

Leviticus Chapter 27

Vows, Dedications, and Tithes



There is some discussion as to how this chapter connects to the rest of the book. Chapter 26 seems to end with a conclusion to the book. Chapter 27 may have been written here, as we see it, or it may have been written later and added to the end of Leviticus. As mentioned in the notes on Leviticus 1:1, there are 56 sections of the book beginning with something like: *the LORD spoke to Moses, saying....* Many or all of these may have been written separately and brought together in this book later. This chapter begins with the words: *Again, the LORD spoke to Moses, saying...* [Picture from www.amazingfacts.org.]

The chapter outlines as follows:

27:1-13 Vows

- Verses 1-8 Vows Concerning People
- Verses 9-13 Vows Concerning Animals

27:14-29 Dedication Gifts

- Verses 14-15 The Dedication of Houses
- Verses 16-25 The Dedication of Lands
- Verses 26-27 The First-born Animals
- Verses 28-29 Unredeemable Dedications

Verses 30-33 Tithes

Verse 34 Conclusion

Concerning Vows

According to the “MacBook Dictionary,” a *vow* is a *solemn promise committing one to a prescribed role, calling, or course of action*. The “Brown, Driver, and Briggs Lexicon” defines the Hebrew word נִדָּר (*neder*) as a *vow*:

1. *of personal service to 'y (of Jacob at Bethel), (at Hebron); (any one), of Nazirite; Hannah's consecration of her son.*
2. *in gen. of any kind of votive offerings of promised gifts to 'y.*
3. *Jephthah's daughter ...*

[The above quote is incomplete but taken directly from the BDB lexicon without modification.]



Why do people make vows? What is it that makes vows appealing? There seems to be three basic reasons for making a vow to God:

1. A promise of future service (as with the Nazirite vow in Numbers 6:1-21, and Jacob's vow at Bethel, which God reminded him of in Genesis 31:31). Martin Luther also made such a vow that made him a monk.
2. A promise of future payment for a favor from God (as with Hannah in 1 Samuel 1:11 and Jephthah's daughter in Judges 11:30-40).
3. A promise of future sacrificial worship of God (as with the votive offering and David's promise in Psalms 116:14-18).

[Picture of Hannah bringing Samuel to the Temple from www.biblical-

art.com.]

Leviticus 27:1-8 Vows Concerning People

This section deals with people who made a rather significant vow to God. Then either they could not pay their vow, or they wanted the Law to specify what that payment should be. That amount differed as to whether they were a man, woman, or child. Ryrie says:

The estimation of the worth of a man or woman dedicated to the Lord was evidently based on his or her worth as a worker for a given number of years (“Ryrie Study Bible,” p. 203).

Maybe, but there is nothing in the text which says that. What might argue against it is verse 8. It says when he or she is poor, then the priest should evaluate what the payment should be. But one’s poverty should not affect their worth as a worker.

Leviticus 27:9-13 Vows Concerning Animals

Sacrificial animals were to be *clean* animals according to the description in the Law. But vows could be paid with *unclean* animals. If clean animals were used to pay vows, they could not be redeemed by money or other animals. If unclean animals were used, then they could be redeemed at the priest’s appraised price plus 20%. If it was not redeemed, the animal apparently went to the priest.

Leviticus 27: 14-15 The Dedication of Houses



Apparently, this was a house in a city, since the next passage talks about property and fields. And these houses were not subject to the Jubilee regulations. The dedication of one’s house to God was much the same as paying vows with an animal. It could be redeemed with the price plus 20%.

[The picture is an excavation of a four-room house in Beersheba. This kind of city house might be dedicated to God (photo from www.bibleplaces.com).]

The more interesting question here is, “What was actually going on in a house dedication and why was one motivated to do that?” The Hebrew word for dedication is *qodesh* (קֹדֶשׁ). It is usually translated *consecrate*, *dedicate*, or *become holy*. For example, the statement in verse 14 that reads *Now if a man consecrates his house as holy...*, the words *consecrates* and *holy* are both the root word קֹדֶשׁ. Walvoord suggests it means the house was *set apart as holy, to be used by the priests* (“Bible Knowledge Commentary” note on 27:14-15). Whatever it included, it meant giving the house to the LORD because the house could be bought back. Possibly those with property could move to another house on their land and give their city house to the LORD to be used as the priests saw fit.

Leviticus 27:16-25 The Dedication of Lands

The dedication of property to the LORD was more complicated because its value was to be determined in proximity to the year of Jubilee. The evaluation was first based upon the cost of the amount of seed required to plant it for 49 years, as if it was dedicated on the Jubilee year. If it was dedicated after that, then its value was to be determined based on how long there was before the next Jubilee year. Again, if a person wished to buy back his property, the cost would be the determined amount plus 20%. If the one dedicating the land failed to redeem it, or if he sold it after having dedicated it to the LORD, it became the property of the priests at the next Jubilee year.

Leviticus 27:26-27 Dedication of the First Born Animals

The first born *clean* animals already belonged to the LORD (Exodus 13:2; 34:19-20), so they could not be dedicated. But the unclean animals could be dedicated and redeemed with the usual price plus 20%.

Leviticus 27:28-29 Unredeemable Dedications

These two verses list three things (or people) which cannot be sold or bought back:

1. *Anything which a man sets apart to the LORD* [as described previously]
2. *Anything devoted to destruction* [like when God told Saul to wipe out all the Amalekites in 1 Samuel 15]
3. [Anyone] *set apart among men [to] be put to death* [like Achan in Joshua 7]

Leviticus 27: 30-33 Tithes

There was to be given to God a tithe of one-tenth of the increase of the land, that is, its trees, herds, and flocks. Presumably, this was consumed by the priests or distributed to the poor by the priests. This tithe could be redeemed for its value plus 20% except for animals. Every tenth one of them belonged to the LORD *whether it is good or bad*.

Leviticus 27:34 Conclusion

Most likely the conclusion here is meant to be for this chapter, not the whole book. It reads:

These are the commandments which the LORD commanded Moses for the sons of Israel at Mount Sinai.

Notice these are called *commandments* twice. The terms *commandments, statutes and judgments* are seemingly used interchangeably (see Deuteronomy 4:5). The concluding statement also declares the divine inspiration of these commands, and they were given to Moses, not to the people. It was the work of Moses, not God, to speak to the people. The text also ends noting the place where the revelation occurred. So we know the time and place. In other words, this is a real historical event of actual verbal revelation, not a mystical experience or a myth.

THOUGHTS AND APPLICATIONS

The advantage of vows is they apply pressure upon the one making the vow to do what he or she promised to do when they no longer feel like doing it. In our society, marriage is the only common vow, and that is broken about half of the time. Vows are not commanded for the church. But there is one clear New Testament example of an apostle taking a vow. In Acts 18:18, Luke thinks it is good to tell us Paul had his hair cut because he had been keeping a vow (probably the Nazirite vow).

The disadvantage of vows is that they require payment, which often puts a person in a difficult or desperate situation (such as Jephthah's daughter and Hannah having to leave her son). They usually create a stressful future scenario of some sort.

Jesus warned against swearing an oath. An oath is not the same as a vow, but it is a close cousin. An oath is more general than a vow, but both are commitments that depend on future circumstances. Jesus said:

Again, you have heard that the ancients were told, "You shall not make false vows, but shall fulfill your vows to the LORD", But I say to you, make no oath at all (Matthew 5:33-34), ... But let your statement be, 'Yes, yes' or 'No, no'; anything beyond these is of evil (verse 37).

The biggest problem with a vow is that you cannot control future circumstances. For example, if you make a marriage vow *Until death do us part* and your spouse divorces you, then you are forced to break your vow, even though you do not wish to. Making a vow is like going into debt or cosigning a note. It is a promise of future performance without an ability to control the future circumstances.
[Wedding picture from www.lightning-entertainment.co.uk.]

