

Doctrine of the Oath

1. The first mention of an oath in the *Bible* is in association with the commandment of Abraham to his servant that a wife should be found for Isaac. When asked what would happen if a woman were not willing to follow Isaac back to the land of Promise, Abraham said the servant would be released from the promise.
 - *Genesis 24:8 And if the woman will not be willing to follow thee, then thou shalt be clear from this my oath: only bring not my son thither again.*
2. The second mention of an oath in *Scripture* is the reaffirmation to Isaac of the divine promise made to Abraham.
 - *Genesis 26:3 Sojourn in this land, and I will be with thee, and will bless thee; for unto thee, and unto thy seed, I will give all these countries, and I will perform the oath which I swear unto Abraham thy father;*
3. An oath was often made with symbolic gestures such as raising the hand or touching the sex organs, thereby symbolizing a person's life and power.
 - *Genesis 14:22 And Abram said to the king of Sodom, I have lift up mine hand unto the LORD, the most high God, the possessor of heaven and earth,*
 - *Genesis 24:2 And Abraham said unto his eldest servant of his house, that ruled over all that he had, Put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh:*
4. Believing God to be favoring Isaac, king Abimelech asked for a treaty with Isaac. An oath was used to seal the treaty thereby insuring that neither party broke their promise.
 - *Genesis 26:28 And they said, We saw certainly that the LORD was with thee: and we said, Let there be now an oath betwixt us, even betwixt us and thee, and let us make a covenant with thee;*
5. On his death bed Joseph made the children of Israel swear they would not leave his bones in Egypt but would take him back home someday.
 - *Genesis 50:25 And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence.*
6. It was and is permissible for a man to vow a vow unto the Lord or to swear an oath provided he keeps his word.
 - *Numbers 30:2 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.*

7. While it is wrong to take the Lord's name in vain by calling God to be a witness to a transaction or statement which is false, it is not wrong to call God as a witness.
 - *Exodus 22:11 Then shall an oath of the LORD be between them both, that he hath not put his hand unto his neighbour's goods; and the owner of it shall accept thereof, and he shall not make it good.*
8. Oaths that had curses attached to them were used to protect property rights from thieves or from those who found a stolen object or knew of a theft.
 - *Judges 17:2 And he said unto his mother, The eleven hundred shekels of silver that were taken from thee, about which thou cursedst, and spakest of also in mine ears, behold, the silver is with me; I took it. And his mother said, Blessed be thou of the LORD, my son.*
 - *Leviticus 5:1 And if a soul sin, and hear the voice of swearing, and is a witness, whether he hath seen or known of it; if he do not utter it, then he shall bear his iniquity.*
9. A bad oath was to be confessed and repented of.
 - *Leviticus 5:4 Or if a soul swear, pronouncing with his lips to do evil, or to do good, whatsoever it be that a man shall pronounce with an oath, and it be hid from him; when he knoweth of it, then he shall be guilty in one of these. 5 And it shall be, when he shall be guilty in one of these things, that he shall confess that he hath sinned in that thing:*
10. A woman suspected of adultery was to be charged with the force of an oath and then tested for the purpose of sexual purity.
 - *Numbers 5:19 And the priest shall charge her by an oath, and say unto the woman, If no man have lain with thee, and if thou hast not gone aside to uncleanness with another instead of thy husband, be thou free from this bitter water that causeth the curse: 20 But if thou hast gone aside to another instead of thy husband, and if thou be defiled, and some man have lain with thee beside thine husband: Numbers 5:21 Then the priest shall charge the woman with an oath of cursing, and the priest shall say unto the woman, The LORD make thee a curse and an oath among thy people, when the LORD doth make thy thigh to rot, and thy belly to swell;*
11. The vows of women were to be honored provided the husband supported them. The principle of the headship of the household is recognized in this passage.
 - *Numbers 30:10 And if she vowed in her husband's house, or bound her soul by a bond with an oath; 11 And her husband heard it, and held his peace at her, and disallowed her not: then all her vows shall stand, and every bond wherewith she bound her soul shall stand. 12 But if her husband hath utterly made them void on the day he heard them; then whatsoever proceeded out of her lips concerning her vows, or concerning the bond of her soul, shall not stand: her husband hath made them void; and the LORD shall forgive her.*

12. God will often do good to a stubborn and rebellious people such as the Exodus Generation because He will honor His word given to another generation.
- *Deuteronomy 7:8 But because the LORD loved you, and because he would keep the oath which he had sworn unto your fathers, hath the LORD brought you out with a mighty hand, and redeemed you out of the house of bondmen, from the hand of Pharaoh king of Egypt.*
13. It is an honor to enter into covenant with the Lord and into His oath.
- *Deuteronomy 29:10 Ye stand this day all of you before the LORD your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, 11 Your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water: 12 That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day:*
14. Covenants have far reaching effects for they can extend from one generation to the next.
- *Deuteronomy 29:14 Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; 15 But with him that standeth here with us this day before the LORD our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day:*
15. Some oaths have conditions attached to them. Rahab had to let down a scarlet cord in order to be saved and she had to be quiet about the spies.
- *Joshua 2:17 And the men said unto her [Rahab], We will be blameless of this thine oath which thou hast made us swear. 18 Behold, when we come into the land, thou shalt bind this line of scarlet thread in the window which thou didst let us down by: and thou shalt bring thy father, and thy mother, and thy brethren, and all thy father's household, home unto thee. 19 And it shall be, that whosoever shall go out of the doors of thy house into the street, his blood shall be upon his head, and we will be guiltless: and whosoever shall be with thee in the house, his blood shall be on our head, if any hand be upon him. 20 And if thou utter this our business, then we will be quit of thine oath which thou hast made us to swear.*
16. Some oaths are hastily made, are foolish in character and have tragic consequences as when Saul made a rash oath that eventually involved his son Jonathan.
- *1 Samuel 14:26 And when the people were come into the wood, behold, the honey dropped; but no man put his hand to his mouth: for the people feared the oath. 27 But Jonathan heard not when his father charged the people with the oath: wherefore he put forth the end of the rod that was in his hand, and dipped it in an honeycomb, and put his hand to his mouth; and his eyes were enlightened. 28 Then answered one of the people, and said, Thy father straitly charged the people with an oath, saying, Cursed be the man that eateth any food this day. And the people were faint.*

17. Sometimes an individual would pronounce a curse upon themselves in association with an oath they had taken. David vowed not to eat until evening with these words: "*God do so to me, and more also, if I taste bread or anything else till the sun goes down*" (2 Samuel 3:35). By this pledge David was demonstrating his determination to honor his word.
18. An oath made in the name of the Lord is to be honored as if the Lord himself had made it. David honored this principle in a positive way as did Solomon in a negative way when he held Shimei accountable for his attitude and actions.
- *2 Samuel 21:7 But the king [David] spared Mephibosheth, the son of Jonathan the son of Saul, because of the LORD's oath that was between them, between David and Jonathan the son of Saul.*
 - *1 Kings 2:42 And the king [Solomon] sent and called for Shimei, and said unto him, Did I not make thee to swear by the LORD, and protested unto thee, saying, Know for a certain, on the day thou goest out, and walkest abroad any wither, that thou shalt surely die? And thou saidst unto me, The word that I have heard is good. 43 Why then hast thou not kept the oath of the LORD, and the commandment that I have charged thee with?*
19. It is not wrong to pray and ask the Lord to be the judge in a matter when a person is accused of doing wrong yet swears his innocence. In legal cases oaths were sometimes used to make a person confess their guilt.
- *1 Kings 8:30 And hearken thou to the supplication of thy servant, and of thy people Israel, when they shall pray toward this place: and hear thou in heaven thy dwelling place: and when thou hearest, forgive. 31 If any man trespass against his neighbour, and an oath be laid upon him to cause him to swear, and the oath come before thine altar in this house: 32 Then hear thou in heaven, and do, and judge thy servants, condemning the wicked, to bring his way upon his head; and justifying the righteous, to give him according to his righteousness.*
20. It is possible to make an oath in the name of the Lord without knowing all the facts or the mind of God as the man Obadiah did in the case of Elijah.
- *1 Kings 18:7 And as Obadiah was in the way, behold, Elijah met him: and he knew him, and fell on his face, and said, Art thou that my lord Elijah? 8 And he answered him, I am: go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here. 9 And he said, What have I sinned, that thou wouldest deliver thy servant into the hand of Ahab, to slay me? 10 As the LORD thy God liveth, there is no nation or kingdom, whither my lord hath not sent to seek thee: and when they said, He is not there; he took an oath of the kingdom and nation, that they found thee not. 11 And now thou sayest, Go, tell thy lord, Behold, Elijah is here.*
21. For centuries sacred oaths have been made in sacred places illustrated by the high priest Jehoiada during the days of Jehoash, king of Judah (d. 796 BC).

- *2 Kings 11:4 And the seventh year Jehoiada sent and fetched the rulers over hundreds, with the captains and the guard, and brought them to him into the house of the LORD, and made a covenant with them, and took an oath of them in the house of the LORD, and shewed them the king's son.*

22. When an oath is good it causes the hearts of people to rejoice.

- *2 Chronicles 15:15 And all Judah rejoiced at the oath: for they had sworn with all their heart, and sought him with their whole desire; and he was found of them: and the LORD gave them rest round about.*

23. Individuals being restored to a place of responsibility will take their duties more seriously if forced to affirm them with an oath.

- *Nehemiah 5:12 Then said they, We will restore them, and will require nothing of them; so will we do as thou sayest. Then I called the priests, and took an oath of them, that they should do according to this promise.*

24. In the act of dedicating or rededicating oneself to the Lord the taking of an oath is not improper.

- *Nehemiah 10:29 They clave to their brethren, their nobles, and entered into a curse, and into an oath, to walk in God's law, which was given by Moses the servant of God, and to observe and do all the commandments of the LORD our Lord, and his judgments and his statutes;*

25. Citizens should be loyal.

- *Ecclesiastes 8:2 I counsel thee to keep the king's commandment, and that in regard of the oath of God.*

26. God will administer retributive divine justice to those who break a solemn oath.

- *Ezekiel 16:59 For thus saith the Lord GOD; I will even deal with thee as thou hast done, which hast despised the oath in breaking the covenant.*

27. Lying about an oath can result in death.

- *Ezekiel 17:16 As I live, saith the Lord GOD, surely in the place where the king dwelleth that made him king, whose oath he despised, and whose covenant he brake, even with him in the midst of Babylon he shall die. 17 Neither shall Pharaoh with his mighty army and great company make for him in the war, by casting up mounds, and building forts, to cut off many persons: 18 Seeing he despised the oath by breaking the covenant, when, lo, he had given his hand, and hath done all these things, he shall not escape.*

28. When an oath has been violated it is best to confess the sin.

- *Daniel 9:11 Yea, all Israel have transgressed thy law, even by departing, that they might not obey thy voice; therefore the curse is poured upon us, and the oath that is written in the law of Moses the servant of God, because we have sinned against him.*

29. Because of the hardness of the human heart oaths were sometimes taken lightly, as if everyone expected the vows to not be honored.

- *Hosea 10:4 They have spoken words, swearing falsely in making a covenant: thus judgment springeth up as hemlock in the furrows of the field.*

30. Oaths were never designed to be used to wrongfully accuse someone.

- *Exodus 20:7 Thou shalt not take the name of the LORD thy God in vain; for the LORD will not hold him guiltless that taketh his name in vain.*
- *Job 31:30 Neither have I suffered my mouth to sin by wishing a curse to his soul.*
- *Psalms 10:7 His mouth is full of cursing and deceit and fraud: under his tongue is mischief and vanity.*
- *Hosea 4:2 By swearing, and lying, and killing, and stealing, and committing adultery, they break out, and blood toucheth blood.*

31. No one should ever rejoice when a false oath is made.

- *Zechariah 8:17 And let none of you imagine evil in your hearts against his neighbour; and love no false oath: for all these are things that I hate, saith the LORD.*

32. The unrighteous often feel it necessary to confirm their evil words and intentions with an oath.

- *Matthew 14:7 Whereupon he promised with an oath to give her whatsoever she would ask.*
- *Acts 23:21 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.*

33. Jesus was once illegally bound by an oath. Though Jewish rule of jurisprudence said a prisoner did not have to testify against himself, Christ was so compelled.

- *Matthew 26:63 But Jesus held his peace. And the high priest answered and said unto him, I adjure thee by the living God, that thou tell us whether thou be the Christ, the Son of God. 64 Jesus saith unto him, Thou hast said: nevertheless I say unto you, Hereafter shall ye see the Son of man sitting on the right hand of power, and coming in the clouds of heaven.*

34. The sin of Peter included not only the betrayal of Christ but using the name of God in vain.

- *Matthew 26:72 And again he denied with an oath, I do not know the man.*

35. No matter how many centuries pass God's people can remember God's oaths and expect Him to honor what He has sworn to do.

- *Luke 1:73 The oath which he sware to our father Abraham,*
- *Acts 2:30 Therefore being a prophet, and knowing that God had sworn with an oath to him, that of the fruit of his loins, according to the flesh, he would raise up Christ to sit on his throne;*

36. Paul was not opposed to the usage of oaths. .

- *2 Corinthians 1:23 Moreover I call God for a record upon my soul, that to spare you I came not as yet unto Corinth.*
- *Galatians 1:20 Now the things which I write unto you, behold, before God, I lie not.*

37. When God the Father swears with an oath it is by Himself, to anything else would negate His own essence and sovereignty.

- *Hebrews 6:16 For men verily swear by the greater: and an oath for confirmation is to them an end of all strife. 17 Wherein God, willing more abundantly to shew unto the heirs of promise the immutability of his counsel, confirmed it by an oath:*

38. Under the New Covenant Christ was made a priest of the order of Melchisedec which was confirmed by an oath.

- *Hebrews 7:20 And inasmuch as not without an oath he was made priest: 21 (For those priests were made without an oath; but this with an oath by him that said unto him, The Lord sware and will not repent, Thou art a priest for ever after the order of Melchisedec:)*

39. While the making of an oath that involves God is not sin, neither is careless oath taking encouraged lest there be sin.

- *James 5:12 But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation.*