

Parashah 33

# B'chukkotai

## בְּחֻקֹּתַי

“By my regulations”

Leviticus 26:3 – 27:34

Torah Together



This last section of Leviticus contains the prophetic list of blessings for obedience to the *Torah* and curses for disobedience. With the fullness of history as a backdrop, it's clear that God knew exactly what the future held for His people. Finally, the last chapter of Leviticus deals with the redemption of things dedicated to God.

### 1. Reward for Obedience - 26:3-13

a) Treaties or covenants of this time period always contained a listing of rewards (or blessings) and punishments (or curses), usually listing rewards first. What did the Israelites have to do to get these rewards?

b) God lists three ways in which the Israelites would be rewarded for obedience. Describe the **physical** or **material rewards** that come from obedience.

c) Describe the **mental** or **emotional rewards** that come from obedience. Do you think these rewards have the same value today?

The “**suzerainty treaty**” is a form of ancient middle-eastern literature which contained sections listing the rewards (or blessings) for keeping the treaty and the punishments (or curses) for breaking the treaty. This form is found in much of the *Torah*. In fact, the entire book of Deuteronomy is written as a **suzerainty treaty**.

**Scripture Link:**  
**Deuteronomy 28:2-14** contains another listing of the blessings that the Israelites will enjoy if they obey God and follow his commandments. Do you find any significant differences in these two lists?

### Individual and National Blessing

While the reward for obedience is stated here for the nation of Israel, it is also true that living a life that is obedient to God's teaching and instruction (his *Torah*) leads to personal blessings as well. Thus when the people of a nation serve God, that nation enjoys the benefits of a better moral and economic climate. The spiritual environment of a nation is a reflection of the spiritual beliefs of its people.

d) Describe the **spiritual rewards** that come from obedience. Do you think this still applies today? If so, who receives this reward?

e) Notice that these rewards have implications both to individual Israelites as well as to the entire nation. Do you think this is still true today? To whom does it apply?

### 2. Punishment for Disobedience - 26:14-46

a) The listing of punishments (or curses) is much longer than the rewards. Why do you think that this is so? What did the Israelites have to do to receive these punishments?

b) Based on your description of the physical rewards of obedience, describe the **physical punishments** for disobedience.

c) Based on your description of the mental or emotional rewards for obedience, describe the **emotional punishments**. Does any particular description shock you?

d) Compare verses 18, 21, 23, and 27. What ideas are common to these verses? What can you learn from this? According to verse 19, what is God trying to accomplish with these punishments?

e) Carefully read verses 33 - 35. What does God say he will do with the Israelites? When this happened, what was to happen to the land? Why did God say he would do this?

f) Verse 38 describes what will happen to the Israelites that are scattered. Do you think this has happened? If so, when? What are the implications of this?

g) According to verses 40 - 45, does God break his covenant with the Israelites? What must the Israelites do to restore the covenant? What does God "remember"?

### To Perish

While God is explaining what troubles will befall the Israelites if they disobey his *Torah*, **Leviticus 26:38** is prophetic in nature. God states, "You will perish among the nations; the land of your enemies will devour you." The word "perish" comes from the Hebrew root *abad* which means "to lose oneself" or "to become lost." This is exactly what happened to the northern kingdom of Israel when they were completely conquered by the Assyrians in about 732 bc. The Israelites were removed from their land, dispersed to the far reaches of the Assyrian empire and "became lost among the nations." (See **2 Kings 17:7-23**)

### Heart Circumcision?

Many people believe the concept of "circumcision of the heart" is a New Covenant teaching, but it is quite clear in **Leviticus 26:40-45** what God means by this term. The purpose of God's punishment for disobedience is that the Israelites would have a "change of heart" and would **turn (repent, *teshuvah* in Hebrew)** from their evil ways and return to God's ways, the *Torah*. So to have circumcised hearts means to have soft hearts, to be willing to humble themselves before God, to confess their sins and to renew their covenant with Him.

### Special Vows

This last chapter deals with a **special vow of dedication** (*yafli neder* in Hebrew) that a person might make, usually in response to a blessing. Essentially, it is a **voluntary offering made to God out of a heart of gratitude**. This term first appears in **Genesis 28:20** when Jacob made such a vow to God after he left home to go to Haran. God takes our promises to him quite seriously and expects us to fulfill them. This is not always possible, however, and God has provided a way to meet our commitment to him by “redeeming” the object of the vow. This might happen for at least two reasons. It may be the case that the item that the offerer has promised to God is no longer in his possession. It may also be that the Levites do not have a need for such an item. In cases such as these, the redemption valuation (*arakhin* in Hebrew) is set by the priest, and if paid by the offerer, fulfills his vow to God. However, in certain specific cases redemption is not permitted.

### 3. Redeeming What is God's - 27:1-34

a) This last chapter of **Leviticus** deals with *arakhin*, sometimes translated ‘valuations.’ It concerns vows and freewill offerings made to the priests or to the tabernacle. Verses 1-8 address the practice of dedicating a person for use by God. What was the value placed on individuals donated in this way? Why was this valuation necessary? Does this practice seem unusual to you? What was the effect of this practice?

b) Verses 9 through 13 deal with giving animals to the priests or to the tabernacle service. What two types of animals could be given? What happened in both cases? Does this seem appropriate to you?

c) What were the rules if a person dedicated his house to God?

d) What rules applied if a person dedicated part of his family's land to God? What rules applied if he dedicated land that was not part of his family inheritance?

e) Why was it not possible to dedicate the firstborn of an animal to God?

f) Verses 28 and 29 use the term *cherem*, something devoted or committed to God. When one gave something to God (through the priests), was it redeemable? What do you think verse 29 means? What connects it to verse 28?

g) According to verses 30-33, what composes the tithe? To whom does it belong? Why do you think someone might want to redeem a part of his tithe?

### **Dedicating or Devoting Something to God**

Generally, an item was "dedicated" (*kadash* in Hebrew) to YHWH as a free will offering, usually as an expression of gratitude for a blessing. In general, God takes vows very seriously and if one makes a vow to God, He expects it to be fulfilled. However, in keeping with God's benevolence, He decided that in some cases, items dedicated to Him could be redeemed. (This might be helpful if the item dedicated is of limited use to the priesthood.) Such items could be redeemed by the giver or another.

The act of "devoting" (*cherem* in Hebrew) something to YHWH is much different. This act was not voluntary and the item could not be redeemed – the item belonged to God (the priests) indefinitely. Sometimes, the item devoted to YHWH was devoted for destruction, as in the case of a person found guilty of a capital offense.

"These are the commands YHWH gave Moses on Mount Sinai for the Israelites."

Leviticus 27:34

## Digging deeper . . . .

1. Read **I Samuel 1**. Does your study of **Leviticus 27** shed any light on Hannah's actions? Do you think she was obligated to leave her son with Eli, the priest, at Shiloh?

### God's Character and the Book of Leviticus

For some people, an in-depth study of the book of **Leviticus** leads to more questions than answers. Many of the practices described seem strange and archaic to our modern eyes. However, if we remember that these are God's teachings and instructions for us, then it is up to us (with His help) to understand them. If we follow the Hebrew tradition of cyclical *Torah* study, we know that we will return to study this book again in about a year. Next year's study may provide additional insight and help to clarify some confusion. And so it goes: each year, as we revisit the *Torah*, we gain further insight into God's character and a better understanding of how He wants us to lead our lives.

1. This completes our study of the book of **Leviticus**. While it may seem that much in this book might not be applicable to our lives today, there are still many profound truths about God and our relationship to him that can be found in these pages. How many can you list?

For further study, see

**Haftarah** : Jeremiah 46:13-28

**Brit Hadashah** : Luke 2:22-24; John 19:31-37; Acts 13:16-17;  
Revelation 8:6 – 9:12; 16:1-21