

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Leviticus 26:1-2

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. This week we will read Leviticus chapter 26. We will read verses 1-2 today.

Moses led the congregation of Israel in the wilderness of Mount Sinai, where they had completed the construction of the tabernacle. God then came to dwell among the Israelites, and the glory of God filled the tabernacle. God called Moses from within the tabernacle and spoke many words to him. Moses recorded these words, which make up the entire book of Leviticus, as it is almost entirely the word of God. The words of God reveal His eternal will and His plan of redemption.

Because of man's sin, God needed to prepare a path. This path includes three steps:

1. The establishment of five basic offerings and the ordinances for sacrifices: burnt offering, grain offering, peace offering, sin offering, and guilt offering.
2. The establishment of the priestly service system, to help the people offer sacrifices to God.
3. Cleansing unclean things in daily life through offerings. In this step, God especially gave ordinances regarding dietary laws, regulations for purification after childbirth, cleansing from leprosy, and purification of discharges.

Of course, in the New Testament, this path is a foreshadowing of Christ. Christ came and declared in John 14:6, "I am the way." With the way provided, man can come before God. Once the way was prepared, the high priest could enter the Holy of Holies once a year, on the Day of Atonement, carrying the burden of the Israelites through the blood of the sacrifices and the incense, to meet with God at the mercy seat. On the one hand, people could come before God to seek His guidance; on the other hand, God could reveal His will to them.

At this point, it marks an important milestone in God's redemption plan. Sinful and fallen people could finally return to the presence of a righteous and holy God. The offerings on the Day of Atonement foreshadow Jesus Christ, who, through His death and resurrection, opened a new and living way for us. We can boldly come before the Father to seek grace, mercy, and timely help. When people meet with God and understand His will, they must bring God into their daily lives, so that they can live before Him and be set apart for Him.

Following this, God revealed that people must avoid all unholy things in their lives. God's instructions applied to the Israelites, the priests, and the high priest. The purpose was for the entire congregation of Israel to become God's people, while God would become their God.

Finally, God established the weekly Sabbath and the seven annual feasts so that people could rest before Him. He also instituted the Sabbath Year every seven years so that even the land could rest before Him. Moreover, every fiftieth year was the Year of Jubilee, in which all the inhabitants of the land would gain freedom, return to their families, and receive the inheritance God allocated to them. At this point, God had revealed His commandments, statutes, and ordinances, and it should have concluded. The final two chapters serve as God's conclusion: Chapter 26 contains God's warning to the Israelites, and Chapter 27 speaks of vows and offerings, expressing God's expectations of the people.

Let us first look at Chapter 26, which is God's warning to His people. The divisions of this chapter are very clear. Verses 1-2 reiterate the most fundamental and central requirements of God in the Law. From verses 3-13, it speaks about the fivefold blessings God would give if the Israelites obeyed His commandments. Verses 14-39 describe the fivefold curses that would come upon the Israelites if they did not listen to God's words or obey His commandments, with the curses being intensified sevenfold. We see that God's words about curses exceed the words of blessing—by more than twice—because God knows that human instinct to avoid calamity is greater than their desire to pursue blessings. Although God earnestly warned the Israelites, these words of curses ultimately became a historical reality for them. More than 3,500 years ago, when God gave the Law to

Moses, He already foretold the consequences of Israel's disobedience. The final section, verses 40-46, speaks of the repentance of Israel and God's remembrance.

Thank God for His mercy—God's people do not end in a state of curses. Because God keeps His covenant and extends steadfast love, when the Israelites humbled themselves in repentance, God still remembered the covenant He made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. With an understanding of the divisions in Chapter 26, today we will focus on the first two verses, which are the most basic and central requirements of the Law. God used 25 chapters to reveal many commandments, statutes, and ordinances, and now He condenses them into a few sentences—the most basic and central requirements. What might these be?

Verse 1: “You shall not make idols for yourselves, neither a carved image nor a sacred pillar shall you rear up for yourselves; nor shall you set up an engraved stone in your land, to bow down to it; for I am the LORD your God.”

This verse is a summary of the first and second commandments of the Ten Commandments. The LORD is our only God—He is sovereign, purposeful, intentional, and has a divine plan. He is also omnipresent, omniscient, and omnipotent. Humans can only submit to God and give Him glory, honor, and praises. This is the proper response of man before God. However, humans exalt themselves, claiming to be wise, and turn the glory of the incorruptible God into idols. Whether it is lifeless images made of wood or metal, standing pillars, or large engraved statues, these are all the work of human hands; yet people still call them gods and bow before them.

The subconscious motivation behind such worship activities is to have God listen to human desires. These man-made gods are created to satisfy human thoughts, desires, and ways. In primitive societies, people erect animal totems; in authoritarian societies, they raise up statues of dictators; in civilized, advanced societies, many idols are set up in people's hearts—such as money, fame, beauty, power, and status. These are all the result of humanity's disobedience to God. God knows the human heart easily crafts idols to replace Him. Therefore, the first

fundamental requirement of the Law is to pursue God as our only goal. Any pursuit outside of God will ultimately become our idol. If we can put God first, God knows all our needs and is willing to richly reward us.

Dear brothers and sisters, in modern society, competition is intense, life is stressful, work is busy every day, and even after work, there is a pile of household chores, children's needs, and church responsibilities on Sundays. It seems so difficult to put God first. The root issue is that our priorities are misplaced. If we pack our daily lives with mundane tasks, we will naturally find no time for God. We should learn to set apart time for daily devotions and prayer first, and then arrange everything else. If we do so, you will find that when your relationship with God is right, handling other matters will become easier and lighter. Matthew 6:33: "But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you."

Verse 2: "You shall keep My Sabbaths and reverence My sanctuary; I am the LORD."

This verse is divided into two parts: observing God's Sabbath and reverencing God's sanctuary. It also tells us the reason: because He is the LORD. He is the One who is self-existent and eternal, the One who is omniscient, omnipotent, completely sufficient, and abundant. He is the One who can meet all our needs and make up for all our shortcomings. If we keep the requirement of the first verse, which is putting God first in all things, the second verse will naturally follow. We will keep God's Sabbath and reverence God's sanctuary.

Let us first examine keeping God's Sabbath. This is the fourth commandment in the Ten Commandments and the foundation for the discussions on God's festivals in Chapters 23-25. On the surface level, this commandment states that no work should be done on the Sabbath day. Following this logic, it requires defining what "work" is. The rabbis of Old Testament Israel developed a long list of Sabbath regulations from this idea. These rules governed the lives of the Israelites on the Sabbath to such an extent that they were constantly at risk of violating them. As a

result, the Israelites could not find true rest on the Sabbath, which directly contradicted God's intention.

Indeed, as Paul says in 2 Corinthians 3:6, "He has made us competent as ministers of a new covenant—not of the letter but of the Spirit; for the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life." The phrase translated as "the Spirit" in this verse literally refers to the Spirit in the original text. Thus, we can also interpret it as: the letter kills, but the Spirit gives life.

When we read the Scriptures, we must go beyond the literal meaning and look for the spiritual meaning behind the words. Clinging rigidly to the letter will lead to spiritual death. This is precisely what the Old Testament rabbis' interpretations of the Sabbath did—they turned the Sabbath into a lifeless letter. In the New Testament, Jesus elevated the meaning of the Sabbath. It was no longer just a day but became a state of being. In Matthew 11:28, He says, "Come to Me, all you who labor and are heavy laden, and I will give you rest." Jesus promises that anyone who is in Christ Jesus can find rest.

If we explore further, why can we find rest in Christ? Even though external circumstances and challenges remain the same, our burdens become light and our paths easier because God is at work, and God has already begun His work. When we act on our own, we disrupt God's rhythm of working. But if we can enter into His rest, we will see how God opens the way for us and accomplishes everything on our behalf. When we have God's calling, we align with Him, let God take the lead, and God takes responsibility. On the one hand, we observe God's actions; on the other, we follow His commands and fulfill our part. This is keeping God's Sabbath—it is not us who work, but God who works.

Secondly, let us consider reverencing God's sanctuary. The sanctuary refers to the tabernacle in the Old Testament, the place where God dwells. Exodus 25:8 says, "And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them." God's intention was to dwell with people and live among them. In the Old Testament, this began with a physical tabernacle, which later expanded into the temple. It was God's Old Testament people, following His will, under His guidance, at the place of

His choosing, through people of His choosing, and at His appointed time, who built this dwelling place for God. It can be said that the sanctuary was the result of God's work.

God's work becomes even clearer in the New Testament. John 2:19-21 states: "Jesus answered and said to them, 'Destroy this temple, and in three days I will raise it up.' Then the Jews said, 'It has taken forty-six years to build this temple, and will You raise it up in three days?' But He was speaking of the temple of His body." Originally, God's dwelling place in the Old Testament was the temple, but in the New Testament, it became the body of Christ. This is not only God's dwelling place but also completely Christ's work, built by Christ Himself.

What, then, is the body of Christ? Paul tells us in Ephesians 1:23: "the church, which is His body, the fullness of Him who fills all in all." In other words, the sanctuary of the Old Testament developed into the church in the New Testament, which is entirely the result of God's work. How does God work? It is through the fullness of Him who fills all in all—that fullness is Christ. When people are filled with Christ, the church is manifested. The church is the result of Christ's fullness being revealed.

Dear brothers and sisters, we often have an inaccurate understanding of the church. We may think that Christians simply gathering together constitutes the church. While this understanding is not entirely wrong—it at least recognizes that the church is not just a building but people who believe in Jesus coming together—it remains incomplete. In Ephesians, Paul raises our understanding to a higher level: the church is filled with Christ and manifests the fullness of Christ. It reveals the perfect humanity and character of Christ. If we understand the church in this way, we will naturally reverence God's sanctuary and behave reverently when we come to church. Our old selves, our lusts, natural preferences, and abilities—all of which are not filled with Christ—do not belong in the church. Those who indulge the flesh and follow their lusts in the church neither know nor reverence the church.

Today, the building of the church involves two aspects. Positively, we seek out the citizens of the Kingdom of Heaven and bring them into the church life. Negatively, we remove sin, the world, and the flesh from every Christian, as these are not part

of the church's composition. The positive work increases quantity, while the negative work improves quality, and Christ is the initiator of both aspects of the work. After enjoying rest in Christ, we cooperate with Him to complete God's building work.

Although these two verses are brief, they encompass God's central requirement for every believer: to put God first, to appreciate His work in rest, and to manifest the results of His work through worship, which is the testimony of the church.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You! You are a faithful Lord, and there is no shadow of turning in You. What You said to Israel in the Old Testament serves as a reminder for us New Testament believers. Help us to learn to put You first in our lives, to rest in You, and to accept Your refining work in us. May my church become a beautiful testimony of You. Bless my church and our church life. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ. Amen.