

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

Leviticus 26: 27-39

Brothers and sisters, peace be with you, this is Hwa-Chi. Thank the Lord, it's time to read the bible again. Today, we will continue to read Leviticus 26: 27-39.

Moses led the 2 million Israelites out of Egypt into the wilderness, and in the third month, they arrived at Mount Sinai. They stayed in the wilderness at Mount Sinai for ten months, during which they first constructed the Tabernacle so that God could dwell among them. As soon as God came, He began speaking to Moses, and the content of His speech comprised the entire Book of Leviticus. At the conclusion of God's message, He told the Israelites that if they obeyed His commandments, they would receive His blessings; but if they disobeyed His commandments, they would bring down His curses. At first glance, the term "curse" may sound too harsh; however, if we examine the content of the punishments, they are indeed severe, making the term "curse" quite appropriate.

The Israelites wandered in the wilderness for nearly 40 years. Later, they came to the plains of Moab on the eastern side of the Jordan River. Moses knew that he himself would not be able to enter the Promised Land, and the first generation of Israelites who followed him out of Egypt would also die in the wilderness. Therefore, the elderly Moses spoke to the younger generation, reiterating God's commandments, statutes, and ordinances, as well as recounting God's works among the people of Israel.

What Moses spoke to the new generation of Israelites is recorded in the Book of Deuteronomy. Near the end of Deuteronomy, Moses again reminded the Israelites to obey all of God's commandments. In Deuteronomy 28:2, he says: "And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God." Moses then goes on to describe the abundant blessings of God. In Deuteronomy 28:15, Moses continues: "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His

statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you." He then describes the severe curses of God. Thus, in Deuteronomy 28, Moses uses the terms "blessings" and "curses," laying out God's blessings and curses before the Israelites, reminding them to choose blessings and avoid curses.

In fact, the same principle applies to the saints of the New Testament. God is indeed full of grace and mercy toward those who remain in His kindness, but He is also very severe toward those who harden their hearts and refuse to repent. May we all take heed of this warning.

Yesterday, we already read about the first four layers of curses. By the fourth layer, the curses were already exceedingly severe. God would raise up neighboring nations to rule over Israel with the sword, and He would discipline them with plague and famine, even handing the Israelites over to their enemies. Today, we will study the fifth layer of curses, which represents the most severe passages of God's discipline upon the people of Israel.

Verses 27–28: “And after all this, if you do not obey Me, but walk contrary to Me, then I also will walk contrary to you in fury; and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins.”

Because the Israelites did not obey God's words and acted contrary to His commandments, it was as though they were opposing God Himself. This provoked God's fierce anger. In response, God declared that He would act against them and punish them sevenfold for their sins. God then foretold the severity of His punishment.

Verse 29: “You shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters.”

Due to the devastation of war and prolonged famine, food would become so scarce that parents would resort to cannibalism, consuming their own children. Similar tragedies occurred in ancient China during the Spring and Autumn and Warring States periods, where parents exchanged children to survive. In the history of the Israelites, this horrifying scenario is recorded in 2 Kings 6:28–29, during the siege of Samaria, the capital of Israel, by the king of Syria. Food shortages were so extreme that a donkey's head sold for eighty shekels of silver, and a quarter of a kab of dove droppings for five shekels. The account describes a woman pleading to the king for justice. She and another woman had agreed to cook and eat their sons. The first woman sacrificed her son, and they ate him together. When it was time to cook the second woman's son, she hid her child, causing the first woman to appeal to the king. Such horrific events occurred among God's people because they failed to obey His commandments and abandoned His covenant.

Verse 30: "I will destroy your high places, cut down your incense altars, and cast your carcasses on the lifeless forms of your idols; and My soul shall abhor you."

The high places were altars set up by the Canaanite inhabitants to sacrifice to their gods, and the incense altars were dedicated to the worship of the sun god. God warned the Israelites not to follow the customs of the Canaanites or worship at their high places after entering the land of Canaan. Disobedience to God's commandments, particularly the first of the Ten Commandments, which forbids the worship of other gods besides the LORD, would result in severe consequences. If the Israelites sacrificed at these high places, God would destroy them, cut down the sun god's images, and cast the Israelites' corpses upon the lifeless forms of their idols. According to the original text, it implies that their corpses would be cast upon the corpses of their idols.

The Israelites, having abandoned God's covenant, lost His protection and consequently perished by the sword, plague, or famine. Their idols, struck down by God, lay shattered and lifeless on the ground, resembling corpses. This vividly highlights the futility of idols, which could neither protect nor help those who

worshipped them. The Israelites, by turning to idols, provoked God to cast their corpses upon the lifeless forms of these idols, perishing alongside them.

In the northern kingdom of Israel, during the reign of Ahab, as recorded in 1 Kings 16:31–32, Ahab took Jezebel, the daughter of Ethbaal, king of the Sidonians, as his wife. He went to serve and worship Baal, building a temple for Baal in Samaria and erecting an altar for him there. Ahab led the Israelites into idolatry, offering sacrifices at the high places to these false gods. This grievously offended God, who allowed the Syrians to rise up and attack Israel. When Ahab went to battle, fully armored, an arrow struck through a gap in his armor, leading to his death.

Because the Israelites worshipped foreign idols, God declared, “My soul shall abhor you.” Idolatry provoked God’s anger, leading Him to abhor the Israelites. If we do not honor God as God, He will cease to regard us as His people and may even abhor us. How terrifying it is to be despised by God!

Verse 31: “I will lay your cities waste and bring your sanctuaries to desolation, and I will not smell the fragrance of your sweet aromas.”

When God abhors a people, He withdraws His protective hand. Without God’s protection, Israel’s cities would become desolate. Even the holy places within the temple—the sanctuary and the Most Holy Place—would be laid waste. There would no longer be priestly service or sacrifices; the aroma of burnt offerings on the altar would cease, as would the incense on the altar of incense within the sanctuary. This signifies that both sacrifice and prayer would be cut off, with God no longer accepting Israel’s sacrifices or prayers, nor smelling the sweet aroma of their offerings.

Verse 32: “I will bring the land to desolation, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it.”

When Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land, God's presence went with them, fighting on their behalf. The inhabitants of Canaan, upon hearing of Israel's approach, fled in fear. They were filled with awe at Israel's God, who spared no effort to protect His people. Yet now, the land of Israel would become desolate, astonishing the enemies residing in Canaan. These enemies, familiar with Israel's history of divine protection, would be perplexed at the loss of God's favor and Israel's downfall.

Verse 33: "I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste."

God declared that He would scatter the Israelites among the nations and pursue them with the sword. The land of Israel, once a land flowing with milk and honey, would now become desolate. Its cities, once situated at the crossroads of Europe, Asia, and Africa—thriving hubs of trade and travel—would be laid to waste.

In 2 Kings 17:6, we see this prophecy fulfilled. During the reign of Hoshea, the last king of the northern kingdom, in the ninth year of his reign (722 BC), the kingdom of Israel was conquered by the king of Assyria. The Israelites were taken captive and deported to Assyria, marking the desolation of the land and the scattering of the people.

2 Kings 17:9-12 tells us the reason for the fall of the kingdom of Israel: "Also the children of Israel secretly did against the Lord their God things that were not right, and they built for themselves high places in all their cities, from watchtower to fortified city. They set up for themselves sacred pillars and wooden images on every high hill and under every green tree. There they burned incense on all the high places, like the nations whom the Lord had carried away before them; and they did wicked things to provoke the Lord to anger, for they served idols, of which the Lord had said to them, 'You shall not do this thing.'" The ten tribes of Israel were scattered among the Assyrians. As for the southern kingdom of Judah, in the eleventh year of King Zedekiah's reign, in 586 BC, the kingdom of Judah was conquered by Babylon.

In 2 Chronicles 36:18-20: “And all the articles from the house of God, great and small, the treasures of the house of the Lord, and the treasures of the king and of his leaders, all these he took to Babylon. Then they burned the house of God, broke down the wall of Jerusalem, burned all its palaces with fire, and destroyed all its precious possessions. And those who escaped from the sword he carried away to Babylon, where they became servants to him and his sons until the rule of the kingdom of Persia.” The two tribes of Judah were also taken captive to Babylon. Indeed, the Israelites were scattered among the nations, the land of Israel became desolate, and its cities were laid to waste.

Verse 34: “Then the land shall enjoy its sabbaths as long as it lies desolate and you are in your enemies’ land; then the land shall rest and enjoy its sabbaths.”

When the Israelites were exiled and scattered among the nations, the land of Canaan, left untended, became desolate. To human eyes, this desolation seemed tragic, but in God’s eyes, it was good because it allowed the land to rest and enjoy its sabbaths. Chapter 25 establishes that every seventh year was a sabbath year when the land was to observe rest unto the Lord. However, because the Israelites disobeyed God's commandments and failed to let the land rest during the sabbath years, the desolation following their exile gave the land the rest it had been denied, thus fulfilling God’s intention for the land to observe its sabbath.

Verse 35: “As long as it lies desolate it shall rest—for the time it did not rest on your Sabbaths when you dwelt in it.”

The land will lie desolate for as many years as it needs to rest, equal to the years it could not rest while the Israelites inhabited it and did not observe the Sabbath years. Since the Israelites did not obey God’s command to let the land rest, God allowed them to be taken into captivity so that the land could finally enjoy its rest. How long would the land rest?

According to 2 Chronicles 36:21: “To fulfill the word of the Lord by the mouth of Jeremiah, until the land had enjoyed her Sabbaths. As long as she lay desolate she kept Sabbath, to fulfill seventy years.” The prophet Jeremiah received God’s revelation that the land, though desolate, would enjoy its rest for seventy years. This signifies that the Israelites owed the land seventy Sabbath years, which God demanded all at once by allowing them to be taken into captivity for seventy years.

How did Jeremiah know that the Israelites owed seventy Sabbath years? When Joshua led the Israelites into the Promised Land, they had to fight to claim it. While they initially gained much territory with God’s presence, the process was incomplete. During the period of the judges and the kings, it was not until David that the Israelites fully possessed the Promised Land. If we count from the year Samuel anointed David as king in 1024 BC until the fall of Judah in 586 BC, this period spans 438 years.

During this time, Scripture does not record the Israelites observing any Sabbath years. According to the regulations for the Sabbath year and Jubilee, every seventh year was a Sabbath year, and every fiftieth year was a Jubilee year, meaning there were eight Sabbath years in every fifty-year period. Calculating $438 \div 50 \times 8$, we find exactly seventy Sabbath years. The Israelites owed the land seventy Sabbath years, so God decreed that they would be taken into captivity for seventy years, allowing the land to rest.

Verses 36-37: “And as for those of you who are left, I will send faintness into their hearts in the lands of their enemies; the sound of a shaken leaf shall cause them to flee. They shall flee as though fleeing from a sword, and they shall fall when no one pursues. They shall stumble over one another, as it were before a sword, when no one pursues; and you shall have no power to stand before your enemies.”

Those who escaped the sword, pestilence, and famine—those remaining Israelites—would be taken captive to the land of their enemies. Without their nation, temple, God’s presence, and protection, they would live in fear. Even the

rustling of leaves in the wind would terrify them, making them think their enemies were chasing them. They would flee in panic, as if being pursued by a sword, though no one was chasing them. They would stumble and fall in confusion, colliding with one another as though they were being pursued by swords, unable to stand before their enemies.

Beloved brothers and sisters, if we honestly reflect on our true condition, we must admit that we are just as powerless as the Israelites, unable to stand before our enemies. Our ability to stand firm comes solely from God's protection. Because God prepares a table for us in the presence of our enemies, we can eat and drink with confidence, all because of Him. Therefore, abandoning God is a foolish act. May we learn from the history of Israel and resolve never to depart from God's presence.

Verses 38-39: "You shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up. And those of you who are left shall waste away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands; also in their fathers' iniquities, which are with them, they shall waste away."

The Israelites taken into captivity would perish among the nations and be consumed in the land of their enemies. Those who remained would also waste away due to their own iniquities, just as their ancestors did, for they committed the same sins as their forefathers. God's fifth level of curse is severe and comprehensive: the Israelites would be taken captive, their land would become desolate, and they would be left with no hope once they departed from God. This serves as a reminder from God to us today.

Let us pray together: Lord, thank You! You have shown us how the Israelites, with their stiff necks, refusing to heed Your words and obey Your commandments, were taken into captivity and caused their land to become desolate. Lord, we ask for Your special protection. The church today is our Promised Land, a place for every New Testament saint to find rest and purpose. Protect us from being taken captive by the enemy; protect us from desolation within the church, ensuring Your presence is always with us. Lord, thank You for clearly placing blessings and curses before us.

Help us to choose blessings and flee from curses. May every saint enjoy Your provision and the rest that comes from You within the church. Bless the church I belong to. In the name of the Lord Jesus Christ, we pray.