

LEVITICUS

Lesson 42 - Chapter 27 (End of Book)

Today we study the last chapter of the book of Leviticus, and bring Leviticus to a close. We might run a tad long in order to finish up.

It is interesting that the final few matters talked about in Leviticus revolve around funding the sanctuary. From a Biblical perspective, the operation of the sanctuary.....what at this point in Israel's history was a portable tent, the Wilderness Tabernacle.....but later would be a fixed building, the Temple...could be funded from a number of sources. And, this chapters deals with the several major categories of sanctuary funding: pledges of silver and animals, consecration of real property like houses and land, giving of firstborn animals and firstfruits of crops, donation of property and tithing.

What we find as we read this chapter is that, in general, the goal was for the priesthood who operated the sanctuary to (more often than not) obtain silver so as **to purchase** whatever was needed for maintenance and operation. Therefore, we will see a schedule of values drawn up in which various pledges of land, and animals....even PEOPLE.....could be exchanged for silver. That is, the idea was that a vow would be made to give thus and so to the sanctuary, and then that person would turn around and REDEEM...buy back... whatever it was he had given. How much would it cost to redeem these things? That is one of the matters this chapter deals with.

We also need to realize that this is looking ahead to the time when Israel was settled in the Land and living a very different kind of life than the nomadic one they were currently experiencing. Common sense dictates that Israel's circumstances would be radically different once they conquered Canaan and they had a permanent home; and this is a good example for us to note that it is the PRINCIPLES of the Law that we need to be more cognizant of than some of the finer details that deal more with cultural and geographical matters as they existed at that moment, but would be fluid as time passed.

So, let me be clear: the rules and regulations contained in chapter 27 are constructed in such a way as to make it the NORM that MOST of what the Sanctuary received was silver, money, something easier to exchange than animals and field crops for needed supplies.

Before we read chapter 27, let me just point out a couple of things: first, doesn't this all sound familiar to us? That where we worship.....synagogue or church.....is typically funded in like manner. Churches and synagogues tend to lump all giving to the institution together and call it tithes or offerings; but Leviticus breaks down the way the institution is funded into more detailed categories, among which, tithing is but one.

Second....just so you'll be thinking about it as we read.....recognize that the subject of tithing, per se, is NOT discussed in the New Testament. It is only lightly alluded to and the number of times the word "tithe" is even used in the NT can be counted on one hand. Even more when it is used (except for one time) it is in the context of making a point about a Torah principle or speaking about the merit of one of the Patriarchs.

The point is this: absolutely NO command is given in the New Testament to tithe....anything! Thus many Believers have taken this lack of a direct NT command to mean that Christians have no requirement to tithe and thus support the institution. Of course, I can't think of any **church or synagogue** that would subscribe to this notion. Now I don't want to detour and discuss tithing in depth, but let me just throw out a couple of thoughts for you to ponder. I'll begin by giving you the bottom line: tithing and giving to support the institution was ASSUMED in the NT. In other words, the NT was never to be taken (as some do) that if Jesus didn't directly command it, we don't have to do it. For one thing don't ever think that all of Yeshua's words were recorded. My goodness, we have but a few pages in our Bibles dedicated to quotes from Messiah and he lived for around 33 years and ministered under the power of the Holy Spirit for at least 3 of those years. The vast majority of what He spoke was not recorded. As I have made it clear over and over again, as Yeshua taught He must have had an inkling that someone would think that if He didn't repeat every detail of the Law that meant He was doing away with it; so in Matthew 5:17, right in the midst of His most famous oracle called the Sermon on the Mount, He reminded folks that not only did He not come to abolish the Law, but not the slightest detail of it would pass until heaven and earth passed away. The Torah had already been established to teach the principle of tithing, and scores of other principles, and Jesus was not going to spend His time on earth repeating what had been long established by the Father.

The New Testament is not a portion of the Bible in which everything from the previous portion (the Law and the Prophets) was supposed to be repeated in order to validate it. It is one of the more curious and frankly revealing traditions of the church to teach the requirement to tithe from that part of the Bible that it otherwise counts as obsolete and downright dysfunctional. As I reminisced over the sermons I have heard on the subject of giving, only in the rare case is a NT passage quoted and it is invariably from the book of Luke chapter 11 vs. 42, which says this: **NAS Luke 11:42 "But woe to you Pharisees! For you pay tithe of mint and rue and every kind of garden herb, and yet disregard justice and the love of God; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.**

And the thought is that while tithing is of course still in effect, that justice and the love of God should be the measure of the tithe....that it CERTAINLY shouldn't be done according to commands and laws..... "legalistically". Right?

Well, let's take a look at the **other** Gospel that employs this same quote, in the book of Matthew.....because THIS verse is usually avoided: **NAS Matthew 23:23 "Woe to you, scribes and Pharisees, hypocrites! For you tithe mint and dill and cummin, and have neglected the weightier provisions of the law: justice and mercy and faithfulness; but these are the things you should have done without neglecting the others.**

Uh, oh. Here we have Yeshua stating straight out that not only is tithing **expressly** a God-ordained provision of the Law, but also justice and mercy and faithfulness are “the weightier provisions **of the Law**”. Further that “ these are things you **should have done** WITHOUT neglecting the others”. In other words this is a statement of complete validation of the Law.....you should do these things (the things set down in the Law) and you should also do the others (also things set down in the Law). So now we see why this is not a particularly popular verse in modern Christendom.

And then from here forward in most sermons all teaching on tithing is usually from the dreaded and supposedly abolished Old Testament. Go figure.

This is but one good example of what I have been teaching you over these years: that it is ASSUMED that the New Testament reader already has a good background in these fundamental matters covered by the Law. After all the Torah was 1300 years old by the time Yeshua arrived on the scene. It was still the basis for existence, behavior, and the religious system of the Jewish people. Jesus doesn't **explain** tithing because there is no need to explain it. He also didn't COMMAND tithing because there was no need; tithing in its many forms was already long established. Every Jew knew what tithing meant, and the many kinds of giving expected of them, and how the system operated, and what its purpose was. BTW Yeshua also doesn't explain that it is necessary to breathe in and out to continue living; nor that if one is cut you will bleed; nor does He explain what the term “the Law” means because everyone He was addressing knew what that meant; it meant the Torah. When I speak to you and use the term “Bible” I don't first stop and explain each week what a Bible is because I assume that since you're here you already know. I also don't reiterate everything we've already established in Torah Class each week otherwise we wouldn't get anywhere.

So, with that as a background, let's read Leviticus chapter 27.

READ LEVITICUS 27 all

This narrative begins by talking about “vows to the Lord”. And the remainder of the chapter continues to discuss vows and how to deal with whatever it was that was vowed. This can all sound a bit hard to untangle, but what it really amounts to is this: men have historically made rash promises to God when they feel threatened or in danger or REALLY want something. As my father, a WWII vet, used to say..... “there are no atheists in fox holes”. So people who have never even considered God or His commands before when in mortal danger, or even in simply serious difficulty, suddenly find religion. And they start making vows (promises) to the Lord if He'll get them out of whatever hopeless situation they find themselves in.

Some years ago I recall watching a hilarious movie called “The End” that starred Dom Delouise and Burt Reynolds. It revolved around a mental facility and a couple of wacky guys who took turns living there. Towards the end of the film, Burt Reynolds decides he's going to kill himself by wading into the ocean surf and then swimming out to sea until he is beyond the point of no return; at which point he would be unable to save himself and would drown. Well the camera follows him as he walks into the salty waters and fights through the oncoming

waves until he reaches the calmer waters. At that point he starts swimming towards the horizon, all the time talking to himself about his troubles. As luck would have it, by the time he is tiring and can't swim another stroke (which was his goal in the first place) he suddenly realizes that his problems AREN'T all that bad after all, and that he does NOT want to die. So he turns back and looks at the distant shore; panic sets in, as he's certain he'll never make it. And the first thing he does as a kind of knee jerk reaction is to look up and shout out to Heaven "Lord, I'll give you everything I have.....everything....if you'll just get me safely back to the beach". As he continues swimming the slightest glimmer of hope overcomes him and he again shouts to the Heavens: "Lord, I'll give you 90% of everything I have if you'll just let me live!". A quick burst of energy propels him even nearer to safety, and in a growing confidence that he's going to make it he yells out, "Lord.....I'll split it with you. I'll give you HALF of everything I own if you'll just help me get to the shore". The swimming and the bargaining continue until he reaches land. Exhausted but alive, he staggers out of the water and rolls over on his back, looks up to Heaven and says: "Thanks God. If there's anything you ever need, let me know and I'll see what I can do."

That is about as good an illustration as I can think of to explain what is going on in Leviticus 27. The Hebrews made vows to God all the time especially when they were worried or scared. It was just part of their culture. At other times when they were in a particularly pious mood. (you know, like after we've sung a really emotional song) they might promise God something that was kind of impulsive. And very often these vows weren't particularly well thought out, and they soon regretted making them. In those days vows were not only public, they were made known to the priests and accompanied with ritual so EVERYBODY knew about it.

So were these folks stuck with their rashly made vows? You bet. However you could legally REDEEM...buy back.... your vow for a price if that vow involved giving the Lord property that had value. Notice that a vow always includes giving God something of value. Promising to be obedient henceforth is just fine as long as it included a gift of proper worth. Typically if the vow involved an item with a value that could be reasonably set then the redemption price was 120% of that item's market value.

In verse 1 we find that the item of value (as part of the vow) was a **human being**. Now, don't get the idea that a man has offered a slave he owns; rather, this is a case where a person offers HIM or HER self. And what is actually being offered is that person's **service** to the Sanctuary.....to the Temple.

Now in reality giving service to the Temple was only rarely even possible. This was because God had ordained that ONLY Levites and priests could serve at the Temple; an ordinary Jew could not. That's not to say that an ordinary Jew who made such a vow couldn't work FOR a priest, outside of Temple duties. But that's not generally what happened nor what was being contemplated.

Were there other means of entering God's service but NOT being attached to the Temple? Yes. We get examples like Sampson and Samuel. Both being vowed to service to God in the form of a Nazarite vow; yet the form of their service did NOT involve Temple service but rather service in different ways (in their cases, as Judges and Prophets) by being dedicated to God.

Since in most cases this person who vowed “himself” to Sanctuary service was not going to ever be able to carry out the vow because he was restricted by regulation from doing it, what was left was to redeem the vow. And verses 3 – 8 explain how the priest was to arrive at a proper evaluation of the amount of money for that person who took the vow to come up with in order to redeem himself.

In a nutshell: men from 20-60 years of age had to pay 50 shekels; women of the same age, 30 shekels. Boy children from 5-20 years old had to pay 20 shekels, girls of the same age range, 10. Infants and toddlers, from 1 month to 5 years, 5 shekels for a boy, 3 or a girl. An elderly person, over 60 years of age, 15 shekels for a male, 10 for a female.

Now this may not sound like a lot but it was a substantial amount of money. In this era the wages for one month’s work was about ONE shekel. So it cost a mature male better than 4 full years of wages to redeem himself from his vow of service to God. Think of one shekel as one month and you get the idea.

Rabbis call this chart of values set down in Leviticus 26 the principle of equivalents.

Actually we’ve seen this concept of equivalents before. We’ve seen it in the presentation of certain kinds of offerings to atone for certain kinds of sins. We’ve seen where a person must present, in silver shekels, 120% of the VALUE of a Ram as a guilt offering, for instance.

Now it might upset some of you ladies to see that your “equivalent” in money is generally from half to 2/3rds that of a male in these verses. On the other hand what we can take from this is that women **were** allowed to make vows to God on their own. And that children were pledged, boys and girls, for service to God by their parents. So we must never go so far as to think that Hebrew society, nor the Laws of Torah, made women or girl children worthless. Yes this was a very male-oriented society but women had rights and value, and men had duties towards them. Further when it came to a woman’s relationship with God, she could have one on a personal basis as is expressed by her ability to make a personal vow.

Starting in verse 9 we move from redeeming pledged people to redeeming pledged animals. The idea was that a person could pledge an animal as part of his or her vow offering, and then turn around and redeem that animal; the cost to do it, though, was 120% of it’s value. In other words a 20% surcharge was added for a person to redeem an animal they had pledged.

A logical question to ask would be ‘so who sets the value for the various animals’? Answer: the priesthood. In many ways this represents tremendous power being vested in the priesthood. After all whatever the priests decided was the proper value for an animal surely **MUST** have carried over into the marketplace. There would not have been one value for an animal offered-up and another for the same animal simply bought and sold in an everyday transaction. So the priests were administrators of justice **AND** had a hand in setting the market price for animals, along with their Temple duties.

The idea behind verse 9 where it says that any animal brought as an offering to the Lord may **NOT** be redeemed, simply brings us back to a principle we learned several months back: the

principle of holy property.

When it says here that this animal is “holy”, it means that it becomes God’s holy property. So the reason this animal can’t be redeemed is because it ALREADY has been transferred to God. And once it belongs to God there is no getting it back. A person who would attempt to do so would be violating God’s holy property and the penalty for this is death.

Further a person who designates an animal for sacrifice as part of a vow can’t later substitute it with another animal; not even an animal of greater value. Another part of the principle of holy property is that at some point in the process of the owner determining WHICH of his animals he will offer, it’s a done deal. And this can be BEFORE he even brings that animal to the Temple. In another words the choice of animal to be given can simply be a mental decision upon which no action has yet been taken; but at that point of decision the animal becomes God’s holy property. IF a person should TRY and make a substitution the priest is instructed to keep BOTH animals. Why? Because now BOTH have been devoted to God and so both are holy property.

The first animal discussed (since it was suitable for altar sacrifice) was, by definition, a ritually CLEAN animal. Verse 11 talks about a ritually UNCLEAN animal being used for a vow offering; and we see that this is perfectly acceptable. Automatically, however, it means that this animal will be exchanged for money since the unclean animal cannot be used for sacrifice nor do the priests eat it. And, as is standard, a 20% surcharge of the animal’s value is added to the cost to redeem it.

Verse 14 shifts from redeeming human and animal life to inanimate objects. And the word used up to now to designate these humans and animals as vow offerings changes. The term changes to consecrations. In other words these things are set apart for God not necessarily as part of a vow but perhaps more as a freewill gift.

Thus if someone consecrates his house but wants to get it back, it costs him 120% of the market value. Next is what happens if someone consecrates LAND. The value of the land is determined by what the potential crop value is as we’ve learned in earlier lessons. Of course we saw this in chapter 25 that dealt with Jubilee. Further even though it is the Sanctuary, operated by the priests, that gets the benefit of the land the laws of Jubilee still apply. The price for redemption of the land by it’s owner is based on the number of years worth of crops it will produce before the next Jubilee; and upon the year of Jubilee the original land owner gets his land back.

Then we get an interesting footnote in verse 25: that the standard for paying the redemption money will be the Sanctuary shekel. What this means is two-fold: 1) the content of the shekel coin is to be silver, and 2) the precise weight shall be 20 gerahs. The situation was this: ANYBODY could mint their own coins in those days and they could determine the coin’s content and weight. The first coins used more money were basically just blobs of silver that, while the metal was still hot and pliable, had a signet ring pushed down upon it to identify the coin’s owner. Eventually most kings and potentates made their own coins for use in their kingdoms. But unlike today where the metal content of the coin has little or nothing to do with

its true value, ancient coins were simply convenient pre-determined amounts of silver and gold. So a 1-shekel coin theoretically contained 1 shekel's worth of silver. A 10-shekel coin contained 10 shekels' worth of silver, and so on.

So here in Leviticus 27 it is set down that one shekel is to consist of 20 gerahs.....20 grains (a measurement of weight)..... of silver. Somebody else could have determined that THEIR shekel was 15 grains, or 18, or 10 or whatever, of silver. So someone would come to the Tabernacle to pay their redemption price with a handful of coins or silver nuggets. A priest would weight it. And based on a standard of 20 grains of silver equaling 1 shekel, that Israelite would pay the proper number of shekels to redeem whatever it was he was redeeming. Many years later during the 1st Temple period (Solomon's Temple) the priests actually minted TEMPLE coins. By the late 2nd Temple period in Yeshua's day, when the entire priest and Temple institution had become corrupt, the ONLY way someone could pay for a redemption or to purchase a sacrificial animal, was WITH coins minted by the Temple. So Jews would come from all over the Roman Empire with perfectly valid coins from wherever they were from; but they were FORCED into exchanging them at the Temple for Temple minted coins. The moneychangers that Yeshua got so angry at were those merchants who bought those foreign coins from Jewish pilgrims for a low price and exchanged them for Temple coins at a price higher than their value. Of course a hefty built-in commission was also charged, and the High Priest was complicit in this nasty business so that he could make some profit for himself as well.

The next type of offering discussed is called firstlings; that is in the sense of firstfruits or firstborn. And the rule is that since ALL firstfruits or firstborns (of animals OR people) belong by default to the Lord, then they CANNOT be consecrated. In other words, nobody can give to the Lord as a consecrated item, something that's already been consecrated. You can't give something that already belongs to God, as though it is an additional offering. That said this applies only to CLEAN things: things that have been declared ritually clean and suitable for sacrifice before Yehoveh. UNCLEAN things (unclean animals in this case) indeed CAN be consecrated to the Lord but they MUST be redeemed and then the money given in its stead. As an example a person can consecrate an unclean animal (say a camel for instance) BUT that person MUST redeem it OR the priest sells the animal to another for money. However the PRICE that must be charged for that animal is 20% above its usual market value.

I suppose a reasonable question might be, 'why would a person go through such a strange process as to give an animal knowing that he'd have to turn around and redeem it'? Remember that we're dealing with an ancient culture, full of customs and traditions; and that this was a farming and herding based society. It might be that the person gives the animal because he currently HAS no money. It is agreed that the animal is held for a time until that person can come up with the money to redeem it.

Verse 28 describes another kind of setting apart an item for God; different Bibles will use different words for this particular kind of giving, some will say "devote" and others will say "proscribe". Our CJB says, "consecrated unconditionally". I don't have a problem with any of those words. What this is getting at is that in THIS particular type of setting-apart an item for God, there can be no redemption. It is a permanent consecration.

The most important thing for us to recognize is not the somewhat arbitrary and loose choice of a word, a term, for each kind of offering like **vow**, and then **consecrations**, and then **devote** or **proscribe**, and so on; what's important is to see that there are a number of kinds or classes of giving things to God or setting things apart for God, each with its own rules and regulations and purposes. The idea that we mechanically give 10% of our income and we're off the hook, or that we can see someone in need but simply look the other way because "we've already given", is unknown in the Bible. It is further unknown that 10% is the final and rigid number. The tithe represents a certain kind of giving, not the sum total of ALL giving.

Notice this seemingly out of place thought in verse 29 that speaks of, "no human who has been 'devoted' or 'set-apart' can be ransomed, he must be put to death". What is going on here is that this is just a Hebrew way of saying no one who has been given the death penalty for some capital crime can be redeemed (for money); he must die. It's kind of interesting the way this whole thing comes full circle. We're going along speaking about devoting or setting aside things to God.....gifts, offerings, good things, positive things..... and then the Scripture just throws someone who has committed a capital crime.....a bad thing, a negative thing.... into that same category.

What is being demonstrated here is that there is a connection between a person violating a very serious law of God and thus getting the death penalty, and the setting aside of things for God. Now please follow this because we're going to see how God (and the Hebrew legal system) views justice.

As we saw in Chapter 26 when God's makes a law, a regulation, He also sets down a blessing for those who are obedient to it and a curse for those who are disobedient to it. The curse for the violation of some of God's laws is physical death. This is NOT a human determination; this is not a group of lawmakers sitting down and determining from their own personal sense of morality, who should live and die. This is GOD's determination as given to Moses and set down in the Torah. When God demands the life of the violator, that life becomes devoted to God. It is all bound up in the same principle that when a sheep or a bull is set apart as a sacrifice, the life of that animal is devoted to God. When in the administration of justice the person who has allegedly violated God's law is found guilty, it is the judge's DUTY to confer the penalty God has commanded upon the guilty party. The judge has no right to do anything else no matter his personal feelings or personal sense of morality. NOT to do so makes the judge guilty of not obeying God. So it is not man who says "you must die for committing murder"....it is God. Man is simply being obedient according to God's laws when we execute a murderer.

A person who is to be killed for violating God's law is, in God's eyes, being set-apart for Him in the sense that God is taking back the life He had given that person. All life is the Lord's; this is why we have the Hebrew thought that a man who violates a capital crime and thus receives capital punishment is atoning for his own guilt by means of his own life. Under most crimes against God (NON-capital crimes) an animal substitute can be offered. That guilty man's sins are then transferred to the animal and in turn God accepts the life of that animal IN PLACE OF the life of the guilty man. Therefore in a way, that condemned man becomes God's holy property just as a sacrificial animal becomes God's holy property. The principle being that

whatever is set-apart for God (whether it be the result of something positive or negative) is God's. And whatever is God's is His HOLY property. And you don't mess with God's holy property.

The last rule discussed as a method of offering or setting-apart for God is the tithe. And, these verses speak of two kinds of tithes: a tenth of the crops from the land and a tenth of the increase of the animals.

Understand: ALL of these different kinds of giving apply to an Israelite's life simultaneously. He doesn't choose from a menu or a list of options for giving; they each apply according to the circumstance. So here a tithe is just an automatic giving of a tenth of your increase (in whatever form that increase might be) in addition to all the other types of giving and devotions of things to God that we've covered.

And since tithes were, at first, usually given in the form of animals or produce (but later more often in coins) then a person could REDEEM his tithed animals or produce by paying their equivalent in money plus a 20% surcharge. And what is also being described is that the tithe is to be a random sampling of his crops and flocks and herds. In other words he is NOT obligated to pick out the best portion nor is he permitted to pick out the worst portion to base his tithe on; the tithe is just to be an honest representation of all that person has, the good along with the bad. This is ENTIRELY different than a firstfruits offering, or a ritual sacrifice, where ONLY the best is given to God. Further, as I stated, the tithe is IN ADDITION TO the firstfruits offerings and all the other kinds of giving as well.

Let me conclude by pointing out that (for the most part) chapter 27 revolves around vows and commitments someone has made to Yehoveh. In general God is NOT seeking our vows. And when He is, our response is taken seriously; changing one's mind is VERY costly....generally a 20% penalty. Vows are not to be taken lightly.

Naturally this same exact principle is brought over to the NT. And just as naturally the NT doesn't re-explain that which has already been explained previously; rather Yeshua takes the meaning of it to another level. For instance He says it is better than swearing a vow (which involves all the stuff we've just been studying), to merely "let your yes be yes, and your no be no". Yeshua is pointing out what we certainly see: there is a MAJOR downside to making vows to God, particularly if you are not very good at following through.

This ends the book of Leviticus, the book of the priesthood. Next week we begin the truly awesome book of Numbers.