

Deuteronomy 28:1-6

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-28/deuteronomy-281-6/>

Moses continued to outline the script for the ceremony to be performed once they had success taking Canaan. This part urged the Israelites to obey their covenant partner, Yahweh, in order that they may be blessed beyond measure in the land of Canaan, which was God's promise to them if they followed faithfully the terms of the agreement.

The verses of this section on blessings have two parts. The first part (vv. 1-2) contains another exhortation to remain obedient to the law of the LORD. The second part (vv. 3-6) has six blessings that the Israelites would receive as a result of their obedience. In the first part, Moses reminded the people that they would receive blessings *if they diligently obey the LORD their God* (v. 1). They were to be *careful to do all His commandments* to please Him and receive the blessings. The phrase *which I command you today* probably means that their strict obedience to the LORD's law needed to start *today*.

A high level of obedience would cause the *LORD* to set Israel *high above all the nations of the earth*. Simply put, the other nations would have an admiration for Israel once they saw that Israel's God had elevated them higher, giving them a superior wisdom and understanding (Deuteronomy 4:6). He wanted them to live a holy life and to represent His rule on earth as a "kingdom of priests" (Exodus 19:4-6). By building a society based on a "love your neighbor as yourself" culture, the society would (naturally) thrive, and demonstrate to surrounding nations the superiority of a self-governing society based on mutual love and cooperation. The surrounding nations were based on a culture of the strong exploiting the weak (Leviticus 18).

As a result of keeping their commitment to obey the covenant into which they had entered, *all these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the LORD your God* (v. 2). The phrase *these blessings* refers to the six blessings that are in vv. 3-6. They are in the form of beatitudes, similar to what Jesus used in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:3-11). Based on Israel's obedience, they would *come upon them and overtake* (Hebrew "naśśag") them, implying that the blessings were guaranteed based on obedience.

These blessings were to be stated by six tribes standing on Mount Gerizim once Israel had entered the land and conquered this part of Canaan. (Deuteronomy 27:12). Moses here continues the script for this ceremony, as a part of his instructions to Israel just prior to entering the land (Deuteronomy 27:1-13).

In the first two blessings, he said, *Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country* (v. 3). The words *city* and *country* comprise a merism (a figure of speech using opposite word pairs to emphasize totality). Here it means that, wherever an Israelite lived, he or she would be blessed. In other words, the blessing would be for everyone in Israel.

The third blessing is concerned with fruitfulness within the home. Moses declared, *Blessed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground and the offspring of your beasts, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock* (v. 4). This blessing would come in the form of human fertility (*offspring of your body*) as well as the increase in crops (*produce of your ground*) and livestock (*offspring of your beasts*). Thus, the Israelites would experience an abundant posterity through large families (Psalm 127:3) and an abundance of material wealth (the crops and livestock).

In an ancient agrarian economy, more children meant more laborers, more protectors, and therefore more material prosperity. So children were seen as a great blessing on multiple fronts. The primary goal of the ancient economy was producing sufficient food to consume, so a high birth rate for livestock and a high yield for crops meant material prosperity. In these verses, God is promising that if Israel would keep their agreement and obey the laws of His covenant, they would experience substantial material prosperity.

Some of the benefit of keeping God's covenant laws would be a result of natural consequences; a love-your-neighbor society will naturally have much greater material prosperity than an exploit-your-neighbor society. But in this case God is promising divine blessing on top of the natural consequences. For example, high crop yields means favorable weather.

The fourth blessing is *blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl* (v. 5). The *basket* refers to the container in which grains were stored at home (Deuteronomy 26:4). The *kneading bowl* refers to a large vessel in which a person (usually a woman) mixed the flour, water, and oil to make bread dough (Exodus 12:34). This mixture was usually left in the bowl to swell or ferment

(Exodus 8:3). Thus, in this verse Moses told the Israelites that they would have more than enough grain and bread (or food) to meet their daily needs.

In the last part, Moses told the people of God that they would be successful in all aspects of life. He said, *Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out* (v. 6). The verbs *come in* and *go out* form another merism, two extremes that express the totality of all that is between. This expression refers to all of Israel's undertakings and activities. God's people would be successful in all areas of life if they kept their part of the covenant. Every part of their existence would benefit from keeping God's covenant law, as they had just promised to do (Deuteronomy 26:17).

This ceremony, where the people gathered on two mountains to pronounce the blessings and cursings of the covenant would have created a tangible and memorable event that would remind the people that their blessing under the covenant was assured if they kept their pledge to follow God's laws. Conversely, the adverse consequences from failing to keep God's laws were just as certain. God's love and acceptance of Israel as His people was given as an unconditional gift (Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:7-8). The gifts of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:29). All of God's promises to Israel will be completely fulfilled (Romans 11:26). But God's blessings depend upon obedience, as illustrated in this script for the ceremony to be performed once they enter the land.

The same basic structure is repeated in the New Testament. God fully accepts all who believe on Jesus, with sufficient faith to look on Jesus on the cross, hoping to be delivered from the deadly venom of sin (John 3:14-15). That acceptance is solely based on what Jesus did, as every sin ever committed was nailed to that cross (Colossians 2:14). But God's blessing depends upon the choices of the believer. If we sow to the flesh, we reap the adverse consequences of the flesh. And if we sow to the Spirit by walking in the obedience of the Spirit, we gain the great spiritual benefit of that walk (Galatians 6:8-10).

To sum up, this section was meant to encourage the people of God to obey the precepts of the covenant diligently, teaching them that their Suzerain (Ruler) God was their only source of blessings. He was the One who would cause the land to become productive. He would enable both human and animal parents to have children and would give Israel food in abundance.

Israel's God, as a gracious Suzerain or Ruler only demanded that His vassals obey the terms of the covenant to receive His blessings.

The people had just agreed to do so (Deuteronomy 26:17). But this ceremony script would cause a tangible reminder of the consequence of keeping or not keeping the covenant. Moses here gave a script for a substantial ceremony involving all the people, to be conducted after they entered the Promised Land. The people needed to understand that keeping the laws of the covenant was for their own good (Deuteronomy 10:13).

Biblical Text:

¹Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the Lord your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. ²All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the Lord your God: ³Blessed *shall you be* in the city, and blessed *shall you be* in the country. ⁴"Blessed *shall be* the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground and the offspring of your beasts, the increase of your herd 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."