

# Numbers 30

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[ 0 : 00 ] And so we're in that closing section of the book of Numbers and the new generation is being prepared to enter the land.! Chapter 26 introduces the new generation with a census, the second census, chapter 27 introduces us to the kind of model heirs, the future heirs of the new generation, the leaders, and Joshua, the model leaders being established.

And last week we moved into kind of the settlement instructions. Do you remember? My bad maths. I think the total was right. I think seven sermons are actually 49.

So there's food offerings. Lambs, lambs, lambs, lambs. I remember them being slaughtered last week. And we saw that there's certain schedules of offerings at regular points.

And the priests providing sacrifices for the nation. Regular food offerings also. And that reminded the people, and 20 and 20 I reminded people that God is dwelling in their midst.

And they need God to be their God and that he is the one who prospers them in their living in the land. And so in verse 30, in chapter 30, we now come to this vow offerings. These are the ones that make, the people who make promises.

[ 1 : 32 ] And they make these promises of their own accord. Which also reminds us, on an individual level, that God is dwelling in our midst. He is the one who prospers us. And so I don't think the ESV is very helpful. I think they've mistranslated that word I would say to you. I don't think it's there in the original. They're thoughtless, at first.

But I also don't think the Men and Vows title and Women and Vows title is actually very helpful. And you probably think, oh, typical. The men get two verses and then the poor women get all these other verses.

I don't think that's very helpful. And hopefully you'll see that as we go through. So what's the lessons in the chapter? Well, the lesson in the chapter is, we are the Lords. And that all of our lives are to be lived before him and in dependence on him.

In thankfulness for his blessing. God cares for us as people. And he cares for us as house souls. And these are great and important comforts.

God is preparing a new generation to be settled in the land. So let's look at the text before us. It's a series of laws about vows and pledges.

[ 2 : 45 ] So up front is the basic law. That's what the title should be of verses 1 and 2. He states the basic law in verses 1 and 2. That's the main exhortation of the chapter. And then the rest of the chapter kind of stretches our thinking in a series of dilemmas.

So the first one in verses 3 to 5. There's a young woman there who's doing business in her father's estate. And then in 10 to 15 you've got a woman doing business in her husband's estate.

But in the middle, in verses 6 to 9, in the meat of the sandwich, you've got a series of women that as they move from one estate to the other. So there's a young woman who's getting married and she moves from her father's responsibility to her husband's responsibility.

As well as the two women whose marriages have tragically ended. And they're moving from being under their husband who's no longer their husband. And so we'll look through the four umpt sections and reflect on the lessons through it.

So the basic law first of all in verses 1 and 2. The basic law is that an individual who makes a vow to the Lord. Or who makes a pledge bound by an oath who swears on the name of the Lord.

[ 3 : 58 ] Any individual who makes any of those promises in God's name must never fail to follow through on them. Let me try and explain to you what's the difference between a vow and a pledge in the name of the Lord.

I know I think you'll be able to understand what's behind this chapter. First of all, the word vow in the Old Testament refers to something different to how we use the word today.

Bible words have Bible meanings. Our sense of vows nowadays is a little bit different than what the Old Testament talks about. Nowadays, and we think of marriage vows, or monastic vows, or something like that.

But the biblical term is a little bit different than the Old Testament. A vow is a prayer to God for his blessing on some undertaking. It's a vow which is a prayer to God for his blessing with a promise of worship and a gift or an offering once the undertaking is done.

So again, that's what a vow is. A vow is a prayer to God for his blessing. And when God fulfills that prayer, there is a promise of worship and a gift or an offering once the undertaking is done.

[ 5 : 15 ] So think of Jephthah in chapter 11. Jephthah was heading off to war and he makes a vow to the Lord that should the Lord grant him victory in battle on that day, Jephthah will worship the Lord with a sacrifice from his house.

And so without going sidetracked with the twists and the turns of Jephthah's story, his vow is an illustration. Jephthah was praying for God's blessing on his undertaking. And in that case, the battle.

And his vow, he was acknowledging, Jephthah was seeing, he had no chance on his own. He was acknowledging that he was entirely dependent on God. He needed God's strength to succeed. And so such a vow is not a bribe. It's not as if God is tempted by anything we might offer him. But a vow is something of value in thanks.

It's a way to confess tangibly and it's drawing our soul into the confession that I cannot succeed without God. And if the Lord is pleased to grant me this vow, if the Lord is pleased to grant me what I'm praying for, which is his choice to do or not, I will offer him such and such an offering or a sacrifice.

[ 6 : 32 ] And it will be meaningful to me as a declaration of thanks. And I will worship him as the one who is deserving praise.

Now that was a vow. There are many other similar examples of vows in the Bible. In the Psalms, you'll sing often of our promise to pay my vows to the Lord.

That is a commitment to continually praise God and to worship him as the one who prospers us. A vow is the promise of a tangible offering made to the Lord before we undertake...

Before God... It's quite different to explain. It is the saying to God, if you do this Lord, I will worship you in this way.

I will give of what I have. Such and such. A pledge is quite similar. But it's made to another person. To another home or game.

[ 7 : 36 ] A pledge is what we would call like a contract. It's a commitment to another person. It's regarding and undertaking. And there's going to be two parties and so it demands our cooperation. And the pledge, this contract, is made before the Lord.

So I make a pledge that once this endeavour is completed, I will give you such and such an amount. And so we enter into contracts that we, with all sorts of legal ramifications, of the contract gets broken.

But all of the commitments that you make and I make are ultimately overseen by the Lord. And in the Old Testament, Israel's pledges would be made in the name of the Lord. That is with God as the judge.

That God is the one who would oversee it. He would oversee its execution and its follow through. And so even in Israel, when state government and authorities got involved in enforcing pledges, they were acting on behalf of the Lord in whose name they'd be made.

So that is a pledge. It is an oath, sealed promise to another person. Two different kinds of promises, sealed before God. At the beginning of some personal undertaking.

[ 8 : 43 ] It might be a business deal. It might be a pledge or a vow in the face of a sin that I'm seeking God's help to defeat. It might be a family thing.

An effort to reach a child who's gone away. I'm praying to the Lord for his help. Or perhaps it's dealing with an illness. Whatever challenge an individual is facing.

It's a great hurdle. And that person knows that they need God's sovereign aid. Or a vow to the Lord. Or a pledge to a colleague might be invoked in God's name.

So the basic law in chapter 30 is God's solemn declaration. That as our divine judge, God is the one who blesses us.

And God is the one who prospers us as we seek his help in our endeavours. But God will hold you to account for every vow.

[ 9 : 41 ] And every pledge made in his name. And so following that basic law, there follows a series of case studies. And the key idea behind these three scenarios is that it is one thing when the property owner makes a vow to God or a pledge to his labour and pays on that promise.

It's one thing when the head of a household, whoever that is, they make the vow and they pay and they make the vow and they pay. But what happens when somebody is part of a family? What happens when somebody is part of a family business?

They make a pledge. A pledge which involves the commitment of household property or money or income. And the head of the family business, the head of the household, does not endorse that commitment.

And yet the pledge was made in the name of the Lord. And so the principle here in the text, I don't think, is so much a question of gender. I think gender provides the stereotype within which we ought to think about it.

But it's really using the paradigm of a house owner. And one of the women in the house, in order to tease out this principle of a swollen commitment to God's name, which commits the family business, commits the property.

[ 11 : 03 ] And the head of the business is in one example, and those who are under him. So, he uses women as an example. But I think it would also apply to sons.

I think it would also apply to children and daughters. So, the key idea behind these three scenarios is this. The head of the household has the opportunity to cancel a vow or a pledge made by a household member.

Even though that pledge was made and sworn in an oath before God. And so what it is, is this. You might not be able to see it yet. But it is a word of assurance and comfort and protection for the junior member of the household.

When they don't follow through on that vow. But the Lord forgives that promise. Okay, the first scenario, verse 3 to 5. Verse 3 to 5 describes a young woman who's at her home.

She's under the authority of her father. And here we meet a young woman who's facing a kind of major undertaking or need. And in her prayers, she prays that when she completes this venture, she's going to bring a lamb to the altar to worship the Lord.

[ 12 : 15 ] Or something like that. Or perhaps she makes a promise, a pledge to a neighbour.

Perhaps she's responsible for the family goats. And in attending the family goats, she does a deal with another goat herder.

That she would be lent a goat for breeding. And there would be the pledge of the offspring. When the offspring come, I'll give you some. Now the first thing to note here, it is assumed, and I want you to really notice this, that it's not just the son, but the young women are involved in the various business ventures.

I think that's quite interesting. They're there. They're working in the business, the family business. And they're part of the family work. And they're able, and they are allowed, these women, to make the kind of pledges and vows that she makes before God.

It's not forbidden. And she pledges with others. And typically, the assumption is, the father is absolutely fine with it. He is standing behind the project, developing the family business.

The fact that our tax deals with the cancellation, doesn't mean that that is the norm, that women weren't allowed to trade at all, and weren't allowed to work. It's nonsense.

[ 13 : 33 ] But where the dilemma is, where there is an issue, typically the father, the father would be okay with what that daughter or son is doing. However, it's ultimately the head of the household, the head of the business property, that is being committed.

And so he learns what's commitment that his daughter has made, and he is able to cancel it. And the comfort of this tax is that the girl who has made this oath before God, God will not hold guilty for not keeping that oath when her father steps in and blocks it.

It is a law that frees this girl from any worry about how God is towards her, because she made a vow to God, but her father says, no, you will not keep that vow.

And so how does God feel about her? Well, stops the breeding plan that she's arranged with her neighbour's goat. And Numbers 30 says, you bear no guilt before God, young girl.

That's the first scenario. The second scenario is in verses 6 to 9, it's got two parts to it, and both parts deal with a woman kind of just about to get married. And on the one hand, there's a young woman, she's about to get, she's about to enter into marriage, and on the other hand, is a woman who is no longer under the headship of a husband, either from death or divorce.

[14:48] I hear the assumption would be divorce. But the woman has retained her property. And so she can do business ventures, and she can make vows.

On the one hand, the woman just entering into marriage, she might not have completed all the business that she was doing before she got married. She's got incomplete family business. And maybe, let's say first, she's been praying for an aunt. And her aunt, her life hangs in the balance. Her aunt has had some injury.

She's in intensive care, let's say. And perhaps, this young girl has made a vow to God that should God do what none of the other doctors seem to be able to do, and should God raise her back to health, this girl promises to worship God at his temple, with an offering.

And when she first made that vow, her father affirmed it. But then suppose the aunt doesn't actually get better. And she's in intensive care for months and years.

[15:55] And the fulfillment of that vow now draws on the flocks of a new household, because the girl's got married. And the law says that even though her vow had been endorsed by her dad while she was in his house, her new husband, her husband, is free to cancel that vow upon coming into his house.

It may not be mean-spirited. It doesn't have to be. It's not as though the husband somehow opposes this lady's love for aunt. Maybe the young guy isn't going to start it, and he doesn't have any sheep or any cash.

The point is this. The girl is making a vow in one house, and then she's transferring to a new house. And in that new situation, the husband might cancel the commitment.

And God assures this young woman, he says, don't worry, young girl. I will forgive that vow. That woman does need to fear God's discipline when she's barred from bringing an offering in that instance.

Let me try and explain why I think verses 6 and 8 translate it wrongly in the ESV. So do you see that there's her pledge to another person, and it's called a thoughtless utterance.

[17:13] There is a reason for that translation, but I don't think it's right. The old King James rightly said it simply translates the word as something uttered. And I don't think the girl in verse 6 or 8 has done anything rash.

It's just another expression for her pledge. The word for utterance is unusual. It's used on a couple of occasions in Psalm 106. In that psalm, which describes how the people really got on Moses' nerves and at the water of Meribah as a result of the people's frustration, Moses uttered foolishly with his lips.

And so there, in Psalm 106, it's clearly foolish, rash speech that Moses speaks. And so, the people who translated the Bible in the last kind of major translation say, well, it's obviously got to be the same word.

But I don't think in verse 6 and 8 it is thoughtless. It's just another case of this woman making a pledge to another. And it may be very wise, but her circumstances change.

Why not? I think it's foolish. I don't think it's foolish because their father endorsed it. It's not a thoughtless utterance, but it's the same as we see in the rest of the chapter. This scenario is in verse 9, the woman's a property owner.

[18:30] It's a bit like Naomi and Ruth, in the book of Ruth, those widows who became property owners. And they became property owners on the death of their husbands. And so a woman, and when she got married in these days, she entered into marriage with a dowry.

And when she was the innocent party in a divorce, she would leave that dowry as a barman. Perhaps more. Death and divorce.

So they're both examples of women who have property, but they don't have a father, and they don't have a husband over them. And in their case, they make their vows, when they make their vows, or their pledges, and they do so on their own authority.

As property owners. And so those women's vows stand without review. And so it's there, I think, it's here, that we find that the principle is not strictly about gender.

It's about property ownership. Finally, the third case, I'm sure you can hardly wait, but it's time to 15. The final scenario is a woman who was married at the time of her vow or pledge.

[ 19 : 36 ] And it won't be a surprise to you, that the man, as the head of the household, can cancel the woman's pledge on the hearing of it. Even though she's sworn in the name of Yahweh, she's sworn with God as her witness, with God as her judge, the Lord assures her that he honors her husband's kind of making that agreement null and void.

And he will not hold her guilty. When he refuses that lamb to be used, or when he refuses the husband for that property to be sold or the finance to be given, the Lord will not hold her guilty. The final scenario closes with a couple of new features in verse 13. The same principle applies when it comes to oaths and pledges when it comes to fasting. That's what it means in verse 13 about afflicting yourself.

That's a technical term. It refers to fasting. So if this woman refers, she commits herself and says, I'm going to fast this Friday, the husband can nullify that out.

Why? Well, because it would have an impact on the whole household. Second of Genesis in verse 14 tells us what happens if the head of the household confirms the vow at first, but then the husband changes his mind and he bars it from fulfilling the commitment.

[ 20 : 57 ] Now God makes it clear this funny chapter that takes an awful lot of work to kind of see through it. God makes it clear that it is for the comfort of the one who is under authority.

It's saying that the head of the household, the man, will be the one, the property owner, will be the one who God will hold accountable for the failure to fulfill that vow. He is the one who first affirmed it but then he later changed his mind and barred it.

And the woman remains free of guilt before God for her inability to follow through and the man will bear her iniquity because he was the one that blocked it.

This whole chapter is written largely for the comfort and the protection of those who are under authority. that they will make their commitments and they will pursue their responsibilities and they will pray and they will seek God's blessing with vows and pledges to come and worship him.

And they have to do that without fear of God's anger upon them if the one responsible for their household puts a stop to that commitment. It's written for the comfort and protection of those under authority.

[ 22 : 21 ] Chapter 30 is actually an encouragement it's an encouragement to the people to seek economic development it's an encouragement to prayer it's an encouragement to care it's an encouragement to advance it's an encouragement to risk in God's name.

So what does this ancient law given to the people of Israel have anything to do with us? Well very very simply with numbers 28 and 29 number 30 reminds us that God cares for his people and God dwells in the midst of his people and it is God who you serve in all your dealings and so your God is not just the God of your quiet time he is the God of your household he is the God of your business he is the God of your schooling he is the God of all your dealings and all your undertakings and God wants you and God commands you to seek his blessing in your labours and to recognise his oversight in the promises that you make in the contracts that you sign in the commitments you say and the things that you undertake and God expects you to praise and thank him for his care as God's people you are to keep your word your contracts your commitments and your promises and you are to keep them not in the fear of man but in the fear of the

Lord but if in the fear of the Lord you make your promise and then a rightful authority blocks it this chapter gives you great peace doesn't it in your forgiveness peace that gives you the assurance to go ahead and to continue to seek his blessing and to make your commitments in his name and we no longer make our vows and pay our vows with animal sacrifices and the like but we still need the blessing of God on our households and on our labours I think it's very interesting isn't it that there's a chapter in the Westminster Confession of Faith on vows and yet we never talk about it and so let us invoke his name invoke his name with reverence and honour in our families and in our church and in our work let's pray