

*Covenant in the
Persian Period*

From Genesis to Chronicles

Edited by

RICHARD J. BAUTCH and GARY N. KNOPPERS

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The Covenant in Leviticus 26

A Concept of Admonition and Redemption

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Introduction

Based on older traditions, theologians of the early Second Temple period cast important issues in written texts that later on became Scripture. Their effect on emerging Judaism and—much later—Christianity was great. The metaphor “covenant” is a significant part of this process and hence it must be studied in all parts of biblical literature. This essay analyzes the topic in the third book of the Torah, Leviticus.

With the exception of Lev 2:13 and 24:8,¹ the term ברית ‘covenant’ appears in Leviticus only in chap. 26. The eight instances form a significant concept in three stages that correspond to the three main parts of the chapter.² Leviticus 26 unfolds its message along the concepts of

1. Lev 2:13 refers to the “salt of the covenant” which should be added to all offerings for Yahweh. Salt was used to preserve food, especially meat. Hence, salt stands metaphorically for endurance and stability. Thus, the “salt of the covenant” added to every offering symbolizes the durability and eternity of Yahweh’s covenant. Lev 24:8 also speaks about “a covenant forever.” The renewal of the 12 loaves of bread presented to Yahweh in the tent of meeting Sabbath after Sabbath by the priests symbolizes the eternal presence of Israel before Yahweh and thus the durability of the covenant. This refers to P’s covenantal theory of an “everlasting covenant,” meaning that in spite of the failures of the people ultimately leading to the exile, it cannot be broken by Israel” (Nihan 2009: 101; see also Stackert 2011: 378). Beyond the context of sacrifices, salt appears as a symbol for the everlasting covenant in 2 Chr 13:5 referring to the promise of an eternal dynasty for David and his descendants.

2. See, e.g., Groß 1997: 56; Joosten 1998: 151. Korpel offers a detailed analysis of the poetic structure of the whole chapter Leviticus 26 (1993: 123–46). Between my reading this paper at the 2012 SBL Annual Meeting at Chicago and its publication in the present volume, my commentary on Leviticus was published in the series Herders theologischer Kommentar zum Alten Testament in 2014. Therefore, much of the material presented here in English can also be found in German in my comments on Leviticus 26; see Hieke 2014: 1047–1102.

admonition and redemption: the first two parts, 26:3–13 and 26:14–39, form the exhortation usually called “blessing and curses.” Similar conditions and sanctions appear at the end of the “Covenant Code” in Exod 23:25–33 and at the end of Deuteronomy in chap. 28 (see also Josh 24:20; Levine 1987: 9; Wenham 1979: 327). The message is clear: as long as Israel observes God’s commandments listed in the preceding chapters, the people will experience blessing in abundance regarding all important areas of human life. If, however, Israel does not obey Yahweh and spurns his statutes, God will bring terror on the people. But the history of Israel makes it impossible to keep this clear black-and-white pattern: Israel had experienced—and survived—the catastrophe of the Exile.³ Hence, a third part, Lev 26:40–45, cushions this impact of history and adds without a special signal the concept of redemption. Within terror, exile, and disaster, during the justly executed punishment of the people, God intervenes in a salvific way by remembering the covenant; Yahweh does not forsake Israel entirely. In the end, God’s desire to lead his people to freedom will tip the balance toward the redemption of Israel from disaster. This construction of admonition and redemption makes it possible to keep an essential tension of biblical theology basically formulated in the formula of grace in Exod 34:6–7. Israel (and thus every human being) remains responsible and is called to live according to God’s commandments; failing to do so or willingly neglecting God’s torah will not be without consequences. But the punishment will not lead into extinction: God’s mercy and his remembrance of the covenant will make a new beginning possible.

*The Conditional Covenant:
Admonition (Leviticus 26:3–13, 14–39)*

The term *covenant* plays a major role in all three parts of Leviticus 26. Regarding the concept “admonition,” the covenant is conditional. In Lev 26:3–13, the part called “blessings” or better “promises” (Milgrom 2001: 2287; Steymans 1999), God enumerates the benefits that will be granted to Israel if the people observe God’s commandments. Israel will gain agricultural and military success, and God will uphold his covenant with Israel (26:9). Here, “covenant” is part of God’s “promises” (Stackert 2011: 381), and the term works as a kind of abbreviation or summary: “covenant” (or God’s upholding of the covenant) stands for all sorts of

3. For a postexilic date of Leviticus 26 see, e.g., Bautch 2009: 57–58; Baumgart 1999: 11; Nihan 2007: 535–45. See also the discussion below about the “confession of sins.”

God's positive attention, affection, grace and donation in favor of Israel.⁴ The combination of the promise "I will make you fruitful and multiply you"⁵ with the covenant resembles Gen 17:4–7; even without mentioning the name "Abraham," the text continues the tradition of Yahweh's promises to Abraham. Hence, the promises mentioned in Lev 26:3–13 pick up the thread of Israel's great traditions of salvation: Israel's identity is at stake.

While Lev 26:9 uses the term *covenant*, Lev 26:12 quotes the two-sided "covenant formula": "And I will walk among you and will be your God, and you shall be my people" (NRSV).⁶ A similar combination of "covenant" and "covenant formula" appears in Exod 6:4 and 6:7. In Exodus as well as here in Leviticus, a formula about God leading Israel from the house of slavery (Egypt) to freedom is added (Exod 6:7; Lev 26:13; Milgrom 2001: 2298). Hence, the positive ideal is clear: God leads Israel from slavery to freedom and grants his elected people a unique relationship resulting in all forms of blessing and positive experiences.⁷ Significantly, both passages (Lev 26:3–13 and 14–39) consistently speak of a single covenant (ברית): they do not distinguish between the (non-Priestly) Sinaitic covenant and the covenant with Abraham (P), although both are presupposed (Nihan 2009: 104).

Contrary to the position of Nihan, Stackert (2011: 385) maintains that the uses of ברית in Leviticus 26 "are entirely comprehensible as part of an isolated P+H composition": their meaning coincides with the use of ברית elsewhere in P and H and contrasts with the sense of ברית in the non-Priestly Torah passages. Stackert concludes: "Leviticus 26 thus supports the view that H is meant as a supplement to P alone and not to the non-Priestly Torah sources. To the extent that H knows these non-Priestly sources, Leviticus 26 also serves as a striking example of the considerable license that a revising author may assert to reorient radically and deviate from his literary forebears." The differences, however, may not be overestimated, as Stackert concedes by noting the "strong structural similarity among the Torah sources regarding their basic views of Israel's history and religion."

4. See, e.g., Num 6:26; Ps 25:16; 69:17; 86:16; 102:18; 119:132: God will lift up his countenance on the people.

5. See, e.g., Gen 1:28; 9:1, 17; 17:5–7, 20; 26:4, 24; 28:3; 35:11; 48:4; Exod 1:7; Jer 3:16; 23:3; Ezek 36:11.

6. This formula appears in variations also in Exod 6:7; Jer 7:23; 31:33; Ezek 11:20; 36:28; 37:27; Zech 8:8. See, e.g., Joosten 1996: 101–7.

7. For the references to the Exodus in Leviticus 17–25 (19:36–37; 22:32b–33; 23:42–43; 25:38, 42, 55), see Joosten 1998: 152–54.

However, God's blessings and benefits depend on Israel's attitude toward the covenant and God's torah: if Israel does not obey God and his commandments, thus breaking the covenant (26:15), God must punish the people severely, and a sword will execute vengeance for the covenant (26:25). This does not refer to the stereotype of a brutal deity executing blind (and often exaggerated) revenge—the term *covenant* rather indicates the authority of a royal suzerain to call a rebellious and disloyal vassal to order by using power and even violence. The text perpetuates the political and military metaphor “covenant” consequently: if Yahweh is the supreme Lord and owner of the land and if he gave it to Israel as a fief, Yahweh has the right to give orders and to demand loyalty. If the vassal becomes disloyal, the supreme Lord must maintain order (Barrick 2005: 119; 2010: 85). The ethical decision and responsibility of human beings for their deeds are taken seriously and to a high degree (see also Nihan 2009: 106).

Hence, Lev 26:14–39, the longer part called “curses” or better “commination” (Milgrom 2001: 2287; Steymans 1999), lists several consequences for Israel's disloyalty to the covenant and God's commandments. God will take back all the promises mentioned in the first part, with one exception: the promise to uphold his covenant is not mentioned and therefore not withdrawn in the second part. Although the covenant is broken by one party (Lev 26:15), God does not dissolve the covenant (Joosten 1996: 116; Stackert 2011: 384). Thus, the idea of “covenant” serves as an anchor and a *Rettungsschirm* (emergency parachute) in order to bridge the doom of destruction and exile.

The Remembered Covenant: Redemption (Leviticus 26:40–45)

Israel experienced the consequences in destruction and exile in the sixth century B.C.E.⁸ But as the people survived the catastrophe, the two parts of admonition must be supplemented by a third part, redemption (Lev 26:40–45; Hieke 2014: 1089–98).⁹ This part reckons with Israel's perma-

8. See, e.g., Halvorson-Taylor 2011: 31–41. She examines in her monograph several prophetic texts that “provide insight into the early, formative period in which the Babylonian Exile was transformed from a historical experience into a multivalent symbol of physical, mental, and spiritual distress” (p. 41). Leviticus 26 in its final form can be regarded as one outcome of this transformational process. Cholewiński (1976: 138) suggests that Lev 26:40–45 presupposes the ongoing Exile and hence has to be dated to the 6th century B.C.E. This proposal is not convincing; the text rather presupposes necessarily that the people survived the Exile and experienced the new beginning in the Persian period.

9. Nihan convincingly demonstrates that the entire final epilogue in Lev 26:40–45 can be read as a coherent section, which is an integral part of the original composition in chap. 26 (2009: 106–9).

nent failure to fulfill God's ethical and cultic demands and demonstrates how God mercifully grants a new beginning after necessary punishment. Detached from the historical situation of Israel before and after the exile, one can ask more generally: as it seems to be natural for a human being to fail to fulfill God's commandments and to despise again and again these instructions, although they will lead to life (see Lev 18:5), how can one stand before God? The idea that God grants a new beginning after the justified punishment is expressed by the metaphor that God "remembered his covenant." It is the covenant with the patriarchs (Jacob, Isaac, Abraham, in this sequence in 26:42) and the (same) covenant with the ancients freed from the land of Egypt (26:45). This concept of redemption that results from the experiences of the Exile and the new beginning in the Persian period is integrated into the revelation at Mount Sinai in order to anchor the paradigm of failure, punishment, forgiveness, and new beginning at the roots of Israel's religion. While the concept of admonition by promises and commination is borrowed from the treaties in the ancient Near Eastern literature,¹⁰ the concept of redemption is unique in Israel's environment (Milgrom 2001: 2329).

The basic structure of Lev 26:40–45 consists of a conditional sentence, that is, a protasis (26:40–41) and an apodosis (26:42–45). The condition or protasis starts in v. 40 with the confession of iniquity and treachery: "But if they confess their iniquity and the iniquity of their ancestors,¹¹ in that they committed treachery against me and, moreover, that they continued hostile to me"—this confession triggers an explanatory parenthesis (v. 41ab) again stressing that God's hostile reaction was a necessary consequence of the people's sins (Milgrom 2001: 2332; Gerstenberger 1993: 393): "So that I, in turn, continued hostile to them and brought them into the land of their enemies." After that explanation, the conditional protasis is resumed by the people's self-humiliation and contrition: "If

10. See, e.g., the Codex Hammurapi (18th century B.C.E; *TUAT* 1:77; Richardson 2000), the Vassal Treaties of Esarhaddon (*TUAT* 1:172; Wiseman 1958), the bilingual inscription on the statue from Tell Fekheriye (9th century B.C.E; *TUAT* 1:634–37; Lipiński 1994: 19–81). For more details on ancient Near Eastern parallels, see Podella 1993: 429–46; Korpel 1993: 146–50. "The most important difference is related to the speaker. In ancient Near Eastern laws and treaties . . . the gods are mentioned in the third person. Either the king himself calls the divine blessings and curses upon his addressees, or they are called on behalf of the king by an unnamed speaker. In Deuteronomy 28 the king is simply replaced by Moses, but the pattern remains the same. In Leviticus 26, however, Yahweh himself is speaking" (Müller 2010: 208; see also Wenham 1979: 327).

11. According to Müller, the phrase "the iniquity of their ancestors" in Lev 26:39b, 40a is a secondary addition (2010: 222).

then their uncircumcised heart is humbled and they make amends for their iniquity” (v. 41cd). The *confession of sins* is a new aspect in the long history of Israel’s iniquity and disobedience, and it corresponds to the ritual of the “Day of Atonement” in Lev 16:21: Contrition and the confession of sins are the way of the Diaspora, far from the ritual at the temple of Jerusalem, to achieve atonement (see 1 Kgs 8:46–51 par. 2 Chr 6:36–39; Baumgart 1999: 17–19).

Boda convincingly demonstrates that the idea of confession of sins created a new, postexilic genre: penitential prayers such as Ezra 9; Nehemiah 1, 9; Daniel 9; Psalm 106 (2001: 195–97; see also Boda 1999: 48, 51). Boda points out that Jer 14:19–21 is drawing on Leviticus 26 (2001: 196). This might be possible, but it does not necessarily imply that Leviticus 26 must have originated in the late Preexilic Period. Leviticus 26 probably was composed together with the chapters usually called the “Holiness Code” (H). According to Nihan, H is a late composition (*post* P) by a pentateuchal redactor dating to the second half of the fifth century B.C.E. (2004: 122). Hence, either Lev 26:42 got the idea about the remembrance of the covenant from Jer 14:21 or the communal lament in the book of Jeremiah is a later addition modeled on the concept of confession of sin in Leviticus 26. However, the date of H is a highly disputed matter, and the scholarly discussion cannot even be summarized here. The recent tendency seems to go toward a postexilic date, and in his various publications Nihan presents convincing arguments for his supposed scenario of the origin of the book of Leviticus. The optimism of the last century regarding the ability to reconstruct the process of the origin of H in every detail and down to every single half verse (as an example see Cholewiński 1976: 131–41) is nowadays rejected for methodological reasons.

One should note, however, that the confession of the sins and the people’s contrition are not an achievement or great merits that create a claim for God’s grace. Contrition and repentance are the precondition for God’s mercy (Bautch 2009: 60). In his conclusion, R. J. Bautch states: “Confession of sin is integral to all of the covenantal texts examined here; it appears in Isa 64:4b–6; Neh 9:33–35; and Lev 26:40, with echoes in Bar 2:30–33” (Bautch 2009: 62; see also Kessler 2010: 327; Baumgart 1999: 17–22). Barrick states:

The Hebrew word for ‘repentance’ (שוב) does not occur in Leviticus 26. However, the concept of repentance occurs in a threefold turning of exiled Israelites to Yahweh: (1) They must confess their guilt and the guilt of their forefathers (v. 40), recognizing their personal and corporate culpability. (2) They must humble their ‘uncircumcised heart’ (v. 41),

bringing it into subjection to the precepts of Yahweh. . . . (3) They must make restitution for their guilt (v. 41), accepting the . . . consequences of sin. (2010: 98–99)

God respects humankind's free will and autonomous decision for good or evil; nobody is saved against his will. Repentance expresses the free decision to accept God's grace. However, as Nihan demonstrates (2009: 110), the people's conversion is predicted to Moses by Yahweh himself: it is not a mere possibility but rather an event that will necessarily happen at some point in the future. In other words, the text portrays God as optimistic enough to presume that finally the people will voluntarily (!) repent and return to God's commandments.

The apodosis (Lev 26:42–45) can then formulate God's merciful love for his people with the metaphor of the remembered covenant (Bautch 2003: 149). The text is artfully structured as a palindromic *inclusio* (Hieke 2014: 1091):

- A 42 Then will *I remember my covenant* with Jacob; *I will remember also my covenant* with Isaac and *also my covenant* with Abraham, and I will remember the land.
- B 43 For the land shall be deserted by them, and enjoy its sabbath years by lying desolate without them, while they shall make amends for their iniquity,
- C because they dared *to spurn* my ordinances, and *they abhorred* my statutes.
- D 44 Yet for all that, when they are in the land of their enemies,
- C' *I will not spurn* them, or *abhor* them so as to destroy them utterly
- B' and break my covenant with them; for I am the LORD their God;
- A' 45 but *I will remember* in their favor *the covenant* with their ancestors whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations, to be their God: I am the LORD.

The center of the apodosis (D) consists of the far-reaching experience of the Exile, hence, the negative consequences of Israel's spurning of God's ordinances (C) came true (see the commination in Lev 26:14–39). However, God does not react in a symmetric way (Gerstenberger 1993: 395): God does not spurn the people so as to destroy them (C'; Baumgart 1999: 13–14).¹² Although the punishment of the Exile was necessary and

12. The verb “to spurn” (סָרַס) might point to earlier texts such as Lam 5:22 or Jer 7:29 (see also Jer 6:30; Amos 5:21), which declare that Yahweh had in fact spurned or rejected his people (or threatened to do so). By using the same verb here, H responds

justified (B), this does not mean that God breaks the covenant with Israel (B'; Stackert 2011: 380). The supreme principle remains the unbroken covenant: God's covenant with the patriarchs (Jacob, Isaac, Abraham)¹³ concerning the land (A) and the same covenant with the ancestors freed from the land of Egypt (A'; Milgrom 2004: 92–95). The remembrance of the covenant frames the whole apodosis. The fact that God “remembers” his covenant with the patriarchs means that the ברית was not abolished or broken in spite of the crimes and the sins of the people that led to the exile (Nihan 2009: 110). “Remembering” is not only an intellectual process but always implies real action (Baumgart 1999: 15; Álvarez Valdés 2003: 167; Gerstenberger 1993: 394). The phrase appears with Noah in Gen 9:15–16 and in Israel's lament about their slavery in Egypt (Exod 2:24; 6:5). The motif also appears in prophetic literature (Jer 14:21; Ezek 16:60) and in the Psalms (Ps 105:8; 106:45; 111:5). The remembrance of the land, however, is unique within the Bible (Levine 1989: 191; Joosten 1998: 159).

It is noteworthy that no separate covenants have been individually formed with Noah, Abraham, etc.; there is only *one* covenant between God and human beings (Nihan 2009: 112; similarly, Stackert 2011: 382). The names stand for individual accentuations and renewals of the *same* covenant: “It turns out in the long run that there is little difference between the covenants of Sinai and Abraham in regard to their fulfillment. The difference lies in their content, but their realization is dependent on Israel's behavior” (Milgrom 2001: 2340–2341; 2004: 95; Hieke 2014: 1097). The covenant with the patriarchs accentuates God's promises of land and progeny (Bautsch 2009: 43); the covenant at Mount Sinai with the “ancestors” (v. 45)¹⁴ accentuates Israel's promise to keep God's com-

to these severe admonitions in prophetic literature with a message of comfort and hope (G. N. Knoppers, personal communication).

13. The sequence Jacob, Isaac, Abraham probably insinuates an ascending line or climax. It goes back into “history” to the very beginning of God's promises of land and progeny, that is, back to Israel's roots (see, e.g., Grünwaldt 1999: 372).

14. See Joosten 1998: 156–59; Nihan 2009: 111; Rothenbusch 2011: 5. Groß assumes that “ancestors” in v. 45 refers to the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. He translates: “But I will remember in their favor (whom I brought out of the land of Egypt in the sight of the nations to be their God) the covenant with (their) ancestors.” However, because the remembrance of the covenant with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob forms the basis for the renewal of the Sinai covenant, Groß notes the strange assumption (“sehr seltsam”) that two valid concepts of covenant exist next to each other. Because there are no differences in content, Groß concludes that the end of Leviticus 26 obviously points to a concept of covenant that no longer distinguishes between the covenant of the fathers and the covenant at Mount Sinai (1997: 60–61).

mandments. They complement one another,¹⁵ and both concepts of covenant remain valid—even if Israel fails to meet God’s claim for a holy people, even if Israel does not obey the social and cultic commandments intended for life (Lev 18:5). The possibility of failure and punishment, even the reality of the Exile—and the concept of redemption and new beginning—are already anchored in the Torah itself, in the fictive narrative of Israel at Mount Sinai. This means that failure and necessary punishment do not question the normative claim of God’s torah. Although God foresees Israel’s failure, God withdraws neither his commandments nor his covenant.

In addition, the exile and the national destruction of Israel are not due to Yahweh’s weakness but are an expression of God’s overarching plan of history. Projecting the various and dramatic experiences of history back to the ideal time of Israel’s foundation at Mount Sinai creates a paradigm that can be applied not only to Judah’s national catastrophe of the sixth century B.C.E but also to later situations and even—in a spiritual transformation—to the existence of the individual before God. The overall message of the text is God’s readiness to forgive and to grant a new beginning, but the concept of covenant also implies that God takes the responsibility and free will of human beings seriously and arranges even dramatic consequences. God’s punishment, however, will not result in utter destruction and a breaking of the covenant: “The exile appears as an opportunity for Israel’s repentance as well as for the Sabbath rest of the land, and it has to be emphasized that, *in spite of the exile*, Yahweh will never let Israel perish” (Müller 2010: 228; emphasis original; see also Grünwaldt 1999: 373–74; Stackert 2011: 380). The word of the prophet Hosea is still true: “For I am the Lord, their God (see Lev 26:44), for I am God, no mortal” (Hos 11:9).

Inner-Biblical Relationships

The concepts of admonition and redemption as well as the conditional and remembered covenant are not unique within the Bible.¹⁶ In terms of its relationship to the curses or commination of Deuteronomy 28–29, Deut 30:1–10 has the same function as Lev 26:40–45 toward Lev 26:14–39 (Cholewiński 1976: 313; Wenham 1979: 332; Nihan 2009: 110):

15. Álvarez Valdés speaks about “dos tipos de alianzas” which the author of Leviticus 26 led to a synthesis (“genial síntesis teológica”; 2003: 170, 180–81).

16. For a detailed presentation and discussion of the biblical “tradition” taken over in Leviticus 26, see Grünwaldt 1999: 348–65.

Table 1. Related Verses in Leviticus 26 and Ezekiel

Ezek 34	Lev 26	Ezek 37	Lev 26
25	6, 9	26	6, 9
26–27	4, 5, 13	27	11, 12
28	5; 6	28	13

a salvation through punishment is possible; the people will survive the threatened distress (which became reality with the exile). Deut 30:2–3 announces that God will have compassion on the people, if they repent and return to God. God’s mercy does not nullify the injustice and evil deeds of the people, but their repentance enables God to grant a new beginning. This new beginning is at the same time a new call to obey the Lord and observe all the commandments in order to gain the promised blessing (Deut 30:8–10).

Deut 30:6 adds a new thought: “Moreover, the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live.” The Bible is aware that the free will of a human being needs God’s help in order to be able to decide freely in favor of God’s torah. God’s support of the human heart to find autonomously the way to life through the love of God is expressed in the metaphor of the “circumcision of the heart.” As circumcision is the sign of the covenant, the concept of “covenant” is present here, although the term does not appear. The “uncircumcised heart” of Lev 26:41c will be “circumcised” by God: God will trim and organize the root of the human beings’ thinking and planning and thus help them to follow the LORD with all their heart and all their soul. This is not a kind of “brainwashing” that makes people do what they do not want to but a parental care for the autonomous human being to come to the appropriate decision and to find the way to true life. Almost the same metaphor appears in Jer 31:33: God will write his torah on the hearts of the people, and this will enable the renewal of the covenant. Ezek 36:26 speaks about heart transplantation: God will remove the heart of stone and replace it by a heart of flesh—then the people will be able to follow God’s statutes and ordinances. “Then you shall live in the land that I gave to your ancestors; and you shall be my people, and I will be your God” (Ezek 36:28). The covenant formula again indicates the renewal of the covenant.

Leviticus 26 and Ezekiel (especially Ezek 34:25–28; 37:26–28) have many terms and phrases in common. Table 1 indicates the related verses

(Hieke 2014: 1065–66). Lyons presents even more details (2010: 7–9, 16–19, 22–26). The phrase “covenant of peace” is especially noteworthy; it appears only in Ezek 34:25; 37:26; Num 25:12; Isa 54:10 (Batto 1987: 202–3). Lev 26:6 and 26:9 combine *peace* and *covenant* within a few verses.

The literary relationship between Leviticus 26 and Ezekiel is disputed. While Milgrom and others opt for Ezekiel as a recipient of Leviticus 26 (Milgrom 2001: 2348–63; 1997; Lyons 2010: 4–6), the tendency goes in the other direction (Greenberg 2005: 409; 476; Nihan 2004: 108–10; 2007: 543; Otto 1999: 180–82; Levine 1987: 30; Müller 2010: 209; Grünwaldt 1999: 350–51). Perhaps there was a common repertoire of Priestly phrases regarding the renewal of the covenant and the people’s attitude toward God’s commandments, and these phrases and concepts influenced the final formulations of the books of Leviticus and Ezekiel.

The prophetic literature (Ezekiel, Jeremiah) underscores especially God’s merciful intervention for the restoration of Israel, while the Torah (Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 30) keeps stressing the call for the people’s obedience to the torah. This debate “reflects the two major theological options of the political and religious elites of the Persian period: *eschatological prophecy* vs. *Torah-based observance*” (Nihan 2007: 545).

Theological and Anthropological Conclusions

The observations above suggest the following theological and anthropological conclusions. The concept of covenant in Leviticus 26 results in one comprehensive covenant between God and Israel thus leading the Priestly and the non-Priestly traditions in the Pentateuch to a synthesis. This synthesis integrates the Sinaitic ברית into P’s concept of an “everlasting” covenant with Abraham and his descendants (Nihan 2009: 115). Thus, Leviticus 26 presents God as a reliable covenant partner (Gerstenberger 1993: 395) and as a merciful and forgiving deity.

J. Joosten provides a fine summary of the whole chapter:

There is no vacillation in Lev 26, but one coherent conception. The dialectic of the chapter is internal, with the tensions flowing from the particular conception underlying the corpus: a) the covenant between YHWH and Israel is a covenant of pure grace: The Israelites were slaves in Egypt and they have been made slaves—or rather, servants—of the living God; b) but high privilege comes with high obligation: the servants of YHWH are to orient their whole lives toward the acquisition of holiness, through observance of the commandments which he has given them to that precise purpose; c) however, even although Israel should not

honour their obligation, thus inviting the complete disintegration of the arrangement instituted at the Exodus: destruction of the sanctuary and exile from the land—even then, the bond between YHWH and Israel will perdure: by right they are his slaves; only by exterminating them could YHWH do away with the covenant, and this he will not, out of faithfulness to the patriarchs, and for fear of the enemy's scorn. He will remember the covenant of the Exodus so as to be their God. (1998: 164).

As Israel is freed from the land of Egypt *in the sight of all nations* (26:45), Israel represents an anthropological paradigm: all human beings are summoned to a life according to God's ethical demands in order to gain a life of prosperity and peace. As human beings experience their failure in following God's commandments and suffer the severe consequences, God will answer confession and repentance by granting a new beginning ("remembering the covenant"). Thus, God's mercy does not suspend the ethical responsibility of the human beings; their actions do not become irrelevant. However, punishment will not be God's last word; it is the covenant that lets God's love prevail against his vengeance.

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