

**Message #32****Numbers 30:1-16**

I have a friend whose father was in the military and fought in war. He told my friend, you will never find an atheist in a foxhole. Everyone in the foxhole believes in God and wants God to get them out of there alive.

We are all familiar with foxhole prayers. Foxhole prayers are prayers that people pray to get them out of a jam. Some crisis hits and they pray and ask God to help them and sometimes they promise if God will do it, they will be faithful to Him. People have a tendency to promise God things in times of crisis.

Now Israel was on the verge of going into the Promised Land. Since the military had been counted, she knew that it would not be long until she would be in war. In any war there are casualties. Some are injured and some die.

Apparently one of the things that some of the people did was to go to the Sanctuary area and make some foxhole type vow or oath to God. Apparently soldiers and their wives and daughters would just start promising a bunch of things if God would give them victory. Well God said, you better think very seriously about what you are vowing to Me. He came up with a very simple principle for His people when it came to these kinds of matters: **“If you vow something, pay up.”** Follow through on what you said you were going to do.

What God says to His people here is this:

**IF GOD’S PEOPLE WANT GOD’S BLESSINGS ON THEIR LIVES, THEY MUST BE PEOPLE OF THEIR WORD.**

Moses was not going to be around much longer and God is zeroing in on subjects and topics that he knows are critical to maintaining the blessings of God. This was a new generation on the verge of going into the Promised Land and if they were going to continue to receive the blessings of God, they must operate in a way that will enable God to bless them.

Religious people of all religions make their vows or pledges. False religion is known for this kind of thing. People make promises and pledges. God says to His people, if you promise something to Me, you had better take it seriously because I do.

What we actually have here is a development of God’s Word as it relates to vows.

We learn from **verse 1** four things:

- 1) Moses is the one speaking this.
- 2) Israel is the one to whom Moses is speaking.
- 3) What Moses is speaking to Israel is the commanded Word of God.
- 4) Moses does not say what the subject of the vow actually is.

The specific information Moses is addressing has to do with vows. It was not uncommon for people to go to the temple or sanctuary and make a vow before God (Ps. 61:8; 116:14). This was especially true during times of war or pending crisis.

Now we may observe from **verse 2** that two different words are used.

The Hebrew word “vow” (וַדַּעַר) is a word that refers to a voluntary promise to do something, give something or sacrifice something (William Gesenius, *Hebrew Lexicon*, p. 535) (Deut. 23:21; Ps. 76:11). According to the NET Bible, which deals with technical grammatical issues, a vow was “a promise to donate something of oneself or one’s substance to the LORD” (*THE NET BIBLE*, p. 354).

The Hebrew word “oath” (שְׁהֵבֹוּאָה) is a word that refers to a sworn covenantal oath that one makes to God (*Ibid.*, p. 800). Typically one would make a vow and seal it with an oath that included a sacrifice (*Ibid.*, p. 354).

The image is to go to worship, stand in the presence of God and vow something and swear to enter into a covenant with God on some matter specifically in renouncing something or some self-denial. For example, a person may promise God that he would refrain from physical intimacy until the victory was secured.

Dr. Warren Wiersbe said he felt that a vow was a promise to do something or give something or sacrifice something and an oath was a promise not to do something (*Be Counted*, pp. 165-166). His conclusion is certainly not out of the question.

Charles Ellicott, the English theologian and scholar of the 1800’s said that a vow was some promise of performance, whereas an oath was a promise of abstinence (*Numbers*, p. 560).

Although we may not be able to completely ascertain the difference, obviously both are serious and even dangerous.

Now obviously to stand in the presence of God at His sanctuary and swear an oath that promised to do something, give something or sacrifice something or that promised not to do something, was very serious in the mind of God.

God’s people make a fatal mistake if they assume that God does not listen to what they say, especially when they show up for worship. In fact, God warns that if you vow to do something and worship and then do not follow through with it, He is angered and may actually destroy the work (Ecclesiastes 5:1-6).

There seems to be two kinds of vows that were possible;

- 1) A person made some voluntary dedicatory vow upon self that promised to impose some self-discipline for the purpose of self-dedication for development of character and achieving some goal;
- 2) A promise one would make to God if God would grant His divine favor or blessing.

It is not uncommon for people to promise God something if He will grant some victory or benefit. Sometimes it was a promise not to do something and sometimes it was a promise to do something.

Regardless of what it was, God takes vows seriously. He takes them very seriously and wise are people who think the same way.

Now in this New Testament Grace Age we are warned not to make vows or oaths. Jesus warned against it (Matthew 5:34-37) as did James (James 5:12). We are to be people of our word, all the time. Our yes is yes and our no is no.

There were four vow areas that are mentioned here that God wants addressed:

**VOW AREA #1 – Vows made by men. 30:2**

God was well aware of the fact that men do at times make vows or promises, especially soldiers on the verge of war. It is interesting in this context that a man could release almost anyone from a vow except himself. God does not say here it is wrong to make a vow or oath, but He certainly says it is dangerous.

The first area of address concerns a man. If a man made a vow to the Lord in which he bound himself to the Lord, he must follow through on what he has promised.

This has generally been interpreted that the man made some promise to abstain from something that was normally permissible. In other words, the man promised to God that he was going to deprive himself of something. Moses said when you do that, you better take your obligation seriously because God certainly does take it seriously.

**VOW AREA #2 – Vows made by a single woman. 30:3-5**

The next cases all involve women. If we put this in the immediate historical context, when men are about to go to war, a daughter or wife could go to the Sanctuary and make a vow or oath before God that she would do something, give something or sacrifice something if God would grant the favor.

In Biblical times the father had power over all who lived under his roof. This even had to do with life and death issues (i.e. Jephthah - Judges 11:30-39).

The daughter who was unmarried was under the care of her father. He was responsible for her. It was his job to protect his daughter and provide for his daughter until she was married. **A daughter needed to realize that in the mind of God, it is more important to obey her father than some self-imposed vow she puts on herself.**

One of the things he had the responsibility to do was to oversee and overrule her when she made some promise or agreement that he felt she was not able to meet.

So if a daughter made some promise to God not to do something or to do something and the father heard it, he had the right and responsibility to either permit it or overrule it.

Sometimes a young lady could react hastily and emotionally and in that case the father could overrule the daughter (Eccl. 5:2).

**VOW AREA #3 – Vows made by married women. 30:6-8**

Now the situation described here is that some woman had made some vow prior to her getting married. She made some rash promise to God before she got married. Now after she is married and her husband learns of the vow, he is responsible to determine whether or not the vow or the obligation stands.

The husband is the one with the final say on the point, for he is to be the head of the house. I realize that this structure of a husband being over the wife is not politically correct today, but it is Biblically correct in both the O.T. and the N.T. (I Corinthians 14:34-35; Ephesians 5:22-23; Colossians 3:18; Titus 2:4-5).

In God's structure of things, the husband is responsible to oversee what the wife is doing and if she makes some vow or promise to the Lord that he deemed as some rash promise, he had the responsibility to either let the vow go or overrule it.

The husband had the right and responsibility to “countermand any undertakings that he considered improper on the part of his wife” (R. K. Harrison, *Numbers*, p. 378).

**VOW AREA #4 – Vows made by a widow or divorced woman. 30:9-15**

What is described here are two types of women who had been previously married. If a widow woman or divorced woman had made some vow while living in her previous husband's house, she was obligated to follow through with it.

The vows remained in force if no objection had been given by the husband at the time of the vow.

However, if the husband had objected to the vow, God would not hold the woman accountable to fulfill it.

**Verse 16** says these are the rules regarding vows.

Now what is this all about? It is about keeping your word when you promise God something. If you vow something, pay up.

God does not just overlook and forget about promises.

James said the tongue is a dangerous thing and there is nothing more dangerous than making rash promises to God.