



Last week we considered some of the parallels between the Sabbath and the Sabbath Year, things like gratitude to God, contentment, and dependence on God. We also saw that God promised blessing and abundance if the people would observe his commands including weekly and yearly Sabbaths. With that promise also comes the curse associated with disobedience. God says that when the people disobey his commands, ignoring and even desecrating his Sabbaths, there will be consequences. Leviticus 26 tells us that the “soil will not yield its crops” (20), they will be terrorized by wild animals (22), they will be struck down by the sword and plague (25), their cities will be destroyed, and the people will be sent into exile (31-33).

The purpose of this judgment is not punitive but to drive the people to confess their sins and humble themselves (40-41). When they do so, the Lord will “remember his covenant” and restore them to the land (40-45). What is often overlooked though is that their exile serves another purpose besides disciplining the people. In their absence, “the land will have the rest it did not have during the sabbaths” the Israelites lived in it (35). What the people refused to do to care for the land will happen as a natural consequence of their discipline.

Ezekiel 20 removes any doubt as to the seriousness with which God takes Sabbath observances. Desecrating Sabbath is tied to idol worship (24), rejecting God's laws (24), and profaning his name (22), while observing Sabbaths serves as a sign of God's covenant with Israel and that he has made them holy (12). When Israel persists in their disobedience, the warning of Leviticus 26 becomes reality, first with the destruction of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in 722 BC and then with the destruction of Jerusalem by Babylon in 586 BC. God carries the remnant of Judah off to Babylon and “the land enjoyed its sabbath rests; all the time of its desolation it rested” (2 Chron. 36:21).

With the closing of 2 Chronicles, Cyrus king of Persia decrees the building of a new temple to the Lord in Jerusalem at God's command. With the command of a pagan king we see that God will ensure that his name will be honored among the nations even as the land receives its rest and God's people are restored to their covenant relationship with him. God's covenant with Israel is unique, but the story of discipline and repentance has been repeated throughout history. We think we are self-sufficient, become proud, deny our dependence on God, and suffer the consequences until we repent and humble ourselves to enjoy God's care and provision.

### Discussion Questions

What are some historical examples of arrogant self-reliance that went badly and resulted in involuntary “rest,” discipline, and even death? What consequences do we experience personally when we overlook Sabbath?

How is the biblical concept of Sabbath different from our society's concept of “rest”? How do those differences highlight God's care and provision for his people?

What can you do with your celebration of Sabbath to experience God's rest in new and deeper ways? How might these experiences of extravagant life point others to Jesus?