

Ki Tavo

כִּי תָבוֹא

“When you come”

Deuteronomy 26:1 – 29:8

Torah Together



This *Torah* portion contains the list of blessings that the Israelites will enjoy if they keep their covenant with God and the curses that they will endure if they break that covenant. You will notice that the list of blessings is comparatively short and not nearly as graphic as the list of curses. From an historical perspective, we know that, in general, the Israelites did not keep God’s covenant.

1. Firstfruits and Tithes - 26:1-15

a) After the Israelites had settled the land, they were commanded to take some of the firstfruits and put them in a basket. Where and to whom were they to present it?

The firstfruits were taken to “the place God will choose to dwell,” i.e., Jerusalem, and were presented to the priest.

b) What were they to declare to YHWH? Why do you think God requested this be done?

The offerer said, “I declare today to YHWH my God that I have come to the land YHWH swore to our forefathers to give us.” Thus the person was stating that God had fulfilled his promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

c) What was to be done with the tithe every third year, “the year of the tithe” (verse 12)? How was this tithe to be used? How was this different than the other two years?

Every third year, the tithe was to stay in the town in which it was grown. It was given to the local Levites and was used to feed the alien, the widows and orphans, and the poor in that town.

2. Follow God’s Commands - 26:16-19

This passage concisely states the covenant (the promise) between God and Israel. What does each party promise to the other? What do you think about these promises today?

The Israelites promised that (1) YHWH is their God and that (2) they would walk in his ways, keep his decrees, commands, and laws, observing them with all their heart and with all their soul. God promised that (1) the Israelites were his people, his treasured possession and that (2) he will set the Israelites in praise, fame, and honor above all the nations, and finally that (3) the Israelites will be a people holy to YHWH. History showed that the Israelites didn’t keep their promises. God will keep his promises, however, and we can look for some of these things yet in the future.

This passage contains a clear statement of the tithe God expected from the Israelites. Notice how they were to present their tithe and what it was to be used for. Do you think these same principles apply to us today?

Recall that a **covenant** was an agreement entered into by two parties, in this case God and Israel. Each party swore on pain of death to keep their promises to the other party.

Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim are located about 25 miles north of Jerusalem. They are only about 3 miles apart, separated by a valley. Between them, in this valley, lies the town of Shechem (today known as Nablus). This is the same town where Jacob's daughter, Dinah, was raped as described in Genesis 34.



Scripture Link:
Joshua 8:30-35 tells the story of the Israelites as they carried out the command that Moses gives them in Deuteronomy 27.

3. The Altar on Mount Ebal - 27:1-8

a) After entering the land, as one of their first acts, God commanded that the Israelites were to cover some large stones with plaster. What was to be done with these stones?

On the stones covered with plaster were to be written "all the words of this law" (verse 3). (It is not clear how much of the Torah was actually written on these stones.)

b) Where were these stones to be set up? What else was to be constructed at this site? Do you find any significance that these items were to be constructed here?

The stones were to be set up on Mount Ebal, the mount of cursing, along with an altar of undressed field stones. The stones declared the penalty for disobeying God's laws but the altar provided a way for the penalty to be paid.

4. Curses from Mount Ebal - 27:9-26

a) The common form for treaties between two parties in ancient times included a description of the benefits (blessings) for keeping the agreement as well as the penalties (curses) for breaking the agreement. These were written and then read in the presence of both parties. In the case of the covenant between God and the Israelites, where was this reading to take place? Can you find these places on a map? Who was to read which part and where were they to be read?

The blessings and curses were to be read from the tops of Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim. On Mount Ebal (Mount of Cursing) were to stand the sons of Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali and on Mount Gerizim (Mount of Blessing) were to stand the sons of Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. The Levites were to pronounce the blessings and curses. (See Joshua 8:30-35 for when this took place.) Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal are well-known today. They are located on either side of Shechem (Nablus) in the West Bank. Even though they are located in "Palestinian territory," there is a Jewish settlement on Mount Gerizim.

b) Verses 15 - 26 list the offenses that would bring about curses. Do you find anything interesting about the offenses that the Levites recited before all the Israelites? Do any particular ones stand out to you as more important than others? How were the Israelites to respond as each offense was recited?

All the curses begin with the phrase "Cursed is the man..." This illustrates how sin starts as a personal issue but can lead to national disobedience. Each individual is responsible for his own conduct. After each curse, the Israelites responded by saying "Amen!" or "so be it."

5. Blessings for Obedience - 28:1-14

a) This rather short section lists the benefits that result from obedience to God's commands. The first 8 verses speak of blessings for the individual. What are some of these?

God would bless the obedient Israelite with fruitfulness in his family, herds and crops (verse 4) whether he lived in the city or the country (verse 3). He would travel in safety (verse 6) and be protected from his enemies (verse 7).

b) Verses 9 through 14 list some of the benefits Israel as a nation will receive for obedience. List these blessings.

God promised that if they were obedient, "all the people of the earth will see that you are called by the name of YHWH and they will fear you" (verse 10). They would enjoy prosperity, lending to many nations but borrowing from none. They would be a leader among the nations (verse 13).

6. Curses for Disobedience - 28:15-68

a) This much longer section (the remainder of the chapter) lists the curses for disobedience. Compare the curses with the blessings given in verses 1-14. Why do you think there is so much more detail given with the curses than with the blessings?

There is a one-to-one correspondence between the blessings and curses, each blessing rephrased as a curse. The extra detail may have been meant to encourage the Israelites not to break their covenant with God. As history unfolded, it also turned out to be prophetic of Israel's future.

"And YHWH has declared this day that you are his people, his treasured possession as he promised, and that you are to keep all his commands."

Deuteronomy 26:18

b) Beginning at verse 26, Moses goes into great (and prophetic) detail about the curses. Can you identify any events described that occurred later in Israel's history?

Verse 36 foretells the defeat and dispersion of Israel (the northern kingdom) by the Assyrians as detailed in 2 Kings 17. (Also see "Digging Deeper" at end of this lesson.) Verse 43 and 44 speak of the domination of Israel by other nations. Verses 49-52 could describe the conquest of Judah by the Babylonians. The cannibalism described in verses 53-57 is depicted in 2 Kings 6:24-29 when Samaria was besieged by the Arameans (Syrians).

c) Verses 64 - 68 describe events in Israel's future. Have all of these events taken place? Are any yet to occur?

Israel has been scattered among all the nations. Verse 68, "YHWH will send you back in ships to Egypt on a journey I said you should never make again" may be an event to occur yet in the future.

The entire book of Deuteronomy is organized in the form of a **suzerainty treaty**, a form of contract in the ancient near-east between two unequal parties, one superior (the suzerain) to the other (the vassal). It is organized as follows:

1. Historical Prologue – where the relationship between the parties is explained
2. Stipulations – where the specific demands of the suzerain are detailed
3. Deposition - where the text of the contract is to be deposited and how it is to be attested
4. List of Witnesses – before whom the oath is sworn
5. Blessings and Curses – a listing of what will happen to the vassal depending on whether oath is kept or broken.

Can you see how the book of Deuteronomy fits into this outline?

Scripture Link:

2 Kings 17 tells the story of the conquest and dispersion of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians in the 8th century bc, which could fit the description given here. It might also describe the dispersion of the Jews after their conquest by the Romans in 70 ad.

7. Renewal of the Covenant - 29:1-9

As Moses prepares to renew God's covenant with Israel, what events does he recall? What does Moses encourage the Israelites to do in verse 9?

Moses recalled the miracles that God performed on their behalf as they left Egypt, the fact that their clothes or shoes hadn't worn out and they were provided daily food and water for 40 years, and the defeat of the Amorites at Moab. Moses encourages the Israelites to follow the terms of the covenant so that they might prosper in everything they do.

Digging deeper

1. In Deuteronomy 28:36, Moses pronounces a curse that would come over Israel in the event of their disobedience. Read II Kings 17. Do you think this is the realization of this curse? Now read II Kings 25. What is different about this situation? Are these both examples of the same curse or are they different?

Second Kings 17 describes the defeat and dispersion of the northern kingdom of Israel by the Assyrians in ~ 728 bc. They indeed were taken to nations unknown to them or their fathers. Second Kings 25 describes the defeat and deportation of the southern kingdom of Judah by the Babylonians. In this case, the Israelites did know of Babylon, so it could be argued that this situation was different. However, in both cases, the Israelites were driven from Israel. In the case of the northern kingdom, the Israelites have yet to return. In the case of the southern kingdom, the Judahites (Jews) returned to the land after 70 years of captivity in Babylon.

2. In Deuteronomy 29:1-9, Moses begins his exhortation to obey God's commands and keep His covenant. In verse 4, Moses says, "But to this day YHWH has not given you a mind that understands or eyes that see or ears that hear." What do you think Moses meant by this? How does Romans 11:7-8 apply here?

One might paraphrase what Moses was saying as follows: "You've experienced many miracles as you left Egypt and since. But you still don't get it! God wants you to love him and obey his commands with all your heart, soul, mind, and strength."

For further study, see

Haftarah : Isaiah 60:1-22

Brit Hadashah : Matthew 13:1-23; Luke 21:1-4;

Acts 28:17-31; Romans 11:1-15