

## HOLY LIVING

### Leviticus 26:1-13

At the start of this study of Leviticus we did a brief and simple exercise regarding what one word or one phrase we might use today to describe or characterize the church. As we conclude this series, another simple exercise might help us gain some insight about the overall message of Leviticus. What would most people think about you when they hear your name? Another way to think about this is to ask “what is the most significant thing about any person?” Answers might range anywhere from a person’s profession (builder, baker, or candlestick maker), family relationships (mom, dad, or child), race (red, yellow, black or white), nationality, religion, political ideology, and any number of things which people might use to categorize themselves or others.

The answers we think about may be influenced somewhat by the scope of our perspective in that a narrow perspective limited to this point in time and this particular area in which we live might be different from what we would have if we took a broader or more long-range view. In an ultimate sense the most significant thing would come down to the answer to the question of “to whom do you belong?” A more conventional way of asking that same question is “Who or what is your god?” The importance of the answer to this question is seen when we consider that we eventually become like whatever is really our god and that our god is whatever we serve.

Many have noted that Leviticus can be characterized as the handbook of holiness and some have noted that the final 40 percent of the book (starting in chapter seventeen) is called the “Holiness Code” that gives many details of the expectations of God for His people. In fact, throughout the accounts of the dealings that God had with Israel, He identified Himself as “the Lord your God.” Since God views Himself as the Lord God of Israel, then it would have been wise for Israel to view themselves as the people of the Lord God. As the New Israel of God, we (the church) should take that same view of ourselves. The concluding remarks of this book are related to the consequences of doing (or not doing) things according to the requirements of the One we recognize as Lord.

#### Faithfulness – 26:1-2

<sup>1</sup> “You shall not make idols for yourselves or erect an image or pillar, and you shall not set up a figured stone in your land to bow down to it, for I am the LORD your God. <sup>2</sup> You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD. Leviticus 26:1–2 (ESV)

This epilogue starts out with a reminder of the vertical relationship that the people had agreed to when God proposed a unique arrangement (covenant) with them after He had delivered them from slavery in Egypt. In the first two verses of chapter twenty-six we see a summary of the precepts of the first four commandments. It was because of this relationship that they could enjoy the benefits and blessing of being a peculiar people who belonged to YHWH. In this relationship the people of Israel were unique in that no other people group on the earth had this arrangement. The relationship was also unique in that the people were to worship, serve, obey, follow and deal only with YHWH.

#### Blessings – 26:3-8

<sup>3</sup> “If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, <sup>4</sup> then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. <sup>5</sup> Your threshing shall last to the time of the grape harvest, and the grape harvest shall last to the time for sowing. And you shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land securely. <sup>6</sup> I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. And I will remove harmful beasts from the land, and the sword shall not go through your land. <sup>7</sup> You shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. <sup>8</sup> Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a

hundred of you shall chase ten thousand, and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. Leviticus 26:3–8 (ESV)

The main and most important reason that we should live our lives in accordance with the will of God as revealed in the commandments and statutes is because of “who He is” as seen in the first two verses of this chapter.

Most of us have a tendency to view this passage (Leviticus 26 and 27) and the parallel passage in Deuteronomy 28 and 29 as a treatise on “rewards and punishment.” The consequence of such a perspective is a “carrot and stick” approach to life and a distortion of our interactions with God. This produces a somewhat juvenile or maybe an infantile reaction or response to life events. This way of thinking leads to self-centeredness in that we behave in such a way to maximize the “carrot” and minimize the “stick” so that we can have more enjoyment in life. In other words, it is all about us and what’s in it for me.

This approach to life is something that we would characterize as a “natural” thing for people to do. That is a good description of it. It is what we have come to expect from the “natural man” or those who are of the world. The use of this “natural” tendency is in common practice in the church. We hear messages that we should tithe because we want to “enjoy the rewards” that come to us when God opens the windows of heaven and pours out blessings. I recently read a statement from a pastor’s comments on the Day of Atonement that said “the more we prepare ourselves for worship, the more we are likely to receive from worship.” If “enjoyment of rewards” and “receiving something from worship” are typical of what motivates us, then we will find ourselves trying to manipulate God or “make a deal” with Him.

To think that we can earn rewards from God by obedience to His commandments and precepts is parallel to the idea that we can earn salvation by good works. A subtle change in terminology from “reward and punishment” to “blessing and discipline” can help us properly think about what is involved in living as the people of God.

God’s blessing is simply a part of what being the “covenant people of God” is about. It is not something that is earned but it is intrinsic to the covenant that God has with His people that we first saw starting with Abraham and promised to his descendants (those who have the faith of Abraham). Access to the blessing (which has multiple expressions of benefits) can be experienced only when those for whom the blessing was intended are abiding under the provisions of the covenant. That is the message of verse three. We can know all about the statutes and the commandments and fail put them into practice in what we do. That failure will produce the same outcome as might be expected for those who are not covenant people of God.

This idea is expressed in the opening verses of Psalms 90 and 91. Most agree that Moses wrote Psalm 90 and some will argue that he also penned Psalm 91. The first verse of Psalm 90 tells us that God has been our dwelling place or refuge in all generations. The first two verses of Psalm 91 tell us “He who dwells in the shelter of the Most High will abide in the shadow of the Almighty. I will say of the LORD, ‘He is my refuge and my fortress, my God, in whom I trust.’” If a person who is protected from the intense heat of the sun by dwelling in the shelter that provides shade leaves that shelter, then he will experience the burning effects of the sun. In a similar way, abiding under the covenant provides protection from the hazards of a fallen world and human wickedness.

Moses mentioned four general areas of daily living that the benefits of the blessing from God would be seen. The first was in their ability to make a living and provide food for themselves. Since their economy would be agriculturally based, the land that grew their crops would be productive and that would require timely rains. Their harvests would be more than sufficient to the extent that they would not get their grains processed before it was time to pick

grapes and the processing of the grapes would not get completed before it time to plant something else. This benefit would be part of what might have been meant when God promised that He would make Abraham to be a great nation. For a nation to be great, it would need to be able to provide abundant food for the people.

The second benefit was related to security and the ability to have peaceful lives could also be thought to be part of what being a “great nation” meant. Dangers were all around from enemy nations that were essentially terrorists and there were wild animals that could be a threat to people who were not protected and to their herds and flocks. The solution was to rid the land of lions, bears, and wolves that would pose a danger for both people and their domesticated animals. If they were attacked, then they would be given success in conquering the attackers. They saw this part of the promise in action as they moved into the Land of Canaan and were able to conquer those who had been living in the land. They also saw the consequences of what would happen when there was sin among the people in the defeat they suffered at the battle of Ai because of the sin of Achan.

### Fellowship – 26:9-13

<sup>9</sup> I will turn to you and make you fruitful and multiply you and will confirm my covenant with you. <sup>10</sup> You shall eat old store long kept, and you shall clear out the old to make way for the new. <sup>11</sup> I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. <sup>12</sup> And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. <sup>13</sup> I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves. And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect. Leviticus 26:9–13 (ESV)

The third general area was related to population growth and to becoming more numerous. This was part of the promise that God had made to Abraham that his descendants would be as numerous as the stars in the heavens. Having big families was considered a blessing from the Lord.

The fourth benefit mentioned was that God would live in their midst and walk among them. The first part of this was likely a reference to the formal dwelling place of God in the Tabernacle. This should have given them confidence in their interactions with other people and as they went about the routine activities of daily living. The benefit of “walking among them” seems to imply a closer and more intimate relationship with them that would be available wherever they might be and was not limited to the rituals that were carried out in the Tabernacle. We could make a case that this fourth benefit forms the foundation of all other benefits that are available to those who belong to the Lord. Being constantly aware of the presence of the Lord in our lives is the key to practical holy living.

Warren Wiersbe commented that as children of God, we already have everything we need for “life and godliness” (2 Peter 1:3), because we now possess “every spiritual blessing in Christ” (Eph. 1:3, NIV). But to possess these blessings is one thing; to enjoy them is quite something else. As we trust God’s promises and obey His commandments, we draw upon our spiritual inheritance and are able to walk successfully and serve effectively. Like the nation of Israel in Canaan, we have battles to fight and work to do. As we walk in obedience to the Lord, He enables us to overcome the enemy, claim the land, and enjoy its blessings.

Failure to walk in the statutes of God and disregard of His commandments result in God doing things to discipline us to bring us back to the place where the blessings are found. The disciplines are usually interpreted as God’s judgments which are thought of as punishments. It would be better if we thought of them as warnings that are meant to get our attention and make needed corrections in our lives that will bring us back into alignment with God and His values.

If we are driving down the road and the vehicle drifts over onto the shoulder of the road,

then the results of the rough surface are immediately felt and the bumpy ride gives us a signal to make a correction. Most of the time we don't even have to think about what to do to get back on the paved driving surface. There are consequences and sometimes a price to pay that come from leaving the approved way. If you happen to hit a pot hole (at 60 mph) in the shoulder area you may be buying a new tire and rim for your car.

There are some who might choose to leave the paved road and deliberately venture off the approved path and find themselves in areas that get them into big trouble such as might result from trespassing or breaking the traffic laws.

In a similar way, we can ignore the life paths that God has provided for His people and find ourselves in a heap of trouble. When that happens, God will provide incentives to help us realize that we are on the wrong road that leads away from fellowship with Him and that we need to get back to the safe places that are available under the covenant.

Some will argue that Leviticus applies only to Israel and not to the church; however, there are some violations of basic principles that can be seen to be happening in our nation which certainly parallel what Moses told Israel to avoid doing.

We need to also keep in mind that all the things that have happened in the past are beneficial to us if we will be open and learn from them. Paul wrote in 1 Corinthians 10:11 "Now these things happened to them as an example, but they were written down for our instruction, on whom the end of the ages has come."