

16. Blessings and cursings

March 3, 2011

Many people think that the Bible is irrelevant to the 21st Century living. Anyone who says that must read chapter 27 and 28 of the Book of Deuteronomy. Because all the things the Lord told the Israelites that they would be cursed if they did were the same things the people of this current carnal world still do whether they'd like to admit the relevance of the Bible or not.

The convenience of civilization, such as cars, computers, and other products that make our lives easier or more difficult, as well as the culture might have changed, but the core mentality of mankind is exactly same – carnal and not willing to obey the Lord's commands.

Jeremiah 17:9 The heart is deceitful above all things, And desperately wicked; Who can know it?

The major portion of tonight's Scriptures were to be repeated by Joshua and the Israelites once they got into the Promised Land.

A. THE LAW WRITTEN ON STONES

Deuteronomy 27:1-8 Now Moses, with the elders of Israel, commanded the people, saying: "Keep all the commandments which I command you today. 2 And it shall be, on the day when you cross over the Jordan to the land which the Lord your God is giving you, that you shall set up for yourselves large stones, and whitewash them with lime. 3 You shall write on them all the words of this law, when you have crossed over, that you may enter the land which the Lord your God is giving you, 'a land flowing with milk and honey,' just as the Lord God of your fathers promised you. 4 Therefore it shall be, when you have crossed over the Jordan, that on Mount Ebal you shall set up these stones, which I command you today, and you shall whitewash them with lime. 5 And there you shall build an altar to the Lord your God, an altar of stones; you shall not use an iron tool on them. 6 You shall build with whole stones the altar of the Lord your God, and offer burnt offerings on it to the Lord your God. 7 You shall offer peace offerings, and shall eat there, and rejoice before the Lord your God. 8 And you shall write very plainly on the stones all the words of this law."

When Israel came into the Promised Land, they were to build a special altar. It was to be made of natural stone, with no iron tool used to carve the stones. With these whole stones making up the altar, they were also to write very plainly on the stones all the words of this law.

This was commanded because God did not want the glory of the stone carver to be the center of attention at His altar. God, at His altar, will share glory with no man – the beauty and attractiveness would be found only in the provision of God, not in any fleshly display by men.

I don't know much about chemistry, but I am venturing to say that lime acidic juice was strong enough to clean up the surface of the stones. Why would the Lord tell them to do this? So God's commandments could be easily seen.

Anything we can do to make God's Word more accessible to others is a good thing, as long as the integrity of God's Word is preserved. Any time God's Word is presented, it must be presented very plainly.

That is one of the reasons why Bible teachers and pastors should take their jobs very seriously. As long as they are called by the Lord in that position, they must communicate God's Word plainly with integrity as the Lord intended.

B. BLESSINGS AND CURSINGS

Deuteronomy 27:11-13 And Moses commanded the people on the same day, saying, 12 "These shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people, when you have crossed over the Jordan: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin; 13 and these shall stand on Mount Ebal to curse: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali.

Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal were located in both sides of Shechem. Mount Gerizim is only 550 ft higher than Shechem. As you can see in this photo, it is not a big majestic mountain.

This dramatic scene was fulfilled in Joshua 8:32-35. He did everything in obedience to this command. Can you imagine you standing in the middle of 2 million people on one of these two mounts and the sound went back and forth?

As the spiritual leaders read these curses, they weren't predicting what would happen if the people disobeyed God. They were calling upon the Lord to send these curses on His people if they turned away from Him. And when the people said "Amen" which means "so be it" after each statement, they were telling God that they were willing to be chastened if they disobeyed Him.

Their "Amen" wasn't just their agreement with the words spoken; rather it was their acceptance of the terms of the covenant. These curses were closely related to the Law Moses had delivered and explained, especially the Ten Commandments.

C. IF YOU DILIGENTLY OBEY THE LORD

Deuteronomy 28:1-2 "Now it shall come to pass, if you diligently obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments which I command you today, that the Lord your God will set you high above all nations of the earth. 2 And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, because you obey the voice of the Lord your God:

If you look at this chapter 28 in a literary form, it is very similar to ancient treaties between a king and his people.

If the nation Israel had simply followed the commands of their Lord God, He would have protected them, provided for them, and blessed them beyond their imagination. But they threw all out by following worthless idols.

Does that sound familiar to you? I believe that God's hand of blessing was on our once great nation from her birth. Now the liberals of this country can not do enough damage by going against the Lord's commands everyday.

The recent stupidity by the Attorney General and the White House declared that the current administration will no longer defend the concept of marriage between one man and one woman. The Congress passed the law that repealed "Don't ask, don't tell" and it encourages homosexuals to have their way of perversion in the military.

In our country's educational system, they rewrite our children's textbooks so that there won't be a mention of "God" anywhere in them. Our nation's morality went down the toilet and lost that strong Christian foundation.

Israel wasn't destroyed because of her military weakness. Rather she was rotten from inside because she lost the sight of God just like the United States is going down and there is nothing any human can do to stop it.

D. IF YOU DON'T, ALL THESE CURSES WILL COME UPON YOU

Deuteronomy 28:15 "But it shall come to pass, if you do not obey the voice of the Lord your God, to observe carefully all His commandments and His statutes which I command you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

The covenant's aspect of the choice was a sword with double edges. Obedience would carry great blessings, but disobedience would carry terrible curses.

In the rest of the chapter 28, we can have a summary of the judgments listed in these verses:

Children cursed – v18

low birth rate – v62-63

Crops ruined and animals killed – v18, v22, v31-32, v38-40, v42, v51

Confusion of mind, madness, and fear – v20, 28-29, 34, 65-68

Sickness – v21-22, 27-28, 35, 59-61

Defeat in war – v25, 49-50, 52

Drought, hunger, and thirst – v22-24, 48

Wives ravished – v30

Oppression and slavery – v29, 33, 48, 68

Cannibalism – v53-57

Captivity – v36, 63-64

Corpses not buried – v26

Poverty, debt, and nakedness – v44, 48

Plans shattered – v30

Robbery – v29, 31, 33

Children kidnapped – v32, 41

Aliens take over the land – v43

Shame and scorn – v37

It's quite depressing to read this long list of calamities, especially when you realize that Israel experienced all of them at one time or another and that innocent people suffered because of the sins of the guilty. Not only Deuteronomy 28, but also Jeremiah's Book of Lamentations is a solemn reminder that it doesn't pay to rebel against God and try to have your own way.

Deuteronomy 28:68 And the Lord will take you back to Egypt in ships, by the way of which I said to you, 'You shall never see it again.' And there you shall be offered for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but no one will buy you."

Bad enough for the daily life of everyone in Israel was destroyed and many of them were exiled to Babylon as slaves, as an insult to injury, no one wants to buy them. You talking about humiliating experiences for the proud people.

I believe that the Lord has a sobering message here for the church in today's world. Like Israel of old, were God's chosen people and a holy nation and have been greatly blessed in Jesus Christ. We are here to spread the Good News of Jesus Christ to everyone around us. If we fail to glorify God and obey His Word, the Lord will chasten us just as He chastened us just as He chastened Israel.

1 Peter 4:17 For the time has come for judgment to begin at the house of God; and if it begins with us first, what will be the end of those who do not obey the gospel of God?

If God chastens His own people for their sins, what will He do to those who don't belong to the family and have resisted His will? But judgment will begin in God's family, and the only way we can avoid it is to turn from our sins and obey His will.

There is a good example of this in Revelation:

Revelation 3:14-17 "And to the angel of the church of the Laodiceans write, 'These things says the Amen, the Faithful and True Witness, the Beginning of the creation of God: 15 I know your works, that you are neither cold nor hot. I could wish you were cold or hot. 16 So then, because you are lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will vomit you out of My mouth. 17 Because you say, 'I am rich, have become wealthy, and have need of nothing'--and do not know that you are wretched, miserable, poor, blind, and naked--"

E. PERCEIVE, SEE AND HEAR

Deuteronomy 29:4 Yet the Lord has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day.

I like that word 'perceive' used here. We don't use that word often. It means "to become aware of, know, discover."

Wouldn't it be great if we get to have a heart to know and discover what the Lord likes and doesn't; and the eyes to see what the Lord wants us to see; and have the ears to hear what the Lord wants us to listen and obey? The only way we can do that is through His Word – putting His Word in our hearts daily.

F. FOLLOWING ONE'S HEART

Deuteronomy 29:19 and so it may not happen, when he hears the words of this curse, that he blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall have peace, even though I follow the dictates of my heart'--as though the drunkard could be included with the sober.

Once a sinner chooses to go against the Lord's commands, there is no limit how he or she can rationalize one's sins and starts to believe one's own lies as a drunkard believes that he is sober like the rest of people.

Speaking of following the dictates of one's heart, do you know there is a church which started its first service with 300,000 people? For the following service was 2 million people. It is the church of Oprah. I am not joking. She started an internet church gathering March 3, 2008.

So what did reverend Oprah Winfrey teach in her services? Here are a few things she taught people and they were happy to receive them:

- Who you are requires no belief.
- Haven is not a location, but refers to the inner realm of consciousness.
- The man on the cross is an archetypal image. He is every man and every woman.

Her web site teaches:

- My mind is God's. I am very holy.
- My holiness is my salvation.
- My salvation comes from me.
- Let me remember that there is no sin.
- Do not make the pathetic error of "Clinging to the old rugged cross."
- The only message of the crucifixion is that you can overcome the cross.

Additionally, she denies that Jesus is the only way to salvation. To make the matter worse is that her mentor is Eckhart Tolle who is a leading spiritist of New Age.

G. APPLICATIONS

1) We always have choices to have God's blessings through our obedience to Him or cursing that proceeds consequences through our disobedience to Him.

2) No one makes us choose cursings over blessings except ourselves.