

Deuteronomy 23:21-23

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Moses commanded the Israelites to fulfill their vows in a timely manner. Failure to keep their vows will surely bring judgment on them.

Another example of stealing—this time from the LORD—was described here in vv. 21 – 23 as *when you make a vow to the Lord your God* (v. 21). This was a voluntary vow made by the worshiper. Here, it probably was comprised of goods or property.

Though the vow was voluntary, once it was made it became an obligation to fulfill. In fact, the person making the vow was instructed to *not delay to pay it*. Although the Suzerain (Ruler) God did not need anything from His vassals for His survival (Psalm 50:1-14), He wanted them to know that not paying the vow was an act of disloyalty to the covenant. In fact, He told them that refraining or delaying the payment of the vow *would be sin in you*. It was not only a violation of the covenant, it was stealing from the LORD. So, the people needed to know that *the LORD would surely require it of you*. The person would be held accountable for not honoring his or her vow.

But no one was obligated to make a *vow*. Moses told the people that *if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you* (v. 22). Simply put, making a vow was not a necessary condition for the Suzerain (Ruler) God to answer His people's prayers. There is nothing wrong in not vowing, but once a *vow* is made, it must be kept and fulfilled. Promises were to be kept. That included promises to the LORD.

Thus, to fail or to *delay to pay a vow* is tantamount to stealing. Because this theft was against the LORD, Moses reminded them that they needed to *be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God, what you have promised* (v. 23). The word *promised* here is literally *spoken with your mouth* in the Hebrew text. Whatever someone promised to do, he or she must do it in a timely manner to be regarded as honest and faithful. Instead of making false vows, it is better not to make them at all.

An instance of making a vow was when Hannah prayed to the LORD asking for a son (1 Samuel 1:9-11). Also, a person might ask for God's assistance to secure victory in battle, as when Jephthah made a vow asking God to deliver the sons of Ammon into his hand (Judges 11:29-33). In any case, once a vow is made, it becomes obligatory and must be honored. In addition, the Old Testament wisdom literature presents similar concepts as the ones seen here (Proverbs 20:25; Ecclesiastes 5:4 – 5).

In the New Testament, Jesus referred to this passage, and made an application of it to urge His listeners to be truthful, telling them to *let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil* (Matt. 5:33 – 37). Also, the apostle Paul applied this concept when he warned the Corinthian believers to fulfill their vow to collect money to give as an offering to provide aid for other believers (2 Corinthians 8:9 – 10).

Biblical Text:

²¹ When you make a vow to the Lord your God, you shall not delay to pay it, for it would be sin in you, and the Lord your God will surely require it of you. ²² However, if you refrain from vowing, it would not be sin in you. ²³ You shall be careful to perform what goes out from your lips, just as you have voluntarily vowed to the Lord your God, what you have promised.