

2. Did Jephthah “Follow Through With His Vow”?

Moving along with my response to Glenn’s commentary, Glenn made what we feel is a very weak, yet clever, attempt at Scripturally justifying his belief that it would have been a more grievous sin if he had honored his vow, and he uses the account of Jephthah in an attempt to justify breaking his own vow. Here is what he wrote:

3. Jephthah (in Judges 11) made a rash vow, but it would have resulted in him committing a more grievous sin **if** he literally fulfilled it (the human sacrifice of his own daughter). [Some commentators believe that *he did not* actually sacrifice his own daughter, but instead commanded her to remain celibate the rest of her life.]

My answer: As we are about to see, if we can trust Yahweh’s Word, we must believe that Jephthah fulfilled his vow. With his response, Glenn essentially expresses agreement with the commentators who believe that Jephthah didn’t “really” sacrifice his own daughter. If we can believe what Scripture says, then we can agree that Jephthah **really did sacrifice his own daughter**. According to Judges 11:30, Jephthah said, “If you will give the Ammonites into my hand, then whoever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return victorious from the Ammonites, shall be Yahweh’s, to be offered up by me as a burnt offering.” According to verse 35, when Jephthah saw his daughter come out of the house to meet him, he tore his clothes, and said, “Alas, my daughter! You have brought me very low; you have become the cause of great trouble to me. For I have opened my mouth to Yahweh, and I cannot take back my vow.”

I hardly believe Jephthah would have expressed such consternation if he knew all along that he was going to command his daughter to remain celibate the rest of her life! Finally, we read in verse 39 that after two months of bewailing her virginity, “she returned to her father, who did with her *according to the vow he had made*.” It seems as though Glenn may need to be reminded of what that vow was, so I will refer him back to verse 30, and ask him if he understands what “burnt offering” means. With regard to the opinions of commentators, the first-century Jewish historian Josephus, who certainly presents one of the most ancient opinions available (if not *the* most ancient opinion), expressed the belief that Jephthah fulfilled his vow to *literally* offer his daughter as a sacrifice.¹

Nevertheless, if Glenn is not comfortable with believing that Jephthah really did sacrifice his own daughter as a burnt offering, we invite him to explain why Joshua son of Nun didn’t decide to abandon his vow to spare the Gibeonites when he found that they had deceived him into going against one of

¹ Cf., *Antiquities of the Jews*, V, vii, 10. As Josephus brought his account of Jephthah’s rash vow to a close, he wrote the following: “Accordingly, when that time was over, he sacrificed his daughter as a burnt-offering, offering such an oblation as was neither comfortable to the law nor acceptable to the Almighty, not weighing with himself what opinion the hearers would have of such a sacrifice.” I am also aware of another ancient Jewish opinion, perhaps even older than the one expressed by Josephus. The author of this writing, known as *Liber Antiquitatum Biblicarum*, is unknown. It was at first thought to have been written by Philo, a first-century Jew who lived from 20 BCE until 50 CE. However, it was later determined, based on the frequent Hebraisms affirming an underlying Hebrew original, that he could not have been the author, and the author thus became known as “Pseudo-Philo,” not because it is a fabrication, but because of the mistaken identity. There are various opinions as to the date of authorship, some attributing it to before the destruction of the temple in 70 CE and others giving it a later date, including the 2nd century CE. This author, like Josephus, made it clear that Jephthah literally sacrificed his daughter, whose name he gives as Seila. Before her death, the author attributes the following words to Seila: “Hear, you mountains, my lamentation, and behold, you hills, the tears of my eyes, and be witnesses, you rocks, to the weeping of my soul. Behold how I am condemned! But let not my life be taken in vain. May my words go forth to the heavens, and my tears be written before the firmament, in order that a father not venture to sacrifice a daughter whom he has vowed, and a ruler not let his only daughter be promised for sacrifice.” -- *Chapter 40:5*

Yahweh's commands. We have found that "where there is a will, there is a way," and we are interested in reading the explanation that Glenn comes up with.

In an updated version of Glenn's "Answers to Objections," he answered the above inquiry as follows:

Jephthah (in Judges 11) made a rash vow, but it would have resulted in him committing a more grievous sin **if** he literally fulfilled it (the human sacrifice of his own daughter). While many believe he **did** follow through with his vow, I am inclined to believe that he may not have.² [Some commentators believe that *he did not* actually sacrifice his own daughter, but instead commanded her to remain celibate the rest of her life, and sacrificed a bullock in her place³. Regardless of our opinions regarding this, it is not completely certain whether he did or did not sacrifice his daughter.]⁴ Likewise, while Joshua made a covenant with the Gibeonites, he later realized his error in not consulting with Yahweh first (since Joshua was commanded to kill and/or drive out all the inhabitants of the land. In this case, Joshua was commanded by Yahweh to keep his vow with the condition of making the Gibeonites into servants.⁵ In my own case, since this admission on my part *does not* add any true evidence in favor of the 50 year cycles, there is really not much that can be done except to acknowledge the error.⁶ It can make

² Of course, Glenn is "inclined to believe" as he does because it would justify his own decision to break the vow he made. Scripture is clear, as are the ancient witnesses, that as horrible and detestable as it may seem to be, Jephthah literally followed through on his vow. However, as we will see shortly, this argument isn't actually about whether or not Jephthah literally sacrificed his daughter -- *it's about whether or not Jephthah honored his vow.*

³ Regarding Glenn's suggestion that, instead of sacrificing his daughter, Jephthah commanded her to remain celibate for the rest of her life, I feel that I should point out that there is simply no precedence for such a thing in Israel. That women should remain celibate as a means of "dedicating their lives to the Almighty" is a teaching introduced by Catholicism. Moshe Reiss, in his article "JEPHTHAH'S DAUGHTER: JEWISH PERSPECTIVES," goes into detail explaining that the belief that Jephthah's daughter was somehow "consecrated" by remaining celibate did not arise until the advent of Christianity, at a time when the Catholic Church instituted the concept of "women's convents":

"One must understand the historical atmosphere reigning in this era in order to grasp the context of this interpretation. The period 1080-1170 was the time of greatest growth of monastic life for women in Spain, England, France and Italy. **According to a study noted by Berman, there were in fact more female recluses than male ones in the period being discussed.**

"Gersonides (1288-1344) and Abarbanel (1437-1508) adopted the consecration ideal as against the sacrificial one. The former suggests that a male would be dedicated to the Tabernacle, not unlike a Levite or Priest, **despite the rule that only a member of the hereditary line of Levi could be so dedicated.** In the case of a woman, she would be required to be celibate, and that Jephthah built a cell for his daughter. Abarbanel states that the Church 'derived the practice of establishing houses of seclusion for women from the daughter of Jephthah.' He states also that the daughter could not even see her female friends who came the four days of the year to visit her, but only hear their voices. That may have come from the Ancrene Riwe well known at the time, that prohibited Christian anchoresses from viewing other persons even in confession, and believes she chose the site for her cell during the two months she wandered on the mountains.

"**The cultural adoption of a Christian idea by these Medieval-Renaissance Jewish commentators is remarkable. All were and remain leading exegetes. To extol a celibate woman appears nowhere in the Tanakh,** although Jeremiah is noted as a celibate prophet and priest (Jer. 16:2). Given that these Jewish commentators lived in areas where women's convents were established, it is difficult to believe, as noted by Berman, that they were not influenced by Christian women's monastic ideals."

http://www.moshereiss.org/articles/16_jephthah.htm.

⁴ As we will see shortly, Glenn's decision to infuse the notion of whether or not Jephthah sacrificed his daughter as an excuse to renege on his own vow is actually a clever diversionary tactic on his part. He may "excuse himself" from the responsibility of honoring his own rash vow, but his concern should be whether or not *Yahweh* has absolved him of the responsibility.

⁵ Notice that Yahweh didn't release Joshua from keeping his vow. This is important, but Glenn doesn't seem to grasp the connection between Joshua's vow and his own vow. Rather, Glenn seems to be saying, "See? Yahweh required Joshua to keep his vow, so this means I don't have to keep mine." ????

⁶ Once again, Glenn doesn't seem to understand the obvious connection between Joshua's vow and the one he made in which he vowed to "embrace the 50-year cycle" if I could produce a table with 70 Sabbatical cycles/Jubilee Years within a 430-year period (using 50-year Jubilee cycles). One example is all it takes to make it a possibility, and this is what I produced. If Glenn

no sense to me to follow through with a rash vow which requires one to acknowledge an *erroneous* interpretation [and, therefore, an erroneous practice] of Scripture.⁷ I could consider doing as Joshua did, and consult Yahweh directly for an answer to this difficulty. However, we are not living in a direct theocracy yet, and since I do not claim to be a prophet I hold no direct two-way communication with Him.⁸ If I am correct regarding the Jubilee cycles, and honor a vow which forces me to teach error, how does this honor Yahweh?⁹ Of course, I will certainly be more careful in the future regarding vows--but I think most people can see the inherit [sic] problem here.¹⁰

The above commentary is so full of unreasonable and objectionable comments that I found it easier to respond by incorporating the eight footnotes. I could go into great detail with regard to how Glenn, for some unexplained reason, attempts to succeed in justifying the breaking of his vow by providing an example of how Yahweh required Joshua to *honor* a vow that he should not have made. I could point out how Glenn's decision to use this account as a "justification" for breaking his own vow is utter nonsense, but instead, we can end the entire argument over whether or not Jephthah honored his vow by providing one verse of Scripture:

³⁹ And it came to pass at the end of two months, that she returned unto her father, **who did with her according to his vow which he had vowed:** and she knew no man. (*Judges 11:39*)

accordingly honors his vow, he will heartily embrace the 50-year cycles and abandon the 49-year cycles. It's as simple as that. "Acknowledging the error" is *not* "honoring the vow"; rather, it is digging for an imaginary loophole.

⁷ Clearly, this is a case of an individual so locked in to his belief that he is unwilling to acknowledge the possibility that he could be mistaken. Glenn is fully aware of the fact that, even though June and I do not agree with his belief regarding the Jubilee cycles, we have never labeled his understanding as being an "*erroneous interpretation*." All unbiased references that we have examined refer to the "49 year cycle vs. 50-year cycle" as a *controversial topic* ... not one that is firmly established. Glenn has the right to be fully persuaded that his interpretation is correct, but to label the other view as "erroneous" without being able to offer the necessary proof is an example of extreme bias -- to the point of stubborn refusal to recognize any other possibility, and, hence, a self-justification for not honoring his vow.

⁸ Actually, the only "consulting" that Glenn needs to do can be accomplished by reading and heeding Numbers 30: 2. This is the "Word of Yahweh" to Glenn, as well as *anyone* claiming to uphold Torah. Glenn approaches this matter from an "acknowledging the error" perspective, whereas it is *really* about "acknowledging the error and repenting of the disobedience." With regard to Glenn's claim to *not* be a prophet, our observation is that his actions belie his words. If Glenn *doesn't* consider himself to be a prophet, why does he take it upon himself to declare that the "clear" meaning of the 1994 Shoemaker-Levy comet fragments that struck Jupiter is that of Yahweh giving mankind a 21-year probationary period before the Judgment? How can Glenn know this?

⁹ Answer to the question: It would honor Yahweh by demonstrating that Glenn is willing to put Torah obedience over and above his interpretation of Scripture ... particularly an interpretation that unbiased scholars label as "controversial." Out of curiosity, we would like to know what harm would come about if Glenn were to suddenly embrace the 50-year cycles. Glenn hasn't explained this to his reading audience yet. I mean, we all agree that "the season is ripe" for the Messiah's return, which means that we should all be ready on a *daily basis* instead of pointing to a certain year in the future, right? So if Glenn were to redirect his focus from promoting the *year* during which the new millennium will begin to instead preparing our hearts and minds on a *daily basis*, what harm would ensue? Why is promoting one's belief pertaining to the length of the Jubilee Cycle more important than obeying a direct Torah command? These are unanswered questions from Glenn, and since he has already indicated that "the horse is now dead," i.e., he's not going to change his mind, I suspect that the questions will remain unanswered, but as the expression goes, "Time Will Tell."

¹⁰ This quote was copied and pasted from W. Glenn Moore's "Answers to Objections" page on his web site. The entire set of questions and answers may be read by accessing the following URL:

http://www.itsaboutthattime.net/answer_objections.htm.

In Glenn's commentary above, he wrote, "While many believe he **did** follow through with his vow, I am inclined to believe that he may not have." If Glenn will only believe what Scripture plainly says, he will understand that there is no "may not have" about it! As we can see from the above verse, Jephthah, in spite of Glenn's expressed doubt, *honored his vow*. We can argue back and forth *ad infinitum* over whether or not Jephthah *really* sacrificed his daughter, but the *bottom line* is this: *Whatever the vow was, Jephthah honored it!* The question was, "Will Glenn honor *his* vow?" I say that this "was" the question because the answer is no longer in question. Glenn has already given us his answer:

I would also like to point out that Larry has continued to make this "rash vow" a major issue in his rebuttal to my study of the Jubilee cycles. The problem with this, however, is simple--this does not contribute **in any way** to the determining of the truth regarding the Jubilee and Sabbatical cycles. The only purpose I can see for continually harping on that would be to divert attention from the real issues. However, it is of no benefit for Larry to continue to belabor the issue. The horse is now dead, and any more continuous beatings would be futile!¹¹

Since "the horse is now dead," it is clear that Glenn has determined and charted his own course and is proceeding accordingly. This is fine; as I stated above, "I frankly do not care whether or not Glenn honors his vow. In fact, if he is not a servant of Yahweh, then I do not expect him to do so. I would only want Glenn to honor his vow **if** he is a servant of Yahweh."

I am left to wonder if guilt is playing a large role in Glenn's expanded commentary above. Somehow, he has formed the impression that I have made his "rash vow" a major issue in my rebuttal. Glenn, who seems to enjoy doing "holy math," should know better.¹² In our study, I devoted a total of 15 paragraphs, covering four pages, towards commenting on Glenn's vow. The entire commentary covers nine pages, but the extra five pages consist of either charts or Glenn's comments. Nevertheless, if I were to count all nine of those pages as my "Rash Vow Commentary," *at best* this would comprise 10% of the entire study! This hardly ranks as "belaboring the issue." It is as though the brief commentary I offered seems so extensive to Glenn because his conscience is making it seem much larger than it really is. Of course, although my commentary is relatively brief, this issue *is* a major concern for anyone who might consider examining Glenn's commitment to Torah obedience. Glenn, when faced with either obeying the law pertaining to honoring our vows (Numbers 30:2) or continuing to teach what he feels he has been drawn to do (even if it means breaking his vow), has chosen the latter. This leaves no room to doubt where Glenn's priorities lie, and we certainly don't need to "beat a dead horse" to see the red flags that this fact raises.

In May 2009, I noticed that Glenn added the following notation to his "Answers to Objections" explanation/justification for not honoring his vow:

[It would appear from my examination of this issue that in Scripture there are different ways in which to correct the problems of rash vows. At the appropriate time I will formulate a more complete response to this issue, which will include my final answer to this in a *separate* presentation.]

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² For example, on the Home Page of his web site, Glenn promotes his video presentation of the Jubilee cycle with the following pitch: "In order to understand the present and the future, we need to link it with the past to clearly see where we are heading and what we should do to prepare for the future. Here is a 30 minute video presentation showing us where we are in time. Download and play the flash video, get out your calculators, and then get ready to do some **Holy Math!**"

From the above addition, it is clear that, indeed, Glenn's conscience is working on him, and since Scripture doesn't actually offer *any* justification for breaking a vow (rash or not), he is doing some digging in an attempt to justify/rationalize his violation of Numbers 30:2. It will be interesting, to say the least, to read what he comes up with. Will it be approved Scriptural examples of righteous believers reneging on rash vows or will his response consist of isolated verses taken out of context in which he attempts to justify circumventing the commandment found in Numbers 30:2? As we are about to see, Glenn apparently believes he has produced an approved Scriptural example of a righteous believer who reneged on a vow (or was forced from keeping it).

Glenn's "Final Answer" and King Saul's Broken Vow

During the week of May 2 – 8, 2009, Glenn submitted his "final answer," providing his reading audience with his justification for reneging on his rash vow. Since King Saul was forced to renege on *his* vow to kill whoever ate anything on a day of battle, this means Glenn is justified to renege on *his* vow to embrace the 50-year Jubilee cycle if I produced the table that he challenged me to create. Here is the pertinent excerpt from Glenn's latest study entitled "Vows and Oaths in Scripture":

Let us consider the foolish vow of Saul. Jonathan, his son, ate of the honey when Saul had plainly commanded none of his army to eat anything on that day. When he found out what Jonathan had done, the people rescued Jonathan from the plan of Saul to have him killed. Saul attempted to fulfill his foolish vow by killing his own son, but instead the people were able to bring him to his senses.

Then said Saul unto the people that were with him, Number now, and see who is gone from us. And when they had numbered, behold, Jonathan and his armourbearer were not there. . . .So Yahweh saved Israel that day: and the battle passed over unto Bethaven. And the men of Israel were distressed that day: for Saul had adjured the people, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food until evening, that I may be avenged on mine enemies. So none of the people tasted any food. And all they of the land came to a wood; and there was honey upon the ground. And when the people were come into the wood, behold, the honey dropped; but no man put his hand to his mouth: for the people feared the oath. But Jonathan heard not when his father charged the people with the oath: wherefore he put forth the end of the rod that was in his hand, and dipped it in an honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his eyes were enlightened. Then answered one of the people, and said, Thy father straitly charged the people with an oath, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food this day. And the people were faint. Then said Jonathan, My father hath troubled the land: see, I pray you, how mine eyes have been enlightened, because I tasted a little of this honey. How much more, if haply the people had eaten freely to day of the spoil of their enemies which they found? for had there not been now a much greater slaughter among the Philistines? And they smote the Philistines that day from Michmash to Aijalon: and the people were very faint. . . . And Saul said, Draw ye near hither, all the chief of the people: and know and see wherein this sin hath been this day. For, as Yahweh liveth, which saveth Israel, though it be in Jonathan my son, he shall

surely die. But there was not a man among all the people that answered him. Then said he unto all Israel, Be ye on one side, and I and Jonathan my son will be on the other side. And the people said unto Saul, Do what seemeth good unto thee. Therefore Saul said unto Yahweh Elohim of Israel, Give a perfect lot. And Saul and Jonathan were taken: but the people escaped. And Saul said, Cast lots between me and Jonathan my son. And Jonathan was taken. Then Saul said to Jonathan, Tell me what thou hast done. And Jonathan told him, and said, I did but taste a little honey with the end of the rod that was in mine hand, and, lo, I must die. And Saul answered, Elohim do so and more also: for thou shalt surely die, Jonathan. And the people said unto Saul, Shall Jonathan die, who hath wrought this great salvation in Israel? Elohim forbid: as Yahweh liveth, there shall not one hair of his head fall to the ground; for he hath wrought with Elohim this day. So the people rescued Jonathan, that he died not. (1 Samuel 14:17, 23-31, 38-45)

Would it have been wrong if Saul fulfilled his vow? Yes it would, for the same reasons given above regarding Jephthah's vow. Saul made a very foolish oath when he forced his army to fight a battle against the Philistines without eating. He also condemned anyone to death who ate anything that day. Yet it was his own son, Jonathan, that had saved Israel that day while eating some of the honey that was found on the ground. While Saul sought to fulfill that vow, the people intervened and saved him from being killed by Saul.¹³

The most obvious question I would ask Glenn after reading this commentary is, "What is your point in sharing this story?"

If I had to guess, I would say Glenn's answer would be, "See? Saul was forced to renege on his foolish vow to kill whoever ate anything on that day of battle, so this means **I** am justified in renegeing on *my* vow!"

To put this in perspective, here's a brief summary of this account, along with Glenn's interpretation: Saul made a foolish vow that whoever ate anything that day would be cursed. His son, Jonathan, wasn't present when his father made the vow, so when he found some honey and ate of it, he had no idea his dad had made the vow.

Well, ignorance is no excuse, so when the truth came out, Saul took no pity on his son and was probably making funeral plans for Jonathan when the people restrained him from carrying out the order. And there you have it: Glenn's excuse.

I will attempt to draw a modern-day analogy. Let's say a man came up with a new house rule that no one is to blow their nose inside his home. In fact, he is so emphatic that no one be allowed to blow their nose in his home that he vows to kill anyone who would dare do such a thing. Let us also say that a few hours after issuing this house rule, his daughter arrives home from work, completely unaware of the new rule. Upon entering the house, she goes straight to her room, grabs a tissue, and begins blowing her nose. Distraught and dumbfounded, the father runs to his wife and screams, "*Can you believe this?! She wasted*

¹³ From "Vows and Oaths in Scripture," by W. Glenn Moore, May 2, 2009, pp. 6-7. This study may be read online by accessing the following URL: http://www.itsaboutthattime.net/PDF%20Files/Vows_Oaths_Scripture.pdf

no time in coming into this house and blowing her nose! Bring her out of her room – she must pay the penalty for her transgression!”

The wife might say, “But, Honey, you can’t be serious! That’s a stupid rule, and besides, she didn’t even know anything about it!!”

“Too bad! I made a vow and I cannot turn back! BRING HER OUT NOW!!!”

On her way to their daughter’s room, the mother picks up her cell phone and upon entering the room, she locks the door behind her. She desperately calls 911 to report that her husband has flipped out and is about to kill their daughter.

Growing impatient, the father goes to the daughter’s door and orders her to come out. Of course, the mother is in there with her, behind the locked door. As the husband begins kicking in the door, the police arrive and arrest him, kicking and screaming that they MUST allow him to keep his vow!

The following day, news reports circulate about a guy who made a stupid vow that he would kill anyone who blew their nose inside his home, and that he attempted to kill his own daughter for violating the house rule, even though she had not so much as *heard* about it before committing the infraction. Thankfully, the report says, the police arrived before he was able to act in accordance with his vow.

Coincidentally, a man reading the newspaper account of this drama smiles to himself as he reads the part of where the father was hindered from carrying out his vow. It turns out that he had recently made a foolish vow himself ... a vow that he now regretted making, but he didn’t know of any loopholes to get him out of having to keep it. “I just found my loophole!” he exclaims.

This is essentially what Glenn is doing with Saul’s broken vow. Glenn apparently feels that Saul’s broken vow gives him the justification he needs to renege on his own vow. This is simply one of the most lame excuses for getting out of a vow that I can imagine, and it can only come from an individual who is seeking a way to circumvent obedience to the law found in Numbers 30:2. Did Jephthah know about Glenn’s “loophole”? Why didn’t he use it? Or how about King Herod? Can’t a *king* find a loophole?

One thing that Glenn might wish to keep in mind as he ponders Saul’s foolish vow: That vow would have resulted in the death of an innocent man who knew nothing of the vow beforehand, and hence cannot be pronounced guilty for violating its precept. Saul’s keeping that vow would have resulted in the death of an innocent man. What would the ramifications be if Glenn were to keep *his* vow? Is anyone holding Glenn back, forcing him to not honor his vow?

King David wrote that whoever keeps his vow, even to his own hurt, is counted among those who will abide in Yahweh’s tabernacle (Ps. 15:1-4). Saul’s vow would have been kept to *his son’s hurt*. Who would be hurt if Glenn were to keep *his* vow? This is yet *another* question that Glenn needs to consider.