

46.

MESSAGE 37

ECONOMIC OBLIGATIONS OF ISRAELTIES TO EACH OTHER

Leviticus 25:1-26:46

Introduction

The first MESSAGE in this section deals with economic obligations that the Israelites owed to each other as fellow servants of Jehovah. Each Israelite was responsible to participate fairly in a system that was designed to provide economic justice to all. The provisions of this MESSAGE were an ingenious system for preventing some families from becoming overly-rich and living in luxury while their neighbors suffered in need. It also was designed to prevent some families from becoming overly-poor as long as they would work and take advantage of their opportunities. If the Israelites had practiced the system faithfully, it would have prevented any Israelite from gaining so much wealth and power that he could oppress a fellow Israelite, and it would have granted every Israelite a genuine opportunity to begin again to work for financial success after he suffered misfortune. The Lord also promised that, if they would be loyal to Him and practice the principles outlined in this MESSAGE, he would control the weather and their enemies to assure their peace and prosperity. Their long troubled history is eloquent testimony that they have not practiced the plan God gave them. Unfortunately, neither has any other nation followed fully the principles involved in that system. For that reason, nations rise and fall and will continue to rise and fall until the End.

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Interpretation

CHAPTER 25

Introductory note (25:1)

Verse 1. And Jehovah spoke to Moses at Mount Sinai, saying,

A new MESSAGE of Jehovah is introduced with this verse. The preposition translated “at” usually means “in,” which has caused some interpreters difficulty in explaining why this MESSAGE should have been recorded at this point since they assume it means Jehovah spoke this MESSAGE while Moses was in the mountain before The Tabernacle was erected. They have struggled to explain a problem that does not exist, because the preposition sometimes was used to mean “at” and should be understood in that manner in this verse. In 1 Samuel 29:1 and in Ezekiel 10:15,20 it clearly means “at” and is translated in that way in almost all English versions.. Jehovah had promised that when The Tabernacle would be built, He would speak to Moses out of The Tabernacle from between the cherubim above the ark (Ex. 25:21-22). When The Tabernacle was set up, God began to speak to him in that manner (Lev. 1:1), and He continued to do so throughout the book of Leviticus. The text gives no indication that suddenly at chapter 25 it begins to refer back to something Jehovah had said months before when Moses was in the mountain. So the supposed problem is easily solved by using the legitimate translation of the preposition “at.” Jehovah spoke to Moses “at” Mount Sinai, “in” the wilderness, “from” The Tabernacle (see Critical Note in SUMMARY NOTE ON FIRE-OFFERINGS, Lev. 7:37-38).¹

1. The sabbatical year (25:2-7)

Verse 2. Speak to the sons of Israel and you shall say to them, When you come into the land that I am giving to you, the land shall keep a sabbath to Jehovah.

Jehovah instructed Moses to tell all the Israelites of a provision He was making for preservation of their land. They would not be able to carry out the provision until they arrived in their Land, because they could not plant crops while moving about in the desert, but Jehovah wanted them to be told in advance of this provision. He wanted them to be prepared to observe these important instructions as soon as they possessed land of their own.

When Israelites would arrive in their Land, they were to be responsible to see that the land would enjoy regular sabbaths, that is times of rest from the labor of growing crops. A sabbath was a time to cease secular work so the time could be dedicated to God. The people were to observe a sabbath every week, but verse 4 specifies that the land was to observe a sabbath every seven years (see comments on Lev. 19:3 in MESSAGE 23 under the heading keep My sabbaths). Dedicating every seventh year as a sabbath for the land served two purposes: (1) It allow the land relief from cultivation so it could recover and fertilize itself. The necessity for that provision is obvious to any person familiar with farming. Land that is tilled constantly year after year becomes exhausted and sterile. Just like people become exhausted and weak without times of rest from constant labor, so does the land. However, when land is allowed to lie fallow for a year, it restores itself. The vegetation that grows voluntarily absorbs nutrients from the air. When that vegetation is plowed into the ground, it provides fertilizer and enrichment for the soil, and then it is ready to work again to provide food for its owners. Some such provision for the enrichment of the ground is necessary for preserving a healthy economy in an agricultural society. Jehovah provided in advance for that kind of wise use of their land. Carefully observing it would not cause them to go lacking. It would provide for continued abundance through the years. It would not weaken their society, but strengthen it. (2) It would recognize that the land belonged to God and was only loaned to them. Allowing the land to restore itself served a spiritual purpose as well. It was a sabbath “to Jehovah.” a time of rest done to obey Jehovah. The seventh year was a form of worship, and it would keep the Israelites’ lives in perspective. It would help them recognize that their livelihoods

¹ NASB, SGV, and MSG translate the preposition as “at.” HCSB, RSV, NRSV, NIV, NEB, JB, MV, LB, BBE, CEV, CJB, and GNB translate it as “on,” while KJV, RV, ASV, and LITV translate it as “in.”

and their daily provisions were gifts from God and not just the results of their own labor.

Verse 3. **[For] six years, you must plant your field and prune your vineyard and you shall gather in its fruits,**

Though Jehovah provided them the land and the strength to cultivate it, He did not just give them food without any effort on the part of the Israelites. He expected them to work the land, plant the seeds, prune their grape vines, weed their grain fields, and gather in their harvests. Work and personal responsibility builds character. Laziness and dependence on others when we can care for ourselves produces selfishness and sin. God expected the Israelites to do for themselves what they could for six years, and then He promised to take care of them during the seventh year.

During the six years that farmers could plant and harvest, they would need to be wise and set aside dried grain, flour, raisins, and other foods that would continue to be usable during the seventh year. They would not need to go lacking during the seventh year, if they would use their opportunities to prepare in advance for observing the Sabbath year.

Verse 4. **But in the seventh year must be a sabbath of a sabbath for the land, a sabbath to Jehovah. You must not plant your field and you must not prune your vineyard.**

God called the seventh year a “sabbath of a sabbath for the land.” That expression means every seventh year was to be an especially holy time that exceeded the significance of ordinary holy times (see comments on Lev. 16:31 in MESSAGE 20 under the heading a sabbath of a sabbath it must be to you, and you shall afflict yourselves). It is important to notice that the year was to be a sabbath of a sabbath for the land, not for the people. A sabbath of a sabbath for the people required them to refrain from all work, even household chores. It would have been impossible for the Israelites to cease every kind of work for an entire year. The seventh year was not a time of rest for the people but for the land. The people were free to work as they needed during that year, as long as they did not

work the land. They were obligated to let the land have time to rest and recover. They were not to work in their grain fields or in their vineyards for the entire year.

Verses 5-7. **5 You must not harvest volunteer growth of your harvest, and you must not gather your dedicated grapes. It must be a sabbath of a sabbath for the land.**

6 Yet the sabbath of the land shall provide food for you and for your male slaves and for your female slaves and for your employees and for the visitor who lives with you,

7 For your livestock and for the wild animals that are on your land. All of its yield may be for food.

The Israelites were not even to harvest any volunteer plants that grew up from seeds dropped during the previous harvest or any grapes that grew on their vines without being cultivated or pruned during that year. The grapes that grew that year were called “your dedicated grapes,” literally “grapes of your dedication.” That expression means the volunteer grain or grapes that grew that year were dedicated to God and were not to be harvested as a money crop.

Even though the Israelites were forbidden to plant or harvest during the sabbatical year, they were free as individuals to gather and eat anything that grew by itself during the year. If a person was short of flour to make bread or of dried fruit to eat, he could gather heads of grain or grapes that grew voluntarily in the field and eat it. The sabbatical year was not provided to cause people to be hungry but to give the land time to recover. A farmer was not only allowed to gather grain or grapes in that manner for himself, but he was also to allow that privilege to his slaves, his employees, and even visitors who remained with him for an extended time. The word translated “visitor” is used in Leviticus 22:10 for a person who lived with or near a priest but who was not a regular part of his family. Such a person was not allowed to eat food from the offerings that were set aside for the priests’ support. However, he was allowed to gather volunteer grain or grapes from his friend’s field if he needed it for food. Such a person was a temporary resident (see comments on Lev. 22:10 in MESSAGE 27).

Furthermore, a farmer's livestock and little wild animals that lived on his land were to be allowed to forage for volunteer grain if they needed food. In addition to supplies set aside in advance for the seventh year, this provision would meet emergency needs during the year, but the stalks of the grain and perhaps even most of the grain, grapes, and olives themselves that would grow without being planted or cultivated would fall to the ground and enrich the soil.

2. The year of the freedom-blast (25:8-22)

Verse 8. **And you shall count for yourself seven sevens of years, seven times seven years, and the days of the seven sevens of years shall be to you forty-nine years.**

Jehovah established another special celebration at the end of seven periods of seven years. The word translated "sevens" is the same word that means "sabbaths." In this case, it is used to mean a period of time made up of seven units (see comments on Lev. 23:15-16a in MESSAGE 31). The units are described as years, and then the verse clearly defines seven sevens of years as forty-nine years. The new celebration was to begin after the forty-ninth year.

This passage does not tell when the Israelites were to begin counting the years. Since the sabbatical year described in verses 1-7 was to begin when the Israelites had settled in their land, likely counting the forty-nine years was also to begin when the Land was divided among the tribes, clans, and families, which Joshua did after the conquests of the Land (Josh. 13:1-21:45).

Verse 9. **Then you shall cause a noise-making shofar to pass along on the seventh month on the tenth day of the month. You must cause the shofar to pass along throughout all the land.**

Then you shall cause a loud shofar. The beginning of this celebration was to be signaled by passing along the loud noise of a shofar. A "shophar" was a musical instrument that is not in use today except in a portrayal of ancient practices. Some translate the word as "trumpet." Others

called it a "cornet." However, it did not correspond to either of those modern instruments. It was built in a long coil, evidently to resemble a ram's horn and to imitate the sounds of a ram's horn. It produced a loud, piercing sound and produced only one note. This verse describes the instrument as "a noise-making shofar," which is an apt description of it. The word translated "noise-making" is the word that is used in Leviticus 23:24 to describe the joyous shouts and noises of the Jewish New Year's Day. The previous passage did not state what was to be used to make the noise, but this verse specifically says it was to be made by a shofar.

to pass along. They were to cause the loud noises of the shofar "to pass along," which means the sounds were to pass from place to place until they had been heard in the whole land. Perhaps the sound was to be passed along from one shofar to another, spaced close enough together for each shofar to hear the sound of another and to pass it on to the next. That arrangement would have been a quick way to send the signal across the whole Land. Another possibility is that a person blowing a shofar was to pass along throughout the whole Land. Such an arrangement is less likely because it could not have been carried out in one day.

on the seventh month on the tenth day of the month. You must cause the shofar to pass along throughout all the land. The signal was to be passed along on the tenth day of the seventh month of the religious calendar. The seventh month of their religious calendar was the first month of their secular calendar, so the signaling from the noise of the shofar was to come ten days after the Memorial of Noise-Making, which was their New Year's celebration (see comments on Lev. 23:24-25 in MESSAGE 32). The tenth day of the seventh month of their religious calendar was The Day of Coverings, the day when all Israelites were called to turn away from sin and recommitment themselves to Jehovah (see comments on Lev. 16:1-34 in MESSAGE 20). Perhaps the signal was to be passed along on that day because the sounding of the shofar announced events that were unique to Israel and that demonstrated dramatically the advantages and blessings of serving Jehovah. Five days after the Day of Coverings, the week-long Feast of Booths was to begin (see comments on Lev.

23:34-36 in MESSAGE 34). The signaling came in the midst of the most significant and the holiest month in their religious year.

Verse 10. **And you shall hallow the fiftieth year, and you shall proclaim liberty through the Land to all its inhabitants. This freedom-blast must be to you, and you shall return a man to his property, and you must return a man to his family.**

11a. This freedom-blast must come to you [in] the fiftieth year.

And you shall hallow the fiftieth year. This statement clarifies that counting seven periods of seven years or forty-nine years was to mark the beginning of the year described in this passage. The observance was actually to be held after the forty-nine year or during the fiftieth year. The noise-making shofars had a significance distinct from that of the Day of Coverings, though both events came on the same day. The sounding of the shofars was to signal the beginning of observances that were to be carried out during the whole fiftieth year. The Israelites were to hallow that year for a special holy purpose. Thus, every fiftieth year two holy years were to be observed back to back. The signal to begin the year was to be given in the seventh month of the religious year, but it was to be the beginning of the fiftieth year from the time the series of seven periods of seven years was to begin.

The fiftieth year did not coincide with the Israelite's religious year, and it did not exactly coincide with their secular year. Rather it began on the tenth day of their secular year. It coincided with their farm year. It came during a lull in the activities of Israelite farmers, between the end of their fall harvest season and the beginning of their fall planting of crops to be harvested the next spring (see comments on Lev. 16:29a in MESSAGE 20). Beginning the year at that time allowed time for the massive reorganization of their nation's life that was the purpose of the fiftieth year.

and you shall proclaim liberty through the Land to all its inhabitants. The purpose of the fiftieth year was to secure freedom for every person who lived in the land. The verse clearly does not say they were to proclaim liberty only to Israelites.

It says they were to proclaim liberty to all the inhabitants of the Land. The fiftieth year was to give freedom to every person who lived in the Land and restore the nation to the free and equal relationships that Jehovah wants all people to enjoy. In Exodus 21:2-11, Jehovah had given the Israelites regulations to control slavery in Israel. He commanded that Israelites were not to own other Israelites, though an Israelite could contract his labor to another Israelite for as long as six years. In the seventh year, the contract laborer was to be free unless he declared to the judges that he wished to continue to serve his master. He also specified that, if a man married a slave, she was to continue with him for life; and he was obligated to treat her with respect and honor. He had no right to cast her off because she was a slave. Nothing had been said previous to this passage about permission for an Israelite to own a foreigner as a slave; however, verses 44-46 below allow that practice. The fiftieth year provided for release from slavery even any foreigners that an Israelite might own. When the shofars sounded throughout the Land, every person living in Israel was to be set free, both from contractual service and from full slavery. Everyone was to begin again as a free person, equal before God and the law.

As liberal as this law was in comparison with other nations of the time, obviously Jehovah did not completely abolish slavery in ancient Israel. Jehovah always has had to deal with people from where they are. Slavery was such a totally accepted practice in that day that even the Israelites were not ready to understand that slavery in and of itself is a moral evil. It took years and a great war for that right to be established in America, and slavery still exists in some nations today. Jehovah instituted laws that controlled slavery and its worst abuses, and then he began to teach them and other nations the evil of slavery until they could accept how terribly evil it is and abolish it altogether.

It must be to you a freedom-blast. The word translated “freedom-blast” has traditionally been transliterated as “jubilee.”² Prior to translating the Bible into English, no such word existed in the English language. When Bible translators began to translate the Bible into English, they did not know what the Hebrew word meant, so they simply transliterated it into the English text. Since readers also did not know what it meant, they supposed that it was a word describing a fifty-year anniversary or at least a time of special commemoration and celebration. The word “jubilee” took on that meaning and maintains it until today. However, its original meaning in Hebrew was quite different. The Hebrew word seems to have been a designation for a certain sound blown on a shofar. It is based on a root that means “to bear along” or “to flow along,” probably indicating that the sound was an extremely loud and long blast. This understanding of the word is supported by a literal translation of both Exodus 19:13 and Joshua 6:5. Exodus 19:13 says, “At the drawing out of the *yobel*, they may come up to the mountain.” Exodus 19:19 describes the carrying out of that event as, “And the sound of the shofar was becoming exceedingly strong.” Joshua 6:5 uses almost the identical expression and says, “And it shall be at the drawing out of the *yobel* with a horn, when you hear the voice of the shofar, all the people must shout with a great shout.” The sound of the shofar is then described as a long extended continual blowing (Josh. 6:15-20). A careful reading of these verses shows that *yobel* does not describe the instrument but the sound. In both passages, the instrument is described as “horn” and “shofar.” The *yobel* was the sound that was to be made with that horn. *Yobel* was a musical notation that indicated a long extended drawn out blast that grew louder and louder.

Evidence to confirm that *yobel* described the sound and not the instrument is that in three of the four passages where the word *yobel* is used, the

² KJV set the pattern and transliterated the word as “jubile.” Only RV has followed the KJV example and used that same spelling. Most versions have added another “e” and transliterated the word as “jubilee”: RSV, ASV, NASB, NRSB, NEB, NIV, LITV, MV, DV, JB, and SGV. HCSB, BBE, and MSG capitalize the transliteration into “Jubilee.” CJB comes closer to the Hebrew spelling and uses “yovel.” CEV uses “celebration,; while GNB and LB omit it altogether.

instrument on which it was played is said to be a shofar (Ex. 19:16; Lev. 25:9-10; Josh. 6:4,6,8,13). It is illogical to use two names for the same instrument in the same verse. Therefore, even though lexicographers, translators, and interpreters have unanimously held *yobel* to be the name of a musical instrument, I submit that its usage much more strongly suggests it is the name of a sound, a long piercing blast that grows louder and louder.

Every time this long, drawn-out, and piercing blast is mentioned in the Scripture, it is associated with freedom. In addition to this verse, the word *yobel* is used in three other passages: (1) Exodus 19:13, where it signaled freedom from slavery in Egypt for the people of Israel; (2) Joshua 6:4,5,6,8,13, where it signaled freeing the land of Canaan from the people who had filled it with evil; and (3) Numbers 36:4, where it referred to the same occasion of liberty described in this passage. Thus, in this writing, the word *yobel* is translated as “freedom-blast,” to indicate both its sound and its meaning. This rendering is far better than simply transliterating the Hebrew word, a practice that has obscured its meaning for English readers and turned it into a word that simply means “fiftieth anniversary.” It is also much more accurate than translating it as “ram’s horn” when the word *yobel* in no way resembles either the Hebrew word for “ram” or the Hebrew word for “horn.”

and you shall return a man to his property, and you must return a man to his family. Freedom was to be established in the fiftieth year in two ways: (1) Land that had been sold or seized for debt was to be released and returned to the family to whom it would be allotted when the Land would be divided after the Israelites had conquered it. (2) People who had been enslaved or who were bound as contract workers were to be released to return to their families. The fiftieth year was to be a time of liberty, when both the land and the people were to be freed from obligations that kept them from the families to whom they belonged.

This freedom-blast must come to you [in] the fiftieth year. . This statement emphasizes that the Israelites were obligated to blow the distinctive long drawn-out blast on shofars every fiftieth year and then practice the liberation it announced.

Verse 11b-12. **11b. You must not plant, and you must not harvest its volunteer growths, and you must not gather its dedicated [grapes].**

12. Because of this freedom-blast, it must be a holiness to you. You may eat its [voluntary] yield.

You must not plant, and you must not harvest its volunteer growths, and you must not gather its dedicated [grapes]. As in the sabbatical year that was to occur every seventh year, the fiftieth year was to be an additional year when the Israelites would not work their fields. The same words are used in this verse as were used in verses 4-5, though the expressions are slightly shortened. The word translated “dedicated [grapes]” is literally “its dedications.” Though the word “grapes” does not occur in this verse, it does occur in verse 5, showing that “volunteer growths” refers to grain and “dedications” refers to grapes (see comments on Lev. 25:4-5 above). During the fiftieth year, the Israelites were to allow their fields to lie fallow for a second successive year to allow them another year to rejuvenate and fertilize themselves. The purpose was the same as the sabbatical year, to protect the land from overuse, so it could continue to provide their needs into the indefinite future.

One naturally wonders how a farming nation could survive without planting or harvesting for a whole year, much less for two successive years. Three explanations are given in this passage to give the answer to that question: The first is implied in this verse. The Israelites knew what to expect well in advance of the year. They would have ample opportunity to prepare for the year and lay aside stores to carry them through. Jesus warned His followers not to worry about tomorrow (Matt. 6: 25-34; Lk. 12:22-30), but that injunction in no way prevents Jehovah’s followers from making preparation for future needs, especially if those needs are expected in advance. In fact, Jehovah expects people to plan wisely and make preparations in coming events.

Because of this freedom-blast, it must a holiness to you. Because of the special importance of the events that were to be announced by the freedom-blast, the whole year was to be a holy year (see comments on Lev. 2:3 in MESSAGE 1 under

the heading [It is] a holiness of holinesses). They were to use their extra time during that year for holy purposes, to serve God and building themselves up spiritually. Having more time to worship God and to grow in God’s grace and knowledge would benefit them more than any extra money they might make by working through the year. Not farming during that year also would encourage them to have an unselfish spirit while land and people were being transferred back to the families to whom they belonged. That unselfish spirit would increase the holiness of the year, because holiness is more a matter of trusting and obeying God than of performing rituals.

You may eat its [voluntary] yield. A second reason the Israelites needs would be met during the year was they would be permitted to eat any crops that grew up voluntarily. They were not to gather it in as a harvest, but individuals could gather any grain that grew up voluntarily from seeds that were dropped during the previous harvest or any grapes that grew on their own on uncultivated vines.

Verses 13-17. **13 In this year of the freedom-blast, you must return each man to his possession.**

14 And if you sell to your associate or buy from your associate’s hand, you must not mistreat a man his brother.

Since the freedom-blast began the holy year that was observed every fifty years, that fiftieth year was called “a freedom-blast” or “the year of the freedom-blast” (Lev.25:13,28,40,50,52,54; 27:17,18, 23,24). When Israelites bought or sold land, they were to agree on a fair price according to the number of years remaining until the year of the freedom-blast. When the price was set, both the seller and the buyer were to be careful not to take advantage of the other and set the price according to the time remaining until the freedom-blast. Thus, transfer of property was more like a lease than a sale, so that each parcel of land would remain through the years in the hands of the family that had received it from Jehovah. It was to remain the property of the family to whom it was given by Jehovah, even if that family leased it to another for a period of years. Each family was to consider its land to be a sacred inheritance from Jehovah. A

family's continuing right to its land would provide the dignity and strength of character that comes from ownership and responsibility. It would provide an economic system that would exalt the dignity and rights of every individual.

Verses 18-22. **18. And you shall observe my statutes and you must keep my judgments and observe them, then you shall dwell in the Land in security.**

19 And the land shall yield its fruit, and you shall eat until satisfied, and you shall dwell in security in it.

20 And because you may say, "What will we eat in the seventh year if we may not plant or gather our crop,"

21 Then I will command my blessing on you in the sixth year, and it shall make produce for three years.

22 And you shall plant in the eighth year and shall eat from the old produce until the ninth year. You will eat old [produce] until its produce comes in.

The third reason the Israelite's needs would be met during the year of the freedom-blast was that God promised to take care of them. He said the Israelites would obey His statutes and He would make their fields so fruitful in the sixth year that they would have enough to last into the third year. The first year would begin on the Day of Coverings, so the second year would end at the Day of Coverings, only weeks before the beginning of fall planting. That crop would ripen the next spring. Jehovah promised them that the harvest of the year before the sabbatical year would be so abundant they still would be eating from it when their spring harvest in the third year would be ready to gather. God never gives a person or a nation a command or a calling without providing the means to perform it.

3. The rights of the poor (25:23-25)

a. Property redemption (25:23-34)

Verses 23-24. **The land must not be sold permanently, for the land [is] mine. You [are] sojourners and visitors with Me.**

This section begins a passage that continues to the end of the Chapter. It contains provisions that the Israelites were to make for the poor. The phrase "if your brother becomes poor" is found in verses 25,35,39, and 47. showing that concern for the poor is the theme that runs through this whole section. The word "brother" referred to all Israelites. It showed the close relationship that Jehovah wanted the Israelites to have with each other. He wanted them to feel such a closeness with each other that they would be ready to help each other in any time of need. The economic system of Israel was to be a humane one. It provided for private ownership and profit, but not to the extent that one person could advance himself in such a way as to do permanent harm to another.

The first provision for the poor was that each family's land was not to be sold permanently. Jehovah already had instructed them that every fiftieth year the land was to return to the family to whom it would be assigned when they arrived in the Land (see comments on vs. 8-17 above). In this passage, Jehovah clarifies that the basis for that provision was that the Land belonged to Him. He allowed them to live on it, use it, and even enrich themselves by it; but they were never to consider it to be their possession. They were to protect it for Him and use it according to His instructions. They were sojourners and visitors on His land (concerning sojourners, see comments on Lev. 16:29b in MESSAGE 20 under the heading [including] the native and the sojourner who sojourns among you, and on Lev. 17:8-9 in MESSAGE 21; concerning visitors, see comments on Lev. 22:10 in MESSAGE 27). He intended, however, that every Israelite family should have property assigned to it permanently. If a family got into financial need and had to sell property, they were not to sell it permanently but lease it until the next sabbatical year. Thus, they would be able to

use their property to gain money in times of need and still not lose it permanently.

Verse 24-28. **24 And in all the land of your possession, you must allow [for] redemption of the land.**

25 If your brother becomes poor and sells some of his property, then his close kinsman-redeemer shall come, and he shall kinsman-redeem his sale.

26 And if a man does not have a kinsman-redeemer and his hand reaches out and obtains enough for his kinsman-redemption,

27 He shall count the years from his sale, and he shall return the overage to the man to whom he sold it, and he shall return to his property.

28 But if his hand does not obtain enough to return it, then the sale shall remain in the hand of its purchaser until the year of the freedom-blast, and at the freedom-blast it shall go back, and he shall return to his property.

In addition to the provision that all lands were to go back to the families that originally owned them every fiftieth year, each man was to be given the right to regain his property at any time within the fifty year period, provided he could pay the value of the lease until the next year of the freedom-blast. The purchaser was obligated to accept the payment and allow the original family to take possession of it again. These provisions were an important aspect of Jehovah's plans to preserve the Israelite economy and an Israelite's right to property ownership.

A piece of property could be redeemed in one of two ways. (1) The nearest kinsman to the man who sold the property could pay back the purchaser, and the seller could return to his property. (2) If the seller later was able to obtain enough money to pay back the purchaser, he could redeem the property himself and possess it again.

This passage is the first reference in the Sinai commandments to the special responsibility of an Israelite to rescue his near kinsman from trouble, though a similar practice was recognized in Judah's day in Genesis 38:1-30. The responsibility to rescue a relative from trouble was to be a sacred

obligation in Israel, commanded by God. It emphasized the importance of family and of family members' supporting and rescuing each other. The Hebrews had a special word for the responsibility of a man to redeem his kinsman from loss or trouble. The word had been used once in Genesis and twice in Exodus to refer to Jehovah's redeeming people (Gen. 48:16; Ex. 6:6; 15:13), but it is used here for the first time to refer to a near relative's redeeming his kinsman. This word is entirely different from another word that was used to rescue or redeem a person or animal under other circumstances. In order to make a distinction between the two words, this writing will use the translation "kinsman-redeem" for the responsibility to rescue a person's nearest of kin. The Hebrews used the participle "kinsman-redeeming [one]" to refer to the man who rescued his kinsman. This writing will refer to him as "kinsman-redeemer." Among Israel's laws, Jehovah specified four occasions in which a man was obligated to kinsman-redeem his nearest relative: (1) buy back his sold property (Lev. 25:24-28), (2) buy him out of contract servitude (Lev. 25:47-55), (3) marry his childless widow (Deut. 25:5-10), and (4) execute his murderer (Num. 35:12-28; Deut. 19:4-6,11-13).

Verses 29. **And if a man sells a dwelling house in a walled city, then his kinsman-redemption shall come [to] an end a year from its sale. His kinsman-redemption must come [within the required] days.**

In walled cities, the right of property redemption was to apply for only for a year after the sale of the property; and it applied only to houses, not to larger buildings. The reason for this provision probably was that the main value of property in a walled city soon would not be in the land but in the building built on it. People in cities would have no incentive to build large buildings if they could not be sure they had the right to hold them after they were built. A man who had a large project in mind could wait a year after obtaining property and then be assured that he could continue his project without fear of losing it. Still, the seller's rights would be protected for a year after the sale. If the seller wished, he could buy back the house within a year and continue to use the house as his dwelling place. If he sold the house to pay a

debt or because of some other need for funds, a near relative could rescue him from losing his house by buying it back for him. If he sold the house because he wanted to live elsewhere, he had a year to change his mind, return the sellers money, and continue to live in the house.

Verse 30. **And if it is not kinsman-redeemed by the completion of a full year, then the house that is in the city that has a wall shall stand permanently to its purchaser through his generations. It must not be released at the freedom-blast.**

After the expiration of a year, city property was to belong permanently to its purchaser. The seller could not go back and claim it by returning he purchasers money, and the right of kinsman-redemption no longer applied to it. The property also was not to go back to the former owner in the year of the freedom-blast. It was to belong to the new owner permanently. The developer was to have a continuing right to it until he decided to sell it or otherwise dispose of it.

Verse 31. **But the houses of the villages that have no wall around [them] must be counted with the field of the land. They may be kinsman-redeemed, and they must be released at the freedom-blast.**

The arrangement was different for houses in towns and villages that did not have walls, because they would be used primarily for houses to live in and would not contain large buildings. A farmer's house in town was to be considered to be an integral part of his field, and the same rights applied to it that applied to his farm. The right to property redemption in unwalled towns and villages was not to expire at the end of a year. That arrangement was to allow a farmer in Israel to live in a town near his farms for the sake of safety as farmers in many countries still do today. Thus, a farmer was to be allowed to retain the same rights to his house in towns they he had to his farm.

Verses 32-34. **32 And if a person from the Levites would redeem [a house], then the sold house shall be released at the freedom-blast, even [in] a city of his possession, for the houses of the cities of the Levites [are] their possession in the midst of the sons of Israel.**

And if a person from the Levites would redeem [a house]. Jehovah gave special redemption rights to the Levites. This provision may have puzzled Moses and the people at the time this MESSAGE was spoken, because up to this point the Levities had been mentioned only briefly and no special place of service had been assigned to them. They were descendants of Levi, Jacob's third son by Leah (Gen. 29:31-34). As a tribe, they are mentioned only three times in Exodus, twice to note that Moses and Aaron belonged to that tribe (Ex. 4:14; 6:25) and once because they kept account of all the gifts that the Israelites contributed for the construction of The Tabernacle (Ex. 38:21). In Leviticus, they had not been mentioned at all up to this point. However, Jehovah began to explain His plans for that tribe two days later in a MESSAGE recorded in Numbers 1:1-16 (see INTRODUCTION TO LEVITICUS under the heading **Theme**, SUMMARY OF LEVITICUS EVENTS AND MESSAGES at the end of this Commentary, and compare Num. 1:1-20 with Num. 1:47-49). In Numbers 1, Jehovah instructed Moses to take a census of the men of Israel, but He told him to take a separate census for the tribe of Levi. He said the reason for the separate census was that the Levites were to have the responsibility of transporting The Tabernacle as the Israelites traveled in the wilderness and of caring for it when they were camped. Also, the Levites were to encamp around The Tabernacle so they could be readily available to it (Num. 1:12,47-52). Soon afterward Jehovah clarified that in performing service for The Tabernacle, the Levites were to be considered ministers to the whole congregation and assistants to the priests, so the priests could give their time to their priestly duties (Num. 3:5-10). In His next MESSAGE recorded in Numbers 3:14-49, Jehovah explained that He was accepting the Levites for those duties in the place of the first-born sons of all the tribes, whom he had claimed for Himself when He killed the first-born sons of the Egyptians to get them to free the Israelites (Ex. 13:1-2,11-16).

These special assignments mean that the Levites were not to be farmers or earn their living with other secular occupations. They were to be full time ministers to Jehovah, so special provisions needed to be made for their living arrangements. Near the end of Israel's journeys in the wilderness, Jehovah gave instructions about dividing the Land among the tribes. Each tribe was to be assigned its own area of the Land, according to their population (Num. 32:1-42; 34:29). However, since the Levites were not to be farmers or herdsman, Jehovah commanded that a total of 42 cities were to be provided for them. Their cities were to be scattered throughout the Land, including some cities in the area of each of the other tribes. Their being scattered into all of the tribal areas indicated that in the Land they would have additional responsibilities in teaching and ministering to the people. When Jehovah gave Moses instructions about dividing the Land, He told Moses about one of those additional responsibilities. Six additional cities were to be assigned to the Levites to serve as Cities of Refuge, to which a person who killed a man by accident could flee and be protected until he could have a fair trial. The Levites were to protect and supervise that person in the city to which he had fled until his trial (Num. 35:1-34).

Jehovah obviously knew He was going to give the Levites all those responsibilities, so He gave them special redemption rights that they would need if they were going to live in cities to carry out their special responsibilities (see comments on Lev. 27:26-27). Jehovah described those special redemption rights in this passage because they fit the topic of this MESSAGE, even though He did not explain the special responsibilities of the Levites until later.

then the sold house shall be released. If a Levite living in one of their cities should lose or have to sell his house, he was to have the right to redeem it, that is, buy it back at any time. He was not to be limited to a year in reclaiming his property even though he lived in a walled city.

also [in] a city of his possession at the freedom-blast. In addition, houses in one of the Levite's cities were to be returned to their original

owners when the freedom-blast sounded at the beginning of the fiftieth year.

for the houses of the cities of the Levites [are] their possession in the midst of the sons of Israel. Both of these provisions were the same rights a farmer had for his farm but different from the rights a developer had in other cities. The reason was that a Levite's city house was his primary residence. He was to receive his house in a city on the same basis as a farmer would receive his land for farming or a herdsman would receive his land for grazing. To have the same rights as other Israelites, the Levites needed the right to redeem their city houses at any time or to receive them back at the freedom-blast (see comments on 27:26-27).³

b. Financial assistance (25:35-38)

Verse 35. And if your brother becomes poor and his hand shakes near you, you shall assist him if [as] a sojourner or a visitor, he shall live beside you.

The second right of those in poverty was the right to assistance from neighbors. When a man lost his property and his wealth, his neighbors were to help make a new beginning. The word translated "assist" does not mean "support," as some English translations suggest. It means "help" or "strengthen."⁴ The word translated "beside" is the word "with," but it should not be understood as meaning "in your home" but "near you." "[As] a sojourner or a visitor" means he was to be treated like a sojourner or a visitor. A sojourner was a person from another nation who had accepted Jehovah and been accepted among the Israelites as one of them. (see comments on Lev. 16:29b in MESSAGE 20 under the heading [including] the native and the sojourner who sojourns among you, on Lev. 17:8-9 in MESSAGE 21, and on Lev. 24:10,22 in MESSAGE 36). Jehovah had given instructions that the Israelites were to love sojourners as themselves and were not to take advantage of them or mistreat them (see comments

⁴ The word translated "assist" does not mean "maintain" (RSV), "uphold" (ASV), "sustain" (NASV, NWV), or "support" (JV). It meant rather "aid" (NEV), "help" (LV), or "strengthen" (alternate translation in ABV).

on Lev. 19:33-37). A visitor was a person from another nation who lived in Israel but who had not become a convert to Jehovah or a naturalized citizen of the nation (see comments on Lev. 22:10 in MESSAGE 27 and on vs. 5-7 above). Even though he had not gained status as a citizen, the Israelites were to treat him with kindness and compassion. When any person living in Israel would become poor and weak, his nearby neighbor was to have compassion on him and assist him. The assistance that was to be provided was not to be welfare, by which the man was to be supported by his neighbor, but assistance by which the man would be helped to begin again to make a living for himself. It was to be the kind of assistance described in Leviticus 19:9-10, in which the needy person was given an opportunity to work to feed himself (see comments on those verses).

Verses 36-37. **36 Do not take interest or profit from him, and you shall fear your God as your brother lives beside you.**

37 You must not lend him your money at interest, and you must not give [him] your food for profit.

Jehovah commanded the Israelites not to take advantage of a person who has suffered a financial loss. They were not to charge him interest on a money loan, and they were not to sell him food at a profit. Those instructions imply that lending money or selling food to a needy person was legitimate. It would allow him money to use in recovering from his loss and help him have food while he recovered, without making him dependent. It would encourage him to gain dignity by working his way out of his difficulty. Thus, the lender would provide assistance in such a way as to preserve for his neighbor the dignity of self help.

Verse 38. **I am Jehovah your God, who brought you out of the land of Egypt to give you the land of Canaan in order to be your God.**

The Israelites were to remember that Jehovah had helped them when they were in poverty. He had brought them out of the land of Egypt so He could be their God. He challenged the Israelites to help others in the same spirit and thus make friends of those they helped.

- c. Freedom from slavery and release from contract service to an Israelite (25:39-46)

Verses 39-46. **39 And if your brother near you becomes poor and sells himself to you, you must not make him serve as a slave.**

40 He must be with you as an employee and a visitor. He must serve with you until the year of the freedom-blast.

41 Then he shall go out from you. He and his children shall go back to his family. He must return to the possession of his fathers.

42 Because they are My slaves whom I brought forth out of the land of Egypt. They must not be sold as slaves.

43 You must not rule over him with harshness, and you shall fear your God.

The third right of a person in poverty was the right to freedom from slavery. If poverty forced an Israelite to sell himself, his brother Israelite was not to buy him as a slave. He was to contract for his services, and he was to pay the agreed upon price. The worker was to hold the status of an employee or a visitor (see comments on Lev. 22:10 in MESSAGE 27 and on Lev. 25:6 above). Jehovah had already commanded in Exodus 21:2-6 that Israelites were not to buy other Israelites as slaves, but that they were to hire them as contract employees. Then in verses 4-10 above, Jehovah had commanded that every fiftieth year all such contract services were to end, so that everyone in the Land could be restored to full freedom. Later in Deuteronomy 15:12-18. Moses confirmed those instructions and added that when the contract worker was released, he was to be given sufficient provisions to support himself while he began to make a living for himself. These verses make the further provision that if a man was freed by the freedom-blast, his children were to go with him, and he was to receive back the property he had inherited from his fathers. However, in Exodus 21:3-4 Jehovah had made the exception that if his wife was a contract worker when he married her, she and the children were to continue in her status and not be freed with the husband.

In no case was an Israelite to be sold as a slave and owned by another Israelite. The reason

Jehovah commanded that Israelites could not be sold as slaves was that they were His slaves, whom He had claimed for Himself by bringing them out of Egypt. Israelites could not be owned by Jehovah and by a man. They were to belong to Jehovah alone. Furthermore, Israelites were not to deal harshly with their contract workers, because they belonged to Jehovah. He wanted His people to be treated with respect and kindness. The words translated “with harshness” mean literally “with severity,” but the term seems always to have been a synonym for slavery, just as “with hard labor” means confinement in a state or federal prison, not just in a local jail (Ex. 1:13,14; Lev. 25:46,53; Eze. 34:4). Employers were to respect God, the true owners of their employees, so much they would not take ownership of other Israelites and would not dare mistreat God’s slaves.

44 Concerning your male slaves and your female slaves that you may have from among the nations that will be surrounding you, you may buy male slaves and female slaves from them.

45 And also from the visitors who sojourn with you, you may buy from them and from their families who have been born among you in your land, even they may be your property.

46 And you shall pass them on to your sons after you to inherit as a property to an age. You may make slaves of them, but you must not rule over your brothers, the people of Israel, one over another with harshness.

Even though instructions not to own an Israelite as a slave implied that Israelites could own slaves from other nations, these verses are the only passage in the Law that specifically addresses that question. The Israelites could own slaves from among the people of other nations. They also could own slaves from among people who lived in Israel but had never accepted Jehovah or been accepted as Israelites, even if they had been born in the Land. No doubt, the implication is that they could not own as slaves people of other nations who had accepted Jehovah as their God. Those who trusted Jehovah had special privileges and special blessings. The Israelites could pass on their slaves to their children when they died, but He put a limit even on that provision. He said slave owners could pass on their slaves to their children “to inherit as a property to

an age.” The words “to an age” generally have been understood to mean either “forever” or “for life.”⁵ Both of those views create problems. “Forever” means Jehovah put approval on slavery for eternity, which from the vantage point of today is repulsive. “For life” conflicts with His commandment that all slaves would be given freedom at the freedom-blast. A better understanding of the words is derived from the usual use of the word “age” in the books of the Law. It is used to mean a long indefinite period of time until God should see fit to change the instructions (see comments on Lev. 6:18 in MESSAGE 5). From that perspective, “to an age” means into the indefinite future until Jehovah would change His instructions concerning owning foreign slaves, which He did in Jesus.

In addition, in Leviticus 19:20-22, Jehovah had forbidden an Israelite slave owner from having sex with a female slave engaged to another man (see comments on those verses). In ancient Israel, Jehovah put limits on slavery far exceeding those of other nations around them, pending the day when Israel and the world was able to understand His desire to abolish slavery altogether (see comments on Leviticus 19:20-22 and on verses 10-11a above).

Later Jehovah warned the Israelites that their laws could not protect them from becoming slaves in other nations if they lived there and were reduced to poverty or if they were conquered by other nations and carried away as captives. An Israelite might become a slave in a foreign land, just as a foreigner might become a slave in Israel. That warning was intended to be an encouragement to them to trust and obey God, so He would not have to allow them to be carried away into other lands (see Deut. 28:68). But, Israelites were free from slavery in their own Land and among their own people.

⁵ KJV, DV, ASV, BBE, RSV, and RV translate those words as “for ever”; CJB and LITV use “forever”; MV uses “for all time”; NASB, LB, and SGV “permanent”; NEB “permanently”; JB “perpetual”; HCSB, NIV, and MSV “for life”; GNB “as long as they live.” CEV and NRSV omit them altogether.

- d. Redemption from contract service to a sojourner or a visitor (25:47-55)

Verses 47-55. **47 And if a hand of a sojourner and visitor reaches out and your brother beside you becomes poor and sells himself to a visitor sojourner with you or to a branch of a visitor's family,**

48 After he has been sold, kinsman-redemption may occur for him. One of his brothers may kinsman-redeem him,

49 Or his uncle or his cousin may kinsman-redeem him, or a near kinsman from his family may redeem him, or if his hand reaches [enough] he may redeem himself.

50 Then he shall account with the purchaser from the year of his sale until the year of the freedom-blast, and the price of his release shall be by the number of years according to the days he was with him [as] an employee.

51 If many years remain according to what they say, he must refund for his kinsman-redemption out of the price of his purchase.

52 And if a few yeas remain until the year of the freedom-blast, then he shall account to him according to what his years say. He must buy back his redemption.

53 He must be with him year by year as an employee. He must not rule him with harshness in your eyes.

54 And if he has not been kinsman-redeemed by these [ways], then he shall be released in the year of the freedom-blast, he and his children with him.

55 For the sons of Israel are My slaves. They are my slaves, whom I brought out of the land of Egypt. I am Jehovah your God.

Greater detail is given concerning release of an Israelite from contract service to a person who was not an Israelite by birth. Probably the reason is that person who was not born an Israelite would be less inclined to obey Jehovah's instructions

concerning their release. Therefore, Jehovah stressed strongly that His instructions for release applied to non-Israelites by birth just like they applied to Israelites (see comments and references cited on v. 35 above).

This passage contains no reference to an Israelite being a slave of a sojourner or a visitor. Since careful attention is given to rules that applied to contract service, the omission of any statement about slavery implies that the same rules applied as those for Israelites, which would mean sojourners and visitors also were not to own Israelites as slaves. However, if an Israelite suffered financial difficulty and had to work for another man to earn his living, he could enter into a contract to serve that man for a specific period of time for an agreed on price. This passage specifies that he could be released from that service in three ways: (1) A relative could serve as his kinsman-redeemer and paying off the remainder of the contract (compare vs. 24-25 above). (2) If the could gain enough money, he could pay off the remainder of the contract himself (compare vs. 26-27 above). (3) He was to be released from the contract on the year of the freedom-blast (compare v. 28 above). These verses give a fuller description of how a labor contract could be paid off. The payment owed was to be figured by counting the number of days remaining in the contract and pay for those days only at the originally agreed on price. He was not to be charged fees or a higher rate for the remaining days.

Sojourners and visitors were to treat their contract workers in the same way that was expected of Israelite employers. They were to treat them with respect as paid employees, and they were not to treat them harshly or abuse them. The reason for treating their contract workers in that manner was that Israelites were slaves of Jehovah, whom He had purchased by setting them free from Egypt. They were to treat Jehovah's slave humanely out of respect for Jehovah.

Critical Note

Among modern interpreters, only Peisker sees Chapter 26 in its proper relationship to the materials that surround it. All others consider that chapter to be either: (1) a concluding exhortation to the entire Book of Leviticus, (2) a concluding note to the “Holiness Code (see INTRODUCTION TO LEVITICUS, under the heading Date and Authorship), or a separate exhortation unconnected to the materials around it. Four arguments show that this chapter is an integral part of this MESSAGE on the economic system of Israel and is in the place where it logically belongs: (1) This chapter is shown to be an integral part of a larger MESSAGE on the economic system of Israel by the absence of the words with which Moses customarily introduced a new MESSAGE from Jehovah. Both Leviticus 25:1 and 27:1 say, “And Jehovah spoke to Moses ..., saying.” Those words are used uniformly throughout the Book of Leviticus to introduce new MESSAGES. Those words do not occur in 26:1, indicating that chapter 26 does not begin a new MESSAGE but is a closing part of the MESSAGE that begins in 25:1. (2) The theme of this chapter is principals related to economic prosperity or poverty, which logical follows the economic regulations outlined in chapter 25. The two chapters are related in theme as well as in structure. (3) The kind of concluding exhortation for the whole of the law, which the interpreters seek to make out of this chapter, occurs later in its proper place at the close of the Book of Deuteronomy and at the close of the life of Moses (Deut. 27:1-31:9). (4) Viewing this chapter as a conclusion to the law turns Chapter 27 into the status of either an appendix or of a clumsy aside tacked on by an inept redactor. This chapter fits too perfectly into the theme of the whole MESSAGE on the economic system of Israel for it to be possible for the disruptive suggestions of negative critics to be correct. It describes features which were necessary to understand the economic system Jehovah outlined for Israel, and its explanations are necessary to an understanding of a number of previous references in the law. As comments below will show Thus, the proper conclusion is that this chapter is the properly placed conclusion, not to the whole law, but to a MESSAGE on the economic responsibilities Israelites owed to each other.

Interpretation

CHAPTER 26

4. The promised results of following the economic system Jehovah commanded (26:1-45)
 - a. If you follow My plan, you will have peace and prosperity (26:1-13)

Verses 1-2. **1 You must not make to yourselves gods, and you must not erect to yourselves an image or a pillar, and you must not set up in your Land a carved stone to bow down to it for I am Jehovah your God.**

2 You must keep My sabbaths, and you must fear My Tabernacle. I am Jehovah.

Jehovah closed this MESSAGE by challenging the Israelites to be loyal to Him only, which included practicing His plan for their economic system. He told them that, if they did not follow His plan, their economy would fail; but if they following His plan, their economy would succeed. He began His challenge to them by commanding them to honor no God but Himself and

to show their loyalty to Him by keeping His sabbaths and by having trembling respect for His

place of worship, The Tabernacle. That commandment was appropriate because, if they were to obey His

commands about their economic system, they first would have to be completely loyal to Him. They needed to understand that their economic system could not be isolated from their religious system. Israel could not practice the economic system God commanded and reap its benefits unless they also were obedient to Jehovah in their worship. Practicing the economic system was just one part of a total life of obedience and service to Jehovah.

Jehovah’s command to Israel concerning images and pillars did not forbid them to make any picture or carving. It forbid them to make pictures or carvings to use in worship. The Canaanites used images of many kinds to represent their gods and goddesses. They also erected carved pillars to remind them of their gods and goddesses. They prayed before those images and offered offerings to them. Jehovah forbid such practices, not only because they represented false gods, but also because He cannot be pictured or represented by

any physical object. He is an infinite, eternal Spirit. He can only be worshipped with people's spirits and hearts. Using images as a means of worshipping Him misleads people about the kind of God He is and causes them to trust in material objects that they can feel, see, and touch. They lead people away from true worship, not into it.

Instead of using images and pillars, the Israelites were to show their loyalty to Jehovah by keeping his sabbaths and by showing trembling reverence for His Tabernacle, where people were to gather to worship Him. The Tabernacle contained the ark and the fiery cloud that represented God's presence, but the people only knew of them and never saw them. They taught about God, but by being inside The Tabernacle where only the priests went, they avoided becoming physical idols that people would honor instead of the God who dwells in people's hearts. Using a physical object to represent God or remind them of God taught exactly the opposite lesson.

Verses 3-13. **3 If you watch after My statutes and My commandments and do them,**

4 Then I will give your rains in their season, and the land will yield its increase and the trees of the field its fruit.

5 And your threshing [grain] will reach until vintage and your vintage will reach until planting, and you shall eat your bread until satisfied, and you shall live in safety in your Land.

6 And I will give peace in the Land, and you will lie down and none will be damaging you, and I will remove dangerous animals from the Land, and the sword will not pass through your Land.

7 And you shall chase your enemies, and they shall fall before you by the sword,

8 And five of you shall chase a hundred and a hundred of you shall chase ten thousand, and your enemies will be falling before you by the sword.

9 And I will turn toward you and will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make My covenant with you to stand firm,

10 And you shall eat old stored [goods], and you shall clear out the old from the face of the new.

11 And I will put My dwelling place among you, and My soul will not despise you.

12 And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be My people.

13 I am Jehovah your God who brought you forth from the land of Egypt from being their slaves, and I broke the bars of your yoke, and I caused you to walk upright.

If Israel would follow the economic system outlined by Jehovah as a part of a trusting and obedient life, Jehovah would guarantee them prosperity. He promised them blessings that would protect and strengthen their economy that no people can guarantee for himself. He named five blessings that He would give them that would promote their prosperity: (1) seasonal rains (vs. 4-5), (2) freedom from the ravages of wild animals (v. 6a), (3) absence of war (v. 6b), (4) victory over any enemies who might attack them (vs. 7-8), (5) population growth (vs. 9-10), (5) the presence of Jehovah in their midst (vs. 11-13). What nation could want for more? God's promises should have made the Israelites realize that the success of their economy depended more on what God could do for them than on what they could do for themselves. Therefore, the best way for them to secure their prosperity was to trust God and obey Him.

- b. If you do not follow My plan, you will receive punishment that will gradually increase from debilitating illnesses to exile in foreign lands (26:14-39).

Verses 14-17. **14 But if you will not hearken to Me and will not do all these commandments,**

15 And if you reject My statutes, and if your soul despises My judgments so as not to do all My commandments to break My covenant,

16 Instead I will do this to you: I will direct terror toward you: deterioration and fever weakening eyes and causing soul to fade, and you shall plant your seed in vain and your enemies shall eat it,

17 And I will set My face against you, and you shall be stricken at the face of your enemies, and those who hate you shall rule over you, and you shall flee when no one is chasing you.

If Israel would refuse to follow the economic system outlined by Jehovah as part of a trusting and obedient life, the opposite would be true. They would be overcome with defeat and poverty by factors over which they had not control. Jehovah mentioned two factors that would destroy them: (1) debilitating diseases (v. 16), and (2) defeat at the hands of their enemies (v. 17).

Verses 18-20. **18 And if in spite of these you will not hearken to Me, then I add punishment seven times worse to you for your sins.**

19 And I will break down the swelling of your power, and I will set your heavens like iron and your land like brass,

20 And your strength shall be exhausted in vain, and your land will not yield its increase, and the trees of the land will not yield its fruit.

If disease and defeat before their enemies would not cause the Israelites to trust God and live by His plan, then He would add additional punishments. God does not pour out His full wrath all at once on rebellious people. His mercy causes Him to begin with lesser punishments and gradually increase them in the hope they will repent before they have to suffer too much. God's punishment is not vengeance. It is redemptive, designed to lead people to repentance and deliverance. However, if disease and defeat would not cause the Israelites to repent, Jehovah would add a punishment that would be seven times more devastating. He would send drought that would deplete everything that gave them strength. They would exhaust themselves with labor and accomplish nothing. Their crops would not produce, and trees would not grow fruit. Their desperation would become seven times worse.

Verses 21-22. **21 And if you continue to walk beside me in opposition and are not willing to hearken to Me, I will add blows seven times worse according to your sins.**

22 And I will release among you animals of the field, and they shall make you childless and destroy your livestock and decimate you, and your conditions shall become desperate.

If drought and hunger would not bring them to repentance, Jehovah would add the ravaging of

wild animals, which would make their poverty seven times worse again. Animals from the wild would kill their children, destroy their livestock, and leave them desolate, saddened, and desperate.

Verses 23-26. **23 If by this punishment you are not turned to me and walk beside me in opposition,**

24 Then I also will walk in opposition to you, and I, even I, will strike you seven times worse for your sins.

25 And I will bring a sword to you to avenge covenant vengeance, and you shall be gathered within your cities, and I will send an epidemic among you, and you will be delivered into the hand of an enemy.

26 When I stop your supply of bread, then ten women shall bake your bread in one oven and shall return your bread by weight and you shall eat, and you will not be satisfied.

If the ravages of wild animals would not be enough to cause the Israelites to turn and live by God's plan, Jehovah would increase their punishment even more and cause their suffering to be increased seven times again. This time their punishment would come through an army that would lay siege to their cities, cut off their food supply, cause an epidemic to break out among them, and overrun them. Jehovah said that punishment would be to avenge the covenant they had broken. The statement does not mean that Jehovah sought to get back at Israel by making them suffer. It means He would give them just retribution for breaking the covenant they had solemnly and freely accepted.

Jehovah gave a vivid description of the sufferings that would come from a siege. What little grain a man could obtain, ten women would be occupied in baking. Baking bread would not occupy so many women because they had so much grain but because they would have so little grain that ten women would be available to bake just one man's grain into bread. They would all work in one oven, because so little grain would be available that it could all be baked in one oven. Then when they measured out to him the bread that was baked from his grain, he would eat it and it would not be enough to satisfy him. The description is a sad

picture of the deprivations that would result from the siege of a city.

Verses 27-39. **27 And if in spite of this, you still will not hearken to Me but walk beside me in opposition,**

28 Then I will walk beside you in hot opposition, and I, even I, will punish you seven times worse for your sins.

29 And you shall eat the flesh of your sons, and you shall eat the flesh of your daughters.

30 And I will destroy your high places and cut down your pavilions, and I will cast your corpses on the corpses of your idols, and My soul will despise you.

31 And I will make your cities a desolation, and I will devastate your holinesses, and I will not smell your soothing fragrances.

32 And I will devastate the Land, so that your enemies who will be living in it will be appalled by it.

33 And I will scatter you among the nations, and I will uncover a sword behind you, and your Land shall be a desolation, and your cities will become a devastation.

34 Then the Land will enjoy its sabbaths all the days of [its] being desolate while you [are] in your enemies' land. Then the land will rest, and it shall enjoy its Sabbaths.

35 All the days of [its] being desolate, it will rest as it did not rest on your sabbaths during your living on it.

36 And those of you who survive, I will cause weakness to come into their hearts in the lands of their enemies, and the sound of a blowing leaf shall chase them [away], and they shall flee like a flight from a sword, and they shall fall when no one chases.

37 And they shall stumble one man over another like from the face of a sword when no one chases [them], and standing firm in the face of your enemies will not exist for you.

38. And you shall perish among the nations, and the land of your enemies shall eat you up.

39. And those of you who are left shall deteriorate in the lands of your enemies through their iniquity, and also through the iniquities of their fathers they shall deteriorate along with them.

If siege and conquest still would not cause them to repent, Jehovah would add a punishment still another seven times worse. He would give them over to total defeat in warfare before their enemies. They would be reduced to total desperation. They would be so hungry they would eat their own children. Their conquerors would turn their cities into piles of rubble and would even devastate their places of worship, both those devoted to false gods and those devoted to Jehovah God. "High places" and "pavilions" seem to refer to shrines devoted to pagan gods. "Holinesses" seems to refer to ceremonies and objects devoted to Jehovah God. Both would be destroyed, because they would not have sincerely worshiped Him in either place. Even when the form of their worship would have been correct, their holy articles and ceremonies of their worship were offensive to Him because they were not loyal to Him in their hearts. Since they had not trusted Him in their hearts, their worship was of no value and the articles used in their worship would be destroyed.

The meaning of the word translated "pavilions" is unknown, and translators have been forced to guess at its meaning. It is derived from a root that is related to heat, often heat from the sun. Therefore, translators have imagined meanings related in some way to fire or to the sun, but their translations are mere guesses. Their guesses have caused them to translate the word in a variety of ways, including "altars," "incense altars," "images," and "pillars."⁶ The only passage that gives any hint as to the word's meaning is 2 Chronicles 34:4, which when translated literally says, "And before his face they broke down the altars of the baals and the pavilions that [were] over it." It is difficult to see how the guesses of the translators could be over the altars of the baals. A much more likely explanation is that the word means "pavilions," which were constructed over open air altars, images,

⁶ KJV translates the word simply as "images," DV as "idols," and MSG as "paraphernalia that goes with them," without trying to connect its meaning to either fire or the sun. The following connect its meaning to fire: NASB, HCSB, NIV, RSV, NRSV, SGV, CEV, LB, and GNB use "incense altars"; NEB uses "incense-altars"; JB, "altars of incense"; and BBE "perfume altars." The following connect its meaning to the sun: ASV and RV use "sun-images"; MV "sun-pillars"; and CJB "pillars for sun worship."

or pillars to shelter them from the heat of the sun. At any rate, all of Israel's sacred places would be destroyed, because the sins of Israel made their use hypocritical and displeasing to God.

Even more would be destroyed than their cities and places of worship. Their conquerors would extend the destruction to the whole Land, until it would become a shambles and a trash heap. Then they would execute a great slaughter of the people. Many would be killed violently, and their corpses would be thrown down on top of the ruins. The destruction would be so complete that even their enemies would be shocked and appalled as they moved into the Land.

After the destruction of their Land and the slaughter of the people, those who would be left alive would be scattered among the nations as exile and slaves. While the Israelites would be in exile, the land would receive the benefit of rest that the Israelites would have refused to provide for it while they were living in their Land (see comments on Lev. 25:1-12 above). While the Land would enjoy its sabbath rests, the rebellious Israelites would be in terror. All the fight would have left them, and they would live in fear. Even the rustle of leaves would cause them to run away like they were under attack by an army. They would fall over each other as they ran. In that state of desperation, they would wither away because of their iniquity and because of the iniquity of generations before them. Their sins would have totally destroyed their whole economy and their whole nation.

This passage is remarkable in how accurately it describes the history of Israel that was still future to the time Jehovah spoke it. All the blessings it describes came true when Israel was obedient to God, and all of the punishments it describes came true when Israel was not obedient to God. Only God could have known so accurately in advance the events that were coming. He told them plainly the results that He knew would come. They could never truthfully say they were not fully warned or properly challenged.

What is even more remarkable is how stubborn the Israelites were in their refusal to heed the clear warnings of this Scripture. Even when

both the blessings and the warnings began to come true, they refused to see and believe. And even after the conquest and destruction of the whole Land came through campaigns of Assyria against Israel and of Babylon against Judah, they continued to resist God until total destruction and exile came to them again with the conquest by Rome not many years after Jesus' death. And still the amazement continues, because Israel as a nation has again been raised to life and has been blessed beyond measure. Yet all over the world, in their Land and out of their Land, the majority of them continue to reject the Messiah God gave to the world through them. No more striking example ever has existed of the depravity of the human heart than the stiff necked stubbornness of God's chosen people. The punishments of this chapter are still valid if Israel continues to repeat the pattern of rebellion they have demonstrated through the ages, but the blessings of this chapter still remain available if they will only believe and accept the Savior God sent to them and to the whole world. Praise be to God that God also has revealed in His Word that the day will come when all Israel will be saved by turning to Jesus with a commitment that they will never again desert (Rom. 11:26-32).

- c. But if they humbly confess their sinfulness, I will remember My covenant with them (26:40-42)

Verses 40-45. **40 But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers through their unfaithfulness that they committed against Me and also by which they walked in opposition to Me.**

41 So that I began to walk in opposition to them and brought them into the land of their enemies, if then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and then they will accept their iniquity,

42 Then I will remember My covenant with Jacob and also My covenant with Isaac, and I also will remember My covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the Land.

Even after receiving all those punishments, if the Israelites would humble themselves and confess their sinfulness, Jehovah would still remember and keep the covenant He had made with Jacob, Isaac, and Abraham. "Accept their iniquity"

means recognizing their sinfulness and turn from it. If they will no longer justify themselves but instead will admit that they are in rebellion, then He will not refuse to forgive and restore them, no matter how far they will have fallen away. If Israel will repent, God will never refuse to honor the covenant He made with Abraham, Issac, and Jacob. At any time, He is ready to honor the guarantee He gave to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob that their descendants would always be His special chosen people. They are not able to function as His people while they are in rebellion by rejecting Jesus, but God will never give up on them and will never refuse to restore them to be His special people when they repent. God will never cease working with them through both punishments and blessings, and as soon as they turn back to Him and call on Him, He will restore them to the special place of service He has reserved for them. This guarantee is so strongly stated in this passage and in many other passages that it is a wonder anyone could ever deny it. Yet, many interpreters do deny it today. The reason they deny it is not that the Scriptural guarantees are unclear or unspecific. The reason is that Gentile Christians today are as selfishly jealous to reserve for themselves alone the blessings of God as the ancient Israelites were to reserve them for themselves alone. Christians are the people of God today. It is as unnecessary for us to be jealous of the Jews today as it was for the Israelites to be jealous of Gentiles in Old Testament times.. Gentile Christians receive every blessing God has to give as freely as any Israelite ever did, but God's acceptance of Gentiles does not abrogate the promises He gave to Israel. Neither are the promises of God to Israel fulfilled in the blessings He gives to Gentile Christians. In this passage those who are offered forgiveness are those who opposed Jehovah and who were taken into the lands of their enemies. They are the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Gentile Christians do not fit those descriptions. Jehovah is rich enough in grace to be able to fulfill all His promises, both His promises to Israelite believers and also His promises to Gentile Christians. Neither group should be jealous of the other or try to deny the validity of God's special plan for the other. God has ample place for both in His service, both in the present and in the future. God's covenant promises to Israel remain open waiting for the day they will humble themselves, accept their iniquity, and repent.

d. Eventually they will repent and be restored to be My people (26:43-45)

43 But the Land will be vacated by them and will enjoy its sabbaths while being desolate without them, and they will accept their iniquity because of and caused by [the fact that] they rejected My judgments and their soul despised My statutes.

44 And in addition, this: Though they will be in the land of their enemies, I will not reject them, and I will not despise them so as to be finished with them and to break My covenant with them, for I am Jehovah their God.

45 And I will remember to them the covenant of their ancestors, whom I brought forth from the land of Egypt before the eyes of the nations in order to be their God. I am Jehovah.

These verses go much further than offering to restore Israel if they will repent. They give assurance that the day will come when Israel will repent and be restored to all the blessings of the covenant. Verse 43 says, "they will accept their iniquity." In explaining their iniquity, the verse repeats the word "because" twice to explain the cause of their iniquity. The cause is they will have rejected God's judgments and despised His statutes. However, the day will come when they will recognize their iniquities. When they do, they will be in the lands of their enemies, but Jehovah will not say they will have gone too far to be restored. He will not break His covenant and refuse to fulfill His promises to them. He will remember and keep the covenant and the promises that He made to their ancestors. Then He truly will be their God. He will demonstrate such astonishing forgiveness and grace, because He is a one of a kind God. He is the one and only Jehovah. Just as God's warnings of exile for the Israelites came true, just so God's promises to Israel will come true when they finally repent.

Summary note (26:46)

Verse 46. **These are the statutes and judgments and laws that Jehovah made between Him and the sons of Israel at Mount Sinai through Moses.**

This verse is a Summary Note added by Moses to summarize the MESSAGE recorded in Chapters 25-26. It should not be understood as a Summary Note for the whole of Leviticus or for the so called "Holiness Code." That interpretation forces one to view Chapter 27 as a mere afterthought, whereas actually the MESSAGE of that Chapter is so vitally linked with the rest of the book it had to be a planned part of it. Whether taken as a Summary Note for this one MESSAGE, the so-called "Holiness Code," or the book of Leviticus, the verse could not mean that these commandments are the only commandments Jehovah made between Himself and Israel at Sinai. It means that these laws were given to Israel at Sinai. Even if the materials concluded by it were at some time circulated separately from other materials in the law, they are too incomplete in themselves and too related to other materials in the Law for any writer ever to claim that these laws were the only ones God gave at Sinai. Therefore, the verse means that these words were actual commandments

Jehovah made between Himself and Israel at Sinai. They were what God actually said, not a paraphrase, an approximation, or a summary of what He said. This verse claims that the statements concluded by this Summary Note are the exact commandments given by Jehovah to Moses. They are what Jehovah actually said. Either the critical claims that these materials developed slowly over a period of many years are false, or the claims of this verse are false. This writer is pleased and unashamed to take his stand on the side of the inspired writing.

Concerning the word translated "statutes," see comments on Leviticus 6:18 in MESSAGE 5 under the heading [It is] a statute [for] an age through your generations. Concerning the word translated "judgments," see comments on Leviticus 5:10 in MESSAGE 2 under the heading according to the judgment. Concerning the word translated "laws," see comments on Leviticus 6:9 in MESSAGE 5 under the heading This is the law of the rededication-offering. Concerning "at Mount Sinai," see comments on Leviticus 7:37-38 in SUMMARY NOTE ON FIRE-OFFERINGS under the heading Critical Note.

Application

Any nation that desires prosperity must take care to preserve the richness of its land and the rights of its people. It must prevent economic oppression by the rich and provide economic opportunity for the poor. Most of all, it must honor Jehovah God and obey His commandments concerning all phases of life. Jehovah is the Maker and Owner of all things. He is the only true source of wealth. He can control the seasons, the weather, the natural phenomena, the calamities, and the enemies of a nation, so as to either cause that nation to prosper or to be destroyed. Therefore, it is He, not the rulers or the people of a nation, who determine if a nation lives in wealth and victory or in poverty and defeat. When a nation is disobedient, He will deny prosperity to that nation no matter how hard its people work. When a nation is obedient, He will give prosperity to that nation even if its people do not have the answers to all of their problems. The future prosperity and freedom of America depend mostly on what America does today with Jehovah God and His son Jesus Christ.