



## Leviticus - Chapter Twenty Six

### Summary of Chapter Twenty Six

A principal element of a covenant document is a section of sanctions, i.e. blessings and curses that are dependent on how one keeps the covenant agreement. Often they appear at the close of a covenant document, and there they enumerate the sovereign's granting of rewards or punishments based on the vassal's obedience or disobedience. Verses 1-13 display the blessings if Israel obeys the covenant; vv. 14-39 pronounce curses.

### **IX**      Leviticus 26:1-46 - Blessings and Curses

Refer to the chapter summary above.

#### **IX.a**      Leviticus 26:1-13 - Rewards for Obedience

These verses remind Israel what is at the heart of Israelite law: fidelity to God and the keeping of the Sabbath. If Israel is faithful to the Word of God, then blessings of abundance will be theirs: rain, abundant crops, rich harvest, and protection from enemies. In addition, God will make them fruitful and multiply them. All these blessings are visible manifestations of the Lord's presence as the Israelites live out their privilege as God's new humanity.

<sup>1</sup> You shall make for yourselves no idols and erect no carved images or pillars, and you shall not place figured stones in your land, to worship at them; for I am the Lord your God. <sup>2</sup> You shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord.

#### Leviticus 26:1-2

You shall make for yourselves no idols; you shall keep my sabbaths. These two statements reflect similar commands made earlier: <<*You shall not make for yourself an idol, whether in the form of anything that is in heaven above, or*

*that is on the earth beneath, or that is in the water under the earth*>> (Exodus 20:4), and: <<*Remember the sabbath day, and keep it holy*>> (Exodus 20:8).

You shall not place figured stones in your land, to worship at them; for I am the Lord your God. Following the death of King Solomon, Israel split into two nations and the northern tribes soon broke this command when their king built two replicas of the golden calf to worship: <<*Jeroboam appointed a festival on the fifteenth day of the eighth month like the festival that was in Judah, and he offered sacrifices on the altar; so he did in Bethel, sacrificing to the calves that he had made. And he placed in Bethel the priests of the high places that he had made*>> (1 Kings 12:32). The prophet warned them that this would lead to their own destruction as a nation: <<*Samaria's king shall perish like a splinter on the face of the waters. The high places of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed. Thorn and thistle shall grow up on their altars. They shall say to the mountains, Cover us, and to the hills, Fall on us*>> (Hosea 10:7-8).

The prophet speaks of the futility for those who worship idols: <<*What use is an idol once its maker has shaped it – a cast image, a teacher of lies? For its maker trusts in what has been made, though the product is only an idol that cannot speak!*>> (Habakkuk 2:18).

You shall keep reverence my sanctuary. This initially applied to the way the people were to approach God in his tabernacle and later on in the temple: <<*You shall keep my sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord*>> (Leviticus 19:30). Today, it applies to the way a Christian is to act and behave: <<*What agreement does Christ have with Beliar? Or what does a believer share with an unbeliever? What agreement has the temple of God with idols? For we are the temple of the living God; as God said, 'I will live in them and walk among them, and I will be their God, and they shall be my people. Therefore come out from them, and be separate from them, says the Lord, and touch nothing unclean; then I will welcome you, and I will be your father, and you shall be my sons and daughters, says the Lord Almighty'*>> (2 Corinthians 6:15-18).

<sup>3</sup> If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully, <sup>4</sup> I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its produce, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.

<sup>5</sup> Your threshing shall overtake the vintage, and the vintage shall overtake the sowing; you shall eat your bread to the full, and live securely in your land. <sup>6</sup> And I will grant peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and no one shall make you afraid; I will remove dangerous animals from the land, and no sword shall go through your land. <sup>7</sup> You shall give chase to your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. <sup>8</sup> Five of you shall give chase to a hundred, and a hundred of

you shall give chase to ten thousand; your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. <sup>9</sup> I will look with favour upon you and make you fruitful and multiply you; and I will maintain my covenant with you. <sup>10</sup> You shall eat old grain long stored, and you shall have to clear out the old to make way for the new. <sup>11</sup> I will place my dwelling in your midst, and I shall not abhor you. <sup>12</sup> And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people. <sup>13</sup> I am the Lord your God who brought you out of the land of Egypt, to be their slaves no more; I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.

### Leviticus 26:3-13

If you follow my statutes and keep my commandments and observe them faithfully, I will give you your rains in their season. God was determined to reveal himself to the world through Israel, either by making them so blessed the world would know only God could have blessed them so; or by making them so cursed, that only God could have cursed them yet cause them to still survive. The choice was up to Israel: <<*I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob*>> (Deuteronomy 30:19-20).

I will give you your rains in their season. In a region that depended on agriculture this was one of the greatest blessings and is a theme repeated elsewhere: <<*Rain in abundance, O God, you showered abroad; you restored your heritage when it languished*>> (Psalm 68:9), <<*They do not say in their hearts, 'Let us fear the Lord our God, who gives the rain in its season, the autumn rain and the spring rain, and keeps for us the weeks appointed for the harvest'*>> (Jeremiah 5:24), <<*Let us know, let us press on to know the Lord; his appearing is as sure as the dawn; he will come to us like the showers, like the spring rains that water the earth*>> (Hosea 6:3), <<*O children of Zion, be glad and rejoice in the Lord your God; for he has given the early rain for your vindication, he has poured down for you abundant rain, the early and the later rain, as before*>> (Joel 2:23), and: <<*yet he has not left himself without a witness in doing good – giving you rains from heaven and fruitful seasons, and filling you with food and your hearts with joy*>> (Acts 14:17).

I will maintain my covenant with you. As a literary form, this chapter is similar to ancient treaties between a king and his people; this is God the King, making a covenant with his people, Israel.

Five of you shall give chase to a hundred, and a hundred of you shall give chase to ten thousand; your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. This clearly speaks of a divine blessing. These remarkable promises clearly have a supernatural element. The principle behind that particular blessing is remarkable; the ratio of five to one hundred is one routing twenty; but the ratio of one hundred to ten thousand is one routing one hundred. Gideon's 300 defeated 135,000 Midianites, as per God's promise: <<*Then the Lord said to Gideon, 'With the three hundred that lapped I will deliver you, and give the Midianites into your hand. Let all the others go to their homes'*>> (Judges 7:7); Jonathan and his armour bearer alone defeated a Philistine army, again acknowledging that it was God who gave them victory: <<*The men of the garrison hailed Jonathan and his armour-bearer, saying, 'Come up to us, and we will show you something.'* Jonathan said to his armour-bearer, 'Come up after me; for the Lord has given them into the hand of Israel.' Then Jonathan climbed up on his hands and feet, with his armour-bearer following after him. The Philistines fell before Jonathan, and his armour-bearer, coming after him, killed them. In that first slaughter Jonathan and his armour-bearer killed about twenty men within an area about half a furrow long in an acre of land>> (1 Samuel 14:12-14).

I will place my dwelling in your midst, and I shall not abhor you. And I will walk among you, and will be your God, and you shall be my people. The best promises are saved for last: firstly, that Israel would enjoy a special relationship with God. If not for this, all the material blessings described previously would be empty. When Israel walked after the Lord, these blessings were real; one example of this is when the Queen of Sheba came to Solomon and saw a nation so blessed, she knew it had to be of God; refer to 1 Kings 10:1-13.

I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect. This final blessing speaks of freedom and dignity. This passage almost feels like the NT: <<*Take my yoke upon you, and learn from me; for I am gentle and humble in heart, and you will find rest for your souls. For my yoke is easy, and my burden is light*>> (Matthew 11:29-30), God proclaims the liberty of his people and then invites them to walk in it.

#### IX.b Leviticus 26:14-46 - Penalties for Disobedience

**The First Stage (vv.14-17).** The reverse side of the blessings in vv.4-7 is set out as punishment. The phrase <<*if you spurn my statutes, and abhor my ordinances*>> refers to the Israelites' inner attitude to the Lord's commandments, and thus to the Lord himself.

**The Second Stage (vv.18-20).** If the people continue to walk in disobedience, the Lord will target their pride and power by stopping the rain. Rather than 'seven times,' sevenfold means 'fully' or 'completely.' If the Hebrews refuse to alter their behaviour as a result of the first series of judgements, these punishments will be added.

**The Third Stage (vv.21-22).** This time the people's hardness of heart will be punished by wild beasts. From this section onward, the idea of walking contrary to the Lord appears frequently and is confirmed by the complementary judgement theme of the Lord's walking contrary to them.

**The Fourth Stage (vv.23-26).** This stage is characterised by the Lord's wrath that manifests itself in the sending of sword and pestilence on the people. For the first time, the deliverance of the people into the hand of the enemy is mentioned.

**The Fifth Stage (vv.27-39).** This is the final set of curses. Intensification is clear in this last series as the people continue in their stubbornness and God increases his punishments. The final place for the covenant breakers will be in exile.

**Conditions and Confession within the Covenant (vv.40-46).** God's rejection of Israel is not final. If the people repent, confess their sins, and walk humbly before God, then he will deliver them from exile and restore them to the Land of Promise. The people, however, have an uncircumcised heart; this means that although the Israelites are circumcised in the flesh, their hearts are actually like the hearts of the pagan peoples.

<sup>14</sup> But if you will not obey me, and do not observe all these commandments, <sup>15</sup> if you spurn my statutes, and abhor my ordinances, so that you will not observe all my commandments, and you break my covenant, <sup>16</sup> I in turn will do this to you: I will bring terror on you; consumption and fever that waste the eyes and cause life to pine away. You shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. <sup>17</sup> I will set my face against you, and you shall be struck down by your enemies; your foes shall rule over you, and you shall flee though no one pursues you. <sup>18</sup> And if in spite of this you will not obey me, I will continue to punish you sevenfold for your sins. <sup>19</sup> I will break your proud glory, and I will make your sky like iron and your earth like copper. <sup>20</sup> Your strength shall be spent to no purpose: your land shall not yield its produce, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit.

#### Leviticus 26:14-20

**But if you will not obey me.** This and the following verses describe a progression of rebellion. God brought these curses slowly to a disobedient Israel, desiring repentance; but if Israel would not repent, the curses would be intensified.

**I will break your proud glory; Your strength shall be spent to no purpose.** This speaks of the stubborn pride of the people in their own strength; a failing that has caused them and many others to fail in the sight of God and in their own futile

lives. This is reflected in other texts: <<Ah, the proud garland of the drunkards of Ephraim, and the fading flower of its glorious beauty, which is on the head of those bloated with rich food, of those overcome with wine! See, the Lord has one who is mighty and strong; like a storm of hail, a destroying tempest, like a storm of mighty, overflowing waters; with his hand he will hurl them down to the earth. Trampled under foot will be the proud garland of the drunkards of Ephraim>> (Isaiah 28:1-3), <<Thus says the Lord: Just so I will ruin the pride of Judah and the great pride of Jerusalem>> (Jeremiah 13:9), <<The Lord God has sworn by himself (says the Lord, the God of hosts): I abhor the pride of Jacob and hate his strongholds; and I will deliver up the city and all that is in it>> (Amos 6:8), and: <<On that day you shall not be put to shame because of all the deeds by which you have rebelled against me; for then I will remove from your midst your proudly exultant ones, and you shall no longer be haughty in my holy mountain>> (Zephaniah 3:11).

Your land shall not yield its produce, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit. It will not matter how hard the people work to produce food, the Lord will ensure their crops fail if the people continue to oppose God. The prophet confirms this curse: <<You shall sow, but not reap; you shall tread olives, but not anoint yourselves with oil; you shall tread grapes, but not drink wine>> (Micah 6:15).

<sup>21</sup> If you continue hostile to me, and will not obey me, I will continue to plague you sevenfold for your sins. <sup>22</sup> I will let loose wild animals against you, and they shall bereave you of your children and destroy your livestock; they shall make you few in number, and your roads shall be deserted.

#### Leviticus 26:21-22

If you continue hostile to me. It is not just a case that the Israelites will drift away from the laws of God but they would actually oppose his will and pay the just penalty for doing so. Jesus teaches that his disciples throughout the ages must adhere to the will of God: <<Your kingdom come. Your will be done, on earth as it is in heaven>> (Matthew 6:10), something he demonstrated in his own life, even to the point of death: <<Then he withdrew from them about a stone's throw, knelt down, and prayed, 'Father, if you are willing, remove this cup from me; yet, not my will but yours be done'>> (Luke 22:41-42).

<sup>23</sup> If in spite of these punishments you have not turned back to me, but continue hostile to me, <sup>24</sup> then I too will continue hostile to you: I myself will strike you sevenfold for your sins. <sup>25</sup> I will bring the sword against you, executing vengeance for the covenant; and if you withdraw within your cities, I will send pestilence among you, and you

shall be delivered into enemy hands. <sup>26</sup> When I break your staff of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in a single oven, and they shall dole out your bread by weight; and though you eat, you shall not be satisfied.

### Leviticus 26:23-26

I myself will strike you sevenfold for your sins. Significantly, God does not say he will forsake Israel: <<*Be strong and bold; have no fear or dread of them, because it is the Lord your God who goes with you; he will not fail you or forsake you.*' Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel: *'Be strong and bold, for you are the one who will go with this people into the land that the Lord has sworn to their ancestors to give them; and you will put them in possession of it. It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed'*>> (Deuteronomy 31:6-8), only that they will be cursed. Sadly, these curses became the tragic story of Israel's history, defeat, deprivation, exile, desolation, and disease all too often have marked Israel's past.

<sup>27</sup> But if, despite this, you disobey me, and continue hostile to me, <sup>28</sup> I will continue hostile to you in fury; I in turn will punish you myself sevenfold for your sins. <sup>29</sup> You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters. <sup>30</sup> I will destroy your high places and cut down your incense-altars; I will heap your carcasses on the carcasses of your idols. I will abhor you. <sup>31</sup> I will lay your cities waste, will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your pleasing odours. <sup>32</sup> I will devastate the land, so that your enemies who come to settle in it shall be appalled at it. <sup>33</sup> And you I will scatter among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword against you; your land shall be a desolation, and your cities a waste.

### Leviticus 26:27-33

You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters. The horrific cannibalism described in v.29 was fulfilled in: <<*Now as the king of Israel was walking on the city wall, a woman cried out to him, 'Help, my lord king!' He said, 'No! Let the Lord help you. How can I help you? From the threshing-floor or from the wine press?' But then the king asked her, 'What is your complaint?' She answered, 'This woman said to me, "Give up your son; we will eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow." So we cooked my son and ate him. The next day I said to her, "Give up your son and we will eat him." But she has hidden her son'*>> (2 Kings 6:26-29); Josephus also

describes cannibalism in Jerusalem when under siege by the Romans; a woman killed and ate her own baby son (Jewish Wars 6.3.4).

<sup>34</sup> Then the land shall enjoy its sabbath years as long as it lies desolate, while you are in the land of your enemies; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its sabbath years. <sup>35</sup> As long as it lies desolate, it shall have the rest it did not have on your sabbaths when you were living on it. <sup>36</sup> And as for those of you who survive, I will send faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; the sound of a driven leaf shall put them to flight, and they shall flee as one flees from the sword, and they shall fall though no one pursues. <sup>37</sup> They shall stumble over one another, as if to escape a sword, though no one pursues; and you shall have no power to stand against your enemies. <sup>38</sup> You shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies shall devour you. <sup>39</sup> And those of you who survive shall languish in the land of your enemies because of their iniquities; also they shall languish because of the iniquities of their ancestors.

#### Leviticus 26:34-39

Then the land shall enjoy its sabbath years as long as it lies desolate. This came to pass during the Babylonian exile: <<*He took into exile in Babylon those who had escaped from the sword, and they became servants to him and to his sons until the establishment of the kingdom of Persia, to fulfil the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had made up for its sabbaths. All the days that it lay desolate it kept sabbath, to fulfil seventy years*>> (2 Chronicles 36:20-21).

They shall languish because of the iniquities of their ancestors. This generational curse is not in any way unfair because it implies that the people have not repented and turned back to God, for this would annul any guilt they may have: <<*You shall not bow down to them or worship them; for I the Lord your God am a jealous God, punishing children for the iniquity of parents, to the third and the fourth generation of those who reject me, but showing steadfast love to the thousandth generation of those who love me and keep my commandments*>> (Exodus 20:5-6).

<sup>40</sup> But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their ancestors, in that they committed treachery against me and, moreover, that they continued hostile to me — <sup>41</sup> so that I, in turn, continued hostile to them and brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their

iniquity, <sup>42</sup> then will I remember my covenant with Jacob; I will remember also my covenant with Isaac and also my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. <sup>43</sup> For the land shall be deserted by them, and enjoy its sabbath years by lying desolate without them, while they shall make amends for their iniquity, because they dared to spurn my ordinances, and they abhorred my statutes. <sup>44</sup> Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn them, or abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them; for I am the Lord their God; <sup>45</sup> but I will remember in their favour the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, to be their God: I am the Lord.

#### Leviticus 26:40-45

But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their ancestors. This displays the greatness of God's mercy. Despite how cursed Israel might be, God would always remember, receive, and bless a repentant Israel. This, too, is reflected in the Scriptures: <<*Then those of Israelite descent separated themselves from all foreigners, and stood and confessed their sins and the iniquities of their ancestors*>> (Nehemiah 9:2), <<*Both we and our ancestors have sinned; we have committed iniquity, have done wickedly*>> (Psalm 106:6), <<*We acknowledge our wickedness, O Lord, the iniquity of our ancestors, for we have sinned against you*>> (Jeremiah 14:20), and: <<*If we confess our sins, he who is faithful and just will forgive us our sins and cleanse us from all unrighteousness*>> (1 John 1:9).

When they are in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn them, or abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them. This also applies to Christians under the New Covenant. God will always be faithful to the covenant, for the sake of the covenant Christians have with God through Jesus.

<sup>46</sup> These are the statutes and ordinances and laws that the Lord established between himself and the people of Israel on Mount Sinai through Moses.

#### Leviticus 26:46

This final verse confirms that all this giving of the law occurred while the Israelites remained encamped at the base of Mount Sinai. This will be reiterated in the final verse of the book: <<*These are the commandments that the Lord gave to Moses for the people of Israel on Mount Sinai*>> (Leviticus 27:34).