DEUTERONOMY

Chapter 28

*Blessings for Obedience*

**If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth. 2 All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God: 3 You will be blessed in the city and blessed in the country. 4 The fruit of your womb will be blessed, and the crops of your land and the young of your livestock—the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. 5 Your basket and your kneading trough will be blessed. 6 You will be blessed when you come in and blessed when you go out. 7 The Lord will grant that the enemies who rise up against you will be defeated before you. They will come at you from one direction but flee from you in seven. 8 The Lord will send a blessing on your barns and on everything you put your hand to. The Lord your God will bless you in the land he is giving you. 9 The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he promised you on oath, if you keep the commands of the Lord your God and walk in his ways. 10 Then all the peoples on earth will see that you are called by the name of the Lord, and they will fear you. 11 The Lord will grant you abundant prosperity—in the fruit of your womb, the young of your livestock and the crops of your ground—in the land he swore to your forefathers to give you. 12 The Lord will open the heavens, the storehouse of his bounty, to send rain on your land in season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations but will borrow from none. 13 The Lord will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the Lord your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom. 14 Do not turn aside from any of the commands I give you today, to the right or to the left, following other gods and serving them.**

**Ch 28** Luth: “Just as this chapter is the longest, it is also the easiest; for it contains nothing but a heap of blessings and cursings” (AE 9:267). Ancient covenants typically included curses on those who broke the covenant. Critics have argued that the curses (e.g., regarding exile) prove a late date for Dt, around the era of Israel’s and Judah’s exiles under Assyria and Babylon. However, such curses are known from the early second millennium BC (e.g., documents from Mari and the Code of Hammurabi [c 1728–1686 BC]), which have numerous curses in common with the list here. This chapter does not teach the way to eternal salvation. Rather, earthly blessings are promised to God’s chosen people for obeying His voice. Such blessings come to us believers as well, for “good works have merit, not for forgiveness of sins, for grace, or for justification (for these we receive only through faith), but for other rewards, bodily and spiritual, in this life and after this life” (Ap V 73). (TLSB)

**28:1–14** These blessings are the opposites of the curses in vv. 15–44 (compare especially vv. 3–6 with vv. 16–19). (CSB)

**28:1** *today*. Israel is in the land of Moab, about to enter Canaan (cf vv 13–14; 29:1). (TLSB)

**28:2** Unimaginable blessings will catch up with and overflow to the Israelites if they obey, but curses will come if they do not (v 15). (TLSB)

**28:3–6** *Blessed*. Repeated six times to emphasize the reward for obedience. Cf vv 16–19, where the word “cursed” is repeated for the same six items. (TLSB)

**28:5, 17** *basket … kneading trough.* Used at home for storage and for the preparation of foods, particularly bread. (CSB)

**28:5** *kneading bowl*. Wide, shallow bowl for preparing bread dough. (TLSB)

**28:6** *when you come in* … *when you go out*. Refers to a person fulfilling daily responsibilities, possibly carrying out military actions (cf 31:2). (TLSB)

**28:7** For the reverse see v. 25. (CSB)

Image of enemy’s unity of attack and disarray of retreat. Victory over neighboring nations is one of the blessings held out to Israel (vv 1, 10) (TLSB)

**28:10** *they shall be afraid of you*. Neighboring nations will avoid attacking Israel for fear of defeat (v 7). (TLSB)

**28:12** *the heavens, the storehouse.* For the heavens as the storehouse of rain, snow, hail and wind see Job 38:22; Ps 135:7; Jer 10:13; 51:16. (CSB)

Heaven is pictured as having a storehouse of water from which the Lord pours down rain (cf 11:11). (TLSB)

 *You will lend.* For the opposite see v. 44; see also note on 15:6. (CSB)

Israel would be blessed with a favorable balance of trade. Cf 1Ki 10:14–25. (TLSB)

**28:13** *the head, not the tail.* For the reverse see v. 44. (CSB)

Israel will be prince among the nations, rich in produce, strong against her enemies, if only they will obey the command of the Lord. (TLSB)

**28:1–14** The Lord presents the blessings connected with the covenant; the curses will be described next. Threat and promise, Law and Gospel, are the ways of God with humankind. Here, the blessings seal the renewal of the covenant, and the curses that follow anticipate the need for the new covenant, sealed in the blood of Christ, which was shed for our blessing and pardon. • Heavenly Father, You have richly blessed me with all I need for daily life. Give me a thankful heart and a desire to serve You and my neighbor. Amen. (TLSB)

*Curses for Disobedience*

**15 However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: 16 You will be cursed in the city and cursed in the country. 17 Your basket and your kneading trough will be cursed. 18 The fruit of your womb will be cursed, and the crops of your land, and the calves of your herds and the lambs of your flocks. 19 You will be cursed when you come in and cursed when you go out. 20 The Lord will send on you curses, confusion and rebuke in everything you put your hand to, until you are destroyed and come to sudden ruin because of the evil you have done in forsaking him. 21 The Lord will plague you with diseases until he has destroyed you from the land you are entering to possess. 22 The Lord will strike you with wasting disease, with fever and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, with blight and mildew, which will plague you until you perish. 23 The sky over your head will be bronze, the ground beneath you iron. 24 The Lord will turn the rain of your country into dust and powder; it will come down from the skies until you are destroyed. 25 The Lord will cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will come at them from one direction but flee from them in seven, and you will become a thing of horror to all the kingdoms on earth. 26 Your carcasses will be food for all the birds of the air and the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away. 27 The Lord will afflict you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors, festering sores and the itch, from which you cannot be cured. 28 The Lord will afflict you with madness, blindness and confusion of mind. 29 At midday you will grope about like a blind man in the dark. You will be unsuccessful in everything you do; day after day you will be oppressed and robbed, with no one to rescue you.10 You will be pledged to be married to a woman, but another will take her and ravish her. You will build a house, but you will not live in it. You will plant a vineyard, but you will not even begin to enjoy its fruit. 31 Your ox will be slaughtered before your eyes, but you will eat none of it. Your donkey will be forcibly taken from you and will not be returned. Your sheep will be given to your enemies, and no one will rescue them. 32 Your sons and daughters will be given to another nation, and you will wear out your eyes watching for them day after day, powerless to lift a hand. 33 A people that you do not know will eat what your land and labor produce, and you will have nothing but cruel oppression all your days. 34 The sights you see will drive you mad. 35 The Lord will afflict your knees and legs with painful boils that cannot be cured, spreading from the soles of your feet to the top of your head. 36 The Lord will drive you and the king you set over you to a nation unknown to you or your fathers. There you will worship other gods, gods of wood and stone. 37 You will become a thing of horror and an object of scorn and ridicule to all the nations where the Lord will drive you. 38 You will sow much seed in the field but you will harvest little, because locusts will devour it. 39 You will plant vineyards and cultivate them but you will not drink the wine or gather the grapes, because worms will eat them. 40 You will have olive trees throughout your country but you will not use the oil, because the olives will drop off. 41 You will have sons and daughters but you will not keep them, because they will go into captivity. 42 Swarms of locusts will take over all your trees and the crops of your land. 43 The alien who lives among you will rise above you higher and higher, but you will sink lower and lower. 44 He will lend to you, but you will not lend to him. He will be the head, but you will be the tail. 45 All these curses will come upon you. They will pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you did not obey the Lord your God and observe the commands and decrees he gave you. 46 They will be a sign and a wonder to you and your descendants forever. 47 Because you did not serve the Lord your God joyfully and gladly in the time of prosperity, 48 therefore in hunger and thirst, in nakedness and dire poverty, you will serve the enemies the Lord sends against you. He will put an iron yoke on your neck until he has destroyed you. 49 The Lord will bring a nation against you from far away, from the ends of the earth, like an eagle swooping down, a nation whose language you will not understand, 50 a fierce-looking nation without respect for the old or pity for the young. 51 They will devour the young of your livestock and the crops of your land until you are destroyed. They will leave you no grain, new wine or oil, nor any calves of your herds or lambs of your flocks until you are ruined. 52 They will lay siege to all the cities throughout your land until the high fortified walls in which you trust fall down. They will besiege all the cities throughout the land the Lord your God is giving you. 53 Because of the suffering that your enemy will inflict on you during the siege, you will eat the fruit of the womb, the flesh of the sons and daughters the Lord your God has given you. 54 Even the most gentle and sensitive man among you will have no compassion on his own brother or the wife he loves or his surviving children, 55 and he will not give to one of them any of the flesh of his children that he is eating. It will be all he has left because of the suffering your enemy will inflict on you during the siege of all your cities. 56 The most gentle and sensitive woman among you—so sensitive and gentle that she would not venture to touch the ground with the sole of her foot—will begrudge the husband she loves and her own son or daughter 57 the afterbirth from her womb and the children she bears. For she intends to eat them secretly during the siege and in the distress that your enemy will inflict on you in your cities. 58 If you do not carefully follow all the words of this law, which are written in this book, and do not revere this glorious and awesome name—the Lord your God— 59 the Lord will send fearful plagues on you and your descendants, harsh and prolonged disasters, and severe and lingering illnesses. 60 He will bring upon you all the diseases of Egypt that you dreaded, and they will cling to you. 61 The Lord will also bring on you every kind of sickness and disaster not recorded in this Book of the Law, until you are destroyed. 62 You who were as numerous as the stars in the sky will be left but few in number, because you did not obey the Lord your God. 63 Just as it pleased the Lord to make you prosper and increase in number, so it will please him to ruin and destroy you. You will be uprooted from the land you are entering to possess. 64 Then the Lord will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other. There you will worship other gods—gods of wood and stone, which neither you nor your fathers have known. 65 Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the Lord will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. 66 You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. 67 In the morning you will say, “If only it were evening!” and in the evening, “If only it were morning!”—because of the terror that will fill your hearts and the sights that your eyes will see. 68 The Lord will send you back in ships to Egypt on a journey I said you should never make again. There you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you.**

**28:15–68** After Moses describes the blessings that would result from obeying the voice of the Lord (vv 1–14), he depicts in vivid language the punishments for disobedience. Specific sins are not named (as in 27:15–26), but rather these curses would fall on Israel for forsaking the Lord (v 20). There are several general categories of punishments: bodily afflictions; mental anguish; family disruptions; loss of crops; defeat in war, including the besieging of towns and the resulting cannibalism. The ultimate curse will be the destruction of Israel as a nation (vv 20, 24, 45, 48, 51, 61, 63; also note the words “perish,” “ruin,” and “consume”). The curses outnumber the blessings four to one. “The old Adam, like an unruly, stubborn ass, is still a part of them [believers]. It must be forced to obey Christ. It not only requires the teaching, admonition, force, and threatening of the Law, but it also often needs the club of punishments and troubles. This goes on until the body of sin is entirely put off [Romans 6:6] and a person is perfectly renewed in the resurrection. Then he will need neither the preaching of the Law nor its threats and punishments, just as he will no longer need the Gospel. These belong to this imperfect life” (FC SD VI 24). (TLSB)

**28:16–19** Cf vv 3–6 for corresponding list of six blessings. (TLSB)

**28:21** *pestilence stick to you*. General term describing a lingering, severe epidemic. (TLSB)

**28:22** Afflictions affecting people and cropland. (TLSB)

**28:23** *sky … bronze … ground … iron.* No rain would pierce the sky or penetrate the ground. (CSB)

Bas: “It threatens him with a complete drought” (*NPNF* 2 8:70). (TLSB)

**28:25** For the reverse see v. 7. (CSB)

Reverse of v 7, which describes Israel as victorious in battle. (TLSB)

**28:26** *your dead body shall be food*. To be denied burial and have one’s body consumed was an ultimate curse in the ancient world. Cf Is 66:24. (TLSB)

**28:27** *boils of Egypt.* See note on Ex 9:9. (CSB)

Sixth of 10 plagues that befell Egypt will strike Israel even more severely. (TLSB)

**28:28** *madness*. Physical afflictions bring on psychological disorders. (TLSB)

**28:29** *no one to help you*. Similar descriptions of abandonment are found in vv 26, 31. (TLSB)

**28:30–32** Demise of a household (cf Ex 20:17). Ordered and tranquil life is displaced by utter futility and helplessness (cf v 51). (TLSB)

**28:30** See 20:5–7. (CSB)

*betroth a wife*. Betrothal more or less equals the relationship of marriage. (TLSB)

**28:32** *eyes look on and fail with longing*. Like the idiom “to cry one’s eyes out.” (TLSB)

**28:33** *nation that you have not known*. God’s agents for inflicting punishment on Israel will be powerful foreign nations like Assyria and Babylon. (TLSB)

**28:35** See note on Ex 9:11. (CSB)

**28:36** *king*. Moses had earlier spoken of Israel’s future king (17:14–20). (TLSB)

*serve other gods of wood and stone*. Because Israel failed to serve the Lord (v 47), they would be forced to serve idols (v 64) and their enemies (v 48). (TLSB)

**28:37** Illustrated in destructions of Jerusalem. Israel would become a horrible object lesson of what happens when a nation fails to serve the Lord. (TLSB)

**28:38–40** Reverse of blessings promised in vv 11–12a. Labor will be in vain. Cf vv 30–32, 51. (TLSB)

**28:41** *captivity*. Assyrians and Babylonians would eventually lead into captivity young and old alike. (TLSB)

**28:43–44** The foreigners residing in Israel (cf 24:14) would come to have the upper hand. The blessings in vv 12b–13a would be radically reversed. (TLSB)

**28:44** See notes on vv. 12–13. (CSB)

**28:45** *pursue*. Intensifies the threatened destruction for failure to obey the Lord’s voice. (TLSB)

**28:46** *forever*. There will never come a time when the descendants of Israel will forget that sin is punished. (TLSB)

**28:48** *yoke of iron*. Common metaphor to express submission to foreign rule. (TLSB)

**28:49** *ends of the earth.* An indefinite figurative expression meaning “far away”—anywhere from the horizon to the perimeter of the then-known world. (CSB)

 *eagle swooping down.* Symbolic of the speed and power of the Assyrians (see Hos 8:1) and Babylonians (see Jer 48:40; 49:22). (CSB)

Or, vulture, which frequented the battlefields. Symbolized an enemy’s power and speed in warfare. (TLSB)

 *whose language you will not understand.* Though related to Hebrew, the languages of Assyria and Babylonia were not understood by the average Israelite (see Isa 28:11; 33:19 and note; 1Co 14:21).

Israel’s conquerors would speak a foreign language. (TLSB)

**28:50** *hard-faced nation*. With armies noted for brutality. (TLSB)

**28:53–57** Possibly the most gruesome scenes in the Bible. Moses does not mince words when warning about the consequences of divine judgment. (TLSB)

**28:53** *suffering that your enemy will inflict on you during the siege.* See vv. 55, 57. The repetition of the clause emphasizes the distress that the Israelites would suffer if they refused to obey the Lord. (CSB)

 *you will eat … sons and daughters.* For the actualizing of this curse see 2Ki 6:24–29; La 2:20; 4:10.

**28:55** A note of ultimate desperation. (TLSB)

**28:58** *words of this law.* See note on 31:24. (CSB)

 *this glorious and awesome name—the Lord*. See note and NIV text note on Ex 3:15. One of the oddities of history and revelation is the loss of the proper pronunciation of the Hebrew word *YHWH*, the most intimate and personal name of God in the OT (see note on Ge 2:4). “Jehovah” is a spelling that developed from combining the consonants of the name with the vowels of a word for “Lord” (*Adonai*). “Yahweh” is probably the original pronunciation. The name eventually ceased to be pronounced because later Jews thought it too holy to be uttered and feared violating Ex 20:7 and Lev 24:16. It is translated “Lord” in this version (see Preface to the NIV). (CSB)

God’s name is synonymous with God Himself and for this reason must be revered. Cf 12:5, 11, 21; 14:23–24. (TLSB)

**28:59** *afflictions*. Lit, “blows”; sometimes translated “plagues.” (TLSB)

**28:60–61** *diseases of Egypt* … *affliction*. Israel is threatened both with Egypt’s plagues and with diseases not previously described. (TLSB)

**28:60** *diseases of Egypt.* Those brought on the Egyptians during the plagues (see 7:15; Ex 15:26). (CSB)

**28:61** *Book of the Law.* See note on 31:24. (CSB)

**28:62** *as the stars in the sky.* See 1:10; see also notes on Ge 13:16; 15:5. (CSB)

Abraham’s offspring were to be as numerous as the stars (Gn 15:5) (TLSB)

*few in number*. As when Israel went down to Egypt (cf 26:5). (TLSB)

**28:63** *plucked off the land*. Even before Israel enters the Promised Land, they are warned of possibly being pulled up as one tears a weed from the soil. (TLSB)

**28:64** *will scatter you.* Experienced by Israel in the Assyrian (722–721 b.c.) and Babylonian (586 b.c.) exiles (see 2Ki 17:6; 25:21). (CSB)

**28:65** Vivid portrayal of one with cried-out eyes (v 32), feeble and fearful, in dread of what might come next (vv 66–67). (TLSB)

**28:66** Cyr Jer: “It was Life, which hung on the Cross” (*NPNF* 2 7:87). Leo: “In the crucified Lord they could think of nothing but their wicked deed, having not the fear, by which true faith is justified, but that by which an evil conscience is racked. But let our understandings, illumined by the Spirit of Truth, foster with pure and free heart the glory of the cross which irradiates heaven and earth, and see with the inner sight what the Lord meant when He spoke of His coming Passion” (*NPNF* 2 12:172). (TLSB)

**28:67** Sights of destruction provoke feelings of dread. (TLSB)

**28:68** *a journey I said you should never make again.* See 17:16; Ex 13:17; Nu 14:3–4. (CSB)

The children of Israel had earlier been forced to serve as slaves in Egypt. Now, their desire to sell themselves as slaves will fail. So dreadful is God’s curse. (TLSB)

**28:15–68** Moses forcefully details the dreadful consequences of disobeying the voice of the Lord God. These punishments would not be the result of the natural cycles of history. Moses repeatedly identifies the Lord as the One who sends the curses. The message is clear: “God threatens to punish all who break these commandments. Therefore, we should fear His wrath and not do anything against them.” St Paul reminds believers that the things that happened to Israel

are examples for us (1Co 10:6). Although we trust in Jesus for the forgiveness of sins and eternal salvation, as sinners, we still need the preaching of the Law. Praise God, who always provides for our needs, speaking the truth to us in love—the harsh truth and the healing truth in Christ. • Help me, loving Savior, to treasure both Law and Gospel as I travel the way that leads to eternal life. Amen. (TLSB)