

Life Lessons from Desert Wandering: To Be Blessed

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I was looking at some mega churches' websites to see some of the catchy wording that is being used. The fourth largest church, used to be number one, had on their website about asking God to fulfill all their dreams. Some other mega churches talked about the blessings of God in some form. This is a great selling point for some mega churches. We all like being blessed by God. The problem is when we use it as a merchandizing element. In fact, when we use just the selling side of God's blessings, we have cheapened that grace from God. If we just treat God's blessings the same way we treat gifts we receive at Christmas time, we have treated the blessings of God in the wrong way and we have viewed God's blessings in the wrong way as well. God's blessings are real and they are a true blessing. However, how are we to view God's blessings today? In today's world, some teach that you should build your faith so you can receive greater blessings. When you get to this point, then God will bless you beyond measure and life will be great. There is some truth in this, but the danger is we don't always get what we want because the will of God is involved plus bad things can happen in our lives that can disrupt our dreams. It doesn't mean we don't have faith, which some teach, but it does rain on the just and unjust as Jesus tells us in Matthew 5: 45. Some of these churches don't teach about the requirements for blessings and how we are to look and use these blessings from God as well. As we continue with the Life Lessons from Desert Wandering in the Old Testament, we'll see how God wanted His blessing treated and the requirements for them.

We've been in Leviticus for the past month. Today, we'll spend some time in Numbers and Deuteronomy. So, first let's turn to Numbers 6: 22 – 27 where we read this from Moses, “²² The LORD spoke to Moses, saying, ²³ “Speak to Aaron and his sons, saying, Thus you shall bless the people of Israel: you shall say to them,

²⁴ The LORD bless you and keep you;

²⁵ the LORD make his face to shine upon you and be gracious to you;

²⁶ the LORD lift up his countenance^[a] upon you and give you peace.

²⁷ "So shall they put my name upon the people of Israel, and I will bless them." (ESV – Biblegateway)

God gives Moses instructions to give to Aaron on the procedures of blessing the nation of Israel. Israel is wandering through the wilderness because of their past sin and God gives them laws to help them keep out of trouble. Now, God gives some nice verses here about Him blessing Israel. This sounds great – the Lord's face will shine upon them and God will be gracious to them. God will put His name on them and they will be blessed. This sounds great and it truly is. The problem is some churches use the same type of wording to sell the blessings of God today. Who wouldn't come to a church to receive this wonderful gift? However, there is more to these blessings from God.

Now, let's turn to Deuteronomy 28: 3 – 8 where we read this, "³ Blessed shall you be in the city, and blessed shall you be in the field. ⁴ Blessed shall be the fruit of your womb and the fruit of your ground and the fruit of your cattle, the increase of your herds 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.

⁷ "The LORD will cause your enemies who rise against you to be defeated before you. They shall come out against you one way and flee before you seven ways. ⁸ The LORD will command the blessing on you in your barns and in all that you undertake. And he will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you.

Boy, doesn't all this sound great. God tells Israel He will bless their fields and with their livestock. God will bless them with tons of children and they will have food coming out their ears. When they get to the promise land, they will have it made. So, some may use this Scripture as well for today. If you have the faith, God will bless you with all the material things you want. What God is saying here is that He will bless them with the basic needs of life – food and children. God will bless them where their enemies won't have victory over them. We should be content with the basic gifts of life from God. You can be poor and be content which is a blessing from God. However, we need to take a closer look at the Hebrew term for "blessed". The Hebrew term used in Deuteronomy is "barak" which means blessing. Plus, it means "invoking divine favor" (Strong's

Concordance). Blessings need something from us. This would go back to the command from God to Israel in Deuteronomy 6:5, "And you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might." When this happens, it invokes divine favor from God. Blessing from God flows freely when this happens daily. This means that doing good deeds only will not give you blessings you are counting on. When we receive blessings from God, it is because He has found favor with us. This is done when we love Him with everything we have and we are obedient to Him.

God gives Israel this message in Deuteronomy 28: 1-2, "**28** "And if you faithfully obey the voice of the LORD your God, being careful to do all his commandments that I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. ² And all these blessings shall come upon you and overtake you, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God. (Biblegateway.com)

God wanted Israel to be obedient and when this was done, they would be blessed. Jesus would restate this in John 10: 10, "My purpose is to give life in all its fullness. (NLT)" Plus, Jesus would restate the Old Testament command in Matthew 22: 37, "You must love the Lord your God with all your heart, all your soul, and all your mind. This is the first and greatest commandment. (NLT)" Jesus wants to give us life in all its fullness. The Greek term for "life" signifies the divine, eternal and abundant life offered through Christ. Jesus shifts the blessings to divine blessings. This would include the gift of salvation, eternal life, the filling of the Holy Spirit within us, and other spiritual blessings. So, the same thing happens with Jesus as it does with God. When we love Jesus with everything we have, it invokes divine favor from God. Now, Jesus focuses on the spiritual blessings of God. The material blessings are still there, but we need to understand the spiritual blessings are needed for the fullness of life. This is "divine" fullness of life. The spiritual blessings is what is needed to help us to stay right with God. Actually, the Spirit of God helps us to see the importance of spiritual blessings vs. material blessings. A hunger and thirsty Christian will want to be blessed with spiritual blessings so that they can enjoy a closer relationship with our divine God. We are truly blessed during this New Testament or New Covenant times! Not only does the Lord want to bless us, Jesus wants us to be blessed with spiritual

blessings which leads to the fullness of life. However, there is more to this blessing event.

Let's turn back to Deuteronomy 28: 9 – 14, where we read, “⁹ The LORD will establish you as a people holy to himself, as he has sworn to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in his ways. ¹⁰ And all the peoples of the earth shall see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they shall be afraid of you. ¹¹ And the LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your livestock and in the fruit of your ground, within the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to give you. ¹² The LORD will open to you his good treasury, the heavens, to give the rain to your land in its season and to bless all the work of your hands. And you shall lend to many nations, but you shall not borrow. ¹³ And the LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you shall only go up and not down, if you obey the commandments of the LORD your God, which I command you today, being careful to do them, ¹⁴ and if you do not turn aside from any of the words that I command you today, to the right hand or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them.

People usually treat God's blessings as a Christmas or birthday gift. Once you get it, it's yours. A few days ago, I went to Cabela's to use gift cards people gave me including from you, the church family. I used the cards for items for myself. I didn't get anything for the church because the gift was for me. The blessings from God are different. In verse 10, God lets us know that the blessing for Israel was so the other nations would see Israel was called by name of the Lord. This goes back to Israel being a lighthouse to the nations around the world. God wanted these blessings to be a witness to the outside nations as well. In other words, Israel was to use these blessings as a witness for God. The spiritual blessings we receive from God should not be kept all for ourselves like a Christmas gift. We let others know how God has blessed us spiritually so that others can hear the gospel message. It looks like God's blessings to us should go through a complete cycle. God's blessing to us should complete the cycle back to God when other outside people praise God for what they see from us. Actually, we could say that God's blessings are working blessings. We just don't keep them to ourselves.

Finally, we see in verse 14, that blessings also have a word of caution. For these blessings, Israel could not turn from one side to another and serve other gods. Some churches have allowed God's blessings to become a selfish gift wish list. When we just do good deeds to receive blessings, it is out of selfish ambitions and you no longer have God number one in your life. That is breaking the command of love that God gave us. We should treat God's blessings as Moses treated the ground he was on when he saw the burning bush. We are on holy ground when we receive a blessing from God and we can't cheapen those blessing with selfish ambitions. God's blessings are serious business and must be treated that way. The blessings from our Lord in the New Testament times came at a great cost – Jesus' life. Let's be thankful for His blessings and let's use them to give Him glory back as He richly deserves. Maybe we need to pray for His Spirit to help us to see and use His blessings to us in the correct manner which would be most pleasing to Him.

NLT Life Application Study Bible. Tyndale House Publisher, Inc.: Wheaton, 1996
Strongest Strong's Concordance. Zondervan: Grand Rapids, 2001.