

בְּחֻקֹּתַי

Bechukotai/In My Statutes Vayikra (Leviticus) 26:3-27:34

This week we will close out the book of **Vayikra, the heart of the Torah**. The **commandments of Torah** make up the **fabric of the universe**. How **Israel** responds to them determines everything from **war** to **disease** to **weather** patterns. The nation of Israel will be blessed with **peace and prosperity** if their choice is to follow **יהוה's** (Yahwey's) **commandments**. If they choose disobedience, **they will experience increasingly severe punishments** – disease, famine, war and exile. However, even in the midst of these terrible curses, **יהוה** **promises that He will not destroy Israel completely but will remember His covenant** with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. Israel will return to their land as a result of **repentance**.

We begin with a **choice**:

Vayikra 26:3 ' If you walk in My statutes and keep My commandments, and perform them,

From our English interpretation we cannot see that the word “**you**” is a **plural** pronoun. Hebrew makes distinctions between the singular and the plural, so the conditional statement that we read in this verse is actually given **to the nation as a whole**, not to the **individual**.

So what we read of in chapter 26 is a listing of **rewards and punishments at the national level**. As a result of **obedience**, the nation will enjoy **prosperity in regards to the land's agriculture, political stability, security, and military successes (26:1-11)**. What we do **NOT** see here is the **promise of prosperity** to the **individual** (in this life) for good deeds, or **punishment** (in this life) for his sins. What is the logic behind this? Israel was chosen to be **יהוה's special nation** among all the nations of the world. Once they entered the Promised Land, Israel would be **judged as a nation**, and they would be **rewarded as a nation**.

Our salvation in Yeshua is **personal**, and there are certain blessings and curses that apply **individually**. However, **Israel** is a **body (of Messiah) made up of individuals**. It is possible as an individual to get lost among the body. It is also possible when the **nation** is disciplined, for **righteous individuals** to be affected right along with the wicked. The **cumulative effective of individuals** being disobedient puts the **entire nation** at risk.

Let me give you another example of a verse which is often used when referring to **personal salvation**, but is actually taken out of context when applied to the **individual** instead of **corporate Israel**:

Jeremiah 29:11 For I know the plans I have for **you**," declares **יהוה**, "plans to prosper **you** and not to harm **you**, plans to give **you** hope and a future.

Sounds good, doesn't it? I've used this verse myself. Clung to it a few times. The problem is that here again the word “**you**” is **plural**. The context of this verse is that it was given to the southern tribes of Israel after the 70 year Babylonian exile. This verse actually fits in with what we are studying in Vayikra 26....after the worst of the worst of the curses promised for disobedience:

Vayikra 26:44 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 **יהוה** their Elohim.⁴⁵ 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 Elohim. I am **יהוה**."

Here's another verse that believers have been confused by:

John 15:16 You did not choose me, but I chose you and appointed you to go and bear fruit--fruit that will last. **Then the Father will give you whatever you ask in my Name.**

Have you ever asked for something “**in His Name**” that **you did not receive**? Have you heard individuals claiming this promise in their prayers? My friends, we have underestimated the importance of the people of **יִשְׂרָאֵל** (i.e. Israel) **coming together as a unified body to obey Torah**. There is **strength in numbers**. We were never meant to operate as **individuals**. I know that some of you currently find yourself alone in this journey, but if you are reading this then **YOU ARE NOT ALONE!** All over the world, **יִשְׂרָאֵל** is **connecting** His people together.

Let's look at a bit of the context of **John 15:16** to see what it takes to get our **prayers answered**:

John 15:5 "I am the vine; you are the branches. **If a man remains in me and I in him, he will bear much fruit**; apart from me you can do nothing.⁶ If anyone does not remain in me, he is like a branch that is thrown away and withers; such branches are picked up, thrown into the fire and burned.⁷ **If you remain in me and my words remain in you, ask whatever you wish, and it will be given you.**⁸ This is to my Father's glory, that you bear much fruit, showing yourselves to be **my disciples**.⁹ "As the Father has loved me, so have I loved you. Now remain in my love.¹⁰ **If you obey my commands, you will remain in my love, just as I have obeyed my Father's commands and remain in his love.**¹¹ I have told you this so that my joy may be in you and that your joy may be complete.¹² My command is this: Love each other as I have loved you.¹³ Greater love has no one than this, that he lay down his life for his friends.¹⁴ **You are my friends if you do what I command.**¹⁵ I no longer call you servants, because a servant does not know his master's business. Instead, I have called you friends, for everything that I learned from my Father I have made known to you.

First of all, do you see that **Yeshua was speaking to His disciples as a group**? He asks them to **love each other and remain connected to Him by obeying His commands**. **THEN** the Father will give them whatever they ask. This section is followed up by this verse:

John 15:17 This is my command: **Love each other**.

Now I hope that you understand by now that “**love**” for one another is defined by the Torah, not by your emotions. The disciples understood this, and it was not necessary for Yeshua to add more detail to His statement.

I have “one more thing” about this. **Numbers DO matter**. There is proof of that in our reading:

Vayikra 26:7 You will pursue your enemies, and they will fall by the sword before you.⁸ **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.

You math scholars will notice right off that these are not the same ratios. Five to 100 would be **1 chasing 20 enemies**, yet 100 to 10,000 would be **1 chasing 100 enemies**. Why the difference? The rabbis have taught that this means **when we are keeping Torah together in unity**, what is accomplished will **increase exponentially** over when only a few are together keeping Torah. I expect that this concept will become more and more obvious **as the body of Messiah (Judah plus Ephraim) continues to come together**. The **power of the Spirit will increase exponentially**. It is my belief that we will also see **more miracles and physical healings** as the **broken pieces of the body of Messiah** are put back together.

Psalm 133:1 A Song of Ascents. Of David. Behold, **how good and how pleasant it is for brethren to dwell together in unity!**

Okay, let's take another look at our opening verse:

Vayikra 26:3 ' If you **walk** (הלך) in My **statutes** (חוקים) and **keep** (שמר) My **commandments** (מצוות), and **perform** (עשה) them,

There are a lot of commentaries written on this verse because the phrase is somewhat odd: “walking” in His statutes, rather than “observing” them. And why “statutes”, when statutes are a subset of **commandments**? יהוה has carefully placed every single word into our Scriptures, so it is worth our time to search this out. I'll detail out a few of these words for you:

- **Walk** (halak - הלך) – Walking as opposed to merely observing **suggests strenuous activity**. The implication is the **progressive mastering of Torah through laborious study**.
- **Statutes** (chukim - חוקים) – Generally described as commandments that are given **without an obvious reason** for obeying. Many teach, however, if you continue **to obey these statutes** and **through study pursue the meaning** for, **eventually they will make sense**. This word comes from a root which means “**to inscribe**”, thus it is said that statutes (חוקים) are “**inscribed on the heart**”. The sages teach that all יהוה's laws will **someday be inscribed on the heart**, thus all commandments will eventually become **statutes**. יהוה tells us He has **inscribed us** on the palms of His hands.
 - **Isaiah 49:16** See, **I have inscribed you on the palms of My hands**; Your walls are continually before Me.
 - **Jeremiah 31:33** "But this *is* the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, says יהוה: I will put **My Torah** in their minds, and **write it on their hearts**; and I will be their God, and they shall be My people.
- **Keep** (shamar - שמר) – Means to keep, guard or observe, but the basic idea of the root is **to exercise great care over**.
- **Commandments** (mitzvoth - מצוות) – General term referring to any commandment given by יהוה.
- **Perform** (asah - עשה) – The covenant people were commanded to “do” everything that יהוה told them to.

What I was hoping you'd grasp from the word study of this verse is that there is a **gradual maturation that occurs through the applied study of the Torah that leads to the right heart attitude**. The **beginner** finds “walking” in the “statutes” to be quite difficult, because **he doesn't understand them**. But **if he expends the energy in his “walk”, with the goal of “keeping” them by “doing them”,** then even those things

previously mysterious and unexplainable become **statutes inscribed on our hearts** that **make sense**. **Keep walking**, because the **blessings** for obedience are **great promises!**

The blessings listed in Vayikra 26 seem to be totally **outnumbered** by the curses. In fact there are 13 verses of blessings and 30 verses of curses. What does this mean? What we find is that the blessings are listed in a **general fashion**, while the curses are listed in much more **detail**. Let's consider how all these blessings/curses were to come about. Once the Israelites were **in the land**, if they followed His statutes they would **immediately enjoy the entire range of infinite blessings**. **BUT** if they **disobeyed** and violated His covenant (disobedient), **the curses would begin to kick in**....not all of them at once, but **one by one**. First they would suffer **minor blows**...**health issues** intended to deter them and **make them repent**. Crop failure would be next and so things would continue to deteriorate for them **unless they repented as a people**.

This is the first blessing for walking in the commandments:

Vayikra 26:4 then I will give you **rain in its season**, the land shall yield its produce, and the **trees of the field shall yield their fruit**.

Rain was and still is very important to the land of Israel. **Rain is necessary at pertinent times** for the crops, but **if it rains out of season** it can wash away the crops or make it hard to plant, harvest, etc. We learned that first hand in Iowa this year as an extremely wet spring made it very difficult for our farmers to get their fields planted. Let's look at some Torah concepts:

- **Rain** – symbolic of **the teaching of the Torah**
- **Trees** – sometimes a symbol for **people**
- **The field** – the **world where the seeds are planted**
- **Fruit** – our **works (righteousness)**
- **In season** – the **times when He meets with us** during Shabbat/festivals

We can paraphrase a couple of the sentences in Vayikra 26:4 to this:

Then I will **teach you Torah** (rain) when **I meet with you during Shabbat and My feast days** (in season). The **people** (trees) who have **received the seed** (the field) will **produce righteousness** (fruit).

Now let's look at the converse of Vayikra 26:4:

Vayikra 26:20 And your strength shall be spent in vain; for **your land shall not yield its produce**, nor shall **the trees of the land yield their fruit**.

Remembering the symbolism for some of these words, do you see how this verse points to people with **no righteousness?** As a result **their strength is spent**, and they have **nothing to show for themselves**.

Exile becomes the worst curse of all, since it is **separation** from the land and from **יהוה**:

Vayikra 26:33 **I will scatter you among the nations** and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste... 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 waste away in their iniquity in your enemies' lands; also in their fathers' iniquities, which are with them, they shall waste away.

But, with יהוה there is always a built in **hope**. Immediately following these verses of despair, יהוה gives the **solution to the dilemma**:

Vayikra 26:40 ' But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their fathers, with their unfaithfulness in which they were unfaithful to Me, and that they also have walked contrary to Me, ⁴¹ and that I also have walked contrary to them and have brought them into the land of their enemies; if their uncircumcised hearts are humbled, and they accept their guilt -- ⁴² then I will remember My covenant with Jacob, and My covenant with Isaac and My covenant with Abraham I will remember; I will remember the land.

At the lowest possible point, the people of Israel will come to the conclusion that they are suffering due to the sins of prior generations as well as the collective sins of their own generation. What will take place is what may be called “**national repentance**”. Israel has been **judged as a nation**. Now **the righteous of that nation must confess the sins of the nation to which they are attached**....just as if it were they, themselves who directly committed these sins.

I can remember exactly the first time I heard of “**national repentance**”. It was the morning of September 11, 2001. I was doing an independent study by Dr. Henry Blackaby on **prayer**. I had just read the workbook chapter explaining how **God’s people must repent as a nation**. In the book of Daniel, it tells us that Daniel had been reading in Jeremiah that the Babylonian exile would last for 70 years. **Exile**....Daniel connected the dots as he knew that **after exile יהוה would begin restoration**. So, Daniel who also would have known Vayikra 26:40-42, clung to the promise that is found here and **confessed his own sins, the sins of his parents, and the sins of the people**:

Daniel 9:1 In the first year of Darius who was made king over the realm of the Chaldeans -- ² in the first year of his reign **I, Daniel, understood by the books the number of the years specified by the word of יהוה through Jeremiah the prophet, that He would accomplish seventy years in the desolations of Jerusalem.** ³ Then I set my face toward יהוה Elohim to make request by prayer and supplications, with fasting, sackcloth, and ashes. ⁴ **And I prayed to יהוה my Elohim, and made confession, and said, "O Adonai, great and awesome El, who keeps His covenant and mercy with those who love Him, and with those who keep His commandments, ⁵ "we have sinned and committed iniquity, we have done wickedly and rebelled, even by departing from Your precepts and Your judgments.** ⁶ "Neither have we heeded Your servants the prophets, who spoke in Your name to our kings and our princes, to our fathers and all the people of the land. ⁷ "O Adonai, righteousness *belongs* to You, but to us shame of face, as *it is* this day -- **to the men of Judah, to the inhabitants of Jerusalem and all Israel, those near and those far off in all the countries to which You have driven them, because of the unfaithfulness which they have committed against You.** ⁸ "O Adonai, to us *belongs* shame of face, to our kings, our princes, and our fathers, because **we have sinned against You.** ⁹ "To Adonai our Elohim *belong* mercy and forgiveness, though we have rebelled against Him. ¹⁰ "**We have not obeyed the voice of יהוה our Elohim, to walk in His laws, which He set before us by His servants the prophets.** ¹¹ "Yes, **all Israel has transgressed Your Torah, and has departed so as not to obey Your voice; therefore the curse and the oath written in the Law of Moses the servant of God have been poured out on us, because we have sinned against Him.** ¹² "And He has confirmed His words, which He spoke against us and against our

judges who judged us, **by bringing upon us a great disaster**; for under the whole heaven such has never been done as what has been done to Jerusalem. ¹³ "**As it is written in the Torah of Moses, all this disaster has come upon us; yet we have not made our prayer before יהוה our Elohim, that we might turn from our iniquities and understand Your truth.**" ¹⁴ "Therefore יהוה has kept the disaster in mind, and brought it upon us; for יהוה our Elohim **is righteous in all the works which He does, though we have not obeyed His voice.**" ¹⁵ "And now, O Adonai our Elohim, who brought Your people out of the land of Egypt with a mighty hand, and made Yourself a name, as *it is* this day -- **we have sinned, we have done wickedly!**" ¹⁶ " O Adonai, according to all Your righteousness, I pray, let Your anger and Your fury be turned away from Your city Jerusalem, Your holy mountain; because for our sins, and for the iniquities of our fathers, Jerusalem and Your people *are* a reproach to all *those* around us. ¹⁷ "Now therefore, our Elohim, **hear the prayer of Your servant, and his supplications, and for Adonai's sake cause Your face to shine on Your sanctuary, which is desolate.**" ¹⁸ "**O my Elohim, incline Your ear and hear; open Your eyes and see our desolations,** and the city which is called by Your name; for we do not present our supplications before You because of our righteous deeds, but because of Your great mercies. ¹⁹ "**O Adonai, hear! O Adonai, forgive! O Adonai, listen and act!** Do not delay for Your own sake, my Elohim, for Your city and Your people are called by Your name."

As I sat there later that morning watching the events of September 11, it seemed right to me that it was time for a **corporate prayer of repentance**. I called the large church that we were a part of at the time and asked about a prayer service. It just so happened that all of our leaders were out of town several hours away at a conference. Those left in the church office asked if I would lead the service since I had made the suggestion. I agreed to and began to think about this idea of **repentance**...

2 Chronicles 7:14 "if **My people** who are called by My name will **humble themselves, and pray and seek My face, and turn from their wicked ways,** then I will hear from heaven, and will **forgive their sin and heal their land.**

Well the pastors and the leaders returned that evening as the magnitude of the situation in our country became more obvious. I still was given a part in the prayer service, and I attempted to prayer the **prayer of repentance**. My recollection is that it was **not a popular prayer**. There were a couple of people who thought that it might be true that the Father was attempting to get our attention. More, however, were interested in the comfort of a God who was grieving alongside of us. I remember the head pastor commenting on the following Sunday that they would not let **anything** stop their **scheduled sermon series**.

It did not occur to me that **corporate repentance** was a **Torah principle**. The truth is... I was not aware of the **foundation of Torah**. Had I known, I would have spoken of **Vayikra 26**. I would have been a **watchman on the wall**. I would have spoken of **not only our sins, but the sins of our fathers**. I would have pointed out that much of what we **inherited** was **not truth**:

Jeremiah 16:19 O יהוה, my strength, and my fortress, and my refuge in the day of affliction, the Gentiles shall come unto thee from the ends of the earth, and shall say, surely **our fathers have inherited lies, vanity and things wherein there is no profit.**

I would have tried to point out the pattern of **confessing our sins AND our father's sins** so that the promised restoration might begin:

Nehemiah 1:5 And I said: "I pray, יהוה Elohim of heaven, O great and awesome Elohim, *You* who keep *Your* covenant and mercy with those who love *You* and observe *Your* commandments,⁶ "please let *Your* ear be attentive and *Your* eyes open, that *You* may hear the prayer of *Your* servant which I pray before *You* now, day and night, for the children of Israel *Your* servants, and **confess the sins of the children of Israel which we have sinned against You. Both my father's house and I have sinned.**

Somewhere around the time of Nehemiah/Ezra, the central prayers of the Jewish liturgy (**the Amidah**) were written. After thousands of years, observant Jews still recite the same Amidah at each prayer service of the day – morning, afternoon, and evening. Here is Blessing Five, called **Teshuvah (repentance)**:

Return us, our Father, to Your Torah; draw us near our King to serve You. Restore us to Your presence in **complete repentance. Blessed are you, O Adonai, Who desires repentance.**

The Amidah prayers can be found at www.hebrew4christians.com under "Prayers". You can listen to them in Hebrew and follow along with the transliteration and the translation. They are appropriate prayers for us today as many of them call upon the **promises of יהוה**, including the work of **Messiah**. We owe another **debt of gratitude** to the Jews for **faithfully praying them and for preserving them for Israel**.

Okay, let's go on. יהוה kept His Word by driving the Israelites out of the Land because of their **disobedience**. He will also fulfill His Word by **completely restoring them back to the Land**. Judah has gone in first. Scripture teaches that the Jews are **always first**.

Deuteronomy 30 lists several details about how this **restoration** will take place and this time, the "**you**" addressed is **singular**:

Deuteronomy 30:1 "Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon **you**, the **blessing and the curse** which I have set before **you**, and **you call them to mind among all the nations where יהוה your Elohim drives you**,² "and **you return to יהוה** your Elohim and **obey His voice**, according to all that I command **you** today, **you** and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul,³ "that יהוה your Elohim will bring **you** back from captivity, and have compassion on **you**, and **gather you again from all the nations where יהוה your Elohim has scattered you**.⁴ "If *any* of **you** are driven out to the farthest *parts* under heaven, from there יהוה your Elohim will gather **you**, and from there He will bring **you**.⁵ "Then יהוה your Elohim will bring **you** to the land which your fathers possessed, and **you** shall possess it. **He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers**.⁶ "And יהוה your Elohim will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love יהוה your Elohim with all your heart and with all your soul, that **you** may live.⁷ "Also יהוה your Elohim will put all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate **you**, who persecuted **you**.⁸ "And **you will again obey the voice of יהוה and do all His commandments which I command you** today.⁹ "יהוה your Elohim will make **you**

abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good. For יהוה will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers,¹⁰ "if you obey the voice of יהוה your Elohim, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, *and if you turn to יהוה your Elohim with all your heart and with all your soul.*

The "you" is singular in this parallel passage to our Torah reading. I see two things going on here simultaneously. There are **the stirrings in the heart of the individual believer** to return to the Father in **repentance and obedience**. At the same time, **these collective individuals are referred to as "you" singular** because **they are becoming connected, just like the dry bones of Ezekiel 37:**

Ezekiel 37:1 The hand of יהוה came upon me and brought me out in the Spirit of יהוה, and set me down in the midst of the valley; and it *was full of bones...*⁵ 'Thus says Adonai יהוה to these bones: "Surely I will cause breath to enter into you, and you shall live."⁶ "I will put sinews on you and bring flesh upon you, cover you with skin and put breath in you; and **you shall live**. Then you shall know that I *am* the יהוה." ' ' ⁷ So I prophesied as I was commanded; and as I prophesied, there was a noise, and suddenly a rattling; and the **bones came together**, bone to bone.⁸ Indeed, as I looked, the sinews and the flesh came upon them, and the skin covered them over; but *there was* no breath in them.⁹ Also He said to me, "Prophesy to the breath, prophesy, son of man, and say to the breath, "Thus says Adonai יהוה: "Come from the four winds, O breath, and breathe on these slain, that they may live." ' ' ¹⁰ So I prophesied as He commanded me, and breath came into them, and they lived, and stood upon their feet, an exceedingly great army.¹¹ Then He said to me, "Son of man, **these bones are the whole house of Israel**. They indeed say, 'Our bones are dry, our hope is lost, and we ourselves are cut off!' ¹² "Therefore prophesy and say to them, "Thus says Adonai יהוה: "Behold, **O My people, I will open your graves and cause you to come up from your graves, and bring you into the land of Israel.** ¹³ "Then you shall know that I *am* יהוה, when I have opened your graves, O My people, and brought you up from your graves.¹⁴ "I will put My Spirit in you, and you shall live, and I will place you in your own land. Then you shall know that I, יהוה, have spoken *it* and performed *it*," says יהוה.' "

Vayikra 27 ends the book with a discussion of laws pertaining to vows that an **individual** makes to contribute towards the upkeep of the sanctuary. These include dedications of persons, animals, houses, and lands. The chapter **seems out of place and anti-climatic**. One might suggest that after such a **focus on corporate Israel**, יהוה again reflects on the **value of each individual**. There is much focus in the Bible on the existence of the people of יהוה...**the nation of Israel**. However, **the importance of every individual** cannot not be **underemphasized**.

And so we conclude the book of Vayikra. Let's finish with two more **prayers** from the **Amidah**. The first is Blessing 6 called Selichah (**Forgiveness**):

Forgive us, our Father, for **we have sinned**; pardon us, our King, for **we have rebelled**; for You are a pardoner and a forgiver. Blessed are you, Adonai, the gracious One who abundantly forgives.

And Blessing 7 called Geulah (Redemption):

Behold our affliction and champion our cause, and **redeem us speedily for the sake of Thy Name.**
Blessed are You, Adonai, Redeemer of Israel.

Shabbat Shalom!

Ardelle

Be strong! Be strong! And may we be strengthened!

חזק חזק ונתחזק