

THE WORD OF GOD

FOR THE

PEOPLE OF GOD

THE SERMONS IN DEUTERONOMY



Lesson 9: Bless You! Curse You!

Deuteronomy 28

Lesson Summary and Objectives

Summary

One final time, Moses lays out blessings and curses for the people of Israel as they enter the new land. God's faithfulness and wrath are both very clear.

Learning Outcomes

- Participants can explain the relationship between love/fait h/obedience.
- Participants can evaluate the importance of individual vs. communal responsibility to God.
- Participants can discuss Moses' list of blessings for staying faithful and how they might apply to us.

Teaching Outline

Invite

- Are you more motivated by the promise of *rewards* for *good* choices, or by the fear of *punishments* for *bad* choices? What about your kids (if you have them)?

Inform

Read Deuteronomy 28:1-14

- The beginning two verses serve as an introductory statement: obey, and God will "set you high above all the nations" and "all these [following] blessings will come on you" (1-2).
- What follows are two sets of blessings, one in a *passive* voice (i.e., things that will just *happen* to Israel), and one in an *active* voice (i.e., things that God will *do* for Israel).
 - Passive:
 - You'll be blessed in the city and country (3).
 - Remember that the "you" in these verses is *plural*, so it's talking about the people as a collective whole, not individual persons.
 - Your children and livestock will be blessed (4).
 - Your basket and kneading trough will be blessed (5).
 - You'll be blessed coming in and going out (6).
 - Active:
 - The Lord will grant that your enemies are defeated (7).
 - The Lord will bless your barns and land (8).

- The Lord will establish you as his people and give you prosperity (9, 11).
 - Note the reason given: "all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord..." (10).
- The Lord will send rain (12).
- The Lord will make you the head, not the tail (13).
- The section concludes with a warning: do not turn aside from the commands (14).

Investigate

- Do you see any difference in the kinds of things promised in the *passive* section (3-6) and the *active* section (7-13)? If so, what?
- Why do you think some blessings are listed in the passive voice, and other with God as the active subject? Is this just a grammatical quirk or something more?
- In general, what kinds of things seem to be promised as blessings here?
- What blessings named in this chapter most directly tie back to God's covenant with Abraham and/or other previous promises?

Teachers, skim through Deut 28:15-68. You'll notice the curses section is much longer. Be prepared to summarize it for your class. Note that this section, too, has passive and active sections.

See if your class can work together to group the curses under broader headings like agriculture, military, health, etc.

As your class the appropriate "investigate" questions above, only this time, ask them about the curses, not the blessings. In addition, try the following questions:

- Why do you think the curses section is so much longer than the blessing section?
- Are there any troubling images for you in this section? Which ones, and why?

Illustrate

- If we assume that the passive and active voices are on purpose, is it fair to say that our actions sometimes have *natural* consequences, and sometimes they have *divinely orchestrated* consequences?
- Is this principle only for Deuteronomy's time, or is it for ours? If so, how?
- Which image appeals to you more: a God who quickly and efficiently gives consequences for behavior (good or bad), or a God who is less interventionist and more or less allows things to happen naturally but doesn't much get involved?

Different people will be attracted to different images, especially depending on the current circumstances in their lives. Those who have been the victim of injustice, for instance, will likely want a God who punishes swiftly. Those, whoever, whose guilty consciences begin to bubble up might prefer a God who doesn't punish so swiftly. Others might have different reasons for their preferences.

- As our study of Deuteronomy draws closer to an end, what are you prepared to say about God, obedience, and love?
- In general, what can you say God expects of his people?

- One of the goals of the blessings was that other people might better recognize God and God's people (i.e., the blessings were evangelistic). Do you think we allow our blessings to perform the same function today?

Inspire

Ideas for closing:

- Read John 10:7-10. See if you can help the class make the connection between life "to the full" (John 10:10) and the blessed life (Deut 28:1-14).

For next class session, read Deuteronomy 32.