



## Numbers - Chapter Thirty

V Numbers 22:1-36:13 - Israel in the Plains of Moab (continues)

V.d Numbers 27:1-30:16 - Laws for the Land (continues/concludes)

### Summary of Chapter Thirty

In a crisis people often make a vow: "If God delivers me from X, I promise to do Y." There are many examples in the Bible, for example: <<Then Jacob made a vow, saying, 'If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat and clothing to wear, so that I come again to my father's house in peace, then the Lord shall be my God, and this stone, which I have set up for a pillar, shall be God's house; and of all that you give me I will surely give one-tenth to you'>> (Genesis 28:20-22), and: <<She made this vow: 'O Lord of hosts, if only you will look on the misery of your servant, and remember me, and not forget your servant, but will give to your servant a male child, then I will set him before you as a nazirite until the day of his death. He shall drink neither wine nor intoxicants, and no razor shall touch his head'>> (1 Samuel 1:11). The danger is that, when the crisis is over, the vow may not be fulfilled. Stern warnings about failing to fulfil a vow are found in Deuteronomy 23:21-23 and Ecclesiastes 5:4-6.

These laws are concerned with defining those few circumstances in which a person may be excused from fulfilling a vow. Basically, a man is always obliged to fulfil his vow, but a woman may be excused if her father or husband, i.e. the head of the family who is assumed to have the authority to nullify such a vow, objects to her vow as soon as he hears about it. However, if the man, as the head of the family, hears of his daughter's or his wife's vow and does not object to it, then it stands and the woman is obliged to fulfil it.

The placement of this law here may seem surprising, but there are several reasons why it should come here. Vows are mentioned in Numbers 29:39, and they are often involved in the offering of a sacrifice. Also, war often prompts vows, and Israel is about to start its military campaign in Canaan. In addition, the conquest of Canaan depends on God keeping his promised word to Israel, and Israel must be equally strict in carrying out her promises to God.

#### V.d.iv. Numbers 30:1-16 - Vows Made by Women

Refer to the chapter summary above.

<sup>1</sup> Then Moses said to the heads of the tribes of the Israelites: This is what the Lord has commanded. <sup>2</sup> When a man makes a vow to the Lord, or swears an oath to bind himself by a pledge, he shall not break his word; he shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth.

#### Numbers 30:1-2

Then Moses said to the heads of the tribes of the Israelites. This instruction was given to the leaders of the tribes of Israel for them to communicate to all the people in each tribe. It is likely that the heads of tribes then disseminated the information via heads of clans. This was a more effective way of communicating than trying to address such a vast nation in any other way.

The general principle here is that whether a man makes a vow to do something positive like offering a sacrifice, or a pledge, i.e. to avoid or abstain from something, he shall not break his word. A vow before God is no small thing. God expressly commanded that Israel should be careful to keep its vows, and to fulfil every oath made. In many circles today, the breaking of an oath is just standard business practice but before God, it is simply sin.

He shall do according to all that proceeds out of his mouth. Because God takes vows so seriously, sometimes it is better not to make a vow at all.

Some people today believe that vows or oaths are not permitted for a Christian. They think this because of what Jesus said in his Sermon on the Mount: <<*But I say to you, Do not swear at all, either by heaven, for it is the throne of God, or by the earth, for it is his footstool, or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make one hair white or black. Let your word be "Yes, Yes" or "No, No"; anything more than this comes from the evil one*>> (Matthew 5:34-37); refer also to James 5:12. However, in context of the rest of Scripture, it can be seen that Jesus was not forbidding oaths, as much as telling his followers that they should be so filled with integrity in their words that an oath is unnecessary. Jesus answered under oath in a court (Matthew 26:63-64), and God himself swears oaths (Luke 1:73, Acts 2:30, and Hebrews 3:18, 6:13 and 6:17).

The wise words of King Solomon state: <<When you make a vow to God, do not delay fulfilling it; for he has no pleasure in fools. Fulfil what you vow. It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not fulfil it>> (Ecclesiastes 5:4-5). Many vows are just plain foolish. "I'll never do that again" is a foolish vow, and it is foolish and unwise to demand such a vow from someone else. Of course, there is a vow everyone can and should make, a vow to praise God: <<My vows to you I must perform, O God; I will render thank-offerings to you>> (Psalm 56:12), and: <<So I will always sing praises to your name, as I pay my vows day after day>> (Psalm 61:8).

<sup>3</sup> When a woman makes a vow to the Lord, or binds herself by a pledge, while within her father's house, in her youth, <sup>4</sup> and her father hears of her vow or her pledge by which she has bound herself, and says nothing to her; then all her vows shall stand, and any pledge by which she has bound herself shall stand. <sup>5</sup> But if her father expresses disapproval to her at the time that he hears of it, no vow of hers, and no pledge by which she has bound herself, shall stand; and the Lord will forgive her, because her father had expressed to her his disapproval.

#### Numbers 30:3-5

When a woman makes a vow to the Lord, while within her father's house, in her youth. Until married, a woman is under her father's authority. If she makes a vow and her father objects, she will be forgiven for not carrying it out. In fact, she is obliged not to carry it out under the law: <<Honour your father and your mother, so that your days may be long in the land that the Lord your God is giving you>> (Exodus 20:12).

<sup>6</sup> If she marries, while obligated by her vows or any thoughtless utterance of her lips by which she has bound herself, <sup>7</sup> and her husband hears of it and says nothing to her at the time that he hears, then her vows shall stand, and her pledges by which she has bound herself shall stand. <sup>8</sup> But if, at the time that her husband hears of it, he expresses disapproval to her, then he shall nullify the vow by which she was obligated, or the thoughtless utterance of her lips, by which she bound herself; and the Lord will forgive her.

#### Numbers 30:6-8

If she marries. If a woman under a vow gets married, her new husband can cancel her vow and, once again, the woman was expected to respect his wishes: <<Wives, in the same way, accept the authority of your husbands, so that,

*even if some of them do not obey the word, they may be won over without a word by their wives' conduct*>> (1 Peter 3:1).

<sup>9</sup> (But every vow of a widow or of a divorced woman, by which she has bound herself, shall be binding upon her.)

#### Numbers 30:9

Every vow of a widow or of a divorced woman, shall be binding upon her. Widows and divorcees are not subject to the authority of a father or a husband, so their vows are binding.

<sup>10</sup> And if she made a vow in her husband's house, or bound herself by a pledge with an oath, <sup>11</sup> and her husband heard it and said nothing to her, and did not express disapproval to her, then all her vows shall stand, and any pledge by which she bound herself shall stand. <sup>12</sup> But if her husband nullifies them at the time that he hears them, then whatever proceeds out of her lips concerning her vows, or concerning her pledge of herself, shall not stand. Her husband has nullified them, and the Lord will forgive her. <sup>13</sup> Any vow or any binding oath to deny herself, her husband may allow to stand, or her husband may nullify. <sup>14</sup> But if her husband says nothing to her from day to day, then he validates all her vows, or all her pledges, by which she is obligated; he has validated them, because he said nothing to her at the time that he heard of them. <sup>15</sup> But if he nullifies them some time after he has heard of them, then he shall bear her guilt.

#### Numbers 30:10-15

And if she made a vow in her husband's house. Vows and pledges made by a woman after her marriage may be waived by a husband as soon as he hears of them, but if he says nothing they are binding. If he later objects to them, he and not the woman is guilty and will suffer the penalty for breaking them.

<sup>16</sup> These are the statutes that the Lord commanded Moses concerning a husband and his wife, and a father and his daughter while she is still young and in her father's house.

#### Numbers 30:16

These are the statutes that the Lord commanded is a summary statement for the whole chapter concerning vows and pledges made by both men and women.