

Text: Dt 28.15-68

THEOLOGICAL OUTLINE OF DEUTERONOMY¹

1. **Consider:** a review of God's faithfulness (1.6–4.40)
2. **Covenant:** an exposition of the law (5–26)
3. **Commence:** preparations for renewing the covenant (27.1–28.68)
4. **Commit:** an exhortation to obedience (29.2–30.20)

Deuteronomy 28.15-68

I noted last time that there is a kind of chiasm in Dt 27-28:

Chiasm: Curses (27.15-26), Blessings (28.1-14), Curses (28.15ff.)

Constable says there are about four times more curses than blessings in this text. "The reason was probably to stress the seriousness of violating the covenant, by describing the consequences in detail. Israel was entering a very dangerous environment in Canaan and needed strong warnings against yielding to the temptations she would encounter there (cf. Gen. 3:14–19)."²

"THE CURSE, in case Israel should not hearken to the voice of its God, to keep His commandments. After the announcement that all these (the following) curses would come upon the disobedient nation (v. 15), the curse is proclaimed in all its extent, as covering all the relations of life, in a sixfold repetition of the word 'cursed' (vv. 16–19, as above in vv. 3–6); and the fulfilment of this threat in plagues and diseases, drought and famine, war, devastation of the land, and captivity of the people, is so depicted, that the infliction of these punishments stands out to view in ever increasing extent and fearfulness. We are not to record this, however, as a gradual heightening of the judgments of God, in proportion to the increasing rebellion of Israel, as in Lev. 26:14ff., although it is obvious that the punishments threatened did not fall upon the nation all at once."³

¹ Adapted from an outline in Lawrence O Richards, *The Bible Readers Companion*, electronic ed. (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1991), 117.

² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Dt 28.15.

³ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, *Biblical Commentary on the Old Testament: The Pentateuch*, trans. James Martin, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), 437.

Organization of the passage:

The opening curses (15-19) [Compare with the blessings in vv. 1-6]

Exposition of the curses (20-68)

The afflictions of God's discipline (20-24) [Disease and drought]

The reverse of victory in God's discipline (25-37)

The economic devastation of God's discipline (38-44)

The political devastation of God's discipline (45-57)

The national dissolution of God's discipline (58-68)

Comments:

Use of hyperbole: "The seriousness of the drought demands hyperbole for a proper description. Thus the sky would become bronze, said the lawgiver, and the earth iron (v. 23)."⁴

"God designed these blessings and curses to persuade His people to obey His covenant with them. Stronger proof of the blessing of obedience and the blasting of disobedience is hardly imaginable. God's will was, and is, very clear and simple: obey His Word."⁵

Commentaries often compare these two chapters to ancient "suzerainty treaties" (agreements between a stronger king and a weaker king). They spelled out the stipulations of their agreement (their covenant) and then included blessings and cursings.

It is often said that Deuteronomy itself is an example of this kind of treaty, a notion I strongly disagree with.

Nevertheless, the blessing and cursing sections of the OT law are very arresting. We cannot read them without a shudder.

⁴ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, v. 4 (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 359.

⁵ Constable, *Expository Notes*, Dt 28.58.

Application:

In the New Testament, God's people are in an individual, spiritual relationship with God based on the New Covenant in Jesus Christ.

Maintenance in the New Covenant depends on Christ's work, not on man's.

Why is that?

1. As we see in the OT, men in the Old Covenant seem unable to keep it, so the cursings lie upon them. (Thus becoming a prophecy of their eventual fate.)
2. We cannot suppose that we would be any better in keeping a Covenant than them, we share the same nature.
3. Paul says the Law is a schoolmaster to bring us to Christ (Gal 3.24)

Gal 3.24 Therefore the Law has become our tutor *to lead us to Christ*, so that we may be justified by faith.

4. The troubles of Israel (experiencing the curses) should warn men outside the New Covenant of their desperate need: God requires obedience of all men and will judge all sinners.

Consequently, though this passage is very hard to take, we have to consider that only through the work of Christ can anyone escape the judgement of God.

Besides escaping judgement, Christ gives us the hope of eternal life and of victory over sin.