

BE'CHUKOTAI – “IN MY STATUTES”

LEVITICUS (VAY'YIKRA) 26:3 – 27:34

INTRODUCTION

1. In this concluding portion, the Torah strikes a tone of warning and admonition.
 - a. The name for this chapter is *tochacha*, literally “warning.”
 - b. Also used to describe Deut. 28.
2. The blessings, due to obedience, are contrasted with dire consequences of disobedience.
3. Many wonder how others can get away with certain things but we can't.
 - a. If a king invaded a country and the people resisted, the conqueror would not punish.
 - b. They would have in their rights to defend themselves.
 - c. If they swear allegiance and then rebel he would punish them for breaking covenant.
4. In context of covenant, God rewards obedient and punishes disobedient.
5. That there are ramifications of disobedience is a harsh truth.
 - a. Naked truth is not always pleasant.
6. When the covenant was renewed with Israel, taught that it was ratified by warnings of this chapter.
7. Chapter makes it clear that, not only Israel's prosperity, but survival depends on loyalty to God and His commands.
 - a. In short, obey and live; disobey and die.
 - b. Not because He will kill you but because your actions will kill you.
 - c. This is my Torah portion.
8. There is a long list of blessings and longer list of punishments.
 - a. The blessings are given in general terms.
 - b. The curses are given in detail to provoke the people to awe and, thus, obedience.
9. When it comes to rewards and curses, no spiritual manifestation is mentioned, but physical.
 - a. Spiritual reward would be obvious and would be quite natural.
10. Not natural that to obey His commands would result in good health, prosperity, triumph over enemies.
 - a. By obeying there are miraculous rewards.
11. One of those rewards is the nearness of God even while we enjoy material rewards.
 - a. Disobedience then is the absence of God while we suffer absence of material reward.

CHAPTER 26: BLESSING FOLLOWS OBEDIENCE

1. Verse 3-4: “If you walk in my statutes...will give your rains in season. . . and land will yield.”
 - a. If you bear good fruit (keep commands) the ground will bear good fruit.
 - b. We came from the dust – must bear good fruit that it may bear good fruit.
2. It must rain that there will not be famine; consequently it is first of the blessings.
 - a. Needed to irrigate crops.
 - b. Affect climate and water supply and, consequently, human health.
3. Verse 5: “Your threshing shall reach unto vintage” – so much wheat that it continues until the time to harvest your grapes.
 - a. Occupied with that until the time comes to sow next year's grain.

4. Amos speaks of a time like this:

“Behold, the days are coming, says the LORD, when the plowman shall overtake the reaper, and the treader of grapes him who sows seed; the mountains shall drip with sweet wine, and all the hills shall flow with it.” – Amos 9:13

5. This would suggest that this is when His people are keeping His instructions.
6. This continuous activity infers that this is part of the blessing.
 - a. When busy, people are fulfilled and their health is better.
 - b. When not busy, they seek amusement and stimulation and not in right places.
7. Verse 6: “I will give peace in the land” – prosperity without peace is valueless.
 - a. Only enjoyable when in peace without dread of assault, robbery or devastation.
 - b. Peace will be so pervasive, enemies will not attempt to use Israel as route to battle.
8. Verse 7 – 8: If attacked, Israel will be able to overcome vastly superior forces.
 - a. The enemy will suffer humiliating defeat because God will be with you.
 - b. Maccabees overcame a much greater force of Greeks because they wouldn’t assimilate.
9. That 5 can pursue 100 demonstrates the more who are united in service to God, the more effective their actions.
10. Verse 9: “Will have respect...and will establish my covenant.
 - a. That He will have respect is literally, “turn to you.”
 - b. Make His face to shine upon you hints that we have turned our face to Him.
 - c. Which is to say that we are committed to keeping His commands.
11. Establish my covenant is said to refer to New Covenant of Jeremiah 31:31-33.
 - a. That covenant will never be annulled for He will “remember their sins no more.”
 - b. Established “with you” is to say, in your own merits not those of the patriarchs.
12. Verse 12: “I will walk among you” – God would closely and intimately associate with Israel.
 - a. This verse makes clear that the blessings described here never completely fulfilled.
 - b. This would then speak of a future time when His laws are written on our hearts.
13. Verse 13: Reminds that He is God who brought Israel out of Egypt and He can do it again.
 - a. He will do it again and in a time when Israel is turning toward Him.
 - b. The law will be written upon their hearts.

CHAPTER 26: CURSES FOLLOW DISOBEDIENCE

1. These punishments are arranged in a series of five groups of increasing severity:
 - Sickness
 - Defeat
 - Famine
 - Wild Beasts
 - Siege and Exile
2. They are not meant as revenge but to provoke us to repent.
 - a. For that reason inflicted in stages of increasing severity.
 - b. If the first group does not attain desired effect, the sin becomes more serious.
 - c. It means that His people refuse to recognize the sin nor God’s authority.
3. Each grouping speaks of sevenfold punishment.
 - a. Some rabbinic sources deem it to be literal, some figurative; i.e. many or multiple.

- b. Seven is also used to define something as “complete.”
4. The first series is:
- Swelling lesions.
 - Burning Fever.
 - Frustrated Longing.
 - Sowing seeds that produce crops for the enemy.
 - Being struck down before the enemy.
 - Being subjugated.
 - Fleeing when none are in pursuit.
5. Rabbi Hirsch makes an interesting comment concerning who the “enemy” is in this grouping.
- “In the case of Israel, the true cause of the downfall will be disobedience to the Torah, but many will say that it was loyalty to the Torah that caused Israel to become weak and suffer defeat. Such people are the internal enemies who by promising freedom if only Israel would cast off the yoke of the Torah, will only increase the wretchedness imposed by outer enemies.”
6. In other words, the enemy without would not be as powerful if it were not for the enemy within.
- a. Enemy within makes it possible for the other to enjoy crops and defeat us in battle.
7. Verse 19: The second series begins with “breaking the pride of your power.”
- a. Understood as the power which causes your pride.
- b. The feeling of independence that results from prosperity.
- c. Also understood to allude to the Temple: the sense that God would never leave us.
8. These seven punishments are:
- Destruction of your pride (i.e. Temple and/or prosperity).
 - Heavens will be like iron (not much rain)
 - Earth will be like copper (land will be hardened)
 - Will extend strength in vain.
 - Earth will not yield crops
 - Trees will not yield fruit.
 - Whatever does grow will drop from tree before maturing.
9. Verse 21: “If you walk contrary (casually) unto me” – your obedience is haphazard & erratic.
- a. Doing the opposite of what you should.
- b. Will treat them as a matter of choice and convenience.
- c. Rather than divinely imposed regulations upon those in the covenant.
10. Hebrew word is קרי *keri* and can also mean “accident.”
- a. In defiance, they would despise His laws and act as if “accident” ruled the universe.
- b. Evolution fits this definition – everything that is, came from nothing by accident.
11. Verse 22: “Will incite the wildlife of the field against you” – including domesticated animals.
12. These seven punishments are:
- Wild beasts will attack.
 - Domestic animals will attack.
 - Poisonous snakes will attack.
 - Death of children.
 - Loss of livestock.

- Reduction of populace.
 - Desolation of roads.
13. Verse 23: “If you will not be corrected unto me” – all intended to bring repentance.
- a. His intention is never destruction but restoration.
 - b. Sometimes that process is painful.
14. Y’shua said this to His congregation on Laodicea:

“As many as I love, I rebuke and chasten. Therefore be zealous and repent.” – Rev. 3:19

15. Verse 24: “I will walk contrary to you” – in effect, I will remove my presence.
- a. If we refuse to “see” Him, He removes presence making it harder for us to see truth.
 - b. The priestly benediction speaks to this issue; He turns His face to us as we turn to Him.
16. Verse 25: “execute the vengeance of the covenant” – retribution for breaking covenant.
- a. Nebuchadnezzar had Zedekiah blinded for rebelling after making a covenant with him.
17. The people would flee to cities to escape the sword only to find epidemics that destroy.
18. Verse 26: “Break your staff of bread” – cut off food supply.
- a. Food becomes so scarce that bread is doled out by measure.

“And I heard a voice in the midst of the four living creatures saying, ‘A quart of wheat for a denarius, and three quarts of barley for a denarius; and do not harm the oil and the wine.’ ” – Revelation 6:6

19. The seven punishments for this series are:
- Foreign invaders.
 - Siege forcing people into cities.
 - Plagues
 - Food shortages
 - Lack of fuel
 - Crumbling bread
 - Constant hunger
20. Verse 29: “You will eat the flesh of your sons...and daughters” – How depraved it must be.
21. Verse 30: “I will destroy your high places” – altars on mounds or hills.
- a. One translation renders it “your lofty buildings” i.e. towers.
 - b. People historically put their trust into their sturdy buildings for protection.
22. Verse 30: “and your sun pillars” – sun idols or images of sun god.
23. Verse 30: “My spirit will reject you” – With removal of presence, the temple loses holiness.
- a. It is no longer His temple but Israel’s sanctuaries which are made desolate.
24. The *mishkan* was built by artisans, erected by Moses but finished by the Presence.
- a. *Ukhvod YHVH milah ha’mishkan* – and the glory of the LORD filled the tabernacle.
 - b. *milah* also means to “complete.”
 - c. Without His presence it becomes a tent and a shell.
25. Verse 31: “I will not smell ... your sweet odors” – incense represents prayer.
- a. Infers that He will listen to their petitions of prayer.
26. The seven punishments for this series are:
- Cannibalism
 - Destruction of structures

- Death of people
 - Loss of Sh'kinah
 - Destruction of cities
 - Desolation of sanctuaries
 - Refusal to accept offerings
27. Verse 32: "I will make the land desolate" – no one would dwell in the land.
- a. Though Israel might be exiled, no other peoples would inhabit either.
 - b. Israel, land of milk and honey, would not sustain a growing population.
28. Verse 33: "I will scatter you among the nations ... and draw out the sword after you."
- a. Something that seems to defeat His purposes and yet serves them.
 - b. Subdue the earth is what was spoken from the beginning.
 - c. Scattering His seed accomplishes His purposes.
29. One source puts it this way:

"Israel's dispersion is not a curse in itself; it is a means of fulfilling God's purpose of spreading His word among the nations. The tragedy lies in being scattered because of the sword."

30. Verse 34: "The land shall be paid her Sabbaths" – make compensation.
- a. For the years of *sh'mittah* that were not observed.
 - b. The land rested in their absence.
 - c. Because of the seventy sabbaticals not observed, Babylonian captivity lasts 70 years.

CHAPTER 26: REPENTANCE BRINGS RESTORATION

1. Verse 40: "they will confess their sin and the sin of their forefathers."
- a. Must acknowledge our sins and that of our forefathers.
 - b. Consequently, the exile has been justified.
2. God doesn't desire our death, so every judgment is followed by promise of mercy.
3. Verse 42: "Will remember my covenant with Jacob, Isaac and Abraham"
- a. Mentioning the patriarchs stresses the enormity of Israel's sin.
 - b. They are descendants of patriarchs and holy men who lived in holy land, yet sinned.
 - c. Abraham's merit was greatest because he had no one to teach him.
 - d. The descendants of pagans - harlots and sinners – will come into the kingdom.

"Y'shua said to them, 'Assuredly, I say to you that tax collectors and harlots enter the kingdom of God before you.' " – Matthew 21:31

4. When Israel repents, He will remember the land – which is part of the covenant.
- a. Cannot separate the land from the covenant made with patriarchs.
 - b. It is the His "field" (Matthew 13).
5. This verse is one of five places Jacob's name is spelled with the letter ו *vav*.
- a. Ya'akov is typically יעקב but here it is יעקוב.
6. Rabbis explain that this has something to do with Elijah (Eliyahu).
- a. Five times his name appears without a ו *vav*.
 - b. His name is typically אליהו but appears five times as אליה.

7. It is explained that Elijah was created for the purpose of heralding the Messiah and “restoring Jacob” back to his God.
8. This is important because:
- Elijah restored the altar of God using 12 stones according to the tribes of Israel.
 - Y’shua says that Elijah would “restore all things” in Matthew 17:11.
 - Elijah was a tishbite and of the “resident aliens” of Gilead.
 - Elijah corresponds to those “grafted in” and those “scattered” among the nations.
 - Ironically, there are five groups of punishments mentioned in this chapter.
9. Rabbis explain when Elijah accomplishes his mission, the γ *vav* will be returned to him.
- a. Inference would be he is not complete until he completes his mission.
 - b. Malachi tells us his mission.

“Remember the Law of Moses, My servant, which I commanded him in Horeb for all Israel, with the statutes and judgments. Behold, I will send you Elijah the prophet before the coming of the great and dreadful day of the LORD. And he will turn the hearts of the fathers to the children, and the hearts of the children to their fathers, lest I come and strike the earth with a curse.” - Malachi 4:4-6

10. Verse 43: “The land will be appeased” – because they didn’t obey the Sabbaths.
- a. Without them the Sabbaths will be repaid to the land.
 - b. Hints that the creation somehow recognizes the authority and law of the Creator.
 - c. The creation eagerly anticipates the revealing of the sons of God (Rom 8:19)
11. Verse 44: “Yet for all that...I will not reject them ... nor destroy them utterly.”
- a. God’s anger is severe but it is not everlasting.
 - b. Furthermore, were He not to deliver them from these countries, Israel would disappear.
12. Among the nations, Israel sought to excel and subsequently assimilated into the cultures.
- a. Became necessary at times to cause upheaval that would force them to move on.
 - b. Exodus generation, for example, and the king who didn’t know Joseph.
 - c. Spanish inquisition, for example, forced eventual expulsion from Spain.
 - d. This worked to undermine their assimilation into those cultures.
13. Israel has forever wanted to be like all the other nations – that’s the reason for punishment.
- a. Exile serves to prevent Israel from assimilating and becoming permanently lost.
14. Verse 45: “The covenant of their ancestors” – literally the “first” generations.
- a. The patriarchs and the twelve sons of Jacob and those who left Egypt.
 - b. They – the patriarchs – were promised God would redeem their offspring.
 - c. He says “I am YHVH” and, thus, He will be faithful to His word.
15. Though He remembers the covenant, He doesn’t return Israel to former status until Messiah.
- a. When the Babylonian exile ended, Israel was not free but a vassal state of Persia.
 - b. A small percentage of the people returned while most remained in Persia.
 - c. Only when Messiah returns will all exiles be returned to the land.

“And He will send His angels with a great sound of a trumpet, and they will gather together His elect from the four winds, from one end of heaven to the other.” – Matthew 24:31

CHAPTER 27: GIFTS AND VALUATIONS

1. The book of Leviticus ends as it began – with a list of regulations concerning Sanctuary.
 - a. Voluntary contributions for the upkeep of the *mishkan*.
2. That they are mentioned here is interesting: perhaps suggesting that, while voluntary vows and offerings are commendable, they don't replace observing what God requires.
3. The exchange between Samuel and Saul comes to mind.

“Then Samuel went to Saul, and Saul said to him, ‘Blessed are you of the LORD! I have performed the commandment of the LORD.’ But Samuel said, ‘What then is this bleating of the sheep in my ears, and the lowing of the oxen which I hear?’ And Saul said, ‘They have brought them from the Amalekites; for the people spared the best of the sheep and the oxen, to sacrifice to the LORD your God; and the rest we have utterly destroyed.’ . . . So Samuel said: ‘Has the LORD as great delight in burnt offerings and sacrifices, as in obeying the voice of the LORD? Behold, to obey is better than sacrifice, and to heed than the fat of rams. For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, He also has rejected you from being king.’ ” – 1 Samuel 15:13–15, 22-23

4. No one should ever think that contributions replace active obedience.
5. Giving does not atone for disobedience unless the giving is coupled with a changed heart.
6. In that vein, as one may vow specific amounts of money, may also vow value of himself.
 - a. Or a thing or property.
7. Better not to than to renege on that vow.
8. Failure to keep it is going against their word as well as violating something that has been deemed holy.
9. Once something has been set apart to God it cannot be substituted with something else.
 - a. To do that, one would forfeit the original as well as the substitute.
 - b. Underscores the sanctity of things God says are “holy.”
 - c. Also reveals person's subconscious thought and their evil inclination.
 - d. Someone who vows quickly and then rethinks the vow inclined toward evil.
10. Consider the account involving Ananias and Sapphira (Act 5:1-11)
 - a. Sold property, obviously to give proceeds to work of God – would be deemed holy.
 - b. Kept back a part after making the vow – lied to God and it brought death.
11. On the other hand, Hannah vowed to dedicate her son, Samuel, to God's service.
 - a. The people of God benefited from her vow.
 - b. She was given an abundance of children because of her faithfulness to keep vow.
12. Verse 26: “A man shall not sanctify it (firstling from cattle or flock)”
 - a. It is firstborn and, therefore, sacred – offered as firstborn offering.
 - b. Can't be set apart for some other use.
 - c. It doesn't belong to the owner but to God.
13. Often thought about this in relation to the firstborn sons of Israel.
14. Is it that they can't be set apart for any other purpose but what the Creator has determined?
 - a. Seeing that they, too, belong to Him.
 - b. Perhaps they even try other things but fail and must come back to what they are to do.

CHAPTER 27: SEGREGATED PROPERTY

1. Verse 28: “No devoted thing... shall be sold or redeemed.”
 - a. Hebrew word חָרֵם *cherem* is customarily used as “cut off, excluded.”
 - b. Even used for “destruction” – banned from human enjoyment.
2. When something is devoted to God is more than a mere presentation.
 - a. Remained “most holy” and possession of Sanctuary.
3. *Cherem* is similar to something offered but there are distinctions.
4. When property is offered to God, it is the value that is sanctified. When the value is transferred to something else – e.g. money – through redemption, the property has no sanctity.
5. In case of *cherem*, property itself leaves control of owner, not merely its value.
 - a. Cannot redeem it and may not use it for any other purpose.
 - b. It is turned over the priests and they can do with it what they wish.
6. Verse 29: “None devoted... of men shall be ransomed but put to death.”
 - a. Is not saying that a person who has been devoted to God’s service is killed.
 - b. Here *cherem* speaks of one doomed to destruction – sentenced to die by courts.
 - c. He can’t be redeemed to escape his sentence.
7. Just like “set apart” doesn’t necessarily mean “holy” in sense we think of it.
 - a. *K’deshah* also translated harlot – set apart but doomed for destruction.
 - b. Likewise, *cherem* in this case is something distinguished in other extreme.
8. Verse 30: “tithe of the land” – so called second tithe.
 - a. Described in Deut. 14:22-23 – was similar to firstling of sacrificial animals.
 - b. Same law of redemption applied.

“You shall truly tithe all the increase of your grain that the field produces year by year. And you shall eat before the LORD your God, in the place where He chooses to make His name abide, the tithe of your grain and your new wine and your oil, of the firstborn of your herds and your flocks, that you may learn to fear the LORD your God always.”

– Deut. 14:22-23

9. Must be protected from contamination and eaten in Jerusalem.
 - a. Called “second tithe” because it is separated after the first tithe separated for Levite.
 - b. Can be redeemed with money.
10. The first tithe, then, is a gift to Levite and has no sanctity assigned to it.
 - a. The second tithe, however, does have sanctity assigned to it.
 - b. Something else to consider is that tithe applies to produce and grains, not money.
 - c. Redemption of the tithe is associated with money.
11. Verse 32: “Tithe of the herd” – Every 10th animal (not first) is like 10th of produce of field.
 - a. The 10th animal of the qualifying herd passed under rod and marked with red paint.
12. Distinguished for tithe in this manner: brought into a corral with narrow opening and moved through the opening; every tenth marked as an offering to YHVH.
13. Verse 33: “He shall not distinguish” – unlike other offerings where you choose the best.
 - a. This is left to “chance” – whichever is tenth is holy.
 - b. The owner is not to choose or else forfeit the choice and the tenth.
14. Even if “bad” in that it has a blemish disqualifying it from being “offering” it is still the tithe.
 - a. Even those who are considered “bad” are still distinguished by the LORD.

“As I live, says the Lord GOD, surely with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out, I will rule over you. I will bring you out from the peoples and gather you out of the countries where you are scattered, with a mighty hand, with an outstretched arm, and with fury poured out. And I will bring you into the wilderness of the peoples, and there I will plead My case with you face to face. Just as I pleaded My case with your fathers in the wilderness of the land of Egypt, so I will plead My case with you, says the Lord GOD. I will make you pass under the rod, and I will bring you into the bond of the covenant.” - Ezekiel 20:33-37

15. Footnote: the word “rod” is שבט *shevat* which is synonymous with שבת *Shabbat*.

a. He alone purges out the “bad” – the rebels (verse 38).

16. In many ways, this summarizes the portion – the rebels will be purged.

a. Those who have a heart will return to Him and His ways.