

# DEUTERONOMY

## Chapter 28

### *Blessings for Obedience*

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

**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. (TL SB)

**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). (TL SB)

**28:7** 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) (TL SB)

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

**28:12** *his good treasury, the heavens.* 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). (TL SB)

*You shall lend.* Israel would be blessed with a favorable balance of trade. Cf 1Ki 10:14–25. (TL SB)

**28:13** *the head, not the tail.* Israel will be prince among the nations, rich in produce, strong against her enemies, if only they will obey the command of the Lord. (TL SB)

**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. (TL SB)

### *Curses for Disobedience*

**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. 21 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. 22 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. 23 And the heavens over your head shall be bronze, and the earth under you shall be iron. 24 The LORD will make the rain of your land powder. From heaven dust shall come down on you until you are destroyed. 25 “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. 26 And your dead body shall be food for all birds of the air and for the beasts of the earth, and there shall be no one to frighten them away. 27 The LORD will strike you with the boils of Egypt, and with tumors and scabs and itch, of which you cannot be healed. 28 The LORD will strike you with madness and blindness and confusion of mind, 29 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. 30 You shall betroth a 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 fruit. 31 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. 32 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. 33 A nation that you have not known shall eat up the fruit of your ground and of all your labors, and you shall be only oppressed and crushed continually, 34 so that you are driven mad by the sights that your eyes see. 35 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. 36 “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. 37 And you shall become a horror, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples where the LORD will lead you away. 38 You shall carry much seed into the field and shall gather in little, for the locust shall consume it. 39 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. 40 You shall have olive trees throughout all your territory, but you shall not anoint yourself with the oil, for your olives shall drop off. 41 You shall father sons and daughters, but they shall not be yours, for they shall go into captivity. 42 The cricket[c] shall possess all your trees and the fruit of your ground. 43 The sojourner who is among you shall rise higher and higher above you, and you shall come down lower and lower. 44 He shall lend to you, and you shall not lend to him. He shall be the head, and you shall be the tail. 45 “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. 46 They shall be a sign and a wonder against you and your offspring forever. 47 Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joyfulness and gladness of heart, because of the abundance of all things, 48 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. 49 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, 50 a hard-faced nation who shall not respect the old or show mercy to the young. 51 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.

52 “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. 53 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. 54 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, 55 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. 56 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, 57 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. 58 “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, 59 then the LORD will bring on you and your offspring extraordinary afflictions, afflictions severe and lasting, and sicknesses grievous and lasting. 60 And he will bring upon you again all the diseases of Egypt, of which you were afraid, and they shall cling to you. 61 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. 62 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. 63 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. 64 “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. 65 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. 66 Your life shall hang in doubt before you. Night and day you shall be in dread and have no assurance of your life. 67 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. 68 And the LORD will bring you back in ships to Egypt, a journey that I promised that 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.”

**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** *heavens ... bronze ... earth... 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*. 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** *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)

**28:36** *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)

**28:45** *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** *end of the earth*. An indefinite figurative expression meaning "far away"—anywhere from the horizon to the perimeter of the then-known world. (CSB)

*swooping down like the eagle*. 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 do not understand*. Though related to Hebrew, the languages of Assyria and Babylonia were not understood by the average Israelite. (CSB)

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** *the distress with your enemies*. 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. (CSB)

**28:58** *this glorious and awesome name—the LORD*. 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. “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. (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)

**28:62** *as the stars in the sky*. 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.* 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)