



We are about to end reviewing the book of Leviticus which finishes the section of God's laws given to Israel while they were in Mount Sinai. They have been there for eleven months (Ex. 19:1; Num. 10:11), since God's law was most probably given on the day of Pentecost and then the main statutes and judgments were given afterwards. Upon completing this, God called Moses up to the top of Mt. Sinai, where he stayed for 40 days. Meanwhile, the Israelites strayed from their oath of faith during the latter part of that time and built a golden calf. Moses came down and in his anger, flung the two tablets with the Ten Commandments, breaking them. After dealing with this apostasy, God again called Moses up to the mount and he stayed for another 40 days. After Moses descended, work was begun building the Tabernacle, which was finished "on the first day of the first month" of the second year (Ex. 40:2). Then, the book of Leviticus was given by God with additional and more specific laws about sacrifices, the priesthood and many other moral and spiritual laws. We are covering this last section, before the people of Israel pull up their tent pegs and begin their trip to the Promised Land.

After giving them specific instructions about His Holy Days, there is an unfortunate incident that now takes place. "Now the son of an Israelite woman whose father was an Egyptian, went out among the children of Israel; and this Israelite woman's son and a man of Israel fought each other in the camp. And the Israelite woman's son blasphemed the name of the Lord and cursed and so, they brought him to Moses...Then they put him in custody, that the mind of the Lord might be shown to them. And the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, 'Take outside the camp him who has cursed; then let all who heard him lay their hands on his head, and let all the congregation stone him...You shall have the same law for the stranger and for one from your own country; for I am the Lord your God. Then Moses spoke to the children of Israel; and they took outside the camp him who had cursed, and stoned him with stones. So the children of Israel did as the Lord commanded Moses'" (Lev. 24:10-23).

Some Bible critics use this incident to show how cruel and extremist is the Old Testament. But before jumping to such conclusion, let's consider the following points:

1. Moses first placed the man under custody until the evidence could be gathered and then consulted with God what to do.
2. The judgment was God's, who can read the heart and mind of the person, and found him guilty and sentenced to be stoned. It was not Moses who decided this, but the Almighty God.
3. The offender apparently wanted to set up his tent, not among the strangers, but among the Danites by right of his Danite mother. Yet it is clearly mentioned his father was an Egyptian, and part of the "mixed multitude" that on the whole caused Moses so many problems because of their unbelief.
4. This example shows what can sometimes happen with such mixed marriages, when they are religiously unequally yoked. There is always the danger that a child will adopt the unbelieving parent's ideas, and learn to blaspheme God with his words and actions, as happened here.
5. Blaspheming and cursing God's name should not be taken lightly. It is part of the prohibition of the Third Commandment: "You shall not take the name of the Lord in vain." In the New Testament, this is the similar to blaspheming the Holy Spirit, God's divine nature and power, although the consequences in this case are far worse—since it leads to the second death.

After this incident, where everyone learns God means business, and to respect His name and what it represents, in chapter 25, God gives His law dealing with the Land Sabbath of the Seventh Year.

"Six years you shall sow your field, and six years you shall prune your vineyard and gather its fruit; but in the seventh year there shall be a sabbath of solemn rest for the land, a sabbath to the Lord. You shall neither sow your field nor prune your vineyard" (Lev. 25:3-4).

So during the seventh year, no crops were to be sown or harvested. But whatever produce grew by itself could be used for daily food by the farmer and the poor of the land (vs. 6). Debts incurred by the poor during the previous six years and that came due, were also to be cancelled at the end of the seventh year (Deut. 15:1-11).

After seven cycles of sabbatical years (49 years), the fiftieth year was proclaimed a jubilee, a time of rejoicing (Lev. 25:8-12). Again the land was to rest from cultivation and all families that had

become poor and had mortgaged their land could return to their possession.

The following is taken from our previous letter series on the subject: “These were major economic laws given by God. They were meant to prevent undue wealth gotten through acquisition of farm land from accumulating in the hands of the rich while the poor become further impoverished. God emphasizes over and over that people are not to oppress one another (Lev. 25:14, 17). Deuteronomy 15 states emphatically that following these economic laws would bring God’s blessings (verses 4, 6, and 10). God wants people to learn to be generous and compassionate—to have the ‘give’ attitude rather than the ‘get’ attitude.

“Today’s world, however, is characterized by materialism and greed. Farmers driven by economics try to milk the last bit of production from their tired soil and livestock. Economies collapse in wrenching depressions—or major recessions—and great hardship affects the world’s economy approximately every fifty years. People practice selfishness and oppression of others.

“God’s land Sabbath and Jubilee were intended to prevent this hard-hearted attitude and the economic curses that naturally result. Man was to willingly forego his crop in the sabbatical year and the Jubilee by letting the land rest. He was to acknowledge God as the true owner of the land and be thankful for God’s generosity. And he was to share the good things of the earth with others. The rest from tilling the land provided opportunities for education, travel, community service, and spiritual reflection.

“God promised to perform a miracle in granting abundant crops in the sixth year of the cycle so that the bounty would suffice until a new crop came in two or three years later (Lev. 25:20-22). This would be a continuing witness of God’s power as Provider, just as the manna in the wilderness had been.

“The question naturally arises, then, how can a Christian apply these laws of God now? Obviously, an individual cannot observe all the details of these laws, since that would require national legislation. An individual cannot release his own debts, and there is no divinely appointed inheritance for each family today. But these laws are all for man’s good, so we ought to observe them to the extent that this can be done in the present system. Even where a

law cannot be practiced in the letter, it should be kept in the spirit.

“We must not oppress anyone in our dealings, and we must strive to be generous, kindhearted, patient, and forgiving. A farmer who owes money to banks probably cannot let all his land rest every seven years, since he owes mortgage and other loan payments that must be made each year. In such a case, it is suggested that the land be rested in rotation so that each field receives its rest sometime during a seven-year period. If one is able to rest the whole farm at once, so much the better. He can reckon his seventh year from the time of his baptism or from the time that the knowledge comes to him regarding the land rest. (Note that the Jews in the state of Israel observe their sabbatical years in the sequence 1993-1994, 2000-2001, 2007-2008 and so on.) God does want us to take care of the soil and to recognize that we are merely tenants on His land, responsible for maintaining its fertility. Virtually all agricultural colleges know the benefits of crop rotation and of ‘resting’ land by putting it in pasture or cover crops periodically. God soil conservation measures should also be practiced.

“God is concerned with how we use the resources He allows us to manage. He is judging each of us by how we deal with and treat our fellowman (1 Pet. 4). Thus, His laws and instructions are not archaic or quaint customs! They are living laws to be observed by God’s people!”

Also, it is important to note that in the following chapter, which we will now study, more is said about the Land Sabbaths, and the punishment on Israel if they did not keep them. “And after all of this, if you do not obey Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins...I will bring the land to desolation, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it. I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste. Then the land shall enjoy its sabbaths as long as it lies desolate and you are in your enemies’ land; then the land shall rest and enjoy its sabbaths. As long as it lies desolate it shall rest—for the time it did not rest on your sabbaths when you dwelt in it” (26:27-35).

Wesley’s Bible Commentary says, “This was actually fulfilled when the Israelites were led into captivity to Babylon. For, from Saul to the captivity

are about 490 years, during which period there were 70 sabbaths of years neglected by the Hebrews. Now the Babylonish captivity lasted 70 years, and during that time the land of Israel rested.”

The Bible Reading Program has an interesting note on Lev. 26: “God had made promises of national greatness to Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and Joseph that were unconditional—He committed Himself to bestow them on their descendants to remain true to His Word. However, God had not as yet bound Himself to any time frame in this regard except that the national greatness had to occur in this age in order for the Israelites to possess the “gate of their enemies” (see Genesis 22:17). Since Israel was not even a nation until the time of Moses in the mid-15th century B.C., this allowed a nearly 3,500-year window until this end time for the birthright blessings of national greatness to be poured out. So would God bestow the blessings at the beginning of that window—that is, to the newly formed nation of Israel here heading toward the Promised Land? It appears that He *would* have—if Israel had met the condition of continued obedience as outlined in this chapter, Leviticus 26, and its parallel passage, Deuteronomy 28. (Again, the blessings themselves were *unconditional*, but God was free to attach conditions as to the *time* in which He would give them.)

“Right up front in Leviticus 26, God stresses prohibitions against idolatry and Sabbath breaking, the very sins for which Israel would be punished by national captivity under the Assyrians more than 700 years later (compare Ezekiel 20:18-24). Then the Eternal lays forth the *conditions* that had to be met in order for them to begin receiving the birthright blessings right away: “If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them, *then* I will give you...” (verse 3). Perfect weather and soil conditions would yield one bumper crop after another. They would have so much that they would have to get rid of their vast surplus to make room for the next incredible harvest (verses 4-5). Their country would not be overrun by deadly snakes, swarms of locusts or disease-bearing tse-tse flies, which now plague the African continent. Savage lions and tigers would not ravage small villages, terrifying and devouring their inhabitants, as happens in some areas of Africa and India today.

“Disobedience, however, would bring a different result—for a time, at least. The Israelites would be victims of sickness and disease, drought, crop failures, famine and pestilence. They would be invaded, defeated, plundered and, as they had been in Egypt, enslaved. Sadly, these exact kinds of curses came on them time after time during the period of the judges. Yet they failed to learn their lesson. The period of the divided monarchy saw Israel wallowing ever more in the worship of Baal and other false gods. And finally, the rest of the curses of Leviticus 26 befell them, including national captivity and a 2,520-year delay in receiving the birthright blessings (see “Birthright Blessings Delayed for 2,520 Years” at www.ucg.org/brp/materials).

“At last, God did bestow the birthright of national greatness on the modern descendants of Israel as He had promised—and the United States, Britain, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, other British-descended areas and, to a lesser extent, the other northwest European nations have been tremendously blessed as a result. But the timing is still in His hands. He is not required to continue the blessings indefinitely in this age. Indeed, many prophecies make it clear that the curses of Leviticus 26 are again going to befall the modern-day descendants of Israel—in a worse way than ever before.”

In chapter 27, we have the tithing law established by God. “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...These are the commandments which the Lord commanded Moses for the children of Israel on Mount Sinai” (vs. 30, 34). Here we see the tithe of our earnings is God’s. We should not even borrow from our tithes (verses 32-33). He who does not tithe is robbing God (Malachi 3:8). We should show God our faith by our actions, and He wants us to test Him in this (Mal. 3:10). Next time we begin with Numbers.