

In Deuteronomy 28:13, God makes a profound promise to His covenant people:

“The Lord will make you the head, not the tail. If you pay attention to the commands of the Lord your God that I give you this day and carefully follow them, you will always be at the top, never at the bottom.”

What Does It Mean to Be “the Head and Not the Tail”?

This phrase is a metaphor used within the blessings section of Deuteronomy 28, where God outlines the results of obedience to His covenant. To be “the head” symbolizes leadership, prominence, influence, and divine favor. In contrast, “the tail” symbolizes subordination, shame, and disadvantage.

This speaks to God’s design for His people to reflect His glory through obedience. Those who align with His will are elevated, while those who rebel fall under consequences. This aligns with the biblical theme found throughout the Torah and the Prophets: *obedience brings blessing; disobedience brings curse* (see also Deuteronomy 30:15–20).

“You Will Be the Head and Not the Tail” — What Does That Really Mean?

Why Not Say “the Head and Not the Foot”?

It’s interesting that Scripture doesn’t contrast the “head” with the “foot,” but with the “tail.” This suggests that the imagery comes from the anatomy of animals—creatures that have both heads and tails.

- The head represents direction, decision-making, and nourishment—it receives food and leads the body.
- The tail is at the very end, following wherever the body moves. It is also near the part of the body where waste exits—symbolically linked to what is undesirable, dirty, and secondary.

From a theological perspective, this shows us a picture of two types of people:

1. Those who fear and obey God: They are leaders, recipients of God’s best, and influencers in the world (Matthew 5:14–16).
2. Those who reject God’s ways: They end up followers of the world, recipients of defilement and disgrace, pushed around by circumstances instead of being guided by divine wisdom.

Jesus affirms this kingdom principle in Matthew 6:33:

“But seek first his kingdom and his righteousness, and all

these things will be given to you as well.”

Covenant Context: Blessings for Obedience, Curses for Disobedience

The entire chapter of Deuteronomy 28 outlines the blessings of the covenant (vv. 1-14) and the curses for breaking it (vv. 15-68). The promise to be the head, not the tail, is conditional. It is not automatic—it requires faithful obedience.

Later in the same chapter, we read the consequences of disobedience:

“The foreigners who reside among you will rise above you higher and higher, but you will sink lower and lower. They will lend to you, but you will not lend to them. They will be the head, but you will be the tail.” (Deuteronomy 28:43-44)

This reversal shows what happens when people ignore God’s commands—they lose not only their blessing, but also their position, influence, and dignity.

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Spiritual Application Today

While these promises were originally given to Israel under the Old Covenant, their spiritual principles remain true for us today under the New Covenant through Christ. In Christ, we are also called to walk in obedience—not to earn salvation, but as evidence of our transformation (Ephesians 2:10, John 14:15).

God desires His people to be examples in society—those who reflect His justice, truth, and mercy. We are called to lead, not lag behind; to influence, not be controlled by the world.

As Romans 12:2 says:

“Do not conform to the pattern of this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind.”

Those who live according to God’s Word will be like the head—stable, wise, fruitful, and favored.

Choose Your Position

Being the “head” is about more than status—it’s about living under the rule and blessing of God. If we desire that place of blessing, leadership, and purpose, we must listen to God’s voice, follow His Word, and reject the idols and systems of the world.

“This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life...” (Deuteronomy 30:19)

Let’s choose life. Let’s walk in obedience. Let’s live as the head, not the tail.

May the Lord help us. Amen.

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