

Covenant Relationship

BELIEVERS FIND GOD'S BLESSINGS THROUGH OBEDIENCE.

Deuteronomy 28:1-6,15-19

1 “Now **A** if you faithfully obey **B** the LORD your God and are careful to follow all his commands I am giving you today, the LORD your God will put you **far above** **C** all the nations of the earth. **2** All these blessings will come and **overtake** **D** you, because you obey the LORD your God: **3** You will be blessed **in the city** **E** and blessed in the country. **4** Your offspring will be blessed, and your **land's produce**, **F** and the **offspring of your livestock**, **G** including the young of your herds and the newborn of your flocks. **5** Your basket and kneading bowl will be blessed. **6** You will be blessed when you **come in** **H** and blessed when you go out. (. . .)

15 “But **if you do not obey** **I** the LORD your God by carefully following all his commands and statutes I am giving you today, all these **curse**s **J** will come and overtake you: **16** You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. **17** Your basket and kneading bowl will be cursed. **18** Your offspring will be cursed, and your land's produce, the young of your herds, and the newborn of your flocks. **19** You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out.”

Exploring Key Words

- A** Moses had talked about God's expectations for “this day” or “today” (Deut. 26:16-19) before shifting to life in Canaan (27:2). Chapter 28 returns his attention to “now” and “today.”
- B** “If” highlights that God's blessings were not automatic. They were based on Israel's obedience to His commands.
- C** Moses had said that God would exalt Israel (26:19), but this verse again highlights obedience. He did not elevate the Israelites for their own sake, but for His glory. He would be honored when His people lived in holiness.
- D** “Accompany” (NIV). The Hebrew suggests a pursuit or chase. It also could relate to reaching a goal. God's blessings always find God's people when they remain faithful to Him.
- E** The pairing of “city” and “country” conveys the totality of God's goodness. The Israelites had not lived in cities since Egypt. But whether they resided in an urban or rural setting, obedience would lead to blessing.
- F** “Fruit of thy ground” (KJV); “crops of your land” (NIV). Fertile crops were considered a blessing from the hand of God (Ps. 104:14).
- G** “Fruit of your cattle” (ESV); “Young of your livestock” (NIV). The fertility of the family would be expanded to include animals.
- H** The Hebrew (*bo*) relates to a trip or journey. For four decades, Israel's travels had been part of God's judgment. Through obedience, their travels in Canaan would yield prosperity.
- I** The curses are not inevitable. Like the blessings, they were conditional. But if the people chose to disobey, they would face the consequences.
- J** An expression of ill will, often taking the form of God's wrath. Here, the curses for disobedience parallel the blessings for obedience.



Faithfulness (Deut. 28:1-6)

- The relationship between God and Israel was a covenant relationship. Faithfulness to His commands would be rewarded.
- God would exalt the Israelites above all other nations. They and their children would be blessed.
- In addition, their land and crops would be prosperous.

Disobedience (Deut. 28:15-19)

- Just as faithfulness to God's commands was rewarded, failure to follow God's commands would lead to consequences. If they disobeyed God, the Israelites would be cursed wherever they journeyed, along with their children.
- In addition, their land and crops would not be fruitful.

Summary Statements

Believers find God's blessings through obedience.

- Believers should enjoy the blessing that comes from following God's commands.
- Choosing to disregard God's commands leads to humiliation.

Memory Verse

Deuteronomy 28:9

Key Doctrine

Man

Only the grace of God can bring man into His holy fellowship and enable man to fulfill the creative purpose of God. (See John 1:16-17; Romans 5:20-21.)

ENGAGE

What wise “messages” did your parents repeat to you over and over again? What impact did hearing those words have on you? (PSG, p. 100)

- We’ve all seen it. The parent is down on one knee, talking to her child as he is about to head out for the first day of a new school year. “Now, you have your backpack? Good. Remember to do what the teacher tells you. No acting up. Don’t forget to bring home any papers I need to sign. Don’t lose your lunch money. And have fun!”
- At this point, the parent isn’t telling the child anything new. He or she is reinforcing and putting a new emphasis on what the child has heard countless times.

Bonus: Aside from your parents, what other wise voices have spoken into your life?

EXPLORE

1. FAITHFULNESS (DEUT. 28:1-6)

Bonus: What are some blessings you might take for granted? How can you avoid that?

- Most covenants and treaties in the ancient Near East began with a list of curses for those who violated the agreement. This chapter does the opposite. It begins on a positive note, listing rewards for faithfulness (vv. 1-14).
- The idea of a blessing or being blessed occurs seven times in verses 2-6. This emphasizes God’s strongest desire for His people. The promise was that God’s blessings would actively pursue His people. However, God’s blessings would take hold only as they obeyed Him.
- Verses 3-6 outline a six-fold covenant between God and His people. The promises are listed in short, crisp sentences. This style would have made them easier to remember and to integrate into worship settings.
- The term translated “blessed” suggests prosperity. We tend to think of prosperity in terms of financial resources. The Hebrew word does not have this limitation. It means having one’s life filled with benefits. God is the ultimate source of all blessings (Jas. 1:17).

How do these promised blessings differ from the prosperity theology that is commonly taught and preached today? (PSG, p. 105)

- Fertility in flocks, fields, and families was a vital contributor to the long-term survival. The text uses the same Hebrew word three times to refer to fertility. The literal translation is “fruit” or “fruitfulness.”
- Baal and Astarte, the primary deities of the Canaanites, were known as fertility gods. But the God of Israel alone was the One who could cause families, cattle, and harvests to be fruitful. For His people, every area of their lives would be blessed.

- The promise that God would bless the “basket” and the “kneading bowl” meant that He would meet the families’ most basic needs. In addition, He would be with them wherever they went and whatever they did.

What do these verses say about the faithfulness of God toward His people? How would these promises encourage God’s people to remain faithful to Him? (PSG, p. 105)

2. DISOBEDIENCE (DEUT. 28:15-19)

Bonus: How do you respond to days when nothing seems to go right for you?

- Verse 15 begins to outline the curses Israel would experience if they disobeyed God’s commands. The list of disasters and miseries (vv. 15-68) is longer than the list of blessings for obedience (vv. 1-14).
- Mirroring the pattern in the first six verses, the idea of curses and cursing occurs seven times in verses 15-19. The emphasis is on God removing His blessing, allowing the curses to take hold of the disobedient.
- “In the city” and “in the country” meant people would be cursed wherever they were. Used together, the terms essentially meant “everywhere.” Likewise, the “basket” and the “kneading bowl” would be cursed. Poverty and scarcity would replace prosperity and fertility.
- The picture in the curses is of a life of misery. This, though, is not God’s desire. The purpose of the curses was to draw God’s people back to Himself.

What do these curses say about God’s nature and character? (PSG, p. 107)

CHALLENGE

As a group, discuss how believers can be used as conduits of God’s blessings to others.

What action plan can you make to be a blessing to a certain individual? (PSG, p. 108)

During the week, evaluate your motivation for the things you do, especially your good deeds.

What actions can you take to make sure your works come from a pure heart? (PSG, p. 108)

FURTHER DISCUSSION



Scan here for additional discussion questions for this week’s study.

BIBLE SKILL (P. 107, PSG)

Read and reflect on a Bible passage.

Read Deuteronomy 28:1-6. Try to imagine a life where every aspect of it experienced God's blessing. *What would that look like in your life? How and where would God's blessing manifest itself?* Now read verses 15-19 and try to imagine life totally apart from God's blessing. *How might the thought of such an awful alternative motivate people to live faithfully by God's commands?* God wanted to see His people demonstrate their faith in Him through obedience to His commands. *How does James describe that concept (Jas. 2:18)?*

Direct adults to the Bible Skill activity on page 107 of the PSG. Draw two columns on the board: "Blessings" and "Curses." Encourage them to help fill in the columns using the verses from Deuteronomy 28. Lead a discussion using questions from the activity.

OBJECT LESSON: BREAD

Display a loaf of bread and read Deuteronomy 28:5. Ask: *How was a loaf of bread a symbol of blessing for the Israelite community?* Lead adults to scan verses 3-6 and to call out other items that represented God's blessings on those who were obedient to Him.

Ask: *What items in our daily lives could represent God's blessings on us?* Record those responses on the board. Remind adults that for every blessing for obedience mentioned, God also warned the Israelites about similar curses for disobedience. Note that God still judges sin and withholds blessings from those who turn away from Him.

Allow adults a few minutes for silent prayer. Urge them to talk with God, showing gratitude for His blessings and asking for His help in avoiding sin.

BLESSINGS AND CURSES

This passage begins a new section listing the covenant blessings for obedience and curses for disobedience (chaps. 28-32). It is possible to read this passage wrongly with a "prosperity gospel" mentality. This views God's blessings like a vending machine that delivers what the buyer wants for the right price. Therefore, it is important to understand what covenant "blessings" are and what they are not.

The chief "blessing" is stated twice in verse 1: "the LORD your God." Israel's covenant relationship with the Lord was an act of His grace that the nation never could have earned. Every other "blessing" is an outflow of that relationship.

The tangible blessings listed here employ a "this-world" terminology. Again, if taken out of context, readers could focus on physical blessings rather than God's higher purpose. Being in right relationship with God brings blessings other than one's salvation. Those can include physical, mental, emotional, relational, material, and numerous other blessings.

Of course, it is possible for lost people to experience God's blessings. For example, someone can walk out of a hospital having experienced God's healing, even if they are no closer to God than when they

went in. The blessing of being in right relationship with God, though, remains even if physical healing does not come.

Moses taught that God's blessings are for God's people to enjoy, but they can be enjoyed only by living in God's way. People enjoy God's grace and blessing through faith and obedience. Faithful works are never the means of earning any blessing. Blessings are enjoyed as a gift of God's grace, gratefully received.

Conversely, people may deserve God's punishment. Thus, the list of curses that typically mirrors the list of blessings (28:15-32:42). Through this listing, God provided a warning of things His people should never want to experience. Thankfully, God's curses are not inevitable, but they are conditioned on the choices people make. In practical terms, the curses are the removal of God's blessings.

The Bible makes it clear that our blessings won't always take a tangible form (Ps. 73:1-28; Dan. 3:16-18; Hab. 3:17-18). Even though God's people may face deep waters and intense fires, He promises His presence (Isa. 43:2). That is the eternal blessing that can never be taken away (Rom. 8:31-39).