

## **Heads held high: New Year 2010**

### **Read Leviticus 26:1-13**

The focal point for our thoughts at the beginning of the New Year is the last phrase of verse 13 “enabled you to walk with heads held high”. It portrays a picture of confidence and strength and being comfortable with yourself, with the Lord and with those around you. It is a lovely picture of how the Lord wants us to go into the New Year.

### **Covenant relationship**

In the NIV Bible, the heading at the top of chapter 26 is ‘Reward for obedience’ and at the beginning of verse 14 ‘Punishment for disobedience’. I do not see this is an accurate reflection of the emphasis of this passage; rather I think it is an explanation for the Israelites of the consequences of not putting God first and walking with him. It is not the case that blessing would be ‘earned’ as a reward for good behaviour, God’s blessing did not have to be earned, it was already there, promised and intrinsic to the covenant relationship. God had called Abraham and the nation of Israel into a covenant relationship with himself and the need to keep that covenant and walk in God’s ways was set as a reminder before the people of Israel on several occasions and this was one such occasion. Moses was reminding them that they are God’s covenant people but that the blessing of that covenant could only be experienced in all its fullness if they lived in accordance with the covenant. Otherwise it would be withdrawn and the withholding of God’s blessing would expose Israel to the hazards of a cursed earth and human wickedness.

Similarly God calls us as Christians into the New Covenant under Jesus Christ and we are in a new relationship and have God’s Spirit within us which gives us a new nature and lifts us out of the normal run of attitudes and experiences. We still have the same difficulties and experiences as people in the world who do not know Jesus but we have a different approach, a different nature within us and we are lifted into all the benefits and blessings of that. We are different because we are in a covenant relationship with God.

In this passage the Lord is saying through Moses that, if the Israelites did not walk in a way which was consistent with the Covenant, then they would start to get affected, or infected, by the world in which they lived. For us, if we walk with the Lord and give him his place in our lives, then we stay in that place where we live in covenant blessings but if we do not then we will lose some of the blessings of that covenant relationship.

We are in the position of enjoying that covenant relationship with the Lord and that is a safe and a comfortable place to be but there is also the need for us to keep our

hearts clean and pure and to walk closely with the Lord and that is a continual process.

“Do not make idols or set up an image or a sacred stone for yourselves, and do not place a carved stone in your land to bow down before it. I am the Lord your God.” Lev 26:1.

We must not try and reduce God to manageable proportions; rather we need to give God his right place in our lives and we need to adjust our thinking to who he is. The first commandment is to love the Lord your God with all your heart and to have no other gods before him. It is important to pursue God's truth in all situations and in our relationships putting him at the centre. In this way we will adjust our views and attitudes to come in line with his truth rather than trying to 'mould' God to fit around our ways or attitudes. It requires openness and humility and a deep desire to know God, to know ourselves and to know other people and to really seek the truth. This is the attitude to pursue this year, that deep desire to know God, to let him be God in our lives and to see and feel things as he sees and feels them.

A.W. Tozer “The essence of idolatry is the entertaining of thoughts about God that are unworthy of Him”.

In the book of Leviticus the Sabbaths and the sanctuary are mentioned as antidotes to idolatry. The word 'Sabbaths' refers to all the special days of the Jewish calendar and not just the seventh day of the week and the sanctuary refers to God's presence, knowing that he is amongst us and with us and in us. If we read God's word and meet with him, talk with him and talk with people who love us and know us well that will help us to walk closely with the Lord and keep in that covenant relationship.

The result is blessing - “I will put my dwelling-place among you, and I will not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people.” Leviticus 26:11-12. Those words convey a strong sense of belonging. The book of Leviticus contains a lot of practical guidelines for all aspects of walking with God. If we walk in his ways the end result will be that we know deeply in our hearts that we belong somewhere, we belong to the Lord. Verses 11-12 echo the picture in the Garden of Eden where God walked companionably with Adam and Eve and that is what God wants to do with us. That gives us a picture of ease, of being with the Lord throughout the day – because we want to and because we belong to him. It is not so much about disciplining ourselves to spend time with the Lord, rather it is about realising who the Lord is and the fact that he takes delight in us and wants to walk with us through our day.

As we go into the New Year it is good to stop and ask ourselves the question whether we feel that the Lord is walking with us in a way which enables us to stand tall with our heads held high. We walk with God and God walks with us, we are a

holy nation, a royal priesthood, we have been born anew into God's Kingdom. We need to carry that knowledge into the New Year, into everyday life so that we know who we are, we know that we are part of the covenant and we live like children of the King. That is what gives us our value and that is the basis upon which we can live our lives in this coming year.

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