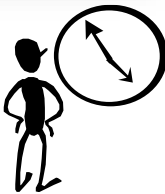


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Time of Assembly



Sunday:

Bible Study	9:00 a.m.
Worship	10:00 a.m.
Worship	5:00 p.m.
(every other week)	

Wednesday:

Bible Study	6:30 p. m.
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Jephthah's Vow

By Steve A. Hamilton

“A mighty man of valor” (Judges 11:1) by the name of Jephthah made a vow to God. Specifically he said, *“If You will indeed deliver the people of Ammon into my hands, then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me, when I return in peace from the people of Ammon, shall surely be the Lord’s, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering”* (Judges 11:30b-31; *emp. mine*). As rash as this vow might be, Jephthah kept his word even though the first thing out of his doors was his only daughter. *“He carried out his vow with her which he had vowed”* (Judges 11:39).

This story distresses many people who find it hard to fathom the very idea that anyone would kill his daughter for a promise no matter how rash. Surely, God understands that he didn’t mean to sacrifice his only daughter. Surely, this story must be misinterpreted. Therefore, people look for an alternate explanation.

The prevalent alternate explanation for this story would have us believe that Jephthah’s daughter was not sacrificed but in reality sent to become a temple priestess. This version would be consistent with his daughter lamenting her virginity since temple priestesses had to be virgins. Never mind the fact that this idea is not found in the passages relating this story.

Certain words in this story are found to be suspect in translation in order to support the temple priestess conclusion. For example, the word “whatsoever” is said to be more correctly translated “whosoever” in the vow. That being the case, then it is argued that Jephthah knew he was making a vow involving a human sacrifice. The vow was not rash because Jephthah (in his mind) was actually making a vow in which someone in his household would ultimately be re-

deemed.

The Old Law allows redemption for persons and property made in a vow (Lev. 27). A close examination of this text reveals that a firstborn child could not be redeemed (Lev. 27:28). According to the temple priestess explanation, Jephthah was distraught because he knew she could not be redeemed upon seeing her walk through the doors. He must have wanted to see someone else come through the doors whom he could redeem.

Unfortunately for this explanation, a firstborn is not the only thing that could not be redeemed. In fact, anyone set aside for destruction could not be redeemed either. *“No person under the ban, who may become doomed to destruction among men, shall be redeemed, but shall surely be put to death”* (Lev. 27:29). Jephthah vowed his daughter’s destruction in exchange for the destruction of the Ammonites. Jephthah inadvertently put his daughter under the ban.

This would mean that Jephthah performed a human sacrifice. It is correctly argued that God finds human sacrifices detestable (Deut. 12:31). However, we must keep in mind that Jephthah made the vow to God. God neither required the vow nor desired it but Jephthah on his own accord made it. *“When you make a vow to the LORD your God, you shall not delay to pay it; for the LORD your God will surely require it of you, and it would be sin to you. But if you abstain from vowing, it shall not be sin to you. That which has gone from your lips you shall keep and perform, for you voluntarily vowed to the LORD your God what you have promised with your mouth”* (Deut. 23:21-23). Jephthah did not sin in making the vow. However, he would have sinned if he failed to keep his vow. *“When you make a vow to God, do not delay to pay it; For He has no pleasure in fools. Pay what you have vowed-Better not to vow than to vow and not pay”* (Eccl. 5:4-5).

Such vows were not unique in the Old Testament. After Aaron’s death, King Arad, the Canaanite, attacked Israel at Mount Hor. *“So Israel made a vow to the LORD, and said, “If You will indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities. And the LORD listened to the voice of Israel and delivered up the Canaanites, and they utterly destroyed them and their cities. So the name of that place was called Hormah”* (Numbers 21:2-3). Hormah literally means utter destruction. How many innocent children died as a result of this vow? Surely, it was more than one daughter.

It would seem that Jephthah was well acquainted with the laws concerning vows and redemption. His vow specifically required a “burnt offering.” A vow offering had to be perfect without defect (Lev. 22:21-25). He also knew the same law made provisions for an unsuitable animal intended for sacrifice if that was what came through his doors (Lev. 27:11-13). Does it make sense to imply that Jephthah intended to offer a

human sacrifice when such an offering is against God's laws? Jephthah obviously had some animal in mind when he made the vow!

Unfortunately for Jephthah, he did not anticipate a person coming out his doors first. He tore his clothes when he saw his only daughter come through the doors. He immediately remembered his vow to God. Bravely, his daughter encouraged him to keep his word but requested time to "bemoan" or "lament" her virginity. Those words are strongly related to death. Then the record says Jephthah "carried out his vow!"

God said, "*For My thoughts are not your thoughts, Nor are your ways My ways,*" says the LORD. "*For as the heavens are higher than the earth, So are My ways higher than your ways, And My thoughts than your thoughts*" (Isa. 55:8-9). A more suitable explanation is not to be found in scriptures for the obvious outcome of this story. We might not like the fact that this story ends with an innocent person being sacrificed for her father's promise. But then again, wasn't Christ an innocent person who was sacrificed for His Father's promise (Gal. 3:16-17)?

Is it Wrong to Kill?

By Steve A. Hamilton

"How could God say, 'Thou shalt not kill,' but then command the Israelites to kill those who did?"

The word "kill" is actually the Hebrew word for "murder." The command is, "Thou shalt do no murder." Killing of any kind is not what is forbidden, only actual murder. For example, Genesis 9:6 states, "Whosoever sheds man's blood, by man shall his blood be shed." The same principle for today is given in Romans 13:1-4. In John 19:10-11 when Pilate told Jesus that he had the power to put him to death, Jesus responded that he would not have this power if it were not given him by God. Man, by some governing authority, is under the responsibility to put to death the murderer. Therefore, God is not forbidding the taking of a life under all circumstances, but in unauthorized circumstances. When God commanded Israel to destroy all in the land of Canaan, He was pronouncing the death penalty on a nation that had practiced things worthy of death under God's law. Israel, was God's authorized instrument to carry out the death penalty. Thus, there is no contradiction." ("Ready to Give an Answer," question #10, by Kercheville)

God cannot sin. *"He is the Rock, his work is perfect: for all his ways are justice: a God of truth and without iniquity, just and right is He"* (Deut. 32:4). *"Therefore listen to me, you men of understanding: Far be it from God to do wickedness, And from the Almighty to commit iniquity"* (Job. 34:10). *"Surely God will never do wickedly, Nor will the Almighty pervert justice"* (Job 34:12).

Remember, sin (i.e. iniquity or wickedness) is a violation of law (1 John 3:4-9). Law is as God defined it. Therefore, God cannot break his own laws (1 John 1:5; Psa.

33:4; 92:15; 145:17; Heb. 6:17-18; Jas. 1:13). God is not capable of sin.

If killing another human being is sin, then God sinned when He killed Ananias and Sapphira (Acts 5:1-11). However, we know God cannot sin. Therefore, killing another human being is not sin! *"Can a mortal be more righteous than God? Can a man be more pure than his Maker"* (Job. 4:17)? *"Let God be true but every man a liar"* (Rom. 3:4).

God Answers Our Prayers

By Steve A. Hamilton

Much of the time we recognize when God answers our prayers. Yet, there are times when God answers our prayers in such a subtle way that we overlook the blessing God has granted. An excellent example of this was the answered prayers on behalf of young Caleb Steinback. The 3 year old was ill and tested to have a high platelet count in his blood and a low amount of hemoglobin. The doctors scheduled additional testing the following Monday. In the mean time prayers were offered at many congregations the Sunday before his additional tests that he might be healed of whatever ailed him. The Monday tests revealed his blood to be normal.

The doctor had a hard time trying to explain why he ordered additional tests when the subsequent results showed no abnormalities in Caleb's blood. Three excuses were offered. It was suggested that the doctor misread the initial results. Yet, the initial results still showed unusual levels in his blood. It was suggested that the father misunderstood the doctor's explanation of his son's condition. Yet, the doctor still ordered the additional tests. It was also suggested that Caleb had an unknown infection that his body was fighting. Yet, by Monday he had totally recovered. The human side of us would like to think that there was a logical explanation for the confusion. Regardless of where the confusion took place we tell ourselves that we are thankful that it was just some kind of misunderstanding or miscommunication.

But was that the reason? Or is it more likely that God answered our prayers in such a subtle way that we are left looking elsewhere? We know God answers prayers. ***"Ask, and it will be given to you; seek, and you will find; knock, and it will be opened to you. For everyone who asks receives, and he who seeks finds, and to him who knocks it will be opened"*** (Matt.7:7-8). In fact, God is most willing to exceed our requests. God ***"who is able to do exceedingly abundantly above all that we ask or think, according to the power that works in us, to Him be glory in the church by Christ Jesus to all generations, forever and ever. Amen"*** (Eph. 3:20-21). So is it unreasonable to think that the initial test results were accurate; that the doctor appropriately ordered the additional blood tests and that the additional tests were accurate despite the doctor's reasoning that something was at fault. Our faith should tell us that nothing was at fault. Caleb is a healthy young boy because God answered and exceeded our prayers!

We should pray that God isn't insulted by our lack of faith when we overlook the blessings of answered prayers. ***"For with God nothing will be impossible"*** (Lk 1:37).