



Leaves From the Tree

Studies from God's Word

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



LEVITICUS 21 - 27

Leviticus 21

21:1-6 - "Then the LORD said to Moses, "Speak to the priests, the sons of Aaron, and say to them: 'No one shall defile himself for a dead person among his people, except for his relatives who are nearest to him, his mother and his father and his son and his daughter and his brother, also for his virgin sister, who is near to him because she has had no husband; for her he may defile himself. He shall not defile himself as a relative by marriage among his people, and so profane himself. They shall not make any baldness on their heads, nor shave off the edges of their beards, nor make any cuts in their flesh. They shall be holy to their God and not profane the name of their God, for they present the offerings by fire to the LORD, the food of their God; so they shall be holy.'"

This chapter continues the section concerned with holiness laws covering the behaviors and conditions that would defile God's people. In the previous chapter the guidelines applied to all of God's holy nation. Now in this chapter these laws only apply to those who are set apart as Levitical priests, and starting in verse 10 only apply to the high priest. This set of three distinct holiness requirements for these three groups within Israel corresponds to the three areas of proximity to the Lord as represented in the tabernacle. There are actually four areas of proximity to the Lord shown in the tabernacle if we include the world of Gentiles outside of covenant relationship with the Lord. They would be allowed to come only to the outer curtain of the courtyard of the tabernacle. All of Israel could come one step closer to the Lord and enter inside the courtyard to offer the sacrifices at the altar. Then, only the Levitical priests could enter into the actual tent of the tabernacle into the outer room called the Holy Place. Finally, only the high priest was allowed into the inner room called the Holy of Holies into the direct presence of the Lord at the ark of the covenant.

These sets of holiness laws were in a sense the qualifications that must be maintained by each group within Israel in order to maintain their right of access into the area of the tabernacle allowed to their group. Membership in that group was not sufficient to maintain access. Each group was required to obey these standards in these laws or else forfeit their access to the Lord's presence. In this section the Levitical priests were not allowed to participate in certain funeral ceremonies or else be ceremonially defiled. They were to refrain from participating in preparing the body for burial of any except the closest family members. The prohibition against baldness, shaving the edges of the beard, or making cuts in their flesh were all also connected to common burial rites of the ancient cultures. Shaving the head and portions of the beard for instance were visible physical expressions of mourning the dead.

It is easy to get sidetracked by the details of these laws that might not make immediate sense to us in our cultural setting today and miss the main point of

why God gave them. The main point was that God was displaying the spiritual principle that our degree of true holiness is established by the nature of our relationship to Him. You and I have zero self generated holiness. All of our holiness is due to our relationship with the Lord Who is the holy One. The closer we are to Him, the greater our reflection of His holiness. We saw this displayed in the experience of Moses. He was granted the privilege of coming closer to the glorious presence of the Lord than anyone else in Israel and when he returned to the people from the Lord's presence, he reflected the glory of the Lord, which is the visible expression of God's holiness, from his face.

The corresponding principle that we are meant to learn from this section of holiness laws is that our behavior can diminish our reflection of God's holiness by exposing ourselves to spiritually defiling elements in the world around us. The great privilege we have been given of access into the presence of the Lord carries with it a corresponding responsibility to honor the Lord's boundaries and to avoid those things in the world that the Lord calls defiling. The Levites could not do as so many Christians do today and presume on the graciousness of God. They could not tell themselves that God understands and then go ahead and give themselves permission to violate the very things God had warned them against.

21:10-15 - "The priest who is the highest among his brothers, on whose head the anointing oil has been poured and who has been consecrated to wear the garments, shall not uncover his head nor tear his clothes; nor shall he approach any dead person, nor defile himself even for his father or his mother; nor shall he go out of the sanctuary nor profane the sanctuary of his God, for the consecration of the anointing oil of his God is on him; I am the LORD. He shall take a wife in her virginity. A widow, or a divorced woman, or one who is profaned by harlotry, these he may not take; but rather he is to marry a virgin of his own people, so that he will not profane his offspring among his people; for I am the LORD who sanctifies him."

This section details the extra high standard of holiness that was required of the high priest. He is "the highest among his brothers." Just like all Israel was held to a higher standard of holy behavior than the Gentiles, and Levitical priests were held to a higher standard of holy behavior than the average Israelite, the high priest was held to a higher standard than the rest of the priests. The general spiritual principle we can derive from this is, "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required;" (Luke 12:48). To those whom God gives greater privileges, He also requires greater responsibility and accountability. The high priest was given the greatest role of leadership in all of Israel. He was also given higher standards of holy behavior.

This was ultimately because the high priest represented Christ. Each high priest in Israel's history stood as a symbol of Christ. The high standard was critical to honor or else the high priest would be saying by his compromised behavior that

Christ was less than perfect. Of course, none of the high priests including Aaron were able to perfectly represent Christ because they were each imperfect men with character flaws and human weaknesses. We are meant to understand though by the highest standard of conduct established by these laws that God intended us to recognize the greater holiness of Christ in this role of high priest, however imperfectly he was represented by the men that held the office of high priest.

Additionally, we can learn from this principle that higher callings in God's kingdom carry a higher standard of accountability to walk in holiness. The passages in I Timothy 3:1-7, and Titus 1:5-9 that detail the qualification standards for those who would serve in the church in the role of elder are examples of this principle. The point is that all Christians are called to holiness and to walk in righteousness, but those who lead the church must be characterized by successfully maintaining those standards of behavior before even entering the office of church leadership.

21:16-23 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to Aaron, saying, 'No man of your offspring throughout their generations who has a defect shall approach to offer the food of his God. For no one who has a defect shall approach: a blind man, or a lame man, or he who has a disfigured face, or any deformed limb, or a man who has a broken foot or broken hand, or a hunchback or a dwarf, or one who has a defect in his eye or eczema or scabs or crushed testicles. No man among the descendants of Aaron the priest who has a defect is to come near to offer the LORD'S offerings by fire; since he has a defect, he shall not come near to offer the food of his God. He may eat the food of his God, both of the most holy and of the holy, only he shall not go in to the veil or come near the altar because he has a defect, so that he will not profane My sanctuaries. For I am the LORD who sanctifies them.'"

This section can be confusing when misread today. It clearly prohibits any Levitical priest who was born with various physical defects and deformities to serve as priests in the tabernacle. There were a total of twelve different types of defects listed and any of them would disqualify the afflicted person from entering the tabernacle. The confusing aspect is that this prohibition seems at first glance to communicate the opposite concern from what we see revealed in the ministry of Jesus. He welcomed and ministered freely to all of the most needy people in Israel. He gave special attention to those who were described in this section such as the time he miraculously healed the man with the withered hand. It seems inconsistent that Jesus was so gracious toward those with these kinds of physical defects, while the Law was so strict on not allowing them access into the tabernacle.

It is not really an inconsistency at all. The ministry of Jesus perfectly expressed God's heart of compassion toward those who are born into this fallen world with

physical deformities. These laws do not reflect God's heart in that way, as if in the Old Testament, the Lord was cold and uncaring, but in the New Testament He is warm and compassionate. The apparent inconsistency is really a confusion of categories and a misunderstanding of Old Testament symbolism. In the Law of God, there are many sections in which the Lord chose to use the physical condition of the human body to symbolically represent the spiritual condition of the heart. In other words, physical deformity symbolized a heart affected by sin. It was necessary to disqualify those who served as priests in the tabernacle who had such physical defects as a representation that those who served God were free from the serious effects of sin. This symbol connects to the New Covenant principle that only those who have been truly born again are identified by God as members of His royal priesthood. The emphasis shifts in the New Testament away from physical condition to spiritual condition.

Questions from Leviticus 20:

Question: 20:27 - Many people, Christians even, believe it is ok to "dabble" in things like enjoying Harry Potter books and movies and other similar things which glorify "white" witchcraft and the occult. Can you comment on how we as Christians should view books and movies like Harry Potter?

Answer: It's a good question that really does deserve a more lengthy answer than I can provide here. I'll try to briefly address the heart of the issue as I see it. The Lord does forbid His people from participating in activities that are often labeled as occult practices, but which are spiritual activities that expose and involve a person to demonic influence if not full blown demonic interaction. The passage you are asking about does address two of those forbidden activities which are mediums and spiritists. However, from what I know about the Harry Potter books and movies, the spiritual activities portrayed in them are of a different forbidden category. This passage from Deuteronomy deals with the specific kind of occult practice that Harry Potter describes.

"There shall not be found among you anyone who makes his son or his daughter pass through the fire, one who uses divination, one who practices witchcraft, or one who interprets omens, or a sorcerer, or one who casts a spell, or a medium, or a spiritist, or one who calls up the dead. For whoever does these things is detestable to the LORD; and because of these detestable things the LORD your God will drive them out before you." (Deuteronomy 18:10-12). Harry Potter is a witch or sorcerer who practices spell casting. In defense of the books and movies, the power that Harry uses is never portrayed as demonic or arising from demonic contact, although he often fights against those. Instead the power is portrayed as arising from within himself and useful as long as he uses his powers for the cause of good.

The problem from a Biblical perspective is that witches and sorcerers are always expressions of evil and the powers associated with them always arising from

demonic contact. You could try and make a case as some have that it is only a fantasy and that the normal rules of God's standards don't apply in the fantasy. The problem is that the stories are primarily aimed at a younger audience and tend to produce a confusing element into where the boundary lines of acceptable spiritual activity really are found. If we allow those lines to be blurred for the sake of telling an entertaining story, what other lines of God's standards are we allowed to cross to tell a good story; murder, adultery, theft, lying, etc.? If asked, I do not recommend the Potter stories in either book or film form for this reason.

Leviticus 22

22:1-3 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Tell Aaron and his sons to be careful with the holy gifts of the sons of Israel, which they dedicate to Me, so as not to profane My holy name; I am the LORD. Say to them, 'If any man among all your descendants throughout your generations approaches the holy gifts which the sons of Israel dedicate to the LORD, while he has an uncleanness, that person shall be cut off from before Me; I am the LORD.'"

Chapter 22 continues the special holiness laws that the Lord gave to all the Levitical priests who served in the tabernacle. These laws did not apply to any Israelite from the other 11 tribes. They do not have any direct application to our lives today, because there is no longer a physical tabernacle on earth, and we are not Levites. However, as the royal priests that serve God in His New Covenant temple, the church, we are meant to learn from the principles imbedded in these laws and apply those principles to our own service to the Lord.

This section required special care to be exercised by the priests as they handled the holy gifts that God's people brought to offer to the Lord. Those gifts were the various animal and grain sacrifices that the Lord commanded His people to worship Him with as we studied in the early chapters of Leviticus. The priests were to recognize the holiness inherent in any gift that a worshipper brought and dedicated to the Lord. Since the priests handled the offerings for the entire nation, it would have been normal and even expected for them to begin to treat the offerings as part of the routine of their daily work. The old saying, familiarity breeds contempt applies here. The priests were to guard their hearts and perspectives from ever handling the offering to the Lord as routine or rote tasks. If they did so, they risked mishandling them by exposing them to various defiling elements and end up dishonoring not just the holy gift, but the holy Lord to Whom they were dedicated.

In our own generation, this principle certainly would apply to those who are called to church leadership responsibility and who handle the financial gifts given to the

Lord by God's people. That money belongs to Him, not the people collecting it, and it must be treated with as much holy respect as the lambs that were offered in the tabernacle. Sadly, the church has far too frequently suffered from those in church leadership that have treated the offerings of the Lord as though it was their personal fund to use as they desired. Another potential application of this principle is that as the people of God offer back to Him their service in the expression of their spiritual gifts, we must all learn to respect those offerings.

22:9 - "They shall therefore keep My charge, so that they will not bear sin because of it and die thereby because they profane it; I am the LORD who sanctifies them."

Because the offerings of the Lord carried special value to the Lord, any disrespectful handling of those holy gifts bore a serious penalty for the priests that dishonored the Lord in that way. Later in Israel's history there is a strong example of this principle being violated by two of the priests of the Lord. "Now the sons of Eli were worthless men; they did not know the LORD and the custom of the priests with the people. When any man was offering a sacrifice, the priest's servant would come while the meat was boiling, with a three-pronged fork in his hand. Then he would thrust it into the pan, or kettle, or caldron, or pot; all that the fork brought up the priest would take for himself. Thus they did in Shiloh to all the Israelites who came there. Also, before they burned the fat, the priest's servant would come and say to the man who was sacrificing, "Give the priest meat for roasting, as he will not take boiled meat from you, only raw." If the man said to him, "They must surely burn the fat first, and then take as much as you desire," then he would say, "No, but you shall give it to me now; and if not, I will take it by force." Thus the sin of the young men was very great before the LORD, for the men despised the offering of the LORD." (I Samuel 2:12-17).

Eli was the high priest of Israel at that time in history. His sons were high level Levitical priests that were given responsibilities in the tabernacle of the Lord second only to Eli himself. These two sons of Eli dishonored the Lord by blatantly mishandling the offerings brought by the people to worship the Lord. They disregarded the standards of the Lord for what was to be offered and how the offerings were to be received by the priests on behalf of the Lord. They essentially abused their positions of authority for their own benefit and because their father the high priest tolerated their sinful actions it seemed that they were beyond correction. However, these men should have paid closer attention to the warning of the Lord in Leviticus 22:9 given to the priests mishandling the gifts of God's people. The warning was clear that those who dared to do so would bear their sin and die as a direct consequence for their rebellion against the Lord's standards. We see the mercy of the Lord in not executing Eli's sons the first day or even week that they abused their positions in this way, but neither was their judgment neglected. Shortly after this pattern of treating the offerings of the Lord with disdain developed, both of the sons of Eli were slain in a battle with the enemies of the Lord in which even the ark of the covenant was captured.

22:26-27 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "When an ox or a sheep or a goat is born, it shall remain seven days with its mother, and from the eighth day on it shall be accepted as a sacrifice of an offering by fire to the LORD."

We have seen many examples in the Law so far of an eighth day pattern. This law for the offering of young sacrificial animals continues that pattern. In this case, the law regulated how old a sacrificial animal had to be before it qualified to be offered. The minimum standard was on the eighth day. This requirement served a double purpose that was both practical and symbolic. The practical purpose was concerned with the natural complications that would arise for the mother of a young animal to be sacrificed if its young was taken from it too soon due to the natural responses of the mother's body to nurse its young in the first days after birth. The symbolic purpose was of course of even greater value because it extends far beyond the natural life of the animals offered. As with all of the previous occurrences of the eighth day pattern we see a connection in symbol to the new creation to come in the work of Christ. The first seven days represent the complete first week of the original creation at the beginning of history. The eighth day is the first day of a new week of a new creation. This corresponds with an animal equivalent to the law of the circumcision of human males which occurred on the eighth day following birth.

22:31-33 - "So you shall keep My commandments, and do them; I am the LORD. You shall not profane My holy name, but I will be sanctified among the sons of Israel; I am the LORD who sanctifies you, who brought you out from the land of Egypt, to be your God; I am the LORD."

The Lord concludes the holiness laws section with this firm reminder of the responsibility of the priests to keep the commands of the Lord. To keep His commands is simply to obey them. The Lord emphasizes their responsibility by the declaration, "I am the LORD." The meaning He is driving home once again to their hearts is simple but at the core of His concern for His people. They must come to the full realization that He is the Lord and they are not. "Lord" is the master, or the one fully in charge. When He declares that He is the Lord to His people that already know Him, it is to remind them not to presume on His commands. The Lord is He Who must be obeyed. These commands are in no sense optional, especially to the priests who must set the example of conscientious obedience for the rest of God's holy nation.

When the Lord then declares that they will not profane His holy name, but that He would be sanctified among the sons of Israel, He was not describing His hope or desire. The Lord was declaring what would happen with the priesthood, and the implication is that when, not if, any priests violate these standards, that He will personally step in and enforce His own holy laws. In other words, the Lord is not going to allow the priests in particular to "get away" with compromising or

violating His holy name as they represented Him to the nation of Israel and the watching world.

Questions from Leviticus 21:

Question: How could God say that the sons of Aaron could not marry a prostitute? How could there be any? Wasn't that a death penalty offense?

Answer: While it is clearly identified as a sin, I don't know of a specific law that required the death penalty for a prostitute in the Old Testament. There was of course the seventh commandment forbidding adultery which was a death penalty offense, but prostitution could be outside the boundaries of adultery. The law in 21:7 also applied to priests marrying former prostitutes. If a woman had been engaged in prostitution in Egypt, but had since the Exodus reformed her ways, she was still ineligible for marriage to one of the priests because of the higher standard of holiness required of them. She could however, marry any other man in Israel.

Leviticus 23

23:1-2 - "The LORD spoke again to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'The LORD'S appointed times which you shall proclaim as holy convocations--My appointed times are these:"

This chapter gives us an overview of the yearly calendar of Israel. Their calendar was established by the Lord, and as we should expect, it was based on both natural and spiritual connections. The year's calendar was marked by seven great events in which all of Israel was called to participate. These seven events are today commonly referred to as the Feasts of Israel, even though not all of them were technically feasts. The feast concept is present in many of these events because the people were to gather together around the tabernacle and later the temple and celebrate the various aspects of why the Lord had established these national activities.

There is a first event upon which all of the other seven events were spiritually based. That first event is the Sabbath. We have previously seen that the Sabbath was the day of rest appointed by the Lord for His holy nation at the end of each week on their calendar. It spiritually pointed both backward and forward in time. It was a reminder of the far distant past as God Himself rested on the seventh day of the original week of creation. His rest from His work of creation formed a pattern for us to follow in resting one day out of every seven from our own work. It pointed forward in time toward Christ as all of the Law of God does. The true spiritual rest of God is the fruit of the work of redemption accomplished by Christ

for us on the cross. When we come to believe in Christ as our Savior, we are permanently resting from attempting to earn our own salvation by our own works.

All of the seven feast days of Israel were Sabbath based in that they were practically oriented on the calendar around the weekly Sabbaths and spiritually based upon the Sabbath concept that the redemption of Israel was the Lord's work. The seven feasts all highlighted some aspect of redemption and served to remind everyone in Israel of this. It is from these special days on the calendar that our modern concept of a holiday developed. Originally, the holidays were "holy days." In our generation the holy element of holidays has been mostly obscured by a spiritually ignorant and uncaring culture. The seven feasts of Israel's calendar year were; Passover, Unleavened Bread, First Fruits, Weeks / Pentecost, Trumpets / New Year, Day of Atonement, Booths / Tabernacles. We have already studied the purpose of Passover which was the portrayal of the deliverance of God's people accomplished by Christ, Unleavened Bread which was meant to teach Israel about the necessity for spiritual sanctification following salvation, and the Day of Atonement which was the most direct image of the cross, so in this study we will focus on the four feasts we have not yet covered.

23:9-14 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you enter the land which I am going to give to you and reap its harvest, then you shall bring in the sheaf of the first fruits of your harvest to the priest. He shall wave the sheaf before the LORD for you to be accepted; on the day after the sabbath the priest shall wave it. Now on the day when you wave the sheaf, you shall offer a male lamb one year old without defect for a burnt offering to the LORD. Its grain offering shall then be two-tenths of an ephah of fine flour mixed with oil, an offering by fire to the LORD for a soothing aroma, with its drink offering, a fourth of a hin of wine. Until this same day, until you have brought in the offering of your God, you shall eat neither bread nor roasted grain nor new growth. It is to be a perpetual statute throughout your generations in all your dwelling places."

The Feast of First Fruits was to take place each year during the very beginning of the harvest season. It was a feast that they would celebrate once they entered the Promised Land and settled and began to plant and harvest crops. As the season's crops began to ripen the owner of the field was to take a sheaf, or a bundle of the grain stalks to the tabernacle to offer to the Lord. Once there the owner of the grain was to present it to the priest and the priest would wave it before the Lord. The term wave could also mean to lift it up before the Lord. The simple act of lifting this one bundle of new grain in the presence of the Lord was to declare in a symbolic act that all of the yet to be harvested grain belonged to the Lord. It was a way of thanking the Lord for the entire harvest and acknowledging that He was Lord of the harvest. Until this first fruits offering was made, each Israelite was forbidden to eat any of the remainder of the grain from his harvest. None of the harvest belonged to even the owner of the field until he

showed that he recognized that all of his harvest really was a gift from the Lord and belonged to Him.

While most of us don't live in a farming environment today, and the Feast of First Fruits does not literally continue in the New Testament, there is of course a carry over of the key principles of the feast for our Christian lives today. The first element that applies to us has to do with the principle of the tithe. We will study in a later section of the Law about the tithe, but it was always associated with the first fruits principle even in the Old Covenant. The principle is that the Lord calls us to honor Him in the practical way of taking a portion of our increase (whether crops or cash) and returning it to Him. Like the wave offering of first fruits it allows us to demonstrate our faith that everything we receive is given to us by the Lord and that all of our resources really belong to Him. Anyone can say that the Lord owns all they have, but only those that practice the tithe are showing their faith in their actions. Keep in mind, this offering to the Lord must be the first fruits, not the last fruits. Many believers today do give back to the Lord, but do so by giving Him what is left over each week or month rather than giving to Him first.

The last aspect of the Feast of First Fruits is really the most significant. It symbolizes one of the core elements of the gospel, which is the resurrection of Christ. In Paul's extended teaching on the resurrection of Christ he identified it with a reference to this feast. "But now Christ has been raised from the dead, the first fruits of those who are asleep." (1 Corinthians 15:20). The connection is that the resurrection is the spiritual harvest of the Lord. One day, at the end of history, when the Lord Jesus returns in His Second Coming, He is going to raise everyone in a great resurrection. The wicked will be raised for the purpose of judgment and punishment, while believers will be raised to everlasting life and reward. The combined resurrection of all believers on that day is the harvest of God. At this point in history, Christ is the only person that has ever been raised to never die again with a resurrection body. He is therefore the firstfruit of that harvest to come. The Feast of First Fruits was separated in time in the calendar of Israel just like the resurrection of Christ is separated in time from our future resurrection. Yet, though separated in time, His resurrection is the guarantee of ours.

23:15-16 - "You shall also count for yourselves from the day after the sabbath, from the day when you brought in the sheaf of the wave offering; there shall be seven complete sabbaths. You shall count fifty days to the day after the seventh sabbath; then you shall present a new grain offering to the LORD."

The next feast was called the Feast of Weeks. It came exactly fifty days after the Feast of First Fruits. It was called Weeks because they were to count seven full weeks from First Fruits and then hold the next feast on the fiftieth day after the forty-nine days of the seven weeks. This feast day is more widely known to most believers as Pentecost. The name Pentecost was derived from the Greek word

for fifty. This feast was an offering associated with the remainder of the harvest each year. The fifty days after the first fruits offering allowed sufficient time for the remainder of the crop to ripen and for it to be harvested. A portion of the remainder of the crop was offered to confirm the earlier expression of faith that the entire harvest belonged to the Lord.

The greater spiritual connection of this feast should be more obvious. "When the day of Pentecost had come, they were all together in one place. And suddenly there came from heaven a noise like a violent rushing wind, and it filled the whole house where they were sitting. And there appeared to them tongues as of fire distributing themselves, and they rested on each one of them. And they were all filled with the Holy Spirit and began to speak with other tongues, as the Spirit was giving them utterance." (Acts 2:1-4). Out of all the days on the calendar, the Lord chose the day of the Feast of Weeks, or Pentecost to reveal the church to the world. This was the first day of the church and was marked by an event that had never occurred in history before this. The Holy Spirit was sent by the ascended Lord Jesus to come and fill every believer. This made these individual believers into the church.

Pentecost also points forward to the end of history and the great resurrection of believers. The filling of believers with the presence of the Holy Spirit today is called the pledge of our future inheritance of the full harvest of the resurrection (Ephesians 1:14). In other words, because the Holy Spirit has come to live in believers now, making them His home, they can be certain that they will receive the fullness of the resurrection to life at the end of history.

23:23-24 - "Again the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'In the seventh month on the first of the month you shall have a rest, a reminder by blowing of trumpets, a holy convocation."

The next feast on the calendar was the Feast of Trumpets. In Hebrew it is called Rosh Hashanna, and marked the end of the harvest season and the end of the calendar year. On this day there were trumpets blown signaling a special day of rest at the end of the year. It was a day for a holy convocation in which all of Israel was called together in the Lord's presence to reflect on the blessings of the Lord in the year past and to remember their covenant relationship with Him before beginning the new year. The trumpets blown were silver (Numbers 10:1-10) which symbolized redemption. The trumpets also represented the call of the Lord to His people and were treated as His voice calling the nation away for the day from their individual concerns to rest together in His presence.

The New Testament is filled with too many trumpet references to mention here, but these two give us the main spiritual connection. "Behold, I tell you a mystery; we will not all sleep, but we will all be changed, in a moment, in the twinkling of an eye, at the last trumpet; for the trumpet will sound, and the dead will be raised imperishable, and we will be changed." (1 Corinthians 15:51-52). "For the Lord

Himself will descend from heaven with a shout, with the voice of the archangel and with the trumpet of God, and the dead in Christ will rise first." (1 Thessalonians 4:16). These passages describe the return of the Lord in the Second Coming. As that great event at the end of history begins, the Lord Himself will signal its beginning with the blast of the trumpet of God. That trumpet sound will mark the beginning of our eternal day of rest with the Lord because of the redemption accomplished for us by Christ.

23:34 - "Speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'On the fifteenth of this seventh month is the Feast of Booths for seven days to the LORD.'"

The final feast day is the Feast of Booths. This is also known as the Feast of Tabernacles. In preparation for this feast which actually lasted a full week, all Israelites were to cut branches of particular trees including the palm. They were to gather their branches and construct from them temporary dwellings or booths. Then, they were to live in the booths for the week of the feast. Even when they later entered the Promised Land and dwelt in houses, for this week each year everyone was to camp in the booths they had made. The purpose of the practice was to be a yearly reminder of where they had come from spiritually. The booths were a vivid reminder of the time of the Exodus in which the Lord delivered all Israel from slavery in Egypt and made them dwell in temporary tents for the duration of their journey through the wilderness. The benefit of this regular reminder of their salvation was that it conditioned their hearts to not forget that the only reason they were not still slaves was the grace and power of God. It is just as critical for believers today to regularly remember their salvation, and never presume on the saving grace of God. Were it not for Christ and the cross, we would all still be slaves to sin.

There is an interesting connection to the Feast of Booths in the ministry of Jesus. By the time of Jesus, the feast in Jerusalem culminated on the seventh and final day of the week of dwelling in booths. On that seventh day, the priests made a procession to the pool of Siloam in Jerusalem and pitchers of water which they brought and poured out down the steps of the entrance into the temple in the sight of all the gathered Israelites. As they poured out the pitchers of water they proclaimed, "Therefore you will joyously draw water from the springs of salvation." (Isaiah 12:3), applying this passage from the prophet Isaiah to the salvation of the Lord. At that exact moment, at the climax of the feast, Jesus connected the symbolism of the feast with His own ministry. "Now on the last day, the great day of the feast, Jesus stood and cried out, saying, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to Me and drink. He who believes in Me, as the Scripture said, 'From his innermost being will flow rivers of living water.'" But this He spoke of the Spirit, whom those who believed in Him were to receive; for the Spirit was not yet given, because Jesus was not yet glorified." (John 7:37-39). The waters poured down the temple steps He proclaimed were a picture of the Holy Spirit's work of salvation in the heart of believers.

Leviticus 24

24:1-4 - "Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Command the sons of Israel that they bring to you clear oil from beaten olives for the light, to make a lamp burn continually. Outside the veil of testimony in the tent of meeting, Aaron shall keep it in order from evening to morning before the LORD continually; it shall be a perpetual statute throughout your generations. He shall keep the lamps in order on the pure gold lampstand before the LORD continually."

The first section of chapter 24 rehearses instructions for the daily maintenance of two of the furnishings of the tabernacle including the lampstand and the table of showbread. We studied the purpose for these furnishings in the book of Exodus for both their practical function and symbolic purpose. The practical function of the lampstand was that it was the single light source for the tabernacle illuminating the interior of God's house for the priests to do their work of service. The symbolism of the lampstand pointed both to the past and to the future just as other aspects of the tabernacle do. The lampstand was a symbolic representation of the original tree of life in the midst of the garden of Eden. As such, it also points forward toward Christ, Who is the source of eternal life because of His saving sacrifice for us on the cross and His resurrection from the dead.

The lampstand was also chosen by the Lord to represent the church in the New Covenant. The reason for this is that just as Christ was the Light of the world throughout His life in this world, the corporate community of believers in Christ is now the light of the world because we have been given by the Lord the responsibility of bearing the light of the gospel message of salvation in Christ alone to the world (II Corinthians 4:4-5). This passage in Leviticus highlights the aspect of the lampstand in which it was shown to be completely dependant upon an outside provision in order to fulfill its purpose. That provision was the oil that the lamps of the lampstand used as fuel for the light. Each lamp had to be filled daily with oil in order to provide the light for the tabernacle. The oil to be burned was special and specific. The Lord only allowed clear oil from beaten olives. This is the first clearest quality of olive oil that is produced by a process that today we call cold pressed. The purity of the oil required was important to its symbolism because the oil describes the ministry of the Holy Spirit in relationship to the church. The picture is that as the church, we are to shine the light of the gospel of Christ to the world so that many will believe and be saved. However, this saving testimony of the gospel is not communicated from the church to the world in our own strength or cleverness. It is as the Holy Spirit fills the church that we become effective representatives of the saving truth of the gospel. Like the lamps on the tabernacle lampstand we each need to be filled daily with the Holy Spirit.

The other aspect of this daily responsibility was the priest who was given the assignment to keep the lamps filled. It was the high priest who each morning was

to enter the tabernacle, and check each lamp. He was to trim the wicks of each lamp and fill each with the day's supply of the oil. The high priest was a type of Christ portraying the ongoing spiritual ministry we each receive from our great High Priest. Jesus is in heaven, but He is not spiritually distant from His church, and it is His responsibility to daily trim us and fill us according to our need. The connection is that while the lampstand symbolizes the church as a whole, the seven individual lamps that were mounted on the lampstand point to the individual believer. This ministry of the high priest was described as him keeping the lamps in order on the lampstand.

Christ works in the lives of each true believer to "keep the lamps in order on the pure gold lampstand." The implication is that left to themselves the lamps will fall out of order in relationship to the lampstand. We are the lamps and the church is the lampstand. The purpose of the Lord for each believer is that they would remain in right order in relationship to the church. That indicates each believer being connected in the right way to the church where they belong. It is one of the priority ministries of the high priest to keep us rightly ordered in the church. We see indications of this heavenly ministry of Jesus as the High Priest working among the lampstands which are His churches on earth in this passage from Revelation. "As for the mystery of the seven stars which you saw in My right hand, and the seven golden lampstands: the seven stars are the angels of the seven churches, and the seven lampstands are the seven churches. To the angel of the church in Ephesus write: The One who holds the seven stars in His right hand, the One who walks among the seven golden lampstands, says this: (Revelation 1:20-2:1). Jesus is described here as walking among the churches. This was the image of the high priest in the later temple of Solomon in which were multiple lampstands. He walked among them to insure all the lamps were filled and oriented on the lampstand so as to give their full light. Many Christians believe all that matters is that they have a relationship with Jesus, and not the church, but these passages reveal that the Lord is concerned about our relationship to His church.

24:10-16 - "Now the son of an Israelite woman, whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the sons of Israel; and the Israelite woman's son and a man of Israel struggled with each other in the camp. The son of the Israelite woman blasphemed the Name and cursed. So they brought him to Moses. (Now his mother's name was Shelomith, the daughter of Dibri, of the tribe of Dan.) They put him in custody so that the command of the LORD might be made clear to them. Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Bring the one who has cursed outside the camp, and let all who heard him lay their hands on his head; then let all the congregation stone him. "You shall speak to the sons of Israel, saying, 'If anyone curses his God, then he will bear his sin. Moreover, the one who blasphemes the name of the LORD shall surely be put to death; all the congregation shall certainly stone him. The alien as well as the native, when he blasphemes the Name, shall be put to death."

This section deals with one of only two events in Leviticus. All of Leviticus is dedicated to different sections establishing laws with the exception of the story of two events. The events are here and in chapter 10. Both events centered on serious violations of the holiness of the Lord and were included in Leviticus rather than in Exodus or Numbers because the spiritual lessons attached to the events drive home the significance of the holiness of the Lord which is the main theme of Leviticus. In this circumstance a man whose mother was an Israelite and whose father was Egyptian engaged in a dispute with another man of Israel. Their dispute became a physical struggle. During the struggle the first man blasphemed the Name of the Lord and cursed. We do not know exactly what was said, but the indications are that he either used the Name of the Lord as a curse or he actually cursed the Name of the Lord. This took place in the ears of witnesses who brought the man to Moses. The witnesses did the right thing to bring him to Moses because at the least, this was a serious violation of the third of the Ten Commandments which commanded them not to take the Name of the Lord in vain.

As the man was brought to Moses to receive his judgment in the case, Moses turned to the Lord to receive His instructions. The seriousness of the transgression had previously been communicated to Israel, but the penalty for such an offence had not yet been specified. The Lord then spoke to Moses and gave clear instructions for what to do to the man who had blasphemed and how it was to be carried out. The response of the Lord in this case might be difficult to accept for some. The Lord required the death penalty for the man. The Lord served as judge and jury in ordering his execution. There was no possibility of appeal, let alone pardon or even probation. This apparently was the man's first offence yet the Lord commanded the stiffest penalty under the Law. Those who oppose the death penalty on "moral" grounds will have to deal with it being the Lord that required the death penalty in this case.

Many have made a classic error of Bible interpretation by reading passages like this one and drawing a sharp and unwarranted distinction between this event and one of the events of the New Testament. Some will reference the handling by Jesus of the case of the woman caught in adultery (John 8:1-11) and build a case in which the God of the Old Testament is harsh and unreasonable, while Jesus is compassionate and reasonable. They claim that Jesus dismissed the use of the death penalty forever by pardoning the woman brought to Him for judgment. That story does not teach that Jesus opposed or changed the death penalty. He pardoned her because the men that brought her to Him for judgment were themselves law breakers and even broke the requirements of the law in the way they brought her to Him. Jesus never taught that the death penalty aspect of the Law of God was to be set aside in the New Covenant. What has changed is that Israel was both a spiritual and civil nation responsible to obey God and enforce all of His laws in the nation. On the other hand the church in the New Testament is a spiritual nation without civil authority to enforce any of God's laws. The church has no proper authority to execute any criminals no matter how serious the crime. That is the responsibility of the state, and the Lord has given authority to the state for that purpose (Romans 13:1-4). That does not change, however, whether a transgression deserves the death penalty or whether the state should carry it out. Our nation still properly executes some criminals for murder for instance and it is morally right for the state to do so because it reflects the righteousness and justice of the Lord.

The specific sin this man committed ended in him being stoned to death. He did not murder anyone. He did commit unspeakable acts upon anyone. What he did was curse the Name of the Lord and in so doing seriously violated the holiness of the Lord in the hearing of others in His holy nation. Our nation today would never even consider executing this man if this event were to happen today. Instead, even if anyone else complained about his behavior, he would have the ACLU take his case all the way to the Supreme Court if necessary to protect his so-called "right" to free speech. The point of this event was to teach Israel and us that the Lord does not consider such speech to be free at all. There was no such "right" in Israel, but rather it was considered among the most serious wrongs that a person could commit. Many would argue that our nation's current stance on this issue is the more enlightened one. The Lord would disagree as should we.

Leviticus 25

25:1-7 - "The LORD then spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When you come into the land which I shall give you, then the land shall have a sabbath to the LORD. Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather in its crop, but during the seventh year the land shall have a sabbath rest, a sabbath to the LORD; you shall not sow your field nor prune your vineyard. Your harvest's aftergrowth you shall not reap, and your grapes of untrimmed vines you shall not gather; the land shall have a sabbatical year. All of you shall have the sabbath products of the land for food; yourself, and your male and female slaves, and your hired man and your foreign resident, those who live as aliens with you. Even your cattle and the animals that are in your land shall have all its crops to eat."

Chapter 25 details special laws regarding the ownership and disposition of the land once Israel reached the Promised Land and possessed it. These laws as much as any others in God's Law were designed to distinguish Israel from all the other nations in the world and to mark them as a holy nation set apart unto Yahweh their God. In this opening section the law of the Sabbath was applied to the land itself. Once reaching Canaan, they were to work the land for six years and then on the seventh year they were to refrain from either planting crops or harvesting them. They were to allow the land to rest completely that seventh year. This was not intended to be a one time event in Israel's history but an ongoing pattern of honoring a Sabbath year each seven years. It would take true faith for Israel to follow this pattern and as a result the Sabbath year became an ongoing test of Israel's faithfulness to the Lord throughout its history. It was a sad testimony, but from what we can tell from Old Testament history, it seems that Israel never completely obeyed this law and set aside a full year to allow the land to rest.

The design of the Lord in this was really socially staggering in its implications. Since Israel was an agricultural society primarily, the vast majority of the inhabitants of the nation would be given if they followed the pattern of the Lord an entire year's vacation one year out of every seven. The people were allowed that year to go out and gather any food which grew naturally for their own survival, but they were not allowed to actually harvest the cultivated crops or plant new ones. To insure the nations provision the Lord promised to bless their harvests on the sixth year so abundantly that they would have enough to eat. This pattern would be similar to how the Lord blessed Egypt with great harvests for seven years during the days of Joseph and by his wisdom they stored enough to feed the nation during the seven years of famine to follow.

Requiring a Sabbath for the land served both a natural and spiritual purpose. The natural purpose was that the land would be replenished with nutrients during the sabbatical year when the crops of that year were to be allowed to die and

eventually be plowed back into the land the following year. This would avoid the problem that every agricultural society must face of land being what is called "farmed out" in which the soil eventually becomes so depleted that it can no longer produce healthy crops. The spiritual reason for the land Sabbath was to remind all of Israel in a regular and dramatic way that the land and crops they enjoyed belonged not to themselves, but to the Lord. They were not free to set their own agenda, but were all required to stop for a full year and demonstrate that they believed that the Lord was in charge of the land and in charge of their crops and harvest. His extra abundant blessing every sixth year preceding the Sabbath year was a powerful reminder that all of their provision came from the Lord, and the seventh year when no one worked their fields was just as strong a reminder that their needs were not met by their own strength and effort, but by the Lord. Though we are not called to practice the Sabbath year pattern in the New Covenant, the believer today should not be surprised when the Lord custom designs testing circumstances to remind them of these same principles and to reveal whether they will trust and obey Him in matters of personal income and provision.

25:8-12 - "You are also to count off seven sabbaths of years for yourself, seven times seven years, so that you have the time of the seven sabbaths of years, namely, forty-nine years. You shall then sound a ram's horn abroad on the tenth day of the seventh month; on the day of atonement you shall sound a horn all through your land. You shall thus consecrate the fiftieth year and proclaim a release through the land to all its inhabitants. It shall be a jubilee for you, and each of you shall return to his own property, and each of you shall return to his family. You shall have the fiftieth year as a jubilee; you shall not sow, nor reap its aftergrowth, nor gather in from its untrimmed vines. For it is a jubilee; it shall be holy to you. You shall eat its crops out of the field."

In addition to the Sabbath year every seven years the Lord ordained a kind of super Sabbath year once every fifty years that became known as the year of Jubilee. Israel was to mark off seven cycles of the Sabbath years and following seven Sabbath cycles (7 years x 7 cycles = 49 years), they were to take another complete Sabbath year on the fiftieth year. This year was to follow the same pattern of the regular Sabbath years in which Israel was not to either plant or harvest their fields that entire year. This year was distinguished from those Sabbath years in that not only were they to not work the fields but it was a special year of liberty for the nation. The celebration of the Jubilee year began on the annual Day of Atonement feast day by the blowing of a ram's horn. The Hebrew word for the ram's horn is yobel, from which our word jubilee is derived. The liberty that was the focus of this year long celebration was both a liberation of lands and people in Israel.

The liberated land had to do with the return of ancestral lands to the family that originally had the right to farm it. There was allowance within the law for

individuals and families that were struggling economically to sell their right to farm the land that had been apportioned to them as their inheritance by the Lord when Israel first entered the Promised Land. Each tribe was assigned their own section of Canaan to possess and each family within that tribe was given a portion of land on which to settle. If due to hardship that family relinquished their right to that land to another, then during the Jubilee the land reverted to its original inheritance. In the same way, individuals and families in hardship could even sell themselves into service to other Israelites. During the Jubilee year these servants were all released throughout Israel and any remaining debt they owed wiped out as they were given a clean start to rebuild their lives and family fortunes. Because this was a huge economic consideration for the nation, the Lord built just guidelines into the jubilee law so that no Israelite was financially mistreated. The value of both land and service was prorated according to the numbers of years since the last jubilee and until the next scheduled one. In requiring this of Israel, the Lord demonstrated to His people that they were not the actual owners of the Promised Land. The Lord owned the land, and Israel were tenants on His land, blessed to possess it and enjoy its fruits, but only at His discretion.

The year of Jubilee held a significant prophetic purpose in God's plans, and He did not treat it as an optional requirement for Israel. What we see in the law of the Jubilee in this chapter of Leviticus is the design of the Lord for Israel, but again, like the Sabbath year pattern, one which Israel never actually obeyed the Lord and practiced. There is no record in all of the Old Testament of Israel ever following the requirements for the jubilee. As a result, the Lord did hold the entire nation accountable for their disobedience to Him and this law and in a later judgment upon the nation mentioned this law specifically as the reason for the judgment. "Those who had escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon; and they were servants to him and to his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfill the word of the LORD by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed its sabbaths. All the days of its desolation it kept sabbath until seventy years were complete." (II Chronicles 36:20-21). The Lord stirred up the Gentile nation of Babylon to invade rebellious Israel and conquer them, taking them into captivity in Babylon. The seventy years of the captivity corresponded to the total of 490 years that Israel had disregarded the Sabbath year law and the Year of Jubilee law.

The spiritual meaning attached to the year of Jubilee was a prophetic preview of the coming ministry of Christ. When Jesus began His ministry He first spoke in a synagogue in Nazareth, and chose to read from the Scriptures a passage from the prophet Isaiah that spoke of how the Jubilee would be ultimately fulfilled when the Messiah came to Israel. "And the book of the prophet Isaiah was handed to Him. And He opened the book and found the place where it was written, "THE SPIRIT OF THE LORD IS UPON ME, BECAUSE HE ANOINTED ME TO PREACH THE GOSPEL TO THE POOR. HE HAS SENT ME TO PROCLAIM RELEASE TO THE CAPTIVES, AND RECOVERY OF SIGHT TO

THE BLIND, TO SET FREE THOSE WHO ARE OPPRESSED, TO PROCLAIM THE FAVORABLE YEAR OF THE LORD." And He closed the book, gave it back to the attendant and sat down; and the eyes of all in the synagogue were fixed on Him. And He began to say to them, "Today this Scripture has been fulfilled in your hearing." (Luke 4:17-21).

Jesus proclaimed that the prophecy of Isaiah regarding the Jubilee was fulfilled by His arrival and ministry. The specifics of the jubilee in the Law were concerned with the liberty of natural land and the release of natural slaves and servants. The jubilee work of Christ was the spiritual fulfillment of what the jubilee was naturally portraying. The liberty that Christ brought was a spiritual freedom of setting the people free from all things that oppressed their lives. The true jubilee was accomplished by Christ on the cross when He set us once and for all free from sin which had enslaved us all. This is why the jubilee was always to begin only on the day of atonement so that Israel would associate their freedom with the redemption provided by the sacrificed lamb of God. Now, those who have been set free by the salvation found only in Christ are truly free. Yet, the fullness of the jubilee will be experienced not only spiritually, but in every way at the Second Coming of Christ when we will enter into the eternal freedom that awaits us then. Now, we eagerly wait for our jubilee of His return just like Israel was meant to wait for that special fiftieth year.

25:47-49 - "Now if the means of a stranger or of a sojourner with you becomes sufficient, and a countryman of yours becomes so poor with regard to him as to sell himself to a stranger who is sojourning with you, or to the descendants of a stranger's family, then he shall have redemption right after he has been sold. One of his brothers may redeem him, or his uncle, or his uncle's son, may redeem him, or one of his blood relatives from his family may redeem him; or if he prospers, he may redeem himself."

This final section of the chapter introduces the law of the kinsman redeemer. Under this law there was an allowance for members of Israelite society to sell themselves into service to other Israelites as we saw in the section above. They could also sell their land rights. This law was a provision from the Lord so that those who had chosen to do so did not have to wait the entire fifty years until the next scheduled jubilee to be freed or for their property rights to be restored. The Lord established for a near relative of the person in such a circumstance to step forward and on behalf of the needy person they could offer to redeem them or their land by paying for them what they could not pay for themselves. We will see in our study of the book of Ruth that this law is the framework for what develops in the relationship between Boaz and Ruth. The law of the kinsman-redeemer also has a powerful prophetic element in it. The work of Christ in accomplishing redemption for us is pictured in this law. Jesus is our kinsman-redeemer Who has paid the price on the cross necessary to redeem us from the debt our sins created for us. The kinsman aspect of His work has to do with the doctrine of the

Incarnation. In order to save us, Jesus had to die for us on the cross. But, for His death on the cross to have the power to save us He first had to be born as one of us. Jesus becoming a human being was Him becoming our kinsman.

Leviticus 26

26:3-8 - "If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments so as to carry them out, then I shall give you rains in their season, so that the land will yield its produce and the trees of the field will bear their fruit. Indeed, your threshing will last for you until grape gathering, and grape gathering will last until sowing time. You will thus eat your food to the full and live securely in your land. I shall also grant peace in the land, so that you may lie down with no one making you tremble. I shall also eliminate harmful beasts from the land, and no sword will pass through your land. But you will chase your enemies and they will fall before you by the sword; five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall before you by the sword."

This chapter is completely different than all of the previous chapters in Leviticus. There are no new laws that are introduced here, but instead we have the Lord's commentary on the two possible responses of Israel to all of the laws previously given. The two responses Israel may make to these laws in the years to follow can be boiled down to obedience and disobedience. The Lord anticipates these choices Israel will make in relationship to Him and His Law and makes a series of commitments to Himself respond according to their choices. This is a key aspect of a covenant relationship called the sanctions of the covenant. The relationship that the Lord formed with Israel at Sinai was not casual but a covenant relationship. As the Lord of the covenant, He promises in this chapter that He will personally monitor the condition of His relationship with Israel and their response to Him. If Israel honors the Lord by submitting to and obeying His laws then He promises to give them the sanctions that are identified as the blessings of the covenant. This first portion of the chapter details the amazing blessings that they can expect to be poured upon their lives by the Lord because of their continuing obedience.

The blessings of the Lord upon His covenant people for their obedience are far ranging and include favorable weather for their crops, abundant harvests, national security, safety from harm, and victory over all of their enemies. The only thing the Lord required of them for all of these overflowing blessings was obedience. The Lord is not exaggerating in this section by artificially enhancing the description of what their lives would be like just to keep them in line. This is the kind of life the Lord desired for His people to enjoy. Remember, it was the Lord Who created the Garden of Eden and originally placed mankind in that gorgeous and perfect environment to live. Adam and Eve lost their home in the

Garden of Eden, not because the Lord wanted to expel them, but because their rebellion required it. His heart to bless them was revealed in the perfection of Eden before they were driven out.

A key consideration in our generation is whether people understand the true nature of the relationship of the Lord to this world which He created and over which He maintains complete control. Many, even within the Christian community have a perspective of the Lord's involvement in the world that recognizes the Lord as original creator, but that He has little day to day involvement in the world. Jesus taught us that God is so fully engaged in His involvement with His world that not even a sparrow falls to the ground apart from Him (Matthew 10:29). This section teaches us that the Lord of the covenant controls the weather. It is not a random meteorological occurrence whether it rains or remains dry. It either rains or doesn't by the will of God. The Lord also controls the production of crops and the amount of the harvests. He is in charge of whether we live in safety or danger. It is His determination whether a nation dwells securely, or trembles in fear at the dangers threatening them from every side. Victory in war is not a product of numbers, weapons, technology, or strategy, but of the Lord. He holds the fate of nations in His hand. Nations ignore and disregard Him to their own peril, but those that honor Him cannot avoid the tremendous blessings He chooses to pour upon them.

As with all other elements of the Old Testament Law and covenant there is a spiritual application for our lives as believers today. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ," (Ephesians 1:3). This is Paul's declaration of the shared blessing of New Covenant believers in the Lord Jesus Christ. Everyone who is in New Covenant relationship with God through the salvation accomplished by Jesus is the recipient of every spiritual blessing in the heavenlies in Christ. The emphasis shifts from Old Covenant to New from natural and physical blessings to heavenly and spiritual blessings. Don't think in terms of us missing out because the spiritual blessings are greater than the natural blessings of the Old Covenant. God has withheld no spiritual blessing from us in Christ. The picture is of a container held by God of all His blessings. In Christ, He has not dribbled some blessings upon us, but has turned the vessel over in pouring out the fullness of His blessings on us.

26:14-28 - "But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments, if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, and so break My covenant, I, in turn, will do this to you: I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that will waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away; also, you will sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies will eat it up. I will set My face against you so that you will be struck down before your enemies; and those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee when no one is pursuing you. If also after these things you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. I will also break down your pride of power; I will also make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze. Your strength will be spent uselessly, for your land will not yield its produce and the trees of the land will not yield their fruit. If then, you act with hostility against Me and are unwilling to obey Me, I will increase the plague on you seven times according to your sins. I will let loose among you the beasts of the field, which will bereave you of your children and destroy your cattle and reduce your number so that your roads lie deserted. And if by these things you are not turned to Me, but act with hostility against Me, then I will act with hostility against you; and I, even I, will strike you seven times for your sins. I will also bring upon you a sword which will execute vengeance for the covenant; and when you gather together into your cities, I will send pestilence among you, so that you shall be delivered into enemy hands. When I break your staff of bread, ten women will bake your bread in one oven, and they will bring back your bread in rationed amounts, so that you will eat and not be satisfied. Yet if in spite of this you do not obey Me, but act with hostility against Me, then I will act with wrathful hostility against you, and I, even I, will punish you seven times for your sins."

The other aspect of the covenant sanctions is covered in this longer section. These are the curses of the Lord that He promises to bring upon the heads of His own people if they turn from Him and disobey His Law. It is a sobering factor that the curse section is significantly longer and more detailed than the blessing section. This is not because the Lord wants to curse more than He wants to bless, but is a necessary description for the hearts of Israel that are inclined to wander from righteousness. The Lord gives a very extensive description of all of the curses they can expect if they veer away from Him into rebellion. This section actually serves as a short preview of Israel's actual history. Sadly, from this point forward, Israel was more marked by long stretches of rebellion against the Lord and His Law with only brief periods of faithfulness in between.

The curses of the covenant were almost exact reversals of the blessings previously named. The first and greatest sanction was that the Lord Himself would set His face against Israel. This is a figure of speech describing a firm and resolute disposition that would not soften no matter how painful the inflicted punishment would be for Israel. This does not describe an emotional outburst on

the Lord's part which would quickly subside. Rather this was a settled and deeply serious intention to carry out full chastisement upon Israel because of their many and long-lasting violations of His Law. The curses included the following events. Israel would be afflicted with terror, consumption, fever, wasting away, their crops would be consumed by their enemies rather than themselves, their hated enemies would rule over them, they would be thoroughly defeated in battle, the weather patterns would devastate them, their harvests would fail, there would be plagues, wild beasts, and pestilence. What the Lord was promising was not one or two of these horrific events, but all of them hitting rebellious Israel in waves.

There is an important triple description of the Lord's judgments which He gives here to show that His judgments will come upon Israel in a progressively growing pattern of chastisement. The principle that the Lord always follows in administering punishment for violations of His Law is that He makes the punishment fit the crime. The Lord never gives anyone more punishment than they deserve. Here, the continuing disobedience of Israel over generations to come calls for a progression of greater and greater judgment. As Israel escalates their rebellion, the Lord will escalate their punishment. This is revealed in this three-fold mention of punishing Israel seven times more for their sins if they do not relent. This pattern of three layers of a seven times judgment is followed in the Book of Revelation which reveals God's covenant judgments upon His rebellious people. In the prophecies of Revelation the three series of seven-fold judgments are seen as the breaking open of seven seals of judgment, the sounding of seven trumpets of judgment, and the pouring out of seven bowls full of the wrath of God.

Covenant judgment is inescapable. No one in Israel who has lived in disobedience to the Lord will be able to avoid or dodge the impact of these curses. The Lord personally participates to insure that each judgment is carried out as He brings what is deserved upon the heads of all the rebels among His people. Thankfully, our situation has been dramatically altered in the New Covenant because of Christ's death upon the cross. We fully deserve the full curse of the Law because of our own sins and disobedience. Yet, the Lord has already directed the full force of all the curses of the Law against His own Son in our stead. "Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law, having become a curse for us--for it is written, "CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO HANGS ON A TREE" (Galatians 3:13). This means that New Covenant believers will never be the target of God's covenant curses even though we deserve them all. Does this mean that we are free to disobey God without sanctions? No, the Lord continues to involve Himself fully in our lives in discipline in order to train our hearts in obedience and to finally break all the old habits of disobedience (Hebrews 12:5-11).

26:40-45 - "If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me, and also in their acting with hostility against Me-- I also was acting with hostility against them, to bring them into the land of their enemies--or if their uncircumcised heart becomes humbled so that they then make amends for their iniquity, then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land. For the land will be abandoned by them, and will make up for its sabbaths while it is made desolate without them. They, meanwhile, will be making amends for their iniquity, because they rejected My ordinances and their soul abhorred My statutes. Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them, breaking My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God. But I will remember for them the covenant with their ancestors, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God. I am the LORD."

Even in the midst of the nearly hopeless condition of future Israel due to their own generations long rebellion and the ensuing judgments of God, there remains a note of hope. As severe as the judgments of God were, they were never designed to completely obliterate Israel such as we saw in the great flood of Noah's day, or the destruction by fire from heaven of Sodom and Gomorrah. The Lord's commitment to His people will not waver through the generations like their commitment to Him will. He loves them, and will bring these judgments upon them in order to turn their hearts back to Him. Sadly, their hearts will become so hardened that it will take very great punishments to even get their full attention, let alone change their perspective and attitude. Yet, in all of the judgments to come, the Lord's purpose in them is redemptive. They are judgments that contain an element of the Lord's grace and mercy. Were there no mercy, the Lord would simply execute them immediately ending any hope of a return and restoration.

In all the difficult times to come, for any who will return to the Lord with true repentance would find mercy and grace. True repentance involved open confession of their sin and turning from them back to the Lord. When the people return to the Lord in this broken hearted way, like the prodigal son coming to his senses in the pig sty and returning to his father's house, the Lord promised that He would run to welcome them back home to full covenant relationship with Him. No matter how far the relationship deteriorates, the Lord will always remain ready to restore a repentant rebel who returns to Him.

Leviticus 27

27:1-4 - "Again, the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, "Speak to the sons of Israel and say to them, 'When a man makes a difficult vow, he shall be valued according to your valuation of persons belonging to the LORD. If your valuation is of the male from twenty years even to sixty years old, then your valuation shall be fifty shekels of silver, after the shekel of the sanctuary. Or if it is a female, then your valuation shall be thirty shekels.'"

The final chapter of Leviticus is dedicated to laws regulating the making and fulfilling of vows. A vow of this type is a solemn promise or commitment to the Lord. It was usually made either in the hope that the Lord would respond to the vow with a future special blessing for the one making the vow, or as an expression of thanksgiving for some special blessing the Lord had already given. It involved words of commitment made in the presence of the Lord, but also included a promise to dedicate something of great personal value to the Lord. There are three kinds of dedicated things covered in these laws. There are vows of dedicating a person, an animal, or a house to the Lord. The dedication by vow was a way of declaring publicly that the person vowing was acknowledging that the Lord was the Lord over the person, animal, or house.

The Lord was also gracious in allowing the person making the vow to redeem their vow. This meant that if they desired to reclaim for their own use what had been vowed, the Lord allowed them to redeem it by in a sense purchasing it back from the Lord. They did so by paying to the priests at the tabernacle the appropriate value for the dedicated thing plus an added 20% redemption value. The redemption of a house for instance would enable the person that dedicated it to the Lord to continue to live in it and enjoy it for themselves, but the redemption was costly. Each person was valued by the Lord by a monetary value. It was a value that was adjusted for factors of gender and age. For instance men from twenty to sixty years old, in what we call the prime years were valued the highest at fifty shekels. Keep in mind that a common laborer's wage was a shekel a month. A fifty shekel redemption value was the equivalent of five years of job income.

For women of the same age range the value set was thirty shekels of silver. It is a common mistake by modern readers of the Bible to read passages like this one and draw a knee jerk conclusion that the Bible is sexist and demeans the value of women. This section is neither sexist or demeaning to women, in spite of the protests of those with an agenda to label the Bible in that way. These laws establishing the value of people dedicated by a vow do not identify the true worth of a person in terms of their value in the eyes of God or in light of eternity. If so, it is not just a gender issue that is created by the laws in this section, but an age issue also. People under twenty years of age are valued at a lower amount, as are people over sixty. Does this mean God considers very young and old people to be less valuable to Him? The short and firm answer is no! What is measured

by these values in this chapter is not a person's intrinsic value as a human being, but their value in terms of their productivity potential in society. The reality is that people in their prime years are more productive than people below and above those years. Additionally, men are more productive than women in the work that is capable of economically sustaining a family. This was especially true in a society based upon an agricultural economy where working the fields and flocks was the primary source of income.

Some may wonder about what kind of circumstance would ever lead a person to make a vow dedicating another person to the Lord. An example of this kind of vow is found in a story from later in Israel's history. Hannah was a woman that greatly desired to have a son, but she had been unable to have one. In a time of prayer Hannah made a special vow to the Lord and promised that if the Lord would bless her with a son, she would honor the Lord for that blessing by dedicating that son to the Lord's service. "She made a vow and said, "O LORD of hosts, if You will indeed look on the affliction of Your maidservant and remember me, and not forget Your maidservant, but will give Your maidservant a son, then I will give him to the LORD all the days of his life, and a razor shall never come on his head." (I Samuel 1:11). When the Lord heard and answered her prayer through the birth of her son, Samuel, she fulfilled her vow to the Lord. After Samuel was weaned, she brought him to the tabernacle of the Lord and gave Samuel to the Lord by giving him to the high priest to raise in the full dedicated service of the Lord.

27:28-29 - "Nevertheless, anything which a man sets apart to the LORD out of all that he has, of man or animal or of the fields of his own property, shall not be sold or redeemed. Anything devoted to destruction is most holy to the LORD. No one who may have been set apart among men shall be ransomed; he shall surely be put to death."

The redemption provision under the laws of the vows covered all things vowed with the exception of those things which were "devoted to destruction." This was a special category of people and things that were under judgment from God and which could not be redeemed. The things within this category were not determined by the people, but by the Lord. When the Lord identified something as devoted to destruction, the people were not allowed to offer a redemption price for it. It was only to be destroyed. There are two important examples of this devoted to destruction principle in Israel's later history.

The first example is during the conquest of the Promised Land under the leadership of Joshua. When Israel conquered the Canaanite city of Jericho, one of the men of Israel named Achan took for himself some items that the Lord had warned all of Israel was to be devoted to destruction. Achan took some clothing, silver and gold that was under the ban of the Lord and hid them in his tent. The Lord exposed Achan's violation of the ban and he was executed by stoning for

violating this law and bringing defilement upon the entire camp of Israel (Joshua 6-7).

The second example is from the early career of King Saul. The Lord commanded Saul to lead Israel out in battle against the nation of Amalek. The Lord instructed Saul to "utterly destroy" Amalek and to spare none from the nation. Amalek was under the judgment of God for previous rebellion against the Lord and Saul and Israel were to act on behalf of the Lord in bringing the Lord's judgment upon them. When Israel defeated Amalek, rather than carrying out the command of the Lord as He has required, Saul decided to spare the king of Amalek. When Samuel the prophet arrived and saw that Saul had spared what the Lord had devoted to destruction he pronounced the Lord's judgment upon Saul.

The principle of people and things devoted to destruction touches at the heart of what we identify as the sovereignty of God. This simply means that the Lord is sovereign, or king, over all things and all people. He determines the fate of people and things. What He devotes to destruction is to be destroyed and we cannot redeem it. What He chooses to redeem will be redeemed and we cannot hinder it. Paul describes the Lord's sovereignty in this way in Romans. "What shall we say then? There is no injustice with God, is there? May it never be! For He says to Moses, "I WILL HAVE MERCY ON WHOM I HAVE MERCY, AND I WILL HAVE COMPASSION ON WHOM I HAVE COMPASSION." So then it does not depend on the man who wills or the man who runs, but on God who has mercy. For the Scripture says to Pharaoh, "FOR THIS VERY PURPOSE I RAISED YOU UP, TO DEMONSTRATE MY POWER IN YOU, AND THAT MY NAME MIGHT BE PROCLAIMED THROUGHOUT THE WHOLE EARTH." So then He has mercy on whom He desires, and He hardens whom He desires." (Romans 9:14-18).