

## Leviticus 27

### Keep Your Promises to God [Slide 1]

If you make a promise to a holy God, you better keep it. Leviticus chapter 27 contains regulations concerning vows to God. The bottom line behind all the regulations in this chapter is this simple truth, that if you make a promise to God you better keep it because all these regulations enable the person making a vow to God to keep their vow.

[Slide 2] In the OT vows were voluntary in nature. You didn't have to make a vow, but if you did, you were required to keep it. Listen to what Deuteronomy 23:22-23 says, "Read." Ecclesiastes 5:4-6 says, "Read." Pay what you vow. Don't be a fool and promise something you can't deliver and don't try to get out of your vow by saying it was a mistake.

When would a person likely make a vow? The two most common occasions a person might make a vow to God was either to overcome a crisis or to ask for a blessing. Let's say that your daughter was stricken by a serious disease or your crops were in danger of being ruined by an approaching storm. You might make a vow to God that if he healed your daughter or saved your crops that you would give something to him. Or you might want God to provide an exceptional wife for your son, so you might vow to God to give him something in exchange for granting that request. At first glance, this may seem a bit mercenary to you, but the mindset of the person making the vow was more along the lines of "Why should I just expect God to do things for me, without me do something for him in return? The motivation was usually one of gratitude and not wanting to always be a taker but rather to give back.

Vows could take many forms. In many of the psalms David vows to publicly praise God or to teach other people about God if God answers his prayer. One of the most famous vows in the OT is that of Hannah who was childless and made a vow to God that if he would give her a son, then she would dedicate him to serve God all his life as a Nazirite. God gave her a son, she named him Samuel, and Samuel became a prophet of the Lord.

An infamous vow is when Jephthah vowed that if God gave him victory over the Ammonites then he would offer up as a burnt offering whatever came out of his door first when he returned in peace from the battle. His only daughter was the first to come out of his door. It was an extremely stupid thing to do, but the book of Judges is full of people doing stupid things because they didn't follow God, but rather did what was right in their own eyes, not much different from now.

[Slide 3] Today we finish the book of Leviticus. By way of recap, the book of Leviticus concerns itself with the question of how can a sinful people live in the presence of a holy God? The laws in Leviticus were specifically aimed at explaining how the Israelites, who literally had God dwelling in the midst of their camp, could live with God and escape his holy wrath against sin. Along the way I have tried to model for you through the sermons the process you need to employ in applying OT law because much of the time the specific laws does not apply to us, as is the case with the legislation in Leviticus 27. Nevertheless the OT laws usually embody principles or timeless truths that do apply to us, but often in different ways in our culture. You have to identify or recognize the underlying principle that is true for all time and then ask how that principle applies today.

[Slide 4] I invite you to turn to Leviticus 27. Leviticus is the third book in the Bible. I'm going to summarize the chapter because we don't need to get bogged down in all the details in

order to understand the main message. Leviticus 27 gives instructions on how you can convert something you have promised to God into monetary value. Verses 1-13 contain rules on converting vows involving people and animals into monetary equivalents.

If a person vowed themselves or their child to the Lord's service it was for the purpose of redeeming the vow with cash and then giving that cash to the priests, so verses 2-7 set the different values to redeem a person based on their gender and age. If for some reason the person could not pay the standard redemption value, then the person would be brought before the priests and they would set a different monetary value on what the person was worth in verse 8.

Verses 9-13 deal with assessing the value of animals.

Verses 14-24 concern vows of houses and land. If a person vowed their house the priests would determine its value. If the person wanted to redeem the house they paid the value determined by the priest plus 20%. Land that was vowed had its value determined by the number of years before the year of Jubilee. If a person wanted to redeem his land before the year of Jubilee, he paid the assessed value adjusted for the number of years left before the year of Jubilee plus 20% more.

Verses 26-34 contain miscellaneous regulations about vows. First-born clean animals could not be vowed because they already belonged to God. First born unclean animals were valued by the priest and added 20% if the owner wanted to redeem it. Otherwise the priests used it as they saw fit. Enemies of Israel that were vowed to God for death during war were to be killed. If a person wanted to redeem their tithe of produce for some reason (probably during drought or famine) they paid its value plus 20%.

God recognized that sometimes the course of events rendered a vow too costly, so typically God allowed the person who made the vow to buy back what they vowed at its market value plus 20%. This taught the people not to make rash vows, but it also taught that God would allow the redeeming of a vow. You still paid your vow but under some conditions God would allow you to change the form of payment.

As I said earlier, the whole purpose of this legislation was to ensure that you kept your vow to God even under changing circumstances, because it is a very serious thing to make a vow to God.

[Slide 5] People don't make a lot of vows to God nowadays. One of the most common vows to God is the marriage vow where people vow to be faithful to their spouse until death do them part. That is a sacred promise to God and God holds people to that promise. That is one of the reasons why divorce is wrong, because by divorcing you are breaking your vow to God.

I don't think many people give much thought to theologically what they are doing when they attend a wedding ceremony, but your main function as a wedding guest is to serve as a witness to the vows the couple is making that day. You then should hold those two accountable to keep their vows and in the future if they consider divorce you should be one of those people reminding them that they made a vow to God for better or for worse, in sickness and in health, for poorer or richer, until death do us part.

I take seriously my role as a witness to the marriage vows and if I do not believe the vows should be made such as when a Christian marries a non-Christian or when someone divorced remarries without Biblical grounds, then I will not attend the wedding as a witness. I have skipped attending weddings within my extended family because I felt my presence would express agreement with the covenant being made, when in fact, I did not agree with that covenant. We have got to treat vows made to God with the utmost seriousness whether we are

making the vow or being witness to the vow. If we don't do that, we imply that it is not important to keep a promise to God.

If you have ever made any kind of promise to God, even an informal one, you need to keep it. Somehow God impressed on me this principle early in my life. I was in elementary school at the time and behind my house was a large field that held four different baseball diamonds. I really wanted a baseball and I didn't have one. I asked God that if he would let me find a forgotten baseball in one of those baseball fields, I would only take one even if I found more. In my little boy's mind I guess the promise not to be greedy was what I offered up to God in exchange for his blessing.

I got on my bike and rode all around those baseball fields, first one, then the second, then the third. No baseball. I was at the last field riding in the outfield and there it was, a baseball lying on the ground. I picked it up. I was so afraid that I would see another baseball and be tempted to take it too and break my promise that I quickly rode home from there with my eyes up and straight ahead, not looking at the ground for fear I would see another baseball. Somehow, I understood early on, "Don't break your promise to God."

Do you have some unfulfilled promises you have made to God? He never forgets them. He doesn't dismiss the promise. You owe him. Better pay up before he judges you to be a vow breaker.

Although this chapter covers vows made to God, the principle is also true for any vows or promises you make. Because God keeps his promises, we, as his followers, are supposed to keep our promises that we make to our fellow human beings.

I find this to be an area in which Christians can be incredibly lax and negligent. How about when you promise to be somewhere at a certain time and you're not there on time? What about when you promise to do something and you don't do it? What about when you promise to not divulge a secret and you do? Integrity extends to the smallest promises we make. When you fail to keep a promise, do you apologize and ask forgiveness or do you just blow off your failure as if it doesn't matter whether you keep your word or not. It matters. It matters to God.

Your reputation as to whether you are a man or woman of your word directly impacts your ability to be a witness for God. If you are a promise breaker, you lose all credibility with nonbelievers if you try to declare God's greatness, because they are going to think, "If God is so great, why couldn't he keep you from lying and breaking your promise?" You see, God has every reason to want you to be completely trustworthy in what you say.

So, don't walk away from Leviticus 27 thinking it has nothing to say to you. None of us lives this life without making promises. God wants you to be a promise keeper because he is a promise keeper to you. He has promised eternal life to you through Jesus Christ. He has promised never to leave you or forsake you. Jesus has promised his followers that he will come back for us and take us to his Father's mansion where he has already prepared a place for us. Thank God, he is a promise keeper. Now, you be like him and keep your promises, even in the smallest promises you make. Let's pray.