

Eternal Consequences

Deuteronomy 27-28

Joe Jones November 15, 2020



Turn in your Bibles to Deuteronomy 27 as we continue this series through the book of Deuteronomy. As you're turning there, I wonder if you've ever been in a situation where a certain person or some event has negatively colored everything else in your life. Even though blessings are all around you, this one thing has soured everything else, casting a dark shadow over those blessings.

I've recently been recounting the many good things in my life. A wonderful wife and four healthy kids that make us laugh and cry. A home to live in with a few wooded acres and a creek that runs through them; I love living in the suburbs. Good food to eat and good drinks to drink. Meaningful friendships. A rewarding job. There are also hard things, but I surely have a lot to be thankful for—and I'll bet you do too.

Yet when I'm living in some kind of sin or am otherwise far from God, it affects everything else in my life. Nothing can really be enjoyed. A dark shadow is cast over the blessings. But when I'm near to the Lord, all is well and the blessings in my life can be enjoyed with thankfulness and freedom.

You see, there are very real consequences to the decisions we make, either for good or for bad. Those consequences affect not only the present; they can also impact eternity. The most important decision with the most profound and lasting consequences is this: will we choose to live for Christ? Will we choose life? That's been a theme of our series throughout this study in Deuteronomy. It makes a lot of sense, but it's not always easy to do.

Let's pray together, as we jump into Deuteronomy 27 and 28 to explore some of these themes.

Father, we pray that You would be with us as we study Your Word. We pray that You would speak through Your Word and encourage our hearts. We pray that You would convict and challenge us as necessary. We pray that You would comfort and console us where we're hurting. So we commit ourselves to You. We pray that Your Word would speak powerfully now. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Let's look at four simple observations from Deuteronomy 27 through 28.

1. Israel's covenant relationship with God was a profound and binding reality.

Let's begin with the word "covenant." We're in a church called New Covenant, but what does that word actually mean? In ancient times, a covenant was an agreement or a pact between two parties that included three specific elements. We can understand the entire book of Deuteronomy as one big covenant that Moses is laying out for the people of Israel. What are the three elements that are part of all ancient covenants?

- First there was what we might call a **historic prologue** or a historic preamble. This is the king coming to a people and saying, "Look at all the good things I've done for you, how I've rescued you and helped you. Look at all these gracious things I've done for you." We saw that in Deuteronomy 1 through 4—all the good things God did for Israel.
- The second part of a covenant is what are called the **stipulations**. How should the people now respond to what God has done for them? How should they obey the commands of the King Who has rescued them? Those stipulations are found in chapters five through 26. There we can read a bunch of commands that are good for Israel to obey.
- Now in chapter 27 we find ourselves at a turning point in the book of Deuteronomy and in this covenant, bringing us to the third aspect of a covenant: **the consequences**. Blessings are promised in response to obedience, but curses will be given for disobedience. This is an important part of ancient covenants.

Listen to the first eight verses of Deuteronomy 27, paying special attention to the focus on both the clarity of the covenant and the longevity of the covenant;

¹ Now Moses and the elders of Israel commanded the people, saying, "Keep the whole commandment that I command you today.

² And on the day you cross over the Jordan to the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones and plaster them with plaster. ³ And you shall write on them all the words of this law, when you cross over to enter the land that the LORD your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, has promised you. ⁴ And when you have crossed over the Jordan, you shall set up these stones, concerning which I command you today, on Mount Ebal, and you shall plaster them with plaster. ⁵ And there you shall build an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones. You shall wield no iron tool on them; ⁶ you shall build an altar to the LORD your God

of uncut stones. And you shall offer burnt offerings on it to the LORD your God, ⁷ and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and shall eat there, and you shall rejoice before the LORD your God.

This covenant is all about the joy of the people of Israel. Verse eight goes on to say, “*And you shall write on the stones all the words of this law very plainly.*”

To be in a covenant relationship with the Lord is not like many modern dating relationships. What are those like? Well, you can get out at any time. The rules of the relationship are not super-clear and there usually aren’t any concrete promises made. But this covenant with God was clearly engraved on stone.

We took a bike ride a couple Saturdays ago as a family. It was unusually warm and sunshiny. We came across a unique tree with branches that hung down and then grew back up. So a bunch of people had engraved their names in this tree. Usually there were two sets of initials, with a plus sign or a heart between them. What does it mean when people do that? It’s forever memorializing or establishing that relationship.

This is precisely why Israel was to engrave the words of the law on this stone when they entered the land of Canaan, so it would be very clear that “You’re in this for the long haul.” It was also really clear what the commandments were, so it would be super-evident if they rejected this law and why they would be receiving the consequences they did.

Did you know that you too, Christian, are in a covenant with God today through Jesus? It’s very clear what’s expected of us in this covenant. Often it’s not that we don’t know what to do. It’s an issue of the heart. It’s to reject the Lord and say, “This covenant relationship—yeah, it’s nice and all, but I’m turning away. I’m giving up. I’m out of this.” To do that, to turn away from your Lord, has staggering consequences. That’s the first observation from Deuteronomy 27 and 28.

2. God’s curse is caused by idolatry and injustice.

We’re going to talk about the contents of the curse later, but first, what brings on the curse? It’s idolatry and injustice. God is very serious about idolatry. Read with me Deuteronomy 27:9-15:

⁹ Then Moses and the Levitical priests said to all Israel, “Keep silence and hear, O Israel: this day you have become the people of the LORD your God. ¹⁰ You shall therefore obey the voice of the LORD your God, keeping his commandments and his statutes, which I command you today.”

¹¹ That day Moses charged the people, saying, ¹² “When you have crossed over the Jordan, these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. ¹³ And these shall stand on Mount Ebal for the curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. ¹⁴ And the Levites shall declare to all the men of Israel in a loud voice:

¹⁵ “Cursed be the man who makes a carved or cast metal image, an abomination to the LORD, a thing made by the hands of a craftsman, and sets it up in secret.’ And all the people shall answer and say, ‘Amen.’”

That’s idolatry. At that time, idolatry took the form of literally building images to bow down to and worship. At its heart, idolatry has to do with our desires and what we ultimately most want and trust. Listen to this quote by Tim Keller, defining idolatry:

An idol is anything more important to you than God, anything that absorbs your heart and imagination more than God, anything you seek to give you what only God can give... It can be family and children, or career and making money, or achievement and critical acclaim, or saving face and social standing. It can be a romantic relationship, peer approval, competence and skill, secure and comfortable circumstances, your beauty or your brains, a great political or social cause, your morality and virtue, or even success in the Christian ministry.

While none of these things are wrong, they can become what Deuteronomy calls an abomination—something God hates—when they take the place of God in our hearts. So whenever anything takes God’s place in your affections and desires deep down in your heart, this is something that is an abomination to God. This is something God hates. And it’s just as evil, Deuteronomy 27:15 says, when it’s done in secret. It doesn’t matter who’s watching. It doesn’t matter who sees. When you’re alone with that idol you cling to, that you put above God, it is just as much an abomination before the eyes of the One Who is most important and always watching.

This is similarly true with injustice. God is very serious about injustice, even if it’s done in secret. Look at Deuteronomy 27, starting at verse 15:

¹⁵ “Cursed be the man who makes a carved or cast metal image, an abomination to the LORD, a thing made by the hands of a craftsman, and sets it up in secret.’ And all the people shall answer and say, ‘Amen.’

¹⁶ *“Cursed be anyone who dishonors his father or his mother.’
And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’*

¹⁷ *“Cursed be anyone who moves his neighbor's landmark.’
And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’*

¹⁸ *“Cursed be anyone who misleads a blind man on the road.’
And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’*

¹⁹ *“Cursed be anyone who perverts the justice due to the
sojourner, the fatherless, and the widow.’ And all the people shall
say, ‘Amen.’*

These are matters of justice. All of these things have to do with the strong taking advantage of the weak. These things too are an abomination to our God.

Christian, if you want to know, “What does God want from me? What does He require of my life?” look at Micah 6:8: *“What does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?”* God’s curse is caused by idolatry and injustice. But what are the contents of God’s curse? What does it look like when God’s curse comes upon a people? This brings us to our third observation from these chapters.

3. God’s blessing is His overflowing favor that infiltrates every area of life.

Before we talk about God’s curse, let’s talk about God’s blessing. What is God’s blessing all about? God’s blessing is His overflowing favor that infiltrates every area of life. Let’s read Deuteronomy 28:1-6, paying special attention to how abundantly generous and pervasive God’s blessing is. It gets into every nook and cranny of our lives. When God pours out His blessing upon us, it is a beautiful, freeing, powerful and bright reality in our lives.

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.*

God’s blessing is found all over the place. Moses goes on to talk about how God’s blessing is His favor that invades every nook and cranny of our lives.

4. God's curse is His awful disfavor that infiltrates every area of life.

However, God's curse is His awful disfavor that infiltrates every area of life. If you were to go home and read through Deuteronomy 28:15 and the verses that follow, I think a word that might come to mind is "awful." When God pours out His curses, it's simply awful. Let's read some of these verses, beginning with verse 15:

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.

This passage goes on to spell out in an increasingly intensifying way God's curse is seen in disease and futile work, enemy invasion and domination, and exile—being kicked out of their homeland—and ultimately pain and suffering and death. It is a terrible, terrible situation when God curses His people.

The pressing question this morning is are you under God's blessing or are you under God's curse? I don't know if there's a more important question for us to answer as human beings. These words, blessing and curse, are used differently in our culture today than they're used in the Bible. We often think about curses in terms of witchcraft or in the arena of superstition. You're cursed for this amount of years if you see a black cat run across the road or if you walk under a ladder. You've probably heard some of these superstitious sayings about bad luck or a bad omen. That's how our culture often understands the word curse.

Blessing is almost a throwaway word with not much substance behind it. There's an author named William Osborn who wrote a book about this theme of blessing in the Bible:

From college acceptance letters to photos of lattes in the sun, Instagram photos are tagged the same: #blessed. While often devoid of much theological reflection, this kneejerk reaction to view the good things in life as God's blessing is not far from the mark. Our problem is not with labeling good gifts as God's blessings, but in dangerously narrowing our vision of blessing to the extent that we only think it exists in the form of acceptance letters and creamy lattes.

Blessing, biblically speaking, is big! It's expansive. But biblically, what is blessing ultimately about? It's ultimately about God's favor. And curse, biblically speaking, is ultimately all about God's displeasure. To be blessed is for God to be for you; to be cursed is for God to be against you. This is what blessings and curses are all about biblically.

I want to very quickly walk through seven Bible passages that speak to the theme of blessing and curse. Strap on your seatbelts because we're going to fly through these verses. But I think we'll get a big view of what God's blessing and God's curse are all about as we walk through these passages.

Passage #1: Genesis 1:28. *"And God blessed [Adam and Eve]. And God said to them, 'Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it and have dominion over the fish of the sea and over the birds of the heavens and over every living thing that moves on the earth.'" So from the beginning, God created His people and His desire and intent was to bless them with 100% blessing.*

Passage #2: Genesis 3:14. Sin enters the world, then *"the Lord God said to the serpent, 'Because you have done this, cursed are you above all livestock and above all beasts of the field; on your belly you shall go, and dust you shall eat all the days of your life.'" Satan, and all of creation with him, is cursed by God because of sin. We feel this today, don't we? Man, do we feel this in our sufferings and in the thorns that grow throughout the world. Ultimately it's because of sin that this curse has entered our world.*

Passage #3: Numbers 6:24-26. The good news is God has not abandoned His creation. He's brought blessing back into the world through Abraham and then through Abraham's children, the people of Israel. These words in Numbers 6:24-26 are words we speak over our kids many nights before they go to bed: *"The Lord bless you and keep you; the Lord make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you; the Lord lift up his countenance upon you and give you peace."* Isn't that beautiful? Isn't that the essence of the blessing we want to receive from God?

But then there are a couple verses tucked into Deuteronomy 21, in the midst of all these laws and commandments, that are very important. They feel a little obscure when we first read them. Deuteronomy 21:22-23 says, *"And if a man has committed a crime punishable by death and he is put to death, and you hang him on a tree, his body shall not remain all night on the tree, but you shall bury him the same day, for a hanged man is cursed by God."*

Passage #4: Then fast forward a couple thousand years and outside the city of Jerusalem there is a Man hanging on a tree. As we come to Matthew 27:46, we read, *"And about the ninth*

hour Jesus cried out with a loud voice, saying, ‘Eli, Eli, lema sabachthani?’ that is, ‘My God, my God, why have you forsaken me?’” Why did Jesus, the only pure and perfect Israelite, both human and the Son of God, put Himself under God’s curse? Why was Jesus, the only One Who did not deserve to be cursed, hanging on a tree? Why was this happening?

Passage #5: The Apostle Paul explains this very clearly in Galatians 3:13-14: *“Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us—for it is written, ‘Cursed is everyone who is hanged on a tree’—so that in Christ Jesus the blessing of Abraham might come to the Gentiles, so that we might receive the promised Spirit through faith.”*

You see, as Jesus was hanging on that tree, He was taking the curse our sins deserved. Isn’t that good news? We’re not going to receive the curse, Christian. You are no longer under the curse of God because Jesus hung on that tree for you, for your sins, taking your punishment. He did this so we might receive the best blessing of all, which is the gift of the Holy Spirit, Who will never leave us. What a blessing we have now because Jesus—out of great love for us—took our curse. What a hope we have for our future!

Passage #6: So we come to the final passage in Revelation 22:3, where it describes the day when Jesus returns and we’re in the new creation: *“No longer will there be anything accursed, but the throne of God and of the Lamb will be in it, and his servants will worship him.”* One day, God’s blessings will flow from His throne uninhibited by the curse that today hangs over the whole world and over each of our lives. What a hope we have as Christians! The Bible gives us this hope. Believer, have hope for your future today. You have very good things coming to you after death or after Jesus returns.

Let’s finish by talking about six takeaways from Deuteronomy 27 and 28 in this theme of blessing and curse.

First, let’s give thanks to the Lord right now for taking the curse for us. Right in our seats, right now, you can say, “Thank You, Lord Jesus.” He is a real person Who loves you and Who died for you. Right now you can thank Him for taking the curse you deserved from God. Do that right now.

Second, let’s cultivate an accurate picture of God’s character. Look at Deuteronomy 28 and how abbreviated the section on blessing is and how long the section on curse is. Why is that? We could conclude from this that God likes to curse people more than He likes to bless people. Actually, God needs to be provoked to curse. But what is most natural to our God is to bless. Part of the evidence of this is the almost unbelievable patience of God with Israel, who generation after generation after generation after generation are stiff-arming their

God. They're saying, "We don't want You. We don't like You. Stay out of our lives. We want to live our own lives. We want to worship idols." This is what Israel did, so literally for hundreds of years, God was patient with them—He was patient and He was patient, then He was patient some more. This history of Israel and of God's dealings with them is a window showing us what our God is like. He's resistant to cursing. He waits a long time. His deepest delight is to bless. This is our God.

Third, let's beware of being around the covenant but not in the covenant. It's dangerous to be around the covenant, but not in the covenant. It's dangerous to be around the church, but not in the church. It's dangerous to be around Christ, we might say, but not in Christ. Maybe some of you have been around the church for quite a while, yet there's no spiritual life inside you. You don't yet have this vibrant relationship with this Person Jesus, even though perhaps you've been trying to follow the rules of Christianity. It's a really dangerous thing to be hearing the good news about Jesus but not truly going all in with Him. It's better not to have heard at all, really.

Fourth, let's be clear that God's blessing comes in two stages. You might ask, "If God's blessing flows into every nook and cranny of life, why am I suffering? Why did my husband leave me? Why did my child die? Why did my teenager run away? Why do I have cancer? Why is there a pandemic? Why did I lose my job? Why is there injustice all over the place in our world?"

The answer is that God's blessing is coming to us in two stages. If we get these two stages mixed up, we're going to be in a lot of trouble and have a lot of unmet expectations. It's vital that we not get these two stages confused. In stage one, the blessing is centrally located in the work of the Spirit inwardly in our hearts, producing His fruit of love, joy and peace. This is where the blessing comes.

Then in stage two, the inward blessing goes explosively public when Jesus returns, when God's blessing will infiltrate every area of our lives in the new creation. The best part of the blessing, now and for eternity, is God Himself and being with Him.

The fifth takeaway is this. Let's be sobered by the terrible reality of hell. The curse God pronounced over Israel for their rejection of Him is just a small picture and warning of the terrible reality of hell itself. This is one of the hardest, if not the hardest, truths of the Bible. The reality is that all who reject God's love will suffer eternally and consciously in hell. Hell is a place that is filled with God's curse and completely devoid of God's blessing.

Right now on earth, all people—even those who reject Jesus—are experiencing immense blessings from God, like sunshine, friendships, food, daily provisions and a million other good things. But hell there is no blessing at all. This is really weighty stuff and there's no good thing there. It's all curse. This is not popular teaching. This is not easy teaching. This teaching breaks our hearts. Yet it's biblical teaching and we're called to receive it. We must take care, each of us personally and individually, that we're truly trusting in Christ with our lives. We are also motivated in this teaching to tell our friends and neighbors about Jesus, the only Savior. Who else can save from this but Jesus? He's a great Savior and we should be motivated by this to tell those around us.

The sixth takeaway is to trust that the blessings coming our way are better than we could ever imagine. We were in our car recently and a Christmas carol came on. That felt a little bit early, but now around mid-November, Christmas is really on the horizon. One of my favorite Christmas hymns is “Joy to the World.” There's a verse that's so hopeful in that hymn that goes like this:

No more let sins and sorrows grow
Nor thorns infest the ground
He comes to make His blessings flow
Far as the curse is found
Far as the curse is found
Far as, far as the curse is found

[From “Joy to the World” by Isaac Watts]

I ask, “How far is the curse found? Where are thorns in our world?” Well, the curse stretches from north to south, from east to west—and it is that far that God's blessing is going to flow one day. The glory of God is going to fill the earth as the waters cover the sea. You see, we're headed to a new creation that is filled with God's blessing and completely devoid of any curse. The new creation is what we really are headed toward today, Christian, and Jesus is coming back soon.

In the midst of a pandemic, we have a great hope for a new creation where there will be no more curse at all in the world and only blessing. We have a great hope to look forward to and God has big plans for us. So let's look forward to what God has promised us and trust that in reality Christ is coming back to rescue us.

Let's pray together.

Father, we give thanks to You, that amid the real and deep and painful sufferings many of us are facing in really profound ways, we have a hope and a future and that Your blessing

really will flow as far as the curse is found. We look forward to that day. But in the meantime, we want to live for You. We thank You that You have forgiven all our sins and set us free so we can live wholeheartedly and joyfully for Christ. We pray that You would empower us to do that. We're weak on our own, yet we can be strengthened by Your Spirit to live the way You want us to live. So we pray that You would help us in these ways as we commit ourselves to You now. In Jesus' name. Amen.

New Covenant Bible Church

4N780 Randall Road, St. Charles, IL 60175

(630) 584-2611 ♦ www.newcbc.org

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