. A messiah, by definition, is one who has been anointed. Isaiah 11:1, for example, is usually understood to be a messianic prophecy, identifying Jesse, the father of David, as the progenitor of the line that the foretold messiah would come from: "Then a shoot will spring up from the stick of Jesse, and a branch from his roots will bear fruit."⁶⁰ David is likewise seen as a messianic figure in Ezek. 34:23-24, "I will put my servant David over them as one shepherd and he will tend them; he will take care of them and be their shepherd. I the Lord will be the God of them and among them, my servant David will be prince. I the Lord have spoken." David was anointed

⁵⁹ Sharyn Dowd and Elizabeth Struthers Malbon. "The Significance of Jesus' Death in Mark: Narrative Context and Authorial Audience." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 125, no. 2 (2006): 295. Dowd and Malbon point out that the gospel of Mark depicts Jesus echoing both Moses and David in a way that communicates his divinity. Dowd's and Malbon's observation also applies to the gospel of Matthew. By referring to Jesus as "Son of Man" or "Son of God" the author underscores a Hebraic connection and emphasizes Jesus' divinity.

⁶⁰ See Daniel Merkur, "The Prophecies of Jeremiah." *American Imago* 42, no. 1 (1985): 1-37. Cf. Jeremiah 33:15.

himself, which positions him as a messiah, “So Samuel took the horn of oil and anointed him face to face with his brothers, and from that day forward, the Spirit of the Lord was powerfully on David” (1 Sam. 16:13).

The title “Son of Man” also occurs in connection with messianic language. One of the most important uses of the phrase “Son of Man” occurs in Daniel’s dream where he sees the prototype of messianic figure, “Just as I saw in night visions, I watched one like a son of man, coming with the clouds of heaven. And he came to the Ancient One and was shown before him” (Daniel 7:13). As Boyarin points out, “It would certainly not be wrong to suggest, I think, that even if the actual notion of a messiah is not yet present here, the notion of a divinely appointed divine king over earth is, and that this has great potential for understanding the development of the messiah notion in later Judaism (including Christianity).”⁶¹ While this verse does not explicitly mention David, David’s strong association with messianic language in the Hebrew Bible qualifies him as a possible referent of Daniel’s dream.⁶² At any rate, the use of the title “son of man” in Daniel’s dream may be said to be messianic.

These same epithets and connections are used to describe Jesus as well. In addition to introducing Jesus’ ancestral relationship to David at the beginning of the Matthean gospel, Jesus is called “the Son of David” in Matt. 9:27, 12:23, 15:22, 21:9, and 21:15. This messianic title connects Jesus back both to David and to the verses noted above, which characterize the messiah as descending from the stem of Jesse. But it also connects Jesus to the archetype of king of Israel. When Jesus approaches Jerusalem on a donkey, crowds shout “Hosanna to the Son of David!

⁶¹ See Daniel Boyarin, “Daniel 7, Intertextuality, and the History of Israel’s Cult.” *The Harvard Theological Review* 105, no. 2 (2012): 154-155.

⁶² The “Son of Man” refers to someone who has a divine connection. As Colpe remarks, “The figure of the Son of Man undoubtedly attracted to itself the attributes of Yahweh, e.g., riding on the clouds...Such traits could be transferred to an eschatological Son of Man only if He was a heavenly being and not a mere earthly messiah.” See, Carsten Colpe, “Ho Huios Tou Anthropou,” in *Theological Dictionary of the New Testament* (vol. 8; Grand Rapids, Michigan, Eerdmans, 1972) 8:406.

Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord! Hosanna in the highest heaven” (Matt. 21:9) and then again, when he enters the temple court, children shout “Hosanna to the Son of David” (Matt. 21:15). Upon hearing this, the Pharisees become furious, in response to which Jesus quotes Psalm 8:2, “From the lips of children and infants you, Lord, have evoked your praise” (Matt. 21:16). That same Psalm also contains a reference to the “Son of Man”: “What is humanity that you are considerate of them, the son of man that you care for him?” (Psalm 8:4).

When Jesus is called or refers to himself as “the Son of Man,” it is a public confession of his true identity. Kingsbury writes, “Our conclusion is that the term Son of Man in the first Gospel is the Christological title with which Jesus encounters the world, first the Jews and then the Gentiles, and particularly his opponents and unbelievers.”⁶³ The persistent use of this title acts as a kind of secondary introduction in Matthew’s gospel. Jesus is first introduced as a descendant of David; he is first Christologically introduced as “the Son of Man.”⁶⁴

In addition to the Davidic references particularly seeming to tie Jesus to the Miriam and Deborah allusions in the story of Jephthah’s daughter, there is at least one other element of the Jesus narrative that expressly relates to Miriam, Deborah, and Jephthah’s daughter. They all three danced to timbrels in a victory song. In the case of Jephthah’s daughter, that performance precedes and paves the way for her sacrifice, since it is in dancing out to meet her father that she falls victim to his vow. Jesus’ own sacrifice is likewise preceded by a hymn. Right after Jesus offers his disciples “the blood of the covenant” in the form of wine (Matt. 26:27-28), they “sang a hymn” and “went out to the Mount of Olives” (Matt. 26:30). This hymn and the dance performed by Jephthah’s

⁶³ Jack Dean Kingsbury, “The Title ‘Son of Man’ in Matthew’s Gospel,” *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 37, no. 2 (1975): 200.

⁶⁴ After positing that Matthew and Luke develop the “Son of Man” tradition, Moloney argues, “The Son of Man tradition, like the Gospel narratives in which it was further developed (Matthew and Luke), became more eschatological as the Gospel traditions developed.”⁶⁴ Moloney’s observation is underscored by Matthew’s verses noted earlier in Matt. 21. These eschatological elements, especially when understood in connection with Jesus as a Davidic figure, clarify the eternal and not merely mortal impact of his sacrifice.

daughter seem ironic. Her performance unknowingly celebrates the victory that ensures her death. Jesus' hymn is the last private moment that he has with his trusted companions before his death.⁶⁵ This singing of a hymn recalls Jesus' Davidic connection as well. David, like Jephthah's daughter, also danced with timbrels (2 Sam. 6:5) and sang hymns (2 Sam. 22).

Jesus' initiation of the covenant in the Passover meal preceding his sacrifice provides insight into the purpose of his sacrifice and shows his direct consent to be killed. Here, as elsewhere in the gospel narrative, Jesus is the type of the obedient son. After he gives his disciples the bread, he takes the chalice and tells them, "This is my blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins" (Matt. 26:28). Jesus identifies the recipients of the covenant as "many" and the reason for the covenant as "forgiveness of sins." He does not indicate how he would achieve this forgiveness for them. However, a Jewish audience familiar with the Hebrew Bible would associate forgiveness of sins with sacrifices.⁶⁶ The Passover commemorates Yahweh preventing the killing of first-born sons in Israel, provided the Israelites slaughtered an unblemished lamb and wiped its blood on their doors (Exod. 12:3). It became an annual religious festival, "That you will declare, 'It is the sacrifice of the Lord's Passover because He passed over the houses of the children of Israel in Egypt, when He killed the Egyptians and delivered our houses.' And the people bowed the head and worshipped" (Exod. 12:27). Like the lamb sacrificed to save the Israelites from the Egyptians, the Israelites were supposed to offer a lamb annually in commemoration of the preservation of their sons from death (Deut. 16:2-5). In Matt. 26 Jesus anticipates his own offering. By instituting a new covenant with his blood, he makes himself the lamb of God.⁶⁷ He obeys his

⁶⁵ Although Jesus knew he was about to die, he likely sang a hymn of praise to God—the same God who orchestrated his death. None of the gospels specify which hymn Jesus sang, but Jewish tradition holds that the Hallel (Psalms 113 to 118) is sung at Passover.

⁶⁶ Benjamin Wisner Bacon, "The Lukan Tradition of the Lord's Supper," *The Harvard Theological Review* 5, no. 3 (1912): 331. Bacon describes how this covenant also goes back to when Moses received all the laws. As Jesus embodies the law, this new covenant extends more than just fellowship, it is a fulfilment.

⁶⁷ It also recalls Lev. 23 where the Lord tells Moses to sacrifice an unblemished lamb along with the first fruits of the harvest. He also said, "You must not eat any bread, or roasted or new grain until

Father by celebrating the Passover feast, according to the tenets of his religion, and also by pre-emptively consenting to his own sacrificial death when he gives his disciples “[his] blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins.”

Even though Jesus agrees to the sacrifice, because he recognizes that God requires it, he does hesitate to obey his Father. He says this nearly explicitly in Matt. 26:39, “Going a little farther, he fell with his face to the ground and prayed, ‘My Father, if it can be done, may this cup be taken from me. But not as I want, but as you want.’” This prayer symbolically references the very cup that was mentioned at the Last Supper. In that scene, Jesus clearly anticipates that he will need to spill his own blood to establish the “blood of the covenant, which is poured out for many for the forgiveness of sins,” and he does submit to this necessity, albeit with some trepidation. Similarly, Jephthah’s daughter agrees to her own sacrifice. When she realizes that Jephthah has made a covenant with God to sacrifice her, she does not hesitate to accept it as authoritative. While Jesus briefly seeks another way, he still agrees to the sacrifice. Jesus’ hesitation marks a major difference between their respective sacrifices.⁶⁸ Jephthah’s daughter’s lack of hesitation can be read as her attempting to gain power in the system, in which she operates, whereas Jesus’ hesitation can be read in the context of his fear and sorrow, which he expresses in Matt. 26:38. Spivey, Smith, and Black write, “Insofar as Jesus acts or speaks in the passion, he voluntarily accepts his death; he obeys God’s will. He could have called legions of angels, but ‘how then would the scriptures be fulfilled?... Thus, Matthew shows that in his passion Jesus fulfills the “higher righteousness” he set forth in the Sermon on the Mount.”⁶⁹ This form of obedience correlates with Jephthah’s daughter.

the very day you bring this offering to your God. This is to be a lasting ordinance for the generations to come, wherever you live” (Lev. 23:14). Jesus borrows and adapts this language, “I tell you, I will not drink from this fruit of the vine from now on until that day when I drink it new with you in my Father’s kingdom.” (Matt. 26:29). Jesus adapts this concept and signifies a change in ordinance through doing so. Nevertheless, this adaptation again signals the concept of animal sacrifice.

⁶⁸ Robert A. Spivey, D. Moody Smith, and C. Clifton Black, “Matthew: The Gospel of Obedience.” In *Anatomy of the New Testament: Seventh Edition*, 7th ed., 113.

⁶⁹ Robert A. Spivey, D. Moody Smith, and C. Clifton Black, *Anatomy of the New Testament*, 113.

Although Jesus expresses some reluctance, he also demonstrates full awareness that he will die and ultimately consents, remaining committed to his fate in the Matthean the Passion narrative.⁷⁰ Jephthah's daughter's lack of hesitation empowers her in a structure that would otherwise prohibit her from having power. In the span of the two months she had to lament with friends, she could presumably have run away and prevented her father from sacrificing her, but she did not. Instead, she offered herself up as the victim. Jesus' moment in the garden of Gethsemane acts as a microcosm of that same decision. Jesus must determine whether or not he will remain in the area even though he knows he will die. His decision to sacrifice his will to the father's and to offer up his body produces a similar result to the effect in Jephthah's daughter's story. Jesus reclaims his death and accumulates power through allowing himself to be killed.

Even though Jesus has elsewhere in Matthew's gospel demonstrated the ability to perform miracles and thus potentially save himself, he remains submissive and obedient throughout his trial. Pilate asks him, "Are you the king of the Jews?" (Matt. 27:11), and Jesus replies, "You said it" (Matt. 27:11). Understanding Jesus as a Davidic figure adds a richness to Pilate's question. Jesus is written as an archetype of that king of Israel and even enters into Jerusalem as a king,⁷¹ but he does not conquer territory or establish an army or cause civil unrest.⁷² Pilate has misunderstood what type of king he is. In a sense, Pilate is meant to represent all those who misunderstand what the connections between David and Jesus are supposed to mean. The text even provides a foil to

⁷⁰ Valeriy A. Alikin, "The Lord's Supper in the Early Church," 120. Pesthy-Simon says, "But there is an important question which has to be asked: was the death of Jesus voluntary or not?" See Pesthy-Simon, *Isaac, Iphigenia, Ignatius*, 101.

⁷¹ Jesus enters Jerusalem in Matt. 21:1-11. There Matthew quotes Zech. 9:9, "Say to Daughter Zion, 'See, your king comes to you, gentle and riding on a donkey, and on a colt, the foal of a donkey'" (Matt. 21:5). This would have been seen as disruptive because Zech. 9:9 is describing how Zion's King, king of Israel, will enter Jerusalem. Although he fulfils a verse of prophetic scripture like Matthew notes, it is effectively declaring himself king.

⁷² Horsley and Hanson, *Bandits Prophets, and Messiahs*, 48-63, describe how prophetic figures often arise at a time of socioeconomic unrest. Jesus' calls for ending class inequality would have been seen as normative given the genre of character he was. If Jesus is to be understood as being tried legitimately for creating socioeconomic unrest, his death would be read differently.

reinforce this idea: Barabbas. The crowd must choose between Jesus and Barabbas, who was accused of starting an insurrection. Barabbas' name even plays on the concept of Jesus as "the Son of Man." Less of a name and more of a title, Barabbas means "son of the Father."⁷³ When the crowd demands that Pilate crucify Jesus and save Barabbas, Pilate relents, "When Pilate saw that he was getting nowhere, but that instead an uproar was starting, he took water and washed his hands in front of the crowd. "I am innocent of the blood of this man," he said. "It is your responsibility!" (Matt. 27:24).⁷⁴ Barabbas actually committed a crime of a similar nature to the one that Jesus is accused of, yet Jesus is misunderstood as the revolutionary rebel. This subtly underscores the Davidic connection yet again.

Jephthah's daughter does not undergo a trial and nobody yells out to save her, but there are two key parallels that can be briefly mentioned. Jesus is clearly a moral exemplar, who is not guilty of any crime yet suffers the penalty of death. Jephthah's daughter did not do anything to merit death, yet she is killed. The second parallel is not exact, but still intriguing. Barabbas, who would have been killed in execution not as a sacrifice, has a title for a name. In the same way that Jephthah's daughter is only ever identified with respect to her father, Barabbas is only known as the "son of the father."

When the guilty Barabbas escapes execution, Jesus effectively takes his place to be executed.⁷⁵ A major difference between Jesus' death and the death of Jephthah's daughter is that

⁷³ For this etymology and further commentary, see Paul Winter, *On the Trial of Jesus* (Berlin, Germany, Studia Judaica, 1974): 61. Also see, Robert L. Merritt, "Jesus Barabbas and the Paschal Pardon." *Journal of Biblical Literature* 104, no. 1 (1985): 57–68.

⁷⁴ The crowd responds to Pilate, "His blood be upon us and upon our children. For a discussion of this, see Catherine Hamilton Sider, "'His Blood Be upon Us': Innocent Blood and the Death of Jesus in Matthew," *The Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 70, no. 1 (2008): 82–100.

⁷⁵ While some scholars, such as Eyal Regev, attempt to portray Jesus as guilty because he planned on destroying the temple, Pilate never mentions the destruction of the temple in his trial. Pilate's declaration that the blood is on the hands of the crowd argues against the idea that Pilate thought Jesus was guilty and reinforces Jesus' innocence. Regev assumes that both the priests and Pilate would have had the same concern about Jesus: the threatened destruction of the temple. There is no evidence to suggest that Pilate was concerned about the persistence of Israelite religious customs and, in fact, this seems to run contrary to the distance he places between himself and the crowd

she seems to have been killed by her father directly, while Jesus' death is more indirect. Although, Jesus does seem to recognize that his Father has a part in that death. The fact that he petitions his Father to remove the cup from him suggests that he comprehends God's role in his imminent suffering. His Father could prevent this, and this may imply that, in some sense, his Father initiates the sacrifice. That the Father seems to facilitate the sacrifice is further confirmed when Jesus says, "may your will be done" (Matt. 26:42). This suggests that the agent behind the sacrifice is the Father. It is, however, carried out by Roman agents, rendering it a state-ordered and state-performed execution.⁷⁶ Jesus predicts that he will die like this three times in the gospel of Matthew, and he agrees to die for the sins of many when he establishes his covenant. He and his Father, his heavenly Father, worked out the details of his death together in the garden. It is, as already noted, similar to Jephthah's daughter's death in that Jesus agrees to his Father's will for him to be sacrificed, but it is different in that mortal agents other than the father perform the actual execution.

Jesus continues to consent to his sacrifice when he is placed on the cross and remains there. Some mock him, "'He saved others,' they say, 'but he can't save himself! He's the king of Israel! Let him come down now from the cross, and we will trust in him.'" (Matt. 27:41-42). When Jephthah's daughter leaves for two months, she does have the ability and the power to permanently leave. She could theoretically hide the rest of her life, but she comes back, and the father offers her up. In view of other miraculous displays, Jesus has the power, the reader presumes, to free himself

when it comes to Jesus. See Eyal Regev, "The Trial of Jesus and the Temple: Sadducean and Roman Perspectives." In *Soundings in the Religion of Jesus: Perspectives and Methods in Jewish and Christian Scholarship*, edited by Bruce Chilton, Anthony Le Donne, and Jacob Neusner, 97–108.

⁷⁶ Roman crucifixion was not only a state-ordered and state-executed type of punishment, but a highly public one—one can even say it was a spectacle as Cook argues. See John Granger Cook, "Crucifixion as Spectacle in Roman Campania." *Novum Testamentum* 54, no. 1 (2012): 68–100. This form of punishment was also mostly given to foreigners. It was a long and gruesome death where Roman guards would remain until they were sure the victim had died. Death by crucifixion usually took 6 hours to 4 days. It was supposed to be a brutal and shameful death. For more discussion, see F. P. Retief and L. Cilliers, "The history and pathology of crucifixion." *South African medical* vol. 93, no. 12 (2003): 938-41.

from the cross. He is, after all, the Son of God according to the text. But instead, he chooses to remain a victim, so that his execution can function as a sacrifice. The covenant which he established in the Last Supper with his blood is fulfilled via his execution, which renders this moment on the cross particularly impactful. His decision to continually consent to his own death just as Jephthah's daughter had to continually consent to her own death adds a layer of meaning: it fulfils and establishes a covenant.

Jesus' identity as a first-born child qualifies him to be sacrificed. He and Jephthah's daughter are both human equivalents of "the firstlings of the flock." Jephthah's daughter, of course, is further qualified for sacrifice by her virginity. Although the text of Judges emphasizes that virginity, the gospel of Matthew never clarifies Jesus sexual or social status. Certainly, the Matthean narrative never mentions Jesus being married or having children. His innocence, however, may well function in a similar way to Jephthah's daughter's virginity. Her sexual purity renders her ritually clean. In Jesus' case, his perfect obedience to the law may be said to render him ritually clean.

As Jephthah's daughter separated herself with some companions in the mountains to mourn her virginity for a time before her death, Jesus, before his anticipated death, separates himself with certain companions in the Garden of Gethsemane to contemplate and grieve. Like Jephthah's daughter, Jesus creates a space for himself, in which he chooses, as an autonomous agent, to face and embrace his fate.

For Jephthah and his daughter, the combined realities of her virginity and death meant that they have no offspring to carry on the family line and act as heirs. Jesus has no known biological children, and his death would seem to mark a similarly emphatic end to his line. But the fact that he is resurrected and precipitates the resurrection of others (Matt. 27:56), means that his life is not ended with his death and that other lives are generated thereby. Furthermore, his sacrificial death empowers him to have offspring. One is reminded of Matthew's quotation of Isaiah 53, a chapter

which the writer of that gospel explicitly relates to Jesus. While not specifically quoted in the gospel, part of that passage reads: “Yet it was the will of the Lord to crush him with pain. When you make his life an offering for sin, *he shall see his offspring*” (Isaiah 53:10). Jephthah’s family seems to be cut off by her virginal death, but, ironically, the end of Jesus’ mortal life as a human sacrifice enables lives everlasting.

The final archetype to be considered is Jesus as prophet-leader and how his expression of this type recalls and mirrors how this is represented in Jephthah’s daughter. Jesus may, of course, be said to be a prophet in a more formal sense than Jephthah’s daughter, but the details of her leadership role, which were examined above, are equally relevant. She, in imitation of Miriam and Deborah, leads out in dance. She also leads her companions into the mountains for her two months of independence. After the hymn is sung at the Last Supper, Jesus leads his companions to the Mount of Olives. Most importantly, Jephthah’s daughter’s sacrifice precipitates the creation of a new custom, modelled on her final acts, in accordance with which the Israelite daughters go out to mourn her annually. Jesus’ passion also establishes a new commemorative custom modelled on his final acts. That custom is anticipated at the Last Supper, which lays the groundwork for the eventual establishment of the eucharistic meal that recall his passion, a meal that represents a covenant transaction between Jesus and his followers.

The final verses of the Matthean text read, “Therefore go and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, and teaching them to obey everything I have commanded you. And I am truly always with you even until the end of the generation”” (Matt. 28:39-40). This commission that Jesus issues to his disciples parallels the impact of Jephthah’s daughter’s death on Israelite women. Her death meant that women could have their own space to commune together. Jesus’ death signifies something greater: that through communion with him and by offering that communion to others, his disciples can create a new body of followers of Jesus. While Jephthah’s daughter’s narrative sets a time for Israelite women to go

into the wilderness to mourn a death, Jesus' narrative invites everyone to commit to a new life: both physically, as his death caused the resurrection, and metaphorically, as his death means that people can become disciples for life.

CONCLUSION

By examining Jesus' sacrifice as described in Matthew's gospel in conversation with the account of Jephthah's daughter, we see that Jesus' death is a human sacrifice modelled on that earlier one. Interpreting his death thus and locating it in that framework highlights archetypal patterns that underscore a variety of transactional relationships: that between Jesus and Israelite tradition, that between Jesus and his Father, that between Jesus and his followers, both those who joined him in his lifetime and those who would be taught to know and commemorate him through the work of his disciples. Understanding Jesus' death as a human sacrifice that is foreshadowed by the story of Jephthah's daughter elucidates the Passion narrative as a whole, revealing the intricacies of Jesus's connections with the Hebrew Bible throughout.

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