

December 23, 2018 - Lev. 26:14–46 - Curses for Disobedience

Torah reading: Leviticus 26:14–46 - Curses for Disobedience

Psalms 89:20-38

Haftarah: Isaiah 1:19-20, 24-28, 31 + 2:1, 5 (a repeat from previous week)

The Curse of the Law

In the Midrash, these passages are called the *Tokheha* (the Admonishment) along with those in **Deuteronomy 28:15-69**

The Mishnah taught that the blessings and curses of Leviticus 26:3–45 and Deuteronomy 28:1–68 should be read on public fast days. The Mishnah taught that they should not interrupt the reading of the curses, but one person reads them all.

The Zohar held that all these admonishments are actually blessings, even if on the surface they appear to be curses, because chastisement reveals the love of the Father.

Elijah told Rabbi Simeon: "Consider, when a king loves his son, although he might curse him and beat him nevertheless he loves him from the bottom of his heart." (Zohar Hadash, 19)

- **Hebrews 12:8** - "But if ye be without chastisement, whereof all are partakers, then are ye bastards, and not sons."

Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law

The treasure hidden within these curses is the revelation that Christ redeemed us from the curse of the Law (**Galatians 3:13**)

Despair

Leviticus 26:14-16 - "But if ye will not hearken unto me, and will not do all these commandments; And if ye shall despise my statutes, or if your soul abhor my judgments, so that ye will not do all my commandments, but that ye break my covenant: I also will do this unto you; I will even appoint over you terror, consumption, and the burning ague, that shall consume the eyes, and cause sorrow of heart: and ye shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it."

"sorrow of heart" - The Jewish translation is "diseases that cause hopeless longing and depression."

Rashi - If you do not learn [the Torah], you will not perform. Scripture hereby enumerates two transgressions [namely, (a) not learning the Torah and therefore (b) not fulfilling its commandments properly]. — [Torath Kohanim 26:18]

[This verse has enumerated] seven sins, the first leading to the second, and so on, until the seventh, [and the process of degeneration is] as follows: [First, a person] does not

learn [the Torah]; then, he [subsequently] does not fulfill [the commandments]; he then despises others who do [fulfill them]; then, he hates the Sages, prevents others from fulfilling [the commandments], denies the [authenticity of the] commandments and [finally] denies the very omnipotence of God.

Leviticus 26:17 - "And I will set my face against you, and ye shall be slain before your enemies: they that hate you shall reign over you; and ye shall flee when none pursueth you."

"I will set my face against you" - Whereas in our obedience, God "will turn away (אַפְּנֶה) from all My affairs to pay your reward," in disobedience He says "I will turn (פִּנֶּה) away from all My affairs, to harm you."

"They that hate you" - both enemies from within and without.

Rashi - I will make your enemies stem from within your very own people. For at the time that the nations stand up against Israel, they seek out only what is visible, as it is said, "And it happened, when Israel sowed, that Midian, Amalek, and the children of the East came up... and they camped against them and destroyed the Land's produce" (Judges 6:3-4). However, when I will set up [enemies] against you from within your very own camp, they will seek out your hidden treasures [within]. Thus, says the verse, "who ate the flesh of My people and flayed their skin from upon them [and opened their bones and broke them]" (Micah 3:3)-the metaphor of breaking the bone to get to the marrow within, alluding to the enemy seeking out the hidden treasure within (Yosef Hallel)].

A Chance to Repent

Leviticus 26:18-19 - "And if ye will not yet for all this hearken unto me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins. And I will break the pride of your power; and I will make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass."

Rashi - I will break the pride of your strength: This is the Temple, and so Scripture says, "Behold, I will profane my sanctuary, the excellency of your strength" (Ezekiel 24:21). - [Torath Kohanim 26:27]

"make your heaven as iron, and your earth as brass" - This is more severe than that of Moses, for there he says, "And your sky above you will be [like] copper and the earth beneath you (like) iron" (**Deuteronomy 28:23**), that the sky will sweat as copper sweats, and the earth will not sweat, just as iron does not sweat, and therefore, [the earth] will preserve [any of] its [existing] fruit. Here, however, [in this harsher curse, pronounced by God Himself,] the sky will not sweat, just as iron does not sweat, and therefore, there will be drought in the world, while the earth will sweat, just as copper sweats, thus causing its fruits to rot [through its dampness]. — [Torath Kohanim 26:28]

Leviticus 26:20 - "And your strength shall be spent in vain: for your land shall not yield her increase, neither shall the trees of the land yield their fruits."

Another Chance to Repent

Leviticus 26:21 - "And if ye walk contrary unto me, and will not hearken unto me; I will bring seven times more plagues upon you according to your sins."

The Jewish translation has "if you treat Me as happenstance"

Rashi - Our Rabbis said that [this word means] temporary, by chance (מְקָרָה), something that happens only sometimes. Thus, [our verse means:] "If you treat the commandments as happenstance, a temporary concern." Menachem [Ben Saruk], (Machbereth, p. 1158) however, explains קָרִי as refraining. Similar is, "hold back (הִקֵּר) your steps" (Prov. 25:17), and also, "he who keeps back (יִקֵּר) his breath" (Prov. 17:27). And this explanation [of עָמִי קָרִי] resembles Onkelos's translation, namely, denoting hardness (קָשִׁי), i.e., [those who commit the sin of עָמִי קָרִי] harden (מְקַשִּׁין) their hearts to refrain from coming close to Me.

Leviticus 26:22 - "I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, and destroy your cattle, and make you few in number; and your high ways shall be desolate."

Rashi - (The rabbis explain that wild beasts and domestic animals will both kill). Here you have seven punishments: 1) the teeth of domestic animals, 2) the teeth of wild animals, 3) the venom of the crawling things of the dust, 4) and they will bereave [you], 5) utterly destroy [you], 6) and diminish [you], 7) and [your roads] will become desolate.

A Third Chance to Repent

Leviticus 26:23-24 - "And if ye will not be reformed by me by these things, but will walk contrary unto me; Then will I also walk contrary unto you, and will punish you yet seven times for your sins."

Leviticus 26:25 - "And I will bring a sword upon you, that shall avenge the quarrel of my covenant: and when ye are gathered together within your cities, I will send the pestilence among you; and ye shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy."

"avenge" = *naqam* - take vengeance, avenge. The word is repeated twice here.
NET - "I will bring on you an avenging sword, a covenant vengeance."

Leviticus 26:26 - "And when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall deliver you your bread again by weight: and ye shall eat, and not be satisfied."

"staff" of bread = a supply that would support a person, as a staff does.

Rashi - This refers to "the arrows of hunger" (see Ezekiel 5:16 where both of these expressions appear, and Redak identifies the "arrows of hunger" as blight, mildew and

locusts, which destroy some or most of the grain).

"and ten women will bake your bread in one oven" - because of lack of wood. The grain will rot, and the bread will become crumbly, breaking apart inside the oven. The women, therefore, will sit and weigh the broken pieces, to divide them among themselves. "you will eat, yet not be satisfied": This describes a curse within the intestines. — [Torath Kohanim 26:34]

A Fourth Chance to Repent

Leviticus 26:27-28 - "And if ye will not for all this hearken unto me, but walk contrary unto me; Then I will walk contrary unto you also in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins."

Leviticus 26:29 - "And ye shall eat the flesh of your sons, and the flesh of your daughters shall ye eat."

i.e. as during a seige.

This prediction actually came to pass at the siege of Samaria by the Syrians (**2 Kings 6:28-29**), and at the siege of Jerusalem by the Babylonians, which Jeremiah bewails, "the hands of pitiful women have sodden their own children, they were their meat in the destruction of the daughter of my people" (Lamentations 4:10). This also happened at the siege of Jerusalem by Titus. A woman named Mary killed her infant child and boiled it during the height of the famine, and after she had eaten part of it, the soldiers found the rest in her house. (Josephus, De Bello. Jud. I. 6. c. 3. sect. 4.)

Leviticus 26:30 - "And I will destroy your high places, and cut down your images, and cast your carcases upon the carcases of your idols, and my soul shall abhor you."

Rashi - The people would be swollen from starvation; [and in a futile gesture of homage,] they would take out their idol from their bosom and kiss it; their bellies would burst open, and they would fall down [dead] on top of it. — [Torath Kohanim 26:36]

Desolation

Leviticus 26:31 - "And I will make your cities waste, and bring your sanctuaries unto desolation, and I will not smell the savor of your sweet odors."

The sweet savor offerings of acceptance will not be received. No pilgrims will ascend to Jerusalem for the feasts.

Rashi - The land will be desolate not only of people, but there will be none who pass by or through the land.

Leviticus 26:32 - "And I will bring the land into desolation: and your enemies which dwell therein shall be astonished at it."

Rashi - since the Land will be desolate of people living in it, Israel's enemies will not find contentment in Israel's Land [and will have to leave]. — [Sifthei Chachamim; Torath Kohanim 26:38]

Scattered

Leviticus 26:33 - "And I will scatter you among the heathen, and will draw out a sword after you: and your land shall be desolate, and your cities waste."

Rashi - a harsh thing [for Israel], for when the people of a country are exiled to the same place, they see each other and find solace. However, Israel was scattered as if through a winnowing basket, just as a person who scatters barley through a sieve [so that] not one of them is attached to another. — [Torath Kohanim 26: 39]

"Your land will be desolate, and your cities will be laid waste." - Why repeat this? The desolation will appear to you as permanent, so there will seem to be no possibility of returning.

The Land Will Enjoy Its Sabbaticals

Leviticus 26:34-35 - "Then shall the land enjoy her sabbaths, as long as it lieth desolate, and ye be in your enemies' land; even then shall the land rest, and enjoy her sabbaths. As long as it lieth desolate it shall rest; because it did not rest in your sabbaths, when ye dwelt upon it."

Rashi - The seventy years of the Babylonian exile [i.e., between the destruction of the first Temple and the building of the second,] corresponded to the seventy years of Shemittah and Jubilee years that took place during the years that Israel angered the Omnipresent while in their Land, [a total of] 430 years. Three hundred and ninety years were the years of their sinning from when they entered the land until the Ten Tribes were exiled, and the people of Judah angered Him for forty more years from the time the Ten Tribes were exiled until the destruction of Jerusalem. This is what is referred to in **Ezekiel 4:4-5** [when God makes Ezekiel figuratively suffer one day for each year Israel sinned, in order to atone for their sins]

Fear During the Exile

Leviticus 26:36-38 - "And upon them that are left alive of you I will send a faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; and the sound of a shaken leaf shall chase them; and they shall flee, as fleeing from a sword; and they shall fall when none pursueth. And they shall fall one upon another, as it were before a sword, when none pursueth: and ye shall have no power to stand before your enemies. And ye shall perish among the heathen, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up."

Rashi - You will become lost among the nations: When you will be scattered, you will become lost from one another.

Leviticus 26:39 - "And they that are left of you shall pine away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands; and also in the iniquities of their fathers shall they pine away with them."

Instead of "pine away" the Jewish translation has "they will rot away because the iniquities of their fathers are still within them."

The Gemara cited a Baraita (a teaching) that interpreted the words "the iniquities of their fathers shall they pine away with them" in **Leviticus 26:39** to teach that God punishes children only when they follow their parents' sins.

Rashi - Heb. יִמָּקוּ, an expression of melting, and has the same meaning as יִמָּסוּ, "they will melt." Similar is, "their eyes will melt (תִּמְקַנָּה) in their sockets" (**Zechariah 14:12**),

A Final Chance to Repent

Leviticus 26:40-41 - "If they shall confess their iniquity, and the iniquity of their fathers, with their trespass which they trespassed against me, and that also they have walked contrary unto me; And that I also have walked contrary unto them, and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if then their uncircumcised hearts be humbled, and they then accept of the punishment of their iniquity:"

Confession - as in exile Daniel did (**Daniel 9:4-19**) and then heard of the promise of Messiah from Gabriel (**Daniel 9:24-27**).

"accept of the punishment of their iniquity" - The rabbis understood to mean that their suffering would atone for their sins.

NET - "then their uncircumcised hearts become humbled and they make up for their iniquity,"

But it is clearly instead talking about the repentance and resultant humbling of their heart that atones, and causes God to "remember" his covenant.

Jacob, Isaac and Abraham

Leviticus 26:42 - "I will remember my covenant with Jacob and also my covenant with Isaac and also my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land."

Rashi - Heb. יַעֲקֹב. [The name יַעֲקֹב is] written in full, [i.e., with a "vav,"] in five places [in Scripture], and [the name] אֱלִיָּהוּ is written defectively [without a "vav," i.e., אֱלִיָּה also] in five places [in Scripture]. Jacob took a letter ["vav"] from the name of Elijah [the Prophet] as security that he will come and herald the redemption of his [Jacob's] children [and since this is Elijah's mission in life, his name will remain "incomplete," as it were, until he fulfills it, speedily, in our days. The five instances of the "vav" symbolize the five fingers of the hand; i.e., this security arrangement between Jacob and Elijah

was sealed by a handshake (Gur Aryeh)].

Why are the forefathers enumerated in reverse order?

To inform [you that the youngest patriarch,] Jacob is [alone] worthy of this [i.e., that Israel be redeemed through his merit alone], but if this is not enough, then Isaac is together with him, and if this is not enough, then Abraham is with him, and [Abraham] is certainly worthy. And why is the expression "remembering" not used with Isaac? [Because] Isaac's ashes (see Rashi on Genesis 22:13; Bereishith Rabbah 56:9; Tanchuma Shelach 14) [always] appear before Me, gathered up and placed upon the altar" [and therefore, God does not have to "remember" Isaac, for Isaac is never forgotten]. — [Hagahoth Ubiyurei Hagra on Torath Kohanim]

But a different Midrash explains that this is to teach that the three patriarchs were on a par.

Leviticus 26:43 - "The land also shall be left of them, and shall enjoy her sabbaths, while she lieth desolate without them: and they shall accept of the punishment of their iniquity: because, even because they despised my judgments, and because their soul abhorred my statutes."

God Will Not Utterly Destroy

Leviticus 26:44-45 - "And yet for all that, when they be in the land of their enemies, I will not cast them away, neither will I abhor them, to destroy them utterly, and to break my covenant with them: for I am the LORD their God. But I will for their sakes remember the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the heathen, that I might be their God: I am the LORD"

- **Romans 11:25-26** - "For I would not, brethren, that ye should be ignorant of this mystery, lest ye should be wise in your own conceits; that blindness in part is happened to Israel, until the fulness of the Gentiles be come in. And so all Israel shall be saved: as it is written, There shall come out of Sion the Deliverer, and shall turn away ungodliness from Jacob:"

Leviticus 26:46 - "These are the statutes and judgments and laws, which the LORD made between him and the children of Israel in mount Sinai by the hand of Moses."

Repeated in Deuteronomy

These blessings and curses were repeated in **Deuteronomy 27 and 28** - the blessings were announced from Mt. Gerizim and the curses from Mt. Ebal.

- **Deuteronomy 27:26** - "Cursed be he that confirmeth not all the words of this law to do them. And all the people shall say, Amen."

Christ Redeemed Us from the Curse of the Law

- **Galatians 3:10** - "For as many as are of the works of the law are under the curse: for it is written, Cursed is every one that continueth not in all things which are written in the book of the law to do them."

- **Galatians 3:13-14** - "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree: That the blessing of Abraham might come on the Gentiles through Jesus Christ; that we might receive the promise of the Spirit through faith."

- **Galatians 3:16** - "Now to Abraham and his seed were the promises made. He saith not, And to seeds, as of many; but as of one, And to thy seed, which is Christ."

Some authorities list **Jeremiah 16:19–17:14** as a haftarah reading for the blessings and curses sections of Leviticus. There is a curse on "the man that trusts in man" in Jeremiah 17:5 and a blessing on "the man that trusts in the Lord" in Jeremiah 17:7.