

Explore the Bible: February 23

Holy Living • Leviticus 26:1-13

By Wayne VanHorn



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Faithfulness (Lev. 26:1-2)

Idolatry represents the sin of faithlessness towards God. Thus, the Lord forbids the making of idols, carved images, sacred pillars, or sculpted stones for the purpose of worship (Lev. 26:1). The reason? “I am the LORD your God,” a phrase appearing 22 times in Leviticus; 21 times in the Holiness Code. The presence of the true God leaves no room for false gods in our lives.

Leviticus 26:2 provides two ways to avoid idolatry. First, the Lord reiterates His command to keep the Sabbaths each week. The phrase “My Sabbaths” underscores the importance of the Sabbath for God’s people and the seriousness of the fourth commandment (Exod. 20:8-11). The Sabbath provided people time to reflect on God as Creator and as Redeemer.

The second way to avoid idolatry was to revere the Lord’s sanctuary. Referred to here as “My sanctuary,” the importance of the tabernacle and the temple for the worship of Yahweh is underscored. The priestly instructions to the people were intended to exalt the Sabbath and the worship center. The concept of the “central sanctuary” is pronounced in Moses’ last addresses to the Israelites on the plains of Moab in the book of Deuteronomy.

Blessing (Lev. 26:3-8)

The biggest word in biblical theology is “if!” Using parallelism, a feature of Hebrew literature, Moses relayed the Lord’s conditions wherein two lines mean virtually the same thing to emphasize one point. In Leviticus 26:3, the statement “If you walk in My statutes” is parallel to “keep My commandments so as to carry them out.” The double use of the pronoun “My” centers us on God’s Word and will. The one point is the demand for obedience.

Leviticus 26:4-8 states God’s blessings in response to His people’s obedience. “Then” completes the conditional

statements of the previous verse. First, God promised to provide timely rains producing crops and fruit-filled trees (26:4). In agrarian terms, the blessing of the food crops would be so bountiful the threshing of the grain harvest would last until the gathering of the grape harvest, which in turn, would last until time to plant the crops again (26:5). The people could eat until satisfied while living securely in the land.

The Lord added the blessings of “peace in the land” and security from enemies and harmful beasts (Lev. 26:6). They would “lie down with no one making you tremble” and “no sword” passing through the land. The elimination of harmful beasts removed the terror of their attack. Leviticus 26:7-8 promises military success. Whether greatly outnumbered, God’s people would be empowered to chase their enemies, who would fall by the sword.

Fellowship (Lev. 26:9-13)

Fellowship with God is the reason the Lord created people in His image and likeness. Once sin entered human history (Gen. 3), people became separated from God. The well known and oft repeated remedy for our sin problem is to confess those sins to God, turn from those sins in repentance, and turn to God in faith. The ultimate promise of God is His presence among His people. That makes the “if” in Leviticus 26:3 of ultimate importance. When we obey God, He promises to turn to us, making us fruitful, and confirming His covenant with us, just as He promised to ancient Israel (Lev. 26:9).

Eating the old grain of the previous year to make way for the new grain speaks to the blessing of abundant harvest (Lev. 26:10). Leviticus 26:11-12 focuses on God’s presence in the midst of His people. The phrase “My residence” renders the Hebrew term *mishkani*, from which the concept of the Shekinah glory derives. God’s presence means we are no longer rejected. He will walk among us as our God and we shall be His people.

The clause "I am the Lord your God" reintroduces the historical reference to Yahweh's deliverance of His people from Egyptian bondage. Freedom from slavery meant His people could "live in freedom," literally "walk uprightly" without the burden of slavery forcing them to be bowed over.

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