

## Deuteronomy 28

*And all these blessings shall come on thee, and overtake thee, if thou shalt obey the voice of the Lord thy God. (Deut. 28:2)*

*But if thou wilt not obey the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep and to do all His Commandments, and His ordinances, which I command thee this day, then all these curses shall come upon thee, and overtake thee. (Deut. 28:15)*

### **Anno Domini 2023: Blessings & Curses**

When an individual or any collection of people, whether they range from a gathering of friends to an entire nation, approach the LORD and ask Him to be their God, a covenant is established. A covenant in Scripture is defined by the website BibleProject ([bibleproject.com](http://bibleproject.com)) as “a relationship between two partners who make binding promises to each other and work together to reach a common goal.” These are often accompanied by oaths, signs and ceremonies and are regarded as more personal and relational (not unlike a marriage) than a legal contract as we understand it today.

There are five such covenants found in Scripture between God and the apex of His creation, humans. But each successive covenant builds on, rather than nullifies, the previous one. For example, God approached Abram to make a covenant with him, promising to build Abram into a great nation through whom all people on Earth will be blessed. This covenant (Genesis 15) was reinforced and expanded upon through the covenant God made with the descendants of Israel (Jacob, Abraham’s grandson), through Moses after God rescued the people from slavery in Egypt. The Mosaic Covenant introduced the Commandments and the Law, yet it was not the end of the process. Ultimately, it would point toward another covenant that would be made through the sacrifice of the *Mashiach*, the Anointed One, Jesus. The prior covenants are not negated, discarded or rendered void, but are fulfilled in Jesus; He Himself said in the Sermon on the Mount (Matthew 5:17), *Do not think that I have come to abolish the Law or the Prophets; I have not come to abolish them but to fulfill them.*

When Jesus permitted (that’s right, *permitted*) Himself to be sacrificed on the Cross, it was the final step in establishing a New Covenant, the shedding of blood. Back in Abraham’s time, covenants were established by cutting an animal in two and walking between the pieces through its blood and also having a meal with your covenant partner(s). The Passover meal Jesus had with His Disciples (known more commonly as *The Last Supper*) was that meal, and the crucifixion was that shedding of blood. This is why, when we accept Jesus as Savior and ask Him to be our personal Lord, we are said to have His blood applied to our lives to cleanse us from our sins – we are entering the New Covenant to be a part of it. Because of this, the Holy Spirit enters our lives and gives us the power to actually live out the Commandments in the Mosaic Covenant, living for God in a way that we are unable to do on our own, without help.

Now – fast-forward more than 1,500 years to a group of people known as the Lollards, descendants of followers of John Wycliffe, the “Morning Star of the Reformation” who tried to change what he saw as corrupt practices in the Church of England. You know the Lollards better as the *Pilgrims*.

Their efforts to *reform the reformers* (as it were) had three parts; two of these tried to change the form of worship in the church, getting rid of some of the trappings and symbols they thought made them too much like older denominations that also were stained by corrupt practices. A third group of the Pilgrims, however, gave up on the idea of reforming the Church of England and decided to leave England altogether; first for Holland and then for North America. This is the group that landed in what is now Plymouth, Massachusetts in 1620 and covenanted among themselves to set up a government for the first colony in what was then called Northern Virginia “for the Glory of God, and Advancement of the Christian Faith, and the Honour of our King and Country”. This covenant, known as the Mayflower Compact (legally speaking, the terms “covenant” and “compact” are much the same), would be formally superseded by a patent from the Council of New England the very next year. But its spirit carried on well beyond the Pilgrim separatists who first wrote it. The idea of a people who could be subject to God in their own consciences *and, thus, govern themselves* without the need for an overreaching, extensive and expansive government that was always in danger of yielding to tyrannical impulses was a powerful one. Its effects would be felt 161 years later with the people of the British colonies that grew out of Plymouth Plantation and other settlements. Many of these people who fought a war – with *documented*, Divine assistance – to become independent from Great Britain would mold a new form of government. This government, influenced by Scripture, was designed to be minimal in scope and in the level of intrusiveness upon the people because, like the Pilgrims, faith in and being subject to God enabled them to govern themselves. The Declaration of Independence was the step that built upon the Mayflower Compact, *laying its foundation on such principles... as to them shall seem most likely to effect their Safety and Happiness*. The Constitution of 1789 organized the government’s powers based on the Declaration. A further covenant reinforcement would come in April of 1789 when, after the inauguration in New York City of George Washington as the first President of the United States under the new Constitution, the government met at nearby St. Paul’s Chapel for Divine services asking the LORD to be the God of the nation.

Now, the argument could be made that, because the practices followed in Scripture were not followed, that what the Founders did are not proper covenants. They actually are, because they were operating under the New Covenant. Because of Jesus’ sacrifice on Calvary, that of a perfect, sinless man being the substitutionary, once for all time death for our sins, the sacrifice of an animal was no longer necessary. *We are* under covenant with God the Father. But covenant also means there are a series of *if/then* provisions in the relationship – or, as we know them in Scripture, *blessings and curses* for obedience or disobedience. In Abraham’s time, to walk between the two pieces of a slain animal, through its blood, figuratively was saying, *may this also happen to me if I do not uphold my part of this covenant*. (This is the forerunner of our modern English phrase, “cutting a deal.”)

In Chapter 28 of the Book of Deuteronomy, the blessings and curses of the Mosaic Covenant are listed. So important to the covenant were these details that the Israelites were instructed not only to engrave them on stones, but to speak the words of them once they entered the Promised Land as a witness to the people. The blessings were to be spoken on Mount Gerizim, and the curses on nearby Mount Ebal where the engraved stones were to be set up. And since God (as the more powerful partner) is the One Who sets the terms of the covenant, it is easy for people to think is that God is

operating in a Divine form of spite, a *My way or the highway* attitude. It is not; it is simply an acknowledgement of man's sin nature and that consequences for our actions exist. Note that in both blessings and curses, God does not at first use the words *I will send*; instead, He uses the words *will overtake you*, implying that the manifestations for good or for ill are automatically triggered by our actions. God used this imagery earlier, in Numbers 32:23: *But if you fail to do this, you will be sinning against the LORD; and you may be sure that your sin will find you out.* Now, God is perfectly capable of intervening to reverse the manifestations or let the next level kick in. But how the process is engaged is up to us.

The bad news is that we have started long ago that process of curses overtaking us, and we are seeing the effects of our personal and national sins as they catch up to us. The good news is that more believers are waking up to the crisis and crying out to God for a new Great Awakening to turn this nation back to Him. Beginning next week, we will examine the blessings and curses in Deuteronomy 28 to see how this nation was blessed in the past, when and how the curses began and our current status.

We as a nation are on the brink, the precipice, at the crossroads. I believe that, ultimately, America will be saved and see that new Awakening as we permit God to move among us and restore us to Himself (which will lead to our blessing and restoration as the America God intends for us to be). We could also be about to see God take stronger measures to get our attention and the next level of the curses engages in order to get us to the Awakening; we may already be at that point now. This is not, as some Bible teachers characterize it, *going 'round the mountain one more time* until we get it right, but inviting even worse conditions than we now experience as we the watchmen remain distracted. God set *We the People* up as the source of political power in this nation; are we going to step up to the task or not?