

Deuteronomy 7:11–26 Health, Wealth, and Prosperity

Many churches today preach a health, wealth, and prosperity message. They claim that if you are faithful to God, and especially if you are generous in your financial support of the church or of a Christian ministry, God will bless your health and grant you financial prosperity. Such preachers often refer to passages like the one we are considering today to back up their claims.

Whenever we read the OT, we have to consider the original author and the original audience. In this passage, Moses is speaking as an inspired prophet to the nation of Israel. This material has a specific audience and application—Israel as they are about to conquer the PL.

What do we in the NT church learn from this? Can we take these statements directly from Moses and apply them to us? No. Moses is *not* talking about church-age believers here; he's talking to Israelites at a particular place and time. The church is not Israel. All of this pertains to the Old Covenant, the Mosaic Covenant, not the New Covenant. We are not under the Old Covenant today. So we cannot claim all of these promises for ourselves. These promises do not pertain to us directly.

However, there are some parallels and some timeless principles here that are applicable to us today. In general terms, God blesses those who obey his commandments. If we listen to God, obey his word and avoid spiritual compromise, God will bless us in various ways. God blesses obedience and faithfulness.

Israel had the right to expect God to bless the nation in concrete, specific ways. God promises them health, wealth, and military victory if they would obey him. These are physical blessings that Israel could expect if they would remain faithful to the covenant.

In the NT era, God's program is the church, not the nation of Israel. God has *not* promised to grant us health, wealth, and victory over our enemies. We don't have a particular land that we are trying to conquer. Most of us don't have livestock to multiply. We are not growing grain or olive trees; we are not gathering grapes. We do not eradicate idolaters or destroy temples. So the situation is different for us than it was for the ancient Israelites.

Still, we can affirm that God promises to bless his people when they obey him. This pattern of blessing still pertains. Perhaps we will not enjoy the exact same kinds of blessings that God promises to Israel, but we can count on God's blessings when we are obedient.

What does this text tell us about how God blesses his people?

I. Blessings are based on God’s covenant with Israel. .12

A. .12 The covenant requires them to obey God’s commands.

1. “listen” is the same word as “hear” (שמע), as in “hear O Israel...” – to heed, to hear, to pay attention, to conform, to obey.
2. Note the words “listen...keep...do them.” So there is no doubt that he’s exhorting them to obey the commandments.
3. He calls these commandments “judgments” (משפטים) – “ordinance of law, custom, manner; governing rules, governing processes.”
4. God would bless them if they obeyed the law—the stipulations God gave them on Mt. Sinai—the ordinances, the rules, the processes the Mosaic law.

So obedience to the OT law is what God required of Israel. What can Israel expect in return from God?

B. .12end The covenant requires that God shows mercy to Israel – “the covenant and the mercy which he swore to your fathers” (.12end)

1. God will keep his side of the covenant—he will bless the descendants of Abraham by giving them the PL. They will be a great people inhabiting the land that God gave them.
2. God will show them mercy.

The word “mercy” (חַסְדִּים) is an exceedingly important one in the OT. The word means “loyal love, faithful love, loving kindness.” The word often refers to God’s faithfulness to his covenant.

It’s not love in the romantic or sentimental sense. It’s love in the sense of keeping one’s word, being faithful.

C. So the idea is that God will keep his end of the bargain if they keep their end of it. God will fulfill his promises to them if they prove to be obedient. They can count on God to bring them into the PL and to cause them to defeat the Canaanites—if they would uphold their end of the covenant. Obedience will yield blessing.

Trans: We are not Israel, and we are not conquering land. Still, the same basic principle pertains to us—God blesses obedience. We are not saved by obedience, but we are blessed through obedience. If we want to enjoy God’s blessings on our lives, then we must obey God’s commands.

II. Blessings from covenant faithfulness would be extravagant. .13-16

This passage contains a list of blessings that God promises to Israel if they will keep the covenant. This is how God would demonstrate his love and mercy toward them. If they prove to be faithful, then God will provide all of these blessings.

- A. .13 He will love you. It's a great blessing to be the object of God's love. God cares, shows compassion.
- B. He will bless you.
- C. He will multiply you.

Remember that Israel was “the least of all people” (vs. 7). They were a relatively small group of former slaves when they came out of Egypt. But if they were faithful, God promises to multiply them. That's exactly what God promised to Abraham about 4 centuries before this.

.13 The blessings of this section pertain mainly to fertility or productivity—human, plant, and animal fertility. The grammar here suggest that God will actively and forcefully increase the productivity of these things.

1. .13b Family fertility: children—“fruit of your womb.” God will multiply your offspring. The women will be fruitful; they'll have large families. In the ancient world, and especially among farmers, having a big family was a blessing. A bigger family meant more prosperity.
2. Field fertility: crops—“Fruit of your land.”
 - a) Your grain—e.g., barley, wheat
 - b) Your new wine—grapes
 - c) Your oil—olive trees

Throughout the OT, fertility of grain, wine, and oil were the marks of blessing and fruitfulness. For an agricultural people, blessings on the soil were very important. Fertile crops meant prosperity.

3. Flock fertility: cattle. God will multiply your cattle and your flocks of sheep and goats.

So God promises great fertility and productivity for Israel's covenant faithfulness.

We should recall that the Canaanites had their own fertility gods—Baal, Ashera. The pagans worshipped these false gods and sacrificed to them in order to insure the fertility and productivity of the land.

God is saying that *he* is in control of the fertility of family, field, and flock. The Canaanite gods have no control over such things; these idols are nothing. Only Yahweh can bless you with multiplied children, crops, and cattle. And he would do that if they are faithful.

- D. .13end He will allow you to remain in the land which God promised to your fathers.

This was a very desirable land—God describes it as a “land of milk and honey.” So it would be a great privilege to live there. They can enjoy this land as long as they remain faithful to the covenant.

- E. .14a You shall be blessed above all peoples. God would provide special privileges to Israel that no other nation would enjoy.

- F. .14b No barrenness among males or females or among livestock

1. To be “barren” meant that you could not produce offspring. For a shepherd, a barren flock would be a disaster.
2. No barrenness implies great fruitfulness and productivity. The flocks and herds would grow. That’s how one becomes prosperous—his flocks and herds expand because they are fruitful.
3. .14end This would be true for “you and your livestock.”

App: In our culture, people often intentionally make themselves barren. They want no children—DINC couples—people who intentionally avoid having children so as to spend all their resources on themselves. Our modern culture stands in opposition/contradiction to the idea that multiplied children are a blessing.

The biblical picture is that Christian families should “be fruitful and multiply.” All of you young people should plan to get married and have lots of children. Enjoy the blessings of fertility and fruitfulness.

- G. .15 no sickness or Egyptian diseases

1. Moses calls them “terrible (הַרְעִים) diseases” – historians confirm that horrible diseases were common in Egypt in ancient times.
2. Here is the promise of good health. God makes this promise to Israel—they can expect good health; they’ll avoid disease.

Quite a wonderful promise – “take away from you all sickness.”
Imagine not needing health care—that would be wonderful.

God had previously promised this:

Exodus 15:26 *“If you diligently heed the voice of the LORD your God and do what is right in His sight, give ear to His commandments and keep all His statutes, I will put none of the diseases on you which I have brought on the Egyptians. For I am the LORD who heals you.”*

3. .15end God would take these diseases and afflict their enemies with them.

Trans: This is a list of wonderful blessings—health, wealth, and prosperity. God promises these privileges to Israel, but ...

III. .16-26 Blessings require Israel to trust and obey.

These are conditional/contingent blessings. God would provide them *if* Israel kept its side of the agreement. What were Israel’s obligations?

- A. .16 Utterly destroy (אָכַל KJV “consume”—eat, devour) all the Canaanites.
 1. This is both a command and a promise. You will destroy them; you must destroy them.
 2. Have no pity on them; no compassion for them. They are deserving of God’s judgment, not his mercy.
 3. Do not serve their gods.
Moses repeats this command frequently. Cf. 7:2-6
 4. (skip up to) .25-26 Along with destroying the people, Israel must destroy the Canaanite religion altogether.
 - a) .25a Burn their religious objects/idols. These religious object were under the ban—they must be devoted to total destruction/annihilation.
 - b) .25b Do not covet the precious materials contained in these idols. Do not take them for yourselves.

Quote: Objects used in idolatry were to be destroyed together with the idolaters.¹ What [the idols] symbolized was so counter to the Lord and his purposes that they could not coexist with him.²

c) .26 Do not bring them into your house

Remember the story of Achan (Josh 7) who did this very thing—he took some of the banned materials from Ai and brought them to his home. He paid a high price for his disobedience.

.26end Moses uses two words here for very strong condemnation/disapproval. Utterly detest and abhor such accursed things.

App: Many people today stress the love of God and totally ignore the fact that God also hates some things. We must affirm both God’s love and God’s hatred of sin, especially idolatry.

We must learn to love what God loves and hate what God hates. God detests and abhors idolatry, wickedness, and gross immorality. We need to feel the same way about such things. We should conform our thinking and feeling to God’s viewpoint on these things.

d) Warnings

(1) .25end You may be snared by them—i.e., you may be influenced by them; you may be tempted by them. Israel seemed to be susceptible to idolatry.

(2) .25end These things are an abomination to God, an accursed thing (אָרְוָה)—devoted to destruction.

(3) .26b If you become idolatrous, you will be “doomed to destruction” like the idols themselves. Israel could guarantee its own destruction if they fall into idolatry. So this is a very strong warning against adopting the false religions of the heathen.

¹ Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. David G. Firth, vol. 5, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 149.

² Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 184.

App: What is God’s attitude toward false religion? God finds it detestable and abominable. True religion cannot coexist with false religion.

We should have the same attitude/viewpoint toward false religion as God does. God does not expect us to destroy anyone or demolish any property, but we should want to see the utter destruction of false religion. This is an abomination to God. He hates it, and we must hate it as well; we must never compromise with it.

- B. .17-19 Don’t be afraid of the Canaanites; remember what God did to the Egyptians.

Why didn’t Israel enter the PL 40 years before this point? For fear of the Canaanites. And it seems that fear was still a factor within Israel.

Instead of focusing on the great power of the Canaanites, focus on the mighty power of God. God had displayed his great power on many occasions; they had seen it for themselves. The Israelites should be fully convinced that God is able to empower them to conquer the PL.

1. God displayed his great power—trials, signs and wonders, God’s mighty, outstretched hand—i.e., the plagues and the exodus and all the miracles associated with it.
2. God will do the same kinds of things to the Canaanites. Israel could expect God to work miraculously on their behalf as they conquer the PL.
3. Egypt was a great, mighty, powerful nation, probably the most powerful nation of the ancient world at that time. Yet look what happened to them—God miraculously destroyed the Egyptians.

The Canaanite nations were rather insignificant compared to Egypt. If God could do the greater to Egypt, he could certainly do the lesser in Canaan.

.18b “remember well what the Lord your God did to Pharaoh and to all Egypt.”

App: The remedy for fear is to remember what God has done in the past. Instead of focusing on the object of fear, focus on God. Trust that God can overcome your fears.

- C. .20-24 Trust God.

1. .20 The Lord will “send the hornet among them”

- a) What is “the hornet”? The word (צִרְעָה) literally means “hornet.”
- b) But what was Moses referring to?
 - (1) He could be referring to actual hornets that attacked the Canaanites. Or...
 - (2) the Canaanite armies will run away like people do from swarms of hornets. Or that...
 - (3) God would send the Canaanites into great confusion; a divinely inspired panic would cause their defeat.

Exodus 23:27-28 *I will send My **fear** before you, I will cause **confusion** among all the people to whom you come, and will make all your enemies turn their backs to you. And I will send hornets before you, which shall drive out the Hivite, the Canaanite, and the Hittite from before you.*

Quote: The reference ... likely is metaphorical of the sense of fear, panic, or discouragement that the Lord would inflict on the Canaanites (11:25—referring to dread and fear).³

- (4) .20end Whatever it was, the work of the hornets would be so thorough that even those Canaanites who survived the battles and who were hiding would be destroyed.
2. .21b God is among you.
- a) God is the Lord—Yahweh, the great and awesome God.
 - b) God is among you—they could count on God’s presence.
 - c) God’s presence should prevent them from being “terrified.”

³ Earl S. Kalland, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 74.

So he's saying, "Don't fear the Canaanites; trust Yahweh—the great and awesome God." KJV – "mighty and terrible." God's presence should remove fear.

3. .22 The Lord will drive them out little by little.
 - a) The initial conquest would proceed quite quickly, but a complete conquest would happen only gradually.
 - b) They could expect this process to take some time—years, in fact to carry out this plan.

4. .23-24 God will deliver them over to you; He will deliver the kings into your hands; you shall destroy them.

a) .24a “he shall deliver their kings...” Defeating the kings implies the defeat of the entire region.

Quote: Canaan was a series of city-states ruled by individual kings. Their defeat as the power symbols of their city-states would mean the disintegration of their armies and the social life of the land.⁴

b) .24b Moses describes what God intends for Israel to do—“destroy their name from under heaven.”

This refers to the complete destruction of the Canaanite civilization and culture, to the degree that no one will remember them—destroy their name, their culture, and their religion. Nothing should remain of them; they are to be utterly exterminated to the point that succeeding generations will forget them. Cf. vs. 16 “destroy/consume/eat up”

c) .24end No one will be able to withstand the armies of the Israelites. These Canaanite people and cities were very powerful, but they stood no chance against a people empowered by God.

⁴ Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. David G. Firth, vol. 5, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 148.

There are many timeless principles for us in this passage.

Many of God's blessings are conditional. If we are obedient, we can expect God's blessings on our lives. Cf. "Seek ye first..." Perhaps we are not receiving God's blessings because we are not obedient or faithful.

We can trust in God. In light of what God has done for us previously, we can trust God to take care of us in the future. And, of course, the ultimate blessing is heaven itself. Our lives will come to an end at some point, but even then, to be absent from the body is to be present with the Lord.

We should hate what God hates. God utterly abhorred and condemned the Canaanite systems of idolatry. Israel must destroy that false religion and those who practice it. Likewise, we should abhor and detest what God hates. What God hates should have no appeal to us. We should try to dismantle error by teaching truth. We cannot compromise with falsehood and error.

We can count on God's presence with us. Jesus said, "I will never leave thee nor forsake thee.... I am with you always." We can face our challenges because God is with us, even through the valley of the shadow of death. But at the same time, we must be faithful to him. We must fulfill our biblical obligations if we expect God to work on our behalf.

.18 Don't be afraid; remember what God did.