

Every other section of the book of Leviticus starts with some sort of clear marker.

Over and over we have heard the phrase, “The LORD spoke to Moses.”

In fact, that phrase occurs at least 37 times in the book of Leviticus – almost in every instance, it is setting up a new section.

Chapter 26 has no such marker.

What does that mean?

It means that we need to read chapters 25-26 together.

All that we have seen about the Jubilee year –  
the importance of the return to the Land in the 50<sup>th</sup> year –  
and the redemption of the Land and of the Seed –  
and of God’s people *not* being slaves –

all of this is prelude to the blessings and curses of chapter 26.

What does that do to our understanding of chapter 26?

Well, listen to the flow of the passage – starting in 25:53 –

*“He shall treat him as a servant hired year by year. He shall not rule ruthlessly over him in your sight. <sup>54</sup> And if he is not redeemed by these means, then he and his children with him shall be released in the year of jubilee. <sup>55</sup> For it is to me that the people of Israel are servants. <sup>[L]</sup> They are my servants whom I brought out of the land of Egypt: I am the LORD your God.*

*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. <sup>2</sup> You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD.*

*<sup>3</sup> “If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them, <sup>4</sup> 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.*

All of the blessings and curses of chapter 26 are rooted in the social order of chapter 25.

This is what Paul is talking about in Ephesians 1:9-10,  
“making known to us the mystery of his will,  
according to his purpose, which he set forth in Christ  
as a plan for the fullness of time, to unite all things in him,  
things in heaven and things on earth.”

The phrase “to unite all things in Christ” is a very simple English translation of a fantastic Greek word – “anakephalaiwsasthai”

kephale means “head” in Greek –  
and so kephalio means “to bring under headings” (or to “summarize”)  
anakephalaiwsasthai – then means to summarize all over again –  
or, as one commentator says well,  
“to gather into coherence under an ordering reality of the head [Christ!],  
a gathering in fullness, of land, families, produce, human freedom and work.  
This is the fullness of God’s creative intention  
returned to God’s own redemptive sovereignty.” (Radner, 265)

The Jubilee pattern was designed to embody the kingdom of God in the life of Israel.  
The Jubilee – with its 7x7 + 1 pattern – was the 50<sup>th</sup> year as the “ultimate 8<sup>th</sup> year.”

Ephraim Radner reflects on how Jesus’ parable of the tenants  
is rooted in the juxtaposition of Leviticus 25 and 26.

In the parable of the tenants, the master plants a vineyard and leased it to tenants.  
The vineyard is a common picture of Israel in the prophets.  
When the season for fruit came, he sent servants to get the fruit.  
The tenants beat one, killed another, and stoned the third.  
Finally the master sends his son, saying, “They will respect my son.”

But the tenants decide to kill the son and seize his inheritance.

Jesus is talking about Leviticus 25-26.  
This is where God entered into a contract with tenants –  
with sojourners – namely, Israel! –  
in order to live as tenants in his land.

Look at verses 1-2

**Introduction: Worship the LORD Alone (v1-2)**

*“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. <sup>2</sup> You shall keep my Sabbaths and reverence my sanctuary: I am the LORD.*

This reminds us of the great commandment –  
You shall love the Lord your God with all your heart,  
and with all your soul, and with all your strength.

There are three themes here:  
First, idolatry – do not make images to worship –  
why?  
Because I am the LORD your God.

And the LORD has only one image: he made *us* in his own image.

And once every year that image would enter the Holy of Holies,  
when the High Priest entered on the Day of Atonement.

Second, Sabbath – you shall keep my sabbaths –  
how we use our time is important!  
The frenetic pace of our world is wrong!  
Keeping Sabbath is not an onerous burden –  
but a chance for rest!

And third, sanctuary – reverence my sanctuary!  
Most Israelites never got anywhere close to going inside it.  
But they could still reverence it!  
How?

Think back to the early chapters of Leviticus:  
by bringing *clean* animals for sacrifice –  
because the clean is moving towards the holy!  
God is holy – and he wants to bring his people to himself –  
and so he calls them to be holy as he himself is holy!

Don't treat God's name as something common.  
When we gather together as his people these things all go together:

Image – Sabbath – Sanctuary

God's image – Jesus – “he is the image of the invisible God” –  
he is the one who has entered God's rest –  
and indeed who has entered the heavenly sanctuary.

And so we – who in Christ are restored after God's image,  
we also participate in that sabbath-rest –  
and enter the holy places in him!

But Israel was given all of this as a picture –  
they were called to pre-figure Christ –  
which is why the blessings and curses come in the form that they do!

### **1. Blessings for Obedience (v3-13)**

<sup>3</sup> “If you walk in my statutes and observe my commandments and do them,  
If Israel obeys – if they live according to the Jubilee – if they observe his commandments,  
then the LORD will give them three things –  
there are three “I will give” statements in verses 4, 6, and 11

#### **a. I Will Give You Rain and Increase (v4-5)**

*<sup>4</sup> 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. <sup>5</sup> 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.*

The Promised Land was not like Egypt.

In Egypt it never rains – the Nile provides all the water that is needed.  
But in Canaan the land requires rain in order to be fruitful.

The two crops that God highlights are grain and wine – grape and bread.

The first sort of security that God provides is *food* security.

Do not be anxious about what you will eat.  
God will provide.

#### **b. I Will Give Peace (v6-10)**

*<sup>6</sup> 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. <sup>7</sup> You shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword. <sup>8</sup> 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. <sup>9</sup> I will turn to you and make you fruitful and multiply you and will confirm my covenant with you. <sup>10</sup> You shall eat old store long kept, and you shall clear out the old to make way for the new.*

Secondly, I will give you peace – *shalom*.

There will be peace from wild animals (v6) – peace from invading armies (v7) –  
and there will also be the peace and wellbeing of fruitfulness in the land.

#### **c. I Will Give My Tabernacle Among You (v11-13)**

*<sup>11</sup> I will make my dwelling<sup>[a]</sup> among you, and my soul 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, that you should not be their slaves. And I have broken the bars of your yoke and made you walk erect.*

And most importantly I will give my tabernacle among you.

The verb is still “I will give” – it just sounds odd in English to say  
“I will give my dwelling among you”!

But God’s presence is a gift.

He has set us free.

Again – remember that we are still in the Jubilee year passage.

God has set his people free from slavery in Egypt.

## 2. Curses for Disobedience (v14-39)

### a. Disease, Famine, and War (v14-17)

<sup>14</sup> “But if you will not listen to me and will not do all these commandments, <sup>15</sup> 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, <sup>16</sup> 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. <sup>17</sup> 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.

Notice who is acting here.

*I will do this to you.*

It may not seem very comforting to think that God is the one who brings disaster!  
But as we’ll see – it would be far, far worse if it was someone else!

But notice what God will do!

He will turn all of your blessings into curses.

Where there was plenty – “you shall sow your seed in vain”

Where there was peace – “you shall be struck down before your enemies”

Where there was God’s presence – “I will set my face against you.”

I will visit you with panic, with wasting disease and fever...

There are all sorts of questions about where Covid came from.

It came from God.

Whatever other source there may be – it came from God as a judgment upon us.

And as long as this age continues in rebellion against God –  
more and more diseases will arise!

Likewise, “I will visit you with panic” –

where does all the social anxiety and depression come from?

It comes from God as a judgment against us!

Let me be clear:

the fact that someone dies of covid – or that someone has anxiety –  
does not mean that God is judging them for some special sin!

These judgments are what is called “common wrath” –  
in the sense that they hit the community at random.

In the same way that there is common grace –  
where the rain falls on the just and the unjust –

even so there is common wrath –  
where a disease wipes out the just and the unjust!

But it is important to recognize that these sorts of judgments  
do come upon the whole community *because of sin*.

And the judgment often has a poetic sort of appropriateness!  
Many have noted the connection between social media usage  
and the spike in anxiety and depression.  
Our 24-7 culture of non-stop information and “virtual” relationship  
have created a world of disconnection and isolation.

When we refuse to take a sabbath – God gives us a sabbatical upside the head!

I put it that way, because in the following verses  
we hear of four different “sevenfold” judgments.

Remember, chapter 26 builds off of the same “And the LORD spoke to Moses” as chapter 25.  
If you won’t follow the sabbatical year and the Jubilee –  
then God will give you a sabbatical to remember!

**b. Sevenfold: Heavens and Earth Shut Off (v18-20)**

*<sup>18</sup> And if in spite of this you will not listen to me, then I will discipline you again sevenfold for your sins, <sup>19</sup> and I will break the pride of your power, and I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze. <sup>20</sup> 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.*

Some commentators try to say that “sevenfold” just means “complete” –  
and it’s true that sevenfold means complete.

It’s certainly *not* the case that the punishment is seven times greater than the sin!

Verses 18-20 focus on the “pride of your power” –  
“your strength shall be spent in vain” –  
because rather than the earth bringing forth grain and wine –  
instead, your heavens will be like iron – and your earth like bronze.

The land will not produce.

**c. Sevenfold: Wild Beasts Turned Against You (v21-22)**

*<sup>21</sup> “Then if you walk contrary to me and will not listen to me, I will continue striking you, sevenfold for your sins. <sup>22</sup> 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.*

And then in verses 21-22, rather than having dominion over the creatures –  
the creatures will bereave you of your children and destroy your livestock.

And again – *I will continue striking you* –  
if you walk contrary to me and will not listen to me!

If we will not listen, then he will do whatever it takes to get our attention.

**d. Sevenfold: Sword, Pestilence, and Famine (v23-26)**

<sup>23</sup> “*And if by this discipline you are not turned to me but walk contrary to me,* <sup>24</sup> *then I also will walk contrary to you, and I myself will strike you sevenfold for your sins.* <sup>25</sup> *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.* <sup>26</sup> *When I break your supply<sup>[b]</sup> 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.*

And so the third sabbatical judgment is the triad of sword, pestilence, and famine.

What does God mean when he says in verse 25,

“I will bring a sword upon you, that shall execute vengeance for the covenant”?

Remember what happened in Egypt?

The angel of death came and struck down the firstborn of Egypt.

But what will happen in Canaan?

Israel will become the angel of death in order to strike down the Canaanites.

If Israel will not obey –

if the people of God will not walk in the ways of his covenant –  
then God will bring a new angel of death.

The book of Revelation will use this theme of sword, pestilence, and famine.

Indeed, the four horsemen of the apocalypse are closely related  
to the four sevens of Leviticus 26.

(And if you are thinking – wait – the seven seals, the seven trumpets,  
the seven bowls...

Exactly!)

And the result is that you shall eat and not be satisfied.

When you obey God and walk in ways,

then there is food and peace because God is with us!

But when you disobey God and walk contrary to his ways –  
then...

it gets worse!

**e. Sevenfold: Cannibalism and Desolation (v27-33)**

*<sup>27</sup> “But if in spite of this you will not listen to me, but walk contrary to me, <sup>28</sup> then I will walk contrary to you in fury, and I myself will discipline you sevenfold for your sins. <sup>29</sup> You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters.*

It’s hard to imagine worse than cannibalism.

How do you get to the point where you would eat the flesh of your own children?!

Hunger does funny things to you.

Sin makes you stupid.

But this is where things went.

In 2 Kings 6 we hear the story of the siege of Samaria –  
where two women start eating their children...

And then the king sends a messenger to Elisha and says,

“This trouble is from the LORD! Why should I wait for the LORD any longer?”

But Israel’s problem was that they had refused to obey the LORD in the first place.

And so God says:

*<sup>30</sup> 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. <sup>31</sup> And I will lay your cities waste and will make your sanctuaries desolate, and I will not smell your pleasing aromas. <sup>32</sup> And I myself will devastate the land, so that your enemies who settle in it shall be appalled at it. <sup>33</sup> 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.*

Already in Leviticus – while Israel is still at Mt. Sinai –  
the LORD says that they will go into Exile.

And the reason for these seven-fold judgments is made clear in v34:

**f. The Land Shall Enjoy Its Sabbaths During Your Exile (v34-39)**

*<sup>34</sup> “Then the land shall enjoy<sup>[c]</sup> its Sabbaths as long as it lies desolate, while you are in your enemies’ land; then the land shall rest, and enjoy its Sabbaths. <sup>35</sup> 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.*

Then the land shall have its Sabbaths (a point made explicit in 2 Chr. 36:21).

If you do not give rest to those under your care –

if you do not give rest to your land –

then God will enforce rest upon you!

Many of you have very little ability to influence your world.



You must do what you can –  
but sometimes it is all you can do to practice rest yourself!

But if you are in a position to give rest to others,  
then do what you can.

But God speaks to the coming Exile in verses 36-39

*<sup>36</sup> 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. <sup>37</sup> 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. <sup>38</sup> And you shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. <sup>39</sup> 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.*

When we turn against the LORD,  
we become fearful and disoriented.

“They shall fall when none pursues.”  
Even when no one is chasing them,  
they will find themselves anxious and afraid.

The closing picture in verse 39 is striking:  
“those of you who are left shall rot away...because of their iniquity,  
and also because of the iniquities of their fathers they shall rot away like them.”

We follow the sins of our fathers –  
and so the judgments of our fathers become ours as well!

### **3. Confession Will Lead to Renewal (v40-45)**

#### **a. If They Confess and Humble Their Uncircumcised Hearts... (v40-41)**

*<sup>40</sup> “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, <sup>41</sup> 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,*

But!!

In Hebrew the “but” is so inobtrusive.  
It’s a “vav” – a simple bent line that can mean “but” “and” “so” “then” –  
the universal conjunction!

And yet it is so important!

Because if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers in their treachery –

and in walking contrary to me –  
if they humble themselves –  
and they make amends for their iniquity!

Repentance means more than just saying “I’m sorry.”  
If you say “please forgive me” – but then just keep doing it –  
well, then you weren’t really very sorry!

You need to make amends.  
You need to make it right.

But there is a problem.  
This is the book of Leviticus – after all.  
We’ve already seen what it takes  
for an unclean people to come into the presence of a holy God.

The heart and soul of Leviticus was chapter 16 –  
where the High Priest enters the Holy of Holies –  
thereby entering the age to come!

But now God is saying that Israel will profane the covenant –  
they will become unclean and be cast out of God’s land.

And yet the LORD says, if they repent,

**b. Then I Will Remember My Covenant (v42-43)**

*<sup>42</sup> 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. <sup>43</sup> 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.*

What is that going to look like?

Well – it will look something like the Day of Atonement – only better.

God gave to Samuel a clue.

When the ark of the covenant was captured in the days of Eli the priest,  
the sons of Eli died in battle –  
the ark was captured by the Philistines –  
and Eli himself died when he heard the news.

This was the first “exile.”

Not the great exile with the destruction of the temple in Jerusalem –  
but the exile from Shiloh.

And in that Exile from Shiloh,  
God showed where the story is going.  
The ark was captured – and taken to the Philistine temple of Dagon.

But in the morning, the priests of Dagon found their idol fallen before the ark.

Think about the picture.

The LORD himself was taken captive.  
He went alone into the stronghold of the Philistines  
in order to do battle against Dagon,  
and demonstrate that the LORD – he is God!

And when the Word became flesh and tabernacled among us,  
the Lord Jesus went into the stronghold of death  
and triumphed over the grave!

**c. I Will Not Break My Covenant with Them (v44-45)**

*<sup>44</sup> 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. <sup>45</sup> 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.”*

Because the LORD promises that he will not forget his covenant.

He said that he would be our God and we would be his people.

Revelation 21:1-4

*Then I saw a new heaven and a new earth, for the first heaven and the first earth had passed away, and the sea was no more. <sup>2</sup> And I saw the holy city, new Jerusalem, coming down out of heaven from God, prepared as a bride adorned for her husband. <sup>3</sup> And I heard a loud voice from the throne saying, “Behold, the dwelling place<sup>[a]</sup> of God is with man. He will dwell with them, and they will be his people,<sup>[b]</sup> and God himself will be with them as their God.<sup>[c]</sup> <sup>4</sup> He will wipe away every tear from their eyes, and death shall be no more, neither shall there be mourning, nor crying, nor pain anymore, for the former things have passed away.”*

**Conclusion (v46)**

*<sup>46</sup> These are the statutes and rules and laws that the LORD made between himself and the people of Israel through Moses on Mount Sinai.*

Solomon’s prayer in 1 Kings 8