

VOWS

“A REFUGE OF LIES”

by Michael Barrett

How often have we hidden behind the things we have said? How often have we been captured by things that we have spoken in anger, fear, or exasperation? Every one of us have experienced deep disappointment when the expectations we held in our hearts that were connected to a particular outcome crumbled right in front of us. Often, in those experiences it seems like there is nothing that could be done to rescue our emotions from all of the pain that comes crashing in on us. Often, in these moments of extreme anguish, and in an attempt to get away from the trauma, we spontaneously erect a wall of words. This reaction is an effort to quickly create a safe house for our souls; a place of comfort and security.

This “wall of words”, however, rather than actually making a place of safety into which we may resort, may well instead construct a stronghold in our soul. That stronghold may at first feel like a safe place, only later to become a prison cell. In this teaching we will borrow the Prophet Isaiah’s words from Isaiah chapter 28. Isaiah prophesied about the power of, and the consequences of words spoken which appear to offer shelter, but incarcerate the fearful, wounded soul, rather than set the wounded soul free and offer life. Isaiah calls the experience of retreating into this “refuge of lies” making a “covenant with death.” These are serious matters and demand our review. Here we will look more closely into swearing an oath and making a vow, and how, by that action, we may quite well create for a part of our soul, a refuge of lies! We will, however, not leave you without hope, because we will also show you a genuine, Biblical remedy for breaking the power of any vow that you may have entered into.

We begin this study with two foundational Scripture passages: Isaiah 28:15-22 and Matthew 5:33-37. Remember that the Scripture tells us in Proverbs 25:2 that it is the glory of God to conceal a matter; it is the honor of kings to search it out! Together, let’s search out the truth concerning vows.

A refuge of lies: Isaiah 28:15-22

Because ye have said, We have made a covenant with death, and with hell are we at agreement; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, it shall not come unto us: for we have made lies our refuge, and under falsehood have we hid ourselves: Therefore thus saith the Lord God, Behold, I lay in Zion for a foundation a stone, a tried stone, a precious

corner stone, a sure foundation: he that believeth shall not make haste. Judgment also will I lay to the line, and righteousness to the plummet: and the hail shall sweep away the refuge of lies, and the waters shall overflow the hiding place. And your covenant with death shall be disannulled, and your agreement with hell shall not stand; when the overflowing scourge shall pass through, then ye shall be trodden down by it. From the time that it goeth forth it shall take you: for morning by morning shall it pass over, by day and by night: and it shall be a vexation only to understand the report. For the bed is shorter than that a man can stretch himself on it: and the covering narrower than that he can wrap himself in it. For the Lord shall rise up as in mount Perazim, he shall be wroth as in the valley of Gibeon, that he may do his work, his strange work; and bring to pass his act, his strange act. Now therefore be ye not mockers, lest your bands be made strong: for I have heard from the Lord God of hosts a consumption, even determined upon the whole earth.

Jesus picks up the same theme in the New Testament gospel of Matthew in chapter 5, verses 33-37 where we are told not to swear an oath at all.

Again, ye have heard that it hath been said by them of old time, Thou shalt not forswear thyself, but shalt perform unto the Lord thine oaths: But I say unto you, Swear not at all; neither by heaven; for it is God's throne: Nor by the earth; for it is his footstool: neither by Jerusalem; for it is the city of the great King. Neither shalt thou swear by thy head, because thou canst not make one hair white or black. But let your communication be, Yea, yea; Nay, nay: for whatsoever is more than these cometh of evil.

Swear; Make or Take an Oath; Vow

I. Swear: Matthew 5:33-37 (see above); Hebrews 6:13-16

A. Hebrews 6:13-16:

For when God made promise to Abraham, because he could swear by no greater, he swore by himself, Saying, Surely blessing I will bless thee, and multiplying I will multiply thee. And so, after he had patiently endured, he obtained the promise. For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife.

1. God swears to Himself
2. God is the greater
3. When “men” swear, they “swear to the greater” (Hebrews 6:16)
4. When a person swears an oath / makes a vow, they make self “the greater”
 - a) These comments presuppose that the oath / vow referred to here is one made by a

person not under the influence of the actual leading of the Holy Spirit

b) This is an important qualifier – no Holy Spirit leading

c) We will address later the vow that Paul took as well as on another occasion the four men that were with Paul who were under a vow

5. An oath for confirmation is “to them an end of all strife”

a) At the moment that a person enters into an oath, the spirit of that person submits to the soul of that person

b) From that time, there is put to an end all strife – that is to say that the soul of that person enters a false rest and security by way of entering into the created stronghold

c) Due to the fact that the person has committed to being inside this stronghold, striving against the enemies scheme is no longer a consideration, thus, the soul is free to “enjoy” the claim of this new territory – the internal “strife” is put to “an end”

d) This “new territory” is what Isaiah spoke about – a “refuge of lies” (Isaiah 28:15)

B. The Two Types of Old Testament Strongholds

1. God as the stronghold – a stronghold that God gives / supplies

a) The name of the Lord is a high tower – Proverbs 18:10

b) The Lord provided a stronghold for David – 1 Samuel 23:14

a. Protecting him from Saul

b. And in that place God continued to prepare David to be king of and lead Israel

2. A stronghold of hiding – as in Jeremiah 51:30 – one that men find or make for themselves

a) Mighty men hiding in a stronghold

b) They refuse to fight

c) They lose their strength

d) Their identity is redefined when they put their trust in the hiding place, and they stay in that place believing that they have security and provision there. Their identity actually shifts from being “mighty men” to being “cowards.”

C. Webster’s definition of “swear”: 1. to utter or take solemnly (an oath); 2. to assert as true or promise under oath

D. Jesus said –

1. Not by heaven

2. Not by earth

3. Not by Jerusalem

4. Not by your own head

5. NOT AT ALL!

II. Oath: g3727. ὄρκος horkos; from ἔρκος herkos (a fence; perhaps akin to 3725); a limit, i.e. (sacred) restraint (specially, an oath): — oath.

A. A fence

B. A limit

C. A sacred restraint

D. Webster's definition of oath: a solemn, usually formal calling upon God or a god to witness to the truth of what one says or to witness that one sincerely intends to do what one says; a solemn attestation of the truth or inviolability of one's words. (Example – "The witness took an oath to tell the truth in court.")

1. Calling upon God, or...

2. Calling upon "a god"

E. A fence, a limit, a restraint!!

1. An oath erects a fence!

2. An oath sets a limit!

3. An oath enforces a restraint!

4. The oath's sphere

a) Sets a limitation on the person's ability to see and hear (in that area of their life)

b) Fences the person in and fences God out (again, in that area of the person's life)

c) Sets in place a "sacred restraint"

a. Webster: restraint: to prevent from doing, exhibiting, or expressing something

b. to limit, restrict, or keep under control

III. Vow: a solemn promise or assertion (specifically) one by which a person is bound to an act, service, or condition.

A. A solemn promise

B. By which a person is bound to:

1. An Act

2. A Service

3. A Condition

C. Note: Acts 18:18; 21:23

1. Paul had taken a vow (Acts 18:18)
2. Four men with Paul had taken a vow (Acts 21:23)
3. This was a vow to God (as opposed to a vow to self)
4. g2171. εὐχή euchē; from 2172; properly, a wish, expressed as a petition to God, or in votive obligation

IV. Result #1 of a Vow or an Oath: you become your own sovereign!!

A. A person making a vow / swearing an oath -

1. The believer in Christ no longer has a life of his / her own
 1. Jesus only did what he saw his Father doing
 2. Jesus never did anything of himself
 3. When a person makes a vow impetuously, they are effectively saying, “In this matter, I do not want God as my Sovereign.”

B. When a person makes a vow, they are taking the responsibility of the direction of their own life, effectively declaring (that in that particular part of their life) that they will not have anyone give direction to them – even God! Do not swear by heaven or by earth – see Isaiah 66:1

V. When God Says “Yes”

A. Though God is Sovereign and has a plan, as well as an ordained way for the lives of those who are members of His family, if a person or a people insist on having something other than God’s best for their life, God will, at times, say “yes.”

1. Numbers 11: The people complained about only having manna to eat. They demanded “flesh to eat.” They continued to cry out and insist on flesh to eat, so God gave them what they demanded, He gave them quail every day for an entire month – 2-3 feet deep, a day’s journey in both directions from their camp – quail!! They got what they insisted on – God said, “yes,” and gave them quail to eat until it came out of their nostrils!
2. 1 Samuel 8: The people reject the Lord; the people demand a king, so God says to Samuel, “Listen to the voice of the people” and basically do everything they say to you. Again, though this was not the plan of God, when the people insisted, God said “yes!”

B. Numbers 13 & 14 – God says YES!

1. God had promised the Israelites the land of Canaan
2. God instructs Moses to send 1 man from each tribe to spy out the land
3. The land is everything the Lord said it would be – and it was populated by strong enemies

4. Of the twelve men that went over to search out the land, Joshua and Caleb brought back an enthusiastic report. While the other ten brought back a fearful, negative report
5. Joshua and Caleb say, "let's go up at once and take the land"
6. The other ten say, "we cannot go over – if we do, we will all be killed"
7. The ten incite the entire congregation to fear and negativity
8. All of the people say, "We cannot go over, we cannot go over, we cannot not"
9. And God says, "I agree, you cannot go over."
10. God turns the Israelites back from being at the threshold of realizing His promises to have them wander in the wilderness for 40 years
11. God closes the door to the unbelieving hearts of those who rejected His ways. God opens a door that no man can close and closes a door that no man can open (cf. Revelation 3:7)

VI. The Impetus of a Vow

- A. An experience of pain at such a degree that the person that has had the painful experience feels compelled to fashion an arrangement that will, in their mind, protect them from a repeat of the pain associated with the experience.
- B. Familial and / or cultural "doctrine" that informs mindsets, which results in vows being made
- C. Fear – torments the soul, the effect of which is often that the person makes a vow
- D. Ignorance / Lack of Knowledge (Hosea 4:6 "My people are destroyed for lack of knowledge")
- E. How it is framed:
 1. I will never...
 2. From now on...
 3. I will absolutely always...
 4. I will never let this happen to me again, ever!

VII. A Vow – Generational Effects

- A. Mephibosheth: Jonathan's son / Saul's grandson was living in squalor and perpetual fear because of what he had been told and what he believed about David
 1. Though we have no record of Mephibosheth taking a vow, he was clearly living under someone's words, and his worldview was informed by the beliefs perpetuated by those around him – likely, primarily family members. He was living in a prison of words!
 2. 2 Samuel 4:4 – "And Jonathan, Saul's son, had a son that was lame of his feet. He was five years old when the tidings came of Saul and Jonathan out of Jezreel, and his nurse

took him up, and fled: and it came to pass, as she made haste to flee, that he fell, and became lame. And his name was Mephibosheth.”

- a) Upon hearing the word that Saul and Jonathan were both dead, Mephibosheth’s nurse
 - 1) Took him up
 - 2) Made haste
 - 3) Fled
 - 4) Caused the 5-year old boy to fall
 - 5) He (Mephibosheth) became lame / crippled
 - b) Every one of us have been “taken up” by those, in most cases, but not always who meant well. Family members, relationships of a variety of kinds, spiritual leaders, business leaders – we could go on and on with this list. Often, though –
 - 1) They took us up
 - 2) They made haste – they were careless
 - 3) They fled
 - 4) And they have caused us to be injured, lamed, and crippled (spiritually / ideologically – in the soul [mind, will and emotions])
 - c) The ones that took us up could have been family, community leaders, church leaders, mentors, business associates, partners who we trusted, etc. And here I am not saying that any of these were evil or ill-intentioned. So even when unintended, the injuries have still, to whatever degree, framed the way we have come forward.
3. The Generational Effect
- a) When David had Mephibosheth brought to him, Mephibosheth said to David, “What is thy servant that thou shouldest look upon such a dead dog as I am?” (2 Samuel 9:8)
 - 1) Mephibosheth saw himself as a “dead dog.”
 - 2) Where did he get this idea?
 - 3) He was living under the effects of the words of another / others
 - 4) 2 Samuel 16:5 – David encounters one of Saul’s house named Shimei (Shimei: h8096. שִׁמְעִי šim’îy; from h8088; famous; Shimi, the name of twenty Israelites < h8088. שְׂמָעָה šêma‘; from 8085; something heard, i.e. a sound, rumor, announcement; abstractly, audience.)
 - i. This man was “famous” for the “sound / rumor” that he put forth
 - ii. He came out cursing David

- iii. Abishai, one of David's mighty men, said to David, "Why should this dead dog curse my lord, the king?"
 - iv. The "sound" / curse over this family was "dead dog" (wretched, worthless, foul, a nuisance)
 - v. Mephibosheth believed he was being hunted down to be killed by David
- b) So, though Mephibosheth himself may not have "made a vow" he was a part of a family that was cut off from their connection to "the king" by way of a "covenant with death" (Isaiah 28:15)
4. But God is a Redeemer!!
- a) David and Jonathan loved each other and made a covenant with one another
 - b) 1 Samuel 18:3 – Jonathan and David made a covenant
 - c) 1 Samuel 20:16 – Jonathan made a covenant with the house of David
 - d) David and Jonathan made a covenant before the Lord
5. It came into David's heart to seek any who were in Jonathan's line, in order to "show them kindness" for Jonathan's sake! David meant to honor his covenant with Jonathan!!
- a) Mephibosheth: his name means, "dispeller of shame"
 - b) God always intended to redeem Mephibosheth! God always intended to dispel the shame that overshadowed and consumed Mephibosheth's life.
 - c) The covenant of the king (King) is always greater than any / every curse that may be upon your family line as a result of doctrine, culture, error, fear, etc.

V. Breaking Vows

- A. When the lie is "baked in", because of a vow, that vow must be broken.
- B. Vows are broken by the authority of the Lord Jesus Christ through:
 - 1. Repentance – which effectively rescues that part of the life (soul) of a believer that, due to the vow, has been under the sovereignty of the vow maker.
 - 2. Forgiveness (where other / others were involved in the hurt that precipitated the vow having been made) the person under the vow must release that person / those people and release themselves from the effects of the vow through the act of forgiveness.
- B. Submitting to God – coming out from under a vow positions the person to take God again as their one and only true Sovereign!
- C. Resisting the devil – your enemy
- D. Believing the truth

- E. This entire process, when executed, breaks the power of the vow, and breaks the power of the person's enemy, thus overthrowing the enemy's power to control the person!
- F. We can clearly see this process in James 4:6-10

VI. We Are Delivered From The Shadow of Death!

- A. Jesus came to deliver us all from the shadow of death and translate us into and under the shadow of the Almighty God, His Father and ours (cf. Luke 1:79).
- B. Remember, your Father opens a door that no man can close and closes a door that no man can open (cf. Revelation 3:7).
- C. In Colossians 1:12-14 NKJV, we have this mighty promise as our inheritance: "giving thanks to the Father who has qualified us to be partakers of the inheritance of the saints in the light. He has delivered us from the power of darkness and conveyed us into the kingdom of the Son of His love, in whom we have redemption through His blood, the forgiveness of sins."

It was for freedom that Christ set us free!! Whoever the Son of God makes free, that person is free indeed!! We were always meant to walk in and live our lives out of the abundant life provided for us by Jesus Christ. And, we are persuaded that "neither death, nor life, nor angels, nor principalities, nor powers, nor things present, nor things to come, Nor height, nor depth, nor any other creature, shall be able to separate us from the love of God, which is in Christ Jesus our Lord." (Romans 8:38-39)

I want to encourage you to open up your heart to the Holy Spirit with regard to this teaching. Please consider these things in an attitude of prayer, while asking the Holy Spirit to show you anything that you need to address having to do with oaths and vows. We know that we can trust the Holy Spirit to be our Teacher and our Guide. Also, we have the assurance that when the Holy Spirit manifests Himself as our guide, that He will lead us out of the shadow of death into the clear light of the Daystar!! We are children of the light. Our fellowship is with the Father and with His Son! In Him there is no darkness at all! It is God who is at work within us, both to will and to do of His good pleasure!! Rejoice beloved. Your redemption is drawing near!

I speak a blessing of grace and peace over you in the name of Jesus Christ our Lord!! As you continue in the word, you will be a disciple of Jesus, and you will know the truth and the truth will make you free!! "And now, brethren, I commend you to God, and to the word of his grace, which is able to build you up, and to give you an inheritance among all them which are sanctified!" (Acts 20:32)