

Review of the Covenant

Deuteronomy 29

Deuteronomy 29:1-9 – *“These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them in Horeb.*

² Now Moses called 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 which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great wonders. ⁴ Yet the Lord has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day. ⁵ And I have led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn out on your feet. ⁶ You have not eaten bread, nor have you drunk wine or similar drink, that you may know that I am the Lord your God. ⁷ And when you came to this place, Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan came out against us to battle, and we conquered them. ⁸ We took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, to the Gadites, and to half the tribe of Manasseh. ⁹ Therefore keep the words of this covenant, and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do.”

Background Notes

Two logical questions come to mind in verse 1. Was this the beginning of a new sermon by Moses, and was this a different covenant than the Mosaic Covenant? Various positions are held.

In reference to the division of the sermons: some commentators believe Moses' second sermon ended in chapter 26, and chapters 27-28 were a summary statement third sermon, and chapters 29-30 were a fourth sermon. Other commentators conclude the second sermon after chapter 28, and thus chapters 29-30 were Moses' third address to the people on the plains of Moab. A third position (and I lean towards this at the present time) is that the second sermon ended with the directions for the two rituals in chapter 26. Chapters 27-28 were instructions for the covenant renewal ceremony that would take place at Shechem when they entered the Land, and chapters 29-30 were a third sermon given by Moses to the children of Israel before they crossed over the Jordan River into the Promised Land.

In reference to question of the covenant: a number of commentators see Deuteronomy 29-30 as a covenant that was separate from the Mosaic Covenant. They call it the “Palestinian Covenant.” Verse 1 seems to support that view: *“These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them in Horeb.”* On the other hand, there is nothing new in these chapters that had not already been stated in the Mosaic Covenant, so some commentators say the point of verse 1 was not a **new covenant** but rather for a **renewed commitment** to the Mosaic Covenant. Remember, 40 years had gone by

since Mount Sinai, and a new generation had grown up. This generation was to ratify the covenant at Shechem, in line with the instructions of chapter 27, after they crossed the Jordan River and began to conquer the Land. So I believe a renewed commitment to the covenant by this new generation would be most appropriate.

So, while we can't be sure whether chapters 29-30 are a different covenant or renewal of the Mosaic Covenant, the emphasis is on possession of the Land for keeping the covenant, and expulsion from the Land for breaking the covenant. A brief history of Israel was given, from their beginnings as a nation in Egypt (v2-3), to their present position on the plains of Moab, ready to go into the Land. The emphasis was on the great signs and miracles that the Lord did for them - great things that they still did not fully appreciate and understand (v4). Think of the miracle of their shoes and clothing not wearing out for 40 years (v5)! They didn't have to make their own bread or find water to drink, like other people, because the Lord provided manna for food and water to drink in the wilderness (v6). And already the Lord had given them military victories and land on the east side of the Jordan River for 2 ½ of the tribes to possess.

Doctrinal Points

1. Keeping the covenant would result in possession of the Land.

Deuteronomy 29:10-15 - *“Therefore keep the words of this covenant, and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do. ¹⁰“All of you stand today before the Lord your God: your leaders and your tribes and your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel, ¹¹ your little ones and your wives—also the stranger who is in your camp, from the one who cuts your wood to the one who draws your water— ¹² that you may enter into covenant with the Lord your God, and into His oath, which the Lord your God makes with you today, ¹³ that He may establish you today as a people for Himself, and that He may be God to you, just as He has spoken to you, and just as He has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ¹⁴“I make this covenant and this oath, not with you alone, ¹⁵ but with him who stands here with us today before the Lord our God, as well as with him who is not here with us today.”*

The land on the east side of the Jordan River had already been given as an inheritance to the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh. Now the rest of the tribes were about to take possession of their allotted portions of the Land. There, **if they kept the Covenant**, they would be established as a nation in the Land that God had given them. Notice that **all** the people were involved affirming in the Covenant - not only the leaders (v10), but also the children, the foreigners, and the servants were to be involved as well (v11). Young people are an essential part of the Covenant Community, both then and today. This covenant was not just for the generation of Moses' day, but also for generations to come (v14-15).

Is this covenant still good today for the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob? Yes, in reference to the Land clause of this covenant, it certainly is. The reason is that the guarantee of the Land goes back to the Abrahamic Covenant –

*which was an **unconditional** covenant.* So ownership of the Land was **unconditional**. However, **possession** of the Land was conditioned upon obedience to the covenant. Keeping the covenant would result in possession of the Land.

2. Breaking the covenant would result in expulsion from the Land.

Deuteronomy 29:16-28 - *“For you know that we dwelt in the land of Egypt and that we came through the nations which you passed by, ¹⁷ and you saw their abominations and their idols which were among them—wood and stone and silver and gold); ¹⁸ so that there may not be among you man or woman or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the Lord our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood; ¹⁹ and so it may not happen, when he hears the words of this curse, that he blesses himself in his heart, saying, ‘I shall have peace, even though I follow the dictates of my heart’—as though the drunkard could be included with the sober.*

²⁰ *“The Lord would not spare him; for then the anger of the Lord and His jealousy would burn against that man, and every curse that is written in this book would settle on him, and the Lord would blot out his name from under heaven. ²¹ And the Lord would separate him from all the tribes of Israel for adversity, according to all the curses of the covenant that are written in this Book of the Law.”*

In verses 16-21 the emphasis was on the responsibility of every individual in the nation to keep the covenant. The people were warned about letting roots of bitterness get the best of them (v18). We too are warned about the deadly nature of bitterness: *“Be careful... lest any root of bitterness springs up to cause trouble, and by this, many become defiled”* (Hebrews 12:15). Are there any “bitter roots” in your heart right now? What does the Scripture say? Keep a lid on them! **Don’t let bitter roots grow up!** Uncontrolled bitterness will defile many people.

The people were warned about boasting in their sins, and thinking that they could get away with sin (v19). This defiance would result in judgment and physical death (v20-21). A young man, a professing Christian, once bragged to me that God had not judged him, even though he had divorced his wife without any biblical reason. A few months later he died of a heart attack - perhaps God’s judgment upon pride and disobedience. Although Christians are not under the Mosaic Law, 1 John 5:16 says that there is a “sin unto death” for a believer.

In verses 22-28, God placed emphasis on the responsibility of the nation as a whole. Notice that these verses were really a prediction of what was to come. The Assyrian and Babylonian conquests would result in plagues, disease and death. *“So that the coming generation of your children who rise up after you, and the foreigner who comes from a far land, would say, when they see the plagues of that land and the sicknesses which the Lord has laid on it”* (v22). The land would be unproductive and desolate like that around Sodom and Gomorrah and the Cities of the Plain that God had judged. *“The whole land is brimstone, salt, and burning; it is not sown, nor does it bear, nor does any grass grow there, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboiim, which the Lord overthrew in His anger and His wrath”* (v23). The question of verse 24, *“All nations would say, ‘Why has the Lord done so to this land? What does the heat of this great*

anger mean?” was answered in verses 25-26: *“Then people would say: ‘Because they have forsaken the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt; for they went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods that they did not know and that He had not given to them.’* Notice the end result in verses 27-28: *“Then the anger of the Lord was aroused against this land, to bring on it every curse that is written in this book. And the Lord uprooted them from their land in anger, in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is this day.”* Breaking the covenant would result in expulsion from the Land.

Practical Application

Concentrate on what God has revealed.

Verse 29: *“The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.”*

When read in its proper context, the **interpretation** of this verse has to do with the clear revelation to the people of Israel that God gave in His covenant: blessings for obedience, and judgments for disobedience. But God had not yet revealed all of Israel’s future to the people.

That is the proper **interpretation**, but the **application** of this verse is certainly wider in scope, and can be applied to believers today. The Lord has revealed a lot to us in His Word - but he has not revealed everything to us.

So we should concentrate our studies on what God **has** revealed, not spending undue time speculating on what God **has not** revealed! And yet some Christians still like to spend way too much time speculating on what God has not revealed - like the date of the Lord’s return or the number of angels! A certain amount of speculation is acceptable, but let’s concentrate our study on what God has revealed to us.

And let’s concentrate on applying it in our lives as well!