

Deuteronomy 27-28 • The Two Witnesses

Introduction

[Note to Small Group Leaders: This is a **MUCH** longer study than usual.]

If you want to understand the two witnesses described in the book of Revelation, learn as much as you can about all the examples of two witnesses throughout the whole of Scripture. We see two witnesses at Sodom and Gomorrah, Aaron and Moses before Pharaoh, Caleb and Joshua and their report about the Promised Land, the two spies and their excursion to Jericho, and so on. It is not unusual to see these witnesses directed by God to perform visible signs and wonders just like the final two witnesses in Revelation, but in this example of the two witnesses we have the greater characteristic which defines their purpose and ministry: to draw attention to God's Word and ways. It is not whether one acknowledges a sign or wonder, but what they do with the more important message accompanying it.

¹Then Moses and the elders of Israel charged the people, saying, "Keep all the commandments which I command you today. ²So it shall be on the day when you cross the Jordan to the land which the LORD your God gives you, that you shall set up for yourself large stones and coat them with lime ³and write on them all the words of this law, when you cross over, so that you may enter the land which the LORD your God gives you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you. ⁴So it shall be when you cross the Jordan, you shall set up on Mount Ebal, these stones, as I am commanding you today, and you shall coat them with lime. ⁵Moreover, you shall build there an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones; you shall not wield an iron tool on them. ⁶You shall build the altar of the LORD your God of uncut stones, and you shall offer on it burnt offerings to the LORD your God; ⁷and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and eat there, and rejoice before the LORD your God. ⁸You shall write on the stones all the words of this law very distinctly."

[Read 27:1-8]

Q: What is the primary requirement?

A: "Keep all the commandments which I command you today." (v.1)

Application: A biblical faith is not based on what we give or sacrifice, but on putting God's Word into practice.

Observation: Note how many times throughout these chapters that Moses returns to this primary requirement, which defines a right relationship with God:

1. "...**Keep** all the commandments..." (27:1)
2. "...**obey** the LORD your God, and **do** His commandments and His statutes..." (27:10)
3. "Cursed is he who does not **confirm** the words of this law by **doing** them." (27:26)
4. "...**do** all His commandments..." (28:1)
5. "...**keep** the commandments of the LORD your God and **walk** in His ways." (28:9)
6. "...**listen** to the commandments of the LORD your God...to **observe** them carefully". (28:13)
7. "...**do not turn aside** from any of the words which I command you today..." (28:14)
8. "...if you do not **obey**...to **observe** to do all His commandments and statutes..." (28:15)
9. "...because you would not **obey** the LORD your God by **keeping** His commandments and His statutes..." (28:45)
10. "If you are not careful to **observe** all the words of this law which are written in this book..." (28:58)
11. "...because you did not **obey**..." (28:62)

Jesus answered and said to him, "If anyone loves Me, he will keep My word; and My Father will love him, and We will come to him and make Our abode with him. He who does not love Me does not keep My words; and the word which you hear is not Mine, but the Father's who sent Me.

— John 14:23-24

Q: Was it at this time that Israel performed these things?

A: The fulfillment is found in Joshua 8:30-35 as Moses' instruction is to do this "on the day when you cross the Jordan" (v.2) and these instructions were given before they entered the land.

Q: Why might it be significant that they were commanded not just to erect the stones of the Law but to also build an altar?

A: It reinforces the fact that the Law bring condemnation (2 Co. 3:7-9), but the altar meets the needs of the condemned sinner.

Q: What is the purpose of having both “burnt offerings” (v.7) and “peace offerings” (v.8)?

A: Burnt offerings deal with sin and are given whole to God; peace offerings celebrate forgiveness and spiritual restoration and are partly eaten by worshippers in a kind of fellowship or communion with God. The burnt offerings are a picture of Christ’s complete sacrifice on our behalf and the peace offerings a reminder that He has reconciled us into a right relationship (communion) with Him. (Rom. 5:1)

Application: *It is not about merely hearing or reciting God’s Word, but putting it into practice.*

[Read 27:9-10]

Q: What defines a group as being “a people for the Lord”?

A: Obedience to His Word.

Point: *While there may be ethnic connections within physical Israel going back to Abraham, the true members of spiritual Israel are distinguished by faith to the point of putting His Word into practice.*

Q: What is the difference between a “commandment” and a “statute”?

A: “Commandments” (“mitsvah” in Hebrew) are the requirements of a covenant relationship; “statutes” (“choq” in Hebrew) are a prescribed task or boundary of a permanent nature in the course of having a covenant relationship and often relate to the handling of sacrifices, proper and improper relationships, etc. It reflects both salvation and sanctification.

Q: What is the important sequence provided in these verses?

A: “...Be silent...listen...obey...”

Application: *Obedience to God’s Word is not only an individual requirement, but together for the whole of God’s people.*

[Read 27:11-26]

Q: Is there a pattern to which tribes were chosen to stand on which mount?

A: The tribes on the mount of blessings are all direct sons of Rachel and Leah, whereas on the mount of curses are the sons by their handmaids plus Leah’s oldest (Reuben, who lost his rights as firstborn) and youngest (Zebulun). Between them stood the Levites with the Ark of the Covenant, the very symbol of Christ the Word.

Q: Why do you suppose that none of the blessings are recited here?

A: It is probably an allusion to the fact that the Law ultimately brings a curse, not a blessing. [Note: 2 Co. 3 contrasts the ministry of the law to the ministry of grace.]

For as many as are of the works of the Law are under a curse; for it is written, “CURSED IS EVERYONE WHO DOES NOT ABIDE BY ALL THINGS WRITTEN IN THE BOOK OF THE LAW, TO PERFORM THEM.”

— Galatians 3:10

⁹Then Moses and the Levitical priests spoke to all Israel, saying, “Be silent and listen, O Israel! This day you have become a people for the LORD your God. ¹⁰You shall therefore obey the LORD your God, and do His commandments and His statutes which I command you today.”

¹¹Moses also charged the people on that day, saying, ¹²“When you cross the Jordan, these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. ¹³For the curse, these shall stand on Mount Ebal: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. ¹⁴The Levites shall then answer and say to all the men of Israel with a loud voice,

¹⁵‘Cursed is the man who makes an idol or a molten image, an abomination to the LORD, the work of the hands of the craftsman, and sets it up in secret.’ And all the people shall answer and say, ‘Amen.’

¹⁶‘Cursed is he who dishonors his father or mother.’ And all the people shall say,

‘Amen.’

¹⁷‘Cursed is he who moves his neighbor’s boundary mark.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’

¹⁸‘Cursed is he who misleads a blind person on the road.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’

¹⁹‘Cursed is he who distorts the justice due an alien, orphan, and widow.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’

²⁰‘Cursed is he who lies with his father’s wife, because he has uncovered his father’s skirt.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’

²¹‘Cursed is he who lies with any animal.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’

²²‘Cursed is he who lies with his sister, the daughter of his father or of his mother.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’

²³‘Cursed is he who lies with his mother-in-law.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’

²⁴‘Cursed is he who strikes his neighbor in secret.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’

²⁵‘Cursed is he who accepts a bribe to strike down an innocent person.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’

²⁶‘Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them.’ And all the people shall say, ‘Amen.’

¹‘Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. ²All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the LORD your God:

³‘Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country.

⁴‘Blessed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground and the offspring of your beasts, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock.

⁵‘Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

⁶‘Blessed shall you be when you come in, and blessed shall you be when you go out. ⁷The LORD shall cause your enemies who rise up against you to be defeated before you; they will come out against you one way and will flee before you seven ways.

⁸The LORD will command the blessing upon you in your barns and in all that you

Q: Carefully look at the actions assigned to each curse. What do they overwhelmingly have in common?

A: Only the first curse (v.16) pertains to Laws stemming from the First Tablet which deal with one’s relationship with God; all the other curses stem from the Second Tablet which deals with one’s relationships with others.

Q: Can we categorize the people listed in the curses?

A: Neighbor (v.17 & 24), blind person (v.18), alien (v.19), orphan (v.19), widow (v.19) and innocent person (v.25) may all be categorized as everyone with whom we come into even casual contact, and father’s wife (v.20), sister (v.22), daughter of his father (v.22), daughter of his mother (v.22) and mother-in-law (v.23) all refer to family members. Notice how these two groups reflect the common themes of righteousness in our treatment of others and faithfulness in our personal relationships—in other words, treating everyone as we would ourselves want to be treated in our relationship with Christ.

Q: Is it possible to be in a right relationship with the Lord without obedience to His Word?

A: Note the final curse: “‘Cursed is he who does not confirm the words of this law by doing them”. (v.20)

Q: What might appear to be missing, considering that these curses were to be uttered by the Levites, those who made up the priesthood?

A: There are no curses relating to the sacrifices, celebrations, or rituals provided in the Law. It is a testimony about the greater importance God places on relationships than rituals and observances.

Application: *The most visible proof of the quality of our faith and obedience is revealed in our relationships with others.*

[Read 28:1-14]

Q: Re-read v.1-2 again to establish the proper context. To whom were these blessings originally promised? Of whom is the proper definition of the pronoun “you” referring to?

A: It is a collective “you” referring to the whole of Israel.

Point: *Although there may be some general points of application for every generation of God’s people provided in these promises, it is important to note that what follows is provided specifically to the nation Israel as a whole. False teachers love to pull these things out of context as some sort of purported formula or promise for anyone, but given in the original historical context, these are only a guarantee if the **whole nation** of Israel corporately remains faithful.*

Q: How would you summarize the common theme of these verses?

A: Obedience brings blessing.

Q: How is this principle carried over into the New Testament?

A: The New Testament believer has “all spiritual things” in Christ, enjoying them as he trusts God and obeys him.

[Continued on the next page.]

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put your hand to, and He will bless you in the land which the LORD your God gives you.

⁹The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways.
¹⁰So all the peoples of the earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they will be afraid of you.

¹¹The LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your beast and in the produce of your ground, in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you.

¹²The LORD will open for you His good storehouse, the heavens, to give rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hand; and you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow.

¹³The LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you only will be above, and you will not be underneath, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I charge you today, to observe them carefully, ¹⁴and do not turn aside from any of the words which I command you today, to the right or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

¹⁵“But it shall come about, if you do not obey the LORD your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you:

¹⁶“Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country.

¹⁷“Cursed shall be your basket and your

Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ,

— Ephesians 1:3

Application: *What literally and physically applied to literal and physical Israel in the Old Testament, literally and spiritually applies to spiritual Israel (the Church) in the New Testament. The people of God in the NT live by faith for the fulfillment of all blessings to come in the next life.*

Q: How are these material blessings applied to the literal land of Israel?

A: Note the locations such as “in the city” (v.3), “in the country” (v.3) and “in the land” (v.8) as well as “when you come in...when you go out” (v.6). This refers to God’s people being faithful in the course of everyday life regardless of where they find themselves situated.

Q: How are the blessings applied to what God’s people do with the land?

A: Items listed such as “ground” (v.4), “herd” (v.4), “flock” (v.4), “basket” (v.5), “beast” (v.11) as well as “the work of your hand” (v.11) refer to what happens when God’s people are faithful in the course of their business dealings and work relationships.

Q: How are the blessings applied on an individual basis?

A: Referring to “the offspring of your body” (v.4 & 11) speaks to what happens when God’s people are faithful in the course of personal relationships.

Q: How are the blessings applied on a nationwide basis?

A: “...your enemies...defeated...” (v.6), “He will bless you in the land” (v.8), “abound in prosperity...in the land...” (v.11), “...you shall lend to many nations...” (v.12), and “...make you the head and not the tail...” (v.12) are describing what happens when God’s people’s faithfulness makes them stand apart from the world.

Q: But what is the greater purpose that all this visible prosperity in the land, while working the land, and in their relationships both personal and corporate, is supposed to achieve?

1. “...establish you as a holy people to Himself...” (v.9)
2. “So all the peoples of the earth will see...” (v.9)

Q: What is someone actually doing when their disobedience produces unfaithfulness to God’s Word and ways?

A: They “turn aside...to the right or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them”. (v.14)

Application: *The greater goal is to become so personally obedient that God’s people become a visible witness to the rest of the world. Disobedience is actually a visible witness of false worship. What is not of God is of the world.*

[Read 28:15-26]

Q: How do v.16-19 parallel the blessings in the previous section?

A: They mirror each other to show that the exact opposite results come from obedience vs. disobedience. For instance, “Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the country” (v.3) for obedience is juxtaposed against “Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country” (v.16) for disobedience.

kneading bowl.

¹⁸“Cursed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock.

¹⁹“Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out.

²⁰“The LORD will send upon you curses, confusion, and rebuke, in all you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken Me. ²¹The LORD will make the pestilence cling to you until He has consumed you from the land where you are entering to possess it. ²²The LORD will smite you with consumption and with fever and with inflammation and with fiery heat and with the sword and with blight and with mildew, and they will pursue you until you perish. ²³The heaven which is over your head shall be bronze, and the earth which is under you, iron. ²⁴The LORD will make the rain of your land powder and dust; from heaven it shall come down on you until you are destroyed.

²⁵“The LORD shall cause you to be defeated before your enemies; you will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them, and you will be an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth. ²⁶Your carcasses will be food to all birds of the sky and to the beasts of the earth, and there will be no one to frighten them away.

²⁷“The LORD will smite you with the boils of Egypt and with tumors and with the scab and with the itch, from which you cannot be healed.

²⁸The LORD will smite you with madness and with blindness and with bewilderment of heart; ²⁹and you will grope at noon, as the blind man gropes in darkness, and you will not prosper in your ways; but you shall only be oppressed and robbed continually, with none to save you.

³⁰You shall betroth a wife, but another man will violate her; you shall build a house, but you will not live in it; you shall plant a vineyard, but you will not use its fruit.

³¹Your ox shall be slaughtered before your eyes, but you will not eat of it; your donkey shall be torn away from you, and

Q: How do the curses begin to take on a different character in v.20-24?

A: They begin to describe the additional effects of God’s judgment for unfaithfulness, that “*The LORD will send upon you curses, confusion, and rebuke*” (v.20) What follows are signs which are biblically associated with God’s judgment for sin. One cannot “rebuke” a non-believer as this is intended to address error or sin in a believer’s life.

Q: How is disobedience chiefly described in v.20?

A: In the actions that are carried out it is described as “*the evil of your deeds*”, and in the effect on one’s personal relationship with God as “*because you have forsaken me*”.

Q: If the purpose of blessings is to reflect a visible witness to the rest of the world, how do v.25-26 actually reflect the same thing?

A: While a faithful people are a visible witness “*So all the peoples of the earth will see*” (v.9), so are the consequences of unfaithfulness a testimony of what will result as “*an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth*”.

Application: *Disobedience to God’s Word results in a visible breakdown in both our personal and spiritual relationships. Unfortunately, unfaithfulness is as powerful a witness to the non-believing world as faithfulness.*

[Read 28:27-46]

Q: Why is it important to maintain the historical context of these things originally applying to the literal nation of Israel?

A: The promises made to the ethnic people Israel were materially confirmed by God by giving them the physical land of Israel, what Scripture repeatedly calls their “inheritance”. Periods of spiritual prosperity and disaster have always been reflected in the physical land of Israel.

Q: What is particularly compelling about the consequences described in v.27?

A: Israel was supposed to learn the right lesson from the judgments God brought on Egypt, but will not find themselves exempt from them if they fail to do so. In fact, the stipulation, “*from which you cannot be healed*” implies it will be even harsher because they should have known better to begin with.

will not be restored to you; your sheep shall be given to your enemies, and you will have none to save you.

³²Your sons and your daughters shall be given to another people, while your eyes look on and yearn for them continually; but there will be nothing you can do.

³³A people whom you do not know shall eat up the produce of your ground and all your labors, and you will never be anything but oppressed and crushed continually. ³⁴You shall be driven mad by the sight of what you see.

³⁵The LORD will strike you on the knees and legs with sore boils, from which you cannot be healed, from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head.

³⁶The LORD will bring you and your king, whom you set over you, to a nation which neither you nor your fathers have known, and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone.

³⁷You shall become a horror, a proverb, and a taunt among all the people where the LORD drives you.

³⁸“You shall bring out much seed to the field but you will gather in little, for the locust will consume it. ³⁹You shall plant and cultivate vineyards, but you will neither drink of the wine nor gather the grapes, for the worm will devour them.

⁴⁰You shall have olive trees throughout your territory but you will not anoint yourself with the oil, for your olives will drop off. ⁴¹You shall have sons and daughters but they will not be yours, for they will go into captivity. ⁴²The cricket shall possess all your trees and the produce of your ground.

⁴³The alien who is among you shall rise above you higher and higher, but you will go down lower and lower. ⁴⁴He shall lend to you, but you will not lend to him; he shall be the head, and you will be the tail.

⁴⁵“So all these curses shall come on you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed, because you would not obey the LORD your God by keeping His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you. ⁴⁶They shall become a sign and a wonder on you and your descendants forever.

Q: Most of what is stated here is an antithesis to the blessings previously listed. Are there any additional items which stand out?

1. “...smite you with madness and blindness and with bewilderment of heart” (v.28)
2. “...you will grope at noon, as the blind man gropes in darkness...” (v.29)
3. “...you shall be driven mad by the sight of what you see.” (v.34)

Point: These seem to refer to the greater terror of spiritual darkness which could only be experienced by those who had the spiritual light to begin with.

Q: What is particularly unique about v.38?

A: Although it would be many centuries before Israel asked for an earthly king to reign over them, this seems to give us a prophetic glimpse that it would surely happen. The fact that it stipulates, “whom you set over you” appears to address a trend of unfaithfulness which ultimately leads not just to exile away from the land of Israel, but “there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone”.

Application: The consequences for disobedience by those who were formally obedient is worse because it extends beyond just a reversal of their formerly blessed physical circumstances, but their spiritual condition as well.

Q: How do v.45-46 summarize the escalating nature of God’s judgment for unfaithfulness?

A: They do not ease up until they have accomplished their greater intended purpose to “obey the LORD your God by keeping His commandments and His statutes which He commanded you”.

Q: And what will the working of God’s judgment on His people ultimately accomplish?

A: “They shall become a sign and a wonder on you and your descendants forever.” (v.46)

Application: Just as signs and wonders are intended to convey the greater importance of accepting God’s message which accompanies them, so too are the signs and wonders of God’s judgment which come upon His people for unfaithfulness.

⁴⁷“Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and a glad heart, for the abundance of all things; ⁴⁸therefore you shall serve your enemies whom the LORD will send against you, in hunger, in thirst, in nakedness, and in the lack of all things; and He will put an iron yoke on your neck until He has destroyed you.

⁴⁹“The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, ⁵⁰a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young. ⁵¹Moreover, it shall eat the offspring of your herd and the produce of your ground until you are destroyed, who also leaves you no grain, new wine, or oil, nor the increase of your herd or the young of your flock until they have caused you to perish. ⁵²It shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls in which you trusted come down throughout your land, and it shall besiege you in all your towns throughout your land which the LORD your God has given you. ⁵³Then you shall eat the offspring of your own body, the flesh of your sons and of your daughters whom the LORD your God has given you, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy will oppress you. ⁵⁴The man who is refined and very delicate among you shall be hostile toward his brother and toward the wife he cherishes and toward the rest of his children who remain, ⁵⁵so that he will not give even one of them any of the flesh of his children which he will eat, since he has nothing else left, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy will oppress you in all your towns. ⁵⁶The refined and delicate woman among you, who would not venture to set the sole of her foot on the ground for delicateness and refinement, shall be hostile toward the husband she cherishes and toward her son and daughter, ⁵⁷and toward her afterbirth which issues from between her legs and toward her children whom she bears; for she will eat them secretly for lack of anything else, during the siege and the distress by which your enemy will oppress you in your towns.

[Read 28:47-57]

Q: How do we know that “obedience” and “faithfulness” are not merely defined as following God’s rules?

A: Because it specifically stipulates in v.47, “Because you did not serve the LORD your God with joy and a glad heart...”

Q: How does what is described in these verses differ significantly in all the things described in the previous sections?

A: This describes an escalation of judgment which does not relate in kind to the blessings for obedience. It seems to describe the next level of judgment for those who have not responded to the lesser signs and events which came earlier.

Q: Why do you suppose it escalates in this way when it comes to the unfaithfulness of God’s people?

A: If they are not going to be a visible testimony to the world of a right relationship with God, they are going to be a visible testimony to the world of the consequences of a wrong relationship.

Q: Have these things ever literally taken place?

A: We know that they happened both during the last days before the Babylonian Captivity as well as in the course of the Roman siege of Jerusalem in 70 AD.

Application: *Unresponsiveness to God’s judgment inevitably leads to even greater judgment.*

⁵⁸“If you are not careful to observe all the words of this law which are written in this book, to fear this honored and awesome name, the LORD your God, ⁵⁹then the LORD will bring extraordinary plagues on you and your descendants, even severe and lasting plagues, and miserable and chronic sicknesses. ⁶⁰He will bring back on you all the diseases of Egypt of which you were afraid, and they will cling to you. ⁶¹Also every sickness and every plague which, not written in the book of this law, the LORD will bring on you until you are destroyed. ⁶²Then you shall be left few in number, whereas you were as numerous as the stars of heaven, because you did not obey the LORD your God. ⁶³It shall come about that as the LORD delighted over you to prosper you, and multiply you, so the LORD will delight over you to make you perish and destroy you; and you will be torn from the land where you are entering to possess it. ⁶⁴Moreover, the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth; and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone, which you or your fathers have not known. ⁶⁵Among those nations you shall find no rest, and there will be no resting place for the sole of your foot; but there the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing of eyes, and despair of soul. ⁶⁶So your life shall hang in doubt before you; and you will be in dread night and day, and shall have no assurance of your life. ⁶⁷In the morning you shall say, ‘Would that it were evening!’ And at evening you shall say, ‘Would that it were morning!’ because of the dread of your heart which you dread, and for the sight of your eyes which you will see. ⁶⁸The LORD will bring you back to Egypt in ships, by the way about which I spoke to you, ‘You will never see it again!’ And there you will offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but there will be no buyer.”

[Read 28:58-68]

Q: Have you noticed a pattern to the opening of each section we have studied in these chapters?

A: They usually begin with a characterization of putting (or not putting) God’s Word into practice from the heart, such as “*you are not careful to observe all the words of this law which are written in this book...*” (v.58)

Application: As with most things biblical, it not a test of knowledge but a test of faith.

Q: What are the main features listed which indicates an escalating judgment on the disobedient?

1. “...*the LORD will bring extraordinary plagues on you and your descendants...*” (v.59)
2. “...*all the diseases of Egypt...*” (v.60)
3. “...*every sickness and every plague...not written in the book of this law...*” (v.61)
4. “...*scatter you among all peoples, from end of the earth to the other end of the earth...*” (v.64)
5. “...*you shall find no rest...but...a trembling heart, failing eyes, and despair of soul...*” (v.65)

Q: How is the final condition described? How is it worse than the first?

A: It is summarized as a return to Egypt (v.68) from which God’s people were originally liberated, but it is worse because they originally believed the message accompanying the signs which brought them out of that old life, so God will bring upon them even greater things than he brought on the unbelieving Egyptians.

“Now when the unclean spirit goes out of a man, it passes through waterless places seeking rest, and does not find it. Then it says, ‘I will return to my house from which I came’; and when it comes, it finds it unoccupied, swept, and put in order. Then it goes and takes along with it seven other spirits more wicked than itself, and they go in and live there; and the last state of that man becomes worse than the first. That is the way it will also be with this evil generation.”

— Matthew 12:43-45

Application: God’s people are not to return to Egypt—a biblical metaphor for the old life from which they were saved, but the consequences of the old life (and worse) await the previously faithful when all else fails.

Overall Application

The parable of the unclean spirits in Mt. 12:43-45 was given at the conclusion of Jesus' discourse on what awaits those who seek a sign in lieu of repentance from the heart. It began with the scribes and Pharisees asking, "Teacher, we want to see a sign from You", Jesus immediately presenting them with, "An evil and adulterous generation craves for a sign...", and concluding His teaching with this parable.

The Jews would return from the Babylonian Captivity purged of their repeated return to the sin of idolatry, but although the house had been swept clean, it was still empty. This is what happens when God's Word and ways becomes just a religion of outward morality undertaken by empty hearts. Satan was able to reenter with others sins and the latter condition of the house of Israel was worse than before. Under the Old Covenant they worshiped idols, but with the advent of the New Covenant they rejected and killed their Messiah!

Even today, one cannot "reform" a church or organization and live respectably without Christ dwelling in their heart. Whereas "religion" is an attempt to clean up the outside, biblical salvation is new life and holiness on the inside.

For if, after they have escaped the defilements of the world by the knowledge of the Lord and Savior Jesus Christ, they are again entangled in them and are overcome, the last state has become worse for them than the first. For it would be better for them not to have known the way of righteousness, than having known it, to turn away from the holy commandment handed on to them. It has happened to them according to the true proverb, "A DOG RETURNS TO ITS OWN VOMIT," and, "A sow, after washing, returns to wallowing in the mire."

— 2 Peter 2:20–22

True revival, documented through Scripture and the history of God's people since Adam, has always entailed the dual aspect of repentance from the heart through the blood with a sincere return to putting God's Word and ways into practice.