

Leviticus 26v17-46

Aaron Eime, Christ Church Jerusalem, 2022

Moses continues his description of God's response to the continued future rebellion and wickedness of the people of Israel. There is a sense of the prophetic at work here as the Israelites have yet to leave the base of Mount Sinai. These warnings are for the generation that does not yet exist. The Lord does not say that He will forsake His people, only that He will punish them (chastise) quite severely in ways we usually might not attribute to the hand of a loving God. Lord Rabbi Sacks comments that these curses can be seen as blessings in that they have the potential to produce confession and repentance. The blessings and punishments in this chapter are corporate in nature, affecting the entire nation, culminating in the exile of Israel. This does not diminish nor take away our individual responsibility, yet it acknowledges that we as individuals cannot be dissociated from the communities we live in. We are called to be part of a holy people. We have both individual and corporate responsibility, and all our choices and actions have consequences on both levels. The future destiny of the nation of Israel is not wrapped up in its military might nor in its future economic power but in its morality. A good Israel will be a great and prosperous Israel. Israel was and is called to be a holy people and a light to the nations, reflecting the truth, the holiness, and the character of the King of the Universe to the rest of the world. The question then becomes 'Can God 'make' you good?' Can you choose to be good or is goodness completely beyond the frame of man? This led to a discussion reflecting on the doctrine of total depravity. Total depravity is the phrase used to describe the theological position that man has the moral inability to do good things 'as viewed by God'. It is a position strongly held by some segments of the Church, particularly Calvinists. Related questions of predestination and free will are held in tension in Hebraic thought. The Dead Sea Community held the theological position of complete predestination, that there was no free will.

The concept of 'you reap what you sow' has different implications in a total predestination worldview. All was ordained by God. In contrast, the majority of Judaism held both positions to be true, it was both and! The Bible does teach that the heart of a man is deceitful and wicked (Jer 17vs9). The Jewish position is that the evil inclination existed before the Fall. The evil inclination was found in an angel before it was found in a human. Despite knowing the heart of man and his propensity for wickedness, God places conditions, 'if-then' statements, in the Gospels, and presents choices in the Torah - choose life (Deut 30vs19). A central theme from the Torah is that God is in control. He is the Creator, the sustainer, the redeemer, the first cause, the one who makes you holy. Spiritual birth is started by God and then is continued by us! God makes the Sabbath holy, now we keep it holy. God's Name is holy, now we keep it holy. God starts the eternal flame of the altar but asks the priests to attend it and keep it burning. There is a cause and effect of what we do as individuals and as communities, churches and nations. Everything has an effect. If it didn't then we would be faced with the despair found in the book of Ecclesiastes where the wise man concluded that 'all is meaningless!'

The chapter's last verse appears to conclude the book of Leviticus and yet there remains one more following chapter. The verse reaffirms the author of the call to holiness, which is the Lord, to the people who are called to holiness, the children of Israel, and the location of the calling at Mount Sinai. Those redeemed from Egypt are both Jews and Gentiles. The call to holiness, therefore, is a call to all the redeemed of the Lord. And that would most definitely include us.