

A NEED FOR HOPE? A COMPARISON BETWEEN THE DYNAMICS IN LEVITICUS 26 AND DEUTERONOMY 28–30*

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1. Introduction

After a series of threats of dire consequences if Israel does not listen to God, the end of Lev 26 (esp. 26:40–45) switches to a positive resolution in a fascinating way. This unexpected turn poses a number of questions: Are these verses a secondary addition, the work of a later redaction? What is the reason for this surprising change? Why could the text not end with “judgment”? Is there a need for hope?

Deuteronomy 28 similarly presents the contrast between the consequences of obedience (28:1–14) and disobedience (28:15–68) of the community. However, by contrast to Lev 26, Deut 28 ends on a somber note of disaster and disappearance in foreign countries. Nevertheless, as Jacob Milgrom has pointed out, its sequel in Deut 30 also gives reason to hope.¹

This essay will investigate the relationship between Lev 26 and Deut 28–30. I will proceed in three steps: first I will analyze Lev 26:39–45, then compare this passage with Deut 28–30, then summarize and evaluate the results.

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1. Jacob Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27: A New Translation with Introduction and Commentary*, AB 3B (New York: Doubleday 2001), 2329. It is best not to compare Lev 26 with Deut 28–30 as a whole because Deut 28:69 is clearly a transition or even the beginning of something new; Deut 29 has very little to do with the issue here; and Deut 30 is a chapter in its own right.

2. Analysis of Leviticus 26:39–45

2.1. Delimitation and Structure

Leviticus 25–26 belong together. They are framed by the narrator's remarks that these are God's commands to Moses on "Mount Sinai" in 25:1 and 26:46, and they have several motifs in common.² The fact that this is the last time God speaks on Mount Sinai underlines the significance of these chapters.

Leviticus 25 is set apart by its focus on stipulations regarding the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years. Leviticus 26, after the initial commands in verses 1–2, constitutes a unit in which God's promises (26:3–13) are in contrast to his threats (from 26:14 onwards). Within the threats, there is a clear progression indicated by the repeated conditional clauses referring to Israel's disobedience: 26:14, 18, 21, 23, 27, each of which is introduced by אִם "and/but if." The fivefold repetition coincides with increasingly severe punishments.

The dynamic is reversed in verse 34, with the first occurrence of אָז, "then,"³ signaling an important change. From this point onward, God's actions show effects within his people and achieve the intended results in a series of steps.

First, the land will receive its deserved rest for the Sabbaths (Sabbatical Years) that were not observed (26:34–35). Second, one group will perish in foreign countries (26:36–38). Third, another group will behave differently and ultimately enjoy a different fate, namely, God's renewed favor (26:39–45).

There is scholarly disagreement over the point at which the third step begins. Some take verse 40 as its start,⁴ others are ambivalent,⁵ while a

2. Ibid., 2150–51, 2274; Hans-Ulrich Steymans, "Verheißung und Drohung: Lev 26," in *Leviticus als Buch*, ed. Heinz-Josef Fabry and Hans-Winfried Jüngling, BBB 119 (Berlin: Philo, 1999), 264–65.

3. It is repeated twice, which gives added weight to it, as also in 26:41.

4. See, e.g., the commentaries of John E. Hartley, *Leviticus*, WBC (Dallas: Word, 1992), 453, 458; Erhard S. Gerstenberger, *Das dritte Buch Mose: Leviticus*, ATD 6 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1993), 393; Alfred Marx, *Lévitique 17–27*, Commentaire de l'Ancien Testament 3b (Geneva: Labor et Fides, 2011), 206–7, and with them the majority of exegetes.

5. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2329, introduces the new unit with "Vv. 40–45. Remorse and the Recall of the Covenant: Return from the Exile Implied," whereas on

few favor verse 39.⁶ Several features favor the inclusion of verse 39 in this last part. To begin with, the first group of “those remaining among you” (26:36) will “perish among the nations,” and “the country of your foes will devour you” (26:38). This gives the impression that no one remains from this group.

Second, the designation “those remaining among you” in 26:39 could be a deliberate repetition of the identical expression in 26:36, serving as a frame for the intervening verses. The verb describing the fate of this group in 26:39 is *מקק*, which is open to various translations. It is possible to render it “to moulder, rot.”⁷ However, if this is understood to describe the same group as in 26:36–38, it would be difficult to reconcile the meaning of 26:39 with that of 26:38, where this group already has been devoured. So it makes better sense for the expression “those remaining among you” in 26:39, identical to the wording in 26:36, to designate another group and to translate *מקק* as “pine away.”⁸ Thus 26:39 appears to envision a second group of Israel’s remnant, which suffers a harsh fate but has a chance to survive.

2335 he writes: “this pericope (vv. 39–45).” Steymans, “Verheißung und Drohung,” 272, leaves it open by using “39/40–45” for the delimitation of the section.

6. So Baruch A. Levine, *Leviticus: The Traditional Hebrew Text with the New JPS Translation*, JPS Torah Commentary (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society, 1989), 190; Thomas Staubli, *Die Bücher Levitikus, Numeri*, NSKAT 3 (Stuttgart: Katholisches Bibelwerk, 1996), 194; Walter Gross, “‘Rezeption’ in Ex 31,12–17 und Lev 26,39–45: Sprachliche Formen und theologisch-kompositionelle Leistung,” in *Rezeption und Auslegung im Alten Testament und seinem Umfeld: Ein Symposium aus Anlaß des 60. Geburtstags von Odil Hannes Steck*, ed. Reinhard Gregor Kratz and Thomas Krüger, OBO 153 (Fribourg: Universitätsverlag, 1997), 45–64; Reinhard Müller, “A Prophetic View of the Exile in the Holiness Code: Literary Growth and Tradition History in Leviticus 26,” in *The Concept of Exile in Ancient Israel and Its Historical Contexts*, ed. Ehud Ben Zvi and Christoph Levin, BZAW 404 (Berlin: de Gruyter, 2010), 207–28, esp. 222.

7. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2273, 2326.

8. So NRSV; similarly Steymans, “Verheißung und Drohung,” 283: “dahinsiechen,” explaining it with “Leid durch Mangel” (“suffering want, lacking”; see also Wilhelm Gesenius and Frants Buhl, *Handwörterbuch*, 17th ed. (Berlin: Springer, 1962), 457: “sich auflösen, dahinschwenden”; and HAL, 594 “zergehen”). Levine (*Leviticus*, 190) translates “shall be heartsick,” but this seems too weak. Hartley (*Leviticus*, 453) renders “languish away” or “wasting away” and explains it as “slow but steady erosion” (468).

Third, the third-person plural “they” at the beginning of 26:40 presupposes a reference to a previously mentioned group.⁹ The only likely referent is “those remaining among you” in 26:39. As a consequence of their misery, the people belonging to this second group will not die but will confess their guilt (26:40), thereby paving the way for God to remember the covenant. So there is already a shift in the dynamic of Lev 26 in verse 39, and in the end God remembers the covenant and reaches his goal: salvation.

Given the factors just mentioned, we can take 26:39–45 as a unit. It starts like the preceding unit with “those remaining among you” (cf. 26:36), but it refers to another group that escapes the fate of the first one, which completely passed away. The survivors in 26:39–45 show a markedly different attitude toward God.

It must be admitted that 26:39 is ambiguous at first glance. One is naturally inclined to connect the phrase “those remaining among you” with the same designation in 26:36. Only in 26:40 is it clear that this must refer to someone else. Ambiguity also arises from the uncertain meaning of the verb *מקק* in 26:39. Ambiguity continues throughout verses 39–45,¹⁰ not just in connection with specific terms and syntax, but also with regard to the unit’s content, which displays significant changes in the attitudes both of humans and of God. Overall, 26:39 has a transitional character, using familiar elements but already introducing the new situation that develops in 26:40–45.

2.2. Placement of Verses 39–45 in Leviticus 26

The positive outcome of God’s dealings with his people in this final small unit of Lev 26 consisting of verses 39–45 stands in sharp contrast to the preceding verses of the chapter, especially those presenting threats. This contrast has led some scholars to regard 26:39–45 as an “appendix”¹¹ or

9. Another argument may be seen in the observation of Hartley, *Leviticus*, 458, that the passage consisting of 26:40–45 “amazingly lacks a distinct introduction.”

10. Ambiguity marks the use of the tenses in 26:41–42, the syntactical structure of 26:41 and the meaning of the root *רצה* in that verse, the term “first ones” in 26:45, and so on.

11. Milgrom, *Leviticus* 23–27, 2329. Markus Zehnder has called the various small parts of Lev 26 toward the end (26:34–35, 36–39, 40–41, 42–45) “a series of after-thoughts.” However, for him this does not imply a secondary layer or a rupture

to separate them diachronically from the rest of Lev 26.¹² However, as Cholewiński has shown, these last verses give the impression of a “beabsichtigte Blütenlese” (“intentional anthology”)¹³ of various expressions dispersed throughout the whole chapter and thus seem to be in continuity with it. The expressions that show the closest connections are the following:¹⁴

- remaining people (26:39; cf. 26:36)
- in the countries¹⁵ of the enemies (26:39; cf. 26:36)
- go with me in hostility (26:40; cf. 26:21, 23, 27)
- go with them in hostility (26:41; cf. 26:28)
- country of the enemies (26:41, 44; cf. 26:38; for plural “countries,” see 26:39)
- the root *רצה* (26:41, 43; cf. 26:34 [2x])
- God’s care for the home country (26:42; cf. 26:34)
- Sabbaths (26:43; cf. 26:2, 34–35)
- despise my rules (26:43; cf. 26:15)
- soul abhors my laws (26:43; cf. 26:15)¹⁶
- break the covenant (26:44; cf. 26:15)
- I am YHWH their God (26:44; cf. 26:1 [“your God”])
- I brought them out of the land of Egypt (26:45; cf. 26:13 [“brought you”])¹⁷

between what lies before 26:34 and 26:34–45 (“Blessing and Curse in Lev 26:3–45: The Interplay of Structure and Meaning” [paper presented at the International Meeting of the Society of Biblical Literature, London, 5 July 2011]).

12. Erich Zenger, “Das Buch Levitikus als Teiltext der Tora/des Pentateuch,” in Fabry and Jüngling, *Levitikus als Buch*, 47–83, esp. 75: “in diachroner Hinsicht eine weiterführende Synthese.”

13. Alfred Cholewiński, *Heiligkeitgesetz und Deuteronomium: Eine vergleichende Studie*, AnBib 66 (Rome: Biblical Institute, 1976), 128.

14. The earlier occurrences in the chapter are given in parentheses.

15. Müller, “A Prophetic View,” 221, interprets the plural as referring to an already “worldwide diaspora.”

16. The expressions for the divine commandments in 26:43 are chiasmatically arranged with regard to 26:15, which may be, according to Seidel’s law, a sign for a deliberate linking with it. “The soul abhors,” with God as subject, also occurs in 26:30.

17. Steymans, “Verheißung und Drohung,” 274, observes with Frank Crüsemann (*Die Tora: Theologie und Sozialgeschichte des alttestamentlichen Gesetzes* [Munich: Kaiser, 1992], 354) the parallel endings of both major parts of Lev 26 (26:3–13 and 14–45) with references to the exodus from Egypt.

- to be God for them (26:45; cf. 26:12 [“for you”])
- I am YHWH (26:45; cf. 26:2)

As this short survey reveals, 26:39–45 are very closely tied to all parts of 26:1–38: the introduction (26:1–2), the unit with promises (26:3–13, esp. the end in 26:12–13), and especially the immediately preceding section of threats (26:14–38).

There are further reasons to understand 26:39–45 as an integral part of Lev 26. A major argument is the fact that already in 26:34–35 there is a kind of “healing” as the country receives its deserved rest. Is it conceivable that God grants restoration to the land but not to his people? A further issue regards the logic of the chapter. Several times God tries to change the people’s behavior by punishing measures.¹⁸ It seems unlikely that he would give up his endeavors without achieving an appropriate result. These observations indicate the high probability that all of Lev 26:3–45 should be regarded as a single intentional unit and that 26:39–45 cannot be regarded as “secondary” or “redactional.”¹⁹

Following the internal dynamics of a progression of ever-widening disaster as a consequence of not obeying God’s commands, there is an initial reversal in 26:34 that leads to a positive outcome.²⁰ On the one hand, this about-face is well founded in the overall movement of the chapter. On the other hand, this outcome is not “natural” in the sense that it follows automatically from the foregoing or that it is its logical conclusion or necessary sequel.²¹

18. See the beginnings with **וְאֵל** in 26:14, 18, 21, 23, 27. They always indicate a new stage of God’s efforts to bring his people back on the right way.

19. Others share this opinion of a uniform text: Norbert Clemens Baumgart, “Überkommene Traditionen neu aufgearbeitet und angeeignet: Lev 26,3–45. Das Heiligkeitgesetz in Exil und Diaspora,” *BZ* 43 (1999): 7; Steymans, “Verheißung und Drohung,” 273; and earlier Marjo C. A. Korpel, “The Epilogue to the Holiness Code,” in *Verses in Ancient Near Eastern Prose*, ed. Johannes C. de Moor et al., AOAT 42 (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1993), 123–50, esp. 150 with reference to 26:40–45: “The regular structure of the whole Epilogue of Lev. 26 forbids us to regard this as a later addition.”

20. It is announced by a double **וְ**, “then.” The same particle will play a decisive role in 26:41, where it is also used twice.

21. As it is interpreted by Jože Krašovec, “The Distinctive Hebrew Testimony to Renewal Based on Forgiveness,” *ZABR* 5 (1999): 235, stating that Lev 26 and Deut 28–30 “must point to the possibility of penitence and renewal.”

Clearly, 26:36–38 and 26:39–41 present two alternatives. One group, obviously not inclined to be corrected, will perish. Another remaining group, under the influence of enormous suffering (מַקָּר in 26:39), will turn to God. The alternatives prove that there is no compulsion to listen to God, but not to follow him means to encounter a series of disasters and, finally, death.

In Lev 26:39–45 there are moments of surprise in unexpected developments on the part of both partners to the covenant. The new behavior of the second group of people in 26:40, who confess their guilt and that of their ancestors, is one surprising development. The other is God's remembering (26:42, 45), followed by a change of attitude for which the contrast between 26:30 ("my soul abhors") and 26:44 (where the same emotion is negated) is significant.

2.3. Interpretation

As a follow-up to God's assiduous teaching, the last unit of Lev 26 (26:39–45) develops a resolution to the continued resistance and stubbornness of his people. At the beginning of the unit (26:39), some of the people suffer in exile: "But those remaining among you will pine away because of their fault in the countries of your foes, and even because of the faults of their forefathers they will pine away." This leads to their recognition and confession of their own guilt and that of the previous generations (26:40): "And they will confess their fault and the fault of their forefathers regarding their betrayal with which they betrayed me, and even, that they went with me in hostility."²²

God, in turn, acknowledges that he has dealt with them in a hostile way. His aim has been to achieve a change of heart in them (26:41): "Even I, I went²³ with them in hostility and brought them into the country of their

22. Steymans, "Verheißung und Drohung," 294, describes the changed people as "ein geläutertes Volk."

23. To some exegetes, the imperfect and perfect consecutive forms of 26:41a present a problem. For example, Gross dismisses 26:40b–41c, arguing: "weil ich ihn von seiner Zeitstruktur nicht mit dem Kontext vereinbaren kann" ("Rezeption' in Ex 31,12–17," 57–58). The solution of Milgrom (*Leviticus 23–27*, 2274, 2332) and others is to understand 26:41a as referring to a past time and taking it as a kind of flash-back, reflecting on a previous stage of punishment already alluded to in 26:33. Milgrom translates: "—so that I, in turn, had to continue in opposition to them and to disperse them in the land of their enemies—" The dashes signify interruption in the sequence

foes (to see) whether²⁴ then their uncircumcised heart would be humbled, and then they would make up [or ‘atone’] for their fault.” If change of heart occurs among the people, God will recall his covenant with their forefathers and will look favorably on their country (26:42): “I will remember my covenant with Jacob, and my covenant with Isaac, and I will remember my covenant with Abraham, and I will remember the land.”

In the scenario of Lev 26, the land had to be abandoned by the people in order to make up for its Sabbaths. For their part, the people had to make up for their sin because²⁵ “they despised my rules, and their soul abhorred my laws” (26:43). Nevertheless, God is mercifully disposed toward them even in their exile and will not exterminate them (26:44): “And even also this: When they will be in the country of their foes, I will²⁶ not despise them and not abhor them to annihilate them and to break my covenant with them, for I am YHWH their God.” To the contrary, he will remember the covenant concluded at the exodus from Egypt and once again assume his role as their God (26:45): “And I will remember for them the covenant with (the) ancestors,²⁷ whom I have brought out of the country of Egypt before the eyes of the nations, to become God for them. I am YHWH.”

of thoughts. If one takes into account the context of the speech, i.e., God addressing Moses on Mount Sinai (Lev 25:1), a rendition with future perfect would be most appropriate, as given by Hartley: “—indeed, I will have defied them—” (*Leviticus*, 453). Müller rightly calls Lev 26 “a piece of prophecy” (“A Prophetic View,” 228).

24. The Hebrew particle וְ, normally translated “or,” can also introduce an indirect question (with Hartley, *Leviticus*, 453). In order to ease the rough transition and make explicit the underlying assumption, I have introduced “[to see]” into the translation. The use of particles in Lev 26 is conspicuous, esp. in 26:39–45: וְ is used for the alternative in 26:3 and 14 and continued four times in the threats until 26:27. הֲ is connected with אֲנִי, “I,” for God’s reactions vis-à-vis false human behavior (26:16, 24, 28), and in a flashback (in 26:41); with וְ, “and even,” for taking up something in addition (26:39–40 and twice in 26:42); and with וְ in a unique combination (26:44). וְ, “then,” serves to introduce consequences (26:34 and twice in 26:41) and only once is joined to וְ (26:41). The repeated וְ (26:43) is unique, too.

25. Milgrom (*Leviticus* 23–27, 2337) renders the emphatic construction in 26:43: “for the very reason.” Hartley (*Leviticus*, 470) translates the unique doubling of the preposition here in וְ וְ as “because, even because.”

26. The verbs translated “despise” and “abhor” here are in *qatal* forms, but because of the speech context (cf. n. 23) and the intended reference for a time to come, they must be translated by future tense.

27. Literally “first ones,” without the definite article, meaning earlier generations.

Key elements in this sequence are the people's confession (26:40)²⁸ and God's renewed graceful inclination toward them (26:42, 44–45). Both covenant partners find a way out of the impasse and thus can reestablish their relationship. Here, as elsewhere, God's remembering often signals a decisive moment.²⁹

Three elements are prominent in Lev 26: the land, the Sabbaths, and the covenant. Regarding the land, God changes its past fate (26:42) by remembering it (26:41).³⁰ Israel's home country is already conspicuously present in the preceding promises (26:4–6, 10) and threats (26:20, 22, 31–32, 34–35). Therefore, mention of the land in verse 41 fits well with the emphasis on it throughout the whole chapter.

The long-neglected Sabbaths will be made up for (26:34–35, 43; see also the command to observe them in 26:2). This topic is featured in the reversal that occurs in verse 34 with the first **אז**, “then,” which introduces the necessary compensation for the people's transgressions. Furthermore, the reference to the Sabbath (26:2) brings to the fore one specific commandment, a decisive divine imperative.³¹ The motifs of land and Sabbath are also connected with the previous chapter, Lev 25. There in verse 2 God demands that the Sabbath year be celebrated when Israel will enter the land. Furthermore, God states in 25:23 that the land belongs to him, and in Lev 26 he shows himself to be responsible for it, taking care of it and giving it its deserved rest.

Three verses in the Lev 26:39–45 unit deal with the covenant: 42, 44, 45. Within these verses, which are within a four-verse range (26:42–45), there are a total of five occurrences of the term **ברית**, “covenant.” No other passage of the Hebrew Bible has a higher density of this expression.³² The emphasis on this motif is enhanced by three further instances within this chapter (26:9, 15, 25), whereas in all the rest of the book of Leviticus it is found only in two other places (2:13; 24:8). Moreover, 26:42 is unique in

28. Baumgart (“Überkommene Traditionen,” 17) grasps its importance, calling it “Weichenstellung” (“setting the course”). He connects it with Lev 16:21 and understands confession as capable of replacing cultic activities (18–19).

29. E.g., Gen 8:1; 30:22; Jer 2:2.

30. This combination is unique, as Staubli (*Levitikus*, 194) and others notice.

31. For the importance of the Sabbath here in Lev 26, see Steymans, “Verheißung und Drohung” 299–301.

32. Gen 17:7–11 also has five occurrences, but within five verses, and there are three more in 17:13–14.

that it reverses the chronological sequence of the covenants, starting with that of Jacob and ending with that of Abraham. This produces the impression that God is looking backward from a time closer to the moment of speaking to a more remote period.

The most important point in the presentation of the covenant motif in 26:42–45 is the singular synthesis of the patriarchal covenants with the covenant at Mount Sinai after the exodus.³³ This means that Lev 26 has a comprehensive view of Israel's prehistory and bases its hopeful perspective on two main pillars of that history as laid out in the two previous books: Genesis and Exodus. God is portrayed here in Lev 26 as a most faithful covenant partner, upholding his relationship with his people despite their infidelity.³⁴

If verses 39–45 form an integral part of Lev 26, this has consequences for the dating of the chapter. The clear references to the exile and its positive results, leading to a conversion of the people, point toward a later time. The majority of interpreters tend in this direction.³⁵ Jacob Milgrom opts for dating Lev 26 in “the Hezekian period,”³⁶ except that he assumes 26:43–44 to be “an exilic interpolation.”³⁷ In any case, Lev 26 as a whole seems to have been composed with the experience of the exile in the background and most likely in postexilic times.

33. Gross, “‘Rezeption’ in Ex 31,12–17,” 61; Zenger, “Levitikus,” 75; Ariel Álvarez Valdés, “Levítico 26: Una síntesis de alianzas como clave de lectura,” *EstBib* 61 (2003): 155–81, esp. 170; and many others. Jacob Milgrom has convincingly shown that the word “covenant” in Lev 26 “nearly always refers to, or includes, the Sinaitic covenant,” with the exception of 26:42 and possibly 26:9 (“Covenants: The Sinaitic and Patriarchal Covenants in the Holiness Code [Leviticus 17–27],” in *Sefer Moshe: The Moshe Weinfeld Jubilee Volume*, ed. Chaim Cohen, Avi Hurvitz, and Shalom M. Paul [Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2004], 91–101, esp. 91, 99), thus refuting the view of those who deny such a reference of Lev 26 to the covenant concluded at Mount Sinai.

34. See the opposition between the people “breaking” the covenant in 26:15 and God not doing so in 26:44 but rather upholding (26:9) and remembering it (26:42, 45).

35. E.g., Valdés, “Levítico 26,” 179; Werner E. Lemke, “Circumcision of the Heart: The Journey of a Biblical Metaphor,” in *A God So Near: Essays on Old Testament Theology in Honor of Patrick D. Miller*, ed. Brent A. Strawn and Nancy R. Bowen (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns 2003), 307; Volker Wagner, “Zwei Beobachtungen im Buch Levitikus,” *BN* 136 (2008): 5–16, esp. 14; Richard J. Bautch, “An Appraisal of Abraham’s Role in Postexilic Covenants,” *CBQ* 71 (2009): 43.

36. Milgrom, *Leviticus* 23–27, 2364. He argues that 26:39–45 “is projected into a future exile” (2335).

37. *Ibid.*, 2365.

3. Comparison with Deuteronomy 28–30

In order to understand the peculiarity of Lev 26 better, it seems appropriate to look for similar texts. After identifying connections with Deut 28 (see below) and surveying other similar passages (e.g., Deut 11:26–31; 27:11–26), we can say that no other text in the Bible is closer to Lev 26 than Deut 28. Therefore, it is justifiable to single out these two chapters for comparison. I will first compare them, then proceed to the development after Deut 28, after which I will highlight some differences between the texts.

3.1. The Relationship Between Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28

Leviticus 26 and Deut 28 are connected in various ways, including by sharing the following elements:

- Alternatives of obedience/disobedience to God, starting with the positive alternative expressed by “listen to my/YHWH’s voice” and “be careful” (שמר, lit., “observe”) and “do (= execute) my/his commandments,” then moving to the negative alternative of failure to listen and do (Lev 26:3, 14; Deut 28:1, 15)
- Long series of consequences that build up strong oppositions (Lev 26:4–12 in contrast to 26:16–39, 41, 43; Deut 28:2–14 in contrast to 28:16–68)
- Proportions between positive and negative parts, with the latter being much longer
- Common expressions and motifs, such as, sicknesses (Lev 26:16; Deut 28:22, 65); heaven and earth in connection with iron and bronze (Lev 26:19; Deut 28:23); blows (Lev 26:21; Deut 28:59, 61); pestilence (Lev 26:25; Deut 28:21); eating one’s own children (Lev 26:29; Deut 28:53); corpses (Lev 26:30; Deut 28:26); reactions of others (Lev 26:32; Deut 28:25, 37); being scattered among the nations (Lev 26:33; Deut 28:64)³⁸

38. Steymans interprets Lev 26 as shedding light (“Lichtkegel”) on Deut 28 (“Verheißung und Drohung,” 270–71). Deut 28 has the same function for the book of Jeremiah. On this, see Georg Fischer, *Der Prophet wie Mose: Studien zum Jeremiabuch*, BZABR 15 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2011), 230–32; and more specifically Fischer, “Fulfilment and Reversal: The Curses of Deuteronomy 28 as a Foil for the Book of Jeremiah,” *Semitica et Classica* 5 (2012): 43–49.

However, as Milgrom has rightly remarked, the many differences between Lev 26 and Deut 28 are more important,³⁹ and these offer clues to proper understanding. Differences include the following:

- Communication structure: Deut 28 is presented as speech of Moses, whereas in Lev 26, God himself speaks. God's speech is highlighted by the twice-doubled framework declarations "I am YHWH" in Lev 26:1–2 and 26:44–45, and also in 26:13, recalling God's liberation of the Israelites.
- Nature of consequences: Deut 28 repeatedly refers to blessings (28:2–8) and curses (28:15–19). Lev 26, however, consists of divine promises and threats.
- Intensification: In Deut 28, a single act of disobedience leads to an uninterrupted series of disasters. This is very different from Lev 26, where God continues to punish Israel only in the case of renewed resistance.
- "Deut 28 has no consolatory epilogue."⁴⁰ The unit ends in 28:68 on a completely negative tone without any glimmer of hope. There is nothing at the end of Deut 28 that corresponds to Lev 26:39–45.
- Different context: Deut 28 follows a series of curses (at the end of Deut 27) and concludes by referring to the covenant in the land of Moab (28:69; ET 29:1).⁴¹ Lev 26 follows laws on the Sabbatical and Jubilee Years (Lev 25), begins with two verses that express the most essential commandments (regarding idolatry and Sabbath observance; 26:1–2), and ends by identifying the foregoing laws as divine instructions (26:46), thus authorizing them in the highest possible way.

The character of the book of Deuteronomy can account for the change of speaker to Moses and certain other alterations but not the intensification or negative ending. Whereas Lev 26 manifests a desire to give many

39. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2346. Hartley also deals with the connections between the two texts, and concludes: "the interplay is very limited" (*Leviticus*, 459–60). However, this statement underestimates the extraordinary similarity between the two texts.

40. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2347.

41. See Dominik Markl, *Gottes Volk im Deuteronomium*, BZABR 18 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2012), esp. 23, 90–91, on the role of Deut 28:69.

opportunities to repent of disobedience and to conclude with hope, Deut 28 presents an ever-increasing number of afflictions and damage resulting from one failure to obey God, with no positive outlook. Although the texts are very close to one another, they are in these respects really quite different.⁴²

3.2. The Dynamics of Deuteronomy 28–30

In order to understand why Deut 28 can conclude on such a negative note, one must read on in the book. Recently Ernst Ehrenreich has carried out a thorough investigation of Deut 30, including detailed treatment of the previous chapters.⁴³ He shows that the curses of Deut 28 undergo a further progression and intensification in 29:15–28⁴⁴ by highlighting Israelite opposition to God's commandments (29:17–18 [ET 18–19]) and adding a reaction by other nations (29:23–27 [ET 24–28]).

Against this background, Deut 30 is a “Wegweiser aus der Krise” (“signpost out of the crisis”).⁴⁵ Two key elements offer the solution to the crisis. The first is the people's turning (שוב) back to YHWH and listening to him anew (30:2). This leads to the second element: God's reversal (twice שוב; 30:3). The latter is broadly developed and includes the promises of renewed mercy/compassion (רחם), the gathering of the dispersed, and their return to the home country (30:3–5).

The high point of the new divine actions is the circumcision of the heart of the people by God (30:6), which for Ehrenreich is the central factor in Deut 30:1–10.⁴⁶ It resolves the weak point of the former covenant and deals with the root of Israel's continued disobedience. Through this means, God himself fulfills what he had asked the people to do in Deut 10:16. Furthermore, this motif in Deut 30:6 (see also Jer 4:4) provides a solution to the problem expressed in Lev 26:41, namely, the “uncircumcised heart” mentioned there. In the book of Leviticus, this motif appears

42. There are still further distinctions between the two texts, such as the fact that Deut 28 is notably longer and much more varied in its curses than Lev 26.

43. Ernst Ehrenreich, *Wähle das Leben! Deuteronomium 30 als hermeneutischer Schlüssel zur Tora*, BZABR 14 (Wiesbaden: Harrassowitz, 2010), 71–104. He deals extensively with Deut 28–29.

44. *Ibid.*, 89.

45. *Ibid.*, 104.

46. *Ibid.*, 156–88.

only at the end and remains an open question. Deuteronomy 30 seems to give an answer to it.

The section Deut 28–30 obviously envisages a development similar to that in Lev 26.⁴⁷ A period of disobedience will lead to exile, but then will come a change of attitude in the people and also on the part of God, leading to a new relationship between them. In its overall movement, Deut 28–30 also shows a desire for hope in the end.

3.3. Different Solutions

The Human Perspective. In Lev 26, God will achieve his goal by inflicting various punishments on his people if they remain hostile to him. On the human side, the experience of the exile will finally cause some to confess their sins and the sins of their ancestors (26:40). This can be connected with the “humbling of the uncircumcised heart” in the next verse. There the expression רצה, to “make up/atone for the fault” (or “amend the iniquity”; 26:41) can be understood as a theological interpretation of what happened as a result of the exile.⁴⁸

Deuteronomy 28–30 also underlines the function of the exile as a catalyst, a concept that is present in 28:36, 63–67; 29:27; 30:1, 3–4 and is an important device for connecting these three chapters. The way to a solution, from the human perspective, is described differently in Deut 28–30 from the way it is in Lev 26. According to Deut 30:1–2, calling to mind Moses’s words, especially those of Deut 28,⁴⁹ can start a process of turning (שוב) as a return to God and listening anew to his voice.⁵⁰ The wording recalls typical Deuteronomic language.⁵¹

47. Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2329. However, the final chapters of Deuteronomy are much more sophisticated than Lev 26. Deut 28–30 envision (projected back to the time of Moses) the possibility of Israel’s future disobedience and subsequent exile. For the implied audience of these chapters, this has already become reality. In a further step, Deut 31–32 announce with highest authority (God is speaking in 31:16–21) that this will certainly happen, but the following “Song of Moses” will bring a solution through God mercifully judging/saving his people (32:36).

48. Isa 40:2, as the next parallel to this use of רצה, confirms this.

49. Deut 30:1 refers back to it by “the blessing and the curse.”

50. Deut 30:2 with “and you will listen to his voice” precisely picks up the decisive point of distinction between salvation and woe (see the opposition between Deut 28:1 and 15).

51. E.g., “with all your heart and all your soul,” already used in Deut 6:5; 10:12.

The Divine Side. God's reactions in Lev 26 and Deut 28–30 also differ. In Lev 26, the primary divine reaction is God's remembering former covenants, an idea that is mentioned four times in 26:42 and 45, where the covenants with the patriarchs are united with the covenant at Sinai (see above). The motif "to remember the covenant" in itself is quite traditional (already appearing in Gen 9:16), but combining the covenants is new and has the effect of strengthening the older, known concept.

Deuteronomy 30 coincides with Lev 26 in connecting alteration in divine action with a change in human behavior. However, whereas Lev 26 uses the key word "remember" for God's reactions, Deut 30 employs שׁוּב, "revert, return."⁵² Moved by compassion, God turns toward his people and starts a whole range of concrete actions that leads to their renewed existence in the promised land (Deut 30:5).

At the same time, God tackles the problem of Israel's infidelity at its roots in Deut 30:6. The heart, as the center of human planning, decision making, and feeling, has also been responsible for the repeated resistance to God. With circumcision of the heart, reminiscent of the sign of the covenant with Abraham (Gen 17), God enables his people and their descendants to remain forever faithful in their relationship with him. Deuteronomy 30 thus shows a more broadly developed solution than Lev 26.⁵³ What is shown as a problem in Lev 26:41, namely, the "uncircumcised heart," receives the promise of healing in Deut 30:6.

4. Conclusion: Results and Evaluation

In Lev 26 and Deut 28–30, toward the end⁵⁴ of two books of the Torah, we find a similar movement. These chapters begin with the opposition of positive consequences when Israel listens to God versus disaster when Israel

52. Twice in 30:3, the same word as for the people in 30:2. For translation of the second occurrence in 30:3 as "return" ("zurückkehren") rather than "again," see Ehrenreich, *Wähle das Leben*, 41, 48.

53. The "spiritual" circumcision of the heart in Deut 30 presupposes the physical one in Gen 17 and builds on it (Baumgart, "Überkommene Traditionen," 22) but goes beyond it, providing its completion.

54. Neither Lev 26 nor Deut 30 are the last chapters of their respective books, but they belong to concluding parts. Lev 27 seems to function as a kind of frame with the beginning of Leviticus (Milgrom, *Leviticus 23–27*, 2409). Deut 31–34, especially the Song of Moses, underline God's willingness for redemption, despite the people's waywardness: "he will have compassion on his servants" (32:36).

is disobedient. The latter option occupies much more space and leads in both books to exile and affliction of the people, with the result that they are reduced to a remnant. However the affliction triggers a change in the behavior of this remnant toward God, leading to a merciful reaction on his side and to a renewed relationship.

Some elements of our analysis of Lev 26 and Deut 28–30 are worth summing up. First, it is important to note that the progression leading to divine grace is peculiar to the Hebrew Bible, in contrast to other ancient Near Eastern texts. In ancient Near Eastern treaty documents outside the Bible, passages with blessings and curses do not offer positive outcomes if covenants are broken.⁵⁵ The end of Deut 28 reflects well such a bleak and disastrous result.

Some exegetes see a change toward a positive outcome as unwarranted and therefore tend to regard the hopeful notes in Lev 26:39–45 and Deut 30 as unoriginal, products of later development. At least for Lev 26, this does not seem to be the case, because 26:39–45 are closely tied to the rest of the chapter (see above). These verses most probably belonged to the original version, planned in this way right from the beginning when Lev 26 was written. This raises the question of why Lev 26 was formulated like this.

The case for redactional reworking is more plausible in the case of Deut 28–30. In this case, one could assume an original ending with Deut 28, parallel to ancient Near Eastern traditions, which in later times was supplemented by a positive outlook.⁵⁶ Nevertheless, Deut 4:26–31 discloses a very similar movement through exile to God's renewed graciousness. Unless one supposes literary operations in both passages, it is more probable that Deut 28–30 develops the program laid down in Deut 4, and thus also corresponds to an original plan.⁵⁷

This development toward a hopeful future is not automatic. Leviticus 26:36–38 knows about a group that will perish in foreign countries, and Deut 28 concludes with very dark pronouncements, with no hint of a

55. Krašovec, "Distinctive Hebrew Testimony," 226, 232; Milgrom, *Leviticus* 23–27, 2329; Korpel, "Epilogue to the Holiness Code," 150.

56. For this position, see, e.g., Georg Braulik, *Deuteronomium*, 2 vols., NechtB, Altes Testament 15, 28 (Würzburg: Echter, 1986, 1992), 2:216–17.

57. For the connections between Deut 4 and 28–30, see Markl, *Gottes Volk*, 38–43; for a diachronic perspective, see Eckart Otto, *Deuteronomium 1–11*, 2 vols., HThKAT (Freiburg: Herder, 2012), 1:535–37.

possible change. But the books do not end there. The following verses or chapters, respectively, present a turning toward salvation.

Our comparison between Lev 26 and Deut 28–30 confirmed that these texts are closer to one another than to any other passage in the Hebrew Bible (see above). At the same time, they differ considerably in various aspects. With regard to their mutual relationship, Deut 28–30 seems to elaborate on and deepen the solution of Lev 26.⁵⁸

Now, at the end of this investigation, we can supply answers from various perspectives to the question posed by the title: “A Need for Hope?” From a theological perspective, it is clear that God is not obliged to renew his favorable attitude toward his people. In Lev 26 as well as in Deut 28–30, he is presented as entirely free in giving a joyful future to his people.

From a literary perspective, the positive outcome in both texts does not seem to stem from traditional literary forms, such as ancient Near Eastern treaties (see above). Nor does it appear to be the product of a secondary development, following some constraint to add an ending on a hopeful note. Right from the beginning, the respective authors conceived the sequence of not listening—judgment—exile—the people’s (re)turn—God’s renewed mercy probably as a result of dealing with and reflecting on the experience of the exile.⁵⁹

Finally, from a human perspective, there is a deep desire for hope. Leviticus 26 and Deut 28–30 certainly testify to that and are well aware of the preconditions for it. The people must confess or turn to God, and he, in turn, will engage with them favorably. Thus, these texts maintain a healthy balance between both sides of the partnership and preserve their respective freedoms. Hope is not the product of necessity but results from processes of maturing. It comes through suffering and affliction, dedication, and divine pedagogy and mercy.

58. Note that Leviticus served as an inspiration not only for the author(s) of Deuteronomy but also for Jeremiah. See Mark E. Biddle, *A Redaction History of Jeremiah 2:1–4:2*, ATANT 77 (Zürich: Theologischer Verlag, 1990), 223–27 on Jer 2–3. The expression “the soul abhors” in Jer 14:19 forms an exclusive link with Lev 26:11, 15, 30, 43. Further connections between Jeremiah and Leviticus are: “I will give shalom” (Jer 14:13; cf. Lev 26:6); the plural of בְּהִלָּה (Jer 15:8; cf. the singular in Lev 26:16); God striking his people (Jer 21:6; cf. Lev 26:24); and “to be given into the hand of...” (Jer 21:10; cf. Lev 26:25).

59. Valdés, “Levítico 26,” 179; Wagner, “Zwei Beobachtungen,” 14; Bautch, “Appraisal of Abraham’s Role,” 43.