



Deuteronomy - Chapter Twenty Nine

Summary of Chapter Twenty Nine

Moses speaks to the people and reminds them of what the Lord has already done for them in bringing them through the wilderness, defeating their many enemies on the way. However, they are reminded that they had already strayed from God and are warned of the devastating effects that will befall both the nation and the land if they and the generations to come do not comply with the covenant they had entered into with the Lord.

V Deuteronomy 29:2-30:20 - Moses' Third Speech: Final Exhortation

These chapters have no close parallel in ancient treaties. They are the climax of the preaching of Deuteronomy, urging Israel to accept the covenant.

¹ These are the words of the covenant that the Lord commanded Moses to make with the Israelites in the land of Moab, in addition to the covenant that he had made with them at Horeb.

Deuteronomy 29:1

Deuteronomy 29:1 is 28:69 in the Hebrew

These are the words of the covenant. Some 40 years before this, at Horeb, that is Mount Sinai, Israel made a covenant with God: <<*Then he took the book of the covenant, and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, 'All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient.'* Moses took the blood and dashed it on the people, and said, 'See the blood of the covenant that the Lord has made with you in accordance with all these words'>> (Exodus 24:7-8).

The covenant in the land of Moab is a reiteration of the covenant at Horeb, i.e. Sinai, and the laws are the same as were given to Israel through Moses at Horeb. The Moab covenant constitutes all the spoken words of Moses in Deuteronomy.

In addition to the covenant that he had made with them at Horeb. For the most part, the people who had the blood of the covenant sprinkled upon them had died in the wilderness. The generation of unbelief had died, now it was an opportunity for the generation of faith. So, Moses will reconfirm the covenant with the new generation and, indeed, all future generations yet to come.

V.a Deuteronomy 29:2-29 - The Covenant Renewed in Moab

Refer to the chapter summary above.

Verse 2 is v.1 in the Hebrew.

² Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: You have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, ³ the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders.

Deuteronomy 29:2-3

You have seen, before your eyes, your eyes saw. There is a strong emphasis on having seen God's past actions, even though the addressees are the next generation. Israel saw great wonders from the hand of God since coming from Egypt: <<*You have seen what I did to the Egyptians, and how I bore you on eagles' wings and brought you to myself*>> (Exodus 19:4). They saw the plagues, they saw the death of the firstborn, they saw the Red Sea parted, they saw the Egyptian armies destroyed, they saw victories won by prayer, they ate the manna, they drank the miraculously provided water, and they saw miracle after miracle.

⁴ But to this day the Lord has not given you a mind to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear.

Deuteronomy 29:4

The Lord has not given you a mind to understand, or eyes to see, or ears to hear. The miracles in and of themselves could not accomplish anything in the heart of Israel. If God did not send his spirit to change their hearts, then the greatest wonder imaginable would not make a difference: <<*Then the eyes of those who have sight will not be closed, and the ears of those who have hearing will listen*>> (Isaiah 32:3). The heart is the organ of understanding and will in the OT; Deuteronomy focuses on the heart as the centre of morality. Despite the emphasis on physical sight (vv.2-3), real 'sight' is with the eyes of faithful obedience. The heart must respond correctly to God: <<*You shall love the*

Lord your God with all your heart, and with all your soul, and with all your might>> (Deuteronomy 6:5), but Israel's heart is unlikely to respond to God in the right way, as seen in Deuteronomy 5:29, 8:17 and 9:4. Israel needs God to correct its lack of right heart, eyes, and ears: <<*Moreover, the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live*>> (Deuteronomy 30:6), which is a key promise in Deuteronomy, looking forward to genuine covenant participation. Paul combines this text with Isaiah 29:10 to explain why many of his Jewish contemporaries do not believe in Jesus: <<*as it is written, 'God gave them a sluggish spirit, eyes that would not see and ears that would not hear, down to this very day'*>> (Romans 11:8).

Some people today think the greatest help to evangelism would be to see more miraculous events. After all, who could not believe in the face of such displays of spiritual power? But seeing great wonders accomplishes nothing apart from a supernatural work of God in someone's heart. Jesus puts the reaction of many to miracles succinctly at the end of the account of the rich man and Lazarus: <<*He said to him, "If they do not listen to Moses and the prophets, neither will they be convinced even if someone rises from the dead"*>> (Luke 16:31).

There are several scriptures that describe those whose faculties are not in tune with the Holy Spirit: <<*You have never heard, you have never known, from of old your ear has not been opened*>> (Isaiah 48:8a), <<*Hear this, O foolish and senseless people, who have eyes, but do not see, who have ears, but do not hear*>> (Jeremiah 5:21), <<*Mortal, you are living in the midst of a rebellious house, who have eyes to see but do not see, who have ears to hear but do not hear*>> (Ezekiel 12:2), <<*So they disagreed with each other; and as they were leaving, Paul made one further statement: 'The Holy Spirit was right in saying to your ancestors through the prophet Isaiah, "Go to this people and say, You will indeed listen, but never understand, and you will indeed look, but never perceive. For this people's heart has grown dull, and their ears are hard of hearing, and they have shut their eyes; so that they might not look with their eyes, and listen with their ears, and understand with their heart and turn – and I would heal them"*>> (Acts 28:25-27), and: <<*They are darkened in their understanding, alienated from the life of God because of their ignorance and hardness of heart*>> (Ephesians 4:18).

⁵ I have led you for forty years in the wilderness. The clothes on your back have not worn out, and the sandals on your feet have not worn out; ⁶ you have not eaten bread, and you have not drunk wine or strong drink – so that you may know that I am the Lord your God. ⁷ When you came to this place, King Sihon of Heshbon and King Og of Bashan came out against us for battle, but we defeated them. ⁸ We took their land

and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh. ⁹ Therefore diligently observe the words of this covenant, in order that you may succeed in everything that you do.

Deuteronomy 29:5-9

I have led you for forty years in the wilderness. During their forty years in the wilderness, their clothes did not wear out, their sandals did not wear out, and although they had no bread to eat or wine to drink, their needs were provided for. Israel conquered their enemies, and they took their land. Clearly, these are remarkable miracles. Clothes and sandals simply do not last forty years of hard marching in the wilderness apart from a miracle. The wilderness does not provide enough food and water to meet the needs of some two million people apart from a miracle. A nation of slaves for more than 400 years does not conquer standing nations and take their land apart from a miracle.

Each of these great wonders, each of which itself is proof of God's power and love for Israel, has a spiritual counterpart in the lives of Christians:

- In the wilderness of this world, God provides clothes for people <<*Therefore I counsel you to buy from me gold refined by fire so that you may be rich; and white robes to clothe you and to keep the shame of your nakedness from being seen; and salve to anoint your eyes so that you may see*>> (Revelation 3:18).
- He gives them footwear: <<*As shoes for your feet put on whatever will make you ready to proclaim the gospel of peace*>> (Ephesians 6:15).
- He gives them bread and wine to drink: <<*For I received from the Lord what I also handed on to you, that the Lord Jesus on the night when he was betrayed took a loaf of bread, and when he had given thanks, he broke it and said, 'This is my body that is for you. Do this in remembrance of me.'* In the same way he took the cup also, after supper, saying, 'This cup is the new covenant in my blood. Do this, as often as you drink it, in remembrance of me.' For as often as you eat this bread and drink the cup, you proclaim the Lord's death until he comes>> (1 Corinthians 11:23-26).
- In him Christians conquer their enemies: <<*No, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him who loved us*>> (Romans 8:37).
- Christians can take the land of their spiritual enemies: <<*for the weapons of our warfare are not merely human, but they have divine power to destroy strongholds. We destroy arguments and every proud obstacle raised up against the knowledge of God, and we take every thought captive to obey Christ*>> (2 Corinthians 10:4-5).

An inheritance to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh.

These two and a half tribes requested and received the Transjordan lands rather

than parts of the Promised Land west of the Jordan. However, they did agree to cross the Jordan with their fellow Israelites in order to help them conquer the land: <<*Then they came up to him and said, ‘We will build sheepfolds here for our flocks, and towns for our little ones, but we will take up arms as a vanguard before the Israelites, until we have brought them to their place. Meanwhile our little ones will stay in the fortified towns because of the inhabitants of the land. We will not return to our homes until all the Israelites have obtained their inheritance’*>> (Numbers 32:16-18).

Therefore diligently observe the words of this covenant, in order that you may succeed in everything that you do. Seeing these great works of God, there is one logical response. Knowing the greatness of God’s love and power should make Israel more committed than ever to keeping his covenant.

¹⁰ You stand assembled today, all of you, before the Lord your God – the leaders of your tribes, your elders, and your officials, all the men of Israel, ¹¹ your children, your women, and the aliens who are in your camp, both those who cut your wood and those who draw your water – ¹² to enter into the covenant of the Lord your God, sworn by an oath, which the Lord your God is making with you today; ¹³ in order that he may establish you today as his people, and that he may be your God, as he promised you and as he swore to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. ¹⁴ I am making this covenant, sworn by an oath, not only with you who stand here with us today before the Lord our God, ¹⁵ but also with those who are not here with us today.

Deuteronomy 29:10-15

You stand assembled today, all of you, before the Lord your God. This means that the covenant was made between God and the entire nation of Israel. This included the leaders, the men, the women, the children, and the foreign servants.

Enter into the covenant of the Lord your God, sworn by an oath. The language of this verse has the style of a formal acceptance of the covenant and its consequences.

He may establish you today as his people. All of Israel was included in God’s desire to enter into covenant, to be the people he had chosen for himself. He was not just looking for a few prominent and talented people, or for just one spiritual tribe like the Levites. God wanted the whole nation to be this people for himself.

Those who are not here with us today refers to future generations. The covenant with God is not simply for one generation, just as the Horeb covenant was also for this current generation: <<*The Lord our God made a covenant with us at Horeb.*

Not with our ancestors did the Lord make this covenant, but with us, who are all of us here alive today>> (Deuteronomy 5:2-3). The covenant demand is here also extended to those who were yet to be born. Future generations were one with that early Israel who took the oath at Sinai and again here near the River Jordan.

¹⁶ You know how we lived in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the midst of the nations through which you passed. ¹⁷ You have seen their detestable things, the filthy idols of wood and stone, of silver and gold, that were among them. ¹⁸ It may be that there is among you a man or woman, or a family or tribe, whose heart is already turning away from the Lord our God to serve the gods of those nations. It may be that there is among you a root sprouting poisonous and bitter growth. ¹⁹ All who hear the words of this oath and bless themselves, thinking in their hearts, ‘We are safe even though we go our own stubborn ways’ (thus bringing disaster on moist and dry alike) — ²⁰ the Lord will be unwilling to pardon them, for the Lord’s anger and passion will smoke against them. All the curses written in this book will descend on them, and the Lord will blot out their names from under heaven.

Deuteronomy 29:16-20

You have seen their detestable things, that were among them. Israel had seen the abominations and filthy idols of their pagan neighbours. God promised that anyone who turns away from the Lord our God to serve the gods of those nations, should never presume on a sense of peace in his heart.

It may be that there is among you. The repeated warning here shows the vulnerability of Israel’s heart to go astray to idolatry.

A root sprouting poisonous and bitter growth. If one Israelite goes astray, the sin is regarded as contagious, infecting other Israelites. Hence the need to ‘purge the evil’ from your midst; refer to Deuteronomy 13:5 and associated comment. A similar command comes in: <<*See to it that no one fails to obtain the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springs up and causes trouble, and through it many become defiled*>> (Hebrews 12:15), which comes from the Greek translation of this phrase.

Bless themselves, thinking in their hearts is an expression of pride. Perhaps one who has turned from the Lord and to idols hears the curses against the covenant-breaker, yet thinks he has escaped any penalty. So, he blesses himself in his heart, saying, “We are safe” or “I have peace.” He may have an immediate sense of

peace at the moment, but it is the peace of the blind, the peace of the ignorant, one who cannot see the peril of coming judgement.

A sinner may feel confident in his own heart, having a marvellous sense of peace. But this peace is an illusion. It is the peace of the blind, of the unknowing. If a bomb is on an aeroplane, almost everyone on the aeroplane is at peace the moment before the bomb explodes. However, their peace is based on their ignorance. In the same way, a sinner may be completely untroubled in his heart. But this is only because he is spiritually blind: <<Jesus said, 'I came into this world for judgement so that those who do not see may see, and those who do see may become blind.' Some of the Pharisees near him heard this and said to him, 'Surely we are not blind, are we?' Jesus said to them, 'If you were blind, you would not have sin. But now that you say, "We see", your sin remains>> (John 9:39-41).

Thus bringing disaster on moist and dry alike. Moist and dry are often translated as 'the drunkard' and 'the sober' respectively. Thus, the drunkard may be happy when he is drunk, but his happiness is based on an illusion. God warns against including the peace of the righteous with the peace the wicked might seem to have. Those who can make sober judgement can realise the reality and blessing of their own salvation in God.

The Lord will be unwilling to pardon them. This truth is plain to see: <<'There is no peace', says the Lord, 'for the wicked'>> (Isaiah 48:22). The score may be settled on either side of eternity, but it will be settled. No one can forsake the Lord and escape the consequences.

Introduction to Deuteronomy 29:21-29

The expectation in these verses is of future idolatry, which is the worst sin in Deuteronomy, and the receipt of God's curses. While Chapter 28 held out blessings and curses as alternatives, it is again clear that the author of Deuteronomy expects Israel to sin because they lack right and true hearts, eyes and ears toward God.

²¹ The Lord will single them out from all the tribes of Israel for calamity, in accordance with all the curses of the covenant written in this book of the law. ²² The next generation, your children who rise up after you, as well as the foreigner who comes from a distant country, will see the devastation of that land and the afflictions with which the Lord has afflicted it — ²³ all its soil burned out by sulphur and salt, nothing planted, nothing sprouting, unable to support any vegetation, like the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the Lord destroyed in his fierce anger — ²⁴ they and indeed all the nations will wonder, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land?

What caused this great display of anger?’²⁵ They will conclude, ‘It is because they abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their ancestors, which he made with them when he brought them out of the land of Egypt.’²⁶ They turned and served other gods, worshipping them, gods whom they had not known and whom he had not allotted to them;²⁷ so the anger of the Lord was kindled against that land, bringing on it every curse written in this book.²⁸ The Lord uprooted them from their land in anger, fury, and great wrath, and cast them into another land, as is now the case.’

Deuteronomy 29:21-28

The Lord will single them out from all the tribes of Israel for calamity. There is an obvious reason to punish the covenant-breaker for his own sake. However, God has a purpose beyond the reason of individual covenant.

The next generation, your children who rise up after you, as well as the foreigner who comes from a distant country. God’s purpose in bringing judgement against a covenant-breaking Israel was also for the sake of the coming generation of Israelites and Gentiles who choose to live in Israel. When they see the devastation that comes from breaking God’s covenant, when they see what happens to the land which the Lord destroyed in his fierce anger, they will be warned to obedience. Christians can also learn from the calamity that comes on the lives of others when they break God’s covenant. It demonstrates that the price of disobedience is not worth it. People can learn that the commands of God are good and intended to be protective of their lives.

The destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim came about by man’s depravity and fundamental refusal to follow God’s ways. The full account can be found in Genesis Chapter 19.

All the nations will wonder. God’s purpose in bringing judgement against a covenant-breaking Israel was also for the sake of all nations. When they see what happens to a nation who forsakes the Lord, they will be warned to obedience: <<*This house will become a heap of ruins; everyone passing by it will be astonished, and will hiss; and they will say, “Why has the Lord done such a thing to this land and to this house?”*>> (1 Kings 9:8), <<*And many nations will pass by this city, and all of them will say one to another, ‘Why has the Lord dealt in this way with that great city?’ And they will answer, ‘Because they abandoned the covenant of the Lord their God, and worshipped other gods and served them’*>> (Jeremiah 22:8-9).

²⁹ The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the revealed things belong to us and to our children for ever, to observe all the words of this law.

Deuteronomy 29:29

The secret things belong to the Lord our God. Not everything that is true of God has been revealed. That there are secret things anticipates the need to trust, obey, and be humble before God: <<*He has told you, O mortal, what is good; and what does the Lord require of you but to do justice, and to love kindness, and to walk humbly with your God?*>> (Micah 6:8). What God has revealed is for the sake of obedience: <<*Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?' No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe*>> (Deuteronomy 30:11-14).

To observe all the words of this law. The law was given so that the people would have a template for an abundant life: <<*You search the scriptures because you think that in them you have eternal life; and it is they that testify on my behalf. Yet you refuse to come to me to have life*>> (John 5:39-40), <<*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life, and have it abundantly*>> (John 10:10), <<*These Jews were more receptive than those in Thessalonica, for they welcomed the message very eagerly and examined the scriptures every day to see whether these things were so*>> (Acts 17:11), and: <<*All scripture is inspired by God and is useful for teaching, for reproof, for correction, and for training in righteousness, so that everyone who belongs to God may be proficient, equipped for every good work*>> (2 Timothy 3:16-17).