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This week's Triennial Torah reading can be found at:

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Deut 28	2 Chron 15-20		Rev 7-10
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Blessings and Curses Revisited (Deuteronomy 28)

In this lengthy chapter (which parallels Leviticus 26), God describes in great detail what would happen to the nation of Israel if they obeyed His words, and what would happen if they disobeyed Him. Verses 2-14 point out the specific blessings for obedience. They would include food in abundance (verses 3-6, 8), safety from enemies (verse 7), healthy children and abundant livestock and produce (verses 11-12). These blessings would also enable Israel to give to many other nations, without having to borrow from them (verse 12). All in all, Israel would become a “holy” people (verse 9), “the head and not the tail” (verse 13).

On the other hand, disobedience would bring about severe punishment. And that is just what happened. We know from history that ancient Israel and Judah later suffered some of the specific curses listed, including military attacks, when the Assyrians and the Babylonians besieged and conquered Samaria and Jerusalem and enslaved the two nations. But we know, too, that an even greater period of devastating punishment is still ahead of us. The Great Tribulation of the end time will be worse than any calamity or holocaust of the past (see Matthew 24:21; Jeremiah 30:7; Daniel 12:1; Deuteronomy 31:29). It will afflict modern Judah, i.e., the Jewish people, and the modern descendants of ancient Israel, especially the United States (Manasseh) and Great Britain along with other Commonwealth nations, such as Canada, Australia and New Zealand (Ephraim). (See our free booklet *The United States and Britain in Bible Prophecy*.) God will use for this punishment the dreadful curses spelled out in Deuteronomy 28 as well as military attacks and enslavement at the hands of a new global superpower, the resurrected Roman Empire, called “Babylon” in the book of Revelation.

In particular, there will be famine due to food shortages and destruction through locusts, worms and other natural disasters, unhealthy livestock, and droughts (verses 17-18, 23-24, 38-40, 42). The people of the land will become incurably sick, both physically and mentally (verses 21-22, 27-28, 34-35, 59-62). They will be conquered by a foreign power and become slaves of

them will be brought as captives of war to distant lands, including Egypt, never to see their country again (verses 32-33, 36, 41, 49 ff., 68; compare Isaiah 11:11). During the siege of their cities, some will even resort to cannibalism (Deuteronomy 28:52-57). This actually occurred during the siege of Jerusalem in A.D. 70 as it did at other times (compare 2 Kings 6:24-30), and it will occur again—only this time, it will be much more severe and widespread. Finally, the peoples of Israel and Judah will be scattered “among all peoples.... and there you shall serve other gods.... And among those nations you will find no rest.... You shall fear day and night, and have no assurance of life” (verses 64-66).

God will bring such terrible punishment on modern Israel and Judah to teach them a much-needed lesson. Of those to whom much is given, much is required—and punishment is worse for those who fail to do right when they ought to know better (compare Luke 12:47-48). Israel and Judah, blessed with divine aid and unparalleled wide access to Scripture, should have been “holy” nations—an example to the rest of the world. But they will end up actually sinking lower than the gentiles in their rebellion against God (see 2 Chronicles 33:9). That is why God will use the “worst of the Gentiles” to punish them (Ezekiel 7:24). But some, while in captivity, will come to their senses and repent, and God will accept them, free them and bring them back to the land which their fathers possessed, to prosper there (Deuteronomy 30:1-5, 9), while placing “all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you” (verse 7).

Asa and Baasha (2 Chronicles 16:1-10; 1 Kings 15:16-22; 16:1-7)

While Asa started his reign well, the wars with Baasha presented a trial in which he did not fare so well spiritually. Baasha, we are told, fortified Ramah. “Ramah was about five and a half miles north of Jerusalem on the main north-south commercial route through the land, and it was therefore of great importance to both kingdoms. It gave east-west access to both the foothills of Ephraim and the Mediterranean coast, so it was of strategic military importance as well. Baasha was striking a blow for control of the center of the land” (Nelson Study Bible, note on 1 Kings 15:17). Sadly, rather than trust in God for deliverance, Asa takes all the money from the temple and palace treasuries and uses it to buy the assistance of the Syrian king, Ben-Hadad (a title shared by a number of Syrian rulers)—who does then break his alliance with Baasha by helping Judah.

There is some question about the timing of these events. Chronicles seems to state that Baasha began his embargo of Judah in Asa’s 36th year. But Baasha’s reign, which began in Asa’s third year, lasted only 24 years (1 Kings 15:33). Thus, Baasha was not even reigning during Asa’s 36th year. So how could he have fortified Ramah at that time? The most logical explanation seems to be that what is meant in Chronicles is that this was the 36th year of Asa’s kingdom—i.e., of Judah as its own kingdom since the division of the monarchy—which would place the fortification of Ramah in the 16th year of Asa and 13th year of Baasha.

The prophet Hanani is sent to reprimand Asa and remind him of his previous reliance on God, which had resulted in an amazing victory over a million-man army instead of his shameful

stooping to buy a retreat. Asa does not like the correction, imprisons Hanani, and takes his anger out on the people. In the meantime, Hanani's son Jehu is sent to Baasha to tell him that his following Jeroboam's sinful actions would result in his receiving Jeroboam's punishment. And indeed, as with Jeroboam, his son reigns only two years before he is deposed and the dynasty of Baasha is wiped out.

Jehoshaphat (2 Chronicles 17; 1 Kings 22:41-44; 2 Chronicles 20:31-33)

Jehoshaphat begins his reign by fortifying the border cities with Israel to increase security—all the while looking to God. And God blesses him immensely for zealously seeking and obeying Him. The king institutes major reforms in this vein. Perhaps his most remarkable action is to send out teachers to instruct the nation in God's laws!

Notice that there is an apparent contradiction between 2 Chronicles 17:6 and 20:33—the first stating that he removed the high places and the latter saying they were not removed. Jamieson, Fausset & Brown's Commentary gives this explanation in its note on the latter verse: "Those [high places] on which idolatry was practiced were entirely destroyed, but those where the people, notwithstanding the erection of the temple, continued to worship the true God, prudence required to be slowly and gradually abolished, in deference to popular prejudice." Of course, often what seems "prudent" to men is in fact compromise with God's express instructions. The Lord no doubt expected a stronger stand to be taken—which is why the failure to remove the high places receives repeated mention throughout the reigns of Judah's righteous rulers.

And this is not Jehoshaphat's only weakness. As the years go by he establishes an alliance with Ahab, which proves to be a mistake on several fronts, as we shall see. Nevertheless, he continues to maintain a right relationship with God overall and proves to be one of Judah's better kings.

"But Our Eyes Are Upon You" (2 Chronicles 20:1-30)

One of Jehoshaphat's better moments comes when Moab, Ammon and Edomites of Mount Seir initiate a war with Judah. Jehoshaphat calls a fast, assembles the nation together at the temple and seeks God's deliverance through heartfelt prayer. Jehoshaphat prays: "O our God, will You not judge them? For we have no power against this great multitude that is coming against us; nor do we know what to do, but our eyes are upon You" (verse 12).

In response, God informs the people of Judah that in the upcoming "battle" they will not have to fight at all, and yet the victory will be theirs. Jehoshaphat believes God, and the next morning the army marches forth singing praises to God instead of planning battle strategies. When they arrive, at an area about 10 miles south of Jerusalem, the opposing armies have fought among themselves and killed each other—an incredible and obvious miracle that strikes fear in the hearts of enemy nations.

Jehoshaphat Allies With Ahaziah (2 Chronicles 20:34-37; 1 Kings 22:45-49; 2 Kings 1; 3:1-3)
Generally speaking, Jehoshaphat, king of Judah, walked in the way of God. But he did not do all that he should have, as he did not remove all the high places from Judah (2 Chronicles 20:33). Yet it should be noted, as mentioned previously in the Bible Reading Program, that this was a common oversight attributed to most of Judah's righteous kings, and is perhaps equally if not more due to a lack of wholeheartedness in obeying God on the part of the nation. A more apparent weakness of Jehoshaphat can be seen in the compromising nature of his allying himself with evil rulers, a fault that became evident again near the end of his life when he allied himself with Israel's wicked King Ahaziah, son of Ahab (1 Kings 22:51-53). But their joint ventures would not prosper, since God does not generally bless such dealings (compare 2 Chronicles 20:35-37).

Though God will sometimes intervene for the sake of a righteous person in such circumstances (compare 2 Kings 3:14), we shouldn't count on it—particularly when we know better. God does not want us to enter into binding partnerships with the wicked that could conflict with our commitment to Him and His ways. His warnings are still the same today: How can two walk together unless they are agreed? (Amos 3:3.) In general, Christians can't work effectively in close relationships with unbelievers—in godly peace and harmony—any more than mismatched animals can make a useful plowing team for a farmer. The way people who live righteously think is as different from those who disregard God's laws as day is from night (compare 2 Corinthians 6:14-18). Ungodly partners can lead to spiritual compromise (see 1 Corinthians 15:33). Of course, there may be some business arrangements where such matters would never be at issue. But any that are considered must be given close scrutiny without glossing over potential difficulties. Despite Jehoshaphat's errors in this regard, it appears that he later recognized that he should not have allied himself with Ahaziah (compare 1 Kings 22:49).

Ahaziah became sick, and rather than establishing a relationship with the true God and placing his trust in Him, he attempted to inquire of the pagan god Baal-Zebub whether he would live or die. As a consequence, God sent the prophet Elijah to the king and informed him that he would not be healed (2 Kings 1:1-6, 15-17). Even then, King Ahaziah did not humble himself and repent, as his father Ahab had done at least temporarily (1 Kings 21:17-29). He attempted to have Elijah arrested (2 Kings 1:9). God, however, made it very clear that He was with Elijah, and that He would protect him from the king's evil devices (2:10-15).

After King Ahaziah's death (1:18), his brother Jehoram (called Joram in 8:25), another son of evil King Ahab, became king over Israel since Ahaziah himself had no son (1:17; 3:1). Jehoram did evil in God's sight, but not to the extent that his father Ahab had, as he did put away his father's sacred pillar of Baal (verses 2-3).

Revelation 7

John is shown Four Messengers holding the four winds of the four corners of the earth. As they are holding the four winds of the four corners of the earth, a Messenger coming from the east

with the seal of Elohim in its hand. The Messenger seals the 144,000 – Twelve thousand from each tribe of Israel.

After the vision of the sealing of the tribes of Israel, John sees a great crowd of other people, from all nations and tribes and peoples and tongues. There were too many to number. These were standing before the throne and before the Lamb and were dressed in white robes and they had palm branches in their hands. They proclaim their testimony, “Deliverance belongs to our Elohim who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb!”

Then John is asked by one of the elders whether or not he knows who this great multitude in white robes are; who are shouting their testimony and if he knows where they came from. He is told they are those who came out of great distress and tribulation and affliction. Because of what they have been through, and because they have washed their robes and made them white in the blood of the Lamb they are now ever before their throne of Elohim to serve Him day and night. The Lamb spreads His Tent over them, feeds them, gives them everlasting water, protects them, and they shall not cry anymore.

Revelation 8

The Lamb opens the seventh seal and then came silence for a time. Then seven messengers were given seven trumpets. A messenger came and stood at the altar holding a golden censer with much incense and he offered it with the prayers of all the set apart ones upon the golden altar. These prayers and incense “went up” before the throne of Elohim.

The messenger filled the censer with fire from the altar and threw it to the earth. This seemed to bring about great noises, thunders, lightnings, and an earthquake. Then the messengers with the seven trumpets begin to sound.

The first messenger with its trumpet brought hail and fire mixed with blood to the earth. One third of the trees were burned up along with all green grass.

The second messenger with its trumpet brought a great mountain burning with fire that was thrown into the sea. A third of the sea became blood and a third of the creatures in the sea died and a third of the ships were destroyed.

The third messenger with its trumpet brought a great star falling from heaven, burning like a torch. It fell on a third of the rivers and on the fountains of water and it was called wormwood. The waters were made bitter and many died.

The fourth messenger with its trumpet brought darkness. A third of the sun, a third of the moon, and a third of the stars were effected such that a third of the day and of the night did not shine.

John then hears an eagle flying and crying, “Woe, woe, woe to those dwelling upon the earth, because of the remaining blasts of the trumpet of the three messengers who are about to sound!”

Revelation 9

The fifth messenger and its trumpet brought another star from heaven who was given the key to the pit of the deep. He opened the pit of the deep and smoke went up out of it. As a result the sun and air was darkened. Locusts also came out of the pit and they were given the authority of scorpions. They are given authority to harm those who do not have the seal of Elohim upon them. They were ordered to only torture and not kill.

Their sovereign is the messenger of the pit of the deep. His name in Hebrew is Abaddon and in Greek his name is Apolloun. This is the first woe from the flying eagle in chapter 8.

The sixth messenger and its trumpet brought a voice from the horns of the golden altar. This voice said, "Release the four messengers, those having been bound at the great river Euphrates."

These four messengers were released to kill a third of mankind with an army of 200,000,000 (two hundred million). They were horsemen with breastplates of fiery red, hyacinth blue, and sulphur yellow. Out of their mouths came fire, smoke, and sulphur. The fire, smoke, and sulphur kill a third of mankind. The people who were not killed by these did not repent of their idolatrous works, nor their murders, drug sorceries, whoring, or thefts.

Revelation 10

John sees a strong messenger coming down from heaven. This is the first time he puts on the adjective of "strong". This messenger was robed in a cloud, and a rainbow on his head, his face like the sun, and his feet like columns of fire. This is Yeshua. He had in His Hand a little book and it was opened. His right foot on the sea and left foot on the land. We find this same wording in the Torah. When He cried aloud – seven thunders spoke. John was going to write down what the seven thunders spoke, but he was instructed not to write the words but to seal up the words the seven thunders spoke.

The strong messenger lifted His Hand and swore an oath that there shall be no further delay. In the days of the sounding of the seventh messenger, the secret of Elohim shall be ended as He declared to His servant the prophets.

John is instructed to take the little book that is in the hand of the strong messenger and eat it. It made his stomach bitter but was sweet as honey in his mouth. Then, he was instructed to prophesy once again concerning many peoples and nations and tongues and sovereigns.