

## **Inter-covenantal Truth and Relevance: Leviticus 26 and the Biblical Covenants**

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*Leviticus 26 provides a key to advancing the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants by showing how the two relate to each other. The parenthetical nature of the chapter shows its inter-covenantal character in six areas: (1) covenant, (2) law, (3) Yahweh, (4) promise, (5) repentance, and (6) revelation. The word for “covenant” used therein always relates to God’s sovereignty and His binding relationship to Israel, sometimes in relation to the Abrahamic Covenant, sometimes in relation to the Mosaic Covenant, and sometimes in relation to a possible future Deuteronomic Covenant. The use of law in Leviticus 26 supplements the use of covenant by reflecting the wisdom and moral character of the covenant-giver and by focusing on His absolute authority. Yahweh, the covenant-maker, is God who identifies Himself with both the Mosaic and the Abrahamic covenants. In the chapter promise includes both the promise to bless under the Abrahamic covenant and the promise to curse under the Mosaic covenant. Though the word for repentance does not occur in the chapter, the concept of repentance is entailed in the promise of Israel’s return from captivity. The word “law” implies a necessity of communicating the law-giver’s standards in written form for the benefit of future generations. Though the NT cites Leviticus 26 only once, the concepts involved in the chapter permeate many parts of the NT. By synthesizing the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, it offers a taste of promise tempered by precept in telling God’s people how to live.*

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Leviticus 26 consists of parenetic revelation given at Sinai on the threshold of Israel’s wilderness wanderings. The apparent tension that the Mosaic Covenant’s promulgation creates between it and the Abrahamic Covenant makes Leviticus 26 relevant to the discussion of the progression and distinction of biblical covenants. After three disturbing apostasies at Sinai, Leviticus 26 explains the relationship between the two covenants and reemphasizes the exclusive lordship of Yahweh. Although Leviticus 26 antedates Paul’s teaching in Gal 3:17 by fifteen centuries, both

proclaim the same truth: “the Law, which came four hundred and thirty years later, does not invalidate a covenant previously ratified by God, so as to nullify the promise.”<sup>1</sup>

The blessings and curses of Leviticus 26 advance the respective emphases of both the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. The blessings relate to the Abrahamic Covenant’s promises regarding land and blessing, but the cursings represent a five-stage process of Mosaic Covenant vengeance.<sup>2</sup> The cursings seek to produce confession of guilt, humility, and restitution—elements that might anticipate either the Deuteronomic (or Palestinian) Covenant or the New Covenant.<sup>3</sup> Restitution involves the sabbatical principle, a significant element of the Mosaic Covenant. The sabbatical principle is central to Leviticus 26. Yahweh is Lord of both space (the land) and time (the sabbaths). The Land-Giver and Exodus-Causer will prove loyal at all times to His covenants and to His covenanted people. In addition to its direct links to the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants, Leviticus 26 also has bearing upon the existence of a covenant that Israel entered in Moab. Later prophetic revelation anchors itself in Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27–28.

This article will discuss the inter-covenantal aspects of Leviticus 26 as that text relates to the following subject areas: (1) covenant, (2) law, (3) Yahweh, (4) promise, (5) repentance, and (6) revelation. The parenthesis in Leviticus 26 contributes to each of these areas of OT theology and, at the same time, provides some potential clues regarding the existence of a Deuteronomic covenant.

### Covenant

Moses employs “covenant” (בְּרִית) eight times in Leviticus 26 (vv. 9, 15, 25, 42 *ter*, 44, 45). It always denotes Yahweh’s binding relationship to His people Israel. This relationship provides Israel with a life that exhibits a goal and with a history that possesses meaning. In all its occurrences in this pericope, “covenant” promotes the concept of the sovereignty of Yahweh, the Covenant-Giver. Six of the eight uses of the term include the first person singular suffix (“My covenant”; vv. 9, 15, 42 *ter*, 44). Yahweh Himself is always the antecedent. This form of reference implies the unilateral nature of the covenants. Yahweh alone establishes the covenants. Yahweh’s personal intervention in the history of Israel points to a central theme of the covenants. His lordship is personal and absolute. The covenant lays hold of the

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<sup>1</sup>NASB. All translations in this study are the author’s own unless otherwise indicated, as here.

<sup>2</sup>The five stages are (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).

<sup>3</sup>There are a number of similarities between the Deuteronomic Covenant and the New Covenant. See Dennis T. Olson, *Deuteronomy and the Death of Moses: A Theological Reading*, Overtures to Biblical Theology (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1994) 126-58 (esp. 153-56).

people of Israel and demands unconditional surrender to the will of God. Loyalty to the covenant must consist of more than outward acquiescence; it must demonstrate an inward reality. The “uncircumcised heart” (v. 41) stands in antithesis to covenant loyalty. Concerning this loyalty, Meredith Kline writes,

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>4</sup>

### The Abrahamic Covenant

Yahweh’s covenant with Abraham appears to underlie the references to “covenant” in Lev 26:9, 42, and 44. The theme of a fruitful population echoes Abrahamic Covenant promises in Gen 17:6, 7, 19, and 21 (cf. also Exod 6:4 and Deut 8:18). Leviticus 26:9 provides an example of the distinctions made within the passage concerning the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. Characteristics of the Abrahamic Covenant include (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, characteristic elements of the Mosaic Covenant involve (1) the theme of law, (2) emphasis on human responsibility, and (3) references to sabbath, sanctuary, and divine sovereignty. Although verse 9 sits in the midst of Mosaic Covenant material, it displays Abrahamic vocabulary, phraseology, and theme. Its message pertains to that brief span of time immediately following the revelation of the Mosaic Covenant at Mt. Sinai. In effect, the message declares that the revelation concerning law equals in authority the older revelation concerning promise. In order to receive the promised blessings contained in the Abrahamic Covenant, Israel must obey the stipulations of the Mosaic Covenant. In other words, the Mosaic Covenant provides the program by which Israelites should manifest their faith by their works (cp. Jas 2:14-26).

Moses associates each of the three references to “My covenant” in Lev 26:42 with one of the patriarchs:

וּזְכַרְתִּי אֶת־בְּרִיתִי יַעֲקֹב -42a  
and I shall remember my covenant with *Jacob*  
וְאֵף אֶת־בְּרִיתִי יִצְחָק -42b  
even my covenant with *Isaac*  
אֶת־בְּרִיתִי אֲבְרָהָם אֲזַכֵּר -42c  
yea, I shall remember my covenant with *Abraham*

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<sup>4</sup>Meredith G. Kline, *By Oath Consigned: A Reinterpretation of the Covenant Signs of Circumcision and Baptism* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1968) 47-48.

-42d  
 והארץ אזכר  
 and I shall remember the land

The triple employment of זכר sets the tone for this section.<sup>5</sup> The first person references indicate that Yahweh Himself will respond to Israel's repentance when it occurs. When Israel repents and turns back to Yahweh, God will reconfirm or renew the Abrahamic Covenant with them. Thus, Moses sets the blessings and cursings of Leviticus 26 against the backdrop of the Abrahamic Covenant. Verse 44 might have the same covenant in view through Yahweh's promise not to initiate any breach of the covenant.

The blessings recited in Lev 26:4-12 fulfill, at least in part, 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).

The biblical text associates all of these blessings with the land that Yahweh will give to Israel. They are consistent with various statements and restatements of the Abrahamic Covenant.

The covenant curses of Lev 26:14-38 indicate, at least in part, a removal of the Abrahamic blessings. Disobedience on the part of Israel results in the following changes:

1. Rather than possessing the land (Gen 12:1; 15:7, 18-21; 17:8), Israel will be

<sup>5</sup> In addition to the repetitions in v. 42, readers should note the following elements: (1) The elevated style of v. 42abc is nearly a tristich containing synonymous parallelism. This does not mean that the three men are synonymous. The proper names are but modifiers of ברית. The last phrase of v. 42 and the subsequent context confirm that the text describes only one covenant. (2) זכר forms an inclusion opening and closing the section in order to maintain the emphasis on remembrance. The absence of זכר in v. 42b helps the inclusio develop. (3) ואף in v. 42bc continues the concept initiated in v. 42a. Its absence in v. 42d confirms the individual nature of that stich. (4) In this text the patriarchal names reverse the triad's usual order (a *hapax phenomenon* in the OT). The backward look to the original Abrahamic promise serves to confront Israel with their covenant relationship to Yahweh. (5) Verse 42d concludes the apodosis (the protasis is in vv. 40-41). The substitution of הארץ for ברית focuses attention on the central promise of the covenant: the land. Moses does not focus attention on the patriarchs, but rather on the land grant. (6) Verse 42d repeats the *yqtl* form of זכר (cf. v. 42c) in order to maintain the continuity between vv. 42abc and 42d. Therefore, it is best to understand v. 42d as a concise summary of v. 42abc. Note also that הארץ תעזב ("the land will be abandoned") in v. 43a immediately follows הארץ אזכר ("I will remember the land") in v. 42d. This case of contrastive anadiplosis is significant in that the Israelites must first abandon the land before Yahweh remembers the land.

- dispossessed from the land (Lev 26:33-38).
2. National greatness (Gen 12:2) will turn into humiliation, inferiority, and insignificance (Lev 26:29, 32, 36-37; Deut 28:43-44).
  3. Blessing (Gen 12:2; 22:17) will turn into cursing (Lev 26:14-38; Deut 28:15-68).
  4. 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).
  5. 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).
  6. Success over Israel's enemies (Gen 22:17) will turn into defeat at the hand of their enemies (Lev 26:16-17, 32, 36-38; Deut 28:25, 31, 48, 52, 68).

The Abrahamic Covenant forms the basis for Yahweh's historical extraction of Israel from Egypt (cf. Gen 15:13, 14). While the nation resides at Mt. Sinai, they will remember that covenant as part of their theological heritage. They are experiencing the beginning of the historical fulfillment of its promises—they are en route to the land Yahweh promised to Abraham's descendants.

The Abrahamic Covenant demonstrates that Israel does not create their own national identity. That covenant provides them with the hope of landedness at a time when they are landless. Leviticus 26:1-13 reveals to Israel that the recent covenant given at Mt. Sinai (the Mosaic Covenant) does not nullify the Abrahamic Covenant. The land of promise comprises the central concept of the Abrahamic Covenant (v. 42). The Mosaic Covenant will not conflict with the landedness Yahweh promised long before Sinai.

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 outwardly manifests 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 slept (15:12-21). Divine sovereignty and human responsibility do not present opposing concepts in the biblical covenants. Indeed, the human vassal must obey Yahweh because He is the sovereign Lord. Without a sovereign Lord, no human accountability can exist—obedience would be non-binding. Subsequent covenants do not alter Yahweh's lordship revealed in His covenant with Abraham. Since the sovereignty of God is not altered, neither are His covenant promises (cp. Gal 3:17).

### **Sinaitic Covenant**

In Leviticus 26 Moses directs attention to the Mosaic Covenant by the prominence of the 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 verses 1-2 also have the Mosaic Covenant in view:

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

The clear statements of verses 15, 45, and 46 remove any remaining doubt. This legal emphasis sets the stage for covenant vengeance in verse 25. It also promotes the sense of Yahweh's lordship which was already present in the Abrahamic Covenant. The covenant at Sinai is based upon Israel's historical deliverance from Egypt. Yahweh performed that deliverance in accord with the prior covenant (vv. 13, 45). The Mosaic Covenant intentionally identifies the people of Yahweh more narrowly. The Mosaic Covenant supplements the Abrahamic Covenant's identification of the land of promise by a refined definition of the people of promise. Just as circumcision provides the outward seal/sign of the Abrahamic Covenant, so the observance of the sabbaths becomes the seal/sign of the Sinaitic Covenant (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 means of the sabbaths.<sup>6</sup> Thus divine revelation binds together the two major elements of these covenants (the land and the people). Yahweh appoints the land for the people and the people for the land.

The 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 special people of God, the chosen people (cf. Deut 7:6-11). Right behavior by the people of Yahweh presents the means by which they might witness to the nations concerning their heavenly Sovereign. 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 will result in the removal of covenant blessings associated with the Mosaic Covenant. The exile will render the following aspects of the Mosaic Covenant inoperable:

- Yahweh will abhor and treat Israel as the tail of all the nations (Lev 26:30; Deut 28:43-44), although she previously enjoyed a position above all the nations (Exod 19:5; Deut 26:18-19).
- The kingdom of priests (Exod 19:6) will become ceremonially unclean and their sacrifices unacceptable (Lev 26:31).

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<sup>6</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 identifies 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 clarifies the situation regarding the identification of the covenant people.

- The holy nation of Israel (Exod 19:6) will become burdened with guilt (Lev 26:39) and characterized by a heathenlike uncircumcised heart (v. 41).
- Israel's history of national deliverance (Exod 19:4) will turn into a history of national exile (Lev 26:33, 38).

Sinai represents 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 at Sinai<sup>7</sup> serve only to remind the nation why Yahweh gave them legislation. They need standards. Without the order those standards produce, chaos and anarchy will prevail. The nation must prepare for their inheritance, the land. The means of preparation consists of instruction, parenthesis. Instruction expresses the primary concept of Torah (תורה, v. 46). Leviticus 26's instruction focuses on identification with the covenant deity or suzerain, Yahweh (cf. v. 45).

### Deuteronomic Covenant<sup>8</sup>

The many parallels between Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27–30 present the reader with a problem regarding relationships between covenants. How does the Deuteronomic Covenant relate to Leviticus 26? The similarities of structure (blessing and cursing), the revelation of the ultimate chastisement for breach of covenant (exile preceded by siege which deteriorates into cannibalism), and a time sphere subsequent to the impartation of the Mosaic Covenant all demonstrate a relationship in content. However, similarity does not equal identity. Leviticus 26 does not reveal ratification of a third covenant. Neither does the chapter describe a third covenant in terms of any relationship to the past covenant (Abrahamic) and the present covenant (Mosaic). The text might contain an allusion to a future covenant; however, those who received Leviticus 26 would not have identified that covenant with Deuteronomy 27–30.

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<sup>7</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 (Lev 24:10-23).

<sup>8</sup>For the sake of discussion, the author defines the Deuteronomic Covenant as the pact God established with Israel on the plains of Moab (Deut 27-30). That covenant was entered by Israel's oath (Deut 29), confirmed by sacrifices and public deposit at Shechem (Josh 8:30-35), and renewed at Shechem near the end of Joshua's ministry (Josh 24:1-28). Synonyms for this covenant include Deuteronomic Covenant and covenant on the plains of Moab. Cf. Charles Caldwell Ryrie, *The Basis of the Premillennial Faith* (Neptune, N.J.: Loizeaux Brothers, 1953) 58-59; 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*, ed. G. Johannes Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren, trans. John T. Willis, 2:256, 268-69; Moshe Weinfeld, *Deuteronomy and the Deuteronomic School* (Oxford: Clarendon, 1972) 59-116; Delbert R. Hillers, *Covenant: The History of a Biblical Idea* (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1969) 58-64, 134-42.

Yahweh revealed the latter text to the new generation of Israelites while they camped on the plains of Moab. Yahweh revealed the former text to their parents and grandparents while they were still at Mt. Sinai (Lev 26:46). Leviticus 26 might be considered a prophetic preview of the Deuteronomic Covenant only in the sense that the basic theological concepts of the Moab 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.

Divine revelation is progressive in nature. The seeds of one age become the flowers of yet another age. Leviticus 26 might contain the seed of the Deuteronomic Covenant. 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. Yahweh will provide transitional revelation expanding and formalizing a covenant upon Israel's 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) would then provide the nation with all the revelation necessary to live within the land itself.

### **Land**

Every gift to the nation of Israel calls her people to an obligation before the covenant suzerain, Yahweh. The land grant to Israel involves the people's identification with Yahweh. The Land-Giver summons the people to service. The summons is both beneficial and binding. The covenant conditions its benefits upon obedience to Yahweh's command. He delivered the enslaved nation from Egypt and they became bond slaves belonging to Yahweh (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 their exodus from Egypt. God in His sovereignty controls the history of the land and the people. Wijngaards points out that, "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.'" It is significant, therefore, that the text of Leviticus 26 refers to "the ancestors" (v. 45) in a context related to the Mosaic Covenant. This establishes a continuity of covenants. Just as Abraham's descendants claim the Abrahamic Covenant while they are at Mt. Sinai, so in the future days an exiled people will repent and claim the covenant made with their ancestors at Mt. Sinai. Willingness to identify themselves as Yahweh's people will qualify them for restoration to the land.

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<sup>9</sup>J. N. M. Wijngaards, *The Dramatization of Salvific History in the Deuteronomic Schools*, Oudtestamentische Studiën 16 (Leiden, The Netherlands: E. J. Brill, 1969):73.

The land of promise provides the setting for fulfillment of both blessings (vv. 4-12) and curses (vv. 14-38). Reward and retribution cannot be fulfilled anywhere else. The landedness of Israel is essential for fulfillment. Israel cannot receive landed prosperity without the land. On the other hand, Israel cannot experience exile from the land until they have first possessed it.

Interestingly, Yahweh treats the land itself as a separate participant in the covenant. It can receive restitution for sabbaths that Israel denied it (vv. 34-35, 43). The land belongs first to Yahweh. Therefore, as its sovereign Lord, He possesses authority to grant it to Israel. He presents the title deed to Abraham's descendants. Any intermediate generation who are disloyal to the covenant will be subject to expulsion from the land (vv. 33-44). Yet, the land will remain, kept in store for that future generation who will obey the precepts of Yahweh. The generations may come and go, but the land will abide as the Abrahamic Covenant's material entity. Yahweh intended to preserve the fruitfulness of the land for the ultimate possessors by means of sabbaths (cf. Leviticus 25). Thus, disobedience to Yahweh's sabbatical legislation involves 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. Israelites can resist such temptations 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, must confess their guilt and make restitution (vv. 40-41). Their remembering and acting upon that memory results, in turn, in Yahweh remembering the land (v. 42). In this way He preserves covenant blessings for His people.

At Mt. Sinai, the land represents hope. In the wilderness, the land represents hope. In the land, when the hope is fulfilled, the land presents the people with a challenge. They must exercise faith in the God of the covenant. Such faith had not been exhibited by those who apostatized at Sinai and who died in the wilderness. During the exile, the land again represents the people's covenant hope.

### **Divine History**

The foundation of the Mosaic Covenant (Lev 26:13, 45) consists of the history of Yahweh's deeds on behalf of His people. Yahweh is the God of history, the sovereign Lord of time and of place. Divine election and deliverance comprise the main factors in Israel's history. Nothing that Israel possesses results from her own work. Yahweh as Creator and Giver graciously and mercifully associates Himself with this nation. As the Lord of history, He controls all history. He can move entire nations in order to chastise disobedient Israel and to return her to the land in the time of her repentance. Indeed, the God of history can prepare the nations for receiving the exiled people (cf. Joseph, Gen 50:20). The nations might swallow up the scattered

Israelites (Lev 26:33) and make them vanish (v. 38), but Yahweh will preserve a remnant so that a new history might begin. Israel must trust the God of history who controls all time, places, and nations.

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

Israel might breach (פרר, Lev 26:15, 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 of disobedience is willful. Therefore, it results in the nullification of blessings associated with the Abrahamic Covenant and identification associated with the Mosaic Covenant. Yahweh, as the suzerain-legislator, deems any infraction of Mosaic legislation as rebellion against His sovereign will.

Yahweh, however, “remembers” (זכר) His covenants; He preserves the covenants. The covenants contain both blessing and cursing. Blessing and cursing are initiated by promise and implemented by legislation. Promise emphasizes divine sovereignty; legislation highlights human responsibility. When Israel proves unfaithful, Yahweh remains faithful. The suzerain’s faithful preservation of the covenant sharply contrasts with the vassal’s failure to submit. Covenant history confirms both divine dependability and human culpability.

The Hebrew Bible identifies the Abrahamic Covenant as a covenant with roots in the history of Israel. It involved Jacob, and before him, Isaac. Before Isaac, Yahweh granted the land to Abraham. Leviticus 26:42 presents this confirmation of prior history. As Yahweh preserves the Abrahamic Covenant (and will continue to preserve it), so also He will preserve the Mosaic Covenant for future generations (v. 45). Yahweh’s deeds in history illustrate His faithfulness to maintain the covenant in spite of the failure of one generation to be faithful to it.

### **Law**

Religious enthusiasm does not suffice for proper participation in the covenant relationship with Yahweh. Enthusiasm without identification leads to confusion. Identification produces unity within and recognition from without. At Mt. Sinai, the apostasies of the golden calf, strange fire, and blasphemy demonstrate what unguided and unstructured religious fervor can generate. Seeing that the emphasis of divine law rests upon Yahweh Himself, any breach of the law consists of defiance directed against the Law-Giver. The stipulations of law exhibit the nature and personality of the Law-Giver. The morality of the law reflects Yahweh’s morality. Israel’s faith is grounded in the precepts of divine law. Divine law identifies Yahweh

as the Creator of the heavens and earth, the Promise-Giver, the Land-Giver, and the Exodus-Causer. Every statute presents a testimony to the election of the people and a witness to their identification with their sovereign Lord.

Moses employs a variety of terms for law in Leviticus 26: חק/חקה (“statute”), מצוה (“commandment”), משפט (“ordinance”), and תורה (“law/instruction”). These terms represent the entire law promulgated at Mt. Sinai. The law must be “kept/preserved” (שמר), “obeyed” (שמע), “walked in (ordering the life)” (הלך), and “practiced” (עשה) (cf. vv. 3, 14-15). Therefore, the law did not serve as mere ornamentation. The law is Israel’s constitution. The nation of Israel derives her identity from corporate and individual observance of Yahweh’s commandments.

The legislation Yahweh promulgates at Sinai does not contradict the promise given to Abraham. The legal covenant (Mosaic) supplements the promissory covenant (Abrahamic). The latter does not nullify the former. Mosaic legislation is a means of implementing Yahweh’s suzerainty. It reaffirms His lordship over His people prior to their entry into the land promised to Abraham’s descendants.

### **Relation to Covenant**

As already observed, law supplements covenant. The treaty form employed by several cultures in the ancient Near East includes stipulations. Thereby the suzerain could identify himself as the overlord, the one with authority to establish the calendar, ordain boundaries, grant life, or deal out death. Legislation clarifies authority. Every covenant must identify an authority in which it resides, an authority capable of meting out the punishments required for breach of covenant. A covenant endures as long as its ratifier and reflects the wisdom and moral character of its ratifier. The ratifier of the covenants with Abraham and Moses is Yahweh Himself. The covenants are His covenants (cf. “My covenant,” Lev 26:9, 15, 42, 44), and the laws are His laws (cf. first-person singular suffixes on terms for law in vv. 3 and 15).

### **Prohibition of Idolatry**

Leviticus 26:1 clearly prohibits all forms of idolatry. The prohibition emphatically identifies the true nature of faith in Yahweh. Such faith recognizes the exclusivity of Yahweh’s deity and lordship. No idolater can truly worship Yahweh. Yahweh’s preeminence as the Creator of heavens and earth makes Him the only true God. Yahweh created and controls all the natural forces of the world. He is the Rain-Giver and the Rain-Withholder (vv. 4, 19); He is the Controller of wild beasts (vv. 6, 22); and He is the Controller of the nations (vv. 7-8, 16-17, 33, 38). He knows the heart and its motives (vv. 36, 41). He is the Destroyer of idols and idol worship (v. 30). Idolatry and its attendant rituals in the ancient Near East implied that the deities were incapable of self-sufficiency. In fact, idolaters were cast in the role of manipulators. They sought to manipulate the deities behind the idols. Not so with Yahweh—no man controls or manipulates Yahweh. Yahweh controls history, nature, life, death, and man.

Leviticus 26 reveals that idolatry is powerless and empty; idolatry is man's product (v. 1). Idolatry is blatant, filthy, and deadly (v. 30<sup>10</sup>). It is doomed to destruction and the idolater is destined to die. Idolatry consists of willful rebellion against the person of Yahweh. It usurps Yahweh's rightful sovereignty. Anyone engaging in such activities against Yahweh is a covenant breaker, a rebel, an anarchist, and a conspirator. According to the treaties of the ancient Near East, to aid in the usurpation of a throne or to engage in intrigue aimed at supplanting the true heir to the throne comprised a capital offense.<sup>11</sup>

Defiance of the Creator of the universe and the God of all history presents a far more serious crime than the breach of any human treaty. The "self-introduction formula"<sup>12</sup> ("for I am Yahweh your God") succinctly expresses the ultimate reason for the prohibition of idolatry. This formula represents the key phrase in Leviticus 18–26.<sup>13</sup> The contrast is self-explanatory. Yahweh's inherent and exclusive authority makes idols worthless, powerless, anthropocentric, and void of any spiritually redeeming value. No room for divided loyalties exists. Yahweh insists upon exclusive lordship in the lives of His people. Awareness of Yahweh's existence, identity, and presence forms the core of the covenant relationship that Israel enjoys.

The idolater chooses the way of the uncircumcised nations (cf. v. 41), therefore those nations among whom he will be exiled (v. 33) will swallow him up (v. 38). His guilt, his treason, will cause him great anguish (v. 39). The only way for restoration to Yahweh's favor comes through confession, humility, and restitution (vv. 40-41). Idolaters must confess their filthy idolatry. Humility results from the realization that one cannot manipulate Yahweh. Restitution must consist in making Yahweh and His land priorities in one's life.

## Observance of Sabbaths

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<sup>10</sup>The following translation of Lev 26:30 brings out the "deadly" aspect of idolatry: "I will destroy your shrines and cut down your incense altars, then I will put your corpses upon the lifeless forms of your filthy idols because I despise [lit., my soul despises] you." The term for idols (אֱלֹהִים) may be "a term of reproach, 'things of dung,' which is vocalized similarly to אֲדָמָה ['detested things']"—Menahem Haran, *Temples and Temple-Service in Ancient Israel: An Inquiry into the Character of Cult Phenomena and the Historical Setting of the Priestly School* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1978) 104-5. Cf. Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Leviticus: A Commentary*, trans. Douglas W. Stott, OTL (Louisville, Ky.: Westminster-John Knox, 1996) 403: "dungy things."

<sup>11</sup>Joseph A. Fitzmyer, *The Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire*, *Biblica et Orientalia* 19 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1967) 15, 21, 83.

<sup>12</sup>John van Seters, "Confessional Reformulation in the Exilic Period," *Vetus Testamentum* 22 (1972):455.

<sup>13</sup>Gordon J. Wenham, *The Book of Leviticus*, NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1979) 250.

“Sabbaths” occurs in the plural throughout the pericope (Lev 26:2, 34-35, 43). Yahweh undoubtedly intends the reference 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 exhibits theological richness. It specially signifies Yahweh’s dominion over Israel.<sup>14</sup> In His sovereignty Yahweh establishes the nation, grants them their land, and claims His demand upon their time.<sup>15</sup> The sabbaths are also a means of reminding Israelites of their deliverance from Egyptian bondage.<sup>16</sup> Walther Zimmerli stresses the significance of Israel’s liturgy: “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>17</sup> Israel’s liturgical calendar is Yahweh-oriented. Yahweh is the God of time as well as the God of space. The sabbath honors the Lord of time. The sabbaths teach the Israelites to trust the Lord of all things for their provisions. Lordship resides at the heart 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 camped 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. He provides the way of service and blesses the path of obedience. Sabbath in the Hebrew Bible expresses more than the vertical relationship to the Lord of all creation. It also conveys concern and care for those who are fellow participants in the covenant (cf. Leviticus 25).

The sabbatical principle constitutes the test, the seal or sign, of the obedience Yahweh demands under the Mosaic covenant (Exod 33:17-21). The legal covenant represents the legislative authority of Yahweh. The sabbath represents Yahweh’s authority over time. Thus sabbatical law embodies the legislation of time.

Even the land needs restitution when Israel fails to grant the time that Yahweh demands for it (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 confirms rebellion against the Lord of time and space. Violation of the land by denying its just recompense indicates a violation of Yahweh’s gift of fruitfulness. Failure to observe the sabbaths consists of robbery because it denies continued fruitfulness for future generations of Abraham’s

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<sup>14</sup>Matitiahu Tsevat, “The Basic Meaning of the Biblical Sabbath,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 84 (1972):455.

<sup>15</sup>Ibid.

<sup>16</sup>Walter Brueggemann, *The Land: Place as Gift, Promise, and Challenge in Biblical Faith* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1977) 64.

<sup>17</sup>Walther Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology in Outline*, trans. David E. Green (Atlanta: John Knox, 1978) 125.

descendants. The liberty proclaimed in the sabbatical principle echoes the divine history. The God of history delivered Israel from servitude in Egypt so that the people might experience liberation from oppression. Denying that liberation equals denying the Lord who brought them out of Egypt (v. 13; cf. 25:38, 42, 55).

### **Yahweh**

Leviticus 26 clearly depicts Yahweh as God of the covenants. Moses employs “Yahweh” (יהוה) six times in the pericope (vv. 1, 2, 13, 44, 45, 46). Twice he uses the title absolutely (vv. 2, 46). Four times he connects the divine title directly with or associates it by context with “your/their God” (vv. 1, 13, 44, 45). In four of these occurrences, Moses mentions Yahweh in relation to the Mosaic Covenant (vv. 1, 2, 45, 46). In two cases, he associates Yahweh with the Abrahamic Covenant (vv. 13 and 44).

#### **Self-introduction Formula**

The self-introduction formula (“for I am Yahweh your God”) is one of the devices by which Moses sets this particular pericope off from the surrounding context. He often mixes this formula with the divine history formula (statement concerning Yahweh delivering Israel out of Egypt). In all cases (Lev 26:1, 2, 13, 44, 45), Moses employs the self-introduction formula as a conclusion to a section of the pericope. This formula marks the precepts of verses 1-2, the blessing of verses 3-12, and also the penalties of verses 14-45. The only mention of Yahweh outside either one of these two formulas appears in the postscript (v. 46), which identifies Yahweh as the Giver of the laws committed to Moses. The dual emphasis on Yahweh’s identification in the section concerning precepts (vv. 1-2) presents an obvious contrast to the idolatry forbidden there. Yahweh is the covenant name of the Covenant-Giver (cf. Exod 3:13-18; also, Gen 12:1, 4; 15:1-8; Exod 20:2, 7). “I am Yahweh” constitutes the divine seal on the covenants involved in Leviticus 26. Covenant preservation depends upon Yahweh’s identity (vv. 44-45).

Yahweh is the author of the precepts (v. 46; cf. vv. 1-2), the author of the history (vv. 13, 45), and the author of the covenant (v. 44). His authority is absolute; His covenants are dependable. He authors both the blessings and the curses, the reward and the retribution.

#### **Relation to Covenant**

The following elements establish Yahweh’s relationship to the covenants in Leviticus 26: (1) the self-introduction formula, (2) the divine history formula, (3) the attribution of the source of the laws at Sinai (v. 46), and (4) the first-person singular suffixes on “covenant.” The covenants did not originate with Israel. Yahweh promulgates the covenants unilaterally.

### Presence and Sanctuary

The word “presence” (פָּנִים, Lev 26:17) refers to the presence of Yahweh. In addition, other phrases or terms allude to the divine presence: “walk among you” (הִתְהַלֵּךְ בְּתוֹךְ, v. 12), “sanctuary” (מִקְדָּשׁ, v. 2), and “tabernacle” (מִשְׁכָּן, v. 11). His presence works both weal (vv. 11-12) and woe (v. 17). His presence is both edifice-oriented<sup>18</sup> (vv. 2, 11) and people-oriented (vv. 12, 17). Notably, His presence involves holiness (note the employment of the root שָׁקַד “holy” in שִׁקְדָּה, “sanctuary”). Reference to holiness stands out in a particularly striking fashion because it occurs in the 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—He is wholly other, incomparable. Also, setting sabbatical time apart for Him implies Yahweh’s holiness.

Verses 14-45 imply that when disobedient Israel is confronted by the punishment-dealing presence of Yahweh, He has ceased to “walk among” them or to tabernacle among them. Indeed, the text pictures Him as “walking in opposition” to them (vv. 24, 28). Even though His presence or sanctuary does not reside with the exiles among the nations (at least not in the same fashion as when they are obedient and in the land), yet Yahweh will preserve His covenant with them (v. 44).

### Promise

Promise here is being used in a very broad sense of the term. It covers both the promise to bless and the promise to curse. It includes 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). This promise precedes the history of deliverance from Egypt (the Abrahamic Covenant) and the entrance into Canaan (the Mosaic and Deuteronomic covenants). Promise does not refer to something inward and spiritual, but to the tangible aspects of covenant life: productivity, peace, population, presence, and land (property). The promise includes a pledge to bless Israelites for their loyalty to the covenant and to curse them for their disloyalty. Yahweh, the God of their ancestors, promises to be loyal to His covenant with His people.

### Blessing and Curse

The blessings and curses of Leviticus 26 bear a good deal of similarity to those of Deuteronomy 27–28 as well as to those of extrabiblical documents such as

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<sup>18</sup>By “edifice-oriented” this writer does not mean that Yahweh is edifice-limited. An edifice merely represents an accommodation to focus attention on Yahweh’s presence among His people. Cf. Ezek 10:3-19; 11:22-23; 43:1-5.

the Esarhaddon vassal treaties and the Sefire stela treaties.<sup>19</sup> Similarities involve both formal structure and traditional phraseology and vocabulary. By their very contexts in the biblical materials, the blessings and curses are distinctly covenantal.<sup>20</sup> The blessings relate directly to the promised blessings and/or privileges of both the Abrahamic and the Mosaic covenants. Likewise, the curses relate directly to the nullification or removal of those same blessings and/or privileges.

The blessings and curses do not in themselves indicate the presence of the Deuteronomic Covenant in Leviticus 26. Any preview of that covenant in the pericope must maintain continuity with the two previous covenants. In other words, a third covenant (whether here or in Deuteronomy 27–30) does not nullify the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants.

### **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>21</sup> Obedience reflects respect for who and what Yahweh is personally and historically (Lev 26:1-3, 13-15, 39-45). Obedience involves acceptance of the lordship of Yahweh in one’s life in both time and space (cf. vv. 2, 34-35, 43). Obedience produces participation in the covenant blessings (v. 9). The precepts of the law reveal the will of Yahweh for Israel. The will of man must yield to the will of Yahweh in order for him to demonstrate loyalty to the covenants (cf. v. 41).

Disobedience expresses denial of the identity of Yahweh in history, covenant, and law. It comprises breach of covenant faith (v. 15). It consists of acting unfaithfully, disloyally, and treasonously (v. 40). It represents blatant opposition to God (vv. 21, 23, 27). Disobedience constitutes nonperformance of His commands (v. 14). It involves rejecting His statutes and despising His ordinances (v. 15). Disobedience involves the inner man (vv. 15, 41, 43; note “soul” and “heart”) and has frightful consequences. Even cannibalism falls within the capability of the disobedient (v. 29). It causes the unacceptability of the sacrifices, which were the outward manifestation of faith (v. 31). Disobedience is worthy only of death (vv. 25, 33, 37, 38) and exile (vv. 33, 44). Death consists of separation from the body; exile means separation from the land.

<sup>19</sup>Fitzmyer, *Aramaic Inscriptions of Sefire* 44-48; D. J. Wiseman, *The Vassal-Treaties of Esarhaddon*, Iraq 20/1 (London: British School of Archaeology in Iraq, 1958) 62, 64,70.

<sup>20</sup>Contra Ronald E. Clements, *Prophecy and Tradition*, Growing Points in Theology (Atlanta: John Knox, 1975) 16-17.

<sup>21</sup>Zimmerli, *Old Testament Theology* 116.

## Guilt

The concept of guilt (עון) occurs in Lev 26:39, 40, 41, and 43. Moses mentions it only in the context of repentance, confession, humility, and restitution. Israelites must acknowledge guilt resulting from disloyalty to the covenant before the breached covenant might be reinstated. Guilt in this context possesses two aspects: (1) the guilt of the ancestors of Israel (“the fathers,” vv. 39, 40) and (2) the guilt of the current generation of Israelites (vv. 39, 40, 41, 43). Yahweh requires confession of both before He grants restoration. The guilt of the current generation holds primary significance. Unless the current generation can recognize, acknowledge, and deal with their own guilt, it is pointless to recognize, acknowledge, and deal with the guilt of their forefathers.

This guilt proves so burdensome that it will lead to severe anguish among exiled Israelites (v. 39). The guilt is real; the burden is real. This does not embody some sort of temporary “guilt trip.” Guilt, properly acknowledged, becomes Yahweh’s instrument to draw Israelites back to the covenant relationship that they enjoyed prior to their willful rebellion against Him. This guilt must be confessed (v. 40).

## Retribution and Chastisement

Yahweh highlights the application of the curses or penalties of Leviticus 26:14-45 by two means: (1) the gradation of punishments in five stages of severity (vv. 16-17, 18-20, 21-22, 23-26, and 27-38)<sup>22</sup> and (2) the recurring refrain, “seven times for your sins” (vv. 18, 21, 24, 28). Three occurrences of the term “discipline” (יסר, vv. 18, 23, 28) emphasize the stages of chastisement. Yahweh intends the entire process, from start to finish, as a means of restoration. However, the primary purpose does not consist of restoration, but of glorifying the covenant God, Yahweh (cf. vv. 44, 45).

Retribution might be terminal (cf. vv. 25, 30, 38), but chastisement might result in restoration through repentance (cf. vv. 39-45). Leviticus 26 speaks to both retribution and chastisement. Divine retribution will come upon those who fail to confess their sins. Yahweh, however, will chastise only those who confess their sins.

In the refrain (“seven times for your sins”), “seven times”<sup>23</sup> implies the sabbatical principle and “for your sins” indicates breach of covenant. The vassal

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<sup>22</sup>For an excellent discussion of the form, structure and setting of vv. 14-45, see John Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC 4 (Dallas: Word, 1992) 457-62.

<sup>23</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 Karl Elliger, *Leviticus*, HAT 1/4 (Tübingen, Germany: Verlag von J. C. B. Mohr/Paul Siebeck, 1966) 375: “Natürlich ist ‘sieben’ eine schematische Steigerungszahl” (“‘Seven’ is naturally a stylized number of intensity”).

treaties of Esarhaddon also apply the term “sin” to breach of covenant.<sup>24</sup> Leviticus 26 emphasizes the seal or sign of the Mosaic Covenant, the sabbaths. The sabbaths’ association with the land (vv. 34-35, 43) at least implies at least some relationship to the Abrahamic Covenant. Yahweh judges His people for their nonobservance of the sabbaths, for their worship of idols, and for the resulting defilement of His people among whom He dwells (cf. vv. 1-2, 29-31). Divine judgment does not betray the covenants (v. 44). On the contrary, judgment declares that disobedience constitutes sin and that sin consists of rebellion against the Lord. Eventually, Yahweh’s judgments will increase to such an intensity and nature that no doubt will remain that He has exercised His covenant rights to exact retribution from those who defy His authority.

### Exile

Exile (“scattering among the nations,” Lev 26:33) constitutes 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 which had characterized their sojourn in Egypt. Servitude will once again engulf the disobedient. Due to their “uncircumcised heart” (v. 41), Yahweh will place them among the uncircumcised—those who are outside the covenants. Exile comprises 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. Exile, landlessness, provides a condition that might give 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 would guide them out of bondage to freedom. Even in the land of their enemies, Yahweh continues to be their God (v. 44). The covenant relationship *per se* knows no geographical or political boundaries. The landedness or the landlessness of Yahweh’s people does not affect His loyalty. Yahweh stands above the circumstances of history, working for the repentance of His covenanted people so that His covenants, together with their promises, might one day be fulfilled completely.

### Repentance

The Hebrew word for “repentance” (נָשׁוּב) does not occur in Leviticus 26. However, the concept of repentance occurs in a threefold turning of exiled Israelites to Yahweh: (1) They must confess their guilt and the guilt of their forefathers (v. 40), recognizing their personal and corporate culpability. (2) They must humble their

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<sup>24</sup>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).

“uncircumcised heart” (v. 41), bringing it into subjection to the precepts of Yahweh. Submission to the divine Suzerain is required of a covenanted people. They must submit to Yahweh’s lordship. Their submission must not consist of mere external compliance in religious exercises; it must be internal and real. (3) They must make restitution for their guilt (v. 41), accepting the federal (or, natural) consequences of sin. Such restitution does not equate with soteriological redemption. Restitution provides evidence, not the cause, of repentance and expiation. The Israelites will experience the impact of sin until the land enjoys its restitution. Exile will continue after repentance until the penalty has been fulfilled. Getting right with God does not insure immediate blessing and removal from uncomfortable circumstances. It does guarantee restoration to the covenant relationship whereby Yahweh might renew promised blessings once the repentant Israelites regain the land.

### Restitution

“Restitution” (הצדקה) not only involves the full application of the federal (or, natural) consequences of sin, but also the full application of that which is right in Yahweh’s covenanted relationship to the land (Lev 26:34-35, 43). Therefore, restitution has a twofold character: positive (that which is right for the land—to enjoy its sabbaths) and negative (that which is the just consequence of sin—the period of Israel’s removal from the land). Through restitution Israel learns that the inexorable will and way of Yahweh will be fulfilled within both time and space.

### Revelation

The very concept of law implies communication between its promulgator and its recipients. Yahweh must reveal commandments, statutes, ordinances, laws and instructions since fallen human beings cannot intuitively deduce them. In the ancient Near East the concept of covenant itself demanded a written record or deposit of a pact for future generations.

The diversity of covenant concepts and forms in Leviticus 26, as compared with the ancient Near Eastern treaties, provides evidence for the independent theology of Israel.<sup>25</sup> Among many scholars, Clements notes, there is “a remarkable unwillingness to appreciate the creative possibilities of Israel’s own religious life and experience.”<sup>26</sup> The richness of Leviticus 26 lies, in part, in its uniqueness at that

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<sup>25</sup>Leviticus 26 contains some elements distinct from the vassal treaties of Esarhaddon and Sefire: blessings (vv. 3-13), provision for reinstatement in case of transgression (vv. 14-45; esp. vv. 39-45), monotheism, and covenantal precedents (vv. 42, 45). In the vassal treaties there are imprecations requested by a third party in the presence of a mediating deity and the employment of ritual magic—neither of which occur in the biblical covenants. For a more detailed study of this topic, see William D. Barrick, “Leviticus 26: Its Relationship to Covenant Contexts and Concepts” (unpublished Th.D. dissertation, Grace Theological Seminary, 1981) 171-84.

<sup>26</sup>Clements, *Prophecy and Tradition* 21.

particular stage of progressive revelation. The confluent nature of the revelation (i.e., drawing upon contemporary vocabulary, style, forms, and cultural milieu) represents a desire on the part of Yahweh for revelation to be immediately understandable and applicable.

Leviticus 26 claims to be Mosaic in time, content, and composition. The self-witness of Scripture must suffice as *prima facie* evidence. Unless equally ancient and authentic documentation can be produced to deny explicitly the claims and contents of this pericope, it must be allowed to stand. This must apply to both the historical claims and the theological concepts. The treaties of Esarhaddon and Sefire cannot be offered as contradictory testimony since they were composed 700 years too late and the differences in subject matter, purpose, and structure disqualify them as legal testimony against the biblical materials in Leviticus 26.

### **Leviticus 26 and the New Testament**

The employment of Lev 26:11-12 in 2 Cor 6:16 represents the only concrete example of the influence of Leviticus 26 on NT revelation.<sup>27</sup> Paul employs the passage from this pericope in order that he might better emphasize the concept of identification with God. Unfortunately, Wenham did not deal with this NT usage in his Leviticus commentary.<sup>28</sup> Wenham, however, does observe that, at least in principle, Christ's teachings in His pre-cross ministry express the blessings and curses of Leviticus 26. Israel was experiencing chastisement for covenant disloyalty at the time of Christ, so Jesus speaks of the eschatological reality of that chastisement. Wenham claims 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>29</sup> This is true insofar as the Book of Revelation directly relates them to the nation of Israel. No warrant exists for applying the covenant blessings and curses to the Gentiles (with the exception of the blessing for all peoples mediated by Abraham's descendants, Gen 12:3). Technically, Yahweh established the covenants with Israel alone (cf. Rom 9:4).<sup>30</sup>

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<sup>27</sup> Paul's quotation of Lev 26:11-12 is paraphrastic. He emphasizes the concept of identification with God (Lev 26:12b). The apostle's omission of Lev 26:11b provides 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 would omit Lev 26:11b ("and my soul will not despise you"), he paraphrased 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. The simple reading of the NT text alongside the Hebrew text makes elaborate discussions of conflation of OT texts, "pearl stringing," pre-Pauline usage, and 4Q LXX Lev<sup>3</sup> unnecessary.

<sup>28</sup> Wenham, *Leviticus* 329-30, 333-34.

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.* 334.

<sup>30</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). Exodus 19:5-6 and Rom 9:4 express this same exclusivity.

The principles of God's dealings with NT believers by means of reward and/or chastisement appear to be basically the same as the principles by which He dealt with Israelites under the covenants. However, this must not be construed as meaning that NT saints come under the same covenant relationship with God as Israel. Similarities are due to the same God, not to the same covenant. The very nature of God demands that the federal (or, 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 demonstrates loyalty 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. Phile 1-25; 1 Pet 5:5-7; 1 John 1:9). The same God promises to reward obedient service (cf. 1 Cor 15:58). The same God demonstrates that He has delivered the believer 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 reveals to Israel the continued authority and perpetuity of the Abrahamic Covenant after the ratification of the Mosaic Covenant, also confirms that testimony in Gal 3:17. New Testament believers must recognize that the authority of one covenant does not annul the authority of a previous covenant. God clearly reveals any exceptions (e.g., Heb 7:11-14). The epistle to the Galatian churches teaches that the law under Moses does not replace Abrahamic faith in Yahweh. Therefore, faith is still binding upon any man's relationship to the God of Abraham.

### **Conclusion**

What then might one conclude concerning the relationship of the Deuteronomic Covenant to Leviticus 26?

- Leviticus 26 does not make any specific reference to the Deuteronomic Covenant.
- Leviticus 26 has some similarities to Deuteronomy 27-30, the pericope involved in the Deuteronomic Covenant. However, similarity does not mean identity.
- Leviticus 26 explains Israel's relationship to the land prior to occupation and subsequent to the revelation of the Mosaic Covenant.
- Although Leviticus 26 contains revelation relating to Israel's exile and subsequent repentance under the Mosaic covenant (v. 45), it is not a formal prophetic announcement.
- Leviticus 26 emphasizes the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants by direct reference. The chapter's terminology and theological concepts contain less direct references to those covenants. The relationship to these two covenants is so

embedded in the text that any connotation regarding the Deuteronomic Covenant must also involve a similar relationship between it and the previous two.

- Affinities between Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 27–30 are far more intimate than any similarities to extrabiblical treaties. The common entities (subject matter, language, historical context, author, and intent) of the two pericopes tie them together. These affinities represent the essence of a potential preview of the Deuteronomic Covenant in Leviticus 26. Leviticus 26 constitutes transitional revelation for the nation of Israel between the Mosaic Covenant granted at Mt. Sinai and the Deuteronomic (or, Palestinian) Covenant granted on the plains of Moab. Being transitional, it does not embody the Deuteronomic Covenant itself. It reveals only the concepts necessary to prepare the nation for entrance into that covenant at a later date.

The pericope, viewed in the context of the Sinai revelation and the Sinai apostasies, offers a perspective not found elsewhere in the Scriptures. That perspective regards the theological instruction of the nation of Israel on the threshold of its wilderness wanderings. Unlike Exodus 20 and Deuteronomy 4, Leviticus 26 is not a mini-statement of the Mosaic Covenant. It is, instead, a compilation and synthesis of the combined truths of both the Abrahamic and Mosaic covenants. The synthesis takes the form of a parenthesis for Israel regarding what Yahweh requires of His people. It provides Israel with another taste of promise tempered by precept. It wraps up the Sinai experience by appealing to a continuity of authority and promise. Leviticus 26 is a theological treatise with implications for living. Many Israelites fell in the wilderness because they failed to heed this timely instruction. Because the Israelites failed so miserably, Paul was moved to confirm the teachings for NT believers struggling with apparent conflict between the Mosaic and Abrahamic covenants (Gal 3:17).

Two areas of covenant did not receive attention in this essay since Leviticus 26 does not explicitly mention them: (1) the relationship of covenant to kingdom and (2) the relationship of kingdom and covenant to the calendar of Israel. These studies might complement the present study. This writer believes that both areas are necessary adjuncts to the theological core of Leviticus 26, if one is to understand properly the relationship of the prophets to Leviticus 26 (and to Deut 27–30). Leviticus 26's primary contribution rests in its explicit proclamation of the lordship of Yahweh in both time and space as it relates to repentance and restoration.