

Deuteronomy 28: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Deuteronomy chapter 28 And the young of your flock Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl Blessed shall you be when you come in And blessed shall you be when you go out 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 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 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 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 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 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 And the Lord shall 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 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 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 Cursed shall you be in the city And cursed shall you be in the field Cursed shall be your basket And your kneading bowl 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 Cursed shall you be when you come in And cursed shall you be when you go out 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 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 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 And the heavens over your head shall be bronze And the earth under you shall be iron The Lord will make the rain of your land powder From heaven dust shall come down on you Until you are destroyed

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 And your dead body shall be food For all the birds of the air And for the beasts of the earth And there shall be no one to frighten them away The Lord will strike you with the boils of Egypt And with tumours and scabs and itches Of which you cannot be healed The Lord will strike you with madness And blindness and confusion of mind 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 You shall betroth the 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 fruits 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

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 A nation that you have not known Shall eat up the fruit of your ground And of all your labours And you shall be only oppressed And crushed continually So that you are driven mad By the sights that your eyes see 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 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 And you shall become a horror A proverb And a byword among all the peoples Where the Lord will lead you away You shall carry much seed into the field And shall gather in little For the locusts shall consume it 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 You shall have olive trees Throughout all your territory

[5 : 03] But you shall not anoint yourself with the oil For your olives shall drop off You shall father sons and daughters But they shall not be yours For they shall go into captivity The cricket shall possess all your trees And the fruit of your ground The sojourner who is among you Shall rise higher and higher above you And you shall come down lower and lower He shall lend to you And you shall not lend to him He shall be the head And you shall be the tail 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 They shall be a sign And a wonder against you And your offspring forever Because you did not serve The Lord your God With joyfulness and gladness of heart Because of the abundance of all things 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 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 A hard-faced nation Who shall not respect the old Or show mercy to the young 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 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 Then the Lord Will bring on you And your offspring Extraordinary afflictions Affliction severe And lasting And sicknesses Grievous and lasting And he will bring Upon you again All the diseases Of Egypt Of which you were afraid And they shall Cling to you 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 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 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 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 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 Your life shall hang In doubt before you Night and day You shall be in dread And have no assurance Of your life 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 And the Lord Will bring you Back in ships To Egypt A journey That I promised you 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 In Deuteronomy Chapter 28 Moses lays out Blessings and curses Before Israel The book of Deuteronomy Is shaped like A covenant document It begins with A preamble In verses 1 to 5 Of chapter 1 Then a historical prologue In chapter 1 Verse 6 To chapter 4 Verse 49 Followed by General stipulations In chapters 5 To 11 Which lay out The ten commandments Followed by a reflection Upon the meaning Of the first commandment Then in chapters 12 To 26 We have specific stipulations And now In chapters 27 To 28 Blessings and curses This will be followed By witnesses And then a concern For succession At the end Here blessings

[10:08] Are followed by curses There are four times As many curses Than blessings Some commentators Suggest that this Is an indication Of the fact That the curse Would be a far more Determinative reality For Israel's future As a result Of their unfaithfulness The juxtaposition Of a way of blessing And a way of curse Is found on various Occasions in scripture Perhaps we could trace The theme all the way Back to the Garden of Eden The tree of the knowledge Of good and evil Which is associated With the threat of death And the tree of life On the other hand Which will they choose?

Or we can think about Leviticus Which has a long section Devoted to blessings And curses The book of Psalms Begins with a psalm Speaking of the blessing Of the person Who meditates upon the law Chapter 9 of Proverbs Explores the contrast Between the way of wisdom And the way of folly Matthew chapter 5 Gives us the blessings Of the Beatitudes Which correspond With the woes Of chapter 23 Various other examples Could be listed Within the opening verses We have a list Of different ways In which Israel Will be blessed A sort of formula Of blessing Blessed are you And these blessings Are paralleled closely With the curses In verses 16 to 19 The blessings here Are followed by promises To Israel If it is faithful Promises of blessings Upon their relations With the nations Their fruitfulness The fruitfulness Of their land And their animals Their standing before God And their standing Among the nations And the curses Which take up Most of the chapter Begin in verse 15 We should immediately Recognise the symmetry Between verses 1 to 6

And 15 to 19 There are two ways One leading to life And the other to death Edward Woods Observes a bookended pattern To verses 23 to 42 It moves from Agricultural disaster To Israel being a horror To others To incurable boils To madness and blindness To exploitation of Israel To the threat of futility And then back again Exploitation Madness and blindness Boils Israel being a horror To others And then agricultural disaster This is the sort of calamity That will befall Israel If they break the covenant And at the very centre of it Is the threat of futility A threat of futility That reminds us of Deuteronomy chapter 20 Verses 5 to 7 And the law for the men Who would be exempt From being called up for war Then the officers shall speak To the people Saying Is there any man Who has built a new house And has not dedicated it Let him go back to his house Lest he die in the battle And another man dedicate it And is there any man Who has planted a vineyard

And has not enjoyed its fruit Let him go back to his house Lest he die in the battle And another man enjoy its fruit And is there any man Who has betrothed the wife And has not taken her Let him go back to his house Lest he die in the battle And another man take her The Lord's intention for Israel Is that no Israelite Experience futility But futility will be the consequence Of Israel's rebellion If Israel turns against the Lord They will not experience The fruitful and successful life In the land That the Lord has intended for them Rather their lives And their work Will be rendered futile And be frustrated Much of what we read In this chapter Exhibits the same sort of Supernaturalism As we saw in the book of Exodus We can often think In terms of naturalism The typical functioning of nature And supernaturalism God miraculously intervening In the course of nature However at many points In the Pentateuch We see hypernaturalism The manifestation of the Lord's power In the functioning of nature

Not as a power over it Or a suspension of Or intervention within it But as a power manifested through it Nature itself accomplishes The will of the Lord Not through a breaking Or suspension of its rules But as a demonstration That nature is the creation Of the Lord And is therefore subject to him The same hypernaturalism Is displayed in these Blessings and curses The consequences of Israel's sin Will come by active Divine punishment But they will also follow As a sort of natural consequence Israel's life is precarious In many ways They aren't especially powerful Or numerous They will be in a land Surrounded by many more Powerful nations A difficult land To keep hold of In certain respects They will be dependent Upon the rain For their crops And agriculture In the wilderness The Lord showed That he would hypernaturally Provide for and protect Israel If they just depended upon him However If they don't trust the Lord Nature will start to threaten And turn against them

[14 : 42] In various ways The protective hedges That the Lord has erected Around them Will be removed And the Lord himself Will drive them off The comprehensive character Of the Lord's blessings And curses Also show the extent Of his power here God is active In every area Of Israel's reality Not just in some areas The God of Israel Does not have A limited divine portfolio He is involved In every aspect of reality In verse 45 The curses are described Like pursuers That will overtake Israel They will hunt them down There is As there often is A poetic justice To many of the judgments For instance If they will not serve The Lord They will serve A foreign nation If they will not Cling to the Lord Diseases will cling to them There is a threat Given of an iron yoke From a foreign captor In verse 48 This is referred to In Jeremiah chapter 28 Verse 14 For thus says The Lord of hosts The God of Israel I have put upon The neck Of all these nations An iron yoke

To serve Nebuchadnezzar King of Babylon And they shall serve him For I have given to him Even the beasts Of the field And the warnings here Anticipate the later Babylonian captivity That Israel will be Brought into As the chapter Nears its end There are the most Horrific and chilling Images of what Will befall Israel Some of which Were actually recorded In the histories of scripture For instance 2nd Kings chapter 6 Verses 24 to 29 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 cab of a 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 wine press 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 This particular act Is seen as the most Horrific act imaginable The sign of Israel Being reduced To the lowest Possible condition The final verses Of this chapter Describe a wasting Away of Israel As their entire history Rots away And unravels They will be afflicted By the diseases Of Egypt They will wither Away from a countless Multitude Into a few scattered And fear ridden Stragglers They will eventually Be shipped back To Egypt But won't even Be desired as slaves So much will they Be despised And abhorred By the nations And this anti-exodus Will render them Much worse off Than they ever were Even at the first God is the lord And the giver Of life And those that Forsake him Choose death A question to consider

The purpose of laws And sanctions Can be educative Designed to direct us Towards that Which is good for us In a liberating way Rather than being designed For the purpose Of restricting And punishing us What are some of the ways In which the curses Of Deuteronomy 28 Could be argued To have such a purpose For the purpose of the