

CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE- PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH

[Adapted from Bethel Bible-Presbyterian
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DHW BIBLE CLASS LESSON 16 LEVITICUS CHAPTER 27

INTRODUCTION

Leviticus ends with rules relating to vows taken by the children of Israel unto the LORD. Vows are voluntarily made. People make vows either to express their devotion and love for the LORD or for specific requests that they ask of God. Hannah made a specific request to the LORD and made a vow that her first born would be given to the LORD (1 Samuel 1:11).¹ Jacob also made a vow to God.² When a vow has been made, it must be kept. It is a very serious offence to break a vow. That is why the inspired writer of the book of Ecclesiastes exhorts that it is better not to make a vow than not to keep it.³

¹ 1 Samuel 1:11 And she vowed a vow, and said, O LORD of hosts, if thou wilt indeed look on the affliction of thine handmaid, and remember me, and not forget thine handmaid, but wilt give unto thine handmaid a man child, then I will give him unto the LORD all the days of his life, and there shall no razor come upon his head.

² Genesis 28:20 And Jacob vowed a vow, saying, If God will be with me, and will keep me in this way that I go, and will give me bread to eat, and raiment to put on, 21 So that I come again to my father's house in peace; then shall the LORD be my God:

³ Ecclesiastes 5:4 When thou vowest a vow unto God, defer not to pay it; for *he hath* no pleasure in fools: pay that which thou hast

Chapter 27 relates how an Israelite could make a voluntary vow of himself or animals or his houses or land. It concludes with the giving of a tenth of one's possessions to the LORD. The study of this concluding chapter of Leviticus should bring out some fundamental principles concerning vows and tithing.

OUTLINE

A. The Dedication Vow of a Person unto the LORD (27:1-8).

1. A person could voluntarily vow to dedicate himself to serve the LORD (vv.1, 2).
2. The person could keep the vow by payment of a fixed sum to the priests (vv.3-7).
 - a. For a man between the age of 20 and 60, 50 shekels (v.3).
 - b. For a woman between the age of 20 and 60, 30 shekels (v.4).
 - c. For a youngster between the age of five and 20, 20 shekels; of a female, 10 shekels (v.5).
 - d. For a male infant between the age of one month and five, five shekels; and of a female infant, three shekels (v.6).
 - e. For an elderly man, 15 shekels; and an elderly woman, 10 shekels (v.7).

vowed. 5 Better *is it* that thou shouldest not vow, than that thou shouldest vow and not pay.

3. The poor could pay a reduced sum estimated by the priest (v.8).

B. The Dedication Vow of An Animal unto the LORD (27:9-13).

1. A person could voluntarily vow to dedicate an animal unto the LORD (v.9a).
2. The animal would be deemed sanctified to the LORD and unalterable (vv.9b, 10).
3. An unclean animal could be offered for a vow subject to the evaluation of the priest (vv.11, 12).
4. The re-purchase back of the animal could be done by payment of a sum plus 20 percent of the value (v.13).

C. The Dedication Vow of the House or Land unto the LORD (27:14-25)

1. A person could vow to dedicate his house unto the LORD (vv.14, 15).
 - The purchasing back of the house could be effected by a payment fixed by the priest with an added 20 percent over the value (v.15).
2. A person could vow to dedicate his land or field (vv.16-25).
 - a. The evaluation of a person's land dedicated to the LORD would be according to the productivity of the land (v.16).
 - b. The evaluation would take into account the number of years until the next jubilee (vv.17, 18).

- c. Redemption of the land would be paid with an additional 20 percent over its value (v.19).

- d. If he did not redeem it or had sold the land to another, his land would be forfeited and in the year of jubilee, the land would belong to the priests (vv.20, 21).

- e. If the land that was dedicated did not belong to the person, the priest would evaluate it and release it to the original owner in the year of jubilee (vv.22-24).

3. All the evaluation must be according to the sanctuary weight (v.25).

D. Other Rulings Regarding the Dedication of Animals (27:26-29).

1. The firstlings of animals belonged to the LORD and could not be offered for a dedication vow (v.26).
2. The firstlings of an unclean animal could be redeemed with an added 20 percent over the evaluation (v.27).
3. All *devoted* things, man, animal, or land might not be redeemed (vv.28, 29).

E. Rules Concerning Tithing (27:30-34).

1. A tenth of the land and its produce belonged to the LORD (v.30).
2. The redemption of the tithe could be done with an added 20 percent to the value (v.31).

3. A tenth of cattle or the sheep belonged to the LORD (vv.32, 33).

F. These were the Commandments of the LORD to the Children of Israel (27:34).

COMMENTARY

Personal Dedication

The LORD told Moses to tell the children of Israel that they could make a vow or a gift to be wholly dedicated to God. There was no compulsion to make such a vow. They could vow by dedicating themselves to the service of the LORD (v.3). And if they did, they should keep the vow or pay a sum of money to the priests. The priest would evaluate the sum to be paid. If the person was aged between 20 and 60, he had to pay 50 shekels of silver (v.3). If it was a woman, the amount would be 30 shekels (v.4). The amount decreased with age - the younger the person, the smaller the amount. If a person was too poor, he could go to the priest for an estimate of how much to pay (v.8).

The amount that a female had to pay was less. This was not because the men were deemed as more valuable than the women. All men and women are equally precious in the sight of God (Galatians 3:28).⁴ Christ died for everyone, big and small, great and low, king and pauper. The measure was the person's worth in terms of his/her service in the temple. We can safely surmise that a man could do more service than a woman. The woman had to look after the family and if she was in

⁴ KJV Galatians 3:28 There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus.

the family way she would not be able to do much. Hence, we see a difference in the premium to keep the vow.

Dedicating an Animal

An Israelite could offer an animal for his vow. But the firstlings of animals, either of cattle or sheep, could not be offered because they belonged to the LORD (v.26). If the animal was unclean, he could not offer it as a sacrifice but he could bring it to the priest to have it valued (v.11). When the time came for the animal to be sacrificed, he must not offer an animal of less value than what was vowed (v.10). If he committed this breach, he would have to give up both the substituted animal and the one originally offered to the priests. For the unclean animal, which could not be offered as a sacrifice, the man had to pay a sum fixed by the priest and an added 20 percent to redeem the animal.

Dedicating a House or Land

The dedication of a house to the LORD was a little more involved. The dedicating of the house or land became the LORD's possession and the priests could dispose of it as they deemed fit. Two examples of this kind were recorded in Acts. Barnabas sold his land and gave all the money to the church (Acts 4:36-37).⁵ Ananias and Sapphira, who sold their property but kept part of the money for themselves, had robbed God and breached their vow (Acts 5:2).⁶ They were severely punished for it.

⁵ Acts 4:36 And Joses, who by the apostles was surnamed Barnabas, (which is, being interpreted, The son of consolation,) a Levite, and of the country of Cyprus, 37 Having land, sold *it*, and brought the money, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

⁶ Acts 5:2 And kept back *part* of the price, his wife also being privy *to it*, and brought a certain part, and laid *it* at the apostles' feet.

The Israelites could redeem the house or land they had vowed. For the house, the priest would estimate the value of the property and add another 20 percent (v.15). In the case of the land, the man who dedicated it had to redeem the land before the year of jubilee (vv.19, 20). The method of evaluation would be according to the size of the land and the number of years until the jubilee. If the land yielded barley, then a homer (about 134-241 litres) of barley seeds at one shekel every year until the jubilee will add up to a maximum of 50 shekels of silver (vv.16-18).⁷

If the man would not redeem it or had sold it to another man, the land could not be redeemed any more. And if the land was not redeemed by the year of the jubilee, it would become a land “devoted” or *herem* to the LORD, that is, it belonged to the LORD. The priests would take possession of the land (vv.20, 21).

If a man dedicated a piece of property which he had bought and which was not originally his own, the priest would evaluate the value of the property up to the year of jubilee for its redemption. However, the land would be returned to its original owner in the year of the jubilee. All evaluation would be according to the sanctuary shekel (v.25).

The Devoted Thing

Every *devoted thing* belonged to the LORD. The word “devoted” is *herem* (in Hebrew). A thing or person that was devoted or *herem* was consecrated permanently. If it was devoted to the LORD, it was given permanently to the service of God. So whatever was

devoted whether man or animal or land or possession cannot be redeemed nor sold (v.28). In a war when the spoil of a city was placed under a *herem*, they belonged to God and on specific instructions from God, the animals or the people might be put to death. An example of this was the taking of Jericho. God gave specific instructions to Joshua that the city and all that was therein were “accursed” (literally *herem*, devoted, Joshua 6:17-19).⁸

Tithing

The custom of tithing was practised even before the Law was given. It started with Abraham. Abraham gave a tenth of all his goods to Melchizedek, who was the priest of the most High God (Genesis 14:20). The LORD imposed upon the children of Israel the tithe of the land and all its produce. And if any man wanted to keep the LORD’s tithe, he should add another 20 percent to its value. The tithe also applied to the herd and the flock. The children of Israel should not try to change any defective cattle or sheep. If he did, both would be forfeited to the LORD.

Tithing was necessary because the priests, who served the tabernacle of the LORD, needed food and resources to maintain the service to God. The imposition of the tithes by the LORD was understandable. In the New

⁷ Wenham, *Leviticus*, 339-340.

⁸ Joshua 6:17 And the city shall be accursed, *even* it, and all that *are* therein, to the LORD: only Rahab the harlot shall live, she and all that *are* with her in the house, because she hid the messengers that we sent. 18 And ye, in any wise keep *yourselves* from the accursed thing, lest ye make *yourselves* accursed, when ye take of the accursed thing, and make the camp of Israel a curse, and trouble it. 19 But all the silver, and gold, and vessels of brass and iron, *are* consecrated unto the LORD: they shall come into the treasury of the LORD.

Testament, tithing is not categorically commanded. But that does not negate the fact that the Church and those who serve the LORD full-time in the church need to be cared for and funds must be obtained to maintain the administrative and pastoral functioning of the church. Those who serve the LORD full time especially those who perform the work of preaching and teaching of the Word are worthy of support (1 Timothy 5:17, 18).⁹ In his second letter to the Corinthian Christians, Paul exhorted them to give willingly and cheerfully to those who were in need (2 Corinthians 9:7).¹⁰ This principle of giving voluntarily does not mean that one should give less. On the contrary, one should give more. Therefore, the Levitical law of tithing is a good guide to those who have purposed in their heart to give to the LORD.

PRACTICAL VALUE

Leviticus concludes with the matter concerning the making of vows and tithing. They are important. We do make vows, not only to God but also to one another (promises are a form of vow). When we make these vows or promises, we must remember to faithfully keep them. Otherwise, it is better not to make any at all.

As regards tithing, Christians ought to realize that the giving of their

resources and income to God is an expression of their love for the LORD and an acknowledgment that all that they possess come from the LORD. Paul wrote instructively and fully on this matter in 2 Corinthians 8 and 9. We must take tithing seriously.

Peter and Chris Geddes are good inspirational examples for us. When they began their marriage, they made a mutual vow to give the first tenth of everything they gained to Christ's work. They started with a small printing business which grew considerably through the years. They increased the percentage of their giving from 10 percent to 20 percent and then to 30 percent. Then they decided to make it 50-50. They could have supported a more lavish home and a more expansive lifestyle but they would not have received the joy which they gained from supporting their church, Christian missions and ministries around the world. The stewardship of our money demonstrates much about ourselves as subjects of the Kingdom of God. AMEN

⁹ 1 Timothy 5:17 Let the elders that rule well be counted worthy of double honour, especially they who labour in the word and doctrine. 18 For the scripture saith, Thou shalt not muzzle the ox that treadeth out the corn. And, The labourer is worthy of his reward.

¹⁰ 2 Corinthians 9:7 Every man according as he purposeth in his heart, so let him give; not grudgingly, or of necessity: for God loveth a cheerful giver.

DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

Daily Readings

Monday: Leviticus 27:1-8; Ecclesiastes 4:4-5.

Tuesday: Leviticus 27:9-13; 1 Samuel 1:11-28.

Wednesday: Leviticus 27:14-25; Acts 5:1-11.

Thursday: Leviticus 27:26-29; Psalm 76:11; Malachi 1:14.

Friday: Leviticus 27:30-34; Malachi 3:7-12; 2 Corinthians 9:6-15.

Discussion Questions

1. How do we know that making a vow is voluntary and not compulsory?

2. Is it all right for a Christian to make a vow unto the LORD?

3. What temptation does the Christian face after he has made a vow to the LORD?

4. What was the penalty for not being able to fulfil one's vow to the LORD?

5. What were the things mentioned in Leviticus 26 that could be offered in a vow to the LORD?

6. What is the most important thing to remember when a Christian has made a vow to the LORD?

10. If everyone in our church thoroughly understands this chapter and each has a passion for living out its truth, what kind of practical changes do you expect to see?

7. What were the things that might not be sold or redeemed?

8. Why did the LORD require His people to tithe?

9. What can we learn about God's character in this chapter?

TEACHING LESSON

- A. Gifts vowed to the Lord had to be valued if they were to be redeemed with money. Such gifts included people, animals, houses and land.
1. Vows were voluntary.
 2. Vows must be kept.
- B. What had been “devoted” (*herem*) could never be bought back.
1. Explain the word “devoted” (*herem*) in contrast to “shall be holy” (*kodesh*) or “sanctify” (*kadesh*).
 2. Identify what is devoted and what is sanctified in a Christian today.
- C. Tithing
1. Practised long before the giving of the Law (Genesis 14:20 & 28:22).
 2. But because of misuse, it is only mentioned in the negative in the New Testament (Matthew 23:23).
 3. However, misuse should never divert us from the validity of the principle of tithing (2 Corinthians 8 & 9).
 - a. Discuss the principles of giving to the Lord.
 4. All our material and financial possessions belong to God; we acknowledge this by joyfully giving a portion to Him and to His service through His ministers.
 - a. Show the truth of the first statement.

- b. Suggest the practical ways of giving to the Lord.

CONCLUSION

What have we learned from the study of Leviticus?

1. God
 - a. His character
 - b. His will
 - c. His dealings with His people
2. The themes
 - a. The Burnt Offerings
 - b. The Feasts of the Lord
 - c. The Dietary Laws
 - d. The Hygienic Laws
 - e. The Marital Laws
 - f. The Community Laws
 - g. Vows and Tithing