

Deuteronomy 28:58-63

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Moses continues the warnings concerning the Israelites violating God's covenantal laws. In this section, He describes widespread disease and multiple disasters if they fail to live in complete obedience to the LORD.

Moses continues giving a script to Israel for a ceremony that they are to perform once they have crossed over into the Promised Land. The script contains blessings for obedience, and cursings for disobedience to the covenant. This followed the ancient form of a Suzerain-vassal treaty.

This section continues the cursings that were to be stated by six tribes standing on Mount Ebal once Israel had entered the land and conquered this part of Canaan (Deuteronomy 27:13). 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).

Moses continued to warn Israel about the consequences of disobeying God's covenantal precepts. He reminded them once again of the conditional nature of the covenant that the Suzerain (Ruler) God had established with them. Verse 58 contains the conditional statement (*if*), and verses 59-63 contain the conclusion (*then*).

The conditional statement began by saying that *if you are not careful to observe all the words of this law which are written in this book* (v. 58). The term *law* (Heb. "tōrā") probably refers to the legal portion of Deuteronomy (chapters 5-28). The Israelites were to be diligent to obey all of the LORD's revealed law.

They were also to be careful to *fear this honored and awesome name, the LORD (Yahweh) your God*. To *fear the LORD* means to be in reverential awe of Him, to care most for what He cares about; that is, to please Him in every regard.

The Israelites were required to obey all the *words* of the *law*, not just some of them. Strict obedience to the law would allow Israel to *fear this honored and awesome name, the LORD*. God's name is synonymous with His character, His

reputation. The LORD's name is the LORD Himself. His name is "majestic in all the earth" (Psalm 8). The LORD is to be revered for who He is. God alone is all-powerful and sovereign.

In the second part of the conditional statement (the conclusion), Moses told the Israelites that *the LORD will bring extraordinary plagues on you and your descendants, even severe and lasting plagues, and miserable and chronic sicknesses* (v. 59). The word for *plagues* (Heb. "makkâ") is not the same as the one used in Exodus 9:14 (Heb. "maggēpā") concerning the plagues on Egypt. It is, however, similar in meaning. Both have the idea of a strike or a wound. The word in this verse seems to be related to various kinds of diseases.

Earlier in Deuteronomy Moses had told Israel that the LORD would remove from them all sickness. Also, *He will not put on you any of the harmful diseases of Egypt* which they had known but instead *lay them on all who hate you* (Deuteronomy 7:15). However, when Israel failed to follow God's commandments, they and their *descendants* would be cursed and would suffer from *all the diseases of Egypt* (v. 60) These were *diseases of which* the Israelites were *afraid* because they witnessed their horrible effects on the Egyptians (see Exodus 7-10). These same diseases would *cling* to them to destroy them. The Israelites would not be healed from those illnesses.

Not only would the Israelites experience the diseases seen in Egypt, *every sickness and every plague which, not written in the book of this law, the LORD will bring on you* (v. 61). The *book of this law* probably refers to the book of Deuteronomy. Israel's disobedience to the Suzerain (Ruler) God would cause them to be afflicted by diseases and plagues of which they had never known before *until they are destroyed*.

As a result of these plagues, the Israelites would *be left few in number* (v. 62). Whereas the Israelites *were as numerous as the stars of heaven* (Exodus 43:13), Israel's population growth was directly tied to God's promises of blessings to the patriarchs (Genesis 15:5; 22:17; 26:4). God was faithful to His words. He blessed Israel's ancestors with many children. He allowed Israel (Jacob) to go down to Egypt, and there he and his sons prospered and *acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous* (Genesis 47:27).

However, although God's promise had been fulfilled in the past, it would be cancelled out if His covenant people failed to abide by His laws. Israel would

thus return to the situation in which Jacob was *a wandering Aramean* and went down to Egypt and sojourned there, *few in number* (Deuteronomy 26:5).

Moses then summarized this section by saying that *it shall come about that as the Lord delighted over you to prosper you, and multiply you, so the Lord will delight over you to make you perish and destroy you* (v. 63). Just as the LORD would take great joy in rewarding and enriching His people when they obeyed the covenant (v. 8), He would equally take great joy in destroying the people when they disobeyed His covenant (v. 18).

In addition to this, the LORD declared that the few remaining Israelites *will be torn from the land where you are entering to possess it*. Though the land of Canaan was promised to Israel in the covenant, it was conditional upon the people's obedience to the LORD's covenant. As long as they obeyed His commands, they would enjoy His blessings in the Promised Land. But if they disobeyed the stipulations of the covenant, they would *be torn* (or "be forcibly removed") *from the land*.

All this was set forth in a ceremony to be performed by the entire nation, that they would understand the gravity of their choice whether or not to actually walk in the ways of the covenant into which they had entered with their Suzerain God. None of this affected God's choice of Israel to be His own. He chose Israel because of His love (Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:7-8). But it did have to do with their blessing. In order to secure God's blessing, they must walk in His ways.

Biblical Text:

⁵⁸ If you are not careful to observe all the words of this law which are written in this book, to fear this honored and awesome name, the Lord your God, ⁵⁹ then the Lord will bring extraordinary plagues on you and your descendants, even severe and lasting plagues, and miserable and chronic sicknesses. ⁶⁰ He will bring back on you all the diseases of Egypt of which you were afraid, and they will cling to you. ⁶¹ Also every sickness and every plague which, not written in the book of this law, the Lord will bring on you until you are destroyed. ⁶² Then you shall be left few in number, whereas you were as numerous as the stars of heaven, because you did not obey the Lord your God. ⁶³ It shall come about that as the Lord delighted over you to prosper you, and multiply you, so the Lord will delight over you to make you perish and

destroy you; and you will be torn from the land where you are entering to possess it.