

Your Life Shall Hang Before Your Eyes

Deuteronomy 28

Expository Lessons from the Book of Deuteronomy

I. Introduction

- a. The **Book of Deuteronomy** consists of three speeches that Moses gave to the Israelites near the end of their 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness.
- b. In **Deuteronomy 27**, we have come to the beginning of Moses' third address (of three). The three speeches are as follows:
 - i. **Speech No. 1: Deuteronomy 1-4** (first four chapters)
 - ii. **Speech No. 2: Deuteronomy 5-26** (twenty-two chapters; about 25 lessons in this series)
 1. This section covers the specific laws and regulations.
 - iii. **Speech No. 3: Deuteronomy 27-34** (last eight chapters of the book)
 1. Final wrap-up, including warnings and blessings, depending on whether the Israelites obey or disobey what has just been handed down.
 2. Death of Moses and handoff of leadership to Joshua.
- c. We are now in **Deuteronomy 28-30**.
 - i. In this part of **Deuteronomy**, Moses explains to the Israelites:
 1. What will happen to them *IF they keep and obey* the laws he has just given them, versus what will happen to them *IF they DO NOT obey* these laws. (**Deuteronomy 28-29**)
 2. Then in **Deuteronomy 30**, he calls them to make a decision to follow the Lord and to keep His laws.
 - ii. This reminds me of the Sermon on the Mount, where Jesus follows the same pattern.
 1. Jesus explains His new laws (in parallel with the Law of Moses), in **Matthew 5-6**, and then
 2. He closes in **Matthew 7** by explaining what will *happen if they obey His commands*, versus what will *happen if they do not obey them*. Based on that, He calls his listeners to make a decision!

3. For those who struggle with calling Jesus' teachings in **Matthew 5-6** as "laws", consider what He says to those who claim to be His followers but who do not follow his commands.
 - a. "Not everyone who says to Me, 'Lord, Lord,' shall enter the kingdom of heaven, but he who does the will of My Father in heaven. Many will say to Me in that day, 'Lord, Lord, have we not prophesied in Your name, cast out demons in Your name, and done many wonders in Your name?' And then I will declare to them, 'I never knew you; depart from Me, *you who practice lawlessness!*'" (**Matthew 7:21-23**, NKJV)
- d. In **Deuteronomy 28**, the chapter we will be reading today, we will find the following:
 - i. A classic *conditional promise* of God. Notice how the word "IF" is used. How we will be treated by the Lord depends on our decision, on how we respond to Him. Whether we choose to obey or disobey.
 - ii. This chapter and the next one provide *the roadmap for pretty much everything that follows in the Old Testament*. It explains in advance what will happen to the Jews (success and prosperity whenever they follow the Lord and obey Him; as well as starvation, defeat by their enemies and captivity in foreign lands when they disobey the Lord).
 - iii. The language here is extremely graphic, to provide a sober warning to the people.
 - iv. Also, there is one rather unusual line in this chapter that several early Christian writers saw as a prophecy pointing to Jesus.
 1. See if you notice it, as we read through the chapter.

II. The Promise of Blessings, If They Obey

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 28:1-14**.
- b. The Lord promises to bless Israel abundantly. These blessings include:
 - i. Their offspring and the produce of their land and flocks will be multiplied and blessed. Rains will come down from heaven, in season.
 - ii. They will be delivered from all of their enemies. They will be above all the other nations, who will fear them. They will rule over other nations.
 - iii. Their barns and storehouses will be filled (material prosperity).

- iv. They will be wealthy and lend to many nations, but borrow from none.
 - v. God will keep the promises He made to their forefathers, that they will be a holy people set apart from all the nations, for Him.
- c. But there is *one condition they must meet* in order to inherit all these promises.
- i. This condition is repeated several times in the passage we just read.
 1. “...*IF* you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to be careful to do all His commandments that I command you today...” (**Deuteronomy 28:1**)
 2. “*IF* you heed the commands of the Lord your God today to keep and do them...” (**Deuteronomy 28:13**)
 - ii. Always be on the lookout for conditions in the promises we find in Scripture! One of the classic problems in the Protestant world is to believe the promises but ignore the conditions upon which they are based (whether specifically written down, or assumed). For example:
 1. “You are My friends *if you do whatever I command you.*” (**John 15:14**, NKJV)
 2. “For *if you forgive men their trespasses, your heavenly Father will also forgive you.* But if you do not forgive men their trespasses, neither will your Father forgive your trespasses.” (**Matthew 6:14–15**, NKJV)
 3. “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. *But he who endures to the end shall be saved.*” (**Matthew 24:12–13**, NKJV)
 4. “Then Jesus said to those Jews who believed Him, ‘*If you abide in My word, you are My disciples indeed.* And you shall know the truth, and the truth shall make you free.’” (**John 8:31–32**, NKJV)
 5. “And because lawlessness will abound, the love of many will grow cold. *But he who endures to the end shall be saved.*” (**Matthew 24:12–13**, NKJV)
 6. “This is a faithful saying: For *if we died with Him, We shall also live with Him. If we endure, We shall also reign with Him. If we deny Him, He also will deny us. If we are faithless, He remains faithful; He cannot deny Himself.*” (**2 Timothy 2:11–13**, NKJV)

7. "This is the message which we have heard from Him and declare to you, that God is light and in Him is no darkness at all. If we say that we have fellowship with Him, and walk in darkness, we lie and do not practice the truth. *But if we walk in the light as He is in the light, we have fellowship with one another, and the blood of Jesus Christ His Son cleanses us from all sin.* If we say that we have no sin, we deceive ourselves, and the truth is not in us. *If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness.* If we say that we have not sinned, we make Him a liar, and His word is not in us." (1 John 1:5-10, NKJV)
 8. "And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are *if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end.*" (Hebrews 3:5-6, NKJV)
 9. "For *you have need of endurance, so that after you have done the will of God, you may receive the promise:* 'For yet a little while, And He who is coming will come and will not tarry. Now the just shall live by faith; *But if anyone draws back, My soul has no pleasure in him.*'" (Hebrews 10:36-38, NKJV)
- d. **Questions:** Do Old Testament passages like this one from **Deuteronomy 28** support the idea that the modern nation of Israel will be blessed by God and will rule over the other nations? Do Old Testament promises like these support the idea that physical Israel remains God's special people today, based on things said to Abraham and Moses?
- i. **Answer:** No. The modern State of Israel *does not even come close* to following the commands of God as handed down from Moses.
 1. The State of Israel was established in 1948. Many of the founders of the modern Zionist movement (such as Theodor Herzl and David Ben-Gurion) were either non-religious secular Jews or possibly even atheists.
 2. The current prime minister (and longest serving prime minister in Israel's history) is Benjamin Netanyahu. He is a secular Jew who does not follow the Laws of Moses in daily life. His tenure in office has been plagued by charges of bribery, corruption, and other ethical misconduct.
- e. **Question:** Can passages like the one we just read from **Deuteronomy 28** be used to support the so-called 'Prosperity Gospel' (that if we follow God's laws, we will be guaranteed material prosperity in this life)?

i. **Answer:** No.

1. First of all, these promises were given to the *nation of Israel* (rather than to each individual), as can be seen from the terms of the blessings offered.
2. Second, Jesus and the apostles made it very clear that if we are living according to the teachings of Jesus, we may *be hated and persecuted in this life*. Furthermore, Jesus and His apostles called us to use our worldly wealth to gain friends, to give to the poor.
 - a. Paul described the ministry of Christ as follows.
 - i. “But in all things we commend ourselves as ministers of God: *in much patience, in tribulations, in needs, in distresses, in stripes, in imprisonments, in tumults, in labors, in sleeplessness, in fastings; by purity, by knowledge, by longsuffering, by kindness, by the Holy Spirit, by sincere love, by the word of truth, by the power of God, by the armor of righteousness on the right hand and on the left, by honor and dishonor, by evil report and good report; as deceivers, and yet true; as unknown, and yet well known; as dying, and behold we live; as chastened, and yet not killed; as sorrowful, yet always rejoicing; as poor, yet making many rich; as having nothing, and yet possessing all things.*” (2 Corinthians 6:4–10, NKJV)
 - b. Peter described our life in this world, and the reward we are looking for:
 - i. “In this you greatly rejoice, *though now for a little while, if need be, you have been grieved by various trials, that the genuineness of your faith, being much more precious than gold that perishes, though it is tested by fire, may be found to praise, honor, and glory at the revelation of Jesus Christ, whom having not seen you love. Though now you do not see Him, yet believing, you rejoice with joy inexpressible and full of glory, receiving the end of your faith—the salvation of your souls.*” (1 Peter 1:6–9, NKJV)

III. The Curses that Will Come if They Disobey the Laws of God

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 28:15-29**.
 - i. All the things that would have been blessed through their obedience will instead be *cursed by God*.
 - ii. Moses gives an incredibly bleak, graphic description of the poverty, hunger, sickness, drought, and other hardships that will come upon the Israelites if they refuse to obey the Lord's commands.
 - iii. Their enemies will overpower them.
- b. Read **Deuteronomy 28:30-52**.
 - i. If they abandon the Lord and disobey His commands, the people will be enslaved and taken into captivity.
 - ii. They will lose their wives, children, and everything they have.
 - iii. They will end up in abject poverty and need.
- c. Read **Deuteronomy 28:53-57**.
 - i. They will be surrounded by their enemies and starved in sieges. The resulting famine will be so bad that women will eat their own infants.
- d. Read **Deuteronomy 28:58-69**.
 - i. They will be brought back to Egypt, and face servitude and plagues.
 - ii. Instead of being as numerous "as stars in the heavens", they will be reduced to the point where they are few in number.
 - iii. They will lose the land they had inherited, and be taken to other lands where they will serve the 'gods' of those lands.
 - iv. They will be offered for sale as slaves, but no one will buy them.
- e. Note that we see all these bad outcomes play out in Old Testament history.
 - i. That culminated with the destruction of Jerusalem in AD 70, in fulfillment of prophecy, shortly after they rejected and killed Christ.
- f. Recall that in the New Testament, there are likewise many places where Jesus warns of the destruction to come if people do not repent and follow Him. He preached destruction as well!
 - i. "There were present at that season some who told Him about the Galileans whose blood Pilate had mingled with their sacrifices. And

Jesus answered and said to them, ‘Do you suppose that these Galileans were worse sinners than all other Galileans, because they suffered such things? I tell you, no; but *unless you repent you will all likewise perish*. Or those eighteen on whom the tower in Siloam fell and killed them, do you think that they were worse sinners than all other men who dwelt in Jerusalem?’” (**Luke 13:1–4**, NKJV)

- ii. “But whoever causes one of these little ones who believe in Me to stumble, *it would be better for him if a millstone were hung around his neck, and he were thrown into the sea*. If your hand causes you to sin, cut it off. It is better for you to enter into life maimed, rather than having two hands, to go to hell, *into the fire that shall never be quenched—where ‘Their worm does not die And the fire is not quenched.’*” (**Mark 9:42–44**, NKJV)
- iii. “Therefore you are witnesses against yourselves that you are sons of those who murdered the prophets. Fill up, then, the measure of your fathers’ guilt. Serpents, brood of vipers! How *can you escape the condemnation of hell?* Therefore, indeed, I send you prophets, wise men, and scribes: some of them you will kill and crucify, and some of them you will scourge in your synagogues and persecute from city to city, that *on you may come all the righteous blood shed on the earth, from the blood of righteous Abel to the blood of Zechariah, son of Berechiah, whom you murdered between the temple and the altar*. Assuredly, I say to you, all these things will come upon this generation.” (**Matthew 23:31–36**, NKJV)
- iv. “Then He will also say to those on the left hand, ‘Depart from Me, you cursed, into the everlasting fire prepared for the devil and his angels: for I was hungry and you gave Me no food; I was thirsty and you gave Me no drink; I was a stranger and you did not take Me in, naked and you did not clothe Me, sick and in prison and you did not visit Me.’” (**Matthew 25:41–43**, NKJV)
 1. The things Jesus warned of were even more terrible than what Moses spoke of. Jesus warned of *everlasting destruction and punishment* on the Day of Judgment, being *cast into the everlasting fire* prepared for Satan and his angels!

IV. Your Life Shall Hang Before Your Eyes

- a. Re-read **Deuteronomy 28:65-66**.
- b. The statement at the end of this passage is both mysterious and seemingly out of place with the rest of the chapter.

- i. “Your Life shall hang before your eyes; and you shall fear day and night, and you will not believe your Life.” (**Deuteronomy 28:66**, LXX, OSB)
- ii. **Question:** What would that statement have meant *to those hearing it*?
 - 1. To me, it sounds like a prophecy about Jesus.
 - 2. The reference to “hanging before your eyes” makes me think of Jesus hanging on the cross. Also, the reference to “your life” and that the Jews would “not believe in it/Him”.
 - 3. However, I do not recall hearing any modern preacher refer to this passage as a prophecy about Jesus.
 - 4. Note that the wording in the LXX brings this into sharper focus as a possible prophecy.
 - 5. Were the OSB translators of the passage we just read trying to make this sound more prophetic than it actually is? Or is that a literal translation from the LXX Greek?
 - a. I checked the Greek, and the translation of the LXX in the OSB here is literal. That is exactly what it says.
 - i. Keeping in mind that since the Greek text of the LXX has no distinction between capital and lower case letters, the capitalized ‘L’ in “Life” is a judgment call made by the translators.
- c. Note that the word translated “hang” here in the LXX is the same Greek word (κρεμάννυμι / kremannumi) found in **Deuteronomy 21:23**, also as quoted in **Galatians 3:13**: “Cursed is everyone who *hangs* on a tree.”
 - i. This is also the same word used by Peter in **Acts 5:30**, where it says, “God... raised up Jesus whom you murdered by *hanging* on a tree.”
 - ii. Based on other places in Scripture where the same word is used to apply to the crucifixion, it makes sense that **Deuteronomy 28:66** could be referring to Jesus *hanging on the cross*.
- d. Also, the reference to “your life” readily applies to Jesus.
 - i. “Jesus said to him, “I am the way, the truth, and *the life*. No one comes to the Father except through Me.” (**John 14:6**, NKJV)
 - ii. The bronze serpent referred to in **John 3** and **Numbers 21** was lifted up and gave life to those bitten by the deadly snakes.

1. “And as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of Man be lifted up, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but *have eternal life*.” (**John 3:14–15**, NKJV)
- e. Early Christian writers saw this as a prophecy about the crucifixion of Jesus and His rejection by the Jews.
- i. From Irenaeus, writing c. 180 AD. (His witness is especially significant since he was only one human link removed from the apostles, having been a student in his youth of Polycarp, who in turn had been taught by the apostles.)
 1. [*After recounting several Old Testament prophecies about the crucifixion of Christ, Irenaeus continues*] “...In this He clearly and plainly signifies His own crucifixion. But Moses too says the same thing to the people, as follows: ‘And your life shall be hanging before your eyes, and you shall fear night and day, neither shall you trust your life.’ (**Deuteronomy 28:66**)”
 - a. (Source: Irenaeus, *Proof of the Apostolic Preaching*, section 79, pages 97-98; published by Paulist Press)
 2. “...He [*the Word of God*] came to His own in a visible manner, and was made flesh, and hung upon the tree, that He might sum up all things in Himself. ‘And His own peculiar people did not receive Him,’ as Moses declared this very thing among the people: ‘And your life shall be hanging before your eyes, and you will not believe your life.’ (**Deuteronomy 28:66**)”
 - a. (Source: Irenaeus, *Against Heresies*, book 5, chapter 18; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 547; see similar in book 4, chapter 10, in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, p. 474)
 - ii. Other early Christian writers who cited this passage from **Deuteronomy 28** as a prophecy about Jesus include:
 1. Novatian, writing c. 235 AD, in *Treatise Concerning the Trinity*, chapter 9; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 618
 2. Origen, writing c. 248 AD, in *Against Celsus*, book 3, chapter 85; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 4, p. 462
 3. Cyprian, writing c. 250 AD, in *Treatises of Cyprian, Treatise 12*, book 2, testimony 20; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 5, p. 524

4. Lactantius, writing c. 304-313 AD, in *Divine Institutes*, book 4, chapter 15; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 7, p. 121

- f. Why this matters to us, today.
- i. From the beginning, the Christian faith was spread based on the solid evidence of fulfilled prophecies that were written centuries before the birth of Christ.
 - ii. If we know the Old Testament prophecies that point to Jesus, we can use them effectively to prove the faith to truth-seeking unbelievers today.
 - iii. This prophecy, written down 1400 years before the birth of Christ, reveals significant things that would be revealed in the life and ministry of Jesus Christ. May we use it to strengthen the faith of those who are weak, and to persuade unbelievers to come to faith. It speaks of Jesus, that...
 1. He would be rejected by His own people, the Jews.
 2. He would hang on the cross, before their eyes.
 3. *He is our life.*