Leviticus Bible Study #32

For lay leaders and deacons to conduct after the Sunday service, or during a midweek Bible study session.

Leviticus 26:1-46

1 “You shall not make idols for yourselves or erect an image or pillar, and you shall not set up a figured
stone in your land to bow down to it, for I am the Lord your God. **2** You shall keep my Sabbaths and
reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord.
3 “If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, **4** then I will give you your
rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit.
5 Your threshing shall last to the time of the grape harvest, and the grape harvest shall last to the time
for sowing. And you shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land securely. **6** I will give peace
in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. And I will remove harmful beasts
from the land, and the sword shall not go through your land. **7** You shall chase your enemies, and they
shall fall before you by the sword. **8** Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall
chase ten thousand, and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. **9** I will turn to you and make
you fruitful and multiply you and will confirm my covenant with you. **10** You shall eat old store long
kept, and you shall clear out the old to make way for the new. **11** I will make my dwelling among you,
and my soul shall not abhor you. **12** And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be
my people. **13** I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not
be their slaves. And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.
14 “But if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments, **15** if you spurn my
statutes, and if your soul abhors my rules, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my
covenant, **16** then I will do this to you: I will visit you with panic, with wasting disease and fever that
consume the eyes and make the heart ache. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall
eat it. **17** I will set my face against you, and you shall be struck down before your enemies. Those who
hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when none pursues you. **18** And if in spite of this you
will not listen to me, then I will discipline you again sevenfold for your sins, **19** and I will break the
pride of your power, and I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. **20** And your
strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield its increase, and the trees of the land shall
not yield their fruit.
21 “Then if you walk contrary to me and will not listen to me, I will continue striking you, sevenfold
for your sins. **22** And I will let loose the wild beasts against you, which shall bereave you of your
children and destroy your livestock and make you few in number, so that your roads shall be deserted.
23 “And if by this discipline you are not turned to me but walk contrary to me, **24** then I also will walk
contrary to you, and I myself will strike you sevenfold for your sins. **25** And I will bring a sword upon
you, that shall execute vengeance for the covenant. And if you gather within your cities, I will send
pestilence among you, and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy. **26** When I break your
supply of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in a single oven and shall dole out your bread again
by weight, and you shall eat and not be satisfied.
27 “But if in spite of this you will not listen to me, but walk contrary to me, **28** then I will walk
contrary to you in fury, and I myself will discipline you sevenfold for your sins. **29** You shall eat the
flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters. **30** And I will destroy your high places
and cut down your incense altars and cast your dead bodies upon the dead bodies of your idols, and my
soul will abhor you. **31** And I will lay your cities waste and will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I
will not smell your pleasing aromas. **32** And I myself will devastate the land, so that your enemies who
settle in it shall be appalled at it. **33** And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheathe the
sword after you, and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste.
34 “Then the land shall enjoy its Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemies'

land; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its Sabbaths. **35** As long as it lies desolate it shall have rest, the rest that it did not have on your Sabbaths when you were dwelling in it. **36** And as for those of you who are left, 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 when none pursues. **37** They shall stumble over one another, as if to escape a sword, though none pursues. And you shall have no power to stand before your enemies. **38** And you shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. **39** And those of you who are left shall rot away in your enemies' lands because of their iniquity, and also because of the iniquities of their fathers they shall rot away like them.
40 "But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me, **41** so that I walked contrary 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, **42** then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. **43** But the land shall be abandoned by them and enjoy its Sabbaths while it lies desolate without them, and they shall make amends for their iniquity, because they spurned my rules and their soul abhorred my statutes. **44** Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn them, neither will I abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them, for I am the Lord their God. **45** But I will for their sake remember the covenant with their forefathers, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the Lord."
46 These are the statutes and rules and laws that the Lord made between himself and the people of Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai.

Introduction

As a sort of appendix to the end of Leviticus, the last two chapters comprise two legal documents. The first, at the twenty-sixth chapter, is a set of covenant blessings and curses. The second, at the twenty-seventh chapter, is a regulatory statute concerning vows and gifts. These were apparently written before Israel went on transit in the wilderness, as both chapters end with similar statements:

Leviticus 26:46 states "These are the statutes and rules and laws that the Lord made between himself and the people of Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai."

Leviticus 27:34 states, "These are the commandments that the Lord commanded Moses for the people of Israel on Mount Sinai."

We understand that each chapter is its own self-contained document, as they both introduce new subject matter from the previous sections and they both end on the same note. Therefore one may safely presume that these were given to Moses just after the golden calf incident (when the Covenant was renewed),[1] and he placed them at the end of the original Leviticus scroll.

The twenty-sixth chapter is, as stated, a set of covenant blessings and curses. If the children of Israel are obedient, they shall be blessed; if they are disobedient, they shall be cursed; if at the last they have been completely rejected on account of their disobedience, they may repent so as to restore their relationship with God. The astute reader of Scripture will notice that a similar passage, Deuteronomy 28, has the same structure and basic message, albeit without any message concerning a return to proper relationship with the Lord.[2] Deuteronomy's blessings and curses are written as the Covenant is renewed before the peoples' entrance into the Promised Land: it is a legal document which the later prophets cite when predicting good or bad to the children of Israel. Leviticus' shorter list, however, is more brusque, giving the people a foretaste of the fuller expression given at the plains of Moab.

1 Exodus 34
2 That is covered in Deuteronomy 30.

Vs.1-2

1 "You shall not make idols for yourselves or erect an image or pillar, and you shall not set up a figured stone in your land to bow down to it, for I am the Lord your God. **2** You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the Lord.

The passage begins with a familiar ban on carved images. The initial re-statement of the latter part to the First Commandment is in keeping with our Lord's earlier pronouncement at Sinai,[3] while offering a bit more detail. The land the Israelites will be entering is known for its carved statues, idolatrous pillars (typically asherah poles), and other cultic implements. Notably, the Lord states that one shall not set up an image *to bow down to it,* granting the people permission to make art in other contexts.

The Third Commandment, Sabbath keeping, is restated as well. Here our Lord adds that the *sanctuary*, namely the Tabernacle, shall be reverenced. This is an alternative to idolatry, as though God were saying "you must look to this sanctuary *instead of* the idols and pillars of the land of Canaan." He knows that man's faith does well when he has an object to faith, something to look to for the assurance of the promises He has made. The Ark of the Covenant, which denotes God's special presence among the people, is just such an object. It is a similar dynamic to the Sacraments today, wherein the believer looks to their Baptism and the Lord's Supper as visible signs of the present grace of God.

Vs.3-13

3 "If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, **4** then I will give you your rains in their season, and the land shall yield its increase, and the trees of the field shall yield their fruit. **5** Your threshing shall last to the time of the grape harvest, and the grape harvest shall last to the time for sowing. And you shall eat your bread to the full and dwell in your land securely. **6** I will give peace in the land, and you shall lie down, and none shall make you afraid. And I will remove harmful beasts from the land, and the sword shall not go through your land. **7** You shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. **8** Five of you shall chase a hundred, and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand, and your enemies shall fall before you by the sword. **9** I will turn to you and make you fruitful and multiply you and will confirm my covenant with you. **10** You shall eat old store long kept, and you shall clear out the old to make way for the new. **11** I will make my dwelling among you, and my soul shall not abhor you. **12** And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people. **13** I am the Lord your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt, that you should not be their slaves. And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.

Having stated the basic requirement for worship (look to the Tabernacle rather than idols), the blessing list commences. In a word, if the children of Israel faithfully adhere to the commandments of God, then the land will be like Eden. There will be verdant growth everywhere and food that is easily harvested with great abundance. Marks of the curse on mankind will be minimized: harvests lasting a maximal amount of time means that the "thorns and thistles" brought on earth by Adam's sin are few and far between, and men sweat little while laboring.[4] The absence of violent invasive species and invading armies means that the curse of death is greatly limited as well. For His part, God also promises to grant to the Israelites automatically what He commanded in Eden: "be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth"[5] will be simply given to them as subduing the earth is a non-issue. He also promises to walk among them, something that had not happened to humanity since before the Fall;[6] while it is not guaranteed that He would do so *visibly* as before, the people will always sense His presence. To put it simply, the reward for obedience to the Edenic impetus behind Levitical law is to live in the closest one could get to an Edenic state. Men and women would be guaranteed to live the *good* life before

3 Exodus 20:4-6
4 Genesis 3:18
5 Genesis 1:28
6 Genesis 3:8

passing on to Heaven.

Vs.14-26

14 "But if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments, **15** if you spurn my statutes, and if your soul abhors my rules, so that you will not do all my commandments, but break my covenant, **16** then I will do this to you: I will visit you with panic, with wasting disease and fever that consume the eyes and make the heart ache. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it. **17** I will set my face against you, and you shall be struck down before your enemies. Those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when none pursues you. **18** And if in spite of this you will not listen to me, then I will discipline you again sevenfold for your sins, **19** and I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. **20** And your strength shall be spent in vain, for your land shall not yield its increase, and the trees of the land shall not yield their fruit.

21 "Then if you walk contrary to me and will not listen to me, I will continue striking you, sevenfold for your sins. **22** And I will let loose the wild beasts against you, which shall bereave you of your children and destroy your livestock and make you few in number, so that your roads shall be deserted.

23 "And if by this discipline you are not turned to me but walk contrary to me, **24** then I also will walk contrary to you, and I myself will strike you sevenfold for your sins. **25** And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall execute vengeance for the covenant. And if you gather within your cities, I will send pestilence among you, and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy. **26** When I break your supply of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in a single oven and shall dole out your bread again by weight, and you shall eat and not be satisfied.

One may notice that the list of punishments for disobedience is much longer than the rewards for obedience. One of the reasons for this is that each set of punishments is a *warning* to the people. At first, God will punish idolatry with disease, fever, and military losses; then the people will have a chance to repent. If they do not, then as the eighteenth verse states the punishment intensifies sevenfold. Upon the peoples' further stubborn disobedience the land is struck with severe famine. If they continue after *that* punishment, then predatory beasts shall return. The twenty-third to twenty-sixth verses show all of the prior plagues coming at once should the people remain stiff-necked.

God's longsuffering nature is on display here. For obedience, the people receive blessing. For disobedience, the people receive punishment – but on a gradient. Our Lord ensures that there will be chance after chance after chance for Israel to repent throughout the centuries, lest they be wiped out in after a single infraction. This reflects the antifragile nature of the Mosaic Law. Previously, after the golden calf incident, God made a motion to exterminate everyone but Moses:[7] it was the prophet's intercession that turned away total Divine wrath for their apostasy. Now, however, under the auspices of this renewed Covenant, God decides to display His patience at the same time as His justice.

Vs.27-39

27 "But if in spite of this you will not listen to me, but walk contrary to me, **28** then I will walk contrary to you in fury, and I myself will discipline you sevenfold for your sins. **29** You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters. **30** And I will destroy your high places and cut down your incense altars and cast your dead bodies upon the dead bodies of your idols, and my soul will abhor you. **31** And I will lay your cities waste and will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your pleasing aromas. **32** And I myself will devastate the land, so that your enemies who settle in it shall be appalled at it. **33** And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will unsheathe the sword after you, and your land shall be a desolation, and your cities shall be a waste.

34 "Then the land shall enjoy its Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemies' land; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its Sabbaths. **35** As long as it lies desolate it shall have rest, the rest that it did not have on your Sabbaths when you were dwelling in it. **36** And as for those of you who are left, I will send

7 Exodus 32:9-14

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 when none pursues. **37** They shall stumble over one another, as if to escape a sword, though none pursues. And you shall have no power to stand before your enemies. **38** And you shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. **39** And those of you who are left shall rot away in your enemies' lands because of their iniquity, and also because of the iniquities of their fathers they shall rot away like them.

Here the language gets departs the subjunctive realm and into the concrete. As Moses writes, it becomes clear that it is not hypotheticals that he is recording from our Lord – but for us this is evident because of Biblical history. As promised ,the peoples' stiff-necked refusal to obey the stipulations of the Law were met with brutal sieges resulting in cannibalism,[8] extensive famines,[9] and finally an exile which enforces the Sabbath years to which the land was entitled.[10] The entire history of Israel prior to the Assyrian Captivity and the Babylonian Exile there were prophets sent to the people to remind them of these Covenant curses; they did not listen, and as Christ comments they typically murdered those prophets.[11] At the time of Moses' writing, these were still "in-theory" punishments, but as the people slid down the path of apostasy it became evident that these writings were prophetic.

Vs.40-45

40 "But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery that they committed against me, and also in walking contrary to me, **41** so that I walked contrary 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, **42** then I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and I will remember my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land. **43** But the land shall be abandoned by them and enjoy its Sabbaths while it lies desolate without them, and they shall make amends for their iniquity, because they spurned my rules and their soul abhorred my statutes. **44** Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not spurn them, neither will I abhor them so as to destroy them utterly and break my covenant with them, for I am the Lord their God. **45** But I will for their sake remember the covenant with their forefathers, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, that I might be their God: I am the Lord."

46 These are the statutes and rules and laws that the Lord made between himself and the people of Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai.

It may appear odd that God would permit the Israelites (or even a portion of them) to return on the basis of repentance and faith – let alone discuss this matter with them seven hundred years before these Exiles took place. Though the text is translated "make amends," it is literally rendered "they accept their guilt"[12] - that is, to confess their fault before God. For the sake of the land's Sabbaths they are still kept out, but the re-establishment of the Covenant relationship with our Lord after the Exile was not predicated on sacrifices, burnt offerings, or penances. After being broken by the hammer of the Law, the children of Israel are granted a Gospel moment of free redemption for the sake of the promises made to the Patriarchs. Throughout Leviticus, the Aaronic priesthood is the only group which lives a lifestyle close to that of a Christian as they exist in a permanent sort of Passover state; here however Moses promises that the generation which returns to the land will experience that forgiveness and absolution which properly is demonstrated in Christian confession today.[13]

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8 2 Kings 6:24-30
9 1 Kings 17
10 2 Chronicles 36:20-21
11 Matthew 23:37
12 Per the interlinear: https://biblehub.com/interlinear/leviticus/26-41.htm
13 1 John 1:8-9