

Adult Bible Class

The Book of Leviticus - Lesson #15

Leviticus Chapter 26

In the Middle East in ancient times, it was a custom for legal documents to end with passages containing blessings upon those who followed the law and curses upon those who did not follow it. We are almost to the end of the book of Leviticus, and God is concluding this book of His law with blessings and curses (this also happens at the end of the book of Deuteronomy).

As we read this chapter, we will read of blessings so wonderful that we know it must be the miracle power of God that brings them to pass. We also read of curses so horrible, that it must be the provoked anger of God that brings them to pass.

Blessings for Obedience

Leviticus 26:1 (NLT) "Do not make idols or set up carved images, or sacred pillars, or sculptured stones in your land so you may worship them. I am the Lord your God. ² You must keep my Sabbath days of rest and show reverence for my sanctuary. I am the Lord.

As God concludes this book to His people, He reiterates these two commandments from the many commandments and precepts given in the Law. These most important of God's commandments are that His people should not make or worship idols (God is a Spirit, and He must be worshiped in a spiritual way), and that they must rest on the Sabbath day and reverence God's sanctuary (the Tabernacle). This is a "do" and a "don't" concerning worship.

Unfortunately, as we read the Old Testament, we discover that the two greatest sins of Israel down through the centuries are 1) idol worship, and 2) disregarding the Sabbath day. Here, some of the Old Testament prophets speak concerning this:

Isaiah 2:8 Their land is full of idols;
the people worship things they have made
with their own hands.
⁹ So now they will be humbled,
and all will be brought low—

Jeremiah 1:16 I will pronounce judgment
on my people for all their evil—
for deserting me and burning incense to other gods.
Yes, they worship idols made with their own hands!

Hosea 5:11 The people of Israel will be crushed and broken by my judgment
because they are determined to worship idols.

Ezekiel 5:9 Because of your detestable idols, I will punish you like I have never punished anyone before or ever will again.

Micah 1:5 ...Where is the center of idolatry in Judah?
In Jerusalem, its capital!

Jeremiah 17:21 This is what the Lord says: Listen to my warning! Stop carrying on your trade at Jerusalem's gates on the Sabbath day. ²² Do not do your work on the Sabbath, but make it a holy day. I gave this command to your ancestors, ²³ but they did not listen or obey...

²⁴ "But if you obey me, says the Lord, and do not carry on your trade at the gates or work on the Sabbath day, and if you keep it holy, ²⁵ then kings and their officials will go in and out of these gates forever. There will always be a descendant of David sitting on the throne here in Jerusalem . . .

²⁷ "But if you do not listen to me and refuse to keep the Sabbath holy, and if on the Sabbath day you bring loads of merchandise through the gates of Jerusalem just as on other days, then I will set fire to these gates. The fire will spread to the palaces, and no one will be able to put out the roaring flames."

Ezekiel 22:8 You despise my holy things and violate my Sabbath days of rest . . . ²⁶ Your priests have violated my instructions and defiled my holy things. They make no distinction between what is holy and what is not. And they do not teach my people the difference between what is ceremonially clean and unclean. They disregard my Sabbath days so that I am dishonored among them.

While in this present day we usually aren't tempted to fashion idol gods out of wood or metal, we can be tempted to create in our minds what we think God is - instead of allowing God to reveal Himself to us. God cannot be fashioned by the hand of man - or the mind of man.

Now back to Leviticus 26:

Promises of Blessings for the Nation of Israel

Leviticus 26:3 (NLT) "If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, ⁴ I will send you the seasonal rains. The land will then yield its crops, and the trees of the field will produce their fruit. ⁵ Your threshing season will overlap with the grape harvest, and your grape harvest will overlap with the season of planting grain. You will eat your fill and live securely in your own land.

⁶ "I will give you peace in the land, and you will be able to sleep with no cause for fear. I will rid the land of wild animals and keep your enemies out of your land. ⁷ In fact, you will chase down your enemies and slaughter them with your swords. ⁸ Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand! All your enemies will fall beneath your sword.

⁹ "I will look favorably upon you, making you fertile and multiplying your people. And I will fulfill my covenant with you. ¹⁰ You will have such a surplus of crops that you will need to clear out the old grain to make room for the new harvest! ¹¹ I will live among you, and I will not despise you. ¹² I will walk among you; I will be your God, and you will be my people. ¹³ I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt so you would no longer be their slaves. I broke the yoke of slavery from your neck so you can walk with your heads held high.

God was going to give His people the land of Canaan - which would be known in the future as the Land of Israel (Eretz Yisrael). Ezekiel 5:5 says, "*. . . I placed her at the center of the nations.*" This land is the bridge connecting the continents of Europe, Africa, and Asia. Because of the location of her land, Israel would have ample opportunity to be a light and an example to all nations. If His people would obey His commands and decrees, God would bless them and the land with abundance.

Deuteronomy 11:10 For the land you are about to enter and take over is not like the land of Egypt from which you came, where you planted your seed and made irrigation ditches with your foot as in a

vegetable garden. ¹¹ Rather, the land you will soon take over is a land of hills and valleys with plenty of rain— ¹² a land that the Lord your God cares for. He watches over it through each season of the year!

¹³ "If you carefully obey the commands I am giving you today, and if you love the Lord your God and serve him with all your heart and soul, ¹⁴ then he will send the rains in their proper seasons—the early and late rains—so you can bring in your harvests of grain, new wine, and olive oil. ¹⁵ He will give you lush pastureland for your livestock, and you yourselves will have all you want to eat.

¹⁶ "But be careful. Don't let your heart be deceived so that you turn away from the Lord and serve and worship other gods. ¹⁷ If you do, the Lord's anger will burn against you. He will shut up the sky and hold back the rain, and the ground will fail to produce its harvests. Then you will quickly die in that good land the Lord is giving you.

There is something special about this land that they are going to possess. In the Old Testament, the promised land is called "*a good land*" sixteen times, and it is described as "*a land flowing with milk and honey*" twenty-three times. But the land will not be special without its special inhabitants. The Israelites were given a mission by God to serve and obey Him in the land. This would show the world what God is like. If they fail in this mission, they will lose the land.

The most disgraceful thing for the Jewish people in the future would be to be separated from their land, or exiled. In history, when the Jewish people are exiled or taken out of the land, this is called the *Diaspora*, which means "dispersion."

As we study the Old Testament, we are mostly studying the people of Israel in their land. The drama of the books of the Old Testament concerns going to the land, their activity in the land - and later, their exile from the land.

The land of Israel in Old Testament days was a prosperous and fertile land. The Jewish historian, Josephus (who lived during the first century) wrote concerning the Galilee area:

"For the whole area is excellent for crops and pasturage and rich in trees of every kind, so that by its fertility it invites even those least inclined to work on the land. In fact, every inch of it has been cultivated by the inhabitants and not a parcel goes to waste. It is thickly covered with towns, and thanks to the natural abundance of the soil, the many villages are so densely populated that the smallest of them has more than fifteen thousand inhabitants."

After the nation of Israel was judged by God in 70 A.D. (the Romans systematically conquered the land, killing many and making slaves of most of those who remained), the Diaspora began and the Jewish people who remained were scattered over the earth to live in other nations. From that time, the land became desolate, unable to grow much of anything. During the next 1800 years or so, numerous empires have conquered the land, and many wars were fought for its possession. Yet, no conqueror ever succeeded in permanently settling the land, nor were they ever able to restore it to its former state of fertility.

When the famous American author, Mark Twain, visited Palestine in 1867, he stated: "*We traversed some miles of desolate country whose soil is rich enough but is given wholly to weeds – a silent mournful expanse... A desolation is here that not even imagination can grace with the pomp of life and action. The further we went the hotter the sun got and the more rocky and bare. Repulsive and dreary the landscape became.*" Prof. Sir John William Dosson, in 1888, wrote: "*Until today no*

people has succeeded in establishing national dominion in the land of Israel....No national unity or spirit of nationalism has acquired any hold there. The mixed multitude of itinerant tribes that managed to settle there did so on lease, as temporary residents. It seems that they await the return of the permanent residents of the land."

God was going to bless the Land of Israel when its rightful owners resided there. If they were gone, the land would be barren waiting for their return. During the time between 70 A.D. and the early 20th century, much of the land became desert and swamps. The Jews began to trickle into the land at the end of the 1800's and the early 1900's. After Israel became a nation in 1948, the land began to "blossom like a rose" (Isaiah 35:1). Swamps were drained, ridding the area of malaria and producing fertile fields for crops. Deserts have been reclaimed and are now being cultivated. What has happened to the land of Israel since the Jews have returned is nothing less than miraculous. Millions of trees have been planted which has had an effect on the climate.

Now let's read the curses upon the people of Israel and the land for their refusal to obey God:

Punishments for Disobedience

Leviticus 26:14 (NLT) "However, if you do not listen to me or obey all these commands, ¹⁵ and if you break my covenant by rejecting my decrees, treating my regulations with contempt, and refusing to obey my commands, ¹⁶ I will punish you. I will bring sudden terrors upon you—wasting diseases and burning fevers that will cause your eyes to fail and your life to ebb away. You will plant your crops in vain because your enemies will eat them. ¹⁷ I will turn against you, and you will be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you will rule over you, and you will run even when no one is chasing you!

Disease and defeat by their enemies...

¹⁸ "And if, in spite of all this, you still disobey me, I will punish you seven times over for your sins. ¹⁹ I will break your proud spirit by making the skies as unyielding as iron and the earth as hard as bronze. ²⁰ All your work will be for nothing, for your land will yield no crops, and your trees will bear no fruit.

No rain...

²¹ "If even then you remain hostile toward me and refuse to obey me, I will inflict disaster on you seven times over for your sins. ²² I will send wild animals that will rob you of your children and destroy your livestock. Your numbers will dwindle, and your roads will be deserted.

Wild animals...

²³ "And if you fail to learn the lesson and continue your hostility toward me, ²⁴ then I myself will be hostile toward you. I will personally strike you with calamity seven times over for your sins. ²⁵ I will send armies against you to carry out the curse of the covenant you have broken. When you run to your towns for safety, I will send a plague to destroy you there, and you will be handed over to your enemies. ²⁶ I will destroy your food supply, so that ten women will need only one oven to bake bread for their families. They will ration your food by weight, and though you have food to eat, you will not be satisfied.

War, plague, famine...

²⁷ "If in spite of all this you still refuse to listen and still remain hostile toward me, ²⁸ then I will give full vent to my hostility. I myself will punish you seven times over for your sins. ²⁹ Then you will eat the flesh of your own sons and daughters. ³⁰ I will destroy your pagan shrines and knock down your places of worship. I will leave your lifeless corpses piled on top of your lifeless idols, and I will despise you. ³¹ I will make your cities desolate and destroy your places of pagan worship. I will take no pleasure in your offerings that should be a pleasing aroma to me. ³² Yes, I myself will devastate your land, and your enemies who come to occupy it will be appalled at what they see. ³³ I will scatter you among the nations and bring out my sword against you. Your land will become desolate, and your cities will lie in ruins. ³⁴ Then at last the land will enjoy its neglected Sabbath years as it lies desolate while you are in exile in the land of your enemies. Then the land will finally rest and enjoy the Sabbaths it missed. ³⁵ As long as the land lies in ruins, it will enjoy the rest you never allowed it to take every seventh year while you lived in it.

Extreme hunger, scattered among nations, land desolate...

³⁶ "And for those of you who survive, I will demoralize you in the land of your enemies. You will live in such fear that the sound of a leaf driven by the wind will send you fleeing. You will run as though fleeing from a sword, and you will fall even when no one pursues you. ³⁷ Though no one is chasing you, you will stumble over each other as though fleeing from a sword. You will have no power to stand up against your enemies. ³⁸ You will die among the foreign nations and be devoured in the land of your enemies. ³⁹ Those of you who survive will waste away in your enemies' lands because of their sins and the sins of their ancestors.

Captivity in a foreign land...

Just as the blessings were magnified by the hand of God, the curses upon the disobedient were magnified. The progression of rebellion is seen above. God would bring curses slowly to a disobedient Israel, asking for repentance through His prophets. If Israel would not repent, then the curses would intensify. However, God does not say that He will forsake Israel:

⁴⁰ "But at last my people will confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors for betraying me and being hostile toward me. ⁴¹ When I have turned their hostility back on them and brought them to the land of their enemies, then at last their stubborn hearts will be humbled, and they will pay for their sins. ⁴² Then I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. ⁴³ For the land must be abandoned to enjoy its years of Sabbath rest as it lies deserted. At last the people will pay for their sins, for they have continually rejected my regulations and despised my decrees.

⁴⁴ "But despite all this, I will not utterly reject or despise them while they are in exile in the land of their enemies. I will not cancel my covenant with them by wiping them out, for I am the Lord their God. ⁴⁵ For their sakes I will remember my ancient covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of all the nations, that I might be their God. I am the Lord."

⁴⁶ These are the decrees, regulations, and instructions that the Lord gave through Moses on Mount Sinai as evidence of the relationship between himself and the Israelites.

No matter how cursed Israel might be, God would always hear their cries of repentance and turn their curses to blessings when they repent.

The Law and New Testament Believers

Jesus Christ came to fulfill the Law of the Old Testament. He said, *Do not think that I came to destroy the Law or the Prophets. I did not come to destroy but*

to fulfill. Jesus Christ did just that. The Old Testament Law is fulfilled in Him. The Old Testament Law was written on stone tablets, but the Law of life in Christ Jesus is written on our hearts through the infilling of the Holy Spirit. The 613 laws of the Old Testament have been condensed to two - *“love the Lord your God with all your heart, with all your soul, with all your mind, and with all your strength...love your neighbor as yourself”* (Mark 12:30-31). The Old Testament Law is still there in a sense, but it is in Jesus Christ. That is why we need Him. We need a blood sacrifice for sin - it's Jesus. We need a burnt offering - it's Jesus. We need a grain offering - it's Jesus. We need a High Priest - it's Jesus. We need a Sabbath of rest - it's through the Spirit of Jesus. We don't need idols, we need Jesus. We need the mind of Christ.

As New Testament Christians, God has placed us in this world to be a light. Jesus said in Matthew 5:16, *Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works and glorify your Father in heaven.* There is tremendous blessing when we glorify God and worship Him in Spirit and in truth. When we receive the Holy Ghost of God, Jesus begins that process of making us more like Him. It is the life of the Spirit that brings us into that wonderful relationship with God. Read what Paul wrote concerning the Old Testament Law contrasted with the New Testament life in the Spirit:

2 Corinthians 3:6 (NLT) He has enabled us to be ministers of his new covenant. This is a covenant not of written laws, but of the Spirit. The old written covenant ends in death; but under the new covenant, the Spirit gives life.

⁷ The old way, with laws etched in stone, led to death, though it began with such glory that the people of Israel could not bear to look at Moses' face. For his face shone with the glory of God... ⁹ If the old way, which brings condemnation, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new way, which makes us right with God!...¹¹ So if the old way, which has been replaced, was glorious, how much more glorious is the new, which remains forever!

¹² Since this new way gives us such confidence, we can be very bold. ¹³ We are not like Moses, who put a veil over his face so the people of Israel would not see the glory, even though it was destined to fade away. ¹⁴ But the people's minds were hardened, and to this day whenever the old covenant is being read, the same veil covers their minds so they cannot understand the truth...

¹⁶ But whenever someone turns to the Lord, the veil is taken away. ¹⁷ For the Lord is the Spirit, and wherever the Spirit of the Lord is, there is freedom. ¹⁸ So all of us who have had that veil removed can see and reflect the glory of the Lord. And the Lord—who is the Spirit—makes us more and more like him as we are changed into his glorious image.