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Discipline for Disobedience

26: 14-39

Discipline for disobedience DIG: What is the difference between punishment and discipline? Why is the list of discipline much longer than the list of blessings? How is God merciful in this progression of discipline? What control did the Israelites have in the seven stages? Why did Moshe use the word discipline in Leviticus and the word curses in Deuteronomy?

REFLECT: Has human nature changed much since these lists of blessings and discipline were written? In what ways is today's Church no different than ancient Isra'el? What control do we have in God's discipline in our lives? How has God shown mercy to you in discipline? When has He been merciful in teaching you in an area of your life where you needed discipline?

The goal of discipline is to bring about change, as any loving parent would do.

It can be observed that the book of **Leviticus** begins with the teaching about the sacrificial system (**to see link click [Ag](#) - The Mitzvot of the Offerings**) and finishes with evidence of the blatant need for those sacrifices. This literary feature is a masterful touch by **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh**, turning **Leviticus** into a complete instructional manual for **the priests**, the spiritual leaders of **Isra'el**. Not only did **they** need to know how to administer the sacrifices, **they** also had to be thoroughly indoctrinated into the reasons for the sacrifices. What better way to teach **them** this concept than to lay out the stipulations for the covenant and then the consequences for being faithful or unfaithful to them? This, in essence, is the nature of the contents of this final parashah of **Leviticus**, Parashah B'Chukotai.



If **God's children** refuse to obey **ADONAI's** mitzvot faithfully, **He** will **discipline them** (see the commentary on **Hebrews Cz - God Disciplines His Children**) for **their** failure to maintain **their** part of the covenantal agreement. The suzerain-vassal treaties of the ancient world (see the commentary on **Deuteronomy Ah - The Treaty of the Great King**) were normally characterized by an imbalance of **blessings** and **discipline**. The more **discipline** the better; all the more to accent the danger of unfaithfulness.⁵²⁸ There is a big difference between punishment or **curses** and **discipline**. In **Leviticus 26:23** the text actually uses the word **discipline** (Hebrew: *yasar*). However, in **Deuteronomy**, Moshe used a different word (Hebrew: *arar*) for **curses** (see **Deuteronomy Ff - Curses for Disobedience**). The goal of punishment is to inflict pain upon someone for what they have done wrong; **discipline**, on the other hand, is strictly for the purpose of bringing about change in the person for their own good, as any loving parent would do.⁵²⁹

Many commentators have observed a gradual worsening in the severity of the **discipline**. **They** are not meant for revenge, but to influence **the Israelites** to repent. The **discipline** is delivered in **seven stages of increasing severity** if **Isra'el** failed to respond. This would show the kindness and mercy of **ADONAI** in that although **Isra'el** would be despising the Torah, **He** would give gradual warnings instead of inflicting a single blow without warning.⁵³⁰

*Dear Heavenly **Father**, Thank **You** that **Your** character never changes. **You** always have **lovingkindness**, or "chesed", for me. Even in the midst of painful times and trials, **Your love** is still wrapped tightly around me as King David wrote in Psalms 63 when he was in the wilderness of Judah, his life in danger from King Sha'ul who was pursuing him with the army to kill him. **Since Your lovingkindness is better than life, my lips will praise You (Psalms 63:3)**. David says that what helped him to not get all upset, nor to complain. **So, I looked for You in the Sanctuary, to see Your power and Your glory (Psalms 63:2)**.*

When I focus on **Your** great power and trust in **You** to bring glory to **Yourself** thru any hard situation, then I can view **discipline** in a positive light. **These trials are so that the true metal of your faith (far more valuable than gold, which perishes though refined by fire) may come to light in praise and glory and honor at the revelation of Messiah Yeshua (First Peter 1:7).**

You discipline in love, knowing when the time is right. When **You** do **discipline** it is not meant as revenge nor to hurt me; rather **You discipline** for my own good - to bring me to repentance so **You** can forgive me. **My son, do not take lightly the discipline of ADONAI or lose heart when you are corrected by Him, because ADONAI disciplines the one He loves and punishes every son He accepts (Hebrews 12:5b-6).**

It is kind of **You** to **discipline**, for **You** are seeking to bless with forgiveness; but that can only happen when I turn from my **sin, repent**, and ask for forgiveness. **But you, O man - judging those practicing such things yet doing the same - do you suppose that you will escape the judgment of God? Or do you belittle the riches of His kindness and tolerance and patience - not realizing that God's kindness leads you to repentance (Romans 2:3-4)?** Thank **You** for being such a wonderful, wise and loving Heavenly **Father** who cares and watches carefully over me to bring them back when I stray - so you when I repent, **You** can bless me. In **the Name of the One** who sits at **Your** right hand. Amen

The first stage - sickness, crop failure and warfare (26:14-17): But if you will not listen to me and obey all these mitzvot, if you loathe my regulations and reject my rulings, in order not to obey all my mitzvot but cancel my covenant: then I, for My part, will do this to you: I will bring terror upon you - wasting sickness and chronic fever to dim your sight and sap your strength. You will sow your seed for nothing, because your enemies will eat the crops. I will set My face against you - your enemies will defeat you, those who hate you will hound you, and you will flee when no one is pursuing you.

Sickness and plague are a result of **sin**. But does this mean that every sickness, mishap, loss and failure is the direct consequence of **sin**? It is neither safe nor healthy to believe that. **God's** ways are infinitely higher than our own, **His** thoughts are infinitely beyond ours. It is utterly impossible for us to make direct correlations between **sin** and being **disciplined**. It is folly to suppose that one who has been stricken with leukemia (**God** forbid) is more **sinful** than a person who has not. **The Master** refuted such simplistic theologies (**Matthew 9:1-7** and **John 9:1-3**). The book of **Job** refutes such theology. Yet it is probably not entirely unhealthy for us to regard our own **sickness** and infirmities as

opportunities for taking **God's** correcting our lifestyle choices which might be a contributing factor. But the **sickness**, crop failure and warfare here in **Leviticus** should be understood as **discipline** on a national level.

The second stage - drought and the destruction of the Temple (26:18-20): The first stage should have been enough to move **the Israelites** towards repentance. Hopefully, after being **disciplined** with **sickness**, **crop failure** and **warfare**, **they** would seek after **YHWH**. But if not, **they** would experience drought and the destruction of the Temple. **If these things don't make you listen to me, then I will discipline you seven times over for your sins. I will break the pride you have in your own power.** This same exact phrase is used in **Ezeki'el 24:21** to refer to **the Temple** as **ADONAI-Elohim** prepared to destroy it, saying: **I am about to profane My Sanctuary, the pride of your strength, the delight of your eyes and your heart's desire. Your sons and daughters whom you have left behind will die by the sword. And not only that, I will make your sky like iron, your soil like bronze** (a poetic description of drought and agricultural failure) - **you will spend your strength in vain, because the land will not yield its produce or the trees in the field their fruit.** This reverses the blessing of **26:4**. **God** is in control, and no other deity retains the power to provide rain or withhold it.

The third stage - wild animals (26:21-22): If this were not adequate to convince **Isra'el** of her need to repent, **ADONAI** promised to increase **the discipline seven times** with a plague of wild beasts. **Yes, if you go against me and don't listen to me, I will increase your calamities sevenfold, according to your sins. I will send wild animals among you; they will rob you of your children, destroy your livestock and reduce your numbers, until your roads are deserted.** After the **Israelite** deportation, **God** sent **lions** to attack **the Samaritans** who settled **the Land**. The attack was so dreadful that **the Samaritans** requested help from **the Israelite priesthood** to learn **the fear ADONAI** (**Second Kings 17:24-28**). Moreover, through the prophet **Ezeki'el**, **Ha'Shem** warned **the people** of the doomed generation of the fall of **Jerusalem**, saying: **Yes, I will send famine and savage beasts upon you to leave you without children** (**Ezeki'el 5:17**).

The fourth stage - siege (26:23-26): If this was still not enough to bring about repentance, **the LORD** promised to bring upon **the nation His sword of vengeance**. This **sword** was an invading army. The **discipline** of a massive invasion in which the inhabitants of the rural areas retreat to the safety of walled **cities**. **If, in spite of all this, you refuse my discipline and still go against me; then I too will go against you; and I, yes I, will strike you seven times over for your sins. I will bring a sword against you which will execute the vengeance of the covenant. You will be huddled inside your cities, I**

will send sickness among you, and you will be handed over to the power of the enemy. Then **God's discipline** goes on to speak of an ensuing famine. **I will cut off your supply of bread, so that ten women will bake your bread in one oven and dole out your bread by weight, and you will eat but not be satisfied.**

The fifth stage - starvation (26:27-32): The **discipline** escalates as those suffering starvation while trapped in **Jerusalem** under siege by **the Babylonians** turned to cannibalism, even eating their own babies. In **his** lamentation, **Jeremiah** writes: **ADONAI, look and see who it is you have thus tormented! Should women eat the fruit of their wombs, the children they have held in their hands (Lamentations 2:20). And if, for all this, you still will not listen to me, but go against me; then I will go against you furiously, and I also will chastise you yet seven times more for your sins. You will eat the flesh of your own sons and daughters (26:27-29).** Josephus, the famous first-century Jewish-Roman historian, reported similar horrors among the starving population of **Jerusalem** under the Roman siege (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Mt - The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple on Tisha B'Av in 70 AD**).⁵³¹

I will destroy your high places, cut down your pillars for sun-worship, and throw your carcasses on the carcasses of your idols; and I will detest you (26:30). Frequent mention is made in the Scriptures of the high places of the idolaters, where they were accustomed to worship their gods, supposing themselves there to be nearer to them, and more likely to be heard by them. This practice was imitated by the Hebrews, though denounced in the Torah.⁵³² This is a cruelly ironic statement: **The Israelite** warriors and citizenry will be slain at the very **altars** and cult centers where **they** offended **YHVH** by **their** worship of foreign **gods** and **idols**.⁵³⁴

I will lay waste to your cities and make your sanctuaries desolate, so as not to smell your fragrant aromas. I will desolate the land, so that your enemies living in it will be astounded by it (26:31-32). Also in **26:11** God spoke of **His** own **Sanctuary**. Instead of **blessing it**, **He** promises to **destroy it** so that **Isra'el** will have no access to **Him** in the midst of the calamities. There will be no way to sacrifice **their purification offerings** (see **AI - The Purification Offering: Purified by Blood**) to seek the mercy of **ADONAI**. To the amazement of **Isra'el's enemies**, the fruitful **land** of **God's blessing (26:2-4)** will become **desolate**.⁵³⁴

The sixth stage - exile (26:33-35): If **the Israelites** would fail to repent, the natural course of events would follow. The besieged **City** would fall and the surviving population would be exiled. **You I will disperse among the nations, and I will draw out the sword**

in pursuit after you; your land will be a desolation and your cities a wasteland. Then, at last, the land will be paid its Shabbats. As long as it lies desolate and you are in the lands of your enemies, the land will rest and be repaid its Shabbats. Yes, as long as it lies desolate it will have rest, the rest it did not have during your Shabbats, when you lived there (see the commentary on [Jeremiah Gu - Seventy Years of Imperial Babylonian Rule](#)).

And history unfolded just as the Torah described it. When **the northern kingdom of Isra'el** rebelled against God (see the commentary on [the Life of Solomon Dd - Golden Calves at Dan and Bethel](#)) Tiglath-Pileser and the Assyrians conquered **her** in 722 BC. The king took **Jews** captive to Assyria (**Second Kings 17:5-6; First Chronicles 5:26**) and also brought his own citizens to live in Samaria (**Second Kings 17:24**) and intermarry with the Jews. Over a hundred years later, the Babylonian king Nebuchadnezzar conquered the southern kingdom of Judah and destroyed the Temple (see [Jeremiah Ga - The Fall of Jerusalem](#)). But amazingly, the prophet Jeremiah declared that **faithless Isra'el**, who has already been destroyed by the Assyrians, was **more righteous than unfaithful Judah (Jeremiah 3:11; also see Ezekiel 16:1-63 and Hosea 2:2-23)**. **More righteous because the northern kingdom of Isra'el did not have the example of punishment before her eyes, as did Y'hudah in Isra'el's destruction. Faithless Isra'el** had actually proven to be *more* righteous than **her treacherous sister Judah**. Why? Because **Y'hudah** had **Isra'el** as **her** example. As a result, **Judah** had greater light as to **ADONAI's** dealing with **sin**. And with greater light comes greater responsibility, and the rejection of greater light means greater judgment. This is a principle throughout Scripture.

Those who would survive the slaughter would live in **fear**. **Ha'Shem** said that **He** would fill **their hearts with anxiety in the lands of their enemies. The sound of a leaf blown away will frighten them, so that they will flee as one flees from the sword and fall when no one is pursuing. Yes, with no one pursuing they will stumble over each other as if fleeing the sword - you will have no power to stand before your enemies.** That unfaithful generation of the destruction of **Jerusalem and the Temple** would **perish in the land of their enemies. They would wilt away, like a flower without water, from guilt over their misdeeds and those of their ancestors (26:36-39)**. The realization that **they** were suffering for the cumulative **sins** of generations would be even more distressing to those faithless exiles.

But even such severe punishment as exile was **disciplinary**. Certainly the unbelievers would be purged from **the nation**, but **the nation** as a whole would be brought to **her** knees. Those judgments were not **God's** last word to **His people Isra'el**. Even at the time

of the exile, the prophets were formulating the promises of blessing in the B'rit Chadashah (see the commentary on [Jeremiah Eo - I Will Make a New Covenant with the People of Isra'el](#)). But the question remains, why did Moses (under the inspiration of **the Ruach Ha'Kodesh**) use the word **discipline** (Hebrew: *yasar*) in **Leviticus** and **curses** (Hebrew: *arar*) in **Deuteronomy**? Just as the northern kingdom of **Isra'el was more righteous** than the southern kingdom of **Judah** because **she** did not have the example of punishment before **her** eyes, as did **Y'hudah** in **Isra'el's** destruction; the **Exodus** generation **was more righteous** than their children that witnessed their parents dying in the wilderness because of their national unfaithfulness. Therefore, the **Exodus** generation was merely **disciplined**, whereas their children, who had more light and assumed greater judgment, would be **cursed** if they rejected the Torah.

The seventh stage - redemption (see **Ez - The Redemption of Isra'el**).