

## The Message America Needs

January 3, 2020 – Leviticus 26

*"We praise Thee, O God! For the Son of Thy love, For Jesus Who died and is now gone above. Hallelujah! Thine the glory, Hallelujah! Amen. Hallelujah! Thine the glory, Revive us again!"*

**\*Our prayer in 2021 is Ps. 85: a greater work of God (Revival) in our hearts, church, and nation**

\*Happy NY & welcome, in person and online, as we finally say **goodbye** to 2020 and **hello** to 2021.

**\*Last year had its challenges, but it also had its blessings, teaching us: greater dependence on God's Spirit; greater surrender to God's plan; and a greater trust in God's promises.**

\*One thing our leadership is thankful for is how **God blessed and protected New Hope in 2020.**

\*Since **Covid started** 42 Sundays ago, we not only remained open, but have seen the gospel flourish, our ministry expand, and remarkable generosity pour out for the sake of Jesus.

**\*Tomorrow we have the joy of mailing out over \$175k to mission partners (local/global).**

\*Today we take a **one week break from Isaiah**, and turn to: **Leviticus!**

\*This sermon has been baking **"in the oven"** for **9 months...**and it's **time to give birth.**

\*God first stirred my heart with this passage in April at the beginning of our economic shaking.

\*Even early on, it seemed that our country was entering a **prolonged period of testing**, and that **behind all the visible realities** stands an **invisible God** who is trying to get our nations' attention

\*I've **talked about it** to family, friends, and staff. I **almost preached it** last April...May...and June.

\*I believed then (and more now) **we are seeing the events of Lev. 26 unfold before our eyes** again in our own time, but I held off...processing...and waiting for the right time.

\*That time is now. It's time to look behind the veil of 2020 and ask: **"What is God up to?"**

\*This Scripture is **old**, but **relevant**. (A reminder that **all Scripture (even Lev.)** is inspired & useful.)

\*It is **lengthy**, but it is **clear**, very easily understood in **1/3rds. (IF/THEN thirds)**

**\*First 1/3 (Good): IF they obey, THEN God promises great blessings** (personal and national).

**\*Second 1/3 (Hard): IF they do not listen, THEN God promises painful consequences.** (P&N)

**\*Third 1/3 (Great): IF they confess sin & turn back, THEN God promises they will find mercy.**

**Turn to Leviticus 26: A Message America Needs.**

### **1. Our Lord blesses obedience, (v.1-13)**

*"You shall not make idols...I am the Lord your God. You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary; I am the Lord." (v.1-2)*

\*This declaration ("**I am the Lord**") forms **bookends** to the chapter: **beginning (v.2) and end (v.45).**

\*Everything God says is based on 1 central issue: **He is God and we should listen.** (still applies)

\*From here, everything gets “**IFFY**”. (God says “**IF**” 9x, followed by “**I will**” 24x.)

\***Jiffy P.B. Logo.** One Commentator: “*This is an ‘iffy’ chapter.*”

\*God promises certain things will happen (**nationally & personally**) based on their actions.

\***First 1/3: GOOD NEWS.** (What would happen to the nation IF they obeyed the Lord?)

“**IF YOU** walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, **THEN I WILL...** (v.3)

“I will...And I will...” (v.6)

“I will...” (v.9)

“I will...” (v.11)

“And I will...” (v.12)

\*We use “**IF/Then**” framework **all the time in life; business, parenting, economy.**

\***IF certain conditions** are met, **THEN** something happens (I used it yesterday on my daughter: “*If you clean out moms closet and purge...Then I will give you \$20.*”

\*In the same way, God promises **IF** people obey Him, **THEN He would give divine stimulus.**

\***What the Divine Stimulus looked like?**

- **Agricultural Flourishing** = abundant rain, harvest, and food. (Restaurants open)! (v.4-5)
- **Political Security** = borders secure; people dwell in safety/peace; no fear of danger. (v.5-8)
- **Physical Health** = life would prosper; the population would be *fruitful and multiply* (v.9)
- **National Abundance** = pictured by **full food pantries!** They would still be *eating last years’ harvest when they have to move it out and make room for new!* (v.10)

\*IOW: God’s blessings would be seen in visible, material abundance on life and culture.

\***The mood of culture.** v.13: “...enabled you to walk with **heads held high.**” (What a joy!)

\*There was no mistake: Behind the **material blessings** was the **presence of the Living God.**

“I will **make my dwelling** among you...And I will **walk among you** and will be your God, and you shall be my people.” (v.11-12)

\*Without getting into the weeds of confusion, **here are basic principles on Blessings:**

- *God still blesses obedience.*
- *Some of God’s blessings are “Iffy.”* (Conditional: “If” we do things.)
- *God’s blessings can be enjoyed by both people and nations.*
- *Great discernment is needed on how God gives blessings today. (Material vs. Spiritual)*

\*The central issue: **Are you making daily choices worthy of receiving God’s blessings?**

2. **...and sin has consequences,** (v. 14-39)

\***Second 1/3: Hard News.** (What would happen to the nation IF the people did not listen to God?)

\*These 26 verses describe the **downward trajectory** of the people & nation:

- **Why it happens? Defiance.**

\*There is a **5-fold pattern of defiance that causes the nation to enter a tailspin:**

*“But **if** you will not listen to me...**then I will...**” (v.14-17)*

*“And **if** in spite of this you will not listen to me...**then I will...**” (v.18-20)*

*“Then **if** you walk contrary to me and will not listen to me, **I will...**” (v.21-22)*

*“And **if** by this discipline you are not turned to me...**then I will...**” (v.23-26)*

*“But **if** in spite of this you will not listen to me...**then I will...**” (v.27-33)*

\*Each time they disobey, the **consequences get bigger, deeper, stronger.**

\*God seems to be **giving them over to greater degrees of discipline to get their attention.**

\*And yet they remain defiant, stubborn, and resistant.

\*Isn't human nature amazing? Some people, even when they face **awful consequences or discipline for bad choices**, still refuse to change their ways.

- **What it looks like? Downfall.**

\*Like JENGA, their choices eventually catch up to them & the whole economy craters.

\*I liken the disaster to **5 Categories of a hurricane**, each category causing more damage:

**Category 1: Personal Fear (v.14-17)**

*“I will visit you with panic, with wasting disease and fever...and **make the heart ache...those who hate you shall rule over you...**”*

\*Widespread **physical sickness** and **mental disease** create elevated levels of anxiety.

\***Two issues** caused great fear in the human heart: **personal sickness & political ruin.**

**Category 2: Political Chaos (v.18-20)**

*“I will **break the pride of your power...your strength shall be spent in vain...your land shall not yield its increase...**”*

\*Political power, once strong, is broken. **The economy**, once **flourishing**, now **flounders**

\*No matter how much **money/time they throw at the problem**, nothing seems to work.

\*The problem is: **No nation can solve a spiritual problem using political muscle.**

**Category 3: Social Isolation (v.21-22)**

*“...your **roads shall be deserted.**”*

\***Roadways** are abandoned. **Highways** are unoccupied. **Streets** are empty.

\*Why? People are forced to stay home because life is dangerous. Potential risks.

\*Notice, this is one way that **God's correction of culture** would be seen: Isolation.

#### **Category 4: National Oppression (v.23-26)**

*"If you gather within your cities, I will send pestilence among you...When I break your supply of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in a single oven...and you shall eat and not be satisfied."*

\*What a contrast to the **full food pantries!** The supply chain of food is broken. The people face economic hardship. The nation feels the oppression.

\*I'm sure **smart people** tried to offer their **solutions to the problems:**

*"If we just offered a bigger stimulus package..."*

*"If we just taxed the wealthy more..."*

*"If we just had better health care..."*

\*But those things were not the issue. The problem was: they were not listening to God

#### **Category 5: Cultural Devastation (v.27-33)**

*"I will lay your cities waste and will make your sanctuaries desolate...I myself will devastate the land...I will scatter you among the nations..."*

\***Jenga! Cities and streets** intended to flourish with **community celebration** are empty.

\***Sanctuaries** intended to flourish with **gathered praise**, are desolate.

\***What a strange feeling recently to walk downtown and see empty streets & locked stores.**

\***What a strange experience to preach Easter Sunday (+ 11 more) in an empty sanctuary.**

\*What is going on here? Some point to various social issues as the problem...but I'm convinced the real issue is behind all of that: **America is not listening to God.**

\*Some **look at the 5 Categories** and wonder **"Where is America at?"** (Not entirely sure.)

\*But regardless of where we are at, our culture should heed the words of Hebrews:

*"Today, if you hear His voice, do not harden your hearts **as in the rebellion.**" (Heb. 3:15)*

- **What God is doing? Discipline.**

\*Behind the **national downfall** it is clear that they are experiencing **divine discipline.**

*"I will discipline you again sevenfold for your sins..." (v.18)*

*"I will continue striking you sevenfold for your sins..." (v.21)*

*"I myself will strike you sevenfold for your sins..." (v.24)*

*"I myself will discipline you sevenfold for your sins..." (v.28)*

\*It's a rare usage of the #7, indicating a perfect amount of discipline, multiplied, over & over.

\*A NH man texted me this week after having read this passage:

*"People can't imagine what God's anger will do. He says He will increase the punishment 7x7x7x7. That is a lot of misery piling up...The question is: **how many 7's will it take for this nation to turn back to God?**"*

\*That is the question for **Israel & America**: If we keep suffering for our choices, and remain defiant against Him, what will it take to get us to turn around?

• **What is the result? Desolation. (v.34-39)**

*"Then the land shall **enjoy its Sabbaths** as long as it lies desolate...then **the land shall rest**, and enjoy its Sabbaths. As long as it lies desolate, **it shall have rest**, the rest that it did not have on your Sabbaths when you were dwelling in it."*

\*IOW: **God shuts the whole thing down**. Everything in the land goes quiet. God **evicts the stubborn tenants (490 years; 70x7's)** and finally the land enters a season of rest.

\*I find it fascinating how our entire nation has been "**forced into rest.**"

\*Admittedly, some people **love it**...but by and large people feel **restricted; punished**.

\*Teens **BEG to go back to school**. **Restaurants are punished if they open**.

\*What is going on? Perhaps it's a **little taste** of how bad things could get if we remain defiant

\*Listen: **God will have His way. His purposes will prevail. The Lord will be glorified.**

3. **...but mercy never expires! (v.40-46)**

**\*The Last 1/3: Hopeful NEWS.**

\*The IFFY passage now brings hope back alive by ending with great words of promise:

*"But **IF they confess** their iniquity...**IF** then their uncircumcised **heart is humbled**...**THEN I will** remember my covenant with Jacob, **and I will** remember my covenant with Isaac **and** my covenant with Abraham, **and I will** remember the land...**I will** for their sake remember the covenant...that I might be their God: I am the Lord."*

\*The **ray of hope** pierces into the darkness of defeat...and the mercy of God shines bright!

\*Hope: No matter how defiant the people have been, or far the nation has strayed, IF they turn back, God's mercy has not expired.

\*If they confess their sins, Then God will forgive them.

\*If they humble themselves and draw near to God, God will draw near to them.

\*Notice the **strange order** of the covenant (Jacob, Isaac, Abraham) is **reversed**...as if to say that God will also **reverse the discipline, rewind the plagues, and restore the nation**.

## Action Steps:

### **Call on God...TODAY.**

*"TODAY if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts..."*

\*TODAY! Not tomorrow, not next week. But reverse course today!

\*Perhaps you are tasting the consequences of sin. Perhaps God has been trying to get your attention. Call upon Him today. Run to the cross. Trust Christ as Lord. His mercy never expires.

### **Make daily choices worthy of Gods blessings.**

\*v.3 still applies: "**IF YOU** walk in my statutes and observe my commandments, **THEN I WILL...**"

\*Blessings follow obedience.

### **Be a "Daniel" in the midst of Babylon.**

\*Daniel "**resolved (determined) that he would not defile himself.**" (Dan. 1:8)

\*It is possible to live in a wicked culture **resolved/determined** to be a man/woman of God.

\*You can be a godly teen, when nobody else at school is. You can make godly choices, when nobody else in culture is. But it starts with personal resolve and humble prayer.

### **Pray for revival, but prepare for hardship.**

*"See that you are not alarmed, for **this must take place**, but the end is not yet."* (Matt 24:6)

\*What direction will America head? Will we see **revival or downfall**? The verdict is still out.

\*We pray for Revival. That God would revive the hearts of our nation (**Tuesday prayer**)

\*But, know this: If we are anything like Israel, **personal defiance** may lead to **national downfall**.

\*If that occurs, believers must be prepared to endure it with hope & confidence in a risen Savior

### **"If you are smarter, you'll learn earlier."**

\*Back in April, I talked over this passage on a bike ride with Kevin. Here's his take:

*"The 1st thing is "I am the Lord your God." I think that simple statement and the gravity of it can get lost. It is very, very heavy! 2<sup>nd</sup>, is how stupid can we as humans be! The answers and solutions are given to us. Simple enough for a 5th grader to get, yet we are hard-hearted and hard-headed enough to refuse God's authority. 3<sup>rd</sup>, is that God's chastening seems to come in escalating increments. He will do what it take to bring us back to him. **If we were smarter we would learn earlier.** My Dad's saying is: "Take your whipping early" and move on!"*

**Hear this:** "Our Lord blesses obedience, and sin has consequences, but mercy never expires."