

Deuteronomy 29:1-15
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Introduction

This chapter begins a new section in the book of Deuteronomy. Moses' first speech to Israel was a review of God's faithfulness to them since the exodus from Egypt (Deut 1:6—4:43). His second speech was an exposition of God's laws to the newly formed theocracy (Deut 4:44—28:68). And this third address was an appeal to faithfulness and commitment to God, with a promise of blessing if they obeyed and cursing if they did not (Deut 29:1—30:20). Moses' audience was the second generation of Israelites since the exodus from Egypt and, with the exception of Joshua and Caleb, would have been under 60 years of age (Num 14:28-33). Moses speaks to them in the present, "today" (Deut 29:4, 10, 12), recalls the Lord's gracious care for them in the past (Deut 29:2-8), and calls for their commitment (Deut 29:9-13), which commitment would positively impact future generations (Deut 29:14-15).

This chapter repeats some of the material previously addressed, and this repetition was intentional on Moses' part. Wiersbe states, "As we read and study Moses' farewell address, we may get weary of these repeated themes, but they are the essence of God's covenant with His people. While the priests and Levites had a copy of the Law of Moses and could refer to it (Deut 17:18; 28:58; 29:20, 27; 31:26), the common people had to depend on their memories, and therefore repetition was important."¹ Both Paul and Peter used repetition in their writings as a pedagogical tool (Phil 3:1; 2 Pet 1:13; 3:1).

An Historical Review (Deut 29:1-8)

In our English Bible, the chapter opens, saying, "These are the words of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the sons of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He had made with them at Horeb" (Deut 29:1). Most conservative scholars believe this verse should be included in the previous chapter. According to Thomas Constable "Chapter 29 verse 1 is the last verse of chapter 28 in the Hebrew Bible. Moses probably intended it to be a summary statement of what precedes, rather than an introduction to what follows. The renewed Mosaic Covenant, to which Moses now called on his hearers to commit themselves, contrasts somewhat with the original Mosaic Covenant to which the Israelites committed themselves at Mt.

¹ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Equipped*, "Be" Commentary Series (Colorado Springs, CO: Chariot Victor Pub., 1999), 171.

Sinai.”² Eugene Merrill agrees, saying, “It seems quite clear, then, that a major break occurs between 29:1 and 29:2, with the former bringing all the previous material to a close and the latter introducing at least the epilogic historical review.”³

What follows in the next two chapters is a renewal of the covenant that God made with the exodus generation. The original Mosaic covenant was ratified at Sinai, and the renewal of the covenant occurred in the land of Moab, where God had already displayed His power by defeating “Sihon the king of Heshbon and Og the king of Bashan” (Deut 29:7), and then distributing it to “to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of the Manassites” (Deut 29:8). Moses was the divinely authorized representative of Yahweh to mediate the covenant between Him and the people of Israel.

The review opens, “And 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 all his servants and all his land; ³ the great trials which your eyes have seen, those great signs and wonders” (Deut 29:2-3). Some of Moses’ audience would have personal memories of the exodus event; however, those born in the wilderness would not. Yet, Moses calls on everyone to remember and identify with the exodus generation, as that connection will define who they are and serve as the basis for commitment. Some could recall seeing the Lord’s work with their own eyes, whereas the others were to see with the eyes of faith as they heard or read about the Lord’s deliverance. Moses, being a man of repetition, was doing all he could to firmly establish the Lord’s words and works into their minds (cf., Deut 1:30; 4:34; 7:18-19; 8:2-4; 11:2-7).

Moses continued, saying, “Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear” (Deut 29:4). This verse is somewhat difficult to understand. The *heart* (לב *leb*) refers to the mind or inner person. The *eyes* and *ears* represent a person’s capacity to receive information, which should lead to understanding. The statement might imply a degree of negative volition, which impairs a person’s ability to understand (cf., John 7:17).

Even if this is correct, it did not stop Moses from being faithful to communicate God’s Word to others. The Lord Himself said, “I have led you forty years in the wilderness; your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandal has not worn out on your foot” (Deut 29:5). Here was a display of God’s logistical grace, in which He provided for His people, even though they had sinned away their inheritance of the land of Canaan

² Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Dt 29:1.

³ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 373.

(Num 14:26-35). Moses had previously said, “For the LORD your God has blessed you in all that you have done; He has known your wanderings through this great wilderness. **These forty years the LORD your God has been with you; you have not lacked a thing**” (Deut 2:7), and, “**Your clothing did not wear out on you, nor did your foot swell these forty years**” (Deut 8:4; cf. Neh 9:7-21). God’s faithful provision for His people is a major motif throughout Scripture.

The Lord continued, saying, “You have not eaten bread, nor have you drunk wine or strong drink, in order that you might know that I am the LORD your God” (Deut 29:6). Bread and wine were the common foods of the day; foods obtained by means of human production. But God’s people did not possess what others possessed, partly because they were in the wilderness and there were no natural resources to draw from. However, the Lord cared for them in His own way, by means of manna and water, which He supplied for them supernaturally.

Moses continued, “When you reached this place, Sihon the king of Heshbon and Og the king of Bashan came out to meet us for battle, but we defeated them; ⁸ and we took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of the Manassites” (Deut 29:7-8). Originally, when the Israelites approached the land of Canaan, they were met with hostility by Sihon and Og, and God caused His people to defeat their enemies in battle and to take their land (Deut 2:26-3:17). Again, the Lord provided for His people whenever there was a need. Thomas Constable states:

The emphasis in this section is on God’s faithfulness in bringing Israel to its present geographical location (cf. Deut 1:6–4:40). To do this, God had provided for the people’s needs in the wilderness, and had given them victory over some of their enemies (i.e., Sihon and Og). He had also given them some of the land He had promised them (in Transjordan: for the Reubenites, Gadites, and the eastern half-tribe of the Manassites).⁴

A Call to Commitment (Deut 29:9-15)

As a result of God’s goodness and faithfulness, Moses called his people to respond in obedience to the One who so loved and cared for them, saying, “So keep the words of this covenant to do them, that you may prosper in all that you do” (Deut 29:9). God is good, and He always desires the best for His people. God’s good laws are never for the harm or deprivation of His people. He desired His people to be blessed, and He’d given them everything they needed to walk in His will (Deut 5:33; 6:3; 7:12-16; 11:26-28; 28:1-14; 30:15-20).

⁴ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible*, Dt 29:2.

Moses addressed the whole nation and not just a few, saying, “You stand today, all of you, before the LORD your God: your chiefs, your tribes, your elders and your officers, even all the men of Israel, ¹¹ your little ones, your wives, and the alien who is within your camps, from the one who chops your wood to the one who draws your water” (Deut 29:10-11). God desired prosperity for the whole nation, and everyone was called upon to walk according to the Lord’s directives in order to open the channels of blessing. According to Wiersbe:

The secret of prosperity was the blessing of God, and the secret of receiving that blessing was obedience to God’s law. Moses began with the leaders of the nation (v. 10), for if leaders don’t set the example as spiritual people, there’s not much hope for the followers. However, nobody in the camp was excluded, and this included the women and children, the resident aliens and the lowest servants. God could not truly be God to them if they refused to accept and obey His law.⁵

And Eugene Merrill adds:

The assembly gathered here is described with unusual fullness—the leaders, the ordinary citizens, wives and children, and resident aliens. That is, the entire believing community was invited to enter into covenant relationship with the Lord without reference to social, economic, gender, or age differences...The covenant was made with all Israel as a collective, to be sure, but it was also made with each and every member of the body.⁶

The covenant renewal required the people of God to act accordingly, by choosing rightly, “that you may enter into the covenant with the LORD your God, and into His oath which the LORD your God is making with you today” (Deut 29:12). This was not a new covenant, but a revitalizing of the original covenant given at Mount Sinai. Peter Craigie states, “God, in sovereignty and grace, initiated the relationship and in so doing committed himself in a promise to the chosen people; the people’s obligation to commit themselves in the covenant was based not simply on law or demand, but on a response of love, for the purpose of the covenant relationship elicited such a response.”⁷

And the blessing of the Lord was promised to His people, “in order that He may establish you today as His people and that He may be your God, just as He spoke to you and as He swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob” (Deut 29:13). Here

⁵ Warren W. Wiersbe, *Be Equipped*, “Be” Commentary Series, 172–173.

⁶ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary, 378.

⁷ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 357.

was theological continuity of commitment on God's part. Just as the Lord had promised to bless Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, so He promised to bless their ancestors. God has integrity and keeps His Word. Eugene Merrill states, "the present covenant rises out of the ancient promises of the Lord to the patriarchal ancestors of the nation (v. 13b). He who had promised to be the God of the fathers (cf. Gen 17:7; Lev 11:45; 26:12) once more gave opportunity to the descendants to seize upon that great privilege and responsibility of being his people."⁸ Accepting God's offer of covenant renewal, with all the blessings associated with it, meant walking with Him and being a blessing to others.

Moses finished this pericope, saying, "Now not with you alone am I making this covenant and this oath,¹⁵ but both with those who stand here with us today in the presence of the LORD our God and with those who are not with us here today" (Deut 29:14-15). Here was a very sober statement, for the decision of Moses' audience would not only impact them, but also others who were not present, which included future generations. According to Jack Deere, "The scope of the covenant renewal also embraced future generations (*those who are not here today*, 29:15). Therefore the obedience of that present generation had a great effect on those not yet born."⁹ And Peter Craigie confirms this, saying:

The people on the plains of Moab were indeed renewing their covenant with God, but they were not to forget that they were but one part of a larger community, a community not limited by the passage of time. The one who is not here with us today—the reference is not to those who could not be present for some reason such as ill health. Rather, the words indicate the generations to be born in the future. The reference to future generations impressed even more firmly the responsibility incumbent on those who were present on the plains of Moab, for not only their own future, but also the future of their posterity would be contingent upon their obedience to the law of the covenant.¹⁰

Individual actions have consequences, both for the present and the future, and for self and others. The choices of one generation would impact the next, for better or worse, creating a pattern of behavior that would lead to blessing or cursing. Of course, the faith of one generation is the faith of one generation, and good choices by parents is no guarantee that subsequent generations will walk in the wisdom of those who came before. Still, each generation must choose to walk with the Lord and abide by His

⁸ Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary, 380.

⁹ Jack S. Deere, "Deuteronomy," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 314.

¹⁰ Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament, 357–358.

directives, or to turn away into a life of sin. But again, actions have consequences, both for the present and the future, for self and others. Choose wisely.

Present Application

In Deuteronomy 29:1-15, Moses revealed God’s goodness and faithfulness to His people and called for them to respond in obedience to the One who so loved and cared for them. Likewise, as Christians, God has demonstrated His love for us through the cross of Christ (John 3:16; Rom 5:6-10; Eph 2:1-9), wherein Jesus has born our sin and paid the penalty that rightfully belongs to us (Isa 53:10; Mark 10:45; 2 Cor 5:21; 1 Pet 1:18-19; Rev 5:9). In Christ (ἐν Χριστῷ) we have judicial forgiveness of sin (Col 1:13-14; 2:13-14), reconciliation to the Father (Rom 5:11; 2 Cor 5:18), peace with God (Rom 5:1), eternal life (John 10:28), and imputed righteousness (Rom 5:17; Phil 3:9). As a result, God calls us to commit ourselves to Him and to live as obedient children. The apostle Paul, having written at length about the mercies of God in his letter to the Christians living in Rome, said, “Therefore, I urge you, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies a living and holy sacrifice, acceptable to God, which is your spiritual service of worship” (Rom 12:1). In this verse, Paul is drawing a logical conclusion to God’s great mercy toward us who have trusted Christ as Savior, and calls us to respond with a life of ongoing service. Earl Radmacher states:

Based on God’s mercy (Rom 9:11, 15, 16, 18, 23; 11:30–32), Paul entreats believers to **present** their **bodies** as a **living sacrifice**, meaning they should use their bodies to serve and obey God (Rom 6:13). Such giving of the body to God is more than a contrast with a dead animal sacrifice, it is “newness of life” (Rom 6:4). **Holy** means set apart for the Lord’s use; **acceptable** means pleasing to Him; and **reasonable** indicates that such a gift is the only rational reaction to all the good gifts God has showered on us.¹¹

But how do we accomplish this task of living holy lives to the Lord? Paul answers it, saying, “And do not be conformed to this world, but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, so that you may prove what the will of God is, that which is good and acceptable and perfect” (Rom 12:2). Being conformed to this world means we follow the values of this world, which values are always at odds with God and His Word. Like a stream that flows in one direction, there is a current to this world that pulls at our hearts and minds to carry us along its course. Any dead fish can float downstream, but one must be alive to swim against the current and not simply be pulled along its course. As growing believers we are called to be transformed by the renewing of our minds,

¹¹ Earl D. Radmacher, Ronald Barclay Allen, and H. Wayne House, *Nelson’s New Illustrated Bible Commentary* (Nashville: T. Nelson Publishers, 1999), 1447.

that we might know God's will and live the acceptable and mature life. The word *transformed* translates the Greek verb μεταμορφόω *metamorphoo*, which means "to change inwardly in fundamental character or condition, be changed, be transformed."¹² This is an internal transformation that occurs gradually, over time, as our minds are renewed by the daily intake and application of God's Word to every aspect of our lives. According to Radmacher:

Instead of being molded by the values of this world, the believer should be transformed, that is, changed by the renewing of the mind. Spiritual transformation starts in the mind and heart. A mind dedicated to the world and its concerns will produce a life tossed back and forth by the currents of culture. But a mind dedicated to God's truth will produce a life that can stand the test of time. We can resist the temptations of our culture by meditating on God's truth and letting the Holy Spirit guide and shape our thoughts and behaviors.¹³

There is intentionality here, as the Christian is called to a life committed to the Lord and His interests and not our own. The fulfillment of this committed life occurs as we study God's Word daily (Josh 1:8; Psa 1:1-3; 19:7; 40:8; 119:1, 9-11, 97; Jer 15:16; 2 Tim 2:15; 1 Pet 2:2; 2 Pet 3:18) and then actively apply it to our lives (Matt 7:24; Jam 1:22). In this way, we will advance to spiritual maturity, glorify the Lord, bless others, and live the best life possible.

¹² William Arndt, Frederick W. Danker, Walter Bauer, et al., *A Greek-English Lexicon of the New Testament and Other Early Christian Literature* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000), 639.

¹³ Earl D. Radmacher, *Nelson's New Illustrated Bible Commentary*, 1447.