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Curses for Disobedience

28: 15-68



If **God's** children refuse to obey **ADONAI's** mitzvot faithfully, **He** will bring a great number of curses on them for their failure to maintain their part of the covenantal agreement. The suzerain-vassal treaties of the ancient world (**to see link click [Ah](#) - The Treaty of the Great King**) were normally characterized by an imbalance of blessings and curses. The more curses the better; all the more to accent the danger of unfaithfulness. There is a mixing of curses that affect home and family as well as those that affect the nation, thus moving toward a more national perspective. As with the blessings, **Moshe** begins by giving a brief statement of the curses in **28:15-19**, followed by a lengthier description of the dreadful consequences in **28:20-68**.⁵⁹⁴

The framework for which **the blessing and curse** can be seen in the Torah is as follows:

A. The blessings and curses in the present renewal of the covenant (11:26-28).

B. The blessings and curses in the future renewal of the covenant (11:29-32).

C. The Specific Stipulations of the Covenant (12:1 to 26:19).

B. The blessings and curses in the future renewal of the covenant (27:1-26).

A. The blessings and curses in the present renewal of the covenant (28:1-69).

It is important to understand that **the blessings** were not merely rewards for moral goodness and **the curses** (Hebrew: *arar*) were punishment for evil-doing and rebellion. Such a view is too shallow. There is a deeper reason. Notably, **Isra'el** was **God's covenant people**. **ADONAI**, in **His** sheer grace, displayed many acts of deliverance on **her** behalf and took **her** into a covenant relationship. In gratitude, **Isra'el** accepted **His** invitation. It was, therefore, **her** covenant with **YHVH** which created, sustained and gave meaning to **her** nationhood. To disobey **God** was to disobey and to reject the very source of **her** life. The only way for **Isra'el** to live was to remain in fellowship with **Him**. In that fellowship lay **her** whole shalom, the totality of **her** whole being. Being out of fellowship with **YHVH** meant that **she** was cut off from life itself. **Her** choice was basically one between the blessing of life and the **curse** of **death** (see [Fq - Choose Life](#)).

The primary concern of **Chapter 28** is not, therefore, with rewards. In secular treaties, the blessings and **curses** were mere sanctions. It was quite different, however, with **Ha'Shem's** covenant. If **Isra'el** asked how life may be lived full of hope, in the enjoyment of **God's** blessing and with the promise of a wonderful future, the answer was that only in fellowship with **ADONAI** and in obedience to **His** mitzvot could such a life be found. There was no other way. If **His** sovereignty was denied and **He** was rejected, **Isra'el** would descend into **the valley of the shadow of death (Psalm 23:4a)**. That would be to reject all of **YHVH's** love for **Isra'el**. Then, as painful as it might be for **Him**, **the LORD** would bring judgment upon **her** so **she** might be purged, refined, and restored.

So, some may ask, "Why so *many* **curses**?" The disproportionate number of curses to blessings is quite normal in the Near East treaties. In the case of **Deuteronomy**, the space allotted to the **curses** is about four times that given to the blessings. This is probably due to the fact that, human nature being what it is, the threat of a severe judgment on the covenant breaker seems to act as a stronger stimulus to correct behavior than any promise of blessing.⁵⁹⁵