

Leviticus 26:3-20. The Covenant

God created mankind for a purpose: to have a relationship with Him, one that is appropriate to the status that we have as His creation and Him as our LORD, Savior, and God. It is a status that should be truly humbling to anyone who begins to understand the infinite power, majesty, and glory of God. Though the LORD desires a personal relationship with us, His purpose does not diminish His power.

A simple illustration comes from the nature of the universe that He created: at least that part of it that we can observe. So far we have identified 100 billion galaxies that contain an average of 300 billion stars that span across an observable distance of about 28 billion light years. We can estimate the age of a galaxy by the nature of the stars it contains, and a problem of scale arises when we have found that the farthest galaxies, whose visual or radio image we can observe left them about 13 billion years ago, appear the same age as those that are closest to us. Because of this, some scientists now estimate the “known” universe to span a distance ten times wider than we can currently observe, or literally 1000 times larger in volume than our current observable universe. This would translate to 100 trillion galaxies. God created this for His own pleasure. How great is your God?

How can we know a God who is so immense and powerful? Such knowledge must take place on His terms, not ours. God established those terms when He first began to reveal Himself to mankind, and those terms have never changed. God promises to bring to Himself any and all people who will place their faith and trust in Him. However, true faith and trust also involves the humble acceptance of His terms that include His demands on our behavior: that we deliberately turn from evil and sinful attitudes and actions. God is Holy and Righteous, and because of His Holiness, He does not condone sin. It is His plan to judge sin and reward faithfulness.

God has given us an opportunity to turn from our sinful nature, a nature that is illustrated by His Word:

Leviticus 26:3. If ye walk in my statutes, and keep my commandments, and do them;

A large part of the books of Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy contain the “Law,” imperatives, commands, and statutes that the LORD proclaimed to His people that serve to illustrate His opposition to sin. The Law serves to contrast

godly and ungodly behavior, helping us to understand the difference. The 26th chapter of Leviticus contains a simple argument: if we are obedient to the LORD who loves us, He will lavish us with His protection and blessing. However, if we rebel against Him, the absence of his protection and blessing will result in our difficult and violent destruction. The LORD promises great reward for those who place their faith and trust in Him. We might be able to understand this reward as an “abundant life,”¹ or a life that is lived to the full.

GOD OFFERS PROVISION AND PROTECTION TO THE FAITHFUL

Leviticus 26:4. *Then I will give you rain in due season, and the land shall yield her increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.*

As the Creator of the universe, God set in place all of its physical properties. It is God who created life itself, something that mankind in all of his science and experimentation can only mimic. It is God who put the entire ecosystem of this world in place. The water in the oceans, the rotation of the earth, and the tilt of its axis all work together to continually distribute moisture all over the surface of the earth, meeting one of our most important and basic needs: fresh, clean water. Fundamentally, the LORD promises to provide for the basic needs of His creation, and specifically for those people who love and trust in Him. As its Creator, God is sovereign over it, and He can and does use its physical properties to accomplish His purpose.² By giving us rain “in due season,” grasses and trees can thrive, reproduce, and produce fruit.

Leviticus 26:5. *And your threshing shall reach unto the vintage, and the vintage shall reach unto the sowing time: and ye shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely.*

God promises that His provision for the faithful will be continuous. The idea is given here of annual provision that maintains the integrity of their crops and fields until harvest time, and what they reap from the harvest will be sufficient to feed them without want until the next.

When we look back at our own lives, we will find that through all of those years of faithfulness to the LORD we did not starve to death. We did not lack for the provision of our basic needs. This does not mean that God is going to buy us a Mercedes Benz³, just because we want one. The promise is that, if we are faithful to Him and follow Him, God will provide for our basic needs. Much of this

¹ John 10:10.

² Consider the Noah flood, or the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, as an example of using the properties of meteorology to rid the earth of its egregious sinfulness.

³ Janis Joplin, Michael McClure, Bob Neuwirth. *Mercedes Benz*, from the album *Pearl*. Produced by Paul A. Rothchild. 1970.

is predicated upon understanding God's Word and purpose for our lives, and depends upon our listening to Him. We will find later in this passage the dangers we face when we fail to listen to Him.

God also promises that we will "dwell in the land safely." God promises His hand of protection over the faithful. Speaking to Israel directly, God demonstrated this promise to them many times when they faced enemies who were defeated and turned away by the LORD's intervention. In the same way, we have no idea of how many times each day the LORD protects His faithful from the dangers of this life. Again, a component of this protection is listening to and following His commandments, guidance that is intended to keep us from danger. It is when we reject the wisdom of God and step out of His hand of protection that we risk dangers that we otherwise would not face.

Leviticus 26:6-8. *And I will give peace in the land, and ye shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid: and I will rid evil beasts out of the land, neither shall the sword go through your land. ⁷And ye shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. ⁸And five of you shall chase an hundred, and an hundred of you shall put ten thousand to flight: and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword.*

God also promises peace to those who are faithful. Of course, all people desire peace, do be free from the fear of attack by evil people. The LORD is speaking to a nation, to a large body of people who are called to faith and obedience to Him. If the people respond, the very idea that the community will be one of faith, serves to rid the community of those who wish to do others harm. Also, as a faith community, the people will be able to take a stand together against their enemies, enemies who will now be attacking not just the LORD's people, but the LORD, Himself.

GOD OFFERS A RELATIONSHIP WITH HIM

Leviticus 26:9. *For I will have respect unto you, and make you fruitful, and multiply you, and establish my covenant with you.*

Again, speaking to a nation of faith, God refers to the favor that He will have for this nation as "respect" or "regard." Again, considering that God is the Creator of the Universe, it is amazing that He would make such a statement at all. Not only will God protect and provide for those who place their faith in Him, He promises to lift them up to a position of having a relationship with Him. There was no mechanism for any kind of "relationship" with a pagan god, simply because they do not exist. Consequently, this was an entirely new idea to the ancient Israelites who had just come out of Egypt and its pagan culture. Their gods had no

“regard” for the people. There was no mechanism for gods to treat the people with “respect.” Yet, God seeks to have a relationship with His creation, and chooses to do that through people of faith.

The promise to “be fruitful and multiply” also has a significance to the ancients that is probably all but lost today. Infant mortality among the people during this time was very high. Ignorance, hunger, and the lack of sanitation took its toll. A large part of the worship of pagan gods was to seek their favor concerning the survival of their newborn children. The LORD promises to end this period of grief for all those who have faith in Him and “keep His commandments.”

Natural human pride will often lead us to bristle against “commandments.” We want to be the master of our own environment. However, it is our own lack of mastery that so often brings us the grief that the ancients experienced. The wisdom of the LORD provides protection through His commandments, and much of that protection is realized in the area of health. The laws that the LORD enacted were uniform across the entire nation of Israel and served to provide them with many benefits if they would simply obey. They provided practical benefits when they instilled unity in the nation, rules on inter-personal behavior, dealing with crime, selecting and handling foods, etc. They provided spiritual benefit when obedience was rewarded by the LORD’s intervention in their lives to provide for their needs.

The establishment of a covenant is another characteristic of God’s plan for His people. Since pagan gods did not exist, there was no such thing as a “covenant” between God and man in their experience. A covenant necessitates relationship. Furthermore the vast gulf between an infinite and holy God, and a finite and quite unholy man is literally impossible to close. Only God can do this, and it is His purpose to do so through the covenant that He makes with man, a covenant that is of His design not ours, but one that is possible for us to accept: God offers this positive and blessed relationship with all who sincerely place their faith and trust in Him.

Leviticus 26:10. And ye shall eat old store, and bring forth the old because of the new.

Returning to the promise of His provision, the LORD makes it clear that the provision is unending. Before they have used up all of the old harvest, the bounty from the new harvest will come. Prior to knowing the LORD, the Israelites participated in the pagan worship practices that continually worked to appease their mythical gods for each crop, each sowing, each reaping, and for the bounty that would last for the next season. It was an on-going struggle necessitating, in their own beliefs, an unending appeasement that only seemed to result in poverty

and hunger when their crops would fail, their stores would be insufficient, or more likely, their stores would be stolen by nomadic marauders.

The LORD is promising that this cycle will end.

Leviticus 26:11. And I will set my tabernacle among you: and my soul shall not abhor you.

Again, in contrast to their pagan experience, the LORD makes a promise that no pagan god could ever do: He will set His “dwelling place” among them. This is not a promise of geography: the pagan beliefs centered around gods that held their influence in geographic areas. To be under the “influence” of a pagan god you must be in that pagan god’s region. However, the LORD makes a promise that is based upon relationship. He is saying, wherever you are, I will be there. When you move, I will move with you. This “special presence” was important to this new nation that had no prior experience with the LORD who is omnipresent: present everywhere in the universe at every moment in time. The LORD demonstrated his “special presence” by making such a promise. The people needed to know that the LORD was with them.

The word rendered “abhor” means to turn away from. The people also needed to understand that the LORD would never leave them. God never turns away from those who maintain their love for Him.⁴

Leviticus 26:12. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and ye shall be my people.

Not only does the LORD covenant to Tabernacle with the people, to “reside” in the region where they live, he promises to “walk” with them. The word that is rendered as “walk” has a broad range of meaning which can refer to a literal walk in the park to that which defines and informs the details of one’s daily life. This use tends towards the latter, wider, definition. The idea is that the LORD will be with each person of faith at all times and in all of the places that they go. They do not have to fear that they might find themselves in a place without the LORD being with them.

Virtually everything in the Jewish experience in some way points back to the Exodus from Egypt. The work of the LORD through this experience, bringing them from Egypt to this mountain, and then taking them on to the Promise Land shapes literally all of their identity. The statement “I will be your God and you will be my people” is repeated several times in the biblical narrative, this being the second. This first time this statement was made was when Moses was

⁴ Hebrews 13:5.

“negotiating” with a very recalcitrant and unshakable Pharaoh, and the LORD first stated this covenantal promise.⁵

Leviticus 23:13. *I am the LORD your God, which brought you forth out of the land of Egypt, that ye should not be their bondmen; and I have broken the bands of your yoke, and made you go upright.*

The LORD reminded the Israelites of the deliverance from bondage that they have experienced, a deliverance that came entirely by the work of God, and by no work of their own. There was nothing that the Israelites could do to be released from Pharaoh’s brutal power, a power that left them entirely hopeless for any positive change. However, because of God’s purpose of redeeming mankind for Himself, He reached through time and space, called Moses and Aaron, and use them to communicate with Pharaoh His plan for their deliverance, and then worked a sequence of miracles to make it happen. He promised to make a covenant with them, that they would be His people, and He would be their God.

This is the covenant, a promise of provision, protection, and relationship with those who will place their faith and trust in Him. This is the same covenant that God has made with all people throughout all of the ages of man from Adam, through Noah, through Moses, through Israel, and finally through the work of Jesus Christ on the Cross.

The fundamental work of the covenant is to reconcile mankind to Himself, to impute His righteousness upon those who love Him so that the sin that so characterizes their lives can be fully and completely forgiven. This is the simplicity of the gospel message: forgiveness of sin is given to all who place their faith and trust in Him. It is that forgiveness that brings us into fellowship with the LORD, and brings His providence, His presence, and His promises.

One would think that, with such a promise coming from God and given to the people of Israel that they would easily accept His love for them, place their faith in Him, and seek to keep His commandments. However, we find that Israel turned away from God’s promise. Jeremiah quotes the promise of God as he looks back at their experience from the Exodus to the period of the kings and to their final destruction when the remnant of faithful Israel is in Babylonian captivity. His summary is disheartening:

Jeremiah 7:23-26. *But this command I gave them, ‘Obey my voice, and I will be your God, and you shall be my people; and walk in all the way that I command you, that it may be well with you.’²⁴ But they did*

⁵ Exodus 6:7.

not obey or incline their ear, but walked in their own counsels and the stubbornness of their evil hearts, and went backward and not forward. ²⁵From the day that your fathers came out of the land of Egypt to this day, I have persistently sent all my servants the prophets to them, day after day; ²⁶yet they did not listen to me, or incline their ear, but stiffened their neck.

There is a devastating consequence to rejecting God's offer of a relationship with Him. When we separate ourselves from God, we are separating ourselves from all of the benefits of that relationship and immersing ourselves back into the wicked, perverse, and pagan world in which we live. For Israel it meant relying on the international intrigue of their neighboring nations for their security instead of the LORD. Caught up in their warfare, they were destroyed as a nation when Israel left the LORD's hand of protection. Only the small remnant of faithful Israel was saved, the few who were taken into Babylonian captivity.

Leviticus 26:14-15. But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; ¹⁵And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant:

The LORD warned them of this future immediately upon describing the benefits of a covenant with Him. If they reject Him, they are no different than all of the others in this wicked world who reject God. Consequently, they cannot expect to be treated any differently. In fact, because they have been made aware of the covenant, their trespass is even greater than that of the pagan. The consequences of their apostasy are profound.

Leviticus 26:16-20. I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. ¹⁷And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you. ¹⁸And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. ¹⁹And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass: ²⁰And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits.

This is only the beginning of the lengthy remainder of this chapter as the LORD describes the devastating consequence of being subject to this world rather than being subject to Him. Like a child, the nation of Israel had little experience with

the nature of this world. They were incubated as a nation within the reign of the Egyptian Pharaohs, and had no experience with the intrigue of nations that would only serve to destroy them. They also had no experience with the Canaanite pagan religion that, though similar to Egyptian mythology, worshipped their fertility gods, the pantheons of Baal and Asherah, in a mixture of debauchery that exercised man's very base desires, proving to be a devastating distraction that would draw them away from faith in God.

God did not need to say that all of their destruction would come at His hand. Their destruction came at the hands of enemies that they had made while they rejected God's offer of protection. Rejecting the leadership of the LORD, they demanded a king, and their succession of godless, worldly kings would only hasten their destruction. Apart from God we make decisions that are not informed by His wisdom and revealed through His Word and through the influence that the Holy Spirit makes on our hearts. Such unwise decisions serve to bring our own grief and destruction.

GOD'S OFFER OF FORGIVENESS

Leviticus 26:40,45. *If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; ⁴⁵But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the LORD.*

As far as Israel would wander away from God, His offer of forgiveness is a fundamental part of His covenant. Israel can, at any time, turn from their immersion in this godless world and come back to Him by placing their faith and trust in Him. This same offer is given to all people:

Romans 10:8-10. *The word is nigh thee, even in thy mouth, and in thy heart: that is, the word of faith, which we preach; ⁹That if thou shalt confess with thy mouth the Lord Jesus, and shalt believe in thine heart that God hath raised him from the dead, thou shalt be saved. ¹⁰For with the heart man believeth unto righteousness; and with the mouth confession is made unto salvation.*

God has reached down through time and space into the universe that He created, and onto this insignificant little planet in an insignificant galaxy, to bring to Himself a people that He created. Giving them free choice, it is His desire that they would choose to honor, love, and obey Him as their Creator, their LORD, and the one who saves them from the consequences of their rejection of Him. The 26th chapter of Leviticus describes some of the nature of the change in this

life that is found when we come to the LORD in faith, and the benefits of His provision and His presence in our lives. It also describes much of the consequence that we experience when we reject Him and choose to immerse ourselves in a world of others who likewise despise God's offer of grace.

God has given us a choice, and we are free to live the life we choose. We can choose to reject God, and He will honor that choice... for eternity. Or, we can choose to place our faith and trust in Him and join Him in this wonderful enterprise called, "life," experiencing the benefits of His presence not just now, but for all eternity.

We might return to Jeremiah's testimony:

Joshua 24:15. ... choose you this day whom ye will serve... but as for me and my house, we will serve the LORD.