



God's Corrective Discipline: Leviticus 26

By Candy Davis

Loving parents discipline their disobedient children. Effective discipline involves clearly communicated expectations along with privileges for obedience and consequences for disobedience.

When I would shop at Target with my youngest son, I had two expectations: keep your hands off the merchandise, and no begging. The first time Tony begged, I escorted him to the car and straight home. The second time, he lost his privilege of shopping with me for two weeks. "I'm *gwoounded* off *Towgit*," he told his grandma with a pout.

Israel's Father had a privilege in store for His children: she would be a special treasure, His kingdom of priests, and a holy nation (Ex. 19:5-6). She had only to meet His set of expectations, His covenant, the Ten Commandments (Ex 20:1-17; Deut. 4:13).

Israel's obedience lasted all of forty-seven days. She broke the covenant by worshipping a golden calf (Ex. 32). Time for God to impose a plan of corrective discipline—of privileges and consequences—to draw His children away from idolatry and back to Himself.

God's plan of discipline is found in Leviticus 26. The blessings and privileges Israel will receive for keeping God's covenant are spelled out in verses 4-13. Included are abundant harvests, protection from enemies, and the presence of God in her midst.

Consequences for disobedience come in five stages and are detailed in verses 14-33. Each stage grows in intensity by sevenfold. Moreover, one stage does not end when the next one starts: consequences are accumulative.

STAGE #1

Consequences: disease; stolen crops; defeat by enemies
Historically: Judges -1 Samuel 16

Lev 26

**¹⁴ ‘But if you do not obey Me, and do not observe all these commandments,
¹⁵ and if you despise My statutes, or if your soul abhors My judgments, so that you do not perform all My commandments, *but* break My covenant,
¹⁶ I also will do this to you: I will even appoint terror over you, wasting disease and fever which shall consume the eyes and cause sorrow of heart.
And you shall sow your seed in vain, for your enemies shall eat it.
¹⁷ I will set My face against you, and you shall be defeated by your enemies.
Those who hate you shall reign over you, and you shall flee when no one pursues you.**

Israel is cursed with disease and depression. Enemies raid her land and pillage her crops. They defeat Israel, taking her captive in her own land. Israel is reduced to a state of terror, running scared even when no enemy is in pursuit. (Amos 3:11; Judges 2:13-15; Judges 6:3-4,11).

REPRIEVE

God, in fairness, raises judges or prophets at each stage to appeal to Israel to repent from her idolatry and thus prevent further chastisement. Israel does not heed God’s first stage of punishment, yet in His mercy, God holds back the second stage of discipline. He establishes the Davidic dynasty to demonstrate how living under God’s choice of king will bless Israel. Under David and Solomon, Israel experiences peace from her enemies and abundant prosperity lasting nearly 100 years.

This interlude of mercy ends, however, when King Solomon becomes prideful. He disobediently accumulates hundreds of foreign wives and concubines (Deut 17:17). His pagan wives turn the heart of Solomon to their gods. (1 Kings 11:1-38). The Lord must put His foot down. Enter Stage Two.

STAGE #2

Consequences: kingdom is divided; drought and famine
Historically: I Kings 12-22

Lev 26

**¹⁸ ‘And after all this, if you do not obey Me, then I will punish you seven times more for your sins.¹⁹ I will break the pride of your power;
I will make your heavens like iron and your earth like bronze.
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.**

God disciplines the prideful kingdom of Solomon by breaking it in two following the king's death (1 Kings 11:11-13). The prophet Ahijah uses a garment torn in twelve pieces to symbolize the division of the nation into two political kingdoms: Ephraim-Israel, with ten tribes to the north, and Judah-Israel, with two tribes to the south (1 Kings 11:31; 1 Kings 12:20).

The two kingdoms can be thought of as siblings, with Israel (north) being the eldest (Jer. 31:9), who is the first to disobey and be punished, followed years later by the younger sibling Judah (south), committing the same sin of idolatry and suffering the same stages of consequences.

Adding a last measure to break Israel's pride, the Lord curses her with drought, a reminder that He is the source of her sustenance and success (1 Kings 17:1; 1 Kings 18:2; Deut 8:11-19).

One thinks Israel would see that her Father means business and turn to Him in repentance, but no. She continues to worship pagan gods and thus brings upon herself Stage Three of God's corrective discipline.

STAGE #3

Consequence: wild animals
Historically: 2 Kings 1-10:31

Lev 26

²¹ 'Then, if you walk contrary to Me, and are not willing to obey Me, I will bring on you seven times more plagues, according to your sins.

²² I will also send wild beasts among you, which shall rob you of your children, destroy your livestock, and make you few in number; and your highways shall be desolate.

Elisha is the prophet commissioned by the Lord to call Israel to repentance in Stage Three. Here we find a controversial event, one that gives the Lord God Almighty a bad rap.

2 Kings 2

²³ Then he went up from there to Bethel; and as he was going up the road, some youths came from the city and mocked him, and said to him, "Go up, you baldhead! Go up, you baldhead!" ²⁴ So he turned around and looked at them, and pronounced a curse on them in the name of the Lord. And two female bears came out of the woods and mauled forty-two of the youths.

At face value, the mauling of youths by two female bears seems a savage consequence, the act of a tyrannical God bent on vengeance. But God had given His children fair warning: turn from your idolatry or you will suffer chastisement under Stage Three. Israel has only herself to blame for not heeding the warning of her loving Father.

STAGE #4

Consequences: war leading to pestilence and famine
Historically: 2 Kings 10:32-16:20

Lev 26

²³ **‘And if by these things you are not reformed by Me, but walk contrary to Me,
²⁴ then I also will walk contrary to you, and I will punish you yet seven times for your sins.**

²⁵ **And I will bring a sword against you that will execute the vengeance of the covenant;**

when you are gathered together within your cities I will send pestilence among you; and you shall be delivered into the hand of the enemy.

²⁶ **When I have cut off your supply of bread, ten women shall bake your bread in one oven, and they shall bring back your bread by weight, and you shall eat and not be satisfied.**

Enemy attacks drive the Israelites into their walled cities where the Lord sends them pestilence and famine. Food supplies are so low that ten women have to divide the bread from one round of baking to feed their families (Amos 4:10; Micah 6:14; Jer. 11:22; Jer. 14:12; Ezek.4:16-17; Ezek.14:21). In case His wayward children forget the reason for their chastisement, verse 25 reminds them: they have broken the covenant.

STAGE #5

Consequences: cannibalism; God rejects their worship; exile from the land
Historically: 2 Kings 17:1-25:30

Lev 26

²⁷ **‘And after all this, if you do not obey Me, but walk contrary to Me,**

²⁸ **then I also will walk contrary to you in fury;**

and I, even I, will chastise you seven times for your sins.

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

³⁰ **I will destroy your high places, cut down your incense altars, and cast your carcasses on the lifeless forms of your idols; and My soul shall abhor you.**

³¹ **I will lay your cities waste and bring your sanctuaries to desolation, and I will not smell the fragrance of your sweet aromas.**

³² **I will bring the land to desolation, and your enemies who dwell in it shall be astonished at it.**

³³ **I will scatter you among the nations and draw out a sword after you; your land shall be desolate and your cities waste.**

Famine is so bad that the Israelites stoop to eating their own children (Jer. 19:9; Deut. 28:53). Pagan high places are destroyed, and Israel's carcasses are heaped onto the worthless idols she worships. (Ezek. 6:4-6). Cities and sanctuaries are brought to waste (2

Kings 23:20; Ezek 6:3-6; Jer. 19:7-8). The land is desolate (Jer 19:7-8). Israel's Father rejects her worship (Isa. 1:13; Amos 5:21-22; Jer 14:12). Worst of all, Israel is exiled into the land of her enemies.

Ephraim-Israel, the northern kingdom, is the first to suffer exile in 722 B.C. at the hand of Assyria, 256 years following the division of the whole nation Israel (2 Kings 17:18, 23). Judah-Israel, failing to learn from her elder sibling, is exiled to Babylon in three batches one hundred and forty years later (2 Kings 25:21; 2 Chron. 36:15-21).

So, over a span of roughly 500 years—from 1 Samuel through 2 Kings 25—stiff-necked Israel manages to sin her way right off her most prized blessing: her land.

Will Israel ever learn? Will her punishment last forever?

RESTORATION

Just as my son was not grounded from Target forever, Israel was not exiled from her land forever. The land is Israel's covenant privilege, and next we learn that God provides a way for her to return to it: through confession (Lev. 26:40-45). If Israel confesses her iniquity and the iniquity of her fathers, and if she humbles her heart and accepts God's punishments, He promises to fulfill the covenant He made with Israel's ancestors, giving them their own land.

Daniel learned that Judah-Israel's exile would last 70 years (Dan 9:2; Jer. 25:11). He prayed a prayer of national confession as God directed (Dan. 9:1-19; Lev 26:40). At the end of 70 years of captivity, Israel was allowed by Cyrus to return home. In the long term, God will remember His covenant and restore not some but all of His children Israel to the land in the pre-advent kingdom. (Deut. 30:1-6; Jer 31; Jer. 32:37-42; Ezek. 37).

Loving parents discipline their disobedient children, whether they are worshipping a golden calf in Bethel, or throwing a fit in Target. Leviticus 26 shows us the corrective discipline plan of a loving Father.