

Daily Bread with Brother Hwa-Chi (Not reviewed by the speaker, for personal use only)

Leviticus 26: 14-26

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the Bible again. We'll continue to read Leviticus chapter 26, and today we'll read from verse 14 to verse 26.

Yesterday, we read that if the people of Israel diligently obeyed God's statutes, commandments, and ordinances, He would bestow fivefold blessings: from abundant harvests to peace and protection, to fruitfulness, and finally, to God's presence and companionship. Among these fivefold blessings, we see that earthly blessings come first, leading to heavenly blessings. This reveals that the blessings God gives us in our daily lives are meant to enable Him to dwell with us and walk with us. Earthly blessings are bound by time and are temporary, but the experience of dwelling and walking with God is eternal. Not only do we have God's presence and guidance in this life, but if we obey and follow Him, we can also bear the fruit of the Holy Spirit in our lives, and this fruit will last forever.

After God finished speaking about blessings, His tone shifted, and He began to warn the Israelites. If they failed to obey His commandments, it would bring about fivefold curses, each increasingly severe, even to the point of being described as terrifying. These fivefold curses are recorded in verses 14 to 39. If you quickly skim through the description of these curses, you might be shocked at how harsh the language is, presenting a stark contrast to the earlier blessings. You might even question whether this is still the same God you know—a God full of love, mercy, grace, and compassion.

We must understand the completeness of God's nature. He is a God of love, and His love is so perfect that there is almost nothing He cannot forgive or tolerate. However, on the other hand, God is righteous. His righteousness is so absolute that He cannot permit even the slightest bit of injustice or unrighteousness. God will certainly deal with sin, and the cost of that judgment is so great that no one can bear it. No wonder Paul says in Romans 11:22, "Therefore consider the goodness

and severity of God: on those who fell, severity; but toward you, goodness, if you continue in His goodness." For those who trust in Jesus Christ, God is merciful. May we all remain in God's goodness—so that even when we are weak or stumble, we will never leave the realm of His grace. Otherwise, when faced with God's righteousness, who can stand?

The curses pronounced by God have a very clear structure, comprising fivefold curses, each beginning with a failure to listen to or obey Him.

- The first layer of curses starts in verse 14: "But if you do not obey Me and do not observe all these commandments..."
- The second layer of curses begins in verse 18: "And after all this, if you do not obey Me..."
- The third layer of curses starts in verse 21: "Then, if you walk contrary to Me and are not willing to obey Me..."
- The fourth layer of curses begins in verse 23: "And if by these things you are not reformed by Me but walk contrary to Me..."
- The fifth layer of curses starts in verse 27: "And after all this, if you do not obey Me but walk contrary to Me..."

The fifth layer curse ultimately leads to the destruction of Israel.

While still in the wilderness, God not only gave the Israelites His commandments but also foretold the eventual fall of Judah nearly a thousand years later. This highlights the importance of taking God's words seriously, especially His warnings. Today, we will focus on studying the first four layers of these warnings.

Verse 14-15: "But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments, and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My

judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, but break My covenant,”

These two verses correspond to verse 3, which states, "If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments," leading to fivefold blessings. Now, God warns the Israelites of the opposite outcome if they fail to obey His statutes and commandments. Simply negating verse 3 would already convey God's meaning. Yet here, we see God tirelessly reminding them, repeating the same message with different expressions, phrasing, and perspectives. "If you do not obey Me" speaks of people ignoring God's words. "And do not observe all these commandments" describes their failure to act on His instructions. "If you despise My statutes" uses a strong, negative verb—"despise"—to emphasize their rejection of His law. "If your soul abhors My judgments" adds emotional depth, describing a profound aversion. Initially, the warnings are framed as negative statements, but later, they are affirmed positively with negative verbs to emphasize the same point.

The passage also transitions from commandments to the covenant: "so that you do not perform all My commandments, but break My covenant." Commandments are God's directives to Israel, while the covenant is a mutual agreement between God and His people. Both, however, convey the same underlying message: the Israelites not listening to God. Here, we see God as a loving father, earnestly warning His rebellious children. Like a parent repeating instructions in various ways, God uses different angles, both direct and indirect, ordinary words and covenant terms, to ensure they understand His commands. This repetition reveals God's deep love for Israel and His hope that they would take His instructions seriously.

Verse 16: “I also will do this to you: I will even appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart. And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it.”

This is God's first warning. He clearly tells the Israelites that if they do not obey His words, He will appoint panic, consumption, and fever to come upon them. The word

"appoint," as used in the KJV, indicates that these afflictions are ordained by God and will certainly fall upon those who disobey His commandments.

Here, three types of afflictions are mentioned:

1. Panic – A psychological illness involving fear and anxiety.
2. Consumption – A physical ailment that depletes one's energy, leaving one unable to muster strength for anything.
3. Fever – A condition causing fever, dizziness, and general discomfort.

These ailments will dominate those afflicted, to the point of causing "your eyes to fail" (or "grow dim") and "your soul to languish"—terms that describe physical exhaustion and spiritual despair. For those who disregard God's commandments, not only will their bodies suffer, but their efforts will also prove futile. They will sow seeds in vain, only to have their harvests seized by their enemies, who will consume the fruits of their labor.

Dear brothers and sisters, isn't this a situation we sometimes face ourselves? There are times when we inexplicably feel anxious, our vision becomes blurred, our spirits are low, and we lack energy for anything. Even when we force ourselves to act, it often results in futility. During such times, it might be worth reflecting on whether we have neglected God's words or violated His commandments. These may be God's first gentle reminders to turn back to Him.

Verse 17: "I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies. Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when no one pursues you."

When God "turns His face against you," it signifies that God is angry with people, turning away and no longer showing them favor. Without God's protection, people are left to be defeated by their enemies. Not only are they overcome, but they also fall under the dominion of their adversaries. Without God's presence and

protection, their hearts are filled with panic and confusion. Even when there is no enemy pursuing them, they flee in fear. When people fail to keep God's commandments, they lose peace, motivation, and faith, causing them to feel like every shadow is a threat. In such a state, there's no need for an enemy to attack—they are already defeated from within. God's commandments are the foundation of our security and purpose. When this foundation collapses, life inevitably falls into disarray.

Verse 18: "And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins."

This is the second level of warning. If people remain unaware and unrepentant after the events of the first warning and still refuse to listen to God's words, God will multiply the punishment sevenfold for their sins.

First, we must understand that God's purpose in punishment is to lead people to repentance and to listen to His words. This kind of punishment is disciplinary and comes with a positive intent, much like how parents discipline their children to teach them obedience. Second, it's clear that not listening to God's words is considered sin. After experiencing the appointed panic, consumption, and fever, if people still do not repent, God will impose a sevenfold punishment for their continued disobedience. The "seven" here does not necessarily mean a literal sevenfold increase in quantity or intensity but represents a complete punishment.

God's punishments are progressive, with each stage being a complete and sufficient warning in itself. From the second level of curses to the fifth, the sevenfold punishment remains consistent. Starting from the first level, which is ordained by God, each subsequent stage introduces a complete punishment before progressing to the next level. God's ultimate goal remains unchanged: He desires that people repent promptly and return to Him.

Verse 19: “I will break the pride of your power; I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze.”

God warns that He will break the pride born of human strength. When people live under God’s protection and everything goes smoothly, they may unknowingly become proud, attributing their success to their own abilities while forgetting it is God’s power and might shielding and sustaining them. When pride arises, God will withdraw His protective hand, and people will immediately be exposed for what they truly are, bringing an end to their arrogance. They will then realize that apart from God, they are nothing.

God further declares that He will make the heavens over them like iron and the earth beneath them like bronze. This imagery is particularly striking. The heavens, which bring rain in due season, represent God’s blessings. When He withholds His blessings, the heavens become like iron, sealing off the life-giving rains of grace. The earth becomes like bronze, losing its ability to provide nutrients for crops.

How often do we fail to recognize the blessings we are surrounded by? When the weather is favorable, crops flourish, and the fields yield a bountiful harvest, we may grow complacent and proud, forgetting that these are all gifts from God. But when God withdraws His blessings, we are left with iron skies and bronze ground—a stark reminder of our dependence on Him.

Verse 20: “And your strength shall be spent in vain; for your land shall not yield its produce, nor shall the trees of the land yield their fruit.”

When the heavens become like iron and the earth like bronze, no matter how much effort we put in or how diligently we work, it all ends in vain. The fields yield no produce, and the trees bear no fruit. This is the second level of the curse: the earth ceases to serve humanity, producing no food. In the first level of the curse, enemies come to plunder the harvest. Now, the situation worsens—there is no harvest to be plundered at all. This progression underscores the seriousness of disobedience to God’s commandments and the increasing severity of the consequences that follow.

Verse 21: “Then, if you walk contrary to Me, and are not willing to obey Me, I will bring on you seven times more plagues, according to your sins.”

This is the third level of the curse. If not only do people refuse to listen to God’s words, but they also actively oppose Him—doing what God has commanded them not to do—then God will bring down seven times the disaster according to their sin. This is even more severe than the second level of the curse, where the earth no longer yields its fruit, because now it involves direct opposition to God’s commands, leading to even greater consequences.

Verse 22: “I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, destroy your livestock, and make you few in number; and your highways shall be desolate.”

God will send wild beasts to invade the places where the Israelites live, causing harm to both people and livestock. Some of their children will be attacked by these beasts and even lose their lives, while others will see their livestock devoured. Due to the presence of these wild animals, the population will decrease, and the roads will become desolate as people no longer dare to travel freely. The third level of the curse begins to directly affect the lives of the Israelites, leading to a reduction in their numbers and the desolation of their paths. This curse escalates the impact of disobedience, affecting not only their resources but also their security and community life.

Verse 23-24: “And if by these things you are not reformed by Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you, and I will punish you yet seven times for your sins.”

The purpose of God sending disasters is to discipline the Israelites and lead them to repentance. If the Israelites refuse to repent and continue to disobey God’s commandments, then, since they have opposed Him, God will also oppose them

and, because of their sin, strike them seven times. This is the fourth level of the curse. God's punishment for those who refuse to repent is progressive, not instantaneous. God continuously gives people opportunities to turn back to Him. Therefore, when we face adversity, we should not complain, but instead reflect on whether we have sinned against God or failed to obey His commandments and laws. Every hardship should be seen as an opportunity for self-examination, confession, and repentance.

Verse 25: "And I will bring a sword against you that will execute the vengeance of the covenant; when you are gathered together within your cities I will send pestilence among you; and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy."

God will bring the sword upon the Israelites as a form of retribution for breaking the covenant. Throughout the history of the Old Testament, especially when the Israelites turned to idolatry, God raised up neighboring nations to wage war against them. When the Israelites were defeated, they would retreat to their fortified cities, thinking that their strong walls would protect them. However, God would send a plague into the city, causing many to die. Even those who escaped the sword and survived the plague would ultimately fall into the hands of their enemies.

Jeremiah 21:4-7 records God's prophecy of this disaster, which indeed came upon the Israelites. "I will turn back the weapons of war in your hands, with which you fight against the king of Babylon and the Chaldeans who besiege you outside the walls, and I will assemble them in the midst of this city. And I myself will fight against you with an outstretched hand and with a strong arm, even in anger and fury and great wrath. I will strike the inhabitants of this city, both man and beast, they shall die of a great pestilence. And afterward," says the Lord, "I will deliver Zedekiah king of Judah, his servants and the people, and such as are left in this city from the pestilence and the sword and the famine, into the hand of Nebuchadnezzar king of Babylon, into the hand of their enemies." From this passage in Jeremiah, it is clear that the prophet Jeremiah, well-versed in Leviticus, understood God's laws. He recorded that when the Babylonian Empire attacked Judah, the punishment

followed the same steps outlined in Leviticus, especially as seen in verse 25. Jeremiah's message to the Israelites was a reminder that these calamities were not random but were the result of God's hand of discipline upon them.

Verse 26: "And when I have broken the staff of your bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall bring back your bread by weight, and you shall eat and not be satisfied."

The staff symbolizes human reliance, and when God breaks the staff, He is essentially breaking human dependence. What is human reliance? Psalm 105:16 says, "He called for a famine in the land; He destroyed all the provision of bread." Human reliance is often on food, and when God breaks this "staff," it signifies the cessation of provision. At that time, there would be ten women using a single oven to bake bread, distributing it by measure. The scarcity of food would lead to a system of rationing, where the amount given to each person would be insufficient to satisfy them. This reflects the fourth level of the curse: God would raise up neighboring nations to attack Israel as part of His discipline.

For New Testament believers, God's discipline is similarly gradual and meant to bring us back to Himself when we stray. When we persist in our own ways and ignore His guidance, God, in His justice, allows trials to come upon us. However, these trials are not punitive in the sense of rejection but are meant to lead us to repentance and restoration. Dear brothers and sisters, when we face difficulties, let us not complain but instead examine ourselves. If we find areas where we have gone astray, we should repent and seek God's mercy.

Let us pray: Lord, thank You! You are a God of love, and You are also a God of justice. Your love is so perfect, and Your justice is equally perfect. Help us stay in Your mercy, even when we stumble or go astray. Grant us ears that hear, so that we can listen to the Holy Spirit's voice in times of hardship, and help us repent in time. In Your justice, Your judgment is also complete—how can we stand on our own? Therefore, have mercy on us and help us remain in Your grace. Bless every aspect of our daily lives. We pray all of this in the name of Jesus Christ. Amen!