

Week of May 25/26, 2013 Blessings of Holiness

Passage Outline:

1. God's Fruitfulness - Leviticus 26:3-10
2. God's Presence - Leviticus 26:11-13
3. God's Restoration - Leviticus 26:40-42,45

What Will Pastor Jim Talk About?

God promises blessings in response to living a holy life. Even when we have wandered away from God, He promises the blessing of restoration when we repent and return to Him. Pastor Jim will encourage you to live a life of holiness—the life you were intended to live—a life characterized by fruitfulness, God's presence, and the promise of restoration.

1. God's Fruitfulness - Leviticus 26:3-10

³ "If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, ⁴ I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit. ⁵ Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land. ⁶ "I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid. I will remove savage beasts from the land, and the sword will not pass through your country. ⁷ You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall by the sword before you. ⁸ Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you. ⁹ "I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you. ¹⁰ You will still be eating last year's harvest when you will have to move it out to make room for the new.

God begins with "If you obey My commands" What follows are the blessings that will flow from God as long as His people follow His Laws and decrees. The first blessing is that the land will yield its produce, and the trees ... will bear their fruit. To have enough food to eat was one of the most precious blessings to Israel, because she a struggled with drought and famine.

The message of these first few verses is often lost on us because of the abundance of food. And yet in a nation of such great abundance, we still have the highest poverty rate of any industrialized nation and the most number of people who go to bed hungry each night. Could it be that since our beloved country has not followed God's commands, He is beginning to withhold the blessing of abundance?

Read the article "The Agriculture of Israel" contained in the heavy duty preparation packet.

God also promises that the people would not have to worry about security. They would live securely in the land, enjoying the fruit of their labors. It naturally follows that if one has economic/provisional prosperity (excessive foodstuffs) then the possibility for pursuing peace in the land will follow. However, notice who it is that provides this peace ("God will give peace ...") to the land. This peace included God's protection against wild beasts, military defeats, and even famine itself. It has been well attested that during biblical times wild, exotic animals inhabited Canaan, including lions and bears (Judg. 14:5; 2 Kings 2:24; Isa. 11:6-9).

Overall we see in this passage that God blesses the efforts of those who walk in His ways. As Christians we have similar promises in Matthew 6:33 and Philippians 4:13,19. Christ spoke of our priorities stating, "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things will be provided for you" (Matt. 6:33). Likewise the apostle Paul encouraged Christians by noting, "I am able to do all things through Him who strengthens me" or again, "And my God will supply all your needs according to His riches in glory in Christ Jesus" (Phil. 4:13,19).

The key to the Old Testament verses as well as those of the New Testament is walking in obedience! Remember that these verses (in either the Old or New Testament) are not some formula on how to gain God's blessing. Rather, they are instructions for living a holy life and letting blessings be the natural result. The Old Testament saints were required to do their part — they didn't simply sit back and wait for God's blessings to fall from the sky. Rather, they still planted, gathered, sowed, and at times went to war with their enemies. However, the outcome, either victory or failure, was the result of the state of their relationship with God!

2. God's Presence - Leviticus 26:11-13

¹¹ I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. ¹² I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. ¹³ I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high.

God said that He would “place My residence among you, and I will not reject you.” A literal translation of the Hebrew says God “tabernacling” with men. The tabernacle of the Old Testament was that special place where God and man fellowshiped. It was the place where God determined to dwell among His people as long as their sins were dealt with in the proper manner. What God desired for His people was that intimate fellowship that signified an ongoing, growing, loving relationship. Paul cited Leviticus 26:12 in 2 Corinthians 6:16 in saying that believers as the living temple of God! Christians are that special, living, holy temple that the Holy Spirit now inhabits. This living relationship with Yahweh is breathtaking in the enormity of the scope of who God is and how He wants to bless Israel and the church.

In verse 12 God “will walk among you and be your God.” The language of this verse is quite reminiscent of how God fellowshiped with Adam and Eve in the garden (see Gen. 3:8). God extends to His people the blessings of His presence. Sadly, because of our sin, it would take the coming of Jesus Christ, who lived among us, to make this a reality. Humanity, in its fallen state, would not nor could not possess this reality of living with God's presence except through the blessings of Jesus Christ.

God reminds Israel that her obedience to God was always a response to God's rescue from Egypt. They did not obey God and thus become God's people. God had already made them His people by delivering them from the Egyptians. Since God had freed Israel, God now reminds them they were His people and not their own.

Read the article “Egypt Before the Exodus” contained in the heavy duty preparation packet.

The imagery of the second half of the verse illustrates just how far God went to deliver His people. He noted, “I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high.” The yoke in Hebrew culture was the crossbeam that sat atop the back of a pair of draft animals as they plowed a field or performed other work functions. Whoever controlled the bars of your yoke controlled the animals to which the beam was attached. In the case of the nation of Israel, the crossbeam was the rod of the Pharaoh and it was he who controlled Israel until God delivered them from their bondage. Not only did He deliver the Israelites but He had given them the ability to walk with heads held high, meaning “to live in freedom.”

As Christians we too have been rescued from the slavery to sin and no longer walk bent over with heavy burdens of sin. We confess that sin (according to 1 John 1:9) and walk upright with newness of life and a restored relationship with God because of Jesus Christ. We recognize when we walk with God, we experience peace and confidence because we know that He will always be with us.

3. God's Restoration - Leviticus 26:40-42,45

⁴⁰ "But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers--their treachery against me and their hostility toward me, ⁴¹ which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies--then

when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin, ⁴² I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, ... ⁴⁵ But for their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God. I am the LORD."

We see here God's guidelines for dealing with our sin. For biblical repentance to occur three conditions must first be met: First, there needs to be recognition of the wrongness of the act and the confession of the sin. Essentially they must "agree" with God that the sin which they have committed is wrong. The process of agreeing with God means taking responsibility for their own sin and guilt rather than passing the blame on others or environment.

Second, there must be some kind of restitution or payment given to God for the wrong committed. In the Lord's Prayer, this idea is picked up when we use the word "debt" rather than trespass. With every sin, we are in debt to God, and owe Him for that wrong. Thank God that our debts have been paid in the blood of Jesus Christ! The first step to receiving that payment is to acknowledge our sin and seek God's payment for that sin through Jesus.

Third, at the very heart of God is His desire to restore His people. We see this in 1 John 1:9, when we repent of our sin, God is pictured as "faithful" and "righteous" forgiving of our sins and cleansing us from all unrighteousness. At the core is the Hebrew word "repent" is the meaning to turn around, to change one's heart, or to change life's direction.

God's faithfulness is pictured here going back to "Jacob ... Isaac and ... Abraham." He stated, "For their sake I will remember the covenant with their fathers." The same faithfulness God demonstrated in bringing the people out of Egypt because of the promises He made to the patriarchs, He would extend to those who repented.

Read the article "The Covenant with Abraham" contained in the heavy duty preparation packet.

God declared that when people who have turned from their holy relationship with Him repent and return to Him, He will then restore them to the relationship based on His covenant faithfulness! Christians who feel they have damaged their relationship with God beyond repair should recognize and accept that God desires restored fellowship with them. He will not reject those who return to Him.

Biblical Truths

1. Evaluate how closely you follow God's laws and observe His commands.
2. Recognize that when we walk with God, we experience peace and confidence, because we know His presence will always remain with us.
3. Christians who feel they have damaged their relationship with God beyond repair should recognize and accept that God desires restored fellowship with them, and He will not reject them when they return to Him.
4. Identify people you know who have turned from God, and pray for their return and restoration.

Word Study: Remember

The Hebrew word translated "remember" has a very interesting, wide range of meaning. It can mean to name, to mention, or to call to mind. These are some of the most common meanings of the word. However, in other contexts it can also have the connotation of being summoned, to report, or even to profess or praise.

In light of the semantic range for the word, the question must be asked, "Who is doing the remembering?"

In Scripture we are told that God remembers His people, His covenant, and even individuals (for example, Noah in Gen. 8:1; Abraham in Gen. 19:29; and etc.).

The memory of God is not in question but rather the will of His people to remember His covenant and love for them. We are told that the people of God can and should remember Him, His words, and His works. This is vividly displayed in the Third Commandment as well as being a constant refrain in the prophets who continually brought back to the people their duty to “remember” what God had done for them.