

December 30, 2018 - Lev. 27:1-34 - Vows and Consecrated things
Torah Reading: Leviticus 27:1-34 - Vows and Consecrated things
Psalm 89:39-53
Haftarah: Judges 11:30-40
2 Kings 12:5-13, 17

An Addendum to the Laws

The passages in this chapter concern vows and things dedicated to God, which are voluntary and not requirements.

That is why they are placed after the finalizing phrase at the end of the previous chapter - "These are the statutes and judgments and laws, which the LORD made between him and the children of Israel in mount Sinai by the hand of Moses."

God takes vows seriously! Just in time for your New Year's Resolutions!

Numbers 30:2 - "If a man vow a vow unto the LORD, or swear an oath to bind his soul with a bond; he shall not break his word, he shall do according to all that proceedeth out of his mouth."

But the mixed nature of making vows is clear from **Deuteronomy 23:21-22** - "When thou shalt vow a vow unto the LORD thy God, thou shalt not slack to pay it: for the LORD thy God will surely require it of thee; and it would be sin in thee. But if thou shalt forbear to vow, it shall be no sin in thee."

The liturgy of the Kol Neidrei before Yom Kippur was to absolve Israel of the unfulfilled vows they had made.

Although vows feature in many stories in the scriptures, it's clear from the New Testament that we are to "swear not," because a vow assumes something about the future that we have no control over.

Jesus is emphatic about it:

Matthew 5:33-37: - "Again, you have heard that it was said to the people long ago, 'Do not break your oath, but keep the oaths you have made to the Lord. But I tell you, Do not swear at all: either by heaven, for it is God's throne; or by the earth, for it is his footstool; or by Jerusalem, for it is the city of the Great King. And do not swear by your head, for you cannot make even one hair white or black. Simply let your 'Yes' be 'Yes,' and your 'No,' 'No'-- anything beyond this comes from the evil one."

James 5:12 - "But above all things, my brethren, swear not, neither by heaven, neither by the earth, neither by any other oath: but let your yea be yea; and your nay, nay; lest ye fall into condemnation (*hypokrisis* - hypocrisy)."

Some Talmud passages seem to agree:

R. Nathan said, "One who vows is as though he built a high place (for idolatry) and he who fulfills it is as though he sacrifices on it" (B. T. Nedarim 22a).

Summary of the Chapter:

Laws touching the redeeming of men devoted to God, **Leviticus 27:1-8**, or of beasts, **Leviticus 27:9-13**; of houses, **Leviticus 27:14,15**; of fields or grounds, **Leviticus 27:16-25**. What things might not be vowed, **Leviticus 27:26-29**. Of redeeming the tithe both of fruit and cattle, **Leviticus 27:30-33**.

Leviticus 27:1-8 - Estimation of the Value of Persons Vowed

Leviticus 27:2 - "Speak unto the children of Israel, and say unto them, When a man shall make a singular vow, the persons shall be for the LORD by thy estimation."

A man could vow to the service of God whatever he had a right over, that is, himself, his wife, his children, his slaves, his beasts, his houses, his fields. Vowing a person to God was, as a rule, no more than vowing so much money to the use of the sanctuary as was fixed as the price of the redemption of the person vowed.

Such vows were redeemable, and, as a rule, were redeemed, though there were some exceptions, like the case of Samuel, who was dedicated as a Nazarite from birth by his mother.

- **1 Samuel 1:11** - Hannah "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."

Slaves, male or female, could be devoted but only if they were heathen, not Hebrews.

The Talmud notes that "if anyone devotes his son or his daughter, his servant or his handmaid, that are Hebrews, or the field of his purchase, they are not devoted (or to be reckoned so), for no man devotes (or ought to devote) what is not his own," and every Hebrew rightfully already belonged to God.

Any thing redeemed - i.e. converted to money and given - would have one fifth the value added (**Leviticus 27:13**).

Vowing and The Jubilee Year - Leviticus 27:17-25

Leviticus 27:17-19 - "If he sanctify his field from (during) the year of jubilee, according to thy estimation it shall stand. But if he sanctify his field after the jubilee, then the priest shall reckon unto him the money according to the years that remain, even unto the year of the jubilee, and it shall be abated from thy estimation."

(NET translation) - "the priest will calculate the price for him according to the years that

are left until the next jubilee year, and it will be deducted from the conversion value.”

Prohibited from Vowing First Fruits, Devoted Things and Tithes - Leviticus 27:26-33

Leviticus 27:26 - “Only the firstling of the beasts, which should be the LORD'S firstling, no man shall sanctify it; whether it be ox, or sheep: it is the LORD'S.”

Firstborn of animals, things devoted, and tithes were forbidden to be vowed, because they already belonged to the Lord, and secondarily to the priests and Levites.

- Numbers 18:13-15 - "The firstfruits of all that is in their land, which they bring to the LORD, belong to you. Every ceremonially clean person in your household may eat them. Every devoted thing in Israel belongs to you. The firstborn of every womb, whether man or beast, that is offered to the LORD belongs to you. But you must surely redeem every firstborn son and every firstborn male of unclean animals."

Leviticus 27:28 - Notwithstanding no devoted thing, that a man shall devote unto the LORD of all that he hath, both of man and beast, and of the field of his possession, shall be sold or redeemed: every devoted thing is most holy unto the LORD.

Spoils of War

The spoils of holy war especially were devoted (*cherem*) to God. *Cherem* means "put under the ban" or "devote to destruction." In some places it can simply mean "exterminate."

This meant that no individual was the victor in war - only God Himself was responsible, since "to the victor go the spoils." The sacred and religiously obligatory nature of holy war meant that participants gained no booty as a motivation for participation.

Achan's action in defying the *cherem* brought a curse upon the people:

- Joshua 7:1 - “But the Israelites broke faith in regard to the devoted things: Achan son of Carmi son of Zabdi son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah, took some of the devoted things; and the anger of the LORD burned against the Israelites.”

Leviticus 27:29 - "None devoted, which shall be devoted of men, shall be redeemed; but shall surely be put to death."

A convicted criminal who is going to be executed has no value to be "devoted" to God.

This also applies when a people or city is declared "*cherem*" or devoted to God for death in war.

It refers to the seven nations of the land of Canaan, and especially the Amalekites, who therefore were not to be spared on any account, but to be put to death, **Exodus 22:20**.

An example is the Canaanite king of Arad:

- **Numbers 21:2** - "And Israel vowed a vow unto the LORD, and said, If thou wilt indeed deliver this people into my hand, then I will utterly destroy their cities."

Later, this comes up when God commanded Saul to destroy the Amalekites:

- **1 Samuel 15:3** - "Now go and smite Amalek, and utterly destroy all that they have, and spare them not; but slay both man and woman, infant and suckling, ox and sheep, camel and ass."

But Saul spared king Agag, sheep and other loot, arguing that they should be devoted to God for sacrifice, etc. and this incurred the displeasure of God and Samuel.

Some have thought that it was through a mistaken understanding of this law, that Jephthah having made a rash vow sacrificed his daughter (**Judges 11:30**)

Also, people were restricted from dedicating everything they had to God; they could only dedicate a portion.

Redemption of Tithes

Leviticus 27:31 - "And if a man will at all redeem ought of his tithes, he shall add thereto the fifth part thereof."

Besides the regular tithe, there was a second tithe to be eaten at feasts in Jerusalem, and a tithe in the third and sixth year for the poor.

The Second tithe, which was to be eaten by the people at feasts in Jerusalem,, could be redeemed in order to be able to eat of it in a place *other* than Jerusalem.

Rashi - And what is [the purpose of] its redemption? In order to permit its being eaten anywhere [outside Jerusalem]. And [instead] he must bring the money [of its redemption] up to Jerusalem and eat [food there, bought with that money], as it is stated, "[And if... the place is too distant from you...] Then you will turn it into money [... and... go to the place which... God will choose. And you will turn that money into whatever your soul desires... and you will eat there before... God]" (**Deuteronomy 14:24-26**).

Leviticus 27:32 - "And concerning the tithe of the herd, or of the flock, even of whatsoever passeth under the rod, the tenth shall be holy unto the LORD."

- **Jeremiah 33:13** - "In the cities of the mountains, in the cities of the vale, and in the cities of the south, and in the land of Benjamin, and in the places about Jerusalem, and in the cities of Judah, shall the flocks pass again under the hands of him that telleth (counts) them, saith the LORD."

The Meaning of a Tenth

The Zohar explains that ten generations had passed since Adam's expulsion from the Garden, and according to scripture "ten is consecrated to God" (**Leviticus 27:32**). Therefore, Noah was born with the divine covenant already expressed in his body as well as his soul - i.e. he was born circumcised.

The Pirke De-Rabbi Eliezer taught that Jacob designated Levi as a tithe, holy to God, within the meaning of **Leviticus 27:32**. Jacob wished to ford the Jabbok and was detained there by an angel, who asked Jacob whether Jacob had not told God (in **Genesis 28:22**), "Of all that you shall give me I will surely give a tenth to You." So Jacob gave a tenth of all the cattle that he had brought from Paddan Aram. Jacob had brought some 5,500 animals, so his tithe came to 550 animals. Jacob again tried to ford the Jabbok, but was hindered again. The angel once again asked Jacob whether Jacob had not told God (in **Genesis 28:22**), "Of all that you shall give me I will surely give a tenth to You." The angel noted that Jacob had sons and that Jacob had not given a tithe of them. So Jacob set aside the four firstborn sons (whom the law excluded from the tithe) of each of the four mothers, and eight sons remained. He began to count from Simeon, and included Benjamin, and continued the count from the beginning. And so Levi was reckoned as the tenth son, and thus the tithe, holy to God, as **Leviticus 27:32** says, "The tenth shall be holy to the Lord." So the angel Michael descended and took Levi and brought him up before the Throne of Glory and told God that Levi was God's lot. And God blessed him, that the sons of Levi should minister on earth before God (as directed in **Deuteronomy 10:8**) like the ministering angels in Heaven.

Wrapping Up Leviticus

Leviticus 27:34 - "These are the commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses for the children of Israel in mount Sinai."

What's the difference between this phrase ("commandments") and the similar one that ended the previous chapter ("statutes and judgments and laws")?

- **Leviticus 26:46** - "These are the statutes and judgments and laws, which the LORD made between him and the children of Israel in mount Sinai by the hand of Moses."

"statutes" - *choq* - statute, ordinance, decree from the word for cut, carve or engrave, inscribe (laws being cut in stone or clay tablets or metal plaques in primitive times)

"judgments" = *mishpat* - judgments, having to do with justice, rightness, court cases, passing sentence, having to do with rights and duties.

"laws" = *torah* - teaching, instructions, doctrines, laws. First used regarding Abraham:

- **Genesis 26:5** - "Because that Abraham obeyed my voice, and kept my charge, my commandments (mitzvotai), my statutes, and my laws."

"charge" = *mishmereth* - to guard or watch over, keep, the performance of an office or duty.

Mitzvah

Apparently the word "mitzvah" of **Leviticus 27** carries more finality than the "statutes and judgments and laws" of **Leviticus 26** and includes all the "charges, statutes and judgments and laws."

Leviticus 27:34 - "These are the commandments, which the LORD commanded Moses for the children of Israel in Mount Sinai."

"commandments" = *mitsvah* - commandment, charge, orders, and in Leviticus "prohibitions."

"*Mitzvah*" became the term used by the rabbis for the full 613 laws given to Israel by God. To do a "mitzvah" was to carry out one of these commandments.

According to Rabbi Ishmael (1st and 2nd centuries A.D.), only the principal commandments of the 613 were given on Mount Sinai, the remainder having been given in the Tent of Meeting.

Rabbi Akiva, on the other hand, was of the opinion that they were all given on Mount Sinai, repeated in the Tent of Meeting, and declared a third time by Moses before his death. According to the Midrash, all divine commandments were given on Mount Sinai, and no prophet could add any new ones.

The number 613 can be obtained by gematria (a traditional Jewish method of mystical number/letter substitution). The gematria value for the word "Torah" is 611, which corresponds to the number of commandments given via Moses, with the remaining two being identified as the first two of the Ten Commandments, which tradition holds were the only ones heard from the mouth of God himself. Jews are also reminded of the 613 commandments by the Tzitzit on their prayer shawls, known as 'fringes' or 'strings.'

- <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mitzvah>

Interestingly, many rabbis declared that most of the commandments will be nullified in the Messianic era.

- Rashi: Today we should observe the commandments (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Avodah Zarah 3a, 4b) because we will not observe them in the world to come.
- All sacrifices will be annulled in the future (Tanchuma Emor 19, Vayikra Rabbah 9:7)
- God will permit what is now forbidden (Midrash Shochar Tov, Mizmor 146:5)
- Most mitzvot will no longer be in force in the days of Messiah (Babylonian Talmud, Tractate Niddah 61b and Tractate Shabbat 151b).

New Testament: Christ fulfilled the Law

Jesus said He did not come to abolish the Law, but to fulfill it (**Matthew 5:17**)

The Law of Christ

- **Galatians 6:2** - "Bear ye one another's burdens, and so fulfill the law of Christ."

Love One Another

- **John 13:34-35** - "I give you a new commandment, that you love one another. Just as I have loved you, you also should love one another. By this everyone will know that you are my disciples, if you have love for one another."

The Law of Liberty

- **James 2:8-12** - "If ye fulfill the royal law according to the scripture, Thou shalt love thy neighbor as thyself, ye do well: But if ye have respect to persons, ye commit sin, and are convinced of the law as transgressors. For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all. For he that said, Do not commit adultery, said also, Do not kill. Now if thou commit no adultery, yet if thou kill, thou art become a transgressor of the law. So speak ye, and so do, as they that shall be judged by the law of liberty."

In other words, recognize there is no way to fulfill the law ourselves, so we trust in Christ, who fulfilled it perfectly.

This is the end of the Book of Leviticus!