

17. Keeping our promises to God

May 28, 2009

The studies of the Book of Leviticus have been an eye opener for all of us. We no longer would look at this Book in the same way. We've learned so much about our Lord Jesus from the view point of the Old Testament.

However, it seems strange and odd that this Book ends with a chapter about vows rather than God's holiness and glory. Some Bible expositors chose not to comment of this chapter in their studies at all.

But I believe that the Lord does not make a mistake and He has an absolutely good reason why He kept this chapter at the end of this Book.

Here is my opinion: So far we have learned all the requirements and obligations of the sacrifices and offerings, rules and commandments to follow. What if a person wants to offer themselves, animals, houses and other properties to the Lord voluntarily, what do they do? Were there any guidelines for that? What if they change their minds? Then what? That is why the Lord is covering all the bases.

Now all these things were exclusively applied for the ancient Jews. What can we learn from this chapter? What principle do we get? That is what we are going to learn here.

I believe that it is appropriate for us to sum up what we have learned from this great Book at the end of tonight's study.

A. THE DEDICATION OF PERSONS

Leviticus 27:1-8 Now the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 2 "Speak to the children of Israel, and say to them: 'When a man consecrates by a vow certain persons to the Lord, according to your valuation, 3 if your valuation is of a male from twenty years old up to sixty years old, then your valuation shall be fifty shekels of silver, according to the shekel of the sanctuary. 4 If it is a female, then your valuation shall be thirty shekels; 5 and if from five years old up to twenty years old, then your valuation for a male shall be twenty shekels, and for a female ten shekels; 6 and if from a month old up to five years old, then your valuation for a male shall be five shekels of silver, and for a female your valuation shall be three shekels of silver; 7 and if from sixty years old and above, if it is a male, then your valuation shall be fifteen shekels, and for a female ten shekels. 8 But if he is too poor to pay your valuation, then he shall present himself before the priest, and the priest shall set a value for him; according to the ability of him who vowed, the priest shall value him.

A worshiper might dedicate himself to the Lord or bring a member of the family or a servant to serve the Lord for life at the sanctuary. However, since there were plenty of Levites, and since they were especially set apart for sanctuary services, it was expected that the person given would be redeemed with money, and the money given to the priests for the ministry of the sanctuary.

In the case of prophet Samuel in 1 Samuel 1 and 2, the boy Samuel was actually given to the high priest and trained to serve in the tabernacle.

If modern day feminists read this portion of Scriptures, they would go ballistic. This is not about treating women less, but it is all about how much work they could do.

Since a shekel was the equivalent of a month's income for a worker, a male from twenty to sixty was evaluated at about four years' income. Put that into current economic equivalents, and you will rightly conclude that people didn't rush into making these vows. It would indeed be a costly thing to pay four years' income to fulfill a vow to the Lord.

I am sure that you all remember a person or two, or even yourself trying to make a deal with God. Making a deal with God is not a good idea. Because God's memory is exceptionally good and ours is not.

Ecclesiastes 5:2 Do not be rash with your mouth, And let not your heart utter anything hastily before God. For God is in heaven, and you on earth; Therefore let your words be few.

Some of you might have been in churches where they drive pledges for future donations. I am very much against the idea, because we do not know what is ahead. But some can say, "We do it by faith." There is a tremendous difference between faith and presumption.

James 4:14-15 whereas you do not know what will happen tomorrow. For what is your life? It is even a vapor that appears for a little time and then vanishes away. 15 Instead you ought to say, "If the Lord wills, we shall live and do this or that."

I like what our church does: "Where God guides, God provides." You cannot go wrong with that and it helps us develop total dependency on God.

You all have witnessed baby / child dedications in our church services. This is the idea. We are presenting our children to the Lord so that we would raise those young people in God's way, not our ways. Many people think that God would bless the child since we dedicate him or her. Of course, the Lord will bless the child. But the idea is not to take blessings from the Lord only, but rather to give the child to Him so that He may use the child's life for His glory. Have you ever thought about in that way? Probably not.

B. THE DEDICATION OF ANIMALS

Leviticus 27:9-13 'If it is an animal that men may bring as an offering to the Lord, all that anyone gives to the Lord shall be holy. 10 He shall not substitute it or exchange it, good for bad or bad for good; and if he at all exchanges animal for animal, then both it and the one exchanged for it shall be holy. 11 If it is an unclean animal which they do not offer as a sacrifice to the Lord, then he shall present the animal before the priest; 12 and the priest shall set a value for it, whether it is good or bad; as you, the priest, value it, so it shall be. 13 But if he wants at all to redeem it, then he must add one-fifth to your valuation.

God says, "Don't substitute." If you have promised to do something for God, go through with it.

Remember the sin of Ananias and Sapphira in Acts 5? They said they were giving to the Lord the entire price of a piece of land, but they didn't go through with it. They didn't have to give all of it to God. Apostle Peter told them that while it was theirs, they were perfectly free to do with it what they wished. It was a voluntary offering, but then they tried to pretend that they were giving everything to God while they were withholding some of it from God. It was their deception and pride got them killed.

C. THE DEDICATION OF THE PROPERTY

From v14 to v25, it talk about the dedication of the property and how it can be redeemed. This must have been a very complicated system. Land could be dedicated to God even though the land belonged to God. The land was evaluated on the basis of its productivity and in relation to the year of Jubilee. All land returned to the original owner at that time.

D. THE UNREDEEMABLE THINGS

Leviticus 27:26-34 'But the firstborn of the animals, which should be the Lord's firstborn, no man shall dedicate; whether it is an ox or sheep, it is the Lord's. 27 And if it is an unclean animal, then he shall redeem it according to your valuation, and shall add one-fifth to it; or if it is not redeemed, then it shall be sold according to your valuation. 28 'Nevertheless no devoted offering that a man may devote to the Lord of all that he has, both man and beast, or the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed; every devoted offering is most holy to the Lord. 29 No person under the ban, who may become doomed to destruction among men, shall be redeemed, but shall surely be put to death. 30 And all the tithe of the land, whether of the seed of the land or of the fruit of the tree, is the Lord's. It is holy to the Lord. 31 If a man wants at all to redeem any of his tithes, he shall add one-fifth to it. 32 And concerning the tithe of the herd or the flock, of whatever passes under the rod, the tenth one shall be holy to the Lord. 33 He shall not inquire whether it is good or bad, nor shall he exchange it; and if he exchanges it at all, then both it and the one exchanged for it shall be holy; it shall not be redeemed.'" 34 These are the commandments which the Lord commanded Moses for the children of Israel on Mount Sinai.

There were things three that already set apart for the Lord and they could not be redeemed.

1) The firstborn animals of Israel

The firstborn animals were all set apart for the Lord at the first Passover. These animals could not be redeemed.

2) The things devoted to the Lord

These would be like the spoils of war at Jericho from the Book of Joshua 6 and 7. We also find another example in 1 Samuel 15 where king Saul tried to con prophet Samuel about the good quality sheep, oxen and other good things he kept for God. Right! The Lord clearly told him to destroy everything and everyone. It became the turning point of his kingship to destruction.

3) The tithe of the Lord

The tithes of the produce had already been set apart for the Lord and couldn't be used any other way.

E. APPLICATIONS

1) God expects us to keep our commitments to Him and be honest in all our dealings with Him.

2) We must not try to negotiate "a better deal" or to escape responsibilities.

3) It's good to give money to the Lord, but giving money isn't always an acceptable way to express our devotion to God. But the best thing to offer to the Lord is our hearts. Once our hearts are in Him, the rest follows.

F. THE SUMMARY OF THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

1) Our God is a holy God.

Whenever we minimize the holiness of God, we're in danger of minimizing human sinfulness, and the combination of these two errors results in the minimizing of the sacrifice of Jesus Christ.

Under the half-cocked banner of God of love and mercy, many churches ignore the holiness and righteousness of God. Consequently, they do not remind their congregation about the justice and judgment of God.

Yes, God loves sinners, that is why He sent His only begotten Son to die for our sins. But He hates and despises our sins. He always disciplines His children who rebel against His holiness, because He loves us.

2) God wants His people to be holy.

Eight times in Scripture, God said, "Be holy, for I am holy." Since God's commandments are His enablements, this commandment assures us that it's possible to live a holy life. What health is to the body, holiness is to the soul. And the Great Physician can give us the spiritual health and wholeness that we need.

Holiness requires living the way the Bible tells us without compromises. Is it popular? No, you will be isolated by others, but you will be welcomed by our God.

3) Holiness begins at the altar.

The idea behind the ancient Hebrew word for 'altar' is essentially, "killing-place." The ancient altar – a place of death – was made holy and was consecrated to God. Like that ancient altar, the altar of the New Covenant – the cross – is transformed from a place of death to a place set apart to bring life.

The first step toward holiness is the admission of my own sin and the recognition of Christ as my Savior and Redeemer from sin. If I think I'm going to become holy because of my sincere resolutions, my religious habits, or my theological knowledge, I'm heading for certain failure. True, we need spiritual knowledge, and we ought to resolve to cultivate godly habits. But apart from the sacrifice of Jesus Christ, all these good things are useless if not harmful.

4) Holiness involves obedience and discipline.

It wasn't enough for the Jewish worshiper to bring a sacrifice to the altar and go away knowing that his or her sins had been forgiven. That worshiper also had to obey God's commandments.

Believers today should do the same. What the Bible tells us, that we must do. Even though there are many things from the Old Testament that do not apply to us because they were for the ancient Israelites. But there are plenty things we must follow in the New Testament. Worshiping the Lord does not stop at the exit door of the church on Sunday. It continues throughout the week, everyday, 24/7.

James 1:22 But be doers of the word, and not hearers only, deceiving yourselves.

5) Holiness must be from God and be genuine.

We must beware of “false zeal.” God killed Nadab and Abihu, the sons of Aaron, because they brought “strange fire” and false zeal into the sanctuary, violating the holy law of God. God doesn’t do that today, if He did, not very many believers would be left.

Hyped-up religious feelings are no guarantee that we’re pleasing God, and the absence of them doesn’t mean we’re failing Him. Satan is a deceiver, and we must be careful to detect and reject his counterfeits.

True worship of God comes from the Spirit of God according to Scripture – in context – and it magnifies and glorifies God alone, not anyone else and all done in order.