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Deuteronomy 28:1-14 “Obedience Brings Blessings”

Intro. As Moses concludes his sermon to the people of Israel, he sets before them two very different options. On the one hand, they may experience the blessing of God on all that they have and do. On the other hand, if they choose the pathway of sin and rebellion, they will experience the curse that such a choice will surely bring. Such a stark contrast would surely get the people’s attention.

If you look back at chapter 27 you see how the difference was vividly portrayed. Israel was commanded to divide the nation and have half the tribes stand on Mount Gerizim to pronounce “Amen” upon the blessings, and the other half to stand on Mount Ebal to pronounce “Amen” upon the curses spoken by the Levites in between the mountains. This was actually done according to Joshua 8:30-35. (See also Ex. 23:20-33 and Lev. 26). The ultimate goal of his message was to call upon his people to make a commitment to obey the Lord and consequently receive the blessings of the Lord.

What is the blessing of God that we should seek? I would define the blessing of God as the active involvement of God in your life to bring about the benefits that we will talk about today. I say “active involvement” because Moses says in v.2 that these blessings will “overtake you.” God is a loving and gracious God. He wants to bless us by His grace. Yet many of His blessings are conditional.

I realize that I must be careful in how I interpret and apply this chapter to believers today. I understand fully that what we read here is the statement of blessings and curses that specifically applied to Israel in relationship to the covenant of law that they agreed to. Israel demonstrated that because of our fallen, sinful state of being, the law cannot bring us blessing but only condemns us with the curse of sin. Only under the New Covenant can we experience the full blessing of God upon our lives. I will talk about that at the end of my message. Nevertheless, there are basic principles in chapter 28 which are timeless and they tend to apply to all peoples. Prov. 14:34 says, “Righteousness exalts a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people.” I believe that God has indeed blessed the United States of America because many of our founding fathers and many within our population over the years have sought to build a nation upon the principles of righteousness. Just about every blessing that I will share with you today has been experienced by our country. Yet in more recent years, we are experiencing less of the blessings that we read about in chapter 28 and instead are experiencing more of the curses we read about here. You will see that in detail next week.

Which would you rather have? Do you want the blessing of God upon your life or do you want to experience the curse of sin? The answer should be obvious. Today were going to focus on the kind of blessings that you can experience from God if you meet the conditions that I will share with you today. I want to assure you that God wants to bless you. He delights in doing so. However, you must meet the conditions I will talk about later.

First of all let us see together:

I. THE BLESSINGS GOD PROMISES

We have before us a sixfold repetition of the word “blessed.”¹ In v.3 these blessings are promised “in the city ... and in the country,” regardless of where we find ourselves. There are several types of blessings that God promises here in chapter 28:

A. You Will Be Fruitful - Look at v.4, “Blessed shall be the fruit of your body, the produce of your ground and the increase of your herds, the increase of your cattle and the offspring of your flocks.” Likewise, he says in v.11, “And the LORD will grant you plenty of goods, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your ground....” Israel was promised the blessing of large families, large herds, and abundant crops. While Israel’s neighbors looked to fertility gods for their economic security, here we see that Israel’s well-being depends on their fidelity to the Lord.

New Testament Christians should be more concerned about spiritual fruitfulness rather than material fruitfulness. Jesus said in John 15:5, “I am the vine, you are the branches. He who abides in Me, and I in him, bears much fruit....” Then he said in v.8, “By this My Father is glorified, that you bear much fruit; so you will be My disciples.”

This blessing will lead to the next blessing:

B. You Will Be Blessed with Plenty – Moses says in v.5, “Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.” Then he says in v.8, “The LORD will command the blessing on you in your storehouses and in all to which you set your hand, and He will bless you in the land which the LORD your God is giving you.” Then he also says in v.11, “And the LORD will grant you plenty of goods....” Prov. 10:22 says, “The blessing of the LORD makes one rich, and He adds no sorrow with it.” Who can deny that having more than just the bare necessities of life is a blessing from the Lord?

Notice in v.8 that such blessings were especially tied to the land that the Lord was giving them.² That link is repeated in v.11. It was a land of milk and honey, a very fruitful land as long as God blesses them with rain at the proper times. And so God says in v.12, “The LORD will open to you His good treasure, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season....”

I am not a health, wealth, and prosperity preacher. Material blessings are given little attention in the promises of the New Testament. Yet our Lord Jesus did say in Matthew 6:33, “seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness and all these things will be added unto you.” I do believe that those who live righteously tend to be better off financial than they would otherwise. That is true also because of the next blessing God promises here:

C. God Will Bless Your Labor - He says in v.8, “The LORD will command the blessing ... in all to which you set your hand....” Likewise, he says in the middle of v.12 that God will “bless all the work of your hand....” Yes, God intends for us to have meaningful and productive work, and He promises to bless the work of our hand. Prov. 10:4 says, “the hand of the diligent makes rich.” If you obey God and work hard, God will bless your labor, and you will tend to enjoy greater prosperity as a result.

Now such blessing from God will lead to yet another blessing:

¹ There are twice as many statements of “cursed...” in this chapter.

² See Genesis 12:7; 13:14-18; 26:3-4; Exodus 3:6-8.

D. You Will Be a Lender, Not a Debtor - Moses says in the last of v.12, “You shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.” Taking on debt, especially excessive debt, results in the curse of bondage. Prov. 22:7 says, “...the borrower is a slave to the lender” (HCSB). The guys is here that his blessing would result in Israel being a lender, not a debtor nation.

During the administration of Pres. Andrew Jackson we paid off our national debt from the war of 1812 after six years in office. In fact, he called debt a “national curse,” probably based on Deuteronomy 28. I believe that was the only time our nation has not been in debt.

I want to encourage you to avoid debt is much as possible and instead seek the blessing of debt free living. It is possible with hard work, discipline, and the blessing of God.

E. God Will Bless You with Protection and Victory - On a personal level this is implied in v.6, “Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out.” God would be with them and protect them wherever they go. Then, on a national level, Moses says in v.7, “The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before your face; they shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways.” Though their enemies combined forces they shall be routed and flee before them in seven different directions. To mistreat God’s people is to invite divine intervention and retribution.

Do a large degree God has blessed America in a similar way. We were victorious in the Revolutionary war. The union was preserved and slavery was abolished in the Civil War. We were victorious in World War I and World War II. We have been victorious in other wars as well. On this Veterans Day weekend let us thank all who have been willing to serve to protect our freedoms.

F. God Will Bless You with Promotion - Moses says in the last of v.1, “the LORD your God will set you high above all nations of the earth.” This would be the result of the fulfillment of the blessings stated in our text. Then Moses says in v.9, “The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, just as He has sworn to you...” Moses had already said something similar in 26:19, “that He will set you high above all nations which He has made, in praise, in name, and in honor, and that you may be a holy people to the LORD your God, just as He has spoken.”³ Then he says in v.10, “Then all peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you.” This expression derives from the practice of inscribing or branding one’s name on property. In the eyes of the nations, Israel was to be closely linked to their God. Likewise, Moses says in v.13, “And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail; you shall be above only, and not be beneath...” This was in line with the elective purposes of God, who chose Israel out “from among” all nations to be his special possession (7:6; 14:2; cf. Exodus 19:6). Though this promise was best fulfilled during the days of King Solomon, the ultimate fulfillment will not take place until the coming kingdom of God.

Notice that such promotion is not just for our personal benefit. It is to result in being a positive witness for the Lord. Others should see that *God* is responsible for such blessings. Israel was to be a worldwide witness of God’s grace. Even so, God calls His redeemed people to the glorious privilege of representing Him to the world and demonstrating by their lives the transforming power of Christ. We too have been called out of the world to be His holy people. We are to demonstrate that God can redeem people from the curse of sin and bring great blessing into our lives by His grace.

³ The notion of Israel as the Lord's holy people was already stated in 7:6; 14:2, 21.

On a personal level we see this illustrated in the life of Joseph. Though sold as a slave, and though falsely accused and put into prison, God so worked in his life that he was promoted from the prison to the palace and became an exalted leader in Egypt. He was a righteous man who had a heart for God and God clearly blessed him.

Most of these blessings have been upon us as a nation. For example, as a Christian nation God put the USA “far above all the nations of the earth” (v.1). Yet by turning from God we are likely to lose that status in the future. As Galatians 6:7 says, you reap what you sow.

Don’t you want to be blessed of God like this? Have you experienced most of these blessings? Wouldn’t you want our nation to continue to be blessed of God? Well let’s see from our text:

II. THE CONDITIONS OF RECEIVING SUCH BLESSINGS

Three times in this text we find the word “if.” These blessings will come “if.” So what were the indispensable conditions of receiving such blessings from the Lord?

A. Hear and Learn God’s Commandments - While the main emphasis is upon obedience in this text, the fact is you cannot obey what you do not know. So the first step in receiving the blessing of God is to learn the commandments of God. In fact, the Hebrew word translated “obey” (*shama*) in vv.1, 2 & 13 first and foremost means “to hear.” We are to hear the voice of the Lord our God before we can obey Him.

B. Keep God’s Commandments – At this point I am not talking about obeying God’s commandments, but taking the next step toward obedience. You see, Moses says in the last of v.1, “... to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today....” Moses says in the last of v.9, “if you keep the commandments of the LORD....” That word translated “observe” and “keep” (*shamar*) means that we not only hear the commandments but keep them and retain them in our memory.

Even so, Jesus said in Luke 11:28, “Blessed are those who hear the word of God and keep it!” Jesus said in John 14:21, “He who has My commandments and keeps them, it is he who loves Me.” Yet how many children, even in Christian homes, are being required to memorize the 10 Commandments? Probably very few. Our AWANA program still requires our students to memorize Scripture, and that is a good thing.

C. Obey God’s Commandments – Though this is implied several times in our text of Scripture in vv.1, 2 & 9, this condition is explicitly stated in the last of v.13, “if you heed the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, and are careful to observe them.” The Hebrew word translated “observe” (*asah*) means “to do.” Yes, doing what God’s commands tends to bring blessing into our lives.

Now there are two additional thoughts about such obedience that deserves special mention. First of all:

1. Obey God’s Commandments Diligently – In vv.1 & 13 Moses commanded them to obey God’s commandments carefully, or diligently. Their obedience was not to be lax or halfhearted. Then he said in v.14, “So you shall not turn aside from any of the words which I

command you this day, to the right or the left....” They were not to pick and choose which commandments to obey but be diligent to obey all of them.

2. Especially Obey the Commandments Regarding Idolatry - Out of all the commandments, one commandment is singled out in the last of v.14. He commands against going “after other gods to serve them.” This was the sin they were especially prone to.

This command is repeated in the New Testament. Paul said in 1 Cor. 10:7, “And do not become idolaters as were some of them....” Then he said in v.14, “Therefore, my beloved, flee from idolatry.” The apostle John said in 1 John 5:21, “Little children, keep yourselves from idols.” Anything in your life that is more important to you than God is an idol (cf. Col 3:5).

Of course, this principle of diligent obedience is found in every dispensation, for God cannot bless those who rebel against Him. Jesus said in John 14:15, “If you love Me, keep My commandments.” James 1:25 says, “But he who looks into the perfect law of liberty and continues in it, and is not a forgetful hearer but a doer of the work, this one will be blessed in what he does.” Rev. 22:14 says, “Blessed are those who do His commandments....”

We are not under the law as a covenant, and so the laws of sacrifice and other laws that were unique to that covenant are not binding upon us. However, the moral laws of the Old Testament are rooted in the timeless character of God and should be learned and obeyed by Christians today. The moral laws are generally repeated in the New Testament. So if you want to experience the blessing of God upon your life, you should learn the principles of righteousness from *both* the Old and New Testaments. Read God’s Word. Come and hear God’s Word taught and preached. Living righteously tends to bring the same kind of blessings that we have just talked about but yielding to sin tends to bring the curses we will talk about next week. Jesus said in Mt. 5:6, “Blessed are those who hunger and thirst for righteousness, For they shall be filled.”

I am not talking about legalism as a way of salvation. Yet I am saying that if you want to be blessed of God, you need to live righteously, not by your own gutsy effort, but by entering into the New Covenant by repentance and faith in Jesus, which brings the power of the Holy Spirit into our lives. The apostle Paul said in Romans 8:4, “that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us who do not walk according to the flesh but according to the Spirit.”

III. GOD’S NEW COVENANT BLESSINGS

The blessings of God were never intended just for Israel. When God called Abraham He said, “in your seed all the families of the earth shall be blessed” (Gen. 22:18; 26:4; 28:14). Yet the proper focus is expressed by the apostle Paul, who said in Eph. 1:3, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” Yes, we should be more concerned about seeking spiritual blessings from God. In Jer. 31:33-34 God promised the following blessings for recipients of His New Covenant: “I will put My law in their minds, and ... hearts; they all shall know Me.... For I will forgive their iniquity, and their sin I will remember no more.” With the promise of the New Covenant in mind, Paul said in Rom. 4:7, “Blessed are those whose lawless deeds are forgiven, and whose sins are covered.” He was quoting from Ps. 32:1. What a blessing it is to be forgiven of sin and have peace with God! Then, while material blessings are nice to have, Paul said in Romans 14:17, “for the kingdom of God is not eating and drinking, but righteousness and peace and joy in the Holy Spirit.” You can be poor in the material things of life but rich in blessings which no one can take from you, such as love, peace, and joy.

So in addition to hearing, keeping and doing God's commandments, what must we do to experience such blessings from God?

A. Repent of Your Sins - Peter said in Acts 3:26, "To you first, God, having raised up His Servant Jesus, sent Him to bless you, in turning away every one of you from your iniquities." Sin brings a curse so to be blessed of God, you need to repent of your sins as the first step.

B. Put Your Faith in Jesus - After Peter confessed his faith in Jesus as the Messiah and Son of God, Jesus said in Mt. 16:17, "Blessed are you, Simon Bar-Jonah..." Likewise, Jesus said in John 20:29, "Thomas, because you have seen Me, you have believed. Blessed are those who have not seen and yet have believed." Faith in Jesus is the starting point. Obedience to his commands is not even possible until you are born again by faith in him and receive the Holy Spirit.

C. Suffering for Christ Brings Special Blessing - Jesus said in Mt. 5:10-11, "Blessed are those who are persecuted for righteousness' sake, for theirs is the kingdom of heaven. Blessed are you when they revile and persecute you, and say all kinds of evil against you falsely for My sake." (Cf. Luke 6:22). 1 Pet. 4:14 says, "If you are reproached for the name of Christ, blessed are you, for the Spirit of glory and of God rests upon you."⁴ Yes, if you suffer for Christ, you will receive a special blessing.

D. Our Greatest Blessing Is Yet To Come - Rev. 14:13 says, "Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on... that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them." Most people want to avoid death at all cost, but the Christian is blessed upon death. After all, Paul said in Php. 1:21, "For to me, to live is Christ, and to die is gain." Then Rev. 19:9 says, "Blessed are those who are called to the marriage supper of the Lamb!" Yes, we can only imagine what the continual state of blessedness will be in heaven and in the coming kingdom of God.

Sources: Daniel I. Block, *The NIV Application Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012); Stephen Felker, *Devotional & Explanatory Notes on the Entire Bible* (Col. Hghts, VA: Published by Author), 2019; Matthew Henry (on *Online Bible*); C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Company, 1978 reprint); J. Vernon McGee, *Thru The Bible*, Vol. 1 (Pasadena, CA: Thru The Bible Radio, 1981); Eugene H. Merrill, *New American Commentary: Deuteronomy* (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994); Larry Pierce, *Online Bible* [Ver. 5:30] (Ontario: onlinebible.net, 2017); Warren Wiersbe, *Expository Outlines on the Old Testament* (Wheaton: Victor Books/SP Publications, 1993). Other sources listed in the footnotes. Unless otherwise indicated, all Scripture quotations are from *The New King James Version* (Nashville: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1982).

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⁴ 1 Pet. 3:14 says, "But even if you should suffer for righteousness' sake, you are blessed."