

The Consequence of Choice
Deuteronomy 28
Newton Bible Church
March 15, 2020

If you've ever watched the NBA playoffs, you've probably been impressed by some superstar player like Michael Jordan, Kobe Bryant or LeBron James. At times, after a series of spectacular plays you may have heard the announcer say something like, "He's really in the zone!"

When a player is in the zone and that individual gets hold of the ball, it's going in the basket. Chalk it up to skill, momentum, passion, or even luck, but they're simply producing and winning in that moment.

We come this morning to consideration of Deuteronomy 28. One of the things that is self-evident in this chapter is that the "zone" God wants us to live in is obedience.

While there are marked similarities between this chapter and the chapter we considered last week, they are separate units. Chapter 27 prescribed the covenant renewal ceremony that was to be completed as soon as possible after Israel entered the promised land. Chapter 28 returns to the theme of the covenant that God had established with Israel, highlighting the blessings that accompany adherence to that covenant and the curses that follow if the covenant stipulations are not followed.

We do not have the time to explore each detail in this chapter or even to read all of the verses. We will read Moses' opening argument in verses 1-14, and then we will attempt to explore the theme of obedience and disobedience as it runs through the chapter. Let's begin:

Deuteronomy 28:1-14 (ESV)

28 "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. ²And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the Lord your God. ³Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. ⁴Blessed 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. ⁵Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. ⁶Blessed 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. ⁸The 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. ⁹The 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. ¹⁰And 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. ¹¹And 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. ¹²The 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. ¹³And 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.

Moses began by declaring that:

1. Obedience brings blessing (vv. 1-14)

a. If Israel chose to obey, it would be blessed with:

- I. Prosperity (God would take it upon Himself to prosper them:)
 - Everywhere they went - whether they were out in the field or at home in the city.
 - By giving them the blessing of children.
 - By multiplying their crops and herds.
 - By prospering their in-home businesses.
 - By safeguarding their accumulation of assets (“blessing on you in your barns”).
 - By placing them in the position of international lenders rather than borrowers.
 - In short, by making them a nation of Abrahams!
- II. Protection (God would take it upon Himself to:)
 - Resoundingly defeat their enemies, so that they would flee in disarray.
 - Generate fear of Israel in the surrounding nations; to the extent that they would be afraid to attack and eager to be seen as good neighbors.
 - Protect their lives and livelihood by regulating the climate of the land He had given to them.
 - Guarantee their peace and safety.
- III. Privilege (God would take it upon Himself to:)
 - Cause them to be identified with Himself (“holy to Himself”) – an identification so powerful that they would be regarded with the same fear in which the nations held the God who was able to deliver them from Egypt and thrust out all of their enemies in the land He had promised to them.
 - Make them the “head” rather than the “tail” – they would be the leader of nations rather than holding up the last place.
 - Set them high above all the nations of the earth. God intended Israel to be the leading nation in the world; with all other nations observing the blessings God lavished upon them, causing those nations to desire to enter into a similar relationship with this all-powerful God, thus becoming the light to the Gentiles God desired them to be!

All of these blessings pertained to the nation of Israel and one day will become reality during the millennial kingdom. Consequently, these specific beatitudes do not apply directly to us. The New Testament does inform us however that there are blessings available to us when we obey that bear some similarity to those promised Israel.

b. If we choose to obey, we are blessed with:

- I. Spiritual prosperity

- Despite what health & wealth preachers declare, nowhere in the New Testament are we promised financial prosperity. The promise that applies to us is provision of our needs, not our wants. God's blessings to Israel played out primarily in the physical realm, while our blessings play out primarily in the spiritual realm.
 - Consequently, the riches God does pour out upon us are of a different type than those Moses described. One difference is that they pertain to heavenly places.
 - **Ephesians 1:3** (ESV)³ 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,
 - These riches are rooted in His grace:
 - **Ephesians 2:4-7** (ESV)⁴ But God, being rich in mercy, because of the great love with which he loved us,⁵ even when we were dead in our trespasses, made us alive together with Christ—by grace you have been saved—⁶ and raised us up with him and seated us with him in the heavenly places in Christ Jesus,⁷ so that in the coming ages he might show the immeasurable riches of his grace in kindness toward us in Christ Jesus.
 - They include an inheritance guaranteed by Him. Paul prayed:
 - **Ephesians 1:18** (ESV)¹⁸ having the eyes of your hearts enlightened, that you may know what is the hope to which he has called you, what are the riches of his glorious inheritance in the saints,
 - These riches also include understanding that comes from God alone. Paul prayed:
 - **Colossians 2:2** (ESV)² that their hearts may be encouraged, being knit together in love, to reach all the riches of full assurance of understanding and the knowledge of God's mystery, which is Christ,
 - All of these riches are found in Christ. This is why George Beverly Shae sang:
 I'd rather have Jesus than silver or gold
 I'd rather be His than have riches untold
- II. Divine protection
- The divine protection Israel would receive was protection from disease and enemy alike. There are those today who would claim the same blessing, but they are either misled or intentionally misleading. The protection promised by our Savior is of a completely different sort. He said:
 - **John 10:27-29** (ESV)²⁷ My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me.²⁸ I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.²⁹ My Father, who has given them to me, is greater than all, and no one is able to snatch them out of the Father's hand.
 - The divine protection we have is that which protects our soul. Jesus said:
 - **Matthew 10:28** (ESV)²⁸ And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. Rather fear him who can destroy both soul and body in hell.
 - Though He may allow our physical bodies to be damaged or even killed, we are completely secure in Him. He will never leave us or forsake us!
- III. Privilege
- We have the privilege of having been adopted as God's children:

- **1 John 3:1-2** (ESV) ³ See what kind of love the Father has given to us, that we should be called children of God; and so we are. The reason why the world does not know us is that it did not know him. ² Beloved, we are God's children now, and what we will be has not yet appeared; but we know that when he appears we shall be like him, because we shall see him as he is.
- We have the privilege of the indwelling Spirit. Jesus promised:
- **John 14:16-17** (ESV) ¹⁶ And I will ask the Father, and he will give you another Helper, to be with you forever, ¹⁷ even the Spirit of truth, whom the world cannot receive, because it neither sees him nor knows him. You know him, for he dwells with you and will be in you.
- He fulfilled that promise at Pentecost and now everyone who trusts in Him receives the indwelling Spirit at the moment of salvation.
- We have the privilege of fellowship with Him and His children:
- **1 John 1:7** (ESV) ⁷ But if we walk in the light, as he is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus his Son cleanses us from all sin.
- These are only a few samples of the privileges available to us in walking in obedience to our Savior!

Obedience brings blessings. Let's return to our text to see what disobedience brings:

Deuteronomy 28:15-20

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.

2. Disobedience brings disaster (vv. 15-68)

- The rest of the chapter spells out in remarkable prophetic accuracy how these curses would play out in Israel's future. We will not take time to read all of these descriptions, but we will allude to them as we consider how disobedience brings disaster. We learn here that:
 - a. If Israel chose to disobey, blessings are reversed:
 - I. Israel will experience disease and drought instead of prosperity
 - Instead of the health needed to become prosperous, "wasting disease and fever (v. 22); the boils of Egypt with tumors and scabs and itch of which you cannot be healed (v.27); madness and blindness and confusion of mind (v. 28); grievous boils of which you cannot be healed from the sole of your feet to the crown of your head (v. 34); all the diseases of Egypt of which you are afraid (v. 60), every

- sickness and affliction not recorded in the law until you are destroyed “(v. 61) will all be brought upon them by the God they have abandoned.
- Instead of the climate needed to sustain prosperity, “drought with blight and mildew (v. 22), the heavens shall be bronze and the earth iron (v. 23), the rain powder and dust (v. 24), you will gather little for the locust shall consume it (v. 38), worm shall eat the vines (v. 39), olives shall drop off (v. 40), hunger and thirst” (v.48) will mark a climate turned against them by the God they have abandoned.
 - Consequently, their prosperity would be forfeited to their enemies.
- II. Israel will experience defeat and deportation instead of protection
- Instead of their enemies fleeing from them, “the LORD will cause you to be defeated before your enemies” (v. 25), flee seven ways before them (25), you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you (v. 48), they shall besiege you in all your towns (52), leading to the unthinkable atrocity of cannibalism (vv.53-57), all a result of God removing His protection from them and using other nations to chastise them.
 - Instead of dwelling securely in the land of promise, “your sons and daughters shall be given to another people (v. 32), the LORD will bring you and your king to a nation that neither you nor your fathers have known (v.36), the LORD will bring a nation against you from far away (v. 49) who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young (v. 50), the LORD will scatter you among all peoples from one end of the earth to the other (v. 64), and among these nations you shall find no respite (v. 65), and the LORD will bring you back in ships to Egypt (v. 68); these deportations also a result of God removing His protection from them and using other nations to chastise them.
- III. Israel will experience subordination instead of privilege
- Rather than fulfilling God’s desire for them to be the head rather than the tail, “you shall be only oppressed and robbed continually and there shall be no one to help you (v. 29), you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually (v. 33), the sojourner who is among you shall rise higher and higher above you, and you shall come down lower and lower (v. 42), he shall be the head and you shall be the tail (v. 44), whereas you were as numerous as the stars of heaven you shall be few in number (v. 62), you shall offer yourselves for sale as slaves but there will be no buyer (v. 68).
 - The curses Moses spelled out in these 54 verses were prophetically 100% accurate.
 - The Assyrian invasion and deportation of the northern kingdom of Israel is accurately described in verses 45 forward.
 - The cannibalism prophesied in verse 53 forward actually happened:
 - **2 Kings 6:28-29** (ESV) ²⁸And 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.’ ²⁹So 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.”

- The fulfillment of the prediction that they would be brought back to Egypt in ships was recorded by Josephus in his account of the wars of Vespasian and Titus. The Jews themselves admit that Deuteronomy 28:68 was literally fulfilled when Titus transported myriads of Jews to Egypt to be employed in public works or to fight in the amphitheater following Titus' reduction of Jerusalem and destruction of the temple.
 - All of these resulted in the subordination that Israel has suffered throughout the centuries. Even though we have seen a return to their land in this last century, the blessings that Moses described await their fulfillment in the millennial kingdom. Disobedience always bring disaster!
- b. If we choose to disobey, blessings are diminished
- I. We will experience diminished fellowship instead of spiritual prosperity
 - If we are truly saved, our salvation is secure, and every spiritual blessing is still available to us when we acknowledge our disobedience and seek forgiveness. Until we confess that sin, the enjoyment of blessings is severely diminished. David expressed the agony of this diminished fellowship:
 - **Psalms 32:1-4 (ESV)** 32 Blessed is the one whose transgression is forgiven, whose sin is covered. ² Blessed is the man against whom the Lord counts no iniquity, and in whose spirit there is no deceit.³ For when I kept silent, my bones wasted away through my groaning all day long. ⁴ For day and night your hand was heavy upon me; my strength was dried up as by the heat of summer
 - Continuing in this condition for a prolonged period may even lead to questioning our relationship with our Heavenly Father. The enemy delights in suggesting to us that we never truly knew Him.
 - This is a miserable place to live – and that misery is a gift of grace from our Father administered through His Spirit. It is meant to drive us back into His arms. If disobedience had no consequences, we would be even more prone to wander than we are!
 - II. We will experience divine chastisement instead of divine protection
 - The writer of Hebrews admitted that none of us enjoy finding ourselves in this place. That writer reminded us that this too is God's grace, even though it is not pleasurable.
 - Hebrews 12:7-9 (ESV) ⁷ 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? ⁸ If you are left without discipline, in which all have participated, then you are illegitimate children and not sons.⁹ 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?
 - This chastisement is actually proof positive that we are His children. When we disobey and experience His chastisement it is a gift of grace that is also meant to drive us into His arms. If we disobeyed and He did not chastise us, it would either mean that He does not love us (and that cannot be!) or that we are not His.

- When chastisement comes, we ought to be grateful that He loves us enough to discipline us. The temporary loss of a sense of His protection is a small price to pay to drive us back into His arms!
- III. We will experience estrangement instead of privilege
 - The privileges He extends to us are meant to reassure us that we are His own and that He is continually caring for us. His Spirit conveys a sense of His presence and assurance of these privileges to us.
 - When we disobey, the Spirit suspends reassurance and concentrates upon conviction of sin. This is meant to lead us to repentance and restoration – as quickly as possible. All of our privileges are still intact, but they will not be enjoyed until we have accepted the gift of repentance the Holy Spirit is offering and inviting us to receive.
 - This heaviness of spirit that feels like estrangement is actually proof positive that we are His and He will not let us go. How the Spirit longs for us to confess and be restored! What joy is available when we do!

As we move toward application of the truths found in this text, we must consider the fact that Moses knew that the Israelites would not obey and that every one of the curses would become sad reality in Israel's life. Because we have the entire Word of God, we understand why this took place:

3. Obedience is only possible "in-Christ" (Scripture teaches that:)
 - a. "dead" people have no choice.
 - Paul described the condition of everyone who is not in Christ:
 - **Ephesians 2:1-3 (ESV)** ² And you were dead in the trespasses and sins ² in which you once walked, following the course of this world, following the prince of the power of the air, the spirit that is now at work in the sons of disobedience— ³ among whom we all once lived in the passions of our flesh, carrying out the desires of the body and the mind, and were by nature children of wrath, like the rest of mankind.
 - Paul is not talking about physical but spiritual death. Just as we would not expect a corpse to be able to choose what will be on the buffet table at the meal following the funeral, we cannot expect someone who is spiritually dead to choose to obey God's instructions.
 - Instead, those who are spiritually dead (even and sometimes especially the religious ones) are following the lead of God's enemy. That enemy deceives them into thinking that they are choosing. The reality is that they are always and only choosing disobedience, even in their efforts to please whatever god they think they are following! Dead people have no choice!
 - b. "live" people have a choice
 - Paul also described the position of those who have been born again and are in Christ:
 - **Romans 6:8-11 (ESV)** ⁸ Now if we have died with Christ, we believe that we will also live with him. ⁹ We know that Christ, being raised from the dead, will never die again; death no longer has dominion over him. ¹⁰ For the death he died he died to

sin, once for all, but the life he lives he lives to God. ¹¹ So you also must consider yourselves dead to sin and alive to God in Christ Jesus.

- Because we have been made alive spiritually we now have the capability of choosing to obey. If this were not true, we would not be commanded to:
 - **Romans 6:12-13** (ESV) ¹² Let not sin therefore reign in your mortal body, to make you obey its passions. ¹³ Do not present your members to sin as instruments for unrighteousness, but present yourselves to God as those who have been brought from death to life, and your members to God as instruments for righteousness.
 - Just as dead people have no choice, live people do have a choice! Furthermore, live people have a model to follow and a Master to obey:
- c. Obedience is following Christ's lead
- The good news is that we do not have to do this alone. Just as God was graciously active in our salvation, He is actively involved in our obedience:
 - **Philippians 2:12-13** (ESV) ¹² Therefore, my beloved, as you have always obeyed, so now, not only as in my presence but much more in my absence, work out your own salvation with fear and trembling, ¹³ for it is God who works in you, both to will and to work for his good pleasure.
 - Obedience brings far deeper pleasure than sin, both now and in the long run. This blessing is not merely the absence of punishment, but the presence of favor. Obedience is not simply something we do for God, but something we do with God as a way to experience more of Him.
 - Christ provides more than an example of obedience; He demonstrates the deep and abiding joy of obeying God. He obeyed the Father not only because it was right but because it was more satisfying. The writer of Hebrews declared:
 - **Hebrews 12:1-2** (ESV) ¹² Therefore, since we are surrounded by so great a cloud of witnesses, let us also lay aside every weight, and sin which clings so closely, and let us run with endurance the race that is set before us, ² looking to Jesus, the founder and perfecter of our faith, who for the joy that was set before him endured the cross, despising the shame, and is seated at the right hand of the throne of God.
 - Jesus Himself assured us that obedience is the pathway of joy:
 - **John 15:10-11** English Standard Version (ESV) ¹⁰ If you keep my commandments, you will abide in my love, just as I have kept my Father's commandments and abide in his love. ¹¹ These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.
 - If we want to experience the joy of God, we must follow Christ's lead and in the power of His Spirit exercise our ability to choose, choosing to obey.

This morning every single one of us here is in one of two camps; the camp of dead people who have no choice or the camp of live people who do have a choice. Allow me to close with a challenge to the members of each camp:

- If the description of the curses for disobedience in this chapter have made you realize this morning that you are a member of the camp of the dead, that is the Spirit working in your heart, inviting you to move from death to life. Do not delay! Accept the gift of repentance and the gift of life by trusting in Christ alone to save you. Please talk to one of us this

morning and ask how you might accept this incomparable gift. You are being offered the gift of life – do not turn away!

- Perhaps the descriptions of blessings and curses in this chapter have made you realize that while you are a member of the camp of the living, you are not experiencing the joy of obedience that is available in Christ. Too many of us have forgotten that forgiveness alone is not the sweetest gift God gives sinners. It is a far greater joy when He not only forgives our iniquity but replaces it with Spirit-empowered conformity to Christ. We have found relief and comfort in the Gospel but may be forfeiting a greater blessing than relief. Plead with Him today to help you move forward in the joy of obedience. This is a prayer He delights to answer.

Prayer