

Leviticus Chapter 26

Blessings and Curses

This chapter has three basic sections:

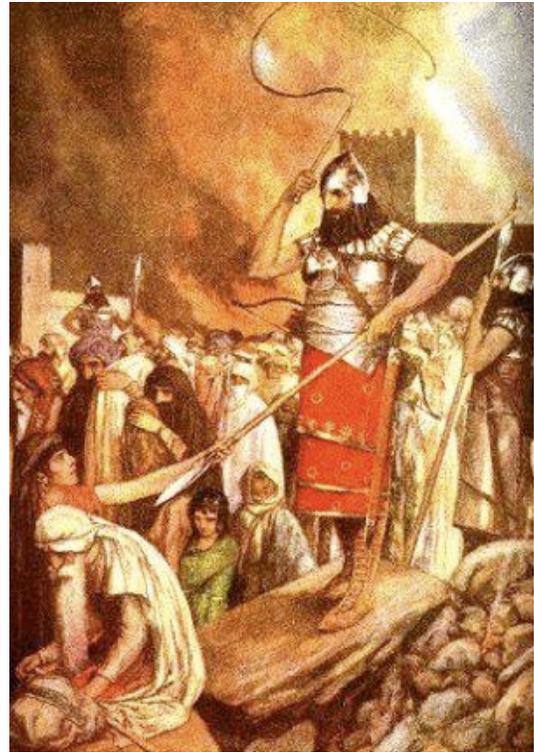
26:1-2 The Fundamentals of the Mosaic Law

26:3-13 Blessings for Obedience

26:14-33 Curses for Disobedience

26:34-46 Future Hope

Many commentators tell us it was common in the ancient Near East to conclude vassal treaties with a section on blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (see Wenham, *Leviticus*, pp. 29-31, 327). It may be that Moses took the words of God and presented them in this form. It could also be that God presented them in this form because it was common in the Near East, and the people would understand what it was. It could also be that God presented it to Moses in this form, and other nations became aware of it and used this form in their covenants.



[Picture of “Judah’s exile from the promised land” from www.oneyearbibleblog.com.]

There are at least three other passages relating the blessings and curses of the Mosaic Law. They are Exodus 23:22-33; Deuteronomy 28; and Joshua 24:20.

Leviticus 26:1-2 Three Basic Commands

Three commandments begin this chapter. They are:

1. *You shall not make for yourselves idols.* This is basically the second commandment (Exodus 20:4-4) and that is explained as, to:
 - *Set up for yourselves an image*
 - *[set up] a sacred pillar,*
 - *place a figured stone in your land to bow down to it*
2. *You shall keep My Sabbaths and*
3. *[You shall] reverence My sanctuary*

Also, the phrase *I am the LORD* is repeated twice in these two verses.

Leviticus 26: 3-13 Blessings for Obedience

The Mosaic Covenant is a conditional covenant. A conditional covenant is in an *If ... Then* form. Here the *If* part is: *If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments so as to carry them out*

The **Then ...** part contains seven basic blessings. Each are elaborated on in such a way that we could list some of the elaborations as another blessing. So there may be different ways to slice this pie. But I find seven basic blessings:

[The parchment below is of part of this section (Leviticus 26:3-9 and 33-37). It is from the Dead Sea Scrolls at Qumran, 30BC-68AD from www.schoyencollection.com.]

1. *Then I shall give you rains in their season, so that the land will yield its produce and the trees of the field will bear their fruit.* [This is followed by examples of potential prosperity.]
2. *I shall also grant peace in the land, so that you may lie down with no one making you tremble.*
3. *I shall also eliminate harmful beasts from the land.*
4. *No sword will pass through your land.* [This could be the same as #2, but I take it #2 is about internal crime and #4 is about foreign enemies.]
5. *I will turn toward you and make you fruitful and multiply you.*
6. *I will make My dwelling among you.*
7. *My soul will not reject you. I will also walk among you and be your God, and you shall be My people.* [This could be an elaboration on #6, but I take it #6 is about God placing His presence in the form of the pillar of cloud and fire over the Tabernacle. I take it #7 is about their salvation and sanctification as a people spiritually related to God. (See Genesis 5:22, 24; 6:9; 17:1; 24:40; 48:15).]



Notice that all these blessing have to do with living in the land. In verse 13, God reminds them that He took them out of slavery in Egypt in order to bring them into this land. He did not free them from the Egyptians to set them free. These blessing cannot be fulfilled outside of their belonging to God, as His slaves, in the physical land of Israel.

Leviticus 26:14-33 Curses for Disobedience

Once again we have an **If ... Then** statement. The **If** statement says:

But if you do not obey Me and do not carry out all these commandments, if, instead, you reject My statutes, and if your soul abhors My ordinances so as not to carry out all My commandments, and so break My covenant ...

Notice obedience is specifically described as keeping God's *commandments, statutes and ordinances*. Also, notice that God assumes that the reason they will not keep them is because they don't like them (*if your soul abhors My ordinances*—He also repeats this in verse 43 where He says *their soul abhorred My statutes*). So, it all comes down to desire – their desire to keep His Commandments.

The **Then** part contains eight basic curses:

1. *I will appoint over you a sudden terror, consumption and fever that will waste away the eyes and cause the soul to pine away.* [This seems to be a reference to diseases.]
2. *You will sow your seed uselessly, for your enemies will eat it up.* [This is not crop failure (that's #4), but crops stolen by their enemies.]

3. *You will be struck down before your enemies; and those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee when no one is pursuing you.* The reason for this is: *I will also break down your pride of power.*
4. *I will also make your sky like iron and your earth like bronze. Your strength will be spent uselessly, for your land will not yield its produce and the trees of the land will not yield their fruit.* [This dry arid desert condition still exists today because of this curse. For example, the hills which are now sand and scrub grass were forested in the Old Testament times. (See Joshua 17:17-18; 1 Samuel 14:25-26; 1 Samuel 22:5; 2 Samuel 18:6, 8.)]
5. *I will let loose among you the beasts of the field, which will bereave you of your children and destroy your cattle and reduce your number so that your roads lie deserted.*
6. *When you gather together into your cities, I will send pestilence among you, so that you shall be delivered into enemy hands ... ten women will bake your bread in one oven, and they will bring back your bread in rationed amounts, so that you will eat and not be satisfied. You will eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters you will eat.* [I put all these together because they all seem to have to do with the sieges against Jerusalem, for example, those discussed in Deuteronomy 28:53-44; 2 Kings 25:1-2; Jeremiah 52:4-5; and Ezekiel 4:7-8.]
7. *I then will destroy your high places, and cut down your incense altars, and heap your remains on the remains of your idols.* The reason for that is: *for My soul shall abhor you.*
8. *I will scatter [you] among the nations ... As for those of you who may be left [alive], I will also bring weakness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies. And the sound of a driven leaf will chase them, and even when no one is pursuing they will flee as though from the sword, and they will fall.* [This probably refers not just to the Babylonian captivity, but also the dispersion of the Jews in Russia, Germany, Poland, etc., all the way up to 1947.]

Although I only count one more category of curses than blessings, there are many more elaborations and explanations in this section. Also, God specifically gives two of His motivations for the curses:

1. *I will also break down your pride of power, and*
2. *My soul shall abhor you.*

One is about them and one is about Him. [Jewish population chart is from the Jewish Virtual Library on www.theevidence.org.]

There is also another statement God makes four times in this *curses*’ passage (verses 18, 21, 23-24, 27-28):

If also after these things you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins.

And it seems that He is increasing the curses *seven times more* as their disobedience increases.

Leviticus 26:34-46 Future Hope

This section discusses a future hope for the land (26:34-35) and a future hope for the people (36-45) and a concluding comment (26:46).

USA	5,800	Romania	14
Israel	4,800	Spain	14
France	600	Austria	10
Russia	550	Denmark	8
Ukraine	400	Poland	8
Canada	360	Morocco	8
United Kingdom	300	Hawaii, USA	7
Argentina	250	Panama	7
Brazil	130	Czech Republic	6
South Africa	106	India	6
Australia	100	Lithuania	6
Hungary	80	Slovakia	6
Belarus	60	Columbia	6
Germany	60	Greece	5
Mexico	41	New Zealand	5
Belgium	40	Kyrgyzstan	5
Italy	35	Bulgaria	3
Uzbekistan	35	Estonia	3
Venezuela	35	Peru	3
Uruguay	32	Puerto Rico	3
Azerbaijan	30	Costa Rica	3
Moldova	30	Hong Kong	3
Netherlands	30	Yugoslavia	3
Iran	25	Croatia	2
Turkey	25	Japan	2
Sweden	18	Tunisia	2
Switzerland	18	Tajikistan	2
Georgia	17	Norway	2
Chile	15	Guatemala	1
Kazakhstan	15	Finland	1

The future of the land was that it would receive the sabbatical rest that the Israelites did not give it. This was discussed in the previous chapter.

The major section is concerning the future hope of the people. First (26:36-39), God reminds them of the curses that will scatter them and cause them to live in deplorable conditions, left to *rot away because of their iniquity in the lands of your enemies*. Then God includes a comment which tells us He does not forget the sins of the past, and that He brings every act into judgment. He says: *and also because of the iniquities of their forefathers they will rot away with them* (26:39).

Then comes the future hope for the people. God tells Moses:

If they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their forefathers, in their unfaithfulness which they committed against Me, and also in their acting with hostility against Me ... then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and I will remember also My covenant with Isaac, and My covenant with Abraham as well, and I will remember the land ... when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, nor will I so abhor them as to destroy them, breaking My covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God (26:40, 42).

The chapter concludes with what sounds like the end of the book. (Reading this, one is surprised there is yet one more chapter.) The conclusion reads:

These are the statutes and ordinances and laws which the LORD established between Himself and the sons of Israel through Moses at Mount Sinai (26:46).

THOUGHTS AND APPLICATIONS

- The phrase *I am the LORD* is repeated twice in the first two verses of this chapter. The point is the same as John 14:6 and Acts 4:12. God is jealous, exclusive, and will permit no worship of anything or anyone else.
- The Sabbath commands separated Israel from the other nations. The reverence of the sanctuary was all about recognizing the holiness of God and fearing God because of His holiness.
- The Mosaic Covenant is a conditional covenant, unlike the Abrahamic Covenant, which is unconditional. Our salvation is like the Abrahamic Covenant. Jesus said: *and I give eternal life to them, and they will never perish; and no one will snatch them out of My hand. My Father, who has given them to Me, is greater than all; and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand* (John 10:28-29). That's like the unconditional covenant with Abraham. It is conditioned only upon our faith (John 1:12). But our spiritual walk with God and eternal rewards depend on our keeping His laws for our age (1 Corinthians 3:11-15; 2 Corinthians 5:10). John wrote: *The one who says, "I have come to know Him," and does not keep His commandments, is a liar, and the truth is not in him* (1 John 2:4).
- In verse 13, God reminds them that He took them out of slavery in Egypt in order to bring them into this land. He did not free them from the Egyptians to set them free. The Christian life is not a life of freedom. It is a life of voluntary slavery to God. That's why the Apostle Paul referred to us as slaves of Christ (1 Corinthians 7:22).
- God assumes that the reason they will not keep His commandments is because they don't like them (*if your soul abhors My ordinances*—He also repeats this in verse 43 where He says

their soul abhorred My statutes). So it all comes down to desire. And God does not seem to be instilling desire in them. He is cursing them because they don't desire what He wants them to desire. For example, we often pray for someone to become a better person in some way. What we really want is for them to change their desires, and we are asking God to do that. But it seems that God does not tend to do that. Rather, He looks for those who, by their own motivation, have a heart for Him (Isaiah 66:1-2).

- God here specifically gives two of His motivations for the curses: (1) *I will also break down your pride of power*, and (2) *My soul shall abhor you*. It seems God's basic plan for man is his humility, and when man refuses to be humble, and, therefore, disobedient to His word, God's *soul shall abhor you*.
- During the cursing section, God repeated four times the comment: *If also after these things you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins*. And it seems that He is increasing the curses *seven times more* as their disobedience increases, and as they will not respond with repentance to His previous curses. God's expectation is that His curses should lead to their repentance. There is a teaching which says, the more we suffer, the more we become dependent upon God, and hence the more we will obey God. It graphs something like this.

[Spiritual Dimensions chart from William Theodore Johnson www.quodlibet.net.]

This may be true to a certain extent, but there seems to be a point where this is no longer the case. For example, the suffering of Job increased (or revealed) his obedience up to a point. After that he complained and demanded an explanation from God. It also depends on a person's spiritual condition as the suffering begins. But three things are true about human suffering:

1. It almost always gets people to thinking and talking about God.
2. It usually brings people closer to God or further away from God.
3. Although suffering does not create faith (faith is created by the Word of God – Romans 10:7), suffering proves our faith and equips us to strengthen the faith of others (Luke 22:31-32).

Spiritual Dimension of Environmental Quality

