

## THE ESCHATOLOGICAL SIGNIFICANCE OF LEVITICUS 26

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*The blessings and curses of Leviticus 26 have eschatological significance because they relate to the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. Verses 33-45 speak of retributive dispersion/exile, the Sabbath rest, the stricken remnant, and the contingency of repentance. Repentance includes Israel's acceptance of retribution, Yahweh's acceptance of repentance, and a summary of the retribution. Chapter 26 touches upon various eschatological themes, one of which is its attention to the Abrahamic, Mosaic, and Deuteronomical covenants. It also speaks of the land promised to Israel under the Abrahamic Covenant, of Israel's exile and eventual salvation, of preservation of the covenant by Yahweh though breached by Israel, of the prohibition of idolatry, of Sabbath observance, of the Lord's presence with Israel, of His promises to bless obedient Israel, of Israel's obedience and disobedience, of retribution and chastisement, and of future exile and repentance. Though the NT has only one direct reference to Leviticus 26, application of the chapter to believers of every era is obvious: faith is the binding requirement for anyone to have a relationship to the God of Abraham.*

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Leviticus is not normally the first source students of Scripture consult when discussing eschatology. Its focus is on holiness,<sup>1</sup> not prophetic events. Leviticus reveals that God called the Israelites to holiness in their worship and daily living as His chosen people. Chapters 1-7 present a sacrificial system that established an outward manifestation of individual and corporate covenant communion consistent with the divine standard of holiness. The sacrificial system facilitated the preservation of fellowship between the people of the covenant and their holy covenant God.

Next, chapters 8-10 define the priestly ministry. The priests were the caretakers of the covenant relationship. Chapters 11-15 move on to describe the purity Yahweh requires of His people so that surrounding nations might recognize Israel's identification with Him. He summons His covenant community to a holy

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<sup>1</sup>Philip J. Budd, *Leviticus*, NCB (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1996) 34.

lifestyle distinct from that of neighboring nations. The annual renewal of this covenant relationship takes place on the Day of Atonement (chap. 16). That high holy day focuses on the sovereign rule of Yahweh over the nation of Israel. On the Day of Atonement the divine Suzerain blesses His covenant people by granting them His continued presence among them (16:16; cf. vv. 1-2).

To ensure the covenant community's holiness, chaps. 17–24 prescribe obligatory ordinances. This legislation affects their diet, social relationships, religious leadership, calendar, and center of worship. The calendar (chap. 23) focuses on the seventh month with its three major observances (vv. 23-43). Eschatological overtones in the realm of kingship and kingdom are especially prominent in the New Year celebration (also known as the Feast of Trumpets, vv. 23-25).<sup>2</sup>

Then chapters 25 and 26 emphasize the monotheistic and sabbatical principles that comprise the two pillars of the Sinaitic Covenant (cf. 25:55–26:3 and Exod 20:2-11). Gerstenberger admits that Isa 61:1-2 (together with Luke 4:16-21) suggests that Leviticus 25 should be read eschatologically, but finds nothing eschatological in the levitical instructions concerning the year of Jubilee.<sup>3</sup> On the other hand, Gordon Wenham correctly connects Christ's quotation of Isa 61:1 with Leviticus 25. "Release" (רָחַץ, *dě'rô'r*) in Isa 61:1 is the same term employed in Lev 25:10. He observes that "It seems quite likely, therefore, that the prophetic description of the 'acceptable year of the Lord' was partly inspired by the idea of the jubilee year. The messianic age brings liberty to the oppressed and release to the captives."<sup>4</sup> The jubilee, therefore, "not only looks back to God's first redemption of his people from Egypt (Lev. 25:38, 55), but forward to the 'restitution of all things,' 'for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells' (Acts 3:21; 2 Pet. 3:13)."<sup>5</sup>

The synagogue avoids Leviticus 26 because of its unpleasant subject matter.<sup>6</sup> Commentaries (past and present, Jewish and Christian) give it sketchy treatment. In addition, materials dedicated to the concept of covenant in the OT rarely discuss the chapter's covenant affinities. Occasional references, however, demonstrate that many biblical scholars are aware of its significance for covenant

<sup>2</sup>For arguments against connecting the OT New Year festival to an enthronement festival, cf. Roland de Vaux, *Ancient Israel*, 2 vols. (New York: McGraw-Hill, 1965) 2:502-6, and Norman H. Snaith, *The Jewish New Year Festival: Its Origin and Development* (London: Society for Promoting Christian Knowledge, 1947). See also C. Hassell Bullock, *Encountering the Book of Psalms: A Literary and Theological Introduction*, *Encountering Biblical Studies* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2001) 196: "though some scholars have made much of the supposed existence of a festival in Israel that enthroned Yahweh, virtually no evidence in the Psalms or elsewhere in the Old Testament supports this view."

<sup>3</sup>Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, trans. Douglas W. Stott, OTL (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster John Knox, 1996) 398.

<sup>4</sup>Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 324. See also the extensive discussion of the eschatological implications of Jubilee in John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC (Dallas: Word, Publisher, 1992) 446-48.

<sup>5</sup>Wenham, *Leviticus* 324.

<sup>6</sup>Bernard J. Bamberger, *Leviticus*, *The Torah: A Modern Commentary* (New York: Union of American Hebrew Congregations, 1979) 290.

studies. Over forty years ago Delbert Hillers placed this section of the Torah on a par with Deuteronomy 28 because the prophets employed the tradition of curses from Deuteronomy 28 and Leviticus 26 to compose their threats of doom.<sup>7</sup>

Multiple similarities between Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28 catapult the former pericope into the same sphere of significance as the latter. Meredith Kline suggested that the curses of Deuteronomy 28 were “anticipated in the promises and threats” of Leviticus 26.<sup>8</sup> Assuming Mosaic authorship for both pericopes, it is safe to assume that Moses wrote Leviticus 26 prior to Deuteronomy 28. God revealed the former at Sinai on the threshold of Israel’s wilderness wanderings, but the latter on the plains of Moab after the wilderness wanderings. The chronological data, therefore, indicates that Deuteronomy 28 is an exposition of Leviticus 26—a point too often neglected.

The promulgation of the Mosaic Covenant creates an apparent tension with the Abrahamic Covenant. Leviticus 26, however, explains the relationship between the two covenants and reemphasizes the exclusive lordship of Yahweh. In effect, the chapter declares that the Mosaic Covenant did not nullify the eschatological promises of the Abrahamic Covenant. That instruction took place fifteen centuries earlier than Paul’s teaching in Gal 3:17 that “the law that came 430 years afterwards does not annul a covenant previously confirmed by God so that it voids the promise.”<sup>9</sup>

The blessings and curses in Leviticus 26 advance the respective emphases of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. The blessings relate directly to the Abrahamic Covenant’s eschatological promises regarding land and blessing. The cursings represent the Mosaic Covenant’s five-stage process<sup>10</sup> designed to produce confession of guilt, humility, and restitution—elements that anticipate the New Covenant and its eschatological elements. Restitution involves the sabbatical principle central to both the Mosaic Covenant and Leviticus 26. Indeed, the sabbatical principle is itself eschatologically significant. The Land-Giver and Exodus-Causer will always be loyal to His covenants and to His covenant people. He is Lord of both space (the land) and time (the sabbaths). The OT prophets expand on Yahweh’s future loyalty and work on behalf of Israel. Leviticus 26 (together with Deuteronomy 27–28) anchors prophetic revelation’s concepts of covenant. House explains that the concepts in these passages provide hope to Israel: “The God who forgave once can surely do so again, as Deuteronomy 30:1-10 indicates.”<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>7</sup>Delbert R. Hillers, *Treaty-Curses and the Old Testament Prophets*, *Biblica et Orientalia* 16 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1964) 78. For a more recent association of Leviticus 26 with the prophets, see Douglas Stuart, *Hosea-Jonah*, WBC (Nashville, Tenn.: Thomas Nelson, 1987) xxxii-xlii.

<sup>8</sup>Meredith G. Kline, *Treaty of the Great King: The Covenant Structure of Deuteronomy: Studies and Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1972) 124.

<sup>9</sup>All Scripture citations are my translation unless otherwise noted.

<sup>10</sup>(1) Debilitation and defeat (Lev 26:16-17), (2) drought (vv. 18-20), (3) devastation by wild beasts (vv. 21-22), (4) deprivation by siege (vv. 23-26), and (5) deportation (vv. 27-38). William D. Barrick, “Leviticus 26: Its Relationship to Covenant Contexts and Concepts” (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, Winona Lake, Ind., 1981) 90.

<sup>11</sup>Paul R. House, *Old Testament Theology* (Downers Grove, Ill.: InterVarsity, 1998) 398.

**Outline of Leviticus 26**

The following outline summarizes the contents of Leviticus 26. The bulk of this study is focused on the third major division regarding penalty (26:14-45), especially the consequence of deportation or exile (vv. 27-38) and the contingency for repentance (vv. 39-45).

- I. Precept (26:1-2)
  - A. Prohibition of Idols (v. 1)
  - B. Preservation of Sabbaths and Sanctuary (v. 2)
    - 1. Sabbath Observance (v. 2a)
    - 2. Sanctuary Reverence (v. 2b)
- II. Promise (26:3-13)
  - A. The Prerequisite: Obedience (v. 3)
  - B. The Product: Blessing (vv. 4-12)
    - 1. Productivity (vv. 4-5)
    - 2. Peace (v. 6)
    - 3. Power (vv. 7-8)
    - 4. Population (v. 9)
    - 5. Provision (v. 10)
    - 6. Presence (vv. 11-12)
  - C. The Premise: Yahweh's Salvation (v. 13)
- III. Penalty (26:14-45)
  - A. The Cause: Disobedience (vv. 14-15)
  - B. The Consequence: Retribution (vv. 16-38)
    - 1. Debilitation and Defeat (vv. 16-17)
    - 2. Drought (vv. 18-20)
    - 3. Devastation by Wild Beasts (vv. 21-22)
    - 4. Deprivation by Siege (vv. 23-26)
    - 5. Deportation (vv. 27-38)
      - a. Introduction (vv. 27-28)
      - b. Dehumanization – Cannibalism (v. 29)
      - c. Desolation (vv. 30-32)
      - d. Dispersion – Exile (v. 33)
      - e. Desertion of the Land (vv. 34-38)
        - (1) The Sabbath Rest (vv. 34-35)
        - (2) The Stricken Remnant (vv. 36-38)
  - C. The Contingency: Repentance (vv. 39-45)
    - 1. Repentance: Israel's Acceptance of Retribution (vv. 39-41)
    - 2. Remembrance: Yahweh's Acceptance of Repentance (v. 42)
    - 3. Repetition: A Summary Concerning Retribution (v. 43)
    - 4. Reaffirmation: Yahweh's Promise to the Exiles (vv. 44-45)

**Examination of Leviticus 26:33-45****Retributive Dispersion/Exile (v. 33)**

Verse 33 sets up a contrast between God's treatment of the land and His

treatment of its population. He announces that He will desolate the land: “but I shall disperse you [pl.] among the nations.” Dispersion (זָרָה, *zārā*) is a subject common to this pericope and to key sections in Ezekiel (e.g., 5:2, 10, 12; 6:8; 12:14, 15; 20:23). “Disperse” (or, “scatter”) is often employed “in agricultural contexts of the winnowing process (e.g., Ruth 3:2; Isa. 30:24; 41:16).”<sup>12</sup> This figure could point to a remnant by implication (cf. Zech 1:18-21 [Heb. 2:1-4] and 13:8-9).<sup>13</sup> At Sinai, Yahweh warned Israel about complacency when they finally took residence in the land. Dispersion was divinely designed to disrupt their complacency.<sup>14</sup> The nation’s apathy toward Yahweh and His covenants would result in God making them landless again. In order to cure their selective amnesia, Yahweh would return them to the bondage from which He had delivered them. Brueggemann’s poignant observation applies here: “It is hard enough for landed people to believe land will be lost. It is harder to imagine Yahweh will do it”<sup>15</sup> (cf. Lev 26:32a, 33a).

The goal of the Abrahamic Covenant was to give an inheritance to the people of the covenant just as Yahweh had promised (cf. Gen 12:7; 13:14-17).<sup>16</sup> Israel’s exile caused a delay in the fulfillment of the Abrahamic promises. Therefore, it could be said that exile itself has eschatological implications, since exile and dispersion indicate that the ultimate fulfillment of the promise is yet future (or, eschatological) in nature.

Yahweh promised that He would “unsheathe the sword behind you [pl.]” (Lev 26:33). In all four OT occurrences of the phrase (here, Ezek 5:2, 12; 12:14), it is preceded by the use of “disperse” and it is always a reference to Israel. “Unsheathe the sword” occurs in three other passages but always in reference to the judgment of a nation outside Israel (Egypt: Exod 15:9, Ezek 30:11; Tyre: Ezek 28:7). In these latter occurrences neither “disperse” nor “behind” are employed.<sup>17</sup> In Lev 26:33 the phrase refers to Yahweh’s dealing with Israel. Emptying (קָוַר) the scabbard (unsheathing a sword) is an act of hostility. Yahweh will unsheathe His sword and position it “behind” Israel, so that they will flee from it and it will block the path of return. Shades of Eden! Just as the flaming sword of the cherubim prevented Adam and Eve’s reentry to Eden (Gen 3:24), so the unsheathed sword of Yahweh will prevent Israel’s reentry to Canaan.

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<sup>12</sup>Ibid., 373.

<sup>13</sup>Gerhard F. Hasel, *The Remnant: The History and Theology of the Remnant Idea from Genesis to Isaiah*, 3rd ed., Andrews University Monographs: Studies in Religion 5 (Berrien Springs, Mich.: Andrews University, 1980) 26, refers to Leviticus 26 in passing while summarizing the viewpoint of Othmar Schilling: “the origin of the prophetic remnant motif is grounded in the sanctions of the law, especially in Lev. 26 and its Deuteronomic parallels.” I would agree with Hasel that the remnant motif is earlier than Leviticus 26, but would argue that the chapter had a significant effect upon the prophetic development of the theology of remnant.

<sup>14</sup>Budd, *Leviticus* 372.

<sup>15</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 113.

<sup>16</sup>Hartley, *Leviticus* 468.

<sup>17</sup>Cf. לוּ in Ezek 28:7 and 30:11, and no preposition in Exod 15:9. The לוּ of both substantives is clearly assonant, drawing attention to the state of the land.

A summary of the effects of deportation comes next in Lev 26:33b: “your land will be for devastation and your cities will become ruins.”<sup>18</sup> This declaration, that Yahweh consigns the land and its cities to a state of devastation, corresponds in its conceptualization and its syntax to the earlier statement (v. 12b) of divine blessing:

12b	wěhāyīti lākem lēlōhim so that I will be your [pl.] God	wě'attem tihēyū-lī lē'am and you yourselves will become my people
33b	wěhāyētā 'aršēkem šēmāmā and your [pl.] land will be for devastation	wě'ārēkem yihēyū hārēbā and your [pl.] cities will become ruins

Deviations from strict correspondence in these two statements are instructive: (1) the possessives “your” and “my” in 12b emphasize mutual identification in the covenant relationship and (2) “And your land shall be” in 33b may be an allusion to Gen 1:2 (wěhā'āreš hāyētā iōhū wābōhū, “and the earth was empty and void”). Such an allusion potentially serves three purposes:

- to remind Israel that Yahweh is historically the Lord, the Creator, of all the earth—not just the Giver of the promised land;
- to emphasize the totality of the dispersion: the land would be without inhabitants; and
- to imply that the dispersion was but the commencement of something new which Yahweh would do.

Allusion to Gen 1:2 is noteworthy for several reasons. First, the re-creation or new creation of the earth is a key eschatological theme in apocalyptic Scripture (cf. Isa 65:17; 2 Pet 3:10-12; Rev 21:1). Eschatologically, judgment precedes emptying or emptiness followed by renewal and restoration (cf. Isaiah 24–26). Eichrodt recognized that “the thought of God’s activity as Creator and Giver in the *bē'rūt* ... with the prophets—and even in P [including Leviticus 26] as well—was definitely primary.”<sup>19</sup> Secondly, Jer 4:23 employs the same predicate adjectives as Gen 1:2 (“empty and void”) to describe the land of Israel following judgment. Thirdly, Israel’s removal from the land or “exile is the way to new life in new land.”<sup>20</sup>

<sup>18</sup>The alternation of the *qatal* (היתה) and *yiqtol* (יהי) of היה is characteristic (cf. 12b).

<sup>19</sup>Walter Eichrodt, *Theology of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., trans. J. A. Baker, OTL (Philadelphia: Westminster, 1961) 1:63. Liberal theologians ascribe the creation narratives to “P.” This cannot be accepted, but their association of the so-called “Priestly” document with the covenant in prophetic literature has some validity. The reason for the association is related to the concept of re-creation in prophetic literature. Cf. Ralph W. Klein, *Israel in Exile: A Theological Interpretation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 125-48.

<sup>20</sup>Brueggemann, *The Land* 122. Cf. Jer 24:4-10.

**The Sabbath Rest (vv. 34-35)**

A careful observation of the two types of clauses in these two verses reveals an elevated prose style:

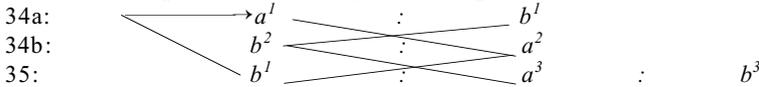
Main clauses (a):

- a<sup>1</sup> *āz tirseh hā'āreš* *'et-šabbēlōteyhā*  
 then the land will enjoy *the restitution of its sabbaths*
- a<sup>2</sup> *āz tišbat hā'āreš wēhiršāt* *'et-šabbēlōteyhā*  
 then the land will rest, yea, it will enjoy *the restitution of its sabbaths*
- a<sup>3</sup> *tišbōt* *'et 'āšer lō 'šābētā bēšabbēlōtekem*  
 it will rest on account of your sabbaths in which it did not rest

Temporal clauses (b):

- b<sup>1</sup> *kōl yēmē hāššammā*  
 all the days of its devastation
- b<sup>2</sup> *wē'atem bē'ereš 'ōyēbēkem*  
*while you are in the land of your enemies*
- b<sup>1</sup> *kōl yēmē hāššammā*  
 all the days of its devastation
- b<sup>3</sup> *bēšibtekem 'āleyhā*  
*while you were dwelling upon it*

A pattern of correspondences and logical development occurs in these verses:



Note, first of all, that the triple chiasm and the repetition of b<sup>1</sup> keep the temporal clauses together in order to emphasize the time factor in these verses—the time of Israel’s exile. Second, the repetition of “sabbath/rest” emphasizes the sabbatical principle. Third, using “land” as the subject of all three main clauses emphasizes the centrality of the land and its relationship to the sovereign decrees of Yahweh. Last, the juxtaposition of “enjoy” and “rest” demonstrates their theological equivalence. Verse 34b is transitional, employing the epexegetical *waw* to join these two terms in the middle member of the construction.

The initial “then” (אז, āz) of v. 34 sets that verse apart from the preceding context. It serves, as it does sometimes in poetry, “to throw emphasis on a particular feature of the description.”<sup>21</sup> The emphasis is on the land’s enjoyment (הרצה, rāṣāh). הרצה may be translated either “enjoy”<sup>22</sup> or “make or obtain restitution”<sup>23</sup> in this context. “Making restitution” could imply that the land shares in the guilt of Israel’s failure to observe the sabbatical years. This is unlikely since the context appears to make “enjoyment” practically equivalent to “rest.” The more positive concept of

<sup>21</sup>Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. A. Briggs, eds., *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (reprint, Oxford: Clarendon, 1968) 23. Hereafter cited as BDB.

<sup>22</sup>Cf. ASV, ESV, NASB, NIV, NRSV, Septuagint, Targum Onqelos, Syriac, Latin.

<sup>23</sup>Cf. BDB, 953 (the land makes the restitution); Ludwig Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, eds., *Lexicon in Veteris Testamentum Libros*, 2d ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1958) 906 (Qal = “obtain restitution,” Hiphil = “make restitution”); Karl Elliger, *Leviticus*, HAT 1/4 (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1966) 377; NASB margin: “make restitution,” “satisfy.”

“obtaining restitution” might indicate the basis for the land being able to enjoy rest. The land might be depicted as being “pleased” at receiving “its due portion.”<sup>24</sup> The “due portion” is defined as “its Sabbaths” which the land will enjoy “all the days of its devastation” (v. 35). Devastation will bring about a forced sabbatical rest—a rest the land had been denied under Israel’s plows:

Then the land shall enjoy *the restitution of*<sup>25</sup> its sabbaths all the days of its devastation while you are in the land of your enemies. Then the land shall rest; yea, it shall enjoy *the restitution of*<sup>26</sup> its sabbaths. It shall rest all the days of its devastation on account of your sabbaths in which it did not rest while you were residing upon it. (vv. 34-35)

The expulsion of Israel was necessitated by their defilement of the land.<sup>27</sup> Leviticus focuses on Israel’s unholy and impure condition as the primary factor leading to her ultimate collapse and deportation. Leviticus shares this viewpoint with Deuteronomy, Jeremiah, and Ezekiel.<sup>28</sup> In Leviticus 26, Moses identifies idolatry and violation of the sabbath (vv. 2, 34-35) as the key areas of disobedience. Of these two, the sabbatical issue receives the greater emphasis in the context. Second Chronicles 36:20-21 makes the same observation:

The remnant *surviving* the sword were deported to Babylon so that they became servants for him [the king of Babylon] and for his sons until the ascendancy of the kingdom of Persia, so that the word of Yahweh through Jeremiah might be fulfilled until the land enjoyed *the restitution of* (רצרה) its sabbaths. All the days of its devastation it rested, so that seventy years might be completed.

The Chronicler associates the chronological extent of the exile (70 years) with the theological nature of the exile (the enjoyment of restitution for non-observed sabbatical periods). Any attempt to account for exactly 70 years of violated sabbatical years and/or jubilees would be an exercise in futility. The Scripture is silent about such figuring and there are too many unknown factors<sup>29</sup> to make an exact accounting feasible.

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<sup>24</sup>“Ihm gebührenden Anteil annehmen”—G. Gerleman, “רצרה,” *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1976) 2:811.

<sup>25</sup>The italicized words are supplied in order to bring out the full scope of רצרה (Qal *yaqtol* here).

<sup>26</sup>רצרה, Qal *qatal*. The alternation of the *qatal* and *yaqtol* forms of רצרה is characteristic of the elevated style of the pericope.

<sup>27</sup>Cf. Hans Eberhard von Waldow, “Israel and Her Land: Some Theological Considerations,” in *A Light Unto My Path: Old Testament Studies in Honor of Jacob M. Myers*, ed. Howard N. Bream et al. (Philadelphia: Temple University, 1974) 506.

<sup>28</sup>Jacob Milgrom, “Leviticus, Book of,” *Encyclopedia Judaica*, ed. Cecil Roth (Jerusalem: Keter, 1971) 11:147.

<sup>29</sup>E.g., the number of times Israel was obedient in sabbatical observances and the exact dates for the Babylonian exile itself.



include perishing (אָבד, cf. Deut 28:22, 63), being devoured (אָכַל, cf. Num 13:32 and Ezek 36:13-14 where land is the devourer), the nations, and the land of the enemies. The reference to devouring in Lev 26:38b does not refer to the land of Canaan, to the infertility of Israel's land (due to devastation),<sup>36</sup> nor to wars, depopulation, drought, famine, or the chastisements of Yahweh.<sup>37</sup> The context refers to physical destruction so clearly that the concept of spiritual stumbling (becoming entangled in sins)<sup>38</sup> also must be ruled out. "Falling under the pressure of the circumstances in which they were placed"<sup>39</sup> is too vague. It means that the exiles will *vanish*. They will be taken from the land Yahweh had given to them, enter their enemies' land(s), and not return. They will die and be decimated in a strange land (cf. Amos 7:17). When Yahweh brought them out of exile, they would be fewer in number than when they went into captivity.<sup>40</sup> This exile will be unlike the Egyptian bondage in which the nation multiplied greatly (cf. Exod 1:7). God sets aside the blessings of the Abrahamic Covenant during Israel's exile:

- Rather than possessing the land (Gen 12:1; 15:7, 18-21; 17:8), Israel will be dispossessed from the land (Lev 26:33-38).
- National greatness (Gen 12:2) will be turned into humiliation, inferiority, and insignificance (Lev 26:29, 32, 36-37; Deut 28:43-44).
- Blessing (Gen 12:2; 22:17) will turn to cursing (Lev 26:14-38; Deut 28:15-68).
- Instead of being a blessing (Gen 12:2-3; 22:18), Israel will become a curse (Lev 26:32, 36-37a; Deut 28:25, 37).
- Multiplication (Gen 12:2; 15:5; 17:4-6; 22:17) will be replaced by diminution (Lev 26:22, 29, 38; Deut 28:18, 20-22, 53-57, 62).
- Success over Israel's enemies (Gen 22:17) will turn to defeat at the hand of their enemies (Lev 26:16-17, 32, 36-38; Deut 28:25, 31, 48, 52, 68).

Promise will be turned to privation. Covenant vengeance consists of the removal of all privileges and protection together with all attendant prosperity.

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<sup>36</sup>Cf. Gray, *Numbers* 151.

<sup>37</sup>Charles Lee Feinberg, *The Prophecy of Ezekiel: The Glory of the Lord* (Chicago: Moody, 1969) 207.

<sup>38</sup>Cf. Carl Friedrich Keil, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Ezekiel*, 2 vols., trans. James Martin, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 2:104-5.

<sup>39</sup>Carl Friedrich Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, 3 vols., trans. James Martin, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1971) 2:477.

<sup>40</sup>Resolving problems concerning the numbers of captives taken from the land (cf. 2 Kgs 24:16; Jer 52:28-30) and the numbers of the returnees (cf. Ezra 2:64-65; Neh 7:66-67) must take into account the concept of remnant (cf. Ezra 1:4; Neh 1:2; Hag 2:3), the necessity of multiplication in exile to survive (cf. Jer 29:6), census figures focused on males (cf. 2 Kgs 24:16; Jer 52:28-30), and later deportations of over 100,000 left in the land (cf. R. K. Harrison, *Old Testament Times* [Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1970] 256; C. F. Keil, *The Prophecies of Jeremiah*, 2 vols., trans. James Kennedy, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* [reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968] 2:330-31).

### The Contingency: Repentance (vv. 39-45)

Divine retribution's ultimate goal, according to vv. 39-45, is the repentance of Yahweh's covenant people (vv. 39-41). When they repent, Yahweh will reinstate or reactivate the Abrahamic Covenant's blessings. Israel must first understand her relationship to the land, observe the sabbatical principle, and confess her guilt (vv. 42-43). Thus, Yahweh, Lord of the covenant, may restore the land and the people to a right relationship with Himself. Above all else, it must be remembered that Yahweh's covenant promise is sure. He reveals His commitment to restore His people in order to reassure them (vv. 44-45). Yahweh remains loyal to His covenant—even when His covenant people are disloyal.<sup>41</sup>

**Repentance: Israel's acceptance of retribution (vv. 39-41).** The same accusative absolute employed in v. 36 is repeated here: "*As for* those who are left *from* among you [pl.]."<sup>42</sup> The text emphasizes the languishing<sup>43</sup> suffered by the guilt-ridden Israelites. This will be their condition in exile. Ezekiel best describes both the resulting cry of the people and Yahweh's response:

Now you, O son of man, you say to the house of Israel: "Thus you speak: 'Our transgressions and our sins *are* upon us so that we are languishing in them. Therefore, how will we live?'" Say to them: "'*As surely as I live,*' declares Lord Yahweh, 'I do not delight in the death of the wicked, but rather in the turning [or, repenting] of the wicked from his way so that he lives. Turn [or, Repent]! Turn from [or, Repent of] your ways, O wicked ones! Yea, why will you die, O house of Israel?'" (Ezek 33:10-11)<sup>44</sup>

While in exile, the disobedient nation will suffer terribly. The remnant of Israel "will languish because of their guilt in the lands" of their enemies (Lev 26:39a). "Yea, they also will languish because of the guilt<sup>45</sup> of their fathers *which*<sup>46</sup> *will be*<sup>47</sup> with them" (v. 39b). By moving the verb ("languish") from the first word in the first clause (39a) to the last word in the second clause (39b), an *inclusio* is formed that emphasizes the concept of languishing. As Budd puts it, "They will ... fester and

<sup>41</sup>Cf. a similar concept in 2 Tim 2:13.

<sup>42</sup>In v. 36 והנשארים ("those who remained") is an accusative absolute serving to isolate and give marked prominence to the object of the sentence. Cf. E. Kautzsch, ed., *Gesenius' Hebrew Grammar*, 2d Eng. ed., trans. and rev. A. E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon, 1920) §143c; hereafter, "GKC."

<sup>43</sup>"Many will perish in a foreign land. Others will מִקַּק, 'languish away,' slowly in the land of their enemies. מִקַּק means 'fester' of wounds (Ps 38:6[5]). The noun of this root מִקַּק means 'rot' (Isa 3:24; 5:24; BDB 596-97). In Zech 14:12 it describes the wasting away of the body, the flesh, the eyes, and the tongue. Here it pictures the slow but steady erosion of people's lives as they eke out a miserable existence in a foreign land (cf. Ezek 4:17; 24:23; 33:10)"—Hartley, *Leviticus*, 468.

<sup>44</sup>The association of מִקַּק with עָנָן is a feature shared by both Leviticus (5:1, 17; 7:18; 10:17; 19:8; 20:17, 19; 22:16; 26:41, 43) and Ezekiel (4:17; 24:23; 33:10). Cf. Budd, *Leviticus* 374.

<sup>45</sup>Plural of intensity.

<sup>46</sup>I.e., the guilt. Cf. Keil and Delitzsch, *Pentateuch* 2:477. The third masculine plural is in agreement with the plural of בעונת which is irregular and takes a feminine ending in the plural.

<sup>47</sup>Supplied in agreement with the time element of the main verb in the context.

decay as a generation, just as their fathers did.”<sup>48</sup> In 39b the adverbial phrases positioned before the verbs draw attention to themselves: “because of their fathers’ guilt ... with them.”

Rashi’s explanation for this concept is that “it means that the guilt of their fathers will be with them as those who are holding fast to the practice of their fathers.”<sup>49</sup> Corporate guilt was so rigidly maintained in pre-exilic Israel that individual responsibility often was ignored. During the Babylonian exile Yahweh reminded Israel that He was concerned more with the individual’s guilt (Ezekiel 18). Although their ancestral guilt had contributed to the reality of exile, Lev 26:39a establishes that Israel will be subject to its own current guilt. In other words, the generation of Israelites facing the day of retribution is also guilty. This may not identify the individual *per se*, but it does distinguish the guilt of separate generations. This same principle of distinguishing guilt also applies to the concept of individual guilt.

In Ezekiel’s and Moses’ days, the solution was repentance (שוב, Ezek 33:11) and confession (ידה Hitpa’el, Lev 26:40a) of personal and corporate guilt: “If<sup>50</sup> they confess their guilt and the guilt of their fathers” (v. 40a). The order is significant. Even though corporate guilt had brought about their languishing under the “specter of an irreversible destiny,”<sup>51</sup> Yahweh replies that personal guilt requires attention first. The now-generation’s guilt, as opposed to the past-generation’s guilt, must be admitted if the repentance is to be genuine.

Corporate guilt ceases to be a problem to the individual who has confessed his own guilt. Corporate guilt is not a straight-jacket or a bottomless pit. Escape from it is the same as for personal guilt: repentance. It is not a destiny. It is a lesson in the history of the faith (or, lack of faith). The covenant not only brings blessing to Abraham’s descendants, it can also bring cursing, depending on each generation’s personal obedience or disobedience. Each generation has the same opportunity to rid itself of a sordid history of disloyalty. Each has the opportunity to be personally loyal to the Lord of the covenant.

A parenthesis from vv. 40b through 41b serves to explain the nature of the guilt and the reason for the nation thus burdened: “because of their being unfaithful to me<sup>52</sup> and also because they walked in opposition to me, I also walked in opposition to them and I brought them into the land of their enemies.” The only new

<sup>48</sup>Budd, *Leviticus* 374.

<sup>49</sup>חומש כולל חמשה חומשי תורה באותיות גדולות מאד (New York: Hebrew Publishing Co., n.d.) 141: כשעונות אבותם אתם כשאורחים מעשה אבותיהם בידיהם.

<sup>50</sup>Cf. GKC, 337 (§112*kk-ll*), 494 (§159*g*).

<sup>51</sup>A. B. Davidson, *The Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. S. D. F. Salmond, International Theological Library (reprint, Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1961) 222. Cf. Davidson’s full discussion, 217-27.

<sup>52</sup>במעלם אשר מעלררבי: This construction is a cognate accusative with an internal object (cf. GKC, 366-67 [§117*p-q*]). There is no retrospective pronominal suffix and אשר introduces the relative clause acting as an attribute for the preceding noun. The expression could be rendered, “being treasonously unfaithful.”

terminology or concept presented in this parenthesis is “being unfaithful.”<sup>53</sup> Elsewhere it describes Achan’s sacrilege (Josh 7:1; cf. 22:20) and the breach of vows (oaths or covenants; cf. Ezek 17:20; Num 5:12). Lev 26:40b deals with covenant treason (breach of covenant).<sup>54</sup> The contexts of Ezek 14:13, 15:8, 20:27, and Dan 9:7 are similar to Leviticus 26 in both contents and concepts.<sup>55</sup>

The protasis (“if they confess”) begun in v. 40a is resumed by means of a dual particle construction containing the conditional “if/whether” together with the temporal “then”: “If then (וְאִם) their uncircumcised heart is humbled and then (וְאִם) they make restitution (וְרָצוּ) for their guilt” (v. 41cd). The temporal reference comes *after* the exile and *at the time of* their confession of guilt. This is the result of Yahweh working in their heart (cf. v. 36a) while they are in exile. Exile will strip the nation of all pretense of being spiritual. Exile will be the irrefutable evidence that they were displeasing to Yahweh. Kline explains it as follows:

The covenant Lord demands heart-consecration which reflected the fulfillment of the consecration sworn in the circumcision oath. Circumcision is an oath-rite. To be uncircumcised would be to place oneself outside the juridical authority of Yahweh and a refusal to consign oneself to the ordeal of the Lord’s judgment for the final verdict on one’s life—eternal weal or woe.<sup>56</sup>

God depicts Israel’s spiritual condition, while living in exile among uncircumcised nations, as an uncircumcised heart (cf. Jer 9:25; Ezek 44:6-9; see also Jer 4:4). He was, in effect, declaring to the nation: “If you want to live like the uncovenanted nations, then live among them!” Exile is a fitting and just punishment.

The confession of guilt (v. 40a) must be sincere. There is no room for pride. The humbling of the nation means that they will no longer be self-reliant, but rather, trusting Yahweh. “Humble” (וָנָנָה, *qāna*, v. 41c) occurs 36 times in the OT (19 of which are in Chronicles). In the spiritual sense (rather than the political or physical) it is used only 18 times (14 in Chronicles, 3 in Kings, and Lev 26:41c)<sup>57</sup> and always in a context of an invasion of the land by Israel’s enemies. Such invasions were in all cases Israel’s chastisement for sinful pride or idolatry. The nations, therefore, will be the instrument of humiliation for disobedient Israel.

The last phrase of v. 41 is the most difficult theologically. The phrase “make restitution for guilt” (וְרָצוּ אֶת־עֲוֹנֵיהֶם) occurs only three times in the OT (here, v. 43, and Isa 40:2). Wenham interprets the phrase in Lev 26:41 as meaning that Israel would “accept (the punishment for) the guilt.”<sup>58</sup> On the same verse Keil and

<sup>53</sup>מַעַל, meaning to “act unfaithfully.”

<sup>54</sup>Walther Zimmerli, *Ezekiel 1: A Commentary on the Book of the Prophet Ezekiel, Chapters 1–24*, trans. Ronald E. Clements, Hermeneia (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1979) 366.

<sup>55</sup>Cf. Dan 9:4-5 (confession, covenant, commandments, guilt, unfaithfulness), 11-14 (Deuteronomic Covenant), 15 (exodus history = covenant formula), 16 (guilt of the fathers).

<sup>56</sup>Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 47-48.

<sup>57</sup>Cf. Elliger, *Leviticus* 378 n. 72.

<sup>58</sup>Wenham, *Leviticus* 332 n. 12.

Delitzsch say that Israel “will take pleasure, rejoice in their misdeeds, *i.e.* in the consequences and results of them.”<sup>59</sup> In other words, Israel will rejoice that God is just in awarding what they deserved. However, Delitzsch elsewhere (*viz.*, Isa 40:2) distinguishes between “a satisfactory reception” and “a satisfactory payment.”<sup>60</sup> He interprets Isa 40:2 in the latter sense. Edward J. Young takes the phrase in Isa 40:2 as a reference to the acceptance of “a sacrifice sufficient to atone for the iniquity.”<sup>61</sup> He further indicates that such a sacrifice is “more fully revealed in the fifty-third chapter of the book.”<sup>62</sup>

Young’s view, therefore, is messianic and soteriological in scope, indicating that the only acceptable restitution for guilt must be made by God Himself in the person of Christ. Redemption or freedom from guilt is not the work of Israel, it is the work of Yahweh (*cf.* Isa 43:22-28).<sup>63</sup> However, “make restitution for guilt” is not a statement of *soteriological redemption*. It is a statement of *federal (or, natural) consequence*. The individual must exhibit a conversion or repentance that exhibits turning away from sin.<sup>64</sup> Conversion focuses “on concrete commands, prescriptions, and rights, contempt for which had called down all the disasters of the past, and the strict observances of which was therefore essential in order to prove the seriousness of the new change.”<sup>65</sup>

Making restitution for guilt, therefore, is “an *evidence* of repentance and expiation,”<sup>66</sup> not the *cause*. Evidence of true repentance also involves the acceptance of the consequences of sin, which are not removed immediately since “conversion and the necessity of continuing to bear God’s punishment are not mutually exclusive.”<sup>67</sup> For example, natural (or federal) consequences were involved in the case of Rehoboam’s servitude to Shishak (2 Chr 12:1-12). The leaders of Israel “humbled themselves” (as in Lev 26:41c) and Yahweh granted them a stay of full execution, but left the nation in subjection to Shishak to teach the converted leaders the seriousness of disobedience and the pleasantness of walking in obedience (*vv.* 6-8, 12). Exile’s impact will linger on. No matter when Israel’s repentance takes

<sup>59</sup>Keil and Delitzsch, *Pentateuch* 2:478.

<sup>60</sup>Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Prophecies of Isaiah*, 3 vols., trans. James Martin, in *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament* (reprint, Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1967) 2:140.

<sup>61</sup>Edward J. Young, *The Book of Isaiah*, 3 vols., NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1965-72) 3:23.

<sup>62</sup>*Ibid.*; *cf.* Delitzsch, *Isaiah* 2:129.

<sup>63</sup>Walther Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline*, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta, Ga.: John Knox, 1978) 217.

<sup>64</sup>*Cp.* the concept of works as the evidence of faith in the epistle of James in the NT. The manifestation of conversion ought not to be limited to active participation in “good works.” It must also involve passive acceptance of the righteous will of God regarding the effects of past sin.

<sup>65</sup>Eichrodt, *Theology* 2:470.

<sup>66</sup>G. Gerleman, “רצרה,” *Theologisches Handwörterbuch zum Alten Testament*, 2 vols., ed. Ernst Jenni and Claus Westermann (München: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1971, 1976) 2:811, “Zeichen der Reue und Busse.” [emphasis added in translation]

<sup>67</sup>Eichrodt, *Theology* 2:471. Punishment, in this sense, is not the mediate effect, but the immediate effect of the sin. Similarly, the NT believer, though forgiven by Christ, still must die physically. His spiritual (second) death, however, is completely removed.



fashion.<sup>72</sup> It probably presents a backward look to the original promise to Abraham. Thus Moses confronts Israel with her historical foundation and her covenant relationship to Yahweh. (5) The apodosis concludes with 42d. It substitutes “the land” for “my covenant,” since the central promise of the covenant was the land. It also utilizes the juxtaposition of these two terms since they are the only truly significant concepts in this context. The patriarchs are not the center of attention. The land, as given by Yahweh, is the focus of the verse. God gave that land by means of the Abrahamic Covenant. (6) Verse 42d duplicates the imperfect of *zākar* at the end of the line (cf. 42c) to maintain the continuity of thought between 42abc and 42d. Therefore, 42d is a concise summary of 42abc.

**Repetition: a summary concerning retribution (v. 43).** Retribution is not primarily reformatory, curative, or preventative in nature. Retribution is primarily revelatory. The just punishment of the sinner, or covenant breaker, reveals the holiness and righteousness of Yahweh. Verse 43 emphasizes the reason for retribution involving the land and people of Israel:

Nevertheless,<sup>73</sup> the land must be forsaken by them, so that it might enjoy the restitution (רצה) of its sabbaths during its desolation without them. However, they themselves must make restitution (רצה) for their guilt *simply* because<sup>74</sup> they rejected my ordinances and they inwardly [deeply?] despised my statutes.

The structure of verse 43 (together with the preceding line, 42b) may be represented in the following fashion:<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>72</sup>Cf. Rashi; H. Freedman and Maurice Simon, eds., *Leviticus*, in *Midrash Rabba*, trans. Judah J. Slotki (London: Soncino, 1961) 4:462 (includes fanciful explanations for many aspects of v. 42).

<sup>73</sup>The disjunctive *waw* is employed here with the emphasized subject, using the preceding והארץ (42d) as a springboard.

<sup>74</sup>יען וביען—cf. Paul Joüon, *Grammaire de l'Hébreu Biblique* (Rome: Institut Biblique Pontifical, 1965) 523 (§170f n. 1). This phrase occurs only here, Ezek 13:10, and 36:3. יען occurs in Ezek 20:16, 24, with a similar context. Its use is emphatic; cf. GKC, §158b.

<sup>75</sup>Some of the correspondences are conceptual, but most involve assonance which can be observed only in the Hebrew. The English translation cannot convey all the nuances (especially in the interlinear format).

(1cs)			אזכר: I shall remember ↓	והארץ and the land	-42d
(3fs)	מהם by them		תעזב shall be forsaken	והארץ and the land	-43a
	מהם without them *	את־שבתתיה בהשמה its sabbaths during its desolation		ותרץ and it shall enjoy	-43b
(3mp)			אתעונום for their guilt	ירצו shall make restitu- tion	והם and they *
		במשפטי מאסו they rejected my ordinances	יען וביען simply because		-43d
	נפשם: their soul	ואתחקתי געלה and despised my statutes			-43e

Note, first of all, that assonance involving רצ (*rs*) in the first member of the first four lines emphasizes the object of retribution and restoration: the land (*hā'āres*). Likewise, the phonetic repetition of *guttural* + ז (אזכר) and (תעזב) serves to heighten the correspondence between the opposites “remember” (זכר) and “forsake” (עזב). What Yahweh will remember, Israel will forsake. Secondly, the repetition of pronouns in “by them ... without them ... and they” binds the first three lines of v. 43 together. Just as vv. 42d and 43a began the same (“and the land”), so 43a and 43b end the same (“by them” and “without them”). Then v. 43c picks up the last concept of 43b (with “and they”) to maintain the continuity. The logical progression is noteworthy:

forsaken **by them** ⇒ enjoyed restitution **without them**  
 ⇒ nevertheless, **they** must make restitution

In vv. 43b and 43c the initial verb is רצה (*rāḥ*), continuing the assonance of vv. 42d and 43a and highlighting the concept of restitution in 43bc. In v. 43de

“They rejected my ordinances and their soul despised my statutes”<sup>76</sup> repeats in reverse order the same phrases found in v. 15, “and if they reject my statutes and their soul despises my ordinances.”<sup>77</sup> It is significant that both verbs in 43de are *qatal* even though they are preceded by their objects.<sup>78</sup> Departure from the usual syntax of the pericope must be for the purpose of bringing the concepts forcefully to the mind of the reader. Disobedience is the true and emphatic cause for the need of restitution. There is no question regarding Israel’s guilt or the necessity of restitution.

Verse 43 presents a negative picture in contrast to verse 42. The jussives (v. 43abc) provide an element of anticipation and decree. Yahweh will initiate *Operation Restitution* on the basis of His covenant with Abraham. The Mosaic Covenant will have a role by means of its sabbatical stipulations. For its part, the Abrahamic Covenant promised a land and a seed to inherit that land. On the other hand, the Mosaic Covenant promised a nation with a special relationship to Yahweh (Exod 19:5-6). Just as God instituted circumcision as the seal of the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 17:9-14), so He made the sabbaths the seal of the Mosaic Covenant (cf. Exod 20:8-11; Lev 25; 26:2; Neh 10:28-31; Isa 58:1-14). The emphasis on *land* in Leviticus 26 belongs to the sphere of the Abrahamic Covenant, while the emphasis on *sabbatical restitution* belongs to the sphere of the Mosaic Covenant.<sup>79</sup>

### Eschatological Significance

#### Covenant

“Covenant” (*bĕrît*) is employed eight times in Leviticus 26 (vv. 9, 15, 25, 42 *ter*, 44, 45). It always denotes a binding relationship between Yahweh and His people Israel. This relationship provided Israel with a life which had a goal and with a history that had meaning. In this pericope, “covenant” promotes the concept of the sovereignty of Yahweh, the Covenant-Giver. In six of the eight uses of the term, “my” is attached (vv. 9, 15, 42 *ter*, 44). Yahweh Himself is always the antecedent, which implies the unilateral nature of the covenants. Yahweh Himself established the covenants, and He alone. Yahweh’s personal intervention in the history of Israel is a central theme of the covenants. Such intervention is not limited to the past; it has its place eschatologically. His lordship is personal and absolute. The covenant demands that Israel surrender unconditionally to the will of God. Loyalty to the covenant must be more than outward acquiescence, it must be an inward reality. As Kline points out, the “uncircumcised heart” (v. 41) is the antithesis of such loyalty:

<sup>76</sup> *bĕmšpāṭay mā ʾāsū wĕ ʿet-ḥuqqōṭay gā ʾalā nāp̄sām.*

<sup>77</sup> *wĕ ʾim-bĕḥuqqōṭay timē ʾāsū wĕ ʾim ʿet-mšpāṭay tigē ʾal nāp̄šēkem.*

<sup>78</sup> This is the only such example occurring in Leviticus regarding “statute” (חקה) and its verbs. The same observation holds for “ordinance” (משפט) and its verbs. Normally, when the noun precedes its verb, the *yiqtol* is employed; and when it follows its verb, the *qatal* is utilized (Lev 18:4, 5, 26; 19:37; 20:22; 25:18; 26:15). The only exception is 26:43.

<sup>79</sup> Onqelos evidently interpreted the retribution of v. 43 in the light of the blessings and cursings of the Deuteronomic covenant, since he substituted the following phrase for יען וביען חלף (“there are cursings instead of blessings distinguished against them”).

The covenant Lord demands heart-consecration which reflects the fulfillment of the consecration sworn in the circumcision oath. Circumcision is an oath-rite. To be uncircumcised would be to place oneself outside the juridical authority of Yahweh and a refusal to consign oneself to the ordeal of the Lord's judgment for the final verdict on one's life—eternal weal or woe.<sup>80</sup>

Since the ultimate salvation of Israel is yet future (cf. Romans 9–11), the covenant has eschatological implications.

**The Abrahamic Covenant.** Yahweh's covenant with Abraham appears to underlie the references to "covenant" in vv. 9, 42, and 44. A fruitful population echoes the theme of Gen 17:6, 7, 19, and 21 (cf. also Exod 6:4 and Deut 8:18). Verse 9 demonstrates the distinctions made within the passage concerning the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. The text characterizes the Abrahamic Covenant by the following elements:

- (1) the theme of promise,
- (2) emphasis on divine fulfillment, and
- (3) references to land, prosperity, and blessing and/or cursing.

On the other hand, it characterizes the Mosaic Covenant by:

- (1) the theme of law,
- (2) emphasis on human responsibility, and
- (3) references to sabbath, sanctuary, and divine sovereignty.

Although v. 9 is in the midst of Mosaic Covenant material, it displays Abrahamic vocabulary, phraseology, and theme. Its message is pertinent to that brief span of time immediately following the revelation of the Mosaic Covenant at Mt. Sinai. In effect, the point is that the revelation concerning law is equal in authority to the older revelation concerning promise. In order to receive the Abrahamic Covenant's promised blessings, Israel must obey the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant. In other words, the Mosaic Covenant would be the program by which Israelites might demonstrate their faith by faith's works (cf. Jas 2:14-26). Yahweh Himself will respond to Israel's repentance when it occurs. When Israel repents and turns back to Yahweh, the Abrahamic Covenant will be reconfirmed or renewed.

The blessings recited in Lev 26:4-12 are, at least in part, a fulfillment of the covenant made with Abraham. Those blessings fall into six categories:

- (1) productivity (vv. 4-5; cf. Gen 24:35; 27:28; 30:43)
- (2) peace (v. 6; cf. Gen 22:17)
- (3) power (vv. 7-8; cf. Gen 22:17)
- (4) population (v. 9; cf. Gen 12:2; 15:5; 17:6)
- (5) provision (v. 10; cf. productivity, above), and
- (6) presence (vv. 11-12; cf. Gen 17:7, 8).

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<sup>80</sup>Kline, *By Oath Consigned* 47-48.

Scripture associates all these blessings with the land that Israel is to receive from Yahweh. They are consistent with various statements and restatements of the Abrahamic Covenant. On the other hand, the covenant curses of Lev 26:14-38 are, at least in part, a removal of the Abrahamic blessings.

The Abrahamic Covenant was the basis for Yahweh's historical extraction of Israel from Egypt (cf. Gen 15:13, 14). While the nation resided at Mt. Sinai, they would remember that covenant as part of their theological heritage. They experienced the beginning of the historical fulfillment of its promises.

The Abrahamic Covenant demonstrated that Israel's national identity is not of their own making. That covenant provided them with the hope of landedness at a time when they were landless. Leviticus 26:1-13 reveals to Israel that the covenant given at Mt. Sinai did not nullify the Abrahamic Covenant. The central concept of the Abrahamic Covenant is the land of promise (v. 42). The Mosaic Covenant will not conflict with the landedness promised long before.

Even the phraseology of covenant disloyalty ("uncircumcised heart," v. 41) reflects the impact of the Abrahamic Covenant on the theology and life of Israel. Circumcision is the outward manifestation of inward commitment to the Abrahamic Covenant (Gen 17:9-14). Personal commitment and accountability are implicit even in the unilateral pact that Yahweh made with Abraham while the latter was in a deep sleep (15:12-21). Divine sovereignty and human responsibility are not opposing concepts in the biblical covenants. Indeed, it is because Yahweh is Lord that the human vassal must obey Him. Human accountability would be nonexistent (at least, nonbinding) if it were not for the divine character. Yahweh's lordship, as revealed in His covenant with Abraham, is not altered by subsequent covenants. Since the sovereignty of God is not altered, neither are the promises of His covenant altered or nullified (cf. Gal 3:17).

The continuity of the Abrahamic Covenant throughout the OT in deliverance contexts illustrates the eschatological implication of its presence in Leviticus 26. Arnold Fruchtenbaum indicates that this covenant ties together the prophetic pronouncements concerning Israel's redemption.<sup>81</sup>

**The Mosaic (Sinaitic) Covenant.** Leviticus 26 directs attention to the Mosaic Covenant by the prominence of its immediate historical context at Sinai and the legal nature of some of the terms used in the chapter ("statutes, commandments," v. 3; "commandments, statutes, ordinances," vv. 14-15; "statutes, ordinances, laws," v. 46). The precepts of vv. 1-2 have the Mosaic Covenant in view:

- prohibition of idols
- observance of sabbaths, and
- reverence for the sanctuary.

Verses 15, 45, and 46 remove any remaining doubt. Their legal emphasis sets the stage for covenant vengeance in v. 25. It also promotes the sense of Yahweh's

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<sup>81</sup>Arnold G. Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology: The Missing Link in Systematic Theology*, rev. ed. (Tustin, Calif.: Ariel Ministries, 1993) 577-81.

lordship which is already present in the Abrahamic Covenant. The covenant at Sinai is based upon the historical deliverance of Israel from Egypt. That deliverance is in accord with the prior covenant (vv. 13, 45). It is intended to identify more narrowly the people of Yahweh. This refined definition of the people of promise supplements the Abrahamic Covenant's identification of the land of promise. Just as the outward seal/sign of the Abrahamic Covenant is circumcision, so the seal/sign of the Mosaic Covenant is sabbath-keeping (cf. Lev 25; 26:2, 34-35, 43). The seal/sign of each covenant affects the realm of the other covenant: the covenant of the land (Abrahamic) relates directly to the people by circumcision, and the covenant of the people (Mosaic) relates directly to the land by the sabbaths.<sup>82</sup> Thus the two aspects of these covenants (the land and the people) are bound together. The land is for the people, and the people for the land.

Legislation connected with the Mosaic Covenant encourages a serious mindset regarding submission to the divine overlord. It also produces humility with reference to the unworthiness of Israel to be the chosen people of God (cf. Deut 7:6-11). Right behavior by the people of Yahweh is the means of witnessing to the nations. By such behavior Israel participates in the testimony that Yahweh Himself initiated by means of their miraculous deliverance from Egypt (cf. Lev 26:45). The legislation marks Israel as the people belonging to Yahweh, the Exodus-Causer.

Disobedience to the absolute sovereign of Israel's history also results in the removal of covenant blessings associated with the Mosaic Covenant. The following aspects of the Mosaic Covenant will be rendered inoperable by exile:

- (1) Though previously a people above all the nations (Exod 19:5; Deut 26:18-19), Yahweh will abhor Israel and treat her as the tail of all the nations (Lev 26:30; Deut 28:43-44). The future "times of the Gentiles" (Luke 21:24; Rom 11:25) reflect this curse.<sup>83</sup>
- (2) The kingdom of priests (Exod 19:6) will become ceremonially unclean and their sacrifices unacceptable (Lev 26:31).
- (3) The holy nation of Israel (Exod 19:6) will be burdened with guilt (Lev 26:39) and characterized by a heathenlike uncircumcised heart (v. 41).
- (4) Israel's history of national deliverance (Exod 19:4) will turn into a history of national exile (Lev 26:33, 38).

Sinai was but the commencement of the relationship between God and Israel. God and the nation must identify with each other if the wilderness years are to lead to the promised land. The apostasies of Sinai<sup>84</sup> only serve to remind the nation why

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<sup>82</sup>A distinction between a covenant of the land and a covenant of the people should not be pressed to an extreme. The Abrahamic Covenant also identified the people of promise, referring to them as the descendants of Abraham. It became clear, however, that some of the descendants of Abraham (through Ishmael) would not be the people of promise. The Mosaic Covenant clarified the situation regarding the identification of the covenant people.

<sup>83</sup>Wenham, *Leviticus* 333.

<sup>84</sup>The golden calf incident provoked the public shattering of the covenant tablets (Exod 32:19). About 3,000 died that day (v. 28). Two priests, sons of Aaron, also died at Sinai when they did not follow divine instructions concerning service at the altar (Lev 10:1-2). Later, a man was executed because of his blasphemous appropriation of the name of God (24:10-23).

Yahweh gave them legislation. They need standards in order to avoid chaos and anarchy. The nation must be prepared for their inheritance, the land. Instruction (the primary concept of *Tôrâh*, v. 46) is the means of preparation. Leviticus instructional 26's focus is on identification with the covenant deity/suzerain, Yahweh (cf. v. 45).

**The Deuteronomic Covenant.**<sup>85</sup> Many parallels between Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27–30 present the reader with a problem of relationship. How is the Deuteronomic Covenant related to Leviticus 26? The similarities of structure (blessing and cursing), the revelation of ultimate chastisement for breach of covenant (exile preceded by siege, deteriorating into cannibalism), and a time subsequent to the impartation of the Mosaic Covenant all demonstrate a relationship in content. However, similarity is not identity. No third covenant is ratified in Leviticus 26. No third covenant is described in terms of a relationship to the past covenant (Abrahamic) and the present covenant (Mosaic). The connotation of a future covenant may be present, but the recipients of Leviticus 26 might not have associated that future covenant with Deuteronomy 27–30. The latter passage was revealed to the new generation of Israelites while they were camped on the plains of Moab. The former was revealed to their parents and grandparents while they were still at Mt. Sinai (Lev 26:46). Leviticus 26 may be considered a prophetic preview of the Deuteronomic Covenant only in the sense that the basic theological concepts of that covenant are present in the pericope. However, Leviticus 26 does not specify that covenant *per se*. Leviticus 26 does not provide a formal prophetic announcement regarding any future covenant.

Revelation is progressive in nature. The seeds of one age become the flowers of yet another age. Thus the seed of the Deuteronomic Covenant is present in Leviticus 26. The blessings and cursings of that chapter are transitional. They prepare Israel for the land while they are at Sinai, prior to commencing their wilderness wanderings. Transitional revelation will be expanded and formalized in a covenant upon arrival at the threshold of the land (on the plains of Moab). The title deed to the land (the Abrahamic Covenant), the constitution for the people of the land (the Mosaic Covenant), and the rights to the riches of the land (the Deuteronomic Covenant) will then provide the nation with all the revelation

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<sup>85</sup>For the sake of discussion, the Deuteronomic Covenant will be defined as the pact God established with Israel on the plains of Moab (Deuteronomy 27–30). That covenant was entered by Israel's oath (chap. 29), confirmed by sacrifices and public deposit at Shechem (Josh 8:30-35), and renewed by common consent at Shechem near the end of Joshua's ministry (24:1-28). Synonyms for this covenant include "Palestinian Covenant" and "Covenant of Moab." Cf. Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1953) 58-59; Renald E. Showers, *There Really Is a Difference!: A Comparison of Covenant and Dispensational Theology* (Bellmawr, N.J.: Friends of Israel, 1990) 77-83; Gordon J. McConville, "בְּרִית," *New International Dictionary of Old Testament Theology and Exegesis*, ed. Willem A. VanGemeren (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1997) 1:750; Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. Peter R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965) 214-17, 226, 230; S. R. Driver, *An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament* (New York: Meridian Library, 1956) 71; M. Weinfeld, "בְּרִית," in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, eds. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1975) 2:256, 268-69; idem, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 59-116; Delbert R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University, 1969) 58-64, 134-42.

necessary to live within the land itself.

### Land

Every gift to the nation of Israel is a summons to an obligation before the covenant suzerain, Yahweh. The land grant to Israel involves the people's identification with Yahweh, the Land-Giver, who calls His people to service. The summons is both beneficial and binding. Benefits are conditioned upon obedience to Yahweh's command. Yahweh delivered the enslaved nation from Egypt and her people became bond slaves belonging to Him (Lev 26:13). The prior bondage differs from the latter in that the latter brings blessing (vv. 2-12). No such rewards accrued as a result of Egyptian bondage.

The land grant predates the existence of Israel *per se*. Abraham received the land grant at the time of his own exodus from Mesopotamia. Israel's national identity was established under Moses at the time of her exodus from Egypt. God controls the history of the land and the people. According to Wijngaards, "From the roughly 160 cases in which biblical passages speak of Jahweh's giving the land to Israel, more than half contain references to 'the fathers.'"<sup>86</sup> Indeed, reference to "the ancestors" (v. 45) in a context related to the Mosaic Covenant establishes continuity between the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. Just as Abraham's descendants claimed the Abrahamic Covenant while they were at Mt. Sinai, so, in the future days, an exiled people will repent and claim the covenant made with their ancestors at Sinai. Willingness to identify herself as Yahweh's people will qualify Israel for restoration to the land.

Leviticus 26 depicts the promised land as the setting for the fulfillment of both blessings (vv. 4-12) and curses (vv. 14-38). It is noteworthy that Ps 72:16-17 describes the worldwide extension of the Davidic kingdom in terms reminiscent of the blessings in Leviticus 26.<sup>87</sup> That is one indication of the eschatological significance of this chapter. Another may be seen in the fact that a series of increasingly severe calamities affecting the reputation and the health of the nation of Israel will signal that divine judgment is underway. Kaiser writes concerning this time of judgment: "Then that nation should know that it was the hand of God, and men should return to Him. This principle was first announced in Leviticus 26:3-33 and used in most of the prophets, especially Amos 4:6-12."<sup>88</sup> Reward and retribution cannot be fulfilled elsewhere. The landedness of Israel is essential for fulfillment. Israel cannot receive landed prosperity without the land. On the other hand, Israel cannot be exiled from the land until they have possessed it.

Interestingly, the land itself is treated as a separate participant in the covenant. It can be the recipient of the restitution of sabbaths that it had been denied (vv. 34-35, 43). It is a land belonging first to Yahweh. As its sovereign Lord, He has authority to grant it to Israel. He presented the title deed to Abraham's descendants, but any intermediate generation who is disloyal to the covenant will be subject to

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<sup>86</sup>J. N. M. Wijngaards, *The Dramatization of Salvific History in the Deuteronomistic Schools*, OTS 16 (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1969) 73.

<sup>87</sup>Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Old Testament Theology* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1978) 161.

<sup>88</sup>*Ibid.*, 251.

expulsion from the land (vv. 33-44). Still, the land will remain, kept for the future generation who will obey Yahweh's precepts. Generations may come and go, but the land will abide as the Abrahamic Covenant's material entity. By means of sabbaths Yahweh intends to preserve the fruitfulness of the land for its ultimate possessors (cf. Leviticus 25). Therefore, disobedience to Yahweh's sabbatical legislation is considered a sin against the land. Even more, it is a sin against future generations since such a breach of the covenant results from greed. Such greed robs the land of its fruitfulness and robs future generations of its provision.

Landedness makes it possible for the people to be tempted in the areas of self-sufficiency, idolatry, and sabbath breaking. Such temptations can be resisted by remembering the history of the people and the land. Remembering the covenant deeds of Yahweh reminds the people that the land they enjoy is an unearned gift. The exiled people, remembering the Lord of the land, will confess their guilt and make restitution (vv. 40-41). Their remembering and acting upon that memory will, in turn, result in Yahweh remembering the land (v. 42). He will preserve the covenant blessings for His people.

At Mt. Sinai and in the wilderness, the land represented hope. When the hope is fulfilled, the land presents the people with a challenge. They are challenged to exercise faith in the God of the covenant. Those who apostatized at Sinai and who died in the wilderness failed to exhibit such faith.

Jelinek observes that some theologians note the absence of land as a theme in the NT and assume that the OT promises have been displaced. He rightly concludes that "we are not justified in emasculating the OT by the virtues of the NT."<sup>89</sup> If language means anything, Israel must yet possess the promised land following their future national repentance.

### **The Lord of History**

Divinely controlled history is the foundation of the Mosaic Covenant (vv. 13, 45). Yahweh is the God of history. He is the sovereign Lord of time and of place. Divine election and deliverance are the main factors in Israel's history. Yahweh as Creator and Giver graciously and mercifully associates Himself with the nation. As the Lord of history, He controls all history. He can move entire nations in order to chastise disobedient Israel and return her to the land in the time of her repentance. The God of history can prepare the nations for receiving the exiled people (cp. Joseph, Gen 50:20). The nations will swallow up the scattered Israelites (Lev 26:33) and make them vanish (v. 38). Yet Yahweh will preserve a remnant so that a new history can begin. Israel must trust the God of history who controls all time, places, and nations.

Scripture describes the Abrahamic Covenant's roots in the history of Israel. It involves Jacob, and before him, Isaac. Before Isaac, it was granted to Abraham. Verse 42 presents this confirmation of prior history. As Yahweh preserves (and will continue to preserve) the Abrahamic Covenant, so also He will preserve the Mosaic

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<sup>89</sup>John A. Jelinek, "The Dispersion and Restoration of Israel to the Land," in *Israel, the Land and the People: An Evangelical Affirmation of God's Promises*, ed. H. Wayne House (Grand Rapids: Kregel, 1998) 236. Jelinek's attention to Leviticus 26 is a welcome contribution to the study of the eschatological significance of the pericope.

Covenant for future generations (v. 45). Yahweh's deeds in history illustrate His faithfulness to preserve the covenant in spite of the failure of one generation to be faithful to it.

### **Breach and Preservation of Covenant**

Israel might breach (vv. 15, 44) the covenant, but Yahweh cannot (v. 44). The "uncircumcised heart" (v. 41) of disobedient Israel reflects her disloyalty to the divine covenants. Yahweh can never be disloyal. He is always faithful because He is "Yahweh their God" (v. 44). Breach of covenant occurs when Israel disobeys the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant (v. 15). Idolatry and sabbath breaking, especially, constitute breach of covenant (vv. 1-2). Such an action is willful. It results in the nullification of blessings associated with the Abrahamic Covenant and the identification associated with the Mosaic Covenant. Any infraction of Mosaic legislation is rebellion against the sovereign will of the suzerain-legislator, Yahweh.

Yahweh, however, "remembers" (*zākar*) His covenants and preserves them. The covenants contain both blessing and cursing, which are initiated by promise and implemented by legislation. Promise emphasizes divine sovereignty; legislation highlights human responsibility. When Israel is unfaithful, Yahweh remains faithful. The Suzerain's faithful preservation of the covenant is in sharp contrast to the vassal's failure to obey. Covenant history, therefore, confirms both divine dependability and human culpability.

### **Prohibition of Idolatry**

It is a serious crime to defy the Creator of the universe and the God of all history. The ultimate reason for the prohibition of idolatry is succinctly expressed in the *Selbstvorstellungsformel* ("self-introduction formula"):<sup>90</sup> "for I am Yahweh your God." This formula is the key phrase in Leviticus 18–26.<sup>91</sup> The contrast is self-explanatory. Yahweh's inherent and exclusive authority makes idols worthless, powerless, anthropocentric, and void of any spiritually redeeming value. There is no room for divided loyalties. Yahweh insists upon exclusive lordship in the lives of His people. Awareness of Yahweh's existence, identity, and presence is central to the covenant relationship that Israel enjoys.

The idolater chooses the way of the uncircumcised nations (v. 41), therefore he will be eaten up by those nations (v. 38) amongst whom he is exiled (v. 33). His guilt, his treason, will cause him great anguish (v. 39). The only way to be restored to Yahweh's favor is by confession, humility, and restitution (vv. 40-41). Idolaters must confess their filthy idolatry, humility must be produced by the realization that they cannot manipulate Yahweh, and restitution must consist in giving Yahweh and His land priority in their lives. Only when these things occur will God restore Israel finally and permanently to the land from which they were expelled in A.D. 70.

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<sup>90</sup>John van Seters, "Confessional Reformulation in the Exilic Period," *Vetus Testamentum* 22 (1972):455.

<sup>91</sup>Wenham, *Leviticus* 250.

### Observance of Sabbaths

“Sabbaths” is plural throughout the pericope (vv. 2, 34-35, 43). The reference is undoubtedly intended to include both weekly sabbaths and annual sabbaths (including the year of jubilee) that are mentioned in the preceding context (chaps. 23–25). Sabbath observance is theologically rich. It specially signifies God’s dominion over Israel.<sup>92</sup> In His sovereignty Yahweh establishes the nation, grants them their land, and claims their time.<sup>93</sup> The sabbaths are also a means of reminding Israel of their deliverance from bondage.<sup>94</sup> As Zimmerli observes, “Any OT theology must pay attention to the way in which the faith of the OT hears the commandment of its God in its liturgical ordinances.”<sup>95</sup> Israel’s liturgical calendar is Yahweh-oriented. He is the God of time as well as the God of space. The sabbaths honor the Lord of time by teaching the Israelites to trust the Lord of all things for their provisions. Thus lordship is the core of the sabbatical principle. By trusting the Lord to provide for the seventh day, the seventh year, and the forty-ninth and fiftieth years, Israel gives tangible witness to His power and wisdom. He who provided in the wilderness had already proclaimed the sabbatical principle while Israel was still at Mt. Sinai. The instruction for God’s people is simple: “Trust me to provide. I am Yahweh. I will not lead you where I cannot care for you.” God never demands what man is unable to do. Rather, He provides the way of service and blesses the path of obedience. Sabbath in the OT is more than an expression of the vertical relationship to the Lord of all creation; it is also an expression of concern and care for those who are fellow participants in the covenant (cf. Leviticus 25).

The sabbatical principle is the test, the seal/sign, of the obedience that the Mosaic Covenant demands (Exod 33:17-21). By means of the sabbath the legal covenant represents Yahweh’s legislative authority over time. Even the land needed restitution when the time that Yahweh demanded for it was not granted by Israel (Lev 26:34-35, 43). Yahweh is Lord of the land as well as the people. The land is a promised possession in a time-space continuum. Breach of the sabbatical principle regarding the land is evidence of rebellion against the Lord of time and space. Therefore, violation of the land by denying its just recompense is a violation of Yahweh’s gift of fruitfulness. It is robbery because it denies continued fruitfulness for future generations of Abraham’s descendants. The liberty proclaimed in the sabbatical principle is an echo of the divinely controlled history. The God of history delivered Israel from servitude in Egypt so that the people would be free from oppression. To deny that freedom is to deny the Lord who brought them out of Egypt (v. 13; cf. 25:38, 42, 55).

### Presence and Sanctuary

Leviticus 26 refers to the presence of Yahweh by such terms and phrases as “presence” (v. 17), “walk among you” (v. 12), “sanctuary” (v. 2), and “tabernacle”

<sup>92</sup> Matitiahu Tsevat, “The Basic Meaning of the Biblical Sabbath,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 84 (1972):455.

<sup>93</sup>Ibid.

<sup>94</sup>Brueggemann, *The Land* 64.

<sup>95</sup>Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline* 125.

(v. 11). His presence works both weal (vv. 11-12) and woe (v. 17). It is both edifice-oriented<sup>96</sup> (vv. 2, 11) and people-oriented (vv. 12, 17). His presence is holy. The reference to holiness is particularly striking because it is in a context of precepts prohibiting idolatry and commanding observance of sabbaths. Yahweh is holy because He is set apart from idols and His presence is distinct from idols. Also, He is holy because sabbatical time is set apart for Him. The implication of vv. 14-45 is that when disobedient Israel experiences the punishment-dealing presence of Yahweh, He has ceased to “walk among” them or to tabernacle among them. Indeed, He walks in opposition to them (vv. 24, 28). Even though His presence or sanctuary is not with the exiles among the nations (at least not in the same fashion as when they were obedient and in the land), Yahweh still will preserve His covenant with them (v. 44).

### **Promise**

Promise here is used in a very broad sense of the term. It is employed to cover both the promise to bless and the promise to curse. It has the sense of fulfillment or commitment as much as the sense of hope or expectancy. Leviticus 26 identifies promise with the solemn, divine self-introduction of the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob (vv. 1, 2, 13, 44, 45; cf. v. 42). Yahweh’s promise in the Abrahamic Covenant preceded His deliverance of Israel from Egypt and bringing them into Canaan. Promise does not refer to something inward and spiritual, but to the tangible aspects of covenant life: productivity, peace, population, presence, and land. God’s promise includes a pledge to bless Israel for their loyalty and to curse Israel for their disloyalty. Yahweh, the God of their ancestors, promises His own loyalty to His covenant and His people. He has not finished His design for Israel—His promises will yet be fulfilled. Merrill sums it up as follows:

Even Israel’s failure, however, would not imperil the purposes of God, for, as New Testament revelation makes clear, the Lord Jesus Christ—the suffering Servant of Isaiah—is in Himself a “new Israel,” as is His Body the church.... But praise be to God, His promise to Israel is not abrogated—not by Israel’s Old Testament disobedience or by the subsequent role of the church. For He will regenerate His ancient people and thus qualify them in ages to come to bring to fruition the grand design for which He had called and elected them (Lev. 26:40-45; Deut. 30:1-30; Jer. 31:27-34; 33:19-26; Ezek. 36:22-38; Rom. 11:25-32). This is the theology of the Pentateuch.<sup>97</sup>

### **Blessing and Curse**

The blessings and curses of Leviticus 26 are quite similar to those of Deuteronomy 27–28. The similarities involve both formal structure and traditional phraseology and vocabulary. By their very contexts in the biblical materials, the

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<sup>96</sup>By “edifice-oriented” the writer does not mean that Yahweh is edifice-limited. The edifice was merely an accommodation to focus attention upon Yahweh’s presence among His people. Cf. Ezek 10:3-19; 11:22-23; 43:1-5.

<sup>97</sup>Eugene H. Merrill, “A Theology of the Pentateuch,” *A Biblical Theology of the Old Testament*, ed. Roy B. Zuck (Chicago: Moody, 1991) 87.

blessings and curses are distinctly covenantal.<sup>98</sup> The blessings are directly related to the promised blessings and/or privileges of both the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants. Likewise, the curses are directly related to the nullification or removal of those same blessings and/or privileges.

### **Obedience and Disobedience**

According to Zimmerli, "Obedience to Yahweh, the one God, who delivered Israel out of slavery and is jealous of his own uniqueness, defines the fundamental nature of the OT faith."<sup>99</sup> Obedience reflects respect for who and what Yahweh is personally and historically (Lev 26:1-3, 13-15, 39-45), includes acceptance of the lordship of Yahweh in one's life in time and space (cf. vv. 2, 34-35, 43), and produces participation in covenant blessings (v. 9). Precepts reveal the will of God for Israel, since the will of man must yield to the will of Yahweh in covenant loyalty (cf. v. 41).

Disobedience is the denial of the identity of Yahweh in history, covenant, and law. It is breach of covenant faith (v. 15), thus acting unfaithfully, disloyally, and treasonously (v. 40) in blatant opposition to God (vv. 21, 23, 27). It may involve nonperformance of His commands (v. 14) while rejecting His statutes and despising His ordinances (v. 15). Disobedience relates to the inner man (vv. 15, 41, 43; note "soul" and "heart") and has frightful consequences. Even cannibalism is not beyond the capability of the disobedient (v. 29). Sacrifice from one who is disobedient is unacceptable since sacrifice should be an outward manifestation of faith (v. 31). Disobedience deserves death (vv. 25, 33, 37, 38) and exile (vv. 33, 44). Whereas death is separation from the body, exile is separation from the land.

### **Retribution and Chastisement**

Application of the curses/penalties of vv. 14-45 is highlighted by two factors: (1) the gradation of the punishments in five stages of severity (vv. 16-17, 18-20, 21-22, 23-26, and 27-38)<sup>100</sup> and (2) the recurring refrain, "seven times for your sins" (vv. 18, 21, 24, 28). The stages of chastisement are emphasized also by the occurrence of the term "discipline" (רִדָּה, vv. 18, 23, 28). From start to finish, the process is intended as a means of restoration. However, the primary purpose is not restoration, but the glorification of the covenant God, Yahweh (cf. vv. 44, 45).

Retribution may be terminal (cf. vv. 25, 30, 38), but chastisement may result in restoration through repentance (cf. vv. 39-45). Both are involved in Leviticus 26. Divine retribution will come upon those who do not confess their sins and chastisement will be administered to those who do confess their sins.

Leviticus 26 emphasizes the seal/sign of the Mosaic Covenant, the sabbaths.

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<sup>98</sup>Contra Ronald E. Clements, *Prophecy and Tradition*, Growing Points in Theology (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) 16-17.

<sup>99</sup>Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline* 116.

<sup>100</sup>For an excellent discussion of the form, structure, and setting of vv. 14-45, see Hartley, *Leviticus* 457-62.

The refrain “seven times”<sup>101</sup> might imply the sabbatical principle. “For your sins” indicates breach of covenant.<sup>102</sup> Yahweh will judge His people for their nonobservance of the sabbaths, for their worship of idols, and for their defilement (cf. vv. 1-2, 29-31). Divine judgment is not a betrayal of the covenants (v. 44). On the contrary, judgment declares that disobedience is sin and that sin is rebellion against the Lord. Eventually, Yahweh’s judgments will increase to such intensity and nature that there will be no doubt that He has exercised His covenant rights to exact retribution from those who defy His authority.

### Exile

Exile (“scattering among the nations,” v. 33) is the ultimate penalty for breach of covenant. It means removal from the land of promise. The landedness for which the nation hopes will dissolve into the landlessness that had characterized their sojourn in Egypt. Servitude will once again engulf them. Due to their “uncircumcised heart” (v. 41) God will place them among the uncircumcised—those who are outside the covenants. Exile is a living death, a living separation from the land of abundant life. Exile means removal from the setting in which Israel can experience the blessings of the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. Exile, however, need not be terminal. Landlessness can be a condition that gives rebirth to hope (vv. 39-45). Landlessness is not synonymous with divine rejection or abhorrence (v. 44). As at Sinai and in the wilderness, landlessness presents the people with a goal for life and a meaning for history. The landless ones must cast their cares upon the One who will guide them out of bondage to freedom. Even in the land of their enemies, Yahweh is their God (v. 44). The covenant relationship knows no geographical or political boundaries. Yahweh’s loyalty is unaffected by the landedness or the landlessness of His people. He is above the circumstances of history, working for the repentance of His covenant people so that His covenants will one day be fulfilled completely.

### Repentance

The Hebrew word for “repentance” (*šûb*) does not occur in Leviticus 26. However, the concept of repentance is found in a threefold turning of the exiled people to Yahweh. First, they will confess their guilt and the guilt of their fathers (v. 40), recognizing their personal and corporate culpability. Next, they will humble their “uncircumcised heart” (v. 41), bringing it into subjection to the precepts of Yahweh, for they must submit to Yahweh’s lordship. Their submission must not be mere external compliance with religious exercises; it must be internal and real. Lastly, they will make restitution for their guilt (v. 41), accepting the natural (federal) consequences of sin. Such restitution is not soteriological redemption. It is the evidence, not the cause, of repentance and expiation. The impact of sin will be

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<sup>101</sup>Seven is more than just a symbolic number: “It is an appropriate and evocative number in view of the importance of the seventh in Israelite religion” (Wenham, *Leviticus* 331). Cf. also Elliger, *Leviticus* 375: “Natürlich ist ‘sieben’ eine schematische Steigerungszahl” (“‘Seven’ is naturally a stylized number of intensity”).

<sup>102</sup>“Sin” is also a term applied to breach of covenant in the vassal treaties of Esarhaddon. See D. J. Wiseman, *The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon*, Iraq 20/1 (London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 1958) 42 (col. iii 160), 50 (col. iv 272), 52 (col. iv 292), 58 (col. v 397).

felt until the land has enjoyed its restitution. Exile will continue after repentance until the penalty has been fulfilled. Getting right with God does not ensure immediate blessing and a solution to uncomfortable circumstances. It does guarantee a restoration to the covenant relationship whereby Yahweh might renew promised blessings once the land is regained.

Is Israel's repentance a precondition to the establishment of the Messianic Kingdom? Fruchtenbaum responds with a clear affirmative, employing Lev 26:40-42 as the first piece of scriptural evidence.<sup>103</sup> The future restoration of Israel is also predicated upon the fulfillment of prophecies concerning a worldwide dispersion. The return from the Babylonian Exile does not fulfill those announcements since the people were restored from but one nation, not from among all nations. Leviticus 26:33 and 39 speak of a scattering among "the nations." Are these references generic (merely referring to exile among Gentiles) or, are these references specifying a universal dispersion? Deuteronomy 30:3 and Jer 29:14 make it clear that the dispersion is universal.

The restoration of Israel from its worldwide dispersion will depend upon their repentance (cf. Jer 3:11-18; Hos 5:13-6:3; Zech 12:1-10). That this did not take place prior to the return from Babylonian Exile may be seen by the words of Jesus Himself 600 years later:

O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, who kills the prophets and stones those who are sent to her! How often I wanted to gather your children together, the way a hen gathers her chicks under her wings, and you were unwilling. Behold, your house is being left to you desolate! For I say to you, from now on you shall not see Me until you say, "Blessed is He who comes in the name of the Lord!"<sup>104</sup>

### **Leviticus 26 and the NT**

The employment of Lev 26:11-12 in 2 Cor 6:16 is the only concrete example of the influence of the chapter on the NT.<sup>105</sup> Paul employs the passage from this pericope in order to better emphasize the concept of identification with God. It is unfortunate that Wenham did not deal with this NT usage in his commentary.<sup>106</sup> Wenham, however, does observe that the blessings and curses of Leviticus 26 are expressed at least in principle by Christ's teachings in His pre-cross ministry. The chastisement of Israel because of covenant disloyalty was a reality among the Jews of Christ's day. Jesus also spoke of an eschatological chastisement. Wenham claims

<sup>103</sup>Fruchtenbaum, *Israelology* 781-91.

<sup>104</sup>Matt 23:37-39 (NASB); the statement of Israel at the end of this passage is a quotation from Ps 118:26.

<sup>105</sup>Paul's quotation of Lev 26:11-12 is paraphrastic. His emphasis is on the concept of identification with God (v. 12b). His omission of v. 11b is a clue to his intention. That phrase does not serve any purpose in Paul's discussion in the context of 2 Corinthians 6. Since he omits Lev 26:11b ("and my soul will not despise you"), he paraphrases 11a ("I will set my dwelling place in your midst"—cf. 2 Cor 6:16, "I will dwell among them"). Having established the concept and the context, Paul proceeds to quote Lev 26:12. Elaborate discussions of conflation of OT texts, "pearl stringing," pre-Pauline usage, and 4Q LXX Lev<sup>a</sup> are made unnecessary by the simple reading of the NT text alongside the MT.

<sup>106</sup>Wenham, *Leviticus* 329-30, 333-34.

that “many of the horrifying judgments described in Rev. 6ff. find their original setting in the covenant curses of Lev. 26 and Deut. 28.”<sup>107</sup> This is true insofar as they are directly related by the Book of Revelation to the nation of Israel. Application of the covenant blessings and curses to the Gentiles is unwarranted (with the exception of the blessing for all peoples mediated by Abraham’s descendants; Gen 12:3). Technically, the covenants were made with Israel alone.<sup>108</sup>

The principles of God’s dealings with NT believers by means of reward and/or chastisement are basically the same as the principles by which He dealt with Israel under the covenants. This must not be construed, however, to mean that NT saints are under the same covenant relationship as Israel. The similarity is due to the same God, not to the same covenant. The very nature of God demands that the natural consequences of sin be exacted from His people in all ages (cf. 1 Cor 11:30; Gal 6:7-10). The same God provides lessons for believers in every era, based upon His historical deeds (cf. Rom 15:4; 1 Cor 10:11-13). The same God blesses in tangible ways those who are faithful (cf. 2 Cor 9:6-15). The same God is loyal even in the face of His people’s disloyalty (cf. Phil 1:6; 2 Tim 2:11-13). The same God is Lord (cf. 1 Cor 12:3). The same Lord requires confession, humility, and restitution (cf. Phil 1:25; 1 Pet 5:5-7; 1 John 1:9). The same God promises that obedient service will be rewarded (cf. 1 Cor 15:58). The same God demonstrates that the believer has been delivered from bondage into a servitude that is totally unlike the bondage of fear and the curse (cf. Acts 26:18; Rom 6:12-23; Col 1:12-13; Heb 2:14-15).

The Lord who by means of Leviticus 26 revealed to Israel the continued authority and perpetuity of the Abrahamic Covenant after the ratification of the Mosaic Covenant, also confirmed that testimony in Gal 3:17. NT believers must recognize that the authority of one covenant does not annul the authority of a previous one. Any exceptions are clearly revealed by God (e.g., Heb 7:11-14). The epistle to the Galatian churches teaches that Abrahamic faith in Yahweh was not replaced by law under Moses. Therefore, faith is still binding upon anyone’s relationship to the God of Abraham.

### Conclusion

The failure of theologians and expositors to give as much attention to Leviticus 26 as they have given to Deuteronomy 27–28 has impoverished the church’s doctrinal corpus. Leviticus 26 contains revelation referring to Israel’s future repentance and restoration, which are confirmed by both OT and NT. Since Israel’s repentance and restoration have not yet occurred, their fulfillment is eschatological. Leviticus 26’s relationship to the Abrahamic Covenant ties fulfillment to the land God promised to give to the descendants of Abraham. The fulfillment of the land promise awaits Israel’s repentance. When Israel turns to God and confesses her sins,

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<sup>107</sup>Ibid., 334. Cf. also Hartley, *Leviticus* 475.

<sup>108</sup>Cf. the postscript of Leviticus 26: “These are the statutes and the ordinances and the laws which Yahweh established between himself and the Israelites on Mt. Sinai through Moses” (v. 46). This same exclusivity is expressed in Exod 19:5-6 and Rom 9:4.

God will restore her to the promised land. Chronologically, Leviticus 26 is the first detailed description of Israel's eschatological repentance and restoration. It provides significant evidence that disobedience to the Mosaic Covenant results in the removal of the blessings promised in the Abrahamic Covenant. The chapter is at the heart of the OT prophets' announcements concerning the future Messianic Kingdom. A proper understanding of the prophetic program of the OT fully integrates the revelation of Leviticus 26.