



Be Blessed!
Deuteronomy 28
GCSP – 06/05/2010

I mailed out a church newsletter this morning; the first one in quite a while. The main article is entitled, "The Biggest Little Word." In the article I briefly deal with the word, "If." All throughout the Bible God tells us, "If you do this, I will do that." These are not small things God promises to do when we fulfill our end of the deal; and our end of the deal is not unreasonable or impossible to do.

Many of God's promises and blessings are unconditional, meaning we do not have to do anything to benefit from them. As a matter of fact we can't do anything to obtain these kinds of blessings or hurry them along.

The Bible tells us that God sends the rain to benefit the just and the unjust; we obviously cannot control the rain. God created the grain and the seed that produces the food we eat, and feeds the animals we use for food. And while we may understand and employ the best practices to grow a more bountiful crop, it is still God who causes the seed to grow.

Salvation is not of us. Scripture is clear that you and I have absolutely nothing to do with being saved; it is completely a work of the Holy Spirit in our lives that draws us to saving faith in Jesus Christ.

There are many other examples in the Bible of blessings we receive by no effort or works of our own; they are simply gifts from our great and magnificent God. But there are other gifts and blessings promised to us that have conditions attached to them; and apart from fulfilling the conditions you will not receive the blessings or benefits.

Turn with me in your Bibles to the Book of **Deuteronomy**.

Deuteronomy 28:1-14

Let's pray.

I know there are many godly teachers and preachers out there who say we cannot lay claim to promises in the Old Testament that were directed at the Children of Israel. So allow me to address this issue before we dive in.

These promises of blessings contained in this passage, were indeed specifically directed at the Children of Israel as they were on the precipice of entering the Promised Land. I am not expecting you to lay claim to a healthy and productive herd or flock if you do not own a herd or flock. You can't claim a bountiful harvest if you do not plant or grow things. Your barns will not be filled if you don't have a barn, etc. But the general principle remains and the promise of blessing in exchange for obedience to God's Word is repeated often in the New Testament.

So don't get hung up on the issue of whether or not the specifics of these promises apply to you or that they only applied to the Children of Israel in the days of Moses; the promise of protection and blessing and provision are just as real to you and I today as they were 4,000 years ago. This is an over-generalization, but the primary blessing in this entire passage is

that of God's complete protection and bountiful provisions for those who obey His commands; and that applies to us still today.

The question you need to ask is simply, "Do I desire the blessing and the provision of God?" If your answer is an emphatic, "Yes!" then you need to make sure you have all the facts and conditions clear in your mind. You can't miss anything and then be deceived into thinking that God does not fulfill His promises, when the real issue is that you have not fulfilled your end of the agreement.

Far too many believers have made the terrible mistake of claiming a promise that is not yet theirs because they have failed to fulfill the conditions or requirements God has set forth.

So let's focus in, phrase by phrase, on these first two verses so we do not miss anything.

Deuteronomy 28:1a – "Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the Lord your God..."

Webster's defines diligent or diligence as, "*steady, earnest, energetic, and painstaking effort.*" How many activities of your life do you perform with diligence? How many things can you honestly say you pursue steadily, earnestly, energetically, and painstakingly? This kind of effort is rare in our world today, let alone in the context of obeying the commands of Scripture.

This in kind of effort has been displayed in some of the elite athletes throughout history. Growing up in the Chicago area, I recall hearing the stories of how Walter Payton trained His body during the off season to be prepared to perform on the field the way he did. Payton was not a big guy by any means; I met him once and was somewhat surprised at how small he was. But on the field, he was able to run through and run over much larger players.

Payton was able to do this because he trained on the steep hill of a landfill in the Chicago suburb of Arlington Heights. After he trained with weights and did his sprints and jogging, he would then run up this steep and hill, as many as 20 times. It was like running uphill in sand. Most people could not even walk up this hill when they were fresh and rested without stopping along the way, but Walter ran up and down this hill in a full sprint at the end of his strenuous and lengthy daily workouts – and this was in the off season when most of his contemporaries were on a beach somewhere or playing a round of golf.

That is as good of a definition of diligence as I can give you. This is the kind of diligence we are to have when approaching our obedience to the Word of God. Half-hearted efforts will not get the job done. Lackadaisical effort does not reach the prize. Good intentions do not gain the benefit. Only steady, earnest, energetic, and painstaking effort gets the job done; diligent obedience to the commands of God is required for the kind of blessing and benefit we are looking at tonight.

Hold your place in **Deuteronomy** and turn with me in your Bibles to **2 Timothy**.

2 Timothy 2:1-6

Paul gives us three illustrations of diligence in this passage: A soldier, an athlete, and a farmer.

The illustration of the soldier gives us the aspect of having a single focus of mind. A soldier in active duty, and the implication is that he is on the battlefield engaging the enemy, cannot also be worried about getting the oil changed on his vehicle at home or painting the house or doing the laundry. A soldier's focus must be on the task before him and on that task alone or his life and the lives of his fellow soldiers could be placed in grave danger.

The illustration of the athlete is one of competing by the rules. Any athlete, who cheats or takes shortcuts or tries to circumvent the standards of proper competition, will not win the prize. He will be disqualified for not adhering to the conditions set forth. An athlete cannot choose the ground rules that he likes but must follow the rules set by the authorities of the games.

The illustration of the farmer is one of persistence and perseverance. A farmer must work long and hard to obtain the harvest. A farmer can't look out the window in the morning and say, "It's going to be a hot one today, I best sit here on the porch with a tall glass of iced tea and wait for a cooler day to work the fields." You have to work those fields just about seven days a week all season long to ensure even the possibility of a good harvest.

My grandpa worked a farm in Missouri during my childhood. He usually had already put in 3-4 hours of hard work before the rest of us got out of bed for breakfast, and sometimes would have to work until dark even when we were in for vacation.

Back now in the Book of Deuteronomy, I hope you are beginning to get the sense of what it means to diligently obey the Lord your God.

Deuteronomy 28:1b - "...being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today..."

The word translated as "**careful**" in this verse means "*to exercise great care, to observe, to guard, and to keep.*" The true sense as used in this verse is to rigorously keep an obligation or to faithfully adhere to the way of the Lord. We are to exercise great care in the keeping of God's commandments.

Once, when Dave & Sue were on a lengthy trip overseas, Sue asked if we would care for her houseplants while they were gone. Other than keeping them in our house and watering them a few times, it did not require great care to keep her houseplants alive. If we were charged with caring for their dog during this trip that would have involved a greater measure of care, but it still would not be great care. Other than making sure the dog has food and water you can pretty much leave them on their own most of the day and night.

Now if someone left us with a newborn baby for a week, a whole different level of care is needed. A baby requires almost constant attention regardless of how you happen to feel at the time and regardless of any other responsibilities you may have. You can't ignore a baby and tell them you will be with them in a few hours after you finish a project you are working on. You can't feed the baby in the morning and call it a day as far as caring for him or her.

Think about how delicately you hold a baby. You support his or her head, you gently cradle them in your arms, and you softly and tenderly bathe them and lotion them and pay attention to their every need. This is the sense of exercising great care.

The sense of the definition to observe is an intense scrutiny. It means to meticulously look at every angle and facet so as to not miss a thing. My wife has always dreamed of being a gemologist; someone who studies diamonds and rubies and sapphires, and rates them based on the cut and clarity and brilliance and whatever else a gemstone is rated on. To me, a diamond is a diamond is a diamond; but truly observing a diamond takes the proper lighting, the proper background, and the proper magnification to be able to see every minute flaw in color, cut and clarity.

Now obviously there are absolutely no flaws in God's Word but this is the sense of carefully observing the Word of God, so that you fully know it in all of its detail.

To guard and to keep gives us the sense of the value of God's Word. Being careful in this sense means you will know and understand just how precious and valuable God's Word is. As **Psalm 19:10** says, speaking of the commandments of the Lord, "**They are more desirable than gold, yes, than much fine gold...**"

The Book of **Joshua** uses this same Hebrew word, so let's quickly turn there.

Joshua 1:7-8

If you were to read the entire chapter you would see that the results and benefit here is that will be strong and very courageous in everything you do.

So how careful are you when it comes to doing what the commands of God say? Do you exhibit great care as with a newborn baby? Do you observe them so carefully that you intimately know every detail? Do you treat them as you would a treasure trove of fine gold?

Deuteronomy 28:1c - "...the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth."

The blessing or the benefit of diligently obeying and being careful to do all of His commands is being set high above all others. What does that mean?

It doesn't necessarily mean you will be promoted to the presidency of your organization or government. It doesn't necessarily mean you will be famous and honored in the social circles of your community. And it doesn't necessarily mean you will be rich beyond measure in the way of money and material goods.

In Israel's case, it specifically meant that God had called them to be "**a kingdom of priests and a holy nation**" (**Exodus 19:5**). Israel was to be a holy nation that enjoyed the prosperity of the Lord in such amazing measure that all nations would recognize and revere the Lord God Almighty. Israel was to be so uniquely blessed that there was absolutely no doubt that the God of Israel was the one and only true God.

We shouldn't have any controversy or arguments about God. There should not be any questions as to which religions of the world are true and genuine. We should never hear any talk of all roads lead to heaven or any religion will do as long as you are sincere in your faith. This was not God's plan for Israel in the days of Moses and it is not His plan for His church today.

Do you know what's different in how this applies to us? - Absolutely nothing. Christians today should be so abundantly blessed by God in every conceivable way that the world would be in awe of the God we serve. That's the promise and the blessing! We should be like Peter in the Book of Acts, where people were lining the streets just trying to have his shadow pass over them to enjoy the healing and blessing of God.

Our lives are to literally be a sweet fragrance, meaning the Lord is in essence dripping off of us, or following us like a strong and wonderful perfume. Paul says in **2 Corinthians 2:15-16**, **"For we are a fragrance of Christ to God among those who are being saved and among those who are perishing; to the one an aroma from death to death, to the other an aroma of life to life."**

And beloved, the fact that the world does not view Israel in this way and the fact that the world does not view the church as a whole in this way or each of us individually in this way, is because we are NOT diligently obeying the Lord and we are NOT being careful to observe His commands!

But we can get there. The blessing and the promise is still available to each of us individually, to the church as a whole, and even to the nation of Israel if we would simply adhere to the conditions God has placed in front of us.

The full extent of the blessing doesn't stop there.

Deuteronomy 28:2 – **"These blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the Lord your God."**

What word jumps out at you in that verse? In the NASB, which I have, it is the word **"overtake."** Almost every popular translation uses the word **overtake** with the exception of the NIV which chooses the word **"accompany,"** which is much too mild a term in the sense of what this truly means. The Message, which is either a translation or a paraphrase depending upon how you view such things, uses the phrase, **"Spread out beyond you,"** which also gets the sense of what Moses was saying.

The Hebrew word is best defined as *"overtake,"* but it also means *"to pursue, to hunt, and to prosper."* The sense then of the blessings of the Lord is that will pursue you and overtake you and prosper you! Is that not the coolest thing? As you diligently obey the Lord and as you take great care in doing all the Lord commands you to do, whether you want them or not the blessings of the Lord will catch up to you, overtake you and prosper you.

Can you get excited about that? But there is one more very important aspect of this based on the sense of this word. The fact that one sense of the word means to hunt and to pursue, tells me that our heart attitude better be in the right place as well. What I mean by that is we cannot obey and do the commands of the Lord for the purpose of receiving these blessings. That would be seeking God's hand instead of seeking His face, so to speak.

Think about this: What are all the commands of God based on to begin with?

Deuteronomy 6:4-15

The love for God alone should be our motivation for obeying and doing the commands of the Lord. Because here's the point; God doesn't put that restriction on these blessings. He is

basically saying in this passage that keeping His commands will result in blessing, but if do not have the right heart attitude of pure and sincere love for the Lord you will run the great risk of turning away from Him after the blessings overtake you.

Do you see that?

Receiving the over-abundance of blessings from the Lord and being able to properly handle them are two different things; and apart from a sincere self-sacrificing love for the Lord you will not be equipped to properly handle everything He desires to pour out on you.

Back in **Deuteronomy 28**, the next 12 verses give some specific detail as to how this blessing will be manifest on the nation of Israel during the time of Moses, but again, the principle is protection and provision which applies to us as well in that general sense.

Allow me to wrap this up though with a word of warning.

Deuteronomy 27:26

If you choose to ignore the commands of God by the mere fact of not obeying and not doing what God says, you will be cursed!

Well, what does that mean? This is a very lengthy passage but I think it would be wise for us to see the awesomeness and the foreboding and the horror and the dread that is included in this warning and this curse that will fall upon those who do not obey and do what the Lord commands.

Deuteronomy 28:15-68

All I can say is, "Wow!"

Can you see at least some of your life in that picture? Can you look back and see how some of these curses fell upon you during the times in your life when you were living in disobedience to the commands of God?

The choice is blessing beyond measure or cursing beyond imagination; the simple conditions are obeying the Lord and doing what He commands to have the abundant blessings pursue you and overtake you, or ignore these conditions and reap the consequences.

Let's pray.