

## Leviticus Chapter 26 – John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is “God’s Conditional Promises”. The key word of this chapter is “if”. God promises to do certain things if we do certain things. Some are good promises and some are not so good promises. ☺ This also means that God wants to get involved in our daily lives.
  - a) I spend a lot of time in these Leviticus lessons talking about God’s unconditional promises to those who put their trust in Him. What about these conditional promises? Are they different for the Jewish people than they are for Christians? Should I care? ☺
  - b) Let me put it another way: The classical view in Christianity is that as long as one is trusting that Jesus paid the price for our sins, and one believes He is both God and in charge of one’s life, one is guaranteed salvation. It is an unconditional promise.
  - c) The next step is the prime topic of these lessons in Leviticus: I believe in Jesus, now what?
    - i) The answers have to do with obedience to God. If we trust in Jesus, then we are to do what He says. Many of the Levitical laws don’t apply to Christians, but God’s attitude about obedience definitely applies to us. What God considers a sin in the Old Testament He still considers a sin in the New Testament. The remedies to deal with sin have changed. We don’t bring sacrificial sheep to church. We understand the price for sin has been paid.
    - ii) Our obedience as Christians forms a “conditional” relationship with God. When we are doing God’s will, our life becomes blessed. When we are not doing God’s will, He has a way of getting our attention. ☺
2. This leads to Chapter 26, the second-to-last chapter of Leviticus:
  - a) The entire chapter is God telling the Israelites how they will be blessed if they obey the commandments of Leviticus and how they will be cursed if they disobey these laws. The last few verses of the chapter deal with remedies after one has suffered for disobedience.
  - b) The entire chapter is God’s “carrot and the stick” lecture to the Israelites.
    - i) For those not familiar with that cliché, it refers to treatment of horses or donkeys. When the animal obeys, one gives them a carrot. When they disobey, the owner applies a stick. It is about rewards and punishments based on obedience.
  - c) The interesting thing about the chapter is that there is no introduction, nor any narrative commentary. There is just a straight series of “If you obey, you will be blessed and if you disobey you will be in big trouble.” Obviously, the chapter is longer than that one statement, so there is a purpose of the specific blessings and curses given in this chapter.
3. Let’s talk a little about God and material blessings:
  - a) First, God is under no obligation to bless us on earth. He could have said, “Just obey Me and that will get you into heaven.” Instead, the blessings and curses primarily deal with our lives in the “here and now”. Don’t get me wrong, all people will be judged by God one day. My point is this chapter primarily focuses on God’s intervention in our lives “now” as opposed to issues He will judge us upon after we die.
  - b) Most adults can name people who are materially blessed in life and don’t care about God. There are powerful and wealthy people who are outright outspoken in their opposition to Christianity. Is God “blessing” them? One answer is, “Let them enjoy it. That’s all the reward they will ever get for all of eternity.” A Psalm-writer (Asaph) contemplated this very issue. He wrote:
    - i) When I thought how to understand this, it was too painful for me – until I went into the sanctuary of God; then I understood their end.” (Psalm 73:16-17, NIV)
    - ii) In other words, once Asaph understood the perspective of living for eternity, he understood the futility of only living for material gain and ignoring God.

- c) OK, does that mean God never materially blesses those who believe in Him?
  - i) Of course not. It is just not a guarantee. Jesus never said, "Follow me and I'll make you multi-millionaires among men". ☺
  - ii) Suppose every one who ever committed their lives to Jesus, then lived a devout Christian life, "mysteriously" became wealthy. If that were the case, people would fake-it and become Christians for the material benefits.
- d) Getting back to the text, Chapter 26 has lots of promises of great blessings to the Israelites if they are obedient and promises of great cursing if they are disobedient.
  - i) One has to remember that if Israel is a little country surrounded by much bigger countries, they have to become dependant upon God for survival. This is also about their desert climate. If rain doesn't come at certain times of the year, there will be no crops. The idea of prosperity is that of good harvest and general-good economy as opposed to say, everyone winning the lottery. ☺
- e) I want to end this with a little bit about the "health and wealth prosperity" teaching.
  - i) There is a false teaching among some Christian churches that say for example, "if you just pray hard enough or have enough faith, God must bless you." I've heard teachings along the line that "The reason you don't have that new car is because you doubted in your faith". This is nonsense. God did not put us (Christians) here to make us rich. God put us here to glorify Him in all that we do!
  - ii) It is interesting that the preachers who teach the verses on material blessings seem to forget the verses about material cursing come right after them. There is an old joke called "Cafeteria Christianity" where people pick and choose which bible verses they want to apply to their lives. That's the point of Leviticus 26: The blessings and curses are a package deal. One has to accept both.

4. Now, let's talk a little about the curses of this chapter:

- a) Most of this chapter deals with promised curses to Israel if they disobey these laws.
- b) The concept of a curse in Hebrew is the lack of a blessing. It is as if God is ignoring us. The consequences "appear" as if God is cursing us.
- c) One of the reason there is a long list in this chapter of curses is that they become a historical reality. One can pick almost every one of these curses, and then go to some other event in the Old Testament (future to Leviticus, past tense to us) and see where these curses literally became truth. One of the reasons the curses are so detailed is that future readers of the bible can literally see how God's word becomes true.
- d) Many hundreds of year later, a copy of the law (probably just Leviticus) was found in the Temple. This was a period of time when God was ignored. When the scroll was read to King Josiah, he went into remorse because that king knew the Israelites were not guilty of keeping the laws. How did he know? He listened to the curses in Chapter 26. He knew that historically, the details of those curses literally came true. (See 2<sup>nd</sup> Chronicles 34:21).
- e) Now onto the important part: Are Christians affected by these curses?
  - i) Peter said in the Book of Acts, "Now then, why do you (some Jewish-Christians) try to test God by putting on the necks of the disciples a yoke (keeping the law) that neither we nor our fathers have been able to bear? No! We believe it is through the grace of our Lord Jesus that we (Jewish-Christians) are saved, just as they (Non-Jewish Christians) are." (Acts 15:10-11 NIV)
  - ii) To paraphrase Peter in Acts 15, "If you study the history of Israel, they have corporately failed to keep God's laws. There are individuals who are devout, but for the most part, the nation failed. That is why they went into captivity. Therefore, why put Gentile-Christians under the bondage of the laws we Jewish-Christians couldn't collectively obey?"

- iii) In other words, Christians are not under “the law”. Salvation for Christians is not dependant upon keeping the laws of Leviticus. We don’t get the special blessings promised the Nation of Israel, but we don’t get the curses either. If you think you want to take a shot at keeping the law, read the curses of this chapter first. Jesus is a much easier route. ☺
5. OK, John, if this chapter is all about blessings and curses on Israel and it doesn’t apply to Christians, why study this chapter? Does God bless and curse those who believe in Him? Other than learning about history, what’s the application to our lives?
- a) First of all, there are material blessings from God. He is in the “miracle business”. I have personally seen lots of great things happen to life all around me in which there is no logical explanation other than the direct intervention by God.
  - b) My point here is that one has to remember “God is in charge and we are not”. One cannot expect miracles just because we ask for them. God has every right to say “no” as much as He says “yes” to our prayer requests. Our job is to do His will, and it is not His job to do our will. Still, there are times, out of God’s love for us, that He grants our requests in way that only He can get the glory for the situation.
  - c) What we do learn from the blessings of this chapter is that God desires to bless people who are obedient to Him. Sometimes the blessings are better seen in hindsight. We look back at our Christian lives and realize all the great things God has done for us.
  - d) One also has to understand the concept of “corporate blessings”. When a nation collectively is obedient to God, He does bless that nation and make it prosper.
  - e) As to God “cursing”, I have also watched the lives of people who turn from God and the consequences thereof. The word “cursing” is best described as a lack of blessing. It is a person saying in effect, “I don’t want to live by God’s rules” and God, out of His free will, saying in effect, “OK, if that’s what you want, I’ll let you go.” People’s lives then go downhill morally. The consequences follow and it “appears” as if God has cursed them.
  - f) Of course bad things happen to good people. I can’t explain all suffering, I just accept by fact that God is in charge and somehow, someway it all serves His purpose. Having the perspective that we all live for eternity makes it possible to accept suffering. (E.g., wonderful person who has to suffer great pain in this lifetime will get to live in heaven for eternity. A rotten person who has great wealth will suffer for eternity.)
  - g) What about times when we are obedient and it still seems like the world is falling apart around us? God maybe testing us, but that is far different from being “cursed” by Him.
  - h) Chuck Swindoll once made the comment, “When we get to heaven, the only word we will get out of mouth is “Oh”. Hey God, why did You allow this happen? “Oh” (As in God gives us the perfect explanation). Well, what about that situation? “Oh”.
6. Verse 1: " `Do not make idols or set up an image or a sacred stone for yourselves, and do not place a carved stone in your land to bow down before it. I am the LORD your God. <sup>2</sup> " `Observe my Sabbaths and have reverence for my sanctuary. I am the LORD.
- a) Verses 1 and 2 restate Commandments #2 and #4 of the Ten Commandments.
    - i) The first four commandments deal with our relationship with God.
    - ii) Commandment #1 (not listed here in Leviticus 26) is to not worship other Gods.
    - iii) Commandment #2 (listed here) is to not make false idols.
    - iv) Commandment #3 (not listed here in Leviticus 26) is to misuse God’s name.
    - v) Commandment #4 (listed here) is to keep the Sabbath.
  - b) Verse 2 expands upon the 2<sup>nd</sup> commandment by adding the fact that one does not bow down before any man-made idol. Verse 4 expands upon the 4<sup>th</sup> commandment by adding the command to reverence (show respect) for God’s sanctuary.

- c) Notice what Verse 1 does not say, “The Lord said to Moses”. That line is commonly used in Leviticus whenever there is a change of topic. It is not used here.
    - i) If you read Verse 1 in context of the last chapter, it is obvious there is a change of topic. The last chapter dealt with the sabbatical year and the “jubilee” year. Now, all of a sudden, were back to commentary on the 10 Commandments.
    - ii) To paraphrase the lack of any “The Lord said to Moses” reference is God saying in effect, “What I am about to say applies to everyone. No introduction or working through Moses is necessary here. Everyone pay attention to what I’m saying!”
  - d) Remember Leviticus 26 is a list of blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience. That list itself does not begin until Verse 3. Prior to the list of do’s and don’ts, why does Leviticus 26 mention these two specific commandments?
    - i) The answer is our obedience stems from God and not our ability to keep all of these commandments on our own.
    - ii) To put it another way, if we focus on one’s relationship with God and He will give us the power to focus on our relationships with other people.
    - iii) These two commands say in effect, “Remember to pray to God only, worship God only and take some regular time off to worship God. It’s downhill from there.” ☺ God provides us with the power to be obedient to Him in all that we do.
    - iv) Didn’t you say a few pages back that Israel failed to be fully obedient to God? That’s true. It stemmed from Israel’s failure to keep these two commandments.
  - e) The second commandment is not to make false gods. Back then, people made little statutes to represent one what worshipped. Idols were used as “good luck charms”. Remember all people worship something. Find someone’s all-consuming passion, and you will find their god. We still have some idols today to represent our gods. They are often bumper stickers and other things that show people what is their “god”.
  - f) The fourth commandment about keeping the Sabbath is also listed here. The previous few chapters focused on all the special holidays and yearlong events dedicated to God. God is saying in effect, “If you remember to keep these special days and the rules that go with them, I’ll bless you. If you keep the Sabbaths and focus on Me, the rest is easy.”
  - g) Is there a parallel concept for Christians? Sure. The idea is that if we dedicate some of our time for God, He will bless our relationship with Him.
    - i) Jesus summed up these verses here in Leviticus and the blessings that follow with the comment: “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.” (Matthew 6:33 NIV)
    - ii) The “things” are those we desire for our lives. The idea is to put God first in our lives and all the things we desire will follow. What happens in practice is that if we are seeking God with all of our heart, soul and strength, our desire for “things” will diminish. Once we let go of such desires, is often when God blesses us with other things we desire in a way that He gets the glory.
7. Verse 3: " `If you follow my decrees and are careful to obey my commands, <sup>4</sup> I will send you rain in its season, and the ground will yield its crops and the trees of the field their fruit. <sup>5</sup> Your threshing will continue until grape harvest and the grape harvest will continue until planting, and you will eat all the food you want and live in safety in your land.
- a) Verse 3 begins the “blessing” verses. The first blessing promised is rain. All of us city and suburban dwellers are thinking, “Oh wow, its pouring rain, gee thank you God!” ☺
    - i) What we forget is the necessity of rain for crops to grow and our water supply.
    - ii) The next time its pouring rain, give God the glory for providing that rain!
  - b) One has to remember that Israel is a desert climate. There are no pipelines to import water from some distant source. There are no automatic sprinklers. The Israelites were truly dependant upon rain for survival.

- c) Notice the blessing of “rain” is a corporate (nationwide) blessing as well as an individual blessing. The idea is for the Israelites to work together to praise God and He will in turn bless them corporately as well as individually.
  - d) The remainder of the text is what follows when the weather cooperates: Plenty of food. The idea is that good rain produces good soil, which produces good crops.
  - e) Notice the text does not say, “If you worry hard enough, I’ll send more rain”. God wants us to focus on Him, and then “He’ll take care of everything else.” It ties back to Jesus statement of “But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all these things will be given to you as well.”
8. Verse 6: “I will grant peace in the land, and you will lie down and no one will make you afraid. I will remove savage beasts from the land, and the sword will not pass through your country.
- a) If one looks at a map of Israel, it is a natural land bridge between three continents. A lot of through-traffic passed on their roads. One of the reasons Israel experienced so much warfare in its history is their land was located between larger warring factions. Armies need food. If Israel produced lots of good food, it makes it even more tempting for armies to attack this country.
  - b) A pessimist would say, “Yeah, look at all these great crops. I’ll just bet an army is waiting just outside our borders to attack us and get all of this.” Obviously, this pessimist has not put their trust in Verse 6 of Leviticus 26. One of the promised blessings of God is not only a bountiful harvest, but one will keep that harvest as well.
  - c) A big part of this verse is about perspective. When things do go well financially, we should praise God and enjoy the blessings. The danger is to become dependant upon that blessing and get our focus off of God. The other danger is being so guilt-ridden about having that blessing that one cannot enjoy it in the first place.
  - d) The second sentence of this verse mentions “savage beasts”. In most countries today, the only time we encounter say lions is in a zoo. These animals roamed freely in the Middle-east desert area. They were a real danger to the lives of people in this area. Having a bountiful crop will attract wild animals, including predator animals. God is saying in effect here, “I will bless you so much, you won’t have to worry about that factor”.
  - e) In other words, a God that loves us goes out of His way to protect us from danger. The idea of these verses is that if one is obedient to God, one does not have to worry about such danger. God’s blessings are not just for us to “stare at”, but for us to enjoy. A pessimist is too afraid to enjoy such blessings out of fear (e.g., wild animals, foreign armies) etc. God is promising “peace” to enjoy the blessings He has given us.
9. Verse 7: You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall by the sword before you. <sup>8</sup> Five of you will chase a hundred, and a hundred of you will chase ten thousand, and your enemies will fall by the sword before you.
- a) Here, God is promising that if a handful of Israelites chase a large army of soldiers, the Israelites will win. If one reads through the Old Testament, they’re a bunch of stories that fit in this category. A man named Gideon with only a few hundred men defeated and killed thousands of Israel’s enemies (Judges 8:10). A Jewish prince named Jonathon (King Saul’s son) killed about twenty Philistines single handedly. (1<sup>st</sup> Samuel 14:12).
    - i) My point here is this verse literally came true through history.
  - b) Remember God wants the Israelites to be His “witnesses” to the world.
    - i) That would mean having miracles to show the surrounding nations how the true God is superior to false gods. Small Jewish armies defeating much larger armies is an example to the world around them of just who is the “true” God.
10. Verse 9: “I will look on you with favor and make you fruitful and increase your numbers, and I will keep my covenant with you.
- a) One of the earlier promises is that there would be plenty of food for all the people.
  - b) A follow up promise here in Verse 9 is there would be plenty of people for all the food!

- c) One has to remember this is a farming based community. A large family had practical benefits, as there was more labor to work the farms.
  - d) A large populated community also makes the nation stronger. In other words, the way to “grow” a nation is to be obedient to God. Remember that these blessings were conditional upon Israel’s obedience.
  - e) How does the Christian “nation” grow? It’s not by clever marketing skills. It is by obedience to God! Then He will bless the Christian “nation” and increase its size.
    - i) It amazes me to see all the clever marketing seminars on church growth and community outreach. Who is going to get the credit for this success? Church growth is based on obedience to God and prayer for its growth. God does not share His glory with anyone. (See Isaiah 42:8).
11. Verse 10: You will still be eating last year's harvest when you will have to move it out to make room for the new.
- a) God is saying in effect, “You’re going to need more refrigerators to put the leftovers as I’ll have so much fresh food coming your way, you won’t know what to do with it!” ☺
  - b) If you have any doubts how God can work in this relatively small land of Israel, prior to the modern state of Israel, it was mostly swampland. The Israelites reworked the soil and now it is one of the largest exporters of fruit to all of Europe. My point here is only that God is capable of blessing the land so much that one has to export the “extra’s”.
12. Verse 11: I will put my dwelling place among you, and I will not abhor you. <sup>12</sup> I will walk among you and be your God, and you will be my people. <sup>13</sup> I am the LORD your God, who brought you out of Egypt so that you would no longer be slaves to the Egyptians; I broke the bars of your yoke and enabled you to walk with heads held high.
- a) The final set of blessings is the fact that God himself will be among us.
  - b) Those who don’t really believe in God would think, “Yeah, yeah, God living among us, whatever. What I really want is those material things listed in the last few verses”.
    - i) My point here is to notice the climatic priority of God. God is saving the best for last by saying in effect the important thing is that one can be with God.
  - c) Let me put this in prayer form: “Lord, we thank You for blessing our lives materially and providing for us today. What I really need to be grateful for is the fact I can talk to You and You listen to me! Even if those material things are taken away, thank You for providing the peace and joy of a close personal relationship with You, Amen”
  - d) The next set of verses begin the “curses”. The last thing God mentions prior to the curses is the fact that God called the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt to be “His people”.
    - i) The word-picture is that prior to our salvation, we too were “slaves to the world”. Before one commits themselves to serving the true God, we focused our lives on everything and anything other than God. Whether we realized it or not, we were “slaves” to this world. God “plucked us out” the same way God took the Israelites out of Egypt. That is why this miracle is emphasized over and over again in Leviticus and all through the bible.
  - e) OK, end of the good news. Time for the curses. Cover your heads, incoming missiles! ☺
13. Verse 14: “But if you will not listen to me and carry out all these commands, <sup>15</sup> and if you reject my decrees and abhor my laws and fail to carry out all my commands and so violate my covenant, <sup>16</sup> then I will do this to you:
- a) Let’s start with the word “all” in Verse 14, as in “carry out all these commands”.
    - i) It’s not just about keeping “Command #2 and #4 of the 10 Commandments. It is about keeping all the laws stated in Leviticus. In other words, if one violates these commands, better start running! ☺
  - b) If you recall from earlier lessons, penalties were spelled out for different violations of the laws. Some penalties were simply isolation for short time period. (These are the “unclean until evening” penalties). Some were more severe and called for death penalties.

- c) My point here is that if one person violated one law, it will not trigger all these curses.
  - d) What triggers the negative events of the remainder of Leviticus 26 is a corporate (all of Israel) general-disregard for God and His laws.
    - i) That is the way rebellion against God always starts: It starts with ignoring a few things about God. It starts with ignoring regular prayer time and regular time in corporate worship. One becomes more apathetic through time and more rebellious. It is one thing to turn from God for a moment, sin, and then confess what one did as wrong. It is quite another to willfully turn from God and not care about the consequences. That is what is in view with these “curses”.
  - e) With that grim introduction complete, let’s go downhill. ☺ Here we go:
14. Verse 14 (cont.) I will bring upon you sudden terror, wasting diseases and fever that will destroy your sight and drain away your life.
- a) The first curse listed is a physically deterioration of one’s life. God is the sustainer of life. In order to live a healthy life, one sticks close to God. To turn from God causes physical deterioration as well as spiritual deterioration.
  - b) This curse is listed first for a reason: There is a word-picture of when one draws away from God, one turns spiritually “unhealthy”. One’s physical health is dependant upon one’s spiritual health.
  - c) Does this mean that if I get sick I somehow sinned? Of course not! Remember the topic at hand is corporate disobedience. God is “promising” the Israelites that if they collectively turn from God, “all of a sudden” bad illnesses will make their way through their nation.
  - d) Does this mean that if a plague hits my country it is because we turned from God? Can’t answer that. The only thing I can say for sure is that God has a purpose in allowing such horrible things to happen. Maybe it helps people pray to God and turn to God when such disasters occur. Maybe it helps bring other Christians together to minister to such people. I can’t explain all suffering. I simply know that there is a God who allows such things ultimately for His glory.
    - i) A rabbi once said, “Those who believe in God only have to explain suffering. Those who don’t believe in God have to explain everything else”. The point is there is so much in our world that is unexplainable other than the existence of God. The only tough question for the believer in God is to explain suffering.
15. Before I talk about the specific curses starting in Verse 16, let’s talk about God “cursing” us.
- a) The idea is not one specific sin. It is about turning from God in every aspect of our lives. It would be like totally renouncing one’s belief in Jesus both Lord and payment for sins.
  - b) The “cursing” came on Israel collectively. The bible tells of historical periods where they were just giving God “lip service” and at the same time worshipping false gods.
  - c) It’s important to add here that God is in charge of “cursing” those who turn from Him. He does not call us to join in the action! ☺ God is more than capable, all by Himself of working on people who are in rebellion. At the same time, God does call Christians to protect each other. That is different from going on the offense against nonbelievers.
  - d) One of the principals to get out of these curses is that life stems from God. That includes our physical health, our daily substance and even our safety.
  - e) Jesus said in effect we can’t accomplish “anything” without abiding in Him (John 15:4-5). That doesn’t mean we can’t go to the bathroom without Jesus’ permission. ☺ It means in order to accomplish anything for God, Jesus needs to be in the picture. It is by praying to God and having the Holy Spirit work within us that we have the power to accomplish anything and everything that is “God’s will” for our lives. God’s will can be anything as simple as praying for someone, helping other people and just “living our lives” in a way that is compatible with biblical principles for our lives.
  - f) With that said, let the wrath of God continue. ☺

16. Verse 16: You will plant seed in vain, because your enemies will eat it. <sup>17</sup> I will set my face against you so that you will be defeated by your enemies; those who hate you will rule over you, and you will flee even when no one is pursuing you.
- a) In Verse 16, God promises that if His people turn from Him, the enemies of Israel will take away the Israelites have grown. The verse goes on to say they will be defeated by their enemies and “those who hate you will rule of you”.
    - i) Remember back in the blessing section, one can eat food without the fear of enemies taking one’s food. Here in Verses 16-17, the opposite is also true. If one turns from God, He takes away our protection and lets our enemies rule over us.
    - ii) If you study the book of Judges, this literally came true. There were various periods where Israel was defeated by their enemies who ruled over them.
    - iii) Remember the reason the curses go on for many verses is to show their historical fulfillment. These curses ended up being prophetic.
  - b) The last negative-promise is that “You will flee even when no one is pursuing you”. In other words, the Israelites will be paranoid and “scaredy cats”. Verse 8 was a blessing saying the Israelites will win victories when outnumbered. Here the opposite is true.
  - c) Think about this principal from the aspect of faith in God. If one doesn’t have that faith, one becomes scared of situations and afraid to face them.
17. Verse 18: “If after all this you will not listen to me, I will punish you for your sins seven times over.
- a) Four times in Leviticus (this is the first) we will read the phrase “seven times over”.
  - b) The number seven is associated with God’s perfection as God rested from His creation on the seventh day. It is God’s colorful way of saying, “If you people disobey me, I’m going to do these horrible things to you. If you still fail to obey me, I’ll begin “Phase 2”, which is a lot worse (i.e., “seven times worse”) than My Phase 1 punishment.”
  - c) With that said, Verse 19 predicts what I call “The Phase 2” curses on the Israelites.
18. Verse 19: I will break down your stubborn pride and make the sky above you like iron and the ground beneath you like bronze. <sup>20</sup> Your strength will be spent in vain, because your soil will not yield its crops, nor will the trees of the land yield their fruit.
- a) To summarize this verse, the Israelites won’t be able to grow crops. In the previous set of curses, it says that enemies will eat the crops that do grow. In “Phase 2”, no crops will grow in the first place. If you have ever tried digging in desert-ground, it practically requires big modern drilling equipment to get through soil that dry.
  - b) The verse mentions “iron and bronze”. This is a poetic way of saying the ground will be so hard one can’t even plant seeds. The “iron sky” is a colorful reference to scorching hot weather so plants cannot grow.
  - c) Most of us know the cliché “fruitless”. It means to try to do something, but the results were empty. Imagine trying to do efforts to please God without His help. Enough said.
  - d) Notice there is a parallel between the blessings and curses. In the “blessing” section, God promised an abundance of produce if obedient. The opposite is true for the “cursing”.
  - e) Does this mean every time there is a drought God is punishing us? It means that if there is a drought, it could mean God is trying to get our attention. Such things are beyond our knowledge. I do know God allows bad things to happen ultimately for His glory. My point here is we cannot assume weather disasters are some sort of God inflicted punishment. Remember these sets of curses are specifically designed for Israel, just as the blessings are designed for Israel. There are principals and word-pictures behind the blessings and curses, and I’m trying to point those out as we go.
19. Verse 21: “If you remain hostile toward me and refuse to listen to me, I will multiply your afflictions seven times over, as your sins deserve.
- a) Here we have the second “seven times” reference. That means we’re about to enter what I call “Phase 3” of the punishment series. Let’s just say God’s not lightening up. ☺

20. Verse 22: I will send wild animals against you, and they will rob you of your children, destroy your cattle and make you so few in number that your roads will be deserted.
- a) In "Phase 2", God worked on the crops. If that didn't get their attention, "Phase 3", which starts in Verse 22, says that wild animals (i.e., predator) animals will attack their livestock and even their own children!
  - b) Is God being cruel here? These verses are stating that God is behind of all of this.
    - i) A better question is, "Why are these people blaming God for their misfortune? These people are the ones turning away from God in the first place!"
    - ii) Remember the Israelites "signed on the dotted line", agreed to keep these laws, and agreed to the penalties. (That is what implied in Deuteronomy Chapter 27)
    - iii) God is saying in effect, "I don't want it to go this far. I really want you to have a relationship with Me and I'll do whatever it takes to get your attention. Hopefully My people will return to me before it gets this bad, if they won't listen, I have to resort to drastic measures."
    - iv) Again, this would be cruel if there was no afterlife. Let's say innocent children get hurt because their parents turn away. All people, including these children will be judged fairly based on their own lives. The kids will be blessed for eternity even though they had to suffer in this lifetime.
  - c) Remember that another purpose of this is for God to show the surrounding nations that He is God. God never abandons the Israelites despite all of this punishment. It is God saying in effect, "The other nations will know I am God by 1) either by the way I bless the Israelites so much people will come to the conclusion that I am God or 2) I will punish the Israelites so much and at the same time keep them as a "people" that other nations will come to the conclusion that I (God) exist.
  - d) When skeptics ask whether or not the bible is the Word of God, I always point out the Nation of Israel. No nation in the history of civilization has ever been conquered, scattered and came back together as a nation - except for Israel; they did it twice. Further, no dead language has ever come back to life in every day use - except for Hebrew. If you want proof of the existence of the God of the bible, study the history of Israel.
21. Verse 23: "If in spite of these things you do not accept my correction but continue to be hostile toward me, <sup>24</sup>I myself will be hostile toward you and will afflict you for your sins seven times over.
- a) Here in Verse 23, we get the fourth "seven times" reference. It is God saying in effect, "I tried "Punishment #1", and that didn't work. Punishment #2 is seven times worse (seven is the poetic number of "perfection"). If that didn't work, I'll try "Punishment #3" which is even seven times worse than that. By Verse 23, we're up to #4. It's not pretty. ☺
  - b) Before I actually go on to "Phase 4", I thought I'd give us all a much-needed break with one of my favorite prophecy references:
    - i) There is a strange prediction in Ezekiel 4:4-6. God told Ezekiel to sleep on his left side for 390 days and lay on his right side for 40 days. God then said each day represents one year. God said in effect there would be (390+40 =) 430 years of "punishment" for the sins of the nation of Israel.
    - ii) The Israelites went into captivity for 70 years. That leaves (430-70=) 360 years unaccounted for in "punishment". The 70-year period was around 600 BC.
    - iii) Now let's get back to this "7-times-worse" reference given in Leviticus 26. If you take 360 years times 7 years is 2,520 years. If one takes the time the Israelites finished the 70-year captivity and then adds 2,520 Jewish years, it comes out to 1948 when modern Israel became a country again! To explain the calculations requires giving you a lot more details about leap years and other dates, but you get the idea. The point here is that the "seven times worse" can be applied to Ezekiel's Chapter 4 prediction as well.

- iv) The Ezekiel prediction is more interesting in that the Babylonian captivity was in three phases. If you use the date the Babylonians first started their attack on Israel as a starting date for this prediction, the results comes out to the exact date in May of 1948 when Israel became a country again. If you use the third phase as a starting date (when Jerusalem fell to the Babylonians) and apply this, it comes out the exact date in 1967 when Israel recaptured Jerusalem in the 6-day war!
  - v) OK, the break is over. Back to the suffering. ☺
22. Verse 25: And I will bring the sword upon you to avenge the breaking of the covenant. When you withdraw into your cities, I will send a plague among you, and you will be given into enemy hands.<sup>26</sup> When I cut off your supply of bread, ten women will be able to bake your bread in one oven, and they will dole out the bread by weight. You will eat, but you will not be satisfied.
- a) These verses are describing a siege. A siege is when an army captures a city by, in effect, surrounding the city and starving it out. The invading army will camp for months or years outside the city walls and not let any supplies in the city. The invading army wins by starving out the inhabitants. That is what is being described here.
  - b) God uses very vivid word pictures to describe this action. Verse 26 says, “10 women will bake bread in one oven”. That means the supply of wheat is so scarce, that a group of people can all bake together and carefully dole it out.
  - c) Unfortunately, this came true in Israel’s history. This is how Jerusalem was destroyed by the Romans in 70AD. History records that multitudes died by starvation during the siege.
23. Verse 27: “If in spite of this you still do not listen to me but continue to be hostile toward me,<sup>28</sup> then in my anger I will be hostile toward you, and I myself will punish you for your sins seven times over.
- a) Here we have another “seven times worse” type of reference. God is saying in effect, “If all of that is not enough to turn you people back to Me, watch what is next!”
  - b) You would think this is enough. Personally, I would have surrendered by Phase 1. ☺
  - c) What would motivate someone not to turn to God at this point? Unfortunately, punishment does not always get someone to change their views. An interesting point in the Book of Revelation is despite all of the horrible things that happen, there are four references to the fact people refused to repent of their sins (Rev. 9:20, 21, 16:9, 16:11). People don’t want to give up their lifestyle despite all the pain it causes.
  - d) Another way to look at this wrath is to consider God, out of His love for us, will go to extreme lengths to get us to come back to Him. The text never says God gives up on them or us. The text never says they stop being the “Chosen People”. The point is once God chooses someone, He refuses to give up on us, no matter how much we rebel against Him.
24. Verse 29: You will eat the flesh of your sons and the flesh of your daughters.<sup>30</sup> I will destroy your high places, cut down your incense altars and pile your dead bodies on the lifeless forms of your idols, and I will abhor you.<sup>31</sup> I will turn your cities into ruins and lay waste your sanctuaries, and I will take no delight in the pleasing aroma of your offerings.<sup>32</sup> I will lay waste the land, so that your enemies who live there will be appalled.<sup>33</sup> I will scatter you among the nations and will draw out my sword and pursue you. Your land will be laid waste, and your cities will lie in ruins.
- a) Here we get into some pretty gruesome predictions. I don’t have to go into great detail describing this text, as it is pretty self-explanatory. I mentioned earlier about sieges. It is the idea of an army surrounding a city and getting victory by starving out that city. Verse 29 describes the extreme effects of a siege, which includes cannibalism.
  - b) These verses are predictive of what eventually happened during the Babylonian captivity. Not only did the Babylonians defeat them, but the Israelites were exported out of that land for 70 years, as that land lay desolate.
  - c) The sad part is God never wanted it to get this bad. It got to a point where the nation rebelled so much, it became like a “mercy killing”.

25. Verse 34: Then the land will enjoy its sabbath years all the time that it lies desolate and you are in the country of your enemies; then the land will rest and enjoy its sabbaths.<sup>35</sup> All the time that it lies desolate, the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths you lived in it.
- Remember the last chapter was about keeping the Sabbath holidays and sabbatical years. God required the land to have an occasional “rest” from being harvested. Here is God saying in effect, “Observe my sabbatical years. If you don’t observe them, I’ll will in effect, “observe them for you” by kicking you out of town until the land has its rest.
  - It is almost as if God is saying the sabbatical rest of the land is more important than the Israelites living in that land. The key issue is not the sabbatical year, it is obedience. By kicking the Israelites out of that land for a time frame, it shows God’s “seriousness” about keeping His laws and decrees.
  - What does all of this mean for you and me? It is about having a healthy “fear of God”. That term is about respect and accountability. It is about the realization God will judge us one day based on our behavior. Our Christian salvation is secured, but our rewards in heaven are based on our behavior. Paul said in Romans 14:11 that each one of us (that is believers) has to given an account of ourselves to God.
  - The good news is we only have four more verses of wrath and punishment. ☺
26. Verse 36: " `As for those of you who are left, I will make their hearts so fearful in the lands of their enemies that the sound of a windblown leaf will put them to flight. They will run as though fleeing from the sword, and they will fall, even though no one is pursuing them.<sup>37</sup> They will stumble over one another as though fleeing from the sword, even though no one is pursuing them. So you will not be able to stand before your enemies.<sup>38</sup> You will perish among the nations; the land of your enemies will devour you.<sup>39</sup> Those of you who are left will waste away in the lands of their enemies because of their sins; also because of their fathers' sins they will waste away.
- Suppose an Israelite thinks, “OK, God was true to His word. Our nation has been captured and I am one of the survivors, now living in a foreign land. I can now pretty much do what I want because it can’t get much worse.”
  - God is rebuking that thought by saying in effect, “Just because you are somewhere else does not mean the punishment is over. I’ll get you no matter where you are”. These verses describe further punishment after being kicked out of the Promised Land.
  - To recap all of this cursing, it starts out with relatively “light” punishment, and eventually gets worse and worse. Just when you think it can’t get any worse, it does.
  - Notice what is never said in any of these curse-verses: “I, God will give up on you”. If anything, it is the opposite. This is about a nation that has collectively rebelled against God. He desires they turn back and goes to extreme length to do so.
  - The punishments described in this chapter are horrible to think about. What is to be understood is just how seriously God hates sin and rebellion and shows the great length God will go to in order to get people to turn back to Him.
  - Notice in all of this, God never violates someone’s free will. If “God is God”, then He could easily make us “robotic creatures” and force us love Him. Instead, God desires it be our decision to turn toward Him. True love requires free will.
  - Another point of all of this is “Without God, our life will become miserable.” Once we have experienced the wonderful sense of peace and joy of abiding in God, life becomes miserable if we willfully turn from that relationship. This is what Jesus meant when He taught that “No one can serve two masters” (Matthew 6:24, Luke 16:13).
27. Verse 40: " `But if they will confess their sins and the sins of their fathers--their treachery against me and their hostility toward me,<sup>41</sup> which made me hostile toward them so that I sent them into the land of their enemies--then when their uncircumcised hearts are humbled and they pay for their sin,<sup>42</sup> I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.

- a) Verse 40 starts off with, “But if they will confess their sins”. This is a highpoint of the chapter. It is God saying in effect that despite all of these horrible punishments, despite all of the suffering caused by My people turning from me, it is never too late to turn back.
- b) Verse 40 comes after all of the horrible curses of this chapter. Now God says in effect, “It is never too late because you still belong to Me.” God is saying the Israelites can regain their relationship by confessing their sins and start living a life of obedience.
- c) Remember that God desired to use the Israelites as His “witnesses” to the world:
  - i) God needs to prove to the world that He is God, and therefore He does great miracles through His people to demonstrate His powers. At the same time, God cannot allow His people to be disobedient because the “world is watching them”.
  - ii) The same applies for Christians. Whether we realize it or not, nonbelievers are watching our behavior. God takes being a witness for Him seriously.
- d) Remember that if God has picked us to spend eternity with Him, God is incapable of changing His mind. If God could change His mind, we can’t trust Him. That is why His unconditional promises of salvation are just that: unconditional.
  - i) At the same time, God goes to extreme lengths to mature us and draw us close to Him. God uses punishment as motivation to draw us back to Him.
- e) Does this mean God can punish Christians the same way He punished Israelites? No. For starters, Christians are not all gathered in one physical location of which we can be exiled. God made a special relationship with the Nation of Israel that is different from the church.
  - i) On the other hand, God can allow a specific church to be ineffective or He can bring it to an end. That is a concept idea taught in Revelation Chapters 2 and 3.
  - ii) At the same time, I do believe God allows bad things to happen to us for some purpose. It does not mean all bad things that happen to us are God-ordained, but they are all God-allowed. One of my favorite prayers during difficult times is, “Lord, let not this lesson be wasted. Help Me to have discernment as to its purpose”. God is under no obligation to explain all the bad things to happen us, but at the same time, God does use negative circumstances to get us to some point in our life that He desires for us to live.
- f) Now let’s get back to the text: If you read all of these verses in context, they are saying in effect, “Look folks, if you are willing to confess your sins, I God, am more than willing to start over with you. That does not mean that I God will immediately put you (The Israelites) back in the land and life will be hunky-dory. ☺ It means that once I am convinced you are truly “broken” from your bad habits and are willing to change for the better, I’ll start to work on you to make it better again”.
- g) Verse 42 says, “I will remember my covenant with Jacob and my covenant with Isaac and my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.” That means God made an unconditional promise to the ancestors of the Israelites to give them the land. That land belongs to God and He gave it to the Israelites. That is the unconditional promise. At the same time, the right to use the land is the “conditional” promise of obedience.
- h) I’ve always argued that the Promised Land is not a word-picture of heaven. The Promised Land had to be conquered and I don’t think there’s murder in heaven. The Promised Land, for the Christian, represents the rich, full, joyful life of fully trusting in God in all that we do. At any time, we can choose to walk away from that lifestyle.
- i) What we discover is when we turn from Him is God then says in effect, “OK, go try life on your own for awhile. Send me a postcard sometime.” ☺ We then mess up because we can’t live without God. We realize our mistakes and turn back to Him. God then starts over because the promise of the rich, full life with Jesus is an unconditional promise.

- j) In other words, we as Christians have both unconditional and conditional promises as well. We have the unconditional promises of salvation. At the same time, our lives can become pretty miserable if we choose to rebel against God. The extremes are not as bad as the Israelites, but the principal still applies: God will go to great lengths to get us to come back to Him when we rebel against Him.
  - k) In the book of Malachi, God states, "I hate divorce". (Malachi 2:16). I believe the underlying message is God can't divorce who He has already committed to, which are those who trust in Him. God will do whatever it takes to bring us back.
28. Verse 43: For the land will be deserted by them and will enjoy its sabbaths while it lies desolate without them. They will pay for their sins because they rejected my laws and abhorred my decrees. <sup>44</sup> Yet in spite of this, when they are in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them or abhor them so as to destroy them completely, breaking my covenant with them. I am the LORD their God. <sup>45</sup> But for their sake I will remember the covenant with their ancestors whom I brought out of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God. I am the LORD.' "
- a) Notice the first words of Verse 44: "In spite of this". That may be the greatest phrase in the whole chapter. It is saying that God will punish rebellion as promised, but that God's unconditional promises remain unconditional. Just because we become unfaithful, God remains faithful to His own promises.
  - b) There is a false-view among many Christians that God is done with the nation of Israel. That "somehow", because they have rejected Jesus, God can now go back on His unconditional promises to them about the Israelites inheriting the Promised Land. If anything, this chapter proves otherwise. Despite all of their punishment for disobedience, God says in Verse 44, "I will not reject them or abhor them". That is about God's unconditional promises.
  - c) Remember that the title of this lesson is "God's conditional promises". This lesson is about understanding the difference between God's conditional promises and His unconditional promises to both the Israelites and to Christians. The primary focus of this chapter is on God's conditional relationship to Israel. The lessons for Christians is to understand why God has both a conditional and an unconditional relationship:
    - i) The unconditional relationship is to understand our security in God.
    - ii) The conditional relationship is to "keep us on our toes", to understand that God won't violate our free-will, but at the same time, will go to incredible lengths to draw us close back to Him after we rebel.
29. Verse 46: These are the decrees, the laws and the regulations that the LORD established on Mount Sinai between himself and the Israelites through Moses.
- a) In Exodus, it is stated that Moses spent forty days on Mt. Sinai alone with God and was given the 10 commandments. (Ref.: Exodus 24:18, 34:28). During that time period is when most of Leviticus was also given. That includes this whole chapter.
  - b) This last verse is God saying in effect, "That's a wrap. This is all I have to say on the matter of my decrees to you. Now get out there and go obey!" ☺
  - c) By the way, there is now only one chapter left in Leviticus. That chapter deals with our vows. It is as if God is saying in these last two chapters: Here are my vows to you in Chapter 26, and here is how you are to handle your vows in Chapter 27.
30. Let me wrap up the key points in our ending prayer: Father, thank You for the fact that no how much we have suffered due to our own sins and the sins of others around us, there is an eternal reward still waiting for us. Help us to have that eternal perspective, especially in our times of weakness. When we turn away from You, give us the wisdom to turn back and not let it grow "seven times worse". Help us in our rebellion to turn back to You and realize our dependence upon You in all that we do. Help us to live the full, rich blessed life that You desire for us. Change our perspective for Your glory, in Jesus name, Amen.