



EXPLORE THE BIBLE.

Numbers, Deuteronomy Sermon Series
Supports Session 11: Covenant Relationship

Sermon Title: “God is not Mocked’: We Reap what We Sow” (Deuteronomy 28:1-6)

Connection to Session 11

Throughout Deuteronomy, Moses spoke often, in many forms and various ways, of Israel’s need to obey God’s law when they entered the land of promise. Israel’s obedience was their side of the contractual obligation with the God of their ancestors who had redeemed them from slavery. In chapter 28, Moses powerfully summarized what God would do to and for Israel if they obeyed, and what he would do to and for Israel if they did not. In short, blessing upon blessing would “come and overtake” Israel if they would “obey the LORD.” But, if they did not obey, curse upon curse would “come and overtake” them (Deut. 28:2,15). God expected nothing but Israel’s best. In Deuteronomy 28:1-6, we find the promised blessings for Israel’s obedience.

Introduction/Opening

God, because of His perfect character, is always faithful to His promises. As the Lord revealed through a pagan seer’s mouth, “God is not a man, that he might lie, or a son of man, that he might change his mind.” The pagan asked rhetorically, therefore, “does he speak and not act, or promise and not fulfill?” (Num. 23:19). The obvious answer is no, because God’s people can know assuredly that whatever message God speaks it will be done. God’s declaration is that He will “bring it to pass”—no matter the message or to whom He declares the message (Ezek. 12:25). For whatever the word that proceeds from His mouth, God promises that it “will not return to me empty, but it will accomplish what I please” (Isa. 55:11). Even when the message seems difficult to fulfill—yes, even when the message seems well-nigh impossible to fulfill—God can and will fulfill it. When God promises that if His people “faithfully obey the LORD [their] God and are careful to follow all his commands,” then all manner of “blessings will come and overtake” them, we can know certainly that it will be done (Deut. 28:1-2). This promise of blessing is true for God’s people even when the obedience is hard, even when the obedience seems to yield no visible reward, and even when the obedience elicits mocking or suffering from one’s fellow man. God will bless His people when they obey Him. God’s people can expect nothing but the best from God if they give God their best. Moses speaks of this truth in the first half of Deuteronomy 28.

Outline

1. Careful and full obedience to God’s law was the condition of Israel’s reception of blessing (v. 1)

a) Moses was clear: If Israel desired the fullness of God’s blessings, then they would have to obey God’s law fully. Moses’s words to the people made this clear. Israel was obliged in

their covenant contract with the Lord to obey Him faithfully. Furthermore, they had to be “careful to follow all his commands.” The words “faithfully,” “careful,” and “all” leave no room for interpretation on the extent and quality of the obedience necessary for God’s people. Namely, if the people desired the covenant’s blessings, then they had to obey each and every command God had given them. Furthermore, they had to obey every part of each command to the fullest extent that obedience was possible whenever their circumstances required that obedience. God was expecting nothing less from Israel.

2. Moses’s general statements of the manifold blessings from the Lord (vv. 1-2,6)

a) Moses first provided two general statements about the blessings that Israel would enjoy for their covenant obedience. First, Moses stated that God would “put [them] far above all the nations of the earth” (Deut. 28:1). That is to say, the Lord’s blessings would be so abundant and full to Israel that no other nation would have been able to compare to their wealth, power, or influence. This sense of the general blessing is evident in Moses’s fuller description of the blessings in the next section (28:7-14). He spoke to Israel’s abundant wealth from the Lord in verse 12 when he stated that Israel would “lend to many nations,” but would not borrow. Moses related Israel’s immense power in verse 13 when he described their situation as one in which they would be “the head and not the tail” when they related to other nations. Lastly, Moses spoke about the influence Israel would have in verse 10 when he related that God’s blessings would be so abundant that nations would “stand in awe” of them.

b) Moses then stated, secondly, that “all these blessings [would] come and overtake” them (12:2). All the blessings Moses described in the following eleven verses would be theirs. God would not fail to fulfil one of them. The fullness of the blessings was to be such that Moses could only describe Israel as being overtaken by them. God promised to open his “abundant storehouse” of heaven and rain a deluge of blessing upon his people (28:12), such that they could have only recalled the imagery of the flood waters covering all of the earth’s high mountains to describe the breadth and depth of God’s blessings (Gen. 7:19-20). So, wherever Israel went, Moses stated they would be blessed when they came in and blessed when they went out (Deut. 28:6). God’s blessings would be a perpetual.

3. Moses’s specific statements of the manifold blessings from the Lord (vv. 3-6)

a) Moses stated that Israel would “be blessed in the city” if they obeyed God’s law (28:3). Though he does not clarify what this means, from what he says in the following verses, and from what is known about the difficult life of pre-modern cities, one can reasonably infer what Moses meant.¹ First, foreign enemies would not rise up against them to besiege the city, overtake it, destroy it, and exterminate or enslave its inhabitants (28:7,32). Second, the Lord would keep the inhabitants of Israel’s cities from “wasting disease, fever, inflammation, burning heat, drought, blight, and mildew”—the pestilences all too common in the cramped and disease-ridden confines of pre-modern cities (28:22). Third, because the Lord would “establish [them] as his holy people” (28:9), Israel’s cities would not be filled with the common crimes of oppression, robbery, and rape (28:29-31).

b) Moses promised that Israel would be “blessed in the country” for their obedience to God’s commandments (28:3). For a primarily agrarian society, such blessings would have been unspeakably valuable. Moses promised that there would be a threefold blessing of “offspring”

¹ Rodney Stark, *The Rise of Christianity* (Harper Collins, San Francisco: 1997): 147-162.

(28:11). First, Israel's offspring would be blessed. They would be fruitful and multiply. God would fulfill his promise to Abraham to make his people as numerous as the stars of the sky (Gen. 15:5). Second, the offspring of their produce would be blessed. Israel's "baskets and kneading bowls" (28:5) would be filled and overflowing with their fields' produce, for God would give rain in its season and bless all the work of their hands (28:12). Israel, if they obeyed, would not ever have to worry about rain, drought, or hard soil (28:23-24). Third, God would bless the "offspring of [their] livestock," the "young of [their] herds," and the "newborn of [their] flocks" (28:4). Israel, if they obeyed, would have had more than enough livestock for their land's cultivation, their tables' food, and the altar's sacrifices. They need not worry that their livestock would become plunder for other people (28:31).

4. Israel's blessing for their obedience would lead to the blessing of the peoples.

a) God promised Abraham, many generations before Moses's words in Deuteronomy 28, that if God blessed his descendants then "all the peoples on earth [would] be blessed through [them]" (Gen. 12:3). Moses recalled this promise when he stated that if Israel would "obey the commands of the LORD [their] God and walk in his ways" then "all the peoples of the earth would see that [they] bear the LORD's name, and they will stand in awe" of them (Deut. 28:9-10). Israel's obedience, therefore, was not only for their good but for the good of all the peoples. For as God told them at Horeb, although the whole earth is His, He chose them as His "own possession out of all the peoples" that, in their obedience to His law, they would be His holy "kingdom of priests" for the sake of all the peoples (Ex. 19:5-6). Israel would be blessed for the sake of being a blessing. This was always God's purpose for Israel. God would be gracious to them and bless them so that His "way may be known on earth, [His] salvation among all nations" (Ps. 67:1-2). God would bless them and "all the ends of the earth will fear him (67:7).

Conclusion

We ought not deceive ourselves as Christians for "God is not mocked," whatever "a person sows he will also reap" (Gal. 6:7). Just as Moses promised Israel, so Paul promised us: obedience to God's commands leads to God's blessings, while disobedience leads to God's curses. "The one who sows to his flesh will reap destruction from the flesh, but the one who sows to the Spirit will reap eternal life from the Spirit. Let us not get tired of doing good, for we will reap at the proper time if we don't give up" (6:8-9). There are blessings in our obedience to God's commands in this life and the life to come. This is why Paul states that "godliness is beneficial in every way, since it holds promise for the present life and also for the life to come. This saying is trustworthy and deserves full acceptance" (1 Tim. 4:8-9).

As Christians, we ought to take this promise to heart, and so "labor and strive" in dutiful, careful obedience to all our God's commands because "we have put our hope in the living God" (4:10). God's grace is not a license for moral laxity, but the grounds upon which we can "deny godlessness and worldly lusts," and by grace's power "live in a sensible, righteous, and godly way in the present age" awaiting "the appearing of the glory of our great God and Savior, Jesus Christ" (Titus 2:12-13). Christians, of all the earth's peoples, are those to be most eager to do good works for God has redeemed and cleansed us for that purpose. In addition, our righteous deeds, given by grace, not only are necessary for us to see the Lord (Heb. 12:14), but are also a necessary means by which God shines His light through us and draws all people to Himself (see

Matt. 5:16). So, then, let us “faithfully obey the LORD [our] God,” carefully following all His commands so that we will be blessed in our comings and our goings (Deut. 28:1,6).

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