

Leviticus 26v1-16

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Israel's covenantal relationship with regard to the Land of Israel was conditional upon Israel's faithfulness to the Torah. If Israel was faithful then the Land would be a place of shalom; if not then the Lord would turn the Land against its inhabitants. Recalling that the Israelites were still encamped around Mount Sinai, this is a prophetic warning for future generations, not the present community which will not enter Canaan. The warning is that breaking the covenant while on the actual soil of the promised land will have consequences. Obedience would bring blessing both to the people and land, as they share a unique bond and connection. Does obedience to God, or His Messiah, still yield blessing today? And if so, how is that different from works-righteousness? Several results of obedience to God are mentioned in Scripture.

Acts 5vs32 says the Holy Spirit is given to those who obey, and Hebrews 5vs9 links obedience to salvation. In our discussion of this issue, we noted once again that the source of obedience and disobedience comes from the heart of the worshiper.

Idolatry, the Sabbath, and the holiness of the Sanctuary are grouped together and begin the chapter on blessings and punishments. God reminds Israel that He alone is to be worshipped. Idolatry is described in a rare comprehensive fourfold form. Idolatry in the ancient world appeared as idols, carved images, sacred pillars, and engraved stones -- physical objects that people prostrated themselves before in submission. Conversely, the Sabbath is a practical expression of worship and obedience to God. Though you do not bow down to the Sabbath, the first thing God created that was holy was the Sabbath. If you can't keep the first thing holy then it will be nigh improbable you'll be able to keep anything else holy either. In the instructions to build the Tabernacle in Exodus, God declares He will live in 'them' not 'it'. This does not diminish the holiness of the Tabernacle. While our bodies are indeed temples of the Holy Spirit, this does not diminish the declaration of Jesus that the Temple was His Father's house. One practical way of reverence for God was honouring the Sanctuary.

Blessings by the Lord upon Israel would be one way through which God would reveal Himself to the world. Israel would be a light to the nations through those blessings, which were contingent upon walking with the Lord. Walking is an active verb and one of the biblical metaphors used in describing an active relationship with God. Jesus does the same thing when He issues His call to 'follow-walk after' Him. God declares that a blessing of obedience would be that He will walk among His people and dwell among them, not in the Sanctuary but in them. The best blessing is saved for last, the presence of God among His people.

The section on punishments or curses for disobedience is twice as long as the promises of blessings for obedience. This is common even in the New Testament where in the Epistle of the Galatians the nine fruits of the Spirit listed by Paul are first preceded by 18 evil fruits. Why do these phenomena occur in Scripture? Perhaps it reflects on the human condition that we respond to threats more than we are motivated by promises of blessings. The subtext here is that we reap what we sow. God is indeed the author of blessing or calamity, but the consequence is not initiated by us but is a divine response to us. Galatians 6vs6-8 maintain the theology of reaping and sowing, therefore Paul admonishes us to 'not become weary of doing good'.