

Handout 1: Numbers Lesson 12

According to Sacred Scripture, a vow to Yahweh was binding. It was a sin to neglect one's promise to God (Lev 5:4); hence there are frequent admonitions in Scripture not to desecrate one's vow (i.e., Dt 23:22/21; Ecc 5:3-5; Mt 5:33-37; Jm 5:12).

Divine instruction on vows in the Pentateuch:

1. The legislation on vows and the sin in neglecting to fulfill them (Lev 5:4-6).
2. Eating certain vow offerings (Lev 7:16-18).
3. Vow offerings must be free of blemishes (Lev 22:17-25).
4. The redemption fee for being released from a vow (Lev 27:1-31).
5. The instructions for the Nazirite vow and related sacrifices (Num Chapter 6).
6. The obligation of grain offerings and wine libations to accompany vow offerings (Num 15:1-10).
7. Specific legislation applied to specific situations of vows within the family (Num 30:2-17).
8. The obligation for men and women to fulfill their temporary vows in a timely manner (Dt 23:22/21-24/23). See CCC 2102-03.

The four classes of women are mentioned in Numbers 30:4-12:

1. The young, unmarried girl who still lives in her father's house (vs. 4-6).
2. The woman who makes a vow that is not completed before she marries (vs. 7-10).
3. The widow or divorced woman who makes a vow (vs. 10).
4. The married woman living with her husband who makes a vow (vs. 11-12).

Numbers Chapter 31: The "vengeance of Yahweh" was to seek vindication for Midianite treachery. The vengeance or "wrath of God" was not revenge but retribution for the sake of righteousness. The Hebrew verb *nakam* has two closely associated meanings: "to redress past wrongs" and "to exact retribution." The first meaning takes the preposition *min*, meaning "from" (31:2), and the later meaning the preposition *be*, meaning "on" (31:3).

Division of the spoils from the war with Midian

- The combatants and the community each received one-half.
- One-five-hundredth of the army's share went to Eleazar for the Sanctuary.
- One-fiftieth of the community's share went to the Levites.

The soldiers paid one-tenth as much as the civilians and the Levites received ten times as much as the priests. For every thousand persons or animals taken, the soldiers received nine more than the civilians.

Midianite spoils:

- 32,000 maidens
- 675,000 sheep and goats
- 72,000 cattle
- 61,000 donkeys
- 16,750 shekels of gold seized by commanders

The Hebrew word *nehalets* in Num 32:17 means "we shall be picked out". It is the same word used in Num 31:3 for the hand-picked commandoes sent in the war against the Midianites. The root of this word is used seven times in Num 32:17, 20, 21, 27, 29, 30 and 32. The phrase *lifnei/lipne YHWH*, meaning "before Yahweh/ in front of Yahweh", occurs seven times in 32:20, 21, 22 twice, 27, 29, and 32.

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