

## Lessons From Desert Wandering – The Joy of Obeying God

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This past week, I became a member of a sportsmen club. I needed someplace with a shooting range so I can keep from getting rusty when shooting a firearm. I have to qualify every year for the state to carry a firearm at work. So, I need someplace to practice and the last place I was a member at is having some issues. This new place required me to get a tour and fill out paper work. While they were going over the paperwork, they spent much time on the rules and regulations of the club. When I was at the first meeting I was required to go to, some of the rules were gone over again. In other words, a big part of the club is following rules and regulations. They are made to keep the club and its members as safe as possible. I don't have problems with following these rules and regulations because they help to keep me and others safe. However, usually humans have a hard time following rules. If we try to think back when we were children, we can think of times where we tried our best to get around rules. As adults, we don't even bother trying to get around them, we just don't obey them at times. Last week, we talked about how the Lord was the maker of decrees for Israel during their journey through the wilderness in the Old Testament. God's rules for them were to help them to live an easier life and to help them to keep away from sin. I find it interesting how mankind has always found it difficult to follow rules and Israel was no exception. However, the Lord does let Israel know the benefits of following His rules and the dangers of not following His rules, which we can't change to fit our desires. This hasn't changed today for us – we too have benefits and dangers on how we treat the rules and decrees of God. Let's continue with our journey in Leviticus.

Turn to Leviticus 26: 3 – 5 where we read this from Moses,<sup>3</sup> "If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, <sup>4</sup>I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees their fruit. <sup>5</sup>Your threshing will continue

until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land.

The Lord has Moses tell the people “if” they follow certain decrees, events will happen. God gives us the ability to make choices and we have to make the choice to follow or not to follow. If one decides to water down a law to make it easier to follow, that still falls under not to follow a decree. Remember, last week we said that nobody has the authority to change any of God’s laws because He is the Lord our God. So, we either obey or not obey.

The Lord then gives Israel some comfort in knowing that if they obey His laws and decrees, they will have rain for the crops and the ground will produce enough food to eat and will be able to eat in safety in their land. Now, the Lord doesn’t say they will be blessed with a mansion or a million-dollar chariot. They would have enough to eat and live in safety. That is called living in contentment. God didn’t make laws and decrees so we could be miserable. Following the laws of God benefit us in all areas of life. Instead of trying to go around God’s laws, we should embrace them. We should allow His Spirit to help us to live out those laws. Hebrews 8: 10 states this, “This is the covenant I will establish with the people of Israel after that time, declares the Lord. I will put my laws in their minds and write them on their hearts. I will be their God, and they will be my people. (NIV Bible Gateway).” The New Testament writer is quoting from Jerimiah telling the Church that this prophecy was fulfilled at Pentecost. The laws of God are written on our hearts and minds through the Holy Spirit. We have it easier than those in the Old Testament because of this. Not only that, but when we follow His laws and decrees, we receive blessings. So, the Lord starts with fulfilling our basic needs for life – food and safety according to His Will.

There is an opposite to this. In Leviticus 26: 14- 16 and verse 20 we read, “<sup>14</sup> “But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, <sup>15</sup> and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, <sup>16</sup> then I will do this to you: I will bring on you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and sap your strength. You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it.



<sup>20</sup> Your strength will be spent in vain, because your soil will not yield its crops, nor will the trees of your land yield their fruit. (NIV – Biblegateway)

If Israel doesn't follow the laws and decrees of the Lord, then there will be punishment. Life will be unbearable. The one reason is because the people will be void of God's presence because of their sin. Plus, there will be no blessings from God that help the people to carry on during our visit on this earth. God had made a covenant with the people and they had agreed to it in Exodus. To go against the laws of God is sin and still is. Sin is disobedience to God. This has not changed for today. Paul states this in Romans 6: 23, "For the wages of sin is death, but the free gift of God is eternal life through Christ Jesus our Lord (NLT)." There is no middle ground here. To live out the law of God through the Spirit means life and to live against the law of God means death. Let's look at some more benefits of wanting to follow the laws of God.

Let's go back to Leviticus and turn to chapter 26 again and look at verses 6 – 8 where we read, <sup>6</sup> "I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid. I will remove wild beasts from the land, and the sword will not pass through your country. <sup>7</sup> You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall by the sword before you. <sup>8</sup> Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you.

Here, the Lord tells Israel if they obey His rules and decrees they will enjoy peace in the land. They will enjoy not only peace with their enemies, but with the beasts of the land as well. Their God will be with them. Since they are obeying God, there is no sin to block the peace He can give them. Paul tells us in Romans 5: 1, "Therefore, since we have been made right in God's sight by faith, we have peace with God because of what Jesus Christ our Lord has done for us. Because of our faith, Christ has brought us into this place of highest privilege where we now stand, and we confidently and joyfully look forward to sharing God's glory. (NLT)" For us today to find peace with God, we must go through Jesus Christ. Jesus takes away that sin that blocks our relationship with Him. We have peace from the guilt that has been removed and we are at peace because we can feel His presence in our life. I was telling someone this past week about the time I was called to take care of a sick raccoon. The raccoon was on a busy trail and he was at a bad

location. He was in a thick brush area with thorns. After I would put him down, I would have to remove him somehow. I prayed for the Lord to help me if He wanted to. The first shot hit the raccoon and he went over backwards and started to roll toward the creek. He fell into the creek which was about three feet deep and he never came back to the surface. He disappeared. I remember after realizing that the Lord answered my prayer, I felt such good peace. Peace because that was a love act by the Lord. When we do not want to sin, the Lord sees that and He gives us inner peace through His Spirit. We are so much more blessed than Israel was. We should be more thankful than we are.

In Leviticus 26: 17, we read this,<sup>17</sup> "I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies; those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you.

If Israel doesn't obey God, then their peace will be removed. In other words, God will remove His presence from them. What a scary thought. Maybe this is why we see so much division and hate going on in America which has seeped even into the Church. Sin has blocked the path of peace to the mind and hearts of people. I find it interesting how some church goers can hate those within the Church that won't water down God's standards that come from His Holy Word. They have no peace. I've stated before I have taken some classes at the Lutheran Seminary in the past few months and to see so many pastors there in such a "miserable state" and in "total despair" (their own words) about the current government. They have no peace. I didn't like what happen in the past four years, but I was not in "total despair". I was mad at times because of some of the unholy things that went on, but I didn't allow it to consume me until I was a miserable human being. I relied more on Jesus and He helped me to see the bigger picture – His Kingdom was more important. God's peace helps us to see earthly thing in the correct way – God's way. There's more.

Let's turn to Leviticus 26: 9 – 13 where we read this, <sup>9</sup> "I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you. <sup>10</sup> You will still be eating last year's harvest when you will have to move it out to make room for the new. <sup>11</sup> I will put my dwelling place<sup>al</sup> among you, and I will not abhor you. <sup>12</sup> I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. <sup>13</sup> I am



the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high.

If they obey the Lord and not sin, God will make His dwelling place among them and He will walk among them. They will be His people. I like how one commentary made the thought that this would be true joy for the people of Israel. We often look at human laws with distaste and follow them with a grudge. As followers of Christ, we should look upon the laws of God with joy because if we follow them, the Lord will dwell with us. Plus, He will help us to hold our heads up high in a culture that is hostile toward God. God's law is the only law that can bring true joy because it's God's law and we should enjoy following them. His laws bring us peace and joy.

The final thing we'll look at can be found in Leviticus 26: 18 – 19, "<sup>18</sup> "If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over. <sup>19</sup> I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze. (NIV – Biblegateway)"

Again, we see that doing the opposite of what God wants will lead to punishment because the Lord is all righteous. The reason people want to change or not obey the laws of God is because of stubborn pride. Proverbs 16: 18 tells us this, "Pride goes before destruction, and haughtiness before a fall (NLT)" Proverbs 16: 5 also states, "The Lord despises pride; be assured that the proud will be punished. (NLT)" Human nature produces bad pride when not controlled by the Holy Spirit. This is why we see so many within the Church watering down or disobeying the laws of God. When our human nature is controlled by His Spirit, then we want His peace and joy which comes from following the laws of God. Let's ask the Lord to help us to keep His laws through His Spirit so we can enjoy the holy benefits that come from obeying them.

*NLT Life Application Study Bible: Tyndale House Publishers: Wheaton, 1996*