

Leviticus 26 - Blessings & Curses

In Ancient Israel's time, the end of a book of laws generally held a list of blessings if the laws were kept, and curses if the laws were broken. This is the way Deuteronomy finishes (Deut 28), and it's also the way Leviticus finishes.



Personal Preparation Day 1 – Blessings for Obedience

God's plan all along was that Israel would receive his blessings. But it's never really been spelt out in Leviticus up until now what that looks like. Let's have a look.

Read Leviticus 26:1-13

1. This section starts off with some general commands for Israel in verses 1-2. What are they?
2. Describe the three different blessings God offered Israel:
 - a. verses 3-5:
 - b. verses 6-8:
 - c. verses 9-13:
3. What enabled Israel to receive these blessings? (verse 13)
4. What was the reason God wanted to bless Israel in this way?

THINK: Many people use passages such as this from the Old Testament to say that God wants to shower his people with the same kinds of blessings. What issues or problems can you see with this? What does the NT have to say?

Personal Preparation Day 2 – Curses for Disobedience

As you can see from today's passage (verses 14-39), the description of what happens if Israel goes astray is a little more detailed than if they obey. Knowing Israel's history, it's not hard to imagine why.

Read Leviticus 26:14-39

1. These curses are described in a series of 5 spiraling consequences. From verses 14,18,21,23 and 27, what was going to set these curses in motion?
2. Describe the curses that would come upon Israel in these circumstances:
 - a. verses 14-17
 - b. verses 18-20
 - c. verses 21-22
 - d. verses 23-26
 - e. verses 27-39

3. What do each of these sections tell the Israelites the purpose of the curses was?

4. The blessings in verses 3-13 are a picture of the Sabbath as God intends it. Peace, prosperity, with Him walking among His people. What kind of Sabbath does God say he will bring about in the event of disobedience? (verses 34-35)

Personal Preparation Day 3 – I will remember...

It's a pretty bleak picture in verses 14-39. And even bleaker because we know that's exactly the path that Israel took - sin spiraling out of control, ignoring the voice of God, and reaping the fruits of disobedience as they were exiled.

But God knew the hearts of the Israelites, and so provided hope even in the worst of circumstances.

Read Leviticus 26:40-46

1. To have hope, what did Israel need to do? (verses 40-41)

2. What response would this prompt from God? (verses 42, 44-45)

3. If Israel were restored to the land, what would have been different than when they were first kicked out? What problem does that pose?

As we work through the Old Testament, Israel experience every curses outlined in Leviticus 26. Famine, war, exile and the destruction of God's dwelling place the temple. But right at the end we see a glimmer of hope. It's not in return from exile, but in the words of the prophets who look forward to something, or someone, who will break the endless cycle of sin.

In Ezekiel 34-37, Ezekiel pictures a people who no longer defile themselves, who are shepherded by a true and righteous King, and have God once more walking in their midst. And it's not in their return from exile that we see this fulfilled, but in the birth of one who would be called Immanuel - which means God with us. (Matthew 1:23).

THINK: In what way do you think Jesus Christ is the answer to the hope and problems we see raised in Leviticus 26?

Group Discussion Questions

One of the most commonly misunderstood and harmful ideas Christians have these days, is how God blesses His people now. Do we have the same promises as Israel? Or has something changed?

1. What examples can you think of where someone's idea of how God blesses some, and doesn't bless others, has caused problems?

As we're going to see in Leviticus 26, God made it very clear to Israel upon what basis he was going to bless, and on what basis he was going to curse. Let's have a look to see what it says.

Israel Blessings & Curses

Read Leviticus 26:1-46

2. What are the three ways God wants to bless Israel in verses 3-13?
3. What are the 5 curses that God outlines in verses 14-39?
4. What does the passage say dictated whether the Israelites received the blessings or the curses?

As we know, things didn't turn out so well for the Israelites. It was their own fault, and it's not as if they didn't know the consequences. It looked like a dismal end to a promising start. But it wasn't the end.

Israel's hope

5. Whatever Israel's situation, what does God specify as the condition for him restoring Israel in verses 40-41?
6. Why would God do this? (verses 42-45)

We have here described for us a series of events that reflect Israel's history. For a while they receive blessing (Solomon being the high point in 1 Kings 9-10), things go bad and they're exiled (end of 2 Kings) but God graciously brings them back to the land (Ezra-Nehemiah).

7. What changed when Israel returned that they won't be exiled again? What does this mean for Israel's future?

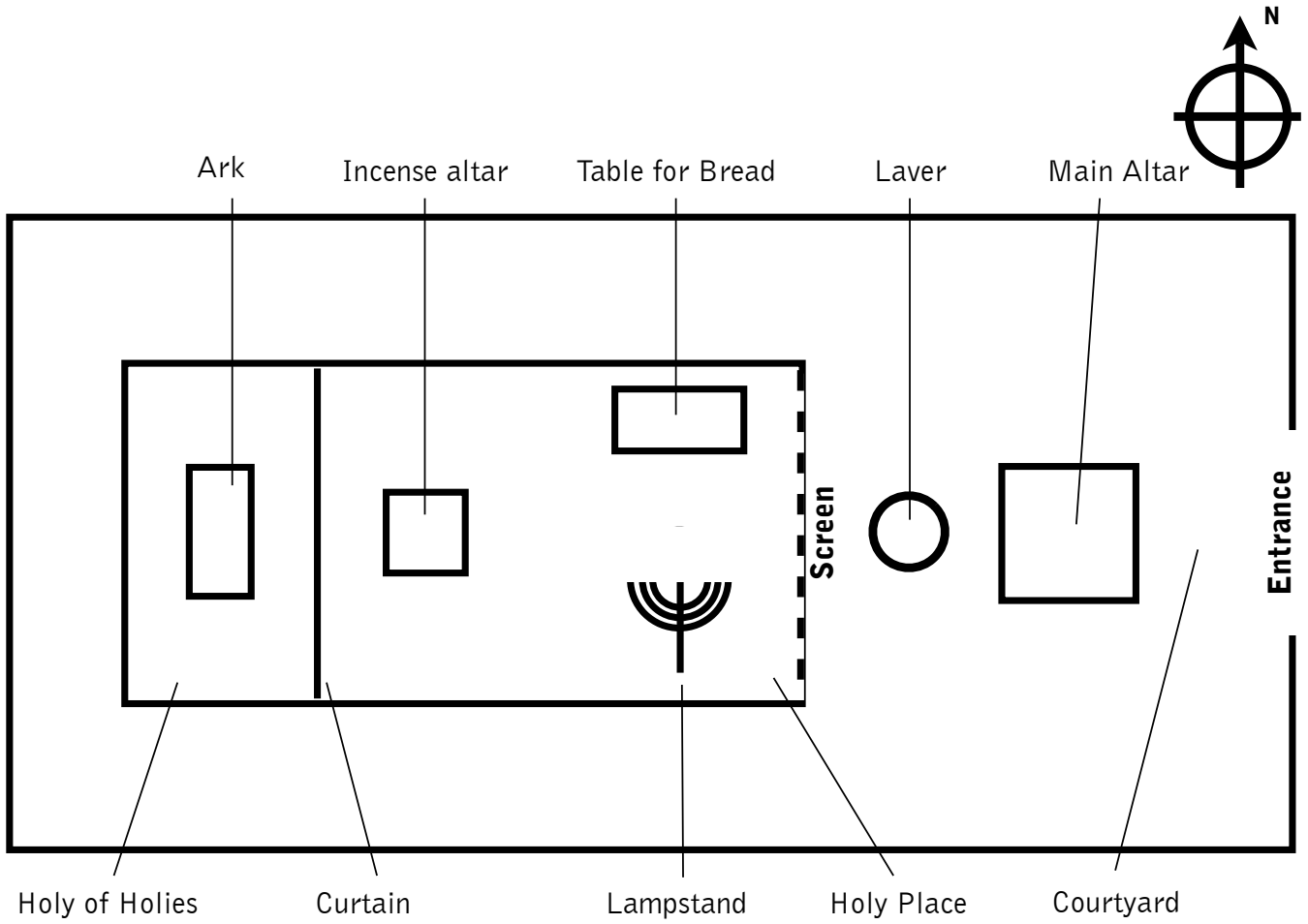
The blessings and curses we read about in Leviticus 26 are for Israel. If we want them to apply to us, we have to become an Israelite, we need to obey the law fully, and we have to ignore what God has done since then. But as we've seen in the previous studies - Christ changed everything. It's through Him that we experience God's blessing and avoid God's curse. Let's see what that looks like.

8. How do the following verses describe the way God does now, and will in the future, bless His people? (Romans 8:17-27; Ephesians 1:3; Colossians 2:9-15; Revelation 21:1-4)

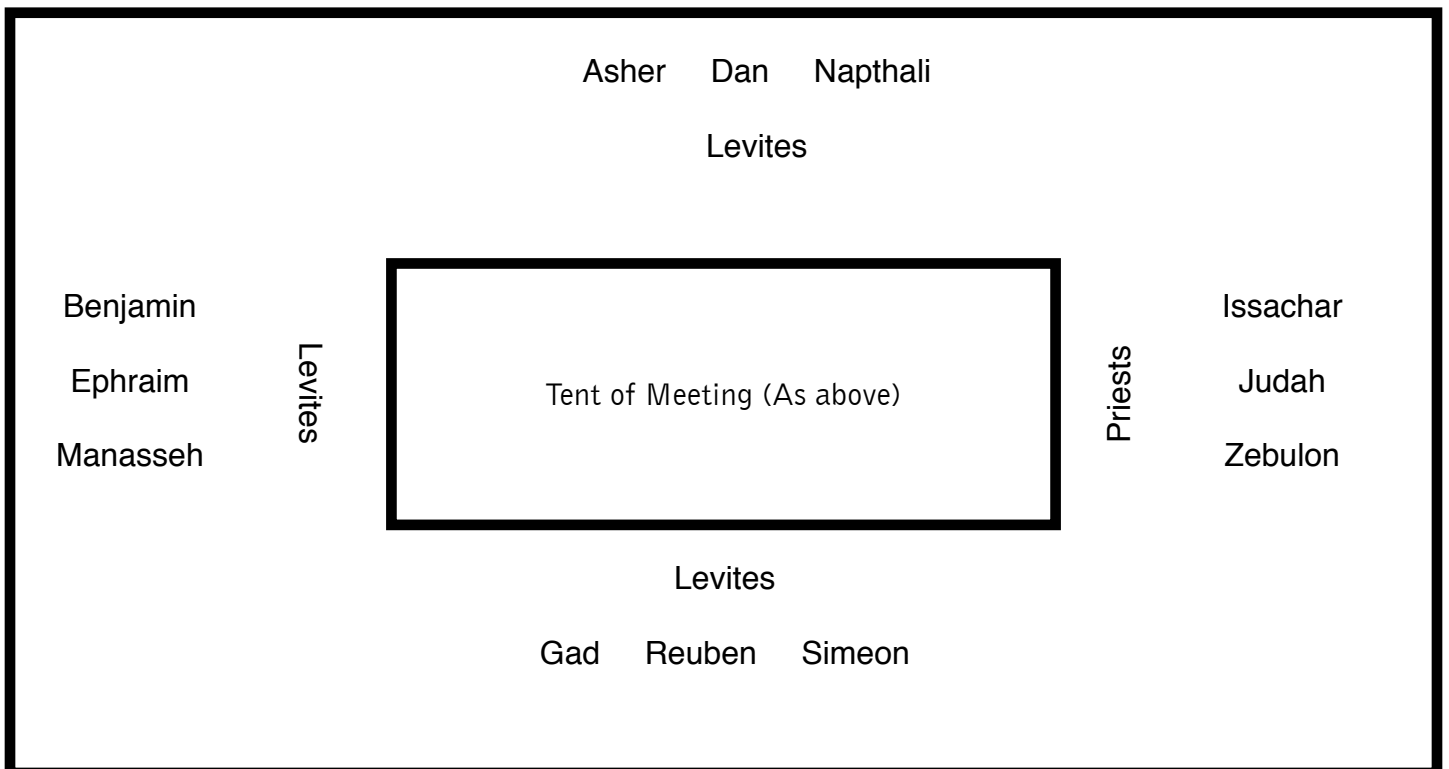
In the Present	In the Future

9. What does this mean for what we should expect life to be like now, what we should value, and where our focus should be? How does this answer some of the ideas we raised at the start of the study?

Appendix A - The Tent of Meeting



The arrangement of the 12 tribes of Israel when camped.



Appendix B

Name of Sacrifice	Types of Animals	Hand-laying?	How is the blood used?	Who gets to eat?	Purpose of Sacrifice
Burnt (Lev 1)	Cattle, sheep, goats, birds.	Yes	Poured on altar sides	No-one	Makes atonement. (1:4)
Grain / Cereal (Lev 2)	Grain			Priests	
Fellowship/ Peace (Lev 3)	Cattle, Sheep, Goats	Yes	Poured on altar sides	Priest & People	
Sin (Lev 4:1-5:13)	Cattle, sheep, goats, birds	Yes	Smear on altars, sprinkled inside tent	Priests	To secure forgiveness for intentional / unintentional sins.(4:26, 31, 35; 5:10, 13)
Guilt (Lev 5:14-6:7)	Rams	Probably	Poured on altar sides	Priests	To secure forgiveness for intentional / unintentional sins.(5:16, 19; 6:7)