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## A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE

### THE BOOK OF LEVITICUS

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#### **BLESSINGS AND DISCIPLINE (26:1–27:34)**

##### **The Big Picture**

God is eager to draw wandering prodigals to himself, and he goes to great lengths with great patience to do so.

##### **The Place of the Passage**

Ancient treaties and covenants were typically sealed with concluding blessings and curses. The book of Leviticus has such a conclusion in chapter 26, although the “curses” in that chapter are not what one might normally expect. Furthermore, a list of congregational responses—vows, dedications, devotions, and tithes—in chapter 27 invites the readers to hear the “blessings and curses” and respond in renewed devotion and worship.

##### **Gospel Connections**

“I WILL BE YOUR GOD.” The 17th-century Puritan preacher Thomas Goodwin once said, “If I were to go to heaven, and find that Christ was not there, I would leave immediately, for heaven would be hell to me without Christ.” Goodwin understood that the joy of our salvation is not the promise of a certain place but restoration to a relationship with our glorious Creator through the self-sacrifice for us of our glorious Redeemer. The heart of the gospel as expressed throughout the Scriptures and in the closing of Leviticus is the promise of communion with God: “I will make my dwelling among you. . . . And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people” (Leviticus 26:11–12).

NO MORE OFFENSE. The Hebrew word translated “abhor” in Leviticus 26 (vv. 11, 30, 43, 44) expresses the sense of revulsion one feels from something that makes the stomach churn. Leviticus uses this word to describe the kind of offense that human sin is in the eyes of God (v. 30). We fail to appreciate the true nature of our sin until we come to recognize the deep, stomach-churning offense it is before God. However, the blessing and cursing sections of Leviticus 26 both culminate in the twice-repeated promise that God’s soul “shall not abhor you” any longer (vv. 11, 44). The marvel of the atonement is that human sin is so perfectly resolved that God’s people are clean and genuinely pleasing in his sight. Because of the atonement taught in Leviticus and accomplished by Christ, God’s soul takes true delight in his people.

##### **Whole-Bible Connections**

ISRAEL’S DISCIPLINE. The punishments outlined in Leviticus 26:14–45 correspond to the kinds of discipline experienced by Israel in the rest of Old Testament history: fear and privation from marauding enemies (Leviticus 26:14–17; Judges 6:2–6), famines (Leviticus 26:18–20;

Ruth 1:1; I Kings 17:1–7), wild animals (Leviticus 26:21–22; II Kings 17:21–26; Ezekiel 5:17), invasions and war (Leviticus 26:23–26; II Kings 17:1–18), and exile with all its horrors (Leviticus 26:27–45; II Chronicles 36:15–21). The fifth series of punishments—exile and all its horrors—so closely parallels the Babylonian exile account of II Chronicles 36:15–21 that it is likely the author of Chronicles intended to show the fulfillment of God’s warning from Leviticus in how he reported that event. But by doing so, he also shows that the Babylonian exile was not divine abandonment but discipline for the purpose of restoration.

### **Theological Connections**

**COVENANT.** The word covenant appears once in the series of promised blessings (Leviticus 26:9) and seven times in the series of disciplines (vv. 15, 25, 42, 44–45). When the Lord pours out his blessings on his people, he does so to “confirm my covenant” with each generation of the faithful (v. 9). Conversely, when God disciplines the unfaithful, he nevertheless refuses to abandon them utterly, because of his “covenant with Jacob . . . with Isaac, and . . . with Abraham” and “with [Israel’s] forefathers, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt” (v. 42, 45). Remarkably, God’s blessings and disciplines are both shown to bring the same result: a faithful people belonging to the Lord (vv. 11–13, 44–46). This stubborn grace of God, who refuses to abandon his people, is rooted in his relation to them through covenant.

**OFFERINGS.** Leviticus contains many regulations for the sacrifices brought to the tabernacle. Chapter 27 introduces a series of offerings brought in various forms of dedication that supported the house of God but were not presented as sacrifices at the altar. Many scholars think this chapter was added at the end of the book to show the importance of financially supporting the work of God’s house. The pattern of both free-will offerings and regular tithes that continues to be observed in many churches finds its basis, in part, in the instructions at the end of Leviticus.

### **Glossary of Terms**

**Righteousness:** The quality of being morally right and without sin. One of God’s distinctive attributes. God imputes righteousness to (justifies) those who trust in Jesus Christ.

**The Exile:** Several relocations of large groups of Israelites/Jews have occurred throughout history, but “the exile” typically refers to the Babylonian exile, that is, Nebuchadnezzar’s relocation of residents of the southern kingdom of Judah to Babylon in 586 BC. (Residents of the northern kingdom of Israel had been resettled by Assyria in 722 BC.) After Babylon came under Persian rule, several waves of Jewish exiles returned and repopulated Judah.

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## Discussion Questions

### **Blessings and Discipline (26:1–46)**

This chapter contains 11 verses about blessings upon the faithful, and 32 about discipline. What does this proportion suggest about the nature of God's people? What does it tell us about the nature of God's love?

### **Renewal and Rededication (27:1–34)**

Chapter 27 seems an odd addendum after the blessings and disciplines in chapter 26, until we recognize the purposes of these vows (vv. 1–13), dedications (vv. 14–27), devoted things (vv. 28–29), and tithes (vv. 30–34). Each of these special offerings was in response to God's blessings or discipline. This passage gave Israelites guidance, after discerning their location on the list of blessings or discipline in the previous chapter, to respond. What types of gifts were Israelites likely to present (either literally or through a financial valuation) in these various offerings?