



Deborah's Messianic Ministries
Teaching - Training - Worship Center
Proclaiming The Way of Messiah

Matot-Masei – Tribes-Journeys
Numbers 30:2-36:13

VOWS and OATHS
Let your YES be YES and your NO be NO
Rabbin Deborah Brandt

Outline of This Week's Parashah Matot (Torah Portion):

30:2[1] Vows and Oaths to YHVH; Vows of Minors and a Married Woman

31:3 The Battle Against Midian—Vengeance for the Balaam Affair

31:13 Moses Rebukes the Military Leaders for Sparing the Female Midianites

31:21 The Laws of Koshering War Spoils and Utensils

31:25 The Division of War Spoils

32:1 Reuben and Gad's Request to Be Granted an Inheritance on the East Bank of the Jordan

32:6 Moses' Objection to the Request for Fear the Eastern Tribes Will Defect From the Western Tribes

32:16 Clarification of the Request: The Eastern Tribes Vow to Send Soldiers to Aid the Rest of the Tribes in Taking the Promised Land West of the Jordan River

32:20 In Light of These New Conditions Moses Concedes

Outline of This Week's Parashah Masei (Torah Portion):

33:1 Summary of Israel's Wilderness Journey

34:1 The Boundaries of the Land of Israel (Eretz Yisrael)

34:16 The Leaders of the Tribes Who Will Lead the Israelites into Their Promised Land Possession

35:1 Cities For the Levites (in Place of a Designated Territory)

35:9 Cities of Refuge for One Who Kills Another Unintentionally

36:1 Laws Concerning Tribal Inter-marriage to Preserve the Integrity of the 12 Tribes

A Study on Vows/Oaths

30:1–16 *The Obligations of Vows.* 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 (e.g., Gen. 28:20–22; 1 Sam. 1:11). The danger is that, when the crisis is over, the vow may not be fulfilled. Stern warnings about failing to fulfill a vow are found in Deut. 23:21–23 and Eccles. 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 fulfill his vow (Num. 30:2), but a woman may be excused if her father or husband (the leader 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 (vv. 5, 8, 12, 14). But if the man, as the head of the family, hears of his daughter’s vow or his wife’s vow and does not object to it, then it stands and the woman is obliged to fulfill it (vv. 4, 7, 11, 13). The placement of this law here may seem surprising, but there are several reasons why it should come here. Vows are mentioned in 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.¹

(Ecc 5:2 AMP) **Do not be hasty with your mouth** [*speaking careless words or vows*] or impulsive in thought to bring up a matter before God. For God is in heaven and you are on earth; therefore let your words be few.

(Ecc 5:3 AMP) For the dream comes through much effort, and **the voice of the fool through many words.**

(Ecc 5:4 AMP) **When you make a vow or a pledge to God, do not put off paying it; for God takes no pleasure in fools** [*who thoughtlessly mock Him*]. **Pay what you vow.** [Psa 50:14; Psa 66:13-14; Psa 76:11]

(Ecc 5:5 AMP) **It is better that you should not vow than that you should vow and not pay.** [Pro 20:25; Act 5:4]

(Ecc 5:6 AMP) **Do not allow your speech to cause you to sin,** and do not say before the messenger (priest) of God that it was a mistake. Why should God be angry because of your voice (words) and destroy the work of your hands? [Mal 2:7]

(Ecc 5:7 AMP) For in a multitude of dreams and **in a flood of words there is worthlessness.** Rather [*reverently*] fear God [*and worship Him with awe-filled respect, knowing who He is*].

Mat 5:34 But I tell you, **do not swear at all—not by heaven,** for it is the throne of God;

Mat 5:35 **or by the earth,** for it is the footstool of His feet; **or by Jerusalem,** for it is the city of the Great King.

Mat 5:36 And **do not swear by your head,** for you cannot make a single hair white or black.

Mat 5:37 But let your word ‘Yes’ be ‘Yes’ and your ‘No,’ ‘No’—anything more than this is from the evil one.”

Do not break your oath (or: "Do not swear falsely," or: "Do not perjure yourself"). **Keep your vows to Adonai.** The distinction between vows and oaths is hazy not only to us, but also within Judaism; and the issue doesn't seem important today. The early believers understood Yeshua not as prohibiting all vows (see Act 18:5 Act 21:23), but as prohibiting vain oaths—the rabbis of the time did the same. In the Apocrypha compare Sir 23:9, "Do not accustom your mouth to swearing oaths, and do not habitually use the name of the Holy One." Philo of Alexandria recommended avoiding oaths entirely (Decalogue 84). The Talmud has this parallel to v. 37: "Let your 'no' and 'yes' both be righteous [i.e., straightforward]." (Bava Metzia 49a) Jewish New Testament Commentary

a [**Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths**] Lev 19:12; Num 30:2; Deu 23:21.

¹ Crossway Bibles. (2008). [The ESV Study Bible](#) (p. 313). Wheaton, IL: Crossway Bibles.

b [forswear] Greek: *epiorkeo* (G1964), **swear falsely**. Making vows by heaven, earth, or any other thing that we have no power to change is forbidden (Mat 5:33-37; Jas 5:12),

(Jas 5:11 TLV) Behold, we consider blessed those who showed endurance. You have heard of the endurance of Job, and you have seen the outcome of Adonai—that Adonai is full of compassion and mercy.

(Jas 5:12 TLV) But above all, my dear brothers and sisters, do not swear—either by heaven, or by the earth, or by any other oath. But let your “yes” be “yes,” and your “no,” be “no”—so that you may not fall under judgment.

Yeshua taught similarly at Mat 5:33-37. This verse follows on the ideas of Jas 4:13-17; if we do not know what tomorrow will bring, we dare not take an oath, because it is such a serious commitment.

Making vows and taking oaths to speak the truth is always right (Mat 5:33; Heb 6:16; Gen 22:16; Gen 28:20).

Men break Vows, God never does!

(Heb 6:13 TLV) Now when God made His promise to Abraham—**since He could swear by no one greater, He swore by Himself**,

(Heb 6:14 TLV) saying, “Surely I will bless you, and surely I will multiply you.”

(Heb 6:15 TLV) And so after waiting patiently, Abraham reached the promise.

(Heb 6:16 TLV) For people swear by someone greater; and the oath, as confirmation, is an end to all their disputing.

(Heb 6:17 TLV) **In the same way God, determining to point out more clearly to the heirs of the promise the unchanging nature of His purpose, guaranteed it with an oath.**

(Heb 6:18 TLV) **So by two unchangeable things, in which it is impossible for God to lie, we who have fled for refuge might have strong encouragement to take hold of the hope set before us.**

(Heb 6:19 TLV) We have this hope as an anchor of the soul, both firm and steady—a hope that enters the inner place behind the curtain.

(Heb 6:20 TLV) Yeshua has entered there as a forerunner on our behalf, having become Kohen Gadol “forever, according to the order of Melchizedek.”

Avraham was a man of great trust (Heb 11:8-19; compare Rom 4:1-22, Gal 3:6-18). The double security of **oath** and **promise** which God offered him **strongly encourages** us, who also have been given a **hope set before us** of going **right on through... the curtain of the Holy Place** in heaven to God himself (compare Heb 10:22). This we will be able to do because we are united with Yeshua, and he has **entered** ahead of us as our **forerunner**. He has been able to enter because he **has become a *cohen gadol* forever, to be compared with Malki-Tzedek**. The author thus returns to the line of thought which he left at 5:10 in order to exhort his readers to diligence. He also is preparing the groundwork for his argument of Heb 7:20-21. Jewish New Testament Commentary

The Kol Nidrei

In the modern Jewish observance, a special prayer known as the *Kol Nidrei* is recited or sung in the evening service. **This special prayer means “all vows” and contains an annulment of any vows** such as forced conversions that were made innocently or while under duress. When Jews were forcefully converted to Christianity, they were exempted from the vow made under duress by means of this prayer on the Day of Atonement.

This renunciation of all vows refers to personal religious vows, not vows made to men. Any obligations they have made to other men must be fulfilled; the singing of the Kol Nidrei does not exempt a Jew from fulfilling his vows to men. Although it is only done in the evening service, it is chanted three times to emphasize its importance. The Kol Nidrei is sung in Hebrew. The English translation is as follows: All vows, renunciations, promises, obligations, oaths, taken rashly, from this Day of Atonement, until the next, may we attain it in peace, we regret them in advance. May we be absolved of them, may we be released from them, may they be null and void and of no effect. May they not be binding upon us. Such vows shall not be considered vows, such renunciations no renunciations, such oaths no oaths. May atonement be granted to the whole congregation of Israel and to the stranger who lives among them, for all have transgressed unwittingly. Forgive the sins of this people in accordance with Your great mercy, as You has continued to forgive them from the days of Egypt until now. As we have been promised: And the Lord said, “I have forgiven in accordance with your plea.”²

The Bible has a lot to say about vows we make before Elohim. Making promises is serious and we need to think before we speak or make a promise. We need to be people of our word before God and our Community. Many times, we all have made rash promises to God without thinking before we speak only to not keep our promises. Vows should be kept, therefore not taken lightly because they were said using God’s Name.

Some Common Vows made today. We are accountable for the oaths we make. Good oaths should be kept, bad oaths need to be repented of in Yeshua’s name.

- Marriage Vows
- In Court of Law – Swearing to tell the truth.
- Pledges to help Organizations – i.e., donations. i.e pledging you will send a certain amount of money
- Being sworn into a public office
- Being sworn in as a Policeman – Serve and Protect
- Doctors Oath to help the sick – Hippocratic Oath.
- Oaths or Pledges to Fraternities etc.
- The Pledge of allegiance to the Flag of America

Have we been snared by the words of our mouths?

(Pro 6:1 TLV) My son, if you have become a cosigner for your neighbor, if you have shaken hands in pledge with a stranger,

(Pro 6:2 TLV) **if you are trapped by your own words, ensnared by the words of your mouth,**

(Pro 6:3 TLV) then do this, my son, and free yourself, since you fell into your neighbor’s hand: Go, humble yourself, plead with your neighbor!

(Pro 6:4 TLV) Allow no sleep to your eyes, nor slumber to your eyelids.

Examples of Oaths in Numbers 30

When a Man Makes a Vow

Num 30:1 Moses spoke to the princes of the tribes of Bnei-Yisrael saying, “This is what Adonai has commanded:

Num 30:2 Whenever a man makes a vow to Adonai or swears an oath to obligate himself by a pledge, he is not to violate his word but do everything coming out of his mouth.

² Fruchtenbaum, A. G. (1983). [*The Messianic Bible Study Collection*](#) (Vol. 119, p. 8). Tustin, CA: Ariel Ministries.

When An Unmarried Woman Makes A Vow- Minor still under Fathers authority

Num 30:3 Suppose a woman **in her youth vows** to Adonai or obligates herself by a pledge in her father's house.

Num 30:4 If her father should hear her vow or her pledge with which she obligated herself and her father says nothing to her, all her vows and every pledge by which she has obligated herself will stand.

Num 30:5 But if her father should forbid it on the day of his hearing it, none of her vows or pledges by which she has obligated herself will stand. Adonai will forgive her because her father has forbidden her.

When a Married Woman Makes A Vow – under her husbands authority

Num 30:6 “Suppose she should marry, after her vow or a rash promise of her lips by which she obligated herself.

Num 30:7 Now if her husband hears about it but says nothing to her on the day he hears about it, her vows will stand and her pledges by which she has obligated herself will stand.

Num 30:8 But if her husband should hear about it and on the day he hears it he forbids it, he thereby nullifies her vow and her rash promise by which her lips have obligated her, and Adonai will forgive her.

When a Divorced Woman or Widow Makes A Vow

Num 30:9 Any vow or obligation of a widow or a divorced woman will be binding on her.

Vows Not Nullified By Husband

Num 30:10 **If in her husband's house she vowed or obligated herself** by pledge under oath,

Num 30:11 and her husband should hear it and say nothing to her, not forbidding her, **all her vows and every pledge by which she has obligated herself will stand.**

Num 30:12 But if her husband should nullify them on the day when he hears of them, nothing from her lips, whether vow or pledge, will stand. Her husband has nullified them and Adonai will forgive her.

Num 30:13 Her husband may ratify or veto any vow or sworn oath to deny herself.

Num 30:14 “But if her husband says nothing to her from day to day, then he is confirming all her vows and all her oaths that are on her. He confirms them by saying nothing to her on the day of his hearing about it.

Num 30:15 But if he nullifies them after hearing about it, he will bear her guilt.”

Num 30:16 These are the statutes that Adonai gave to Moses relevant to relationships between a man and his wife, as well as between a father and his young daughter still living in his house.

Example of a Rash Vows

#1. Jephthah's Awful Vow – Judges 11:29-40

Jdg 11:29 Then the Ruach Adonai came upon Jephthah, so he marched through Gilead and Manasseh, and passed through Mizpah of Gilead, and from Mizpah of Gilead he crossed over to the children of Ammon.

Jdg 11:30 Then Jephthah vowed a vow to Adonai and said, “If You will indeed give the children of Ammon into my hand,

Jdg 11:31 then it will be that whatever comes out of the doors of my house to meet me when I return safely from the children of Ammon, it will be Adonai's, and I will offer it up as a burnt offering.”

Jdg 11:34 Now when Jephthah arrived at his home in Mizpah, behold, his daughter was coming out to meet him with tambourines and with dances. Now she was his only child. Besides her he had no son or daughter.

Jdg 11:35 Upon seeing her, he tore his clothes and said, “Alas, my daughter! You made me bow down in grief—

you've made me miserable! For I have opened my mouth to Adonai, and I cannot take it back.”

Jdg 11:36 “My father, you have opened your mouth to Adonai,” she said to him. “Do to me what proceeded from your mouth—since Adonai brought vengeance on your enemies, the children of Ammon.”

Jdg 11:37 She said further to her father, “Let this thing be done for me. Let me be alone two months, so that I may go on the mountains and mourn my virginity, I and my companions.”

Jdg 11:38 “Go!” he said. So he sent her away for two months. So she left, she and her companions, and mourned on the mountains because of her virginity.

Jdg 11:39 Then at the end of two months she returned to her father, who did with her according to his vow he had made—so she was never intimate with a man. So it became a custom in Israel,

Jdg 11:40 that the daughters of Israel would go annually to commemorate the daughter of Jephthah the Gileadite four days in a year.

Now according to the Rabbis, she was not killed as a sacrificed but was sent away and never married and stayed a virgin her entire life due to her father’s vow. However due to the rash vow his daughter would never marry or have children.

Firstly it is important to emphasize that Judaism has always viewed human sacrifices as a reprehensible abomination. Regarding the Canaanites, Moses says: “For every abomination to G-d which He hates, they did to their gods; for also their sons and theirdaughters they would sacrifice in fire to their gods.”³

Based on this idea, many of the biblical commentators⁴ maintain that Jephthah did not offer his daughter as a sacrifice. In fact, his original vow, “whatever comes forth . . . shall be to G-d, and I will offer it up for a burnt-offering,” had a dual intention: if it will be a person, then it “shall be [consecrated] to G-d”; and if it should be an animal, then “I will offer it up as a burnt offering.” (The Hebrew prefix ו which precedes the words “I will offer it” can be translated as “and” or “or.”)

According to this interpretation, Jephthah’s daughter was sent to the mountains to live in seclusion. She never married and dedicated her life to the service of G-d. Rabbi Naftali Silberberg,

There is nothing wrong with Vows, as long as they are honored. However, it is better not to vow and make promises you probably will not keep.

Examples of Vows made that were good.

#1. Jacob’s Tithes – Genesis 28:20-22

This vow was to honor God with his tithes for protecting him on his journey.

Gen 28:20 Then Jacob made a vow saying, “If God will be with me and watch over me on this way that I am going, and provide me food to eat and clothes to wear,

Gen 28:21 and I return in shalom to my father’s house, then Adonai will be my God.

Gen 28:22 So this stone which I set up as a memorial stone will become God’s House, and of **everything You provide me I will definitely give a tenth of it to You.**”

#2. Hannah’s Vow – 1 Samuel 1:11, 27-28

Hannah honored her vow to God when she gave birth to a son when he was old enough she gave him into Gods service and he became one of the greatest prophets in Israel, Samuel.

1Sa 1:11 So she made a vow and said, “Adonai-Tzva’ot, if You will indeed look upon the affliction of Your _____ handmaid, remember me and not forget Your handmaid, but grant Your handmaid a son, then I will give _____

him to Adonai all the days of his life and no razor will ever touch his head.”

1Sa 1:27 For this boy I prayed, and Adonai has granted me my petition that I asked of Him.

1Sa 1:28 So I in turn dedicate him to Adonai—as long as he lives he is dedicated to Adonai.” Then he bowed in worship there before Adonai.

#3. Elkanah’s Yearly Vow – 1 Samuel 1:21

Elkanah was Hannah’s husband, and he made a vow offering which he fulfilled.

1Sa 1:20 So it came to pass at the turn of the year that Hannah conceived and gave birth to a son. She called his name Samuel, “because I have asked Adonai for him.”

1Sa 1:21 When the man Elkanah and all his household went up to offer the annual sacrifice to Adonai and to fulfill his vow offering,

#4. Jobs vow with his eyes – Job 31:1

Here we see a vow or covenant of the eyes to keep eyes pure and not look at anything that would cause us to lust after our eyes.

Job 31:1 I made a covenant with my eyes not to pay attention to a virgin.

#5. David’s Vow – Psalm 132:2

David made a vow to build a Temple for Adonai. David honored his vow by collecting all that would be needed to build the temple. However, the fulfillment of the vow would be completed by Solomon his son since God would not allow him to build the Temple since he was a man of war.

Psa 132:1 A Song of Ascents. Adonai, remember David, all his afflictions,

Psa 132:2 and how he swore to Adonai, vowed to the Mighty One of Jacob:

Psa 132:3 “I will not enter the tent of my house nor lie on my bed,

Psa 132:4 nor will I give sleep to my eyes, nor slumber to my eyelids,

Psa 132:5 till I find a place for Adonai, a dwelling for the Mighty One of Jacob.”

#6. Jonah’s Vow – Jonah 2:9-10

After Jonah’s rebellion and punishment in the belly of the whale, he repented and vowed to complete the call to preach to Nineveh repentance. He was rescued and was able to complete his vow.

Jon 2:9 But I will sacrifice to You With the voice of thanksgiving. **That which I have vowed I will pay.**
Salvation is from the LORD.”

Jon 2:10 Then the LORD commanded the fish, and it vomited Jonah up onto the dry land.

#7 Paul’s Vow – Acts 18:18

Paul completed a vow he made to God and to pay for others who were completing a Nazirite vow.

Act 18:18 Paul, having stayed many more days, said farewell to the brothers and set sail to Syria, and with him were Priscilla and Aquila. **At Cenchrea Paul had his hair cut off, for he was keeping a vow.**

Ref: Nazirite Vow

Num 6:2 “Speak to Bnei-Yisrael and say to them: **Any man or woman who desires to vow a Nazirite vow to be separate for Adonai,**

Num 6:3 is to abstain from wine and any other fermented drink. He is not to drink any vinegar made from wine or any fermented drink, or any grape juice, or eat grapes or raisins.

Num 6:4 All during his days as a Nazirite he is not to eat anything from the grapevine—even the seeds or skins.

Num 6:5 **All the duration of his Nazirite vow**, no razor is to come on his head until the time of his consecration to Adonai is over. He is to be holy, and the hair of his head is to grow long.

Num 6:6 All the days of his separation to Adonai, he is not to go near a dead body.

Num 6:7 Even if his father, mother, brother or sister should die, he is not to make himself unclean, because his consecration to God is on his head.

Num 6:8 **All the days of his separation, he is to be consecrated to Adonai.**

RABBI AKIVA: Pirke Avot – Sayings of the Fathers regarding Vows

Tradition is a fence for the Torah;

Tithes are a fence for riches;

Vows are a fence for abstinence;

A fence for wisdom—silence. (3:17B)

מסורת—סיג לתורה, מעשרות—סיג לעשר, נדרים—סיג לפרישות, סיג לחכמה—שתיקה.

Vows. Vows, *nedarim* in Hebrew, are promises to God to do or not to do something. Jewish tradition has had a changing view of such vows and of the abstinence or self-denial that often results from them. The Torah describes a class of self-deniers, the Nazarites, and a tractate of the Talmud is dedicated to vows. **However, the Rabbis conclude that one should avoid formal vows. Any verbal agreement, though, has the force of a vow, so that keeping promises is a sacred obligation.** Vows are still permissible if their intent is to break bad habits, and this may be the thrust of Rabbi Akiva’s saying here.

There is a strand of asceticism—the idea that self-denial is holy—in Jewish tradition. But it is a minor strand, and is strictly limited. Rabbi Akiva ruled against hurting oneself (BK 15b), and there is a general rule that you should not deny yourself things that are not already denied by the Torah and Rabbinic law. A later Sage, Rav, said that on the day of judgment a person will have to answer for every good permissible thing that he or she could have enjoyed but did not (P. KID 4:12, 66d).

A fence for wisdom. Knowing when to be silent and when to speak is a mark of wisdom, and protection for it, as well. This a stronger admonition than the popular saying, “If you can’t say something nice about a person, don’t say anything at all.” When should we be silent, aside from avoiding *lashon ha-ra* (defamation)? Rabbi Nahmias, a medieval commentator, in his commentary on this mishnah said, “**The Holy One, blessed be He, created for you two ears and a mouth, so that you might listen twice as much as you speak.**”³

Hazek, hazek, v’nit’chazek! Be strong, be strong and let us be strengthen!

P. KID *Kiddushin*, Talmud

³ Berkson, W., & Fisch, M. (2010). *Pirke Avot: Timeless Wisdom for Modern Life* (First edition, pp. 122–123). Philadelphia, PA: The Jewish Publication Society.