



BLESSINGS AND CONSEQUENCES

Deuteronomy 27–28

The highest motivation for obeying God is love for Him. But we also need rewards for obedience and consequences for disobedience to move us to faithfully follow Him. This is what stands behind the instructions for Israel’s covenant renewal in Deuteronomy 27–28.

As we continue our Wisdom Journey in Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28, we need to remember that a new generation of Israelites are standing on the threshold of the promised land. They’re up at the front door, ready to step in.

Few of them are old enough to remember the awesome glory of God back there on Mount Sinai forty years earlier. That’s when God gave Israel His covenant and Israel promised to obey all He commanded.

Well, a lot has happened since then. This new generation must personally voice their own commitment to God’s covenant. Moses will not witness this because he’s going to die before the children of Israel enter the land, but he does describe the form this renewal ceremony should take. Let’s look at Deuteronomy 27, and listen to Moses deliver what we will call *covenant renewal instructions*.

Moses has Israel’s tribal elders stand with him as he begins in verse 2-3:

“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. And you shall write on them all the words of this law.”

They are to carry these engraved stones from the Jordan River to Shechem, more than thirty miles away. Shechem is where Abraham had first built an altar to the Lord nearly seven hundred years earlier.

Israel is to build an altar at Shechem between two round-top mountains, Mount Gerizim to the south and Mount Ebal to the north. And on this altar, Moses says here in verse 6:



Stone altar from Megiddo



“You shall offer burnt offerings . . . to the LORD your God, and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and shall eat there, and you shall rejoice before the LORD.”

The burnt offering communicated their commitment to the covenant, and the peace offering communicated their thanksgiving for the covenant.

Now in verse 9, Moses and the priests speak to the nation Israel:

“This day you have become the people of the LORD your God. You shall therefore obey the voice of the LORD your God, keeping his commandments.”

In other words, this is a rededication service, and the nation’s leaders are saying, “We want all of you to recommit yourselves to obeying the Lord as His special people.”

Moses then appoints six tribes to stand on Mount Gerizim and the other six on Mount Ebal. The priests will stand between them at this altar in Shechem. The tribes standing on Mount Gerizim will represent the blessings of obeying God’s covenant, and those standing over on Mount Ebal will represent the consequences for disobeying it.

In verse 14, Moses tells the Levites that when all the tribes are in place, they are to speak “in a loud voice.” Here is what they are to say—verse 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.”

Then the people are to respond by saying “Amen,” which means, “let it be so.” The priests will then go on to deliver eleven more curses, and each time the people will shout, “Amen”—“you’re right; let it be so.”

These curses or consequences relate to everything from failing to worship God to dishonoring parents, perverting justice, and engaging in immorality. The last item in the list, here in verse 26, just sort of sums up the main issue: “Cursed be anyone who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.” And with that, Moses concludes the covenant renewal instructions.

In chapter 28, Moses delivers what we will call the *covenant renewal conditions*. Here we find a number of conditional statements: *If* they obey God’s commands, here is what will happen; and *if* they disobey, then this will happen.

Moses begins by encouraging the nation in verse 2, “All these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God.” His blessings are just going to overtake them—and who doesn’t want to be overtaken by the blessings of God? All Israel has to do is obey.

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The specific blessings for obedience to the Lord listed in verses 3-6 are fertile families, fertile cattle, and fertile ground for bearing crops. Verses 7-12 promise the protection of God as He defeats their enemies, fills their barns, and even causes other nations to marvel at this remarkable God and His chosen people. No



one will be able to ignore the fact that Israel’s families are growing, their herds and flocks are multiplying, and the heavens just seem to be sending them rain for the crops at just the right time.

What is evident here is that God is eager to bless His people. He loves them, and He tells them how they can live so that their lives are blessed and overflowing with joy!

At the same time, God tells His people what they can expect if they refuse to live by His word. Here is the warning for disobedience and rebellion—verse 15: “But if you will not obey the voice of the LORD your God . . . then all these curses shall come upon you.”

If they decide to forsake God’s covenant after rededicating themselves to it, they will suffer the consequences—and that principle remains true to this day for anyone. Solomon wrote that the way of the sinner is filled with thorns and snares (Proverbs 22:5). It’s a miserable path, no matter how much you have—if you don’t have the Lord.

Now from verse 15 to verse 68, the consequences of disobedience are laid out for every generation of Israel to ponder. Several times throughout this lengthy list of curses, Israel is reminded of the reason for their suffering: “on account of the evil of your deeds” (verse 20); “because you did not obey the voice of the LORD” (verse 45); “because you did not serve the LORD” (verse 47).

Friend, don’t avoid reading all these verses. I can see several lessons in this covenant renewal ceremony and the rehearsing of the blessings and curses that apply to believers today. Let me give you just two.

The first one is this: *God’s goodness should motivate our obedience.* Israel has experienced the blessings of God in their past, and they have been promised God’s blessing in the future. It’s as if Moses is saying to them—and to us—“Listen, let God’s goodness, in

the past *and* in the future, move you, motivate you, to obey Him in the present.”

The second lesson is this: *God’s consistent discipline should discourage our disobedience.*

Moses has delivered in these fifty-four verses a series of consequences for disobeying the Lord. This is the kind of stuff that God disciplined Israel for in the past, and this new generation should know better.

Moses is effectively saying, “Don’t go there; don’t repeat history. Allow God’s consistent discipline to put a stop to any thought of disobedience.”

The God of Israel has not changed. He’s your God today, through faith in His Son, Jesus Christ. Obedience still matters. It will still bring freedom and joy to your life. And your disobedience will still bring discipline because God cares too much to let you wander away too far.

Name as many characteristics of God’s nature as you can. How does this list encourage you to trust and obey God’s word? What practical ways might you daily remind yourself of who God is so that your heart is eager to obey His word?

How does 1 John 4:8b encourage you to fully embrace the consequences of your sin? What spiritual life-lessons have you learned from embracing the consequences of sin? Why might it be a good idea to wisely share these life lessons with your yet to be saved family and friends?

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