

November 16, 2025

COVENANT RELATIONSHIP: DEUT 28:1-6,15-19

Introductory Activity¹

Say: *Benjamin Franklin supposedly said that death and taxes were the only guarantees in life.*

Encourage the group to suggest other “guarantees.” After a few minutes, suggest that one sure thing this time of year is called the “college coaching carousel.” Explain that this is when schools fire their head football coaches in the middle of the season. It happens every season. Few professions reward success and punish failure as quickly as college football coaching. And this fall, several major college programs have parted ways with their head coaches during the season. For example, Auburn recently dismissed Hugh Freeze after the Tigers lost five out of six games after starting 3-0. Auburn made the decision even though Freeze’s contract included a buyout worth more than \$15 million. Freeze joined coaches like James Franklin (Penn State), Brian Kelly (Louisiana State), Billy Napier (Florida), and Mike Gundy (Oklahoma State) in the unemployment line. Schools often cite issues like **poor performance** and **unmet expectations** for taking a new direction. (Teachers’ Note: highlight those two reasons. They will connect with the lesson.) When a team thrives, the coach is celebrated. When the results start to slide, though, the consequences can come swiftly.

Explain: Today’s session comes from Deuteronomy 28, where Moses described Israel’s covenant relationship with God. Explain that God had expectations for His people, and their ability to obey Him would determine whether they would be blessed or cursed. Say: *Just as a coach’s future depends on faithfully leading a team to meet its standard, Israel’s future depended on faithfully walking in God’s ways.*

1. FAITHFULNESS (DEUT. 28:1-6)

Read (or have someone read) Deuteronomy 28:1-6.

Explain: This passage reveals the explicit reality of the covenant relationship between Israel and their God. We are reminded of this in verse 1. Moses tells them to “obey the LORD your God.” First, the God they were to obey was Yahweh, the LORD who had delivered them from Egypt. Second, He was *their* God. There was a special relationship between the God of Creation and the people of Israel. The Lord had established a covenant with them at Sinai. A covenant is an “Oath-bound promise

Notes:

This Lesson was created using:

- *Explore the Bible Leader Guide* (ETB LG)
- *Explore the Bible Personal Study Guide* (ETB PSG)
- *Explore the Bible Commentary* (ETBC)
- *Preaching the Word: Deuteronomy* (Preaching)
- *New American Commentary: Deuteronomy* (NAC)

¹ Adapted from https://explorethebible.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Extra_FALL25_S11_Jackson.pdf
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Covenant Relationship: Deut 28:1-6,15-19

whereby one party solemnly pledges to bless or serve another party in some specified way.”² God would bless the people, and the people would serve Him. The covenant between God and Israel was established by God and was to be accepted by Israel. They brought nothing to the table and were only expected to fulfill the obligation to serve the Lord.³ In Exodus 19:8, the people agreed to the covenant, “We will do all that the Lord has spoken.” Deuteronomy 28:1 reminds the people of their obligation and God’s promise of blessing. First, their obligation is to “faithfully obey” and “carefully follow” the Lord and His commands.

The phrase “faithfully obey” is emphatic in the original language. The instruction to “carefully follow” denotes “intentional and watchful obedience to God’s commands.” (ETB LG, 124) They were not instructed to sort of obey the Lord or kind of follow His commands. They were to exhibit diligence in their commitment to keep His commands. If you examine verse 1, you will notice that the command to follow the Lord is embedded in a conditional, if/then, statement. If they diligently follow the Lord, then the Lord will do something. The verse reveals that “the LORD your God will put you far above all the nations of the earth.” This is the second reality of the covenant between Israel in God. He has promised to bless the people. Verses 2-5 explain some of the blessings that will elevate them above the other nations. The first of the blessings is “hidden” in verse 2.

Reread verse 2 (See Notes Box.)

Moses says the blessings of God will overtake them. This same word is used to describe someone being overtaken in battle (Hos 10:9), by sword (Jer. 42:16), and by calamities (Job 27:20).⁴ We can picture in our minds what it means to be overtaken or overrun in battle or by the sword or calamities. These things come upon a person in a way that cannot be stopped. The soldier cannot stop or hide from the surging tide of battle or the raised sword of an overwhelming opponent. The homeowner of the beachfront cottage cannot stop the winds or the storm surge from the coming hurricane. Now take those negative images and replace them with the blessings of God. That is the picture we have in verse 2. The blessings of God will overtake the people like a surging battle or the winds of the storm. The people would not be able to stop the blessings of God. That reality is a blessing in itself. The other blessings are enumerated in verses 3-6 and expounded upon in verses 7-13.

Notes:

Deut. 28:2

All these blessings will come and overtake you, because you obey the Lord your God:

² Steven B. Cowan, “Covenant,” ed. Chad Brand et al., *Holman Illustrated Bible Dictionary* (Nashville, TN: Holman Bible Publishers, 2003), 355.

³ See, Gerard Van Groningen, “Covenant,” in *Evangelical Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, electronic ed., Baker Reference Library (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1996), 124.

⁴ See Francis Brown, Samuel Rolles Driver, and Charles Augustus Briggs, *Enhanced Brown-Driver-Briggs Hebrew and English Lexicon* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1977), 673.

The Blessing of Protection: Verse 3 is a general blessing that exhibits God's blessing on the people wherever they reside. The Explore the Bible Leader Guide expressly couples this blessing with the blessing of protection (ETB LG, 124). We can see this in verses 6 and 7, and particularly in verse 7.

Read verse 7 (See Notes Box.)

Those who live inside walled cities would be protected, and those who live in the wide-open countryside would be protected. The walls would not be the city dwellers' protection, and the lack of walls would not be the downfall of the rural farmer because the Lord would be their hedge of protection.

The Blessing of Population: Verse 4 begins again with a general promise to bless their offspring. If, though, God is going to bless their offspring, they must have offspring to bless. Here we see the blessing of population. The blessing promised by the Lord will enable them to grow as a populous nation. Moses does not provide an overt exposition on the blessing of population in verses 7-14, just a repetition in verse 11. He does, however, provide some very explicit curses related to children and the destruction of the population later in the chapter (vv. 32, 50, 53-57, 61) and sums up his comments related to population in verse 62. This verse reveals the opposite of the blessing of population given in verse 4. Verse 62 states, "62 Though you were as numerous as the stars of the sky, you will be left with only a few people, because you did not obey the Lord your God." If the resulting curse for unfaithful living is so great, how much more the blessing of population for a faithful nation.

The Blessing of Production: The nation was a largely agricultural one, and the Lord promises the blessing of production. Since they are an agricultural people, the blessing of production is not one to bless their shipbuilding, car manufacturing, or semiconductor production. Instead, He will bless their production of bulls, sheep, and goats along with their wheat and barley. Moses expounds on this in the following verses.

Read verse 8a (See Notes Box)

Read verse 12 (see Notes Box)

This economic provision will be a blessing to the nation, not just as a means of sustenance but as a way to grow in overall wealth. The blessing of production is also the blessing of fulfilling work and faithful praise. Calvin writes, "God would not, indeed, have us lie idle, and therefore... He requires the labour of our hands, but He would have the fruit of our labours attributed to Himself."⁵ The blessing of the Lord would allow the people to experience the fulfilling task of working the ground, akin to the experience

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Deuteronomy 28:7

The Lord will cause the enemies who rise up against you to be defeated before you. They will march out against you from one direction but flee from you in seven directions.

Deut. 28:8a

⁸ The Lord will grant you a blessing on your barns and on everything you do

Deut. 28:12

¹² The Lord will open for you his abundant storehouse, the sky, to give your land rain in its season and to bless all the work of your hands. You will lend to many nations, but you will not borrow.

A note on Calvin's French: "Que nous demeurions assis, et les jambes croisees comme des faineans;" that we should remain seated, with our legs crossed, like do-nothings." (Calvin and Bingham, page 222 fn. 3)

⁵ John Calvin and Charles William Bingham, *Commentaries on the Four Last Books of Moses Arranged in the Form of a Harmony*, vol. 3 (Bellingham, WA: Logos Bible Software, 2010), 221-222.

of Adam in the garden before work became toil. His blessing will also remind the people that He is the One who causes their work to produce above and beyond their own ability.

The Blessing of Purpose: Verse 6 provides a summary for this initial explanation of God's blessing. The people would be blessed when they "come in" and when they "go out." However, in Moses' exposition of the blessings below, He outlines one of the reasons God will bless them. He provides the blessing of purpose.

Read Verses 9-10 (See Notes Box)

The people of Israel were always intended to be a missionary people. The Lord would establish them in the land as His holy people set apart by righteousness. He would bless them and cause the nations to observe them. This observation would cause the nations to "stand in awe of" them. Their existence and the Lord's blessings were always meant to draw men to the Lord. (See Groningen, 128)

Summarize Transition: Moses sums up his exposition of the blessings in verse 14. This verse is a reiteration of what was said in verse 1. He concludes, "14 Do not turn aside to the right or the left from all the things I am commanding you today, and do not follow other gods to worship them." All of the blessings of God are contingent on their faithful commitment to the covenant. Things are different for believers today for two reasons. First, the New Covenant is based on Christ's sacrificial work on the cross. Second, God has not established us in a physical territory in which we are to grow and prosper. Instead, He has established us in a spiritual Kingdom. In that Kingdom, His blessings are both temporal and spiritual. He might choose to bless us in physical ways and/or spiritual ways. As we grow in the Lord and experience His blessing, we will function, like Israel, as a light to the nations. Nevertheless, like Israel, we will not experience His blessings if we do not follow His instructions.

In the next passage, Moses, as God's spokesperson, is going to outline the ramifications for the people if they ignore God's instructions. We will look at them from the perspective of the person experiencing them and from the perspective of a person today seeking God's blessings but not adhering to the gospel message.

2. DISOBEDIENCE (DEUT. 28:15-19)

Read (or have someone read) Deuteronomy 28:15-19.

Explain: The exposition of the curses is much longer than the one related to blessings. Maybe this is because people respond better to negative consequences than positive ones (ETB PSG, 106). Maybe it is because God knew Israel would take this path. We do not know, but we do know that the forewarning is an act of grace. The Lord was telling them beforehand what would happen if they failed in their covenant obligations. The forewarning would also provide the people with a means to assess their situation. If, in

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Deut. 28:9-10

⁹ The Lord will establish you as his holy people, as he swore to you, if you obey the commands of the Lord your God and walk in his ways.

¹⁰ Then all the peoples of the earth will see that you bear the Lord's name, and they will stand in awe of you.

the future, they experienced events like the ones outlined in the curses, they could stop and ask if they had failed to follow the Lord. This would allow them the opportunity to repent and return to Him. All of the Law was meant to help the people know how to follow the Lord and to know when they failed to do so. This is different from the pagan nations who were constantly trying to determine the will of the “gods” and to understand if the “gods” were pleased or displeased.

Verses 15-19 are basically a mirror image of verses 1-6. The first six verses outline the blessings of following the Lord, and verses 15-19 outline the curses that will result from not following Him. Verse 15 expresses this reality. Everything is contingent on the people’s decision to follow the Lord. The Israelite or group of Israelites or the entire nation of Israel that decided to forego their commitment to the Lord’s law is, in effect, expressing their belief that they, not the Lord, know what is best. This is an expression of pride. When they begin to act in this prideful, unfaithful manner, they will experience the Lord’s faithfulness to bring about the curses He promised. Let’s quickly look at each curse, a principle we can derive from the curse, and how that may manifest in the life of a person refusing the gospel today.

The first curse is given in verse 16. The prideful, unfaithful Israelites will be cursed in the city and in the country. Remember, we saw that the mirror blessing was both general (blessings regardless of location) and specific (God’s protection regardless of location). The principle we can derive from this curse is that **Even the Best Planner Cannot Avoid the Curse**. An Israelite might say, “I will live in the city and be protected behind its walls.” Or he might say, “I will live in the country away from a possible siege or battle.” It doesn’t matter where they live. If the Lord decides to bring about an invasion by a foreign power, even the best planner would suffer. Today (and always), the biggest threat to a person’s security is death and judgment. People today might manage the terror associated with that threat by planning ahead. They might determine to live a good life or mix and match a few different faith traditions together to prepare for the afterlife. Or they might plan for the afterlife by not thinking about it and living “their best life now.” In reality, it does not matter how we plan if our plans do not adhere to God’s Word and His gospel plan.

The second curse listed is given in verse 17. It is a curse on the production of grain. A principle we can derive from this curse is that **Even the Hardest Worker Cannot Avoid the Curse**. If God decides to send locusts, drought, or disease on the farmland, the farmer cannot do enough to save his crop. He can use pesticides, irrigation systems, or genetically modified seeds, but none of these can stave off the Lord’s judgment. Today, those who refuse to live by the gospel will try and try to win God’s favor. They might volunteer at the food bank or give to charities. They might even work, work, work at the church to earn their salvation. However, the only way to have God’s favor is to submit to His Son and make Him Lord.

The third curse comes at the beginning of verse 18. Like the initial curse we saw that the mirror blessing to this one is both general and specific. The Lord would curse the population in general and deplete the population as well. We see that **Even The Most Dutiful Parent Cannot Avoid The Curse**. Many unbelievers today want the best for their children. They will send them to the best athletics camp or extracurricular activities. They will

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make sure they succeed in school and go to the best colleges. They will even give them a leg up financially if they can. However, all the success in this world is for naught if the parent does not help their child succeed spiritually. The “best” parent of the most successful kid cannot avoid the reality of sin and the curse of judgment. A parent cannot force their child into the Kingdom, but they can send them to the best ministries, make sure they succeed in knowing the Bible, and give them a leg up by raising them in a godly home.

The fourth curse is also found in verse 18. This is an expansion of the curse related to production. Here we see that **Even the Wealthy Cannot Avoid the Curse**. Even the Israelite with the most land and the largest flock or herds could not avoid God’s curse. They might be able to hang on a little longer than someone with less land or small herds, but if the Lord brings judgment, they will not be immune. Today, many people think that wealth, social standing, or influence is enough. Nevertheless, when a person stands before a holy God, He is not going to examine their bank account, ask about their friends, or the influence they had in politics. Instead, He is going to examine their heart, ask about their relationship with Christ, and how much influence He had over their lives.

The last curse found in verse 19 is a mirror of the blessing we found in verse 6. It too is a general curse. Like the blessings that will manifest as they come and go, the judgment of God will as well. We also saw that the corresponding blessing related to the purpose given to Israel as the light to the nations. Here we see that **Even the Most Purpose-Filled Person Cannot Avoid the Curse**. Everyone is looking for something to give their life purpose. Some seek it in business, others in hobbies, still others seek it in “doing good.” The reality is that true purpose cannot be found outside of Christ. If a person ignores the gospel message and refuses to submit to the Lord, he will be aimless and live a life devoid of true meaning. Moreover, everything he does will burn up in eternity.

Summarize and Transition: The Israelites could have avoided God’s judgment on the nation by following His precept. As we see in the history of the nation, they did not do this, and everything God warned them about came to fruition. We should know that there is nothing we can *do* to avoid the judgment for our sin. Judgement is coming for the best planner, the hard worker, the best parent, the wealthy, and the active. Only Jesus can enable us to avoid judgment. His death on the cross is the only thing that makes it possible. When He draws a person to Himself and enables them to say yes to the gospel, they can rest assured that He will bring blessings, not curses, on their life.

CONCLUDE

“After summarizing the main points from the PSG, return to the example of college football coaching changes. Say: *Hugh Freeze’s buyout exceeded \$15 million. When you add up the buyouts being paid to fired coaches this year, the figure is now past \$182 million.* [It may seem that] in some cases, the consequences of getting fired [are] positive. Ask: *How is that different from the curses for disobedience spelled out in Deuteronomy 28? How can understanding the consequences of our sin help us become more obedient to what God is doing in our lives?*”

Encourage adults to think about a time when they knew what was right but chose their own way instead. Remind them that we serve a God of mercy who will take us back when we turn away from sin and return to Him. Close the session in prayer, thanking God for our covenant relationship with Him through Jesus. Ask Him to help each adult to cultivate a heart that obeys Him out of love and gratitude.”⁶

⁶ Adapted from https://explorethebible.lifeway.com/wp-content/uploads/2025/11/Extra_FALL25_S11_Jackson.pdf
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