

Numbers 30:2

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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.¹ This establishes the solemn binding nature of vows made to God. The Hebrew 'neder' (נָדֵר, vow) means a voluntary promise beyond required obedience, while 'shebuah' (שְׁבֹועָה, oath) involves invoking God's name as witness. The phrase 'bind his soul' shows that vows obligate one's entire person, not just external actions. Breaking vows profanes God's name and demonstrates untrustworthiness. The command 'shall not break his word' (literally 'shall not profane his word') emphasizes the sacredness of verbal commitments. This verse establishes the principle that our words matter deeply to God. Jesus' teaching about vows (Matthew 5:33-37) doesn't contradict this but warns against casual oath-making. Reformed theology emphasizes covenant-keeping God as the model for human faithfulness.

Historical Context

This chapter addresses vows in context of Israel's covenant community, with special provisions for women under male authority (fathers for unmarried daughters, husbands for wives). Ancient Near Eastern law codes (Hammurabi, Middle Assyrian Laws) addressed vows and oaths, showing their legal importance. In Israel, vows could include dedicating property to God (Leviticus 27), Nazirite consecration (Numbers 6), or promising specific actions. The Jephthah incident

(Judges 11) shows the serious consequences of rash vows. Ecclesiastes 5:4-5 warns against making vows carelessly. Jesus encountered vow-keeping issues with Pharisees who used Corban vows to avoid family obligations (Mark 7:10-13). Archaeological evidence includes votive inscriptions from ancient Israel showing the practice of dedicating items to God. The Jerusalem Talmud extensively discusses vow regulations.

Related Passages

Romans 10:9 — Confession and belief for salvation

John 3:16 — God's love and salvation

Study Questions

1. What does the binding nature of vows teach about the weight and power of our words before God?
2. How can we practice integrity in our commitments while heeding Jesus' warning against casual oath-making?

Interlinear Text

אִישׁ	רִאֵשׁ	רַיִשׁ	נַדְרֵךְ	לִיהְיוֹת	בְּעֵזֶל	שְׁבֻעָה
If a man	H3588	vow	H5088	unto the LORD	H176	or swear
H376		H5087		H3068		H7621
לֹאֵסֶר	אָסֶר	עַל	לֹא	נֶפֶשׁ	לֹא	כָּכֶל
to bind	with a bond	H5921	his soul	H3808	he shall not break	his word
H631			H5315		H2490	H3605
בְּיַצְרֵא	מִפְתַּח	יְשַׁבֵּחַ				
according to all that proceedeth	out of his mouth	he shall do				
H3318		H6213				

Additional Cross-References

Psalms 50:14 (Parallel theme): Offer unto God thanksgiving; and pay thy vows unto the most High:

Psalms 116:14 (References Lord): I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people.

Job 22:27 (Parallel theme): Thou shalt make thy prayer unto him, and he shall hear thee, and thou shalt pay thy vows.

Acts 23:12 (Parallel theme): And when it was day, certain of the Jews banded together, and bound themselves under a curse, saying that they would neither eat nor drink till they had killed Paul.

Acts 23:21 (Parallel theme): But do not thou yield unto them: for there lie in wait for him of them more than forty men, which have bound themselves with an oath, that they will neither eat nor drink till they have killed him: and now are they ready, looking for a promise from thee.

Psalms 22:25 (Parallel theme): My praise shall be of thee in the great congregation: I will pay my vows before them that fear him.

Psalms 116:18 (References Lord): I will pay my vows unto the LORD now in the presence of all his people,

Psalms 55:20 (Parallel theme): He hath put forth his hands against such as be at peace with him: he hath broken his covenant.

Proverbs 20:25 (Parallel theme): It is a snare to the man who devoureth that which is holy, and after vows to make enquiry.

Nahum 1:15 (Parallel theme): Behold upon the mountains the feet of him that bringeth good tidings, that publisheth peace! O Judah, keep thy solemn feasts, perform thy vows: for the wicked shall no more pass through thee; he is utterly cut off.
