

March 24, 2019
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Deuteronomy
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Deuteronomy 28.

1. Why did God promise such severe discipline in response to their disobedience of His law?
2. How do we reconcile promised judgment for disobedience to God's law with the reality that no one can fully keep God's law?
3. How does this text about promised blessing and judgment help us understand the need for the Savior?
4. Is it fair to apply the principles of our text to America?
5. Have you ever experienced God's chastening because of disobedience? What form did it take?

IF YOU OBEY GOD'S VOICE Deuteronomy 28

The title of this sermon is the big "hypothetical" of the human race. When God placed our parents, the original humans, in His special garden He said, "Look around at the incredible blessings I have given you. It's all yours. Enjoy my blessings." He also said, "Oh, by the way, there is one very important rule. That tree over there is called 'the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.' Don't ever eat of it because if you do you will immediately kill our relationship and begin dying physically."

Therefore, we understand that, from the very outset of our existence, God established His principle of blessing in exchange for obedience, and judgment in exchange for disobedience. That principle is explained, reestablished, illustrated, demonstrated, postulated, and commanded as the essence of God's character. Our Creator gave His law to manifest His essential character to us His Created beings. Because His law is firmly established and revealed in creation, in our consciences, and in the Bible, we have no argument for ignorance. We know the rules.

God simply requires that we obey in order to enjoy His blessings and to avoid His judgment. On many various levels that formula works out in history and in our own lives. Ultimately though, we discover that it is very difficult to obey God, and virtually impossible to keep all His rules all the time. That reality leads us to the greatest of blessings. God commanded regarding Jesus Christ and His sacrifice for sins on the cross: "*This is my beloved Son, with whom I am well pleased; listen to him*" (Matthew 17:5). God's command is, "*Believe in the Lord Jesus, and you will be saved, you and your household*" (Acts 16:31). God requires, "*If you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved*" (Romans 10:9).

The blessing that comes from obedience to those commands is eternal life lived in fellowship with our Creator. That is the way God intended life to be from the beginning. The curse that comes from disobedience is everlasting punishment in hell that our Creator created for Satan and the fallen angels.

The principle of blessings for obedience, and judgment for disobedience is the message of our text. Chapter twenty-eight in Deuteronomy contains a long list of specific blessings God's people would enjoy if they obeyed Him. It also contains a longer list of specific judgments God's people would have to endure for disobeying Him. We will approach the text in an unusual way compared to our normal handling of texts throughout this study in Deuteronomy. I will read the entire text (which will take about ten minutes) and then make some simple observations and applications afterward. In a way, this is more accurately what God the Holy Spirit inspired Paul to write to Pastor Timothy: "*Until I come, devote yourself to the public reading of Scripture, to exhortation, to teaching*" (1 Timothy 4:13).

Deuteronomy 28

Promised Blessing

1 *“And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. 2 And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. 3 Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. 4 Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. 5 Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. 6 Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. 7 “The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you. They shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. 8 The LORD will command the blessing on you in your barns and in all that you undertake. And he will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. 9 The LORD will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in his ways. 10 And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you. 11 And the LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground, within the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give you. 12 The LORD will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands. And you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. 13 And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you shall only go up and not down, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, being careful to do them, 14 and if you do not turn aside from any of the words that I command you today, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.*

Warnings of Curses

15 *“But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes that I command you today, then all these curses shall come upon you and overtake*

you. 16 Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the field. 17 Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. 18 Cursed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground, the increase of your herds and the young of your flock. 19 Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. 20 “The LORD will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in all that you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and perish quickly on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken me. 21 The LORD will make the pestilence stick to you until he has consumed you off the land that you are entering to take possession of it. 22 The LORD will strike you with wasting disease and with fever, inflammation and fiery heat, and with drought and with blight and with mildew. They shall pursue you until you perish. 23 And the heavens over your head shall be bronze, and the earth under you shall be iron. 24 The LORD will make the rain of your land powder. From heaven dust shall come down on you until you are destroyed. 25 “The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You shall go out one way against them and flee seven ways before them. And you shall be a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. 26 And your dead body shall be food for all birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth, and there shall be no one to frighten them away. 27 The LORD will strike you with the boils of Egypt, and with tumors and scabs and itch, of which you cannot be healed. 28 The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind, 29 and you shall grope at noonday, as the blind grope in darkness, and you shall not prosper in your ways. And you shall be only oppressed and robbed continually, and there shall be no one to help you. 30 You shall betroth a wife, but another man shall ravish her. You shall build a house, but you shall not dwell in it. You shall plant a vineyard, but you shall not enjoy its fruit. 31 Your ox shall be slaughtered before your eyes, but you shall not eat any of it. Your donkey shall be seized before your face, but shall not be restored to you. Your sheep shall be given to your enemies, but there shall be no one to help you. 32 Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, while your eyes look on and fail with longing for them all day long, but you shall be helpless. 33 A nation that you have not known shall eat up the fruit of your ground and of all your labors, and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually, 34

so that you are driven mad by the sights that your eyes see. 35 The LORD will strike you on the knees and on the legs with grievous boils of which you cannot be healed, from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head. 36 "The LORD will bring you and your king whom you set over you to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known. And there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone. 37 And you shall become a horror, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples where the LORD will lead you away. 38 You shall carry much seed into the field and shall gather in little, for the locust shall consume it. 39 You shall plant vineyards and dress them, but you shall neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes, for the worm shall eat them. 40 You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but you shall not anoint yourself with the oil, for your olives shall drop off. 41 You shall father sons and daughters, but they shall not be yours, for they shall go into captivity. 42 The cricket shall possess all your trees and the fruit of your ground. 43 The sojourner who is among you shall rise higher and higher above you, and you shall come down lower and lower. 44 He shall lend to you, and you shall not lend to him. He shall be the head, and you shall be the tail. 45 "All these curses shall come upon you and pursue you and overtake you till you are destroyed, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that he commanded you. 46 They shall be a sign and a wonder against you and your offspring forever. 47 Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, 48 therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger and thirst, in nakedness, and lacking everything. And he will put a yoke of iron on your neck until he has destroyed you. 49 The LORD will bring a nation against you from far away, from the end of the earth, swooping down like the eagle, a nation whose language you do not understand, 50 a hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young. 51 It shall eat the offspring of your cattle and the fruit of your ground, until you are destroyed; it also shall not leave you grain, wine, or oil, the increase of your herds or the young of your flock, until they have caused you to perish. 52 "They shall besiege you in all your towns, until your high and fortified walls, in which you trusted, come down throughout all your land. And they

shall besiege you in all your towns throughout all your land, which the LORD your God has given you. 53 And you shall eat the fruit of your womb, the flesh of your sons and daughters, whom the LORD your God has given you, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemies shall distress you. 54 The man who is the most tender and refined among you will begrudge food to his brother, to the wife he embraces, and to the last of the children whom he has left, 55 so that he will not give to any of them any of the flesh of his children whom he is eating, because he has nothing else left, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy shall distress you in all your towns. 56 The most tender and refined woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground because she is so delicate and tender, will begrudge to the husband she embraces, to her son and to her daughter, 57 her afterbirth that comes out from between her feet and her children whom she bears, because lacking everything she will eat them secretly, in the siege and in the distress with which your enemy shall distress you in your towns. 58 "If you are not careful to do all the words of this law that are written in this book, that you may fear this glorious and awesome name, the LORD your God, 59 then the LORD will bring on you and your offspring extraordinary afflictions, afflictions severe and lasting, and sicknesses grievous and lasting. 60 And he will bring upon you again all the diseases of Egypt, of which you were afraid, and they shall cling to you. 61 Every sickness also and every affliction that is not recorded in the book of this law, the LORD will bring upon you, until you are destroyed. 62 Whereas you were as numerous as the stars of heaven, you shall be left few in number, because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God. 63 And as the LORD took delight in doing you good and multiplying you, so the LORD will take delight in bringing ruin upon you and destroying you. And you shall be plucked off the land that you are entering to take possession of it. 64 "And the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. 65 And among these nations you shall find no respite, and there shall be no resting place for the sole of your foot, but the LORD will give you there a trembling heart and failing eyes and a languishing soul. 66 Your life shall hang in doubt before you. Night and day you shall be

in dread and have no assurance of your life. 67 In the morning you shall say, 'If only it were evening!' and at evening you shall say, 'If only it were morning!' because of the dread that your heart shall feel, and the sights that your eyes shall see. 68 And the LORD will bring you back in ships to Egypt, a journey that I promised that you should never make again; and there you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but there will be no buyer." (Deuteronomy 28:1-68).

Application to the Nation of Israel.

At issue was obedience to the Lord's commands. The call for obedience was never in doubt, or at least never should have been. The phrase, "*If you will obey . . .*" or some similar form of the command shows up in verses 1, 2, 9, 13 and 14. The LORD's promise was that in response to His people's obedience, He will act favorably.

It was not that if the people tried to obey God's law that "luck" would be on their side, or that things could work out quite well. Rather, the Lord Himself promised to take affirmative action in their behalf. For example, we read statements like, *The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you (v.7)*. Or *The LORD will command the blessing on you in your barns and in all that you undertake (v.8)*. Or *The LORD will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in his ways (v.9)*. *And the LORD will make you abound in prosperity (v.11)*. *And the LORD will make you the head (v.13)*.

The problem is revealed in a statement of possibility or cause and effect such as "If you will not obey," there was going to be judgment or discipline. Consider about a half dozen of these very pointed statements in our text. *But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God or be careful to do all his commandments and his statutes (v.15)*. *Because you have forsaken me (v.20)*. *Because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God (v.45)*. *Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things (v.47)*. *If you are not careful to do all the words of this law that are written in this book (v.58)*. *Because you did not obey the voice of the LORD your God (v.62)*.

In response to that determined disobedience, the Lord will act in judgment. It is not just that circumstances would turn bad for the people, or that the nation as a whole would run into a spat of bad luck, or their enemies just naturally become powerful and nasty. God promised to take the initiative against His own people if they treat Him with stubbornness. God's promised initiative is revealed in statements like, *The LORD will send on you curses, confusion, and frustration in all that you undertake to do (v.20)*. Or *The LORD will make the pestilence stick to you (v.21)*. Or *The LORD will make the rain of your land powder. From heaven dust shall come down on you until you are destroyed (v.24)*. *The LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies (v.25)*. This is such an important issue that the promise shows up at least sixteen times in the text.

After hearing these words, no one in Israel should have had any doubt about the rules of the game. God communicated His law in clear and unambiguous terms. What He expected for maintaining fellowship was never in doubt. That He would bless obedience immensely was never in doubt. That He would punish disobedience thoroughly was never in doubt.

On the other hand, the question of the people's obedience was always in doubt. Were the millions of Israelites more likely or even more capable of obeying God than Adam and Eve were? The parents of this generation of Israelites had proven that no amount of love, provision, and displays of power from God were sufficient to make them obey.

The facts of Israel's history proves Israel's choice. Most of their history is a story of disobedience. At the outset, as Joshua was establishing the people in the land, Achan disobeyed God's clear instruction about not taking things dedicated to destruction. It might even be difficult to grasp that God held the entire nation guilty for the man's crime. *But the people of Israel broke faith in regard to the devoted things, And the anger of the LORD burned against the people of Israel (Joshua 7:1)*.

Another example of early disobedience was in the fact that the people of Epharim and Manasseh were not satisfied with their allotment and wanted something different (Joshua 17:14). Then there was the infamous period of the Judges which might best be described as 350 years of disaster in their relationship with God. And Israel's

first king displayed the essence of stubborn rebellion. Finally God dropped the hammer on Saul and sent word through the prophet Samuel, *For rebellion is as the sin of divination, and presumption is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the LORD, he has also rejected you from being king (1 Samuel 15:23).* Throughout their history, only a few of Israel's kings tried to obey God. And to this day, the nation of God's people is but a rebellious remnant.

Does God keep His promises? Yes. Therefore, much of Israel's history is a story of curses. God fulfilled His promised curses during the Judges period. We studied in the past that repeated cycle during the time of the Judges where there was the people's disobedience, which led to the God's promised curse fulfilled, which led to repentance and obedience, which led to promised blessing fulfilled, and repeat – again and again.

God fulfilled His promised curses with painful accuracy before He scattered Israel and sent Judah into captivity. Read the sad historical account of Syria's siege of Samaria. *Afterward Ben-hadad king of Syria mustered his entire army and went up and besieged Samaria. And there was a great famine in Samaria, as they besieged it, until a donkey's head was sold for eighty shekels of silver, and the fourth part of a kab of dove's dung for five shekels of silver. Now as the king of Israel was passing by on the wall, a woman cried out to him, saying, "Help, my lord, O king!" And he said, "If the LORD will not help you, how shall I help you? From the threshing floor, or from the winepress?" And the king asked her, "What is your trouble?" She answered, "This woman said to me, 'Give your son, that we may eat him today, and we will eat my son tomorrow.' So we boiled my son and ate him. And on the next day I said to her, 'Give your son, that we may eat him.' But she has hidden her son'" (2 Kings 6:24-29).*

Is it possible that the Holocaust under Hitler well demonstrated the same promise of God's curse for disobedience? Ongoing persecution of Jews is a reminder of God's curses for disobedience.

Application to Our Circumstances.

How is this text applicable to our circumstances? Or is it? As a nation, it is a little difficult for us to make application because no

other nation is equivalent to Israel. God chose to create only one nation to be His special people. It is true that in addition to Israel, God raises up and puts down all nations. Therefore, God creates all nations, establishes their boundaries, and determines the time of their existence, their size, their strength. But only one nation is God's special possession on earth.

However, various nations throughout history have been characterized by greater or lesser relationships with God. At times, some nations have sought to know God and serve Him by trying to keep His laws. Our own nation might be the greatest example of a nation that God raised up to bless as we tried to obey Him. Those days are past.

Because God's principles are eternal, it is possible that a physical nation on earth might experience a similar relationship with God. Over the years, sincere preachers in America have drawn that comparison because of God's promise to Solomon. Then the LORD appeared to Solomon in the night and said to him: *"I have heard your prayer and have chosen this place for myself as a house of sacrifice. When I shut up the heavens so that there is no rain, or command the locust to devour the land, or send pestilence among my people, if my people who are called by my name humble themselves, and pray and seek my face and turn from their wicked ways, then I will hear from heaven and will forgive their sin and heal their land" (2 Chronicles 7:12-14).*

Principally, God still blesses conformity to His commands. All civilized nations will have laws that reflect God's basic laws or they will not long endure. It is necessary for people to implement rules that demonstrate God's character to some extent in order for us to interact without destroying each other. From America's founding, it has been evident that our forefathers had a respect for God and the Bible. Therefore, our founding documents and original laws and constitution reflect an esteem and respect for God. Some people believe that America has for several years been the greatest nation in the world (one which other people try to break into) because God has blessed the people's obedience.

However, at this point, we as a society may well be proving that God is faithful to the other side of the equation also. That is because principally God also continues to curse people who reject His

commands. Sometimes God levels the results of the curse through drought or natural disasters. Sometimes His judgment comes through bad leadership. Sometimes it is a matter of a stronger nation overrunning the disobedient people. Today, America is in many ways under God's curse.

Is it possible to apply the principles of our text to the Church, Christians, the people of God? Christians are also God's chosen nation. We are a kingdom. We are not an earthly kingdom or nation. We are not relegated to the earth and to declination and deterioration all earthly kingdoms experience. We are an eternal, spiritual kingdom for now. Paul taught Christians in Colossae, *He [God] has delivered us from the domain of darkness and transferred us to the kingdom of his beloved Son (Colossians 1:13)*. James wrote, *Listen, my beloved brothers, has not God chosen those who are poor in the world to be rich in faith and heirs of the kingdom, which he has promised to those who love him? (James 2:5)*. And we read that in the end, *And made us a kingdom, priests to his God and Father, to him be glory and dominion forever and ever. Amen (Revelation 1:6)*.

Therefore, because of our relationship with Christ, Christians are subject to blessings and discipline. God promises to bless Christians who love Him. This is a great hope for us. *Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places (Ephesians 1:3)*.

But if we, the people of God, can count on His blessings, can we not also count on His discipline? Indeed. God does promise to discipline Christians who love Him but slip into sin and rebellion. Christians ought to be familiar with God's promise in the letter to the Hebrew Christians. *In your struggle against sin you have not yet resisted to the point of shedding your blood. And have you forgotten the exhortation that addresses you as sons? "My son, do not regard lightly the discipline of the Lord, nor be weary when reproved by him. For the Lord disciplines the one he loves, and chastises every son whom he receives." It is for discipline that you have to endure. God is treating you as sons. For what son is there whom his father does not discipline? If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons. Besides this, we have had earthly fathers who disciplined us and we respected*

them. Shall we not much more be subject to the Father of spirits and live? (Hebrews 12:4-9).

God is gracious. God is just. God is faithful. God's grace and discipline are tempered by His justice. He will always do right.