

**SERMON BY REV W HUIZINGA  
ON LEVITICUS 26:3-5  
FOR THANKSGIVING DAY**

**LITURGY**

Votum and Salutation

Psalm 65:1,4

The Ten Words of The Covenant

Psalm 65:2,3

Congregational Prayer

Thankoffering

Hymn 8:3,4,5

Read - Psalm 65

Text - Leviticus 26:3-5

Sermon

**GOD PROMISES YOU THE LAND  
FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY.**

We will see this promise:

- 1. In its biblical perspective.***
- 2. With its condition to obey.***
- 3. With its rewards.***

Hymn 57:1,4

Prayer of Application and Thanks

Psalm 65:5,6

Benediction

Beloved congregation of our Lord Jesus Christ.

*Let all men come with jubilation:  
The earth its harvest did provide.  
God is good and gracious;  
Richly did He bless us -  
He, our God and King.*

Thanksgiving time!. It reminds us of our dependence on the fruits of the land, yes, of the land. You have heard the expression of "living off the land". In a way that is true of us all. The land of (Western) Australia was fruitful, especially in the past year. There were abundant rains and bumper crops. As we drove to Albany we saw the fields of yellow canola standing tall and thick in the fields. What a beautiful sight!

We had daily bread to do our daily tasks.

So thanksgiving time, as the harvest feast, points us to the blessings of land and crops. That theme of the land and God's blessing over play a central role in the OT. And we want to pay attention to that theme this morning.

Our text comes from the Book of Leviticus, a book devoted to the levitical ministries and to the priestly service of the people of Israel. It speaks of the sacrifices, the holy orders, clean and unclean objects and animals, about feasts, and about the life of obedience and holiness. All of it points to Jesus Christ who kept all these laws of holiness. He fulfilled the sacrificial system. His deeds of deliverance fulfilled the OT feasts. Through Him God's blessings descend upon us. That promise of the fertile land has also passed to us. We have inherited the promises made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. But what does it mean to us that God promised Israel so long ago "a land flowing with milk and honey?"

I preach to you God's Word from Leviticus 26:3-5 under this \*THEME:

## **GOD PROMISES YOU THE LAND FLOWING WITH MILK AND HONEY.**

We will see this promise:

- 1. In its biblical perspective.***
- 2. With its condition to obey.***
- 3. With its rewards.***

### ***1. In its biblical perspective.***

The promise of the land really begins with the beginning - the creation of heaven and earth by God. Out of nothing and out of chaos God created a wonderful earth with heavens. As its crown God placed man in its center. As king man enjoyed dominion over land, water and sky. As king God put him to work. That model Garden of Eden had to be duplicated over all the earth. But then sin entered. Man wanted to play God. God's image rebelled. Consequently man, as an exile, had to leave the model garden.

But God made plans to restore the earth; to remove the thorns and thistles, yes the curse, from the land.

God's blessing of the land and of kingship do not end here. Remember the biblical story about the land.

To Adam and Eve came the promise of the man-child who would destroy the instigator, the Serpent. Then later on God chose Abraham and God made his covenant with him and his family. To them God promised the whole land of Canaan. Though they lived in that land of promise as strangers, one day it would be theirs. That took some time. In the time when Moses wrote the book of Leviticus Israel had still not inherited the land flowing with milk and honey. But the people were ready to enter. Therefore God instructed them how to live in the land with their holy God.

Obviously, the land flowing with milk and honey formed one part of the covenant which God formed with Israel. But in every covenant there are two parties – God and his people. God promised the land flowing with milk and honey. What about Israel?

God demanded obedience not only from their fathers and mothers, so that it would go well with them and that they could live long in the land which the LORD their God would give them. And the most important, yes, the most wonderful, blessing was that God would live with them in the land:

*I will set my tabernacle among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. I will walk among you and be your God, and you shall be my people (vv.11-12).*

God living with them! That spelled blessing and life! Israel would also become kings as well as priests again.

But this is not all. For remember that God wanted to restore the whole earth back to its former glory and goodness. To make a start on that program, God began with one nation and demonstrated his intentions of peace and prosperity with them. This was only one nation, and God had promised Abraham that he would be the father of many nations. Yes, all families would be blessed in him and in his seed. So it was only a small beginning. Here in one small land on the huge globe God brought back the glimmerings of the first paradise. It was just a start, but it was an important one, since it gave the blueprint of what was to come.

In Jesus Christ, the seed of the woman and the one Mediator between man and God, this promise of the land became "yes and amen". For in the NT we receive that wider perspective. I quote just two texts to illustrate this. First of all, listen to Romans 4:13:

*For the promise that he, Abraham, would be the **heir of the world** was not to him or to his seed through the law, but through the righteousness of faith.*

You will note that Abraham was not only inheriting that small nation of Canaan where he sojourned, as the OT tells us, but he was to inherit the world. That is the NT perspective.

Think also of Ephesians 6:2-3:

*Honor your father and mother, which is the first commandment with promise: that it may be well with you and you may live long **on the earth.***

This is an obvious quotation of the fifth commandment, but with a NT perspective. No longer does Paul say that God's people would live long in the land (of Canaan), but they would live long, yes forever, on the earth. And times prohibits me from mentioning that beautiful chapter 11 of Hebrews where this perspective blossoms brightly.

Finally, at the end of the Bible we return to the theme of the beginning of the Bible. The heavens and earth which the Serpent and man ruined is then restored by the new heavens and the new earth where God dwells with man. All tears and sorrow depart and the tree of life resumes its central position. Harvests come in on a monthly basis.

So this promise of the land flowing with milk and honey applies to you in Jesus Christ who fulfilled the law for us. We now are heirs of the kingdom of God and of the new creation. We may look forward to abundant and endless harvests on the new earth where Jesus, the Lamb, and the Father will live with us in glory. Every harvest season should remind us of that glorious, future blessing. This text speaks to us of the magnificent promise of the most fertile land imaginable.

## **2. The promise with its condition of obedience.**

It all sounds so fantastic, almost unbelievable. I'm sure that it must have appeared as a dream to Israel too; a dream which would come true. But this is not to say that the promise was automatic. It was a free gift, for which Israel did not slave or toil. The whole land - homes, barns, cisterns, fields, vineyards and herds - was an outright gift, a heritage. They did not earn it. Yet the promises of the covenant are attached to the obligations. The covenant is not unconditional in the sense that no matter how wickedly you behave the LORD will deliver all his promises. No, we need to obey God and trust in Him with all our heart.

This demand of the covenant comes out most strongly in our text. Moses here accents the requirement of obedience – *if you walk in my statutes and keep my commandments, and perform them* (v.3).

In order to understand this we should first of all pay attention to the format in which this text stands. Leviticus 26 is a collection of blessings which will descend on those who keep the covenant as well as a longer list of curses on those who do not. So it is a concluding chapter in which the blessings and curses of the law are reiterated for effect. We find the same thing in Deuteronomy 28. That in a nutshell explains the type of text we are dealing with.

In such covenants or treaties it was customary to rehearse the major benefits which the sovereign had bestowed on the covenanted party, in order to induce it to show thankfulness and allegiance. To reinforce this a list of blessings for faithfulness and a longer list of curses for rebellion concluded the covenant. We find the same feature in God's covenant with Israel. Mind you, there is an important difference. In the legal, extra-biblical texts the

gods (in the plural) are invoked to act either in blessing or curse. Each god - responsible for example for rain, disease, war and the like - is requested to act. But in the biblical text it is straightforward. There are no prayers or requests to God to respond with blessing to obedience and with curses to rebellion. There was no doubt that God would carry out his word. God is not an idol of man's imagination.

When Israel entered the promised land they had to stop at Mt. Gerizim and Mt. Ebal. Six tribes would stand on one mount to rehearse the blessings and the other six tribes stood on the other mount to rehearse the curses. Thus they confirmed the covenant made at Mt. Sinai. Together with the fantastic promises of harvests and blessings comes the sober demand for obedience. God obligated Israel to a life of thankful obedience. The same is true for us in the new covenant of grace.

To explore the demand for obedience we can look at texts where the promise of the land flowing with milk and honey is connected with call to keep the commandments.

*You shall therefore keep all my statutes and all my judgments, and perform them, that the land where I am bringing you to dwell may not vomit you out. And you shall not walk in the statutes of the nation which I am casting out before you; for they commit all these things, and therefore I abhor them.*

*But I have said to you, you shall inherit their land, and I will give it to you to possess, a land flowing with milk and honey. I am the LORD your God, who has separated you from the peoples (Lev. 20:22-24).*

The report of the 12 spies who returned from a survey of the promised land confirmed it was indeed one flowing with milk and honey (cf. Num. 13:27). But the 10 spies and most of Israel decided not to claim the promise. Joshua and Caleb did give a favourable report. These two godly men exhorted Israel to trust in God and to fear Him (cf. Num. 14:7,8). So there was the need to claim the promise.

Moses reminds Israel of the same need to obey so that they could inherit that wonderful land (cf. Deut. 8:6-10).

So the promise depended on the obedience of Israel. Humanly speaking, you would say that the free gift of an inhabitable land with farmhouses, buildings, orchards, vineyards, fortified cities, minerals and you name, would induce them to do exactly as God commanded. If you were given a whole country freely, would you not obey these conditions? Of course!

Brothers and sisters, boys and girls, we have learned to know our own sin and misery. We do not breathe optimism about our abilities, our allegiance. In fact, we are rather sober about what Israel would do. We know how they murmured, complained and rebelled in the wilderness, even in spite of this great promise of the land flowing with milk and honey.

Indeed, Moses had to say

*And when the LORD saw it, He spurned them (Israel),  
Because of the provocation of his sons and his daughters.  
And He said: I will hide My face from them,  
I will see what their end will be,  
For they a perverse generation,  
children in whom is no faith (Deut. 32:19,20).*

So Israel's disobedience would lead them into exile. They would lose the land. When Jesus walked across Judah, much of the land was in foreign hands. Apparently God was faithful to his curses as well as his blessings.

How then would the promise ever be realized? And if the promise of the small land could not be realized, how will the plan for a brand new world ever materialize?

Brothers and sisters, the only answer is Jesus, the Christ. Jesus kept the whole law. He was holy as His Father. Love and obedience flowed from him. But that was not all. Jesus accepted the role of Mediator. He accepted the curses which our rebellion and sinfulness deserved. God poured out his curses on Jesus. The death on the tree of the cross showed God's curse. Jesus accepted that in the place of his people. Jesus was obedient unto death, the death on the cross.

Accordingly he deserved the reward of the land. In Him you and I thus receive the promise of the land flowing with milk and honey. He has guaranteed the fulfilment of the promise of the new world.

Jesus poured out the Spirit on us so that we would live and work thankfully for him from now on. The Spirit makes us willing and ready to serve Jesus. As we look back on a year of labour, what do we see? Obedience out of thanks and joy – at home and at school!? Love and delight to do Christ's will!? Service at the workplace for Christ and not for man!?

You individually must answer those questions. If you answer there was indeed a beginning of obedience, then God be praised! The Spirit of Jesus did his work in you. If there was slackness, self-serving greed, or a seeking to please men for personal benefits, then we had better humbly bow in prayer of confession of sins. Let us then seek Christ who forgives our sins and who thereby guarantees that the new covenant will stay in effect. The new land will come.

### **3. The rewards with this promise.**

What a promise!

*Then I will give you rain in its season, the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.*

*Your threshing shall last till the time of vintage, and the vintage shall last till the time of sowing;*

*You shall eat your bread to the full, and dwell in your land safely (vv.4,5).*

The farmers would have to work non-stop to gather in all the crops. The grain was usually gathered in early summer, then there was a gap of two months until the grapes and olives were ready to pick. Once the rains began in late fall or early winter, sowing would commence. Bumper crops follow bumper crops. Such abundance was of course not natural, not even exceptional, but the outright blessing of the covenant God. For the covenant Lord is also the God of creation who controls the elements. He can cause a dry land to blossom so that paradise starts to return.

This text should make us shout with joy! What generous blessings! What a prospect for the future! Yet the reality is so different, so sad. We read so little of the realization of this promise. We read of famines and of invaders.

Will this text then never come true? In fact this blessing often comes in the form of prophecy. I think for example of Amos 9:13.

*Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD,  
When the plowman shall overtake the reaper,  
And the treader of grapes him who sows seed;  
The mountains shall drip with sweet wine,  
And all the hills shall flow with it.*

This text is a call for the Messiah. Without him these blessings will remain unfulfilled.

What about us? Can we apply this text directly to ourselves? For example, sects often do just that. The Mormons place much stock in their material provisions. That the Salt Lake City valley blossomed was a sign of God's blessing. They make the same equation as the pharisees did. The pharisees considered riches to signify God's acceptance and blessing. The more riches the more blessed a person was. Is that the standard we should apply? Obviously not!

Yet we often come across this direct application of the OT promise of abundant harvests and blessings as a sign of God's reward. You hear it made by some politicians who espouse religious principles. For example does America receive bumper crops because it is so faithful? And does Iraq need to import shiploads of our grain because it flagrantly opposes God, and thus cannot supply its own grain? I think that such a formula is extremely simplistic at best. In this age wheat and weeds grow together. No one land is the holy land. No, Canaan was a picture of the new paradise, of the new earth, and not of the world in our days.

If God blesses our fields with good crops, we receive them as blessings because of the Christ. God wants his plans fulfilled, and therefore he gives harvests. You, his workers, must have daily bread so that you may seek his kingdom. Moreover, He wants no one to be excused from living to his praise. Therefore his earth yields good harvests for the many mouths of all his creatures. But the Lord can also bring down plagues, famines, and droughts in order to teach mankind to honour Him.

Let us then eat our meals with thankful hearts because of what the Lord Jesus Christ has brought for us by his perfect obedience. When the crops are harvested, let us rejoice in them, remembering why God continues to send them. Let us rejoice in them, reminding ourselves that one day the new earth will yield those fantastic harvests mentioned in God's Word. For you brothers and sisters, by the work of Christ and grace of God, are headed for the new world which will flow with milk and honey. Amen.