

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

Leviticus 27: 9-15

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Today, we will continue to read Leviticus 27: 9-15.

When a person experiences the abundance of God's grace, they can express gratitude and make vows to God by offering people, livestock, houses, and land. Yesterday, we read about the valuation of people; today, we will examine livestock and houses. As before, we will first understand God's commands to the Israelites based on the literal meaning of the text, then reflect from a New Testament perspective on how saints can apply these teachings in their lives today.

Verse 9: "If it is an animal that men may bring as an offering to the Lord, all that anyone gives to the Lord shall be holy."

The livestock of the Israelites represented their wealth. If an Israelite vowed to offer livestock to the Lord as an offering, the offering must be consecrated to God, as it was set apart for Him. God was pleased to accept such offerings.

Verse 10: "He shall not substitute it or exchange it, good for bad or bad for good; and if he at all exchanges animal for animal, then both it and the one exchanged for it shall be holy."

This verse is rich in meaning, which we will unpack slowly. Initially, it states that a person must not substitute the animal they vowed to offer to God with another type. For example, if they vowed to offer a bull, they cannot substitute it with a sheep, or vice versa. They cannot substitute a small animal for a large one or a large one for a small one. Furthermore, substitution within the same kind of animal is

also prohibited. For instance, if they vowed to offer the calf born of a cow, once it is born, regardless of its quality, God would accept it, and they cannot replace it.

God values the heart behind a vow made to Him rather than the animal itself, for all cattle on a thousand hills and all sheep on many mountains already belong to Him. God does not care about gaining or losing one animal, as they are already His. Instead, He cherishes the gratitude and intent of the person's heart when making the vow. This is similar to a child in a family. Everything the child has is provided by the father, yet when the child wishes to give the father a gift, the father is delighted—not because of the gift itself, which already belonged to him, but because of the child's love. Therefore, God insists there should be no substitution or exchange.

The verse elaborates further, addressing "good for bad." This refers to the selfishness of human nature. Continuing the example, suppose someone vowed to offer the calf born of their cow. If the calf turned out perfect, they might become reluctant to give it and try to substitute another. God declares that substituting good for bad is unacceptable. Similarly, substituting bad for good reflects a person's love for God. For example, if the calf was born with defects, the person might feel uneasy about offering it to God and seek to replace it with a healthier one. But God says no, substitution of bad for good is also unacceptable. This reflects a deeper truth: every person is flawed by nature. We do not need to wait until we are "better" to come before God; we can approach Him just as we are, and He will accept us.

If livestock is exchanged for livestock, both the original and the substitute will become holy. If a person feels compelled to replace one animal with a better one out of love for God, God values their intent and will consecrate both animals to Himself. This teaches us that once livestock is offered to God, it cannot be reclaimed. Therefore, vows should not be made impulsively or emotionally but with careful consideration. Vows made to God that align with His will and are made sincerely are pleasing to Him.

Dear brothers and sisters, perhaps you have had such an experience. In your youth, you attended a Christian conference where God's word deeply moved you. When the speaker issued a call for those who desired to dedicate themselves to the Lord, you responded under the prompting of the Holy Spirit and offered yourself to Him. Later, you may have forgotten this commitment and returned to your old life. But believe me, there will come a day when this vow resurfaces in your heart. You may forget, but God does not. He will bring you to a point where you must fulfill your vow.

Verses 11-13: "If it is an unclean animal, which they do not offer as a sacrifice to the Lord, then he shall present the animal before the priest; and the priest shall set a value for it, whether it is good or bad; as you, the priest, value it, so it shall be. But if he wants at all to redeem it, then he must add one-fifth to your valuation."

If the livestock you vowed to offer to God is unclean, it cannot be offered to the Lord as a sacrifice. For example, camels and donkeys are unclean animals and cannot be placed on the altar. In such cases, the animal must be brought before the priest, who will determine its value based on its actual condition, whether good or bad. The valuation made by the priest is final and cannot be contested. If the person who made the vow wants to redeem the animal, they must pay the valuation price plus an additional 20%. This shows that what is vowed and dedicated to God belongs to Him. If one regrets the vow, they must redeem it by paying the priest's valuation plus 20%.

For New Testament believers, we no longer keep livestock or vow to offer animals to God because livestock represented the wealth of the Israelites. In Genesis 32, when Jacob returned from Padan Aram, he feared that his brother Esau might still harbor resentment against him. In Genesis 32:13-16, we see Jacob giving Esau a large number of livestock, including female and male goats, sheep, camels, cows, bulls, donkeys, and foals. Jacob wanted to demonstrate his wealth to Esau and show that he was not returning to claim his father's inheritance.

The New Testament application is that saints dedicate their wealth to God through vows. Once a vow is made, the ownership of that wealth belongs to God. If someone insists on redeeming it, they must add 20% to its value. For example, if the church needs a vehicle for evangelism, and you are moved to vow your family's SUV to the church, the ownership of that vehicle becomes the church's. If you wish to redeem it, you must pay the vehicle's appraised value plus 20%, converting this amount into a cash offering to the church.

After discussing vows related to dedicating wealth, verses 14-15 address regulations for dedicating houses to God.

Verse 14: "And when a man dedicates his house to be holy to the Lord, then the priest shall set a value for it, whether it is good or bad; as the priest values it, so it shall stand."

When someone dedicates their house to the Lord, the ownership of that house belongs to God. The priest will assess the house's value based on its condition, whether good or bad, and the priest's valuation is final without room for dispute. According to the regulations for selling houses in Leviticus 25:29-31, a house that can be vowed and dedicated should be one located within a walled city, as houses in villages are treated as part of the land. Israelites were forbidden to permanently sell land because it had to return to the original owner during the Year of Jubilee. The handling of such properties follows the regulations for dedicating land. Houses in walled cities can be freely bought and sold, and if sold, they can be redeemed within one year. After one year, they can no longer be redeemed.

Verse 15: "And if he who dedicates it wants to redeem his house, then he must add one-fifth of the money of your valuation to it, and it shall be his."

The one who vows to dedicate their house to God has up to a year to redeem it, during which they must pay the priest's valuation plus 20%. By doing so, they give

the value to the LORD, and the house returns to them. In the Old Testament, God needed a physical dwelling, either the tabernacle or the later temple. The Levites, separated for God's service among Israel, managed such dedications. When livestock and houses were vowed and offered to God, their ownership transferred to Him, effectively to the priests for use.

In the New Testament, the church becomes God's dwelling place, no longer confined to a physical structure but represented by the gathering of saints. Each saint in the church is a royal priest. When saints vow to dedicate their possessions or houses to God, the principles remain but with more flexibility in application.

Let us examine the practices of the early church. The Jerusalem church initially practiced communal living. In Acts 4:32-35, "Now the multitude of those who believed were of one heart and one soul; neither did anyone say that any of the things he possessed was his own, but they had all things in common. And with great power, the apostles gave witness to the resurrection of the Lord Jesus. And great grace was upon them all. Nor was there anyone among them who lacked; for all who were possessors of lands or houses sold them, and brought the proceeds of the things that were sold, and laid them at the apostles' feet; and they distributed to each as anyone had need."

This practice of communal sharing was a voluntary vow led by the Holy Spirit, not a mandate. As a result, none among them lacked. However, dishonesty in such matters invited the Spirit's severe judgment. Acts 5 recounts the story of a couple, Ananias and Sapphira, who sold property but secretly kept part of the proceeds while pretending full dedication. Peter rebuked them in Acts 5:3-4: "But Peter said, 'Ananias, why has Satan filled your heart to lie to the Holy Spirit and keep back part of the price of the land for yourself? While it remained, was it not your own? And after it was sold, was it not in your own control? Why have you conceived this thing in your heart? You have not lied to men but to God.'" Upon hearing these words, Ananias fell down and died immediately.

This underscores the principle that vows and offerings to God must come willingly, without compulsion. However, once a vow is made, it must be honored without

deceit, as any fraud is a direct affront to the Holy Spirit and God, carrying grave consequences.

The communal practice of the early church did not last long, as the Jerusalem church soon faced great persecution. The saints dispersed, spreading the gospel to other regions. This period of communal sharing likely allowed them to settle property and assets in preparation for the coming trials. Once persecution came, the saints were free to leave Jerusalem, fulfilling God's plan for the gospel to spread from Jerusalem to Judea, Samaria, and ultimately the ends of the earth.

In Acts 10, as the gospel reached the Gentiles, Cornelius, a devout centurion, opened his house, inviting relatives and friends to hear Peter preach the gospel. This marked the beginning of the Gentile mission, demonstrating that in the New Testament, opening homes for the gospel is a model of dedicating houses to God.

Later, Paul continued Peter's mission to the Gentiles. In Acts 16, Paul, following a vision, brought the gospel to Europe. In Philippi, Paul began preaching to women by the riverside. Acts 16:14-15 records: "Now a certain woman named Lydia heard us. She was a seller of purple from the city of Thyatira, who worshiped God. The Lord opened her heart to heed the things spoken by Paul. And when she and her household were baptized, she begged us, saying, 'If you have judged me to be faithful to the Lord, come to my house and stay.' So she persuaded us." Lydia's house became the starting point for the gospel in Europe, setting an example of opening homes to serve God.

Even today, the homes of saints remain vital for spreading the gospel. We must learn to open our homes, receive saints, share the gospel, and lead others to salvation. Though challenging—preparing before meetings, tidying afterward, and addressing unexpected situations during gatherings—such acts bring immense blessings. Hebrews 13:2 reminds us that we may unknowingly entertain angels.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You. Your grace has abundantly provided us with material wealth and a comfortable home. Help us, with a heart of gratitude, to dedicate our possessions and open our homes for the church's use. May these temporary earthly things in Your hands produce eternal and infinite value. Bless

what I offer, bringing forth a hundredfold harvest. I pray in the name of the Lord Jesus Christ.