

Numbers Chapter 30

Verses 1-16: Vows were often uttered in times of crisis: (Gen. 28:20-22; Num. 21:2; Judges 11:30-31; 1 Sam. 1:11; 14:24; Jonah 1:16; 2:9; Acts 18:18, 21, 23; 23:12-14). But when the crisis passed and the prayer was answered, there was the temptation for a man to forget the vow (Deut. 23:21-23 and Eccl. 5:4 warn against this).

This chapter added clarification to the laws regarding vows given (in Lev. 27:1-33). The basic principle for men is restated (in verse 2). Then, it was asserted that a man was also responsible for the vows made by women in his household (verses 3-16). A father or husband could overrule the vow of a daughter or wife, but a man's silence, if he knew of the vow, meant it must be accomplished.

Verses 1-2: The principle is that he cannot "break his word". The law mentions two types of vow: the "vow" (neder), and the "bond" (issar). The former term is the more common, and here at least means a vow to do something positive such as offering a sacrifice, whereas "issar" is a vow of abstinence, a self-imposed fast (compare 1 Sam. 14:24; Psalm 132:2-5). Vows were not required but, once made, they must be kept, thus to enter into one required serious thought. What is vowed before God is binding. Vows to Him are not trifling things.

Numbers 30:1 "And Moses spake unto the heads of the tribes concerning the children of Israel, saying, This [is] the thing which the LORD hath commanded."

Or the princes of them, who could more easily be convened, and who used to meet on certain occasions. And on whom it lay to see various laws put in execution.

"Concerning the children of Israel": How they ought to conduct and behave in the following case. It being an affair which concerned them all.

"Saying, this is the thing which the Lord hath commanded": Relating to vows. Aben Ezra is of opinion that this was delivered after the battle with Midian, of which there is an account in the following chapter. And is occasioned by what was said, to the tribes of Gad and Reuben (Num. 32:24).

The head of each tribe was, in a sense, responsible for teaching the people under them the ways of God. Moses brings this particular message to the attention of these leaders. Notice that this is a commandment.

Numbers 30:2 "If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth."

"A vow ... bind his soul with a bond": A promise to do something or a promise not to do something. Christ could have had this text in mind (Matt. 5:33).

This is explaining the seriousness of making a vow. This is probably, speaking of making a promise to the LORD. Whatever a man promises God, he must do without exception. A vow is not something you can change your mind about.

Verses 3-6: A vow made by a woman could be invalidated by her father (in the case of an unmarried daughter), or by her husband (in the case of a wife). A widow or divorced woman was responsible for her own vows (verse 9). If the husband "holds his peace" (keeps silent), then this indicates consent. The clear implication of these laws is that a wife's duty to submit to her husband was comparable to the child's duty to obey his parents (compare verses 3-5). Neither wives nor children could substitute self-imposed religious obligations for God-given duties.

Numbers 30:3 "If a woman also vow a vow unto the LORD, and bind [herself] by a bond, [being] in her father's house in her youth;"

Who has not passed thirteen years, as the Targum of Jonathan.

"And bind herself by a bond": Lay herself under obligation to perform her vow by an oath. Being in her father's house; unto the twelfth year, as the same Targum. That is under his care, tuition, and jurisdiction. Whether she literally, or properly speaking, is in the house or not at the time she vows. so Jarchi interprets it of her being in the power of her father, though not in his house, she being not at age to be at her own disposal, but at his. Wherefore it is added:

"In her youth": Which, as the same writer explains it, signifies that she is "neither a little one, nor at age. For a little one's vow is no vow. And one at age is not in the power of her father to make void her vow. Who is a little one? One vows a vow that is twelve years and one day old, there is no need to examine them. "He seems to refer to a passage in the Misnah, "a daughter of eleven years and one day, her vows are examined; a daughter of twelve years and one day, her vows are firm. But they are to be examined through the whole twelfth year."

A young girl in her father's house was subject to her father, so her vow would be taken differently. She may make a vow that her father would not allow her to keep.

Numbers 30:4 "And her father hear her vow, and her bond wherewith she hath bound her soul, and her father shall hold his peace at her: then all her vows shall stand, and every bond wherewith she hath bound her soul shall stand."

Her vow, which is binding upon her, or her vow and an oath annexed to it. Which makes it still more strongly binding. And this he hears himself, or it is reported to him by others. And her father shall hold his peace at her. Shall not reprove her for it, nor contradict her in it. Then all her vows shall stand; be they what, or as many as they may.

"And every bond wherewith she hath bound her soul shall stand": His silence being to be interpreted as approving of them, and consenting to them.

The father not saying anything, showed that he approved of the vow, and he cannot cause her not to keep the vow. He should have spoken up, if he did not want her making the vow. It is her obligation to keep the vow, and the father's obligation to allow her to keep it.

Numbers 30:5 "But if her father disallow her in the day that he heareth; not any of her vows, or of her bonds wherewith she hath bound her soul, shall stand: and the LORD shall forgive her, because her father disallowed her."

Disapproves of her vow, and expresses his dislike of it, and declares it null and void. Which, if done at all, is to be done on the same day he hears it. And not on another day, as Aben Ezra observes. Not the day following, and much less on a third or fourth day, etc. And it might be done on a Sabbath day.

"Not any of her vows, or of her bonds wherewith she hath bound her soul, shall stand": But become null and void, she being at the control of her father. And having nothing in her own power, and at her own disposal, to vow or consecrate. But wholly in the power and at the disposal of her father.

"And the Lord shall forgive her": The breach of her vow, it shall not be imputed to her as a sin.

"Because her father disallowed her": So, that it was no fault of hers that it was not fulfilled. Though she might be blameworthy to make one, without previously obtaining his consent. And making it rashly without his previous knowledge, she not being in her own hands. And in this respect, may be said to be forgiven by the Lord, which supposes some fault committed.

The girl cannot overrule her father. If he has protested the vow and will not let her keep it, then she cannot be held responsible for not keeping the vow. It is not her fault, that she cannot keep the vow, and she is released from the vow.

Numbers 30:6 "And if she had at all a husband, when she vowed, or uttered ought out of her lips, wherewith she bound her soul;"

Or "when her vows were upon her". Was either betrothed or married to a man.

"Or uttered ought out of her lips": Wherewith she bound her soul. Uttered anything, either with or without premeditation. Either with thought and deliberation, or rashly and imprudently, as the word signifies. Yet in such a manner that it was binding upon her.

Her husband is the same as her father was, in the verse above. Her vow is just as good, as her husband will allow her to keep.

Numbers 30:7 "And her husband heard [it], and held his peace at her in the day that he heard [it]: then her vows shall stand, and her bonds wherewith she bound her soul shall stand."

The vow she made, and by his silence consented to it.

"Then her vows shall stand, and her bonds wherewith she bound her soul shall stand": Or she be under obligation to perform them.

This is saying, that if her husband heard the vow and approved of it, she should be allowed to keep the vow.

Numbers 30:8 "But if her husband disallowed her on the day that he heard [it]; then he shall make her vow which she vowed, and that which she uttered with her lips, wherewith she bound her soul, of none effect: and the LORD shall forgive her."

Expresses his dislike of it. And this he does as soon as he hears it, at least that same day. According to the Jews, within the space of twenty-four hours.

"Then he shall make her vow which she vowed, and that which she uttered with her lips, wherewith she bound her soul, of none effect": By contradicting it, and forbidding the performance of it. Or however by declaring to her, or to others, that it is not agreeable to his mind and will that it should be fulfilled.

"And the Lord shall forgive her": Excuse her performance of the vow, and not impute sin to her on that account. Nor punish for the breach of it, she being under the cover of her husband, and obliged to submit to his will. According to Jarchi, the Scripture speaks of a woman that vows to be a Nazarite. Her husband hears and makes it void. But she does not know it, and transgresses her vow, and drinks wine, and is defiled with the dead. So that she has need of forgiveness, though it is made void. And if vows made void, he adds, have need of pardon, much more those that are not.

This again is saying that she could not keep the vow, because her husband would not allow her to. She is not held responsible for the vow in that case, and God forgives her of the vow.

Numbers 30:9 "But every vow of a widow, and of her that is divorced, wherewith they have bound their souls, shall stand against her."

"A widow ... her that is divorced": These were not viewed as being under a man's authority, so the word of the woman alone sufficed.

She is responsible for her own vow, if she is not under the authority of a husband.

Numbers 30:10 "And if she vowed in her husband's house, or bound her soul by a bond with an oath;"

Before his death, in his lifetime, or before divorced. The Targum of Jonathan adds, by way of explanation, "and not at age for marriage". Understanding it of a betrothed, and not a married person. But Jarchi says, the Scripture speaks of a married one, which seems most likely.

"Or bound her soul by a bond with an oath": To fulfil her vow. To abstain from this, or to do that or the other thing.

This is speaking of a married woman living with her husband. The husband can allow, or disallow her vow, as her father did.

Numbers 30:11 "And her husband heard [it], and held his peace at her, [and] disallowed her not: then all her vows shall stand, and every bond wherewith she bound her soul shall stand."

Heard her make her vow, and bind it with an oath, and was silent at it. Which was consenting to it. And did not contradict her, nor show any displeasure or resentment at her on account of it. The Targum of Jonathan adds, "and died before she was at age." But what follows held good equally of one that was at age for marriage, and actually married to him.

"Then all her vows shall stand, and every bond wherewith she bound her soul shall stand": Be ratified and confirmed. And she be under obligation to make them good.

If he allows her to make the vow and he knows about it, she is responsible to keep the vow, and he is responsible to let her keep the vow.

Numbers 30:12 "But if her husband hath utterly made them void on the day he heard [them; then] whatsoever proceeded out of her lips concerning her vows, or concerning the bond of her soul, shall not stand: her husband hath made them void; and the LORD shall forgive her."

Declaring they were contrary to his mind and will, he disapproved of them, and forbid the carrying them into execution.

"Then whatsoever proceeded out of her lips concerning her vows, or concerning the bond of her soul, shall not stand": Though her husband be dead, or she be divorced from him.

"Her husband hath made them void, and the Lord shall forgive her": She will neither incur his displeasure for not fulfilling her vow, nor have any punishment inflicted on her. The Targum of Jonathan is, "if her husband makes them void, and she knows it not and transgresses, it shall be forgiven her by the Lord."

In this case, he did not approve the vow. He will not let her keep the vow, and she cannot be held responsible. God will forgive her.

Numbers 30:13 "Every vow, and every binding oath to afflict the soul, her husband may establish it, or her husband may make it void."

By fasting, as Aben Ezra observes. As when a vow was made, or a person bound herself by an oath to abstain from such and such food, or to fast on such a day. To keep a fast which was not appointed, to set apart a day for fasting. Besides the grand and general fast on the Day of Atonement. Jarchi from hence gathers, that a man only makes vows of afflicting the soul, or vows of fasting. But this is not said by way of limitation and restriction, but by way of amplification and illustration. Giving a particular instance, by which others may be judged of.

"Her husband may establish it, or her husband may make it void": Just as he pleased", and this power a husband had, to prevent confusion in the family. And trouble in the affairs of it, by vowing abstinence from such and such food. Or from such and such liquor, and the like. And to prevent running into expenses he was not able to answer, by vowing and dedicating. This and the other to holy uses, for sacrifices, and repairs of the temple, and the like.

The husband is the authority over the wife in the flesh. He can disallow her vows, or honor them, as he chooses.

Numbers 30:14 "But if her husband altogether hold his peace at her from day to day; then he establisheth all her vows, or all her bonds, which [are] upon her: he confirmeth them, because he held his peace at her in the day that he heard [them]."

Said not one word to her day after day. Neither on the day he heard her vow, nor the day following.

"Then he establisheth all her vows, or all her bonds, which are upon her": By his silence.

"He confirmeth them, because he held his peace at her, in the day that he heard them": For not to contradict them was to confirm them.

This is saying, if he was aware she made the vow, and did nothing about it at the time, he cannot go back later and not allow her to keep them. He confirmed her vow with his silence.

Numbers 30:15 "But if he shall any ways make them void after that he hath heard [them]; then he shall bear her iniquity."

Some way or other expressing his dislike of them. Not at the time he heard them, but some time afterwards. One day after, as the Targum of Jonathan.

"Then he shall bear her iniquity": Be accountable for the breach of the vow. The sin shall be reckoned to him, and he shall bear the punishment of it. Because he ought to have declared his disapprobation of it sooner. And it may be, his doing it when he did was only in a spirit of contradiction, or through covetousness. And it would have been more advisable to have let the vow stand, and therefore acted a criminal part, and so was answerable for it. The Targum of Jonathan explains it, "her husband or her father shall bear her iniquity": Supposing her not to be of age. Aben Ezra gives the reason of it, because she is in his power.

If he disallows her vow at a later date, he is responsible for the sin. She is not responsible.

Numbers 30:16 "These [are] the statutes, which the LORD commanded Moses, between a man and his wife, between the father and his daughter, [being yet] in her youth in her father's house."

Relating to vows made by the wife, and confirmed or disannulled by the husband. Aben Ezra adds, if she is at age or in puberty, understanding it of a married and not a betrothed wife.

"Between the father and his daughter": If she is not at age, as the same writer observes. For if she is at age he has nothing to do with her vows.

"Being yet in her youth": Not at age, being not twelve years and one day old.

"In her father's house": In his power and jurisdiction. And at his disposal, and so could make her vows void or firm, as he pleased. This power of ratifying or disannulling vows a husband had over his wife, and a father over his daughter. To prevent imprudent and extravagant vows, and the too frequent use of them. The consequences of which might be bad in families.

This is explaining the authority of the father in his own home, and the authority of the husband in his own home. In the New Testament, we read of a husband and wife who broke their vow to God. In the case of Ananias and Sapphira vowing to the Holy Ghost, they were each responsible for their own vow. They were each killed, because they each lied to the Holy Ghost. The difference is that this case was a spiritual promise made to God. The lesson above, is speaking of the authority of her husband, or father, over her flesh in the home.

Numbers Chapter 30 Questions

1. Who did Moses speak to?
2. Why did he speak to them?
3. What is verse 2 speaking of?
4. This promise is made to the _____.
5. A vow is not something you can _____ your mind about.
6. A young girl in her father's house was subject to her _____.
7. If the father holds his peace, when she vows, the vow _____.
8. The father, by not saying anything, showed what?
9. It is her obligation to keep the vow, and his obligation to _____ _____ to keep it.
10. Is she responsible, if the father disallows the vow?
11. Why does the LORD forgive her?
12. What if it is her husband?
13. Is the same thing true for a widow, as a wife?

14. What if her husband heard the vow, and said nothing for several days, and then would not let her keep it, who is responsible?
15. What is this lesson conveying about authority in the home?
16. Who are a husband and wife, in the New Testament, who lied to God?
17. Who was killed for their lies?