



Living Faithfully

*If you fully obey the LORD your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations on earth.
(Deuteronomy 28:1)*

Our God: A Faithful Father

God is a faithful father: when He says something, you can _____ (Deut. 7:9-11). Faithfulness matters because each of us depends on other people. When that dependence is affirmed, we flourish. But faithfulness can be hard—how do we remain faithful when life is unpredictable, frustrating, exhausting, and sometimes feels unrewarding?

Curses for Faithlessness; Blessings for Faithfulness (27:1-28:14)

- **Deut. 27:1-4. Elders of Israel.** Notice that Moses shares leadership with the elders of the congregation (cf., Exod. 18:12-27). Effective congregations may have a charismatic leader, but they also have elders who provide vision, wisdom, stability, and pastoral care (cf., Acts 14:23; 1 Tim. 3:1-7). **Large stones.** Israel was to put up a remembrance wall with the Law of God written across it. **Ebal.** A small mountain north of Shechem and opposite Mt. Gerizim.



Mt. Ebal, with the ruins of Shechem at bottom left. Gerizim (unpictured) is over your left shoulder (dmy)

- **27:5-8. Fieldstones.** The prohibition against dressing up stones was probably meant to prevent Israel from making _____ out of the stones (Exod. 20:22; cf. Deut. 27:15). 1 Pet. 2:4-5 teaches us that we Christians are the stones of God's temple. **Rejoicing.** Worship should be joyful.
- **27:9-14. Gerizim.** The Samaritans today note that Gerizim has a dozen springs on it, but Ebal is largely dry. Curses were offered on Ebal, and blessings on Gerizim (cf., Joshua 8:33). **Simeon.** The six who offered blessings were sons of Leah and Rachel, the actual wives of Jacob; the six who offered curses were from Jacob's wives and their servants.
- **27:15-26. Amen.** A Hebrew word meaning "True!" or "Faithful!" Used twelve times in this text, it is

analogous to saying "I do" in a wedding service. These curses recap various elements of the law focused on protecting holiness and ethics. **By doing them.** James reminds us that hearing the Word but not obeying it is a form of self-deceit (James 1:22-25).



Looking south across the Jezreel Valley with its abundance of crops (dmy)

- **28:1-2. Blessings.** Obedience to God brings good results.
- **28:3-14. Basket** This series of blessings describes a good life in the land of promise. **Come in ... go out.** God will give blessings in every direction. **Flee in seven.** The term is almost humorous; nobody can defeat those who obey God.

Holy people. Israel's mission was to demonstrate to the world

the character of God: to be a light to the nations (Isa. 42:6). **Do not turn aside.** Israel was to walk a straight line; an earthy way of saying _____.

Live Faithfully

1. **Recover your purpose and mission.** It is incredibly difficult to be faithful if we don't know our _____. Our purpose is to worship God (Eph. 1:4-6). Our mission is to make disciples (Matt. 28:18-20).

Knowing this clarifies your goals and motivates you to live faithfully. For example, knowing that you married Jim so that you could worship God through marriage helps you remain faithful to Jim. Treating marriage only as a means to _____ leaves you flirting with unfaithfulness.

2. **Limit your commitments.** If you spread yourself thinly, you will be tempted to be unfaithful. Be _____, quick to be faithful.
3. **Surround yourself with faithful people.** Faithlessness is a _____. If you hang around faithless people, you, too, will become faithless. Peer pressure is not just for teens. (Cf., 1 Cor. 15:33)
4. **When you fall, get back up.** We are human, and humans stumble. But stumbling is not the same as failure. Get up, make things _____, and receive the grace of God. (Cf., Prov. 6:1-8)
5. **Celebrate the joy of faithfulness.** Faithful people can sleep at night because they know that they have done the right thing. There is great joy in being right with God and others. (Cf., Judg. 9:19; 2 Cor. 1:24)



A Bedouin man from southern Israel with fire-baked bread, a symbol of abundance—cf., Psalm 104:15 (dmy)

Does the Bible Teach the Prosperity Gospel?

Using texts like Deut. 28:1-14, some Christians preach “the prosperity Gospel”: that obedience to Jesus will lead to wealth in this life. In extreme cases, some even preach that a lack of wealth in this life indicates disobedience to God. But Jesus seems to promise the exact opposite: following Him will lead to deprivation and even persecution (Matt. 24:9; John 16:33; 2 Tim. 3:12). How do we reconcile these apparent inconsistencies?

The OT promises of prosperity were premised on the faithfulness of the *entire* nation. In other words, the prosperity promised in the OT could only be realized if the *whole nation* practiced obedience. Were the whole of Israel to be obedient, the nation would be something of a paradise on earth. In the same way, were the whole human race today to practice obedience, we would all enjoy a level of prosperity. But neither Israel nor the whole world has practiced wide-scale obedience. For this reason, prosperity has been spotty and uneven. And because of sinfulness, prosperity has often been deeply unjust, both in how it is acquired and how it is used.

Because of sin, there is no guarantee that obedience to Jesus will produce much in terms of physical blessings in this life. Further, because of the hostility of unbelievers, obeying Jesus will frequently lead to deprivation in this life. So, in this life we must learn the value of doing without, of suffering, and of being satisfied with our daily bread. In this life, the prosperity we receive for obedience may only be spiritual: love, grace, truth, hope, joy, contentment, and the like. But aren’t these the very things that physical prosperity was supposed to bring us anyway?

In the next life, sin and evil will be banned. There, Jesus promises, our abundance will far exceed anything the Israelites could have ever envisioned. “At the renewal of all things, when the Son of Man sits on his glorious throne, you who have followed me will also sit on twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel. And everyone who has left houses or brothers or sisters or father or mother or wife or children or fields for my sake will receive a hundred times as much and will inherit eternal life.” (Matthew 19:28-29)

The prosperity Gospel distorts the message of Jesus and must therefore be rejected—it is not the Gospel.

Answers: stake your life on it; idols; righteous; why; happiness; slow to commit; virus; right