

# NUMBERS

## Chapter 30

### *Men and Vows*

**Moses spoke to the heads of the tribes of the people of Israel, saying, “This is what the LORD has commanded. 2 If a man vows 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.**

**30:1–16** The principal OT passage on vows (see Dt 23:21–23). A vow is not to be made rashly (cf. Ecc 5:1–7), and a vow to the Lord must be kept. (CSB)

**30:2** *vows a vow*. Chs 28–29 dealt with prescribed offerings but not the previous regulations governing “vow offerings and ... freewill offerings” (29:39; Lv 27; Nu 6). Such vows were made publicly before God and His servants at the tabernacle (cf Ps 116:18–19). (TLSB)

*he shall not break his word*. The general rule was to remain in force: all vows were to be kept (cf v 9). But special provisions are now added for vows by women if they affected relations between “a man and his wife” and between “a father and his daughter” (v 16). “You must also know how to use God’s name rightly. For when He says, ‘You shall not take the name of the Lord, your God, in vain,’ He wants us to understand at the same time that His name is to be used properly. For His name has been revealed and given to us so that it may be of constant use and profit. So it is natural to conclude that since this commandment forbids using the holy name for falsehood or wickedness, we are, on the other hand, commanded to use His name for truth and for all good, like when someone takes an oath truthfully when it is needed and it is demanded” (LC I 63–64). (TLSB)

**30:1–2** Vows made to God—made in His name—are to be carried out faithfully. When these vows are not fulfilled, they reflect poorly on God’s good name and shame His people. Our word must be our bond, including our word of repentance when we do not live up to our words. God’s Word does not fail us. All His promises are yes to us in Christ Jesus (2Co 1:20). • “Speak, O Lord, Your servant listens, Let Your Word to me come near; Newborn life and spirit give me, Let each promise still my fear. Death’s dread pow’r, its inward strife, Wars against Your Word of life; Fill me, Lord, with love’s strong fervor That I cling to You forever!” Amen. (LSB 589:1)

### *Women and Vows*

**3 “If a woman vows a vow to the LORD and binds herself by a pledge, while within her father’s house in her youth, 4 and her father hears of her vow and of her pledge by which she has bound herself and says nothing to her, then all her vows shall stand, and every pledge by which she has bound herself shall stand. 5 But if her father opposes her on the day that he hears of it, no vow of hers, no pledge by which she has bound herself shall stand. And the LORD will forgive her, because her father opposed her. 6 “If she marries a husband, while under her vows or any thoughtless utterance of her lips by which she has bound herself, 7 and her husband hears of it and says nothing to her on the day that he hears, then her vows shall stand, and her pledges by which she has bound herself shall stand. 8 But if, on the day that her husband comes to hear of it, he opposes her, then he makes void her vow that was on her, and the thoughtless utterance of her lips by which she bound herself. And the LORD will forgive her. 9 (But any vow of a widow or of a divorced woman, anything by which she has bound herself, shall stand against her.) 10 And if she vowed in her husband’s house or bound herself by a pledge with an oath, 11 and her husband heard of it and said nothing to her and did not oppose her, then all her vows shall stand, and every pledge by which she**

**bound herself shall stand. 12 But if her husband makes them null and void on the day 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 made them void, and the LORD will forgive her. 13 Any vow and any binding oath to afflict herself,[a] her husband may establish, or her husband may make void. 14 But if her husband says nothing to her from day to day, then he establishes all her vows or all her pledges that are upon her. He has established them, because he said nothing to her on the day that he heard of them. 15 But if he makes them null and void after he has heard of them, then he shall bear her iniquity.” 16 These are the statutes that the LORD commanded Moses about a man and his wife and about a father and his daughter while she is in her youth within her father's house.**

**30:3–16** Highlights relationships between fathers/daughters daughters and husbands/wives. An Israelite woman was typically in a dependent relationship with a male family member. This reality has offended some advocates of women’s rights, who view such a situation as “patriarchal” or unfair. Such assessments fail to appreciate the realities of life in a tribal culture, where raids on villages were common. Women who did not have a protector were extremely vulnerable (Gn 34:1–2; Dt 21:10–14; 22:23–29; 2Sm 13:14; 2Ki 5:2). Women in Israel sought a dependent relationship; interdependency was regarded as a matter of survival (see note, Is 4:1). The modern battle between the sexes was completely unknown to ancient Israelites and is foreign to God’s design for families. (TLSB)

**30:3–5** The vow of an unmarried woman still under her father’s protection might be nullified by her father. This and the following law were probably designed for the protection of the woman, who in ancient Near Eastern society was subject to strong societal pressures, some of which would leave her without defense. (CSB)

**30:3** *binds herself*. The purpose of the additional regulations was to safeguard marital harmony (e.g., 1Sm 1:11, 22–23). The vow to abstain from sexual relations was to be made by women only with the consent of their husbands or the men they were about to marry (cf 1Co 7:1–7) women only with the consent of their husbands or the men they were about to marry (cf 1Co 7:1–7). (TLSB)

**30:4** *father ... says nothing*. He makes no protest; silence establishes his responsibility. (TLSB)

**30:5** *the LORD will forgive her*. He will not hold her responsible for the vow. (TLSB)

**30:6–15** In certain instances, the head of the household may “make void” (v 13) the pledge, provided that he makes his objections known “on the day that he hears” (v 12) of it. (TLSB)

**30:6–8** The vow of a married woman might be nullified by her husband. (CSB)

**30:6** *thoughtless utterance*. A hasty vow. (TLSB)

**30:9** *widow or divorced woman*. She is her own agent in the taking of vows. (CSB)

Cf Dt 24:1–4. A widow or a divorced woman who was not bound by family ties could make vows of any kind. (TLSB)

**30:10–15** Further examples of the complications that come in the taking of vows within the husband-wife relationship. Such complications may have come up much as in the case of Zelophehad’s daughters (27:1–11). One case after another presented itself, resulting in this final codification. Presumably, in the centuries leading up to the NT, the legal decisions on vows became even more complex. The words of Jesus that one is to avoid complications connected with oaths (Mt 5:33–37) are liberating. (CSB)

**30:3–16** Dependents need the approval of their father or husband to make a binding vow. Our decisions are often not simply our own; they certainly affect other people—especially in a family. As you pray about the path of life ahead, consider how your choices will affect others. Discuss matters with them, as appropriate. Pray for the Lord’s guidance, and seek understanding in His Word. His Word to you is good, sealed in the promise of Christ Jesus, the head of His Bride, the Church. • “Unless You build it, Father, The house is built in vain; Unless You, Savior, bless it, The joy will turn to pain. But nothing breaks the union Of hearts in You made one; The love Your Spirit hallows Is endless love begun.” Amen. (*LSB* 858:4) (TLSB)