

Deuteronomy 29: Biblical Reading and Reflections

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[0 : 0 0] Deuteronomy chapter 29 Or eyes to see or ears to hear I have led you forty years in the wilderness Your clothes have not worn out on you And your sandals have not worn off your feet You have not eaten bread And you have not drunk wine or strong drink That you may know that I am the Lord your God And when you came to this place Sihon the king of Heshbon And Og the king of Bashan Came out against us to battle But we defeated them We took their land and gave it for an inheritance To the Reubenites, the Gadites And the half-tribe of the Manassites

Therefore keep the words of this covenant And do them, that you may prosper In all that you do You are standing today, all of you Before the Lord your God The heads of your tribes, your elders and your officers All the men of Israel Your little ones, your wives And the sojourner who is in your camp From the one who chops your wood To the one who draws your water So that you may enter into the sworn covenant Of the Lord your God Which the Lord your God is making with you today 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 fathers To Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob It is not with you alone That I am making this sworn covenant But with whoever is standing here with us today Before the Lord our God And with whoever is not here with us today You know how we lived in the land of Egypt And how we came through the midst of the nations Through which you passed And you have seen their detestable things Their idols of wood and stone Of silver and gold Which were among them Beware lest there be among you A man or woman Or clan or tribe Whose heart is turning away today From the Lord our God To go and serve the gods of those nations Beware lest there be among you A root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit One who, when he hears the words Of this sworn covenant Blesses himself in his heart Saying, I shall be safe Though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart This will lead to the sweeping away Of moist and dry alike The Lord will not be willing to forgive him But rather the anger of the Lord And his jealousy will smoke against that man And the curses written in this book Will settle upon him And the Lord will blot out his name From under heaven And the Lord will single him 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 And the next generation Your children who rise up after you And the foreigner who comes from a far land Will say When they see the afflictions of that land And the sickness with which The Lord has made it sick The whole land burned out

With brimstone and salt Nothing sown And nothing growing Where no plant can sprout An overthrow like that of Sodom and Gomorrah Admer and Zeboim Which the Lord overthrew In his anger and wrath All the nations will say Why has the Lord done thus to this land?

What caused the heat of this great anger? Then people will say It is because they abandoned the covenant of the Lord The God of their fathers Which he made with them When he brought them out of the land of Egypt And went and served other gods And worshipped them Gods whom they had not known And whom he had not allotted to them Therefore the anger of the Lord Was kindled against this land Bringing upon it all the curses Written in this book And the Lord uprooted them from their land In anger and fury and great wrath And cast them into another land As they are this day The secret things belong to the Lord our God But the things that are revealed Belong to us And to our children forever That we may do all the words of this law In Deuteronomy chapter 29 and 30 Moses exhorts Israel As they are about to enter the land He looks back to Horeb And forward to entry into the land And the destiny of the nation after that Israel has just accepted and ratified the covenant Prior to entering fully into the land

[4 : 1 8] And now Moses discusses the implications Of their accepting the covenant And its sanctions The summons in verse 2 Looks back to the summons of chapter 5 verse 1 Which looked back to the covenant of Horeb However now they have ratified the covenant themselves Moses

recounts the history That has brought them to this point And verses 2 and 3 Recall Deuteronomy chapter 4 verse 34 Or has any God ever attempted To go and take a nation for himself From the midst of another nation By trials, by signs, by wonders and by war By a mighty hand and an outstretched arm And by great deeds of terror All of which the Lord your God Did for you in Egypt before your eyes However Despite the great deliverance And witnessing such wonders and judgments Israel had failed to reach A point of understanding Geoffrey Tegy suggests that verse 4 Should be translated But the Lord did not give you a mind to understand Etc.

Until today The point then would be Not as it is in many translations That Israel still didn't understand But that now On the brink of entering into the land Israel has finally grasped What their fathers had not The Lord led them in the wilderness And miraculously provided for them Within it for 40 years And then gave them victory Over Sihon king of Heshbon And Og king of Bashan As a preliminary taste Of the Lord's empowering of them For the conquest of the land In order that they might learn The lessons that they had failed To learn earlier on The purpose of the wilderness Wandering then Was not merely punitive It was educative Israel couldn't enter into the land In its ignorance and rebellion So 40 years of tough training Was necessary Before they could be prepared To do so Finally Now they have received Their painful remedial training And they are ready To graduate to life in the land However in this And the following chapter We gather that Even lessons so painfully learned Can be easily forgotten

If they are not careful This is why memory Is such an insistent theme Of the book of Deuteronomy If they do not remember The lessons that they spent So much time And difficulty in learning Can be forgotten With devastating consequence All Israel is standing Before Moses Formally to ratify And enter into the covenant This isn't just The typical public gathering Of the male assembly of Israel The women The children And the sojourners Are present too The covenant is made With the male assembly But not with them only The entirety of the body of Israel Has to be personally present To enter into this Not just their public And representative persons The covenant isn't merely For the Israelites present At that time either It's for all of their descendants This covenant ceremony Placed obligations Upon generations yet to be born They could resist those obligations But they had no choice In coming under these obligations The verses that follow Draw Israel's attention To what they have witnessed Among the nations With whom they have had dealings To this point And the idolatries Of those nations A solemn warning Is given about Anyone in the nation Who presumptuously Follows in the ways Of those nations Confident that the Lord Won't judge him This begins As Moses makes clear With the bitter root Of a stubborn heart That turns away From the Lord Such a heart Will produce If it's not dealt with Poisonous fruit That will lead to painful And signal judgment Upon many External conformity Is not enough Hearts need to be Ordered to the Lord And if they are not The long term consequences Will be horrific This is something That the entire nation Needs to be vigilant about If such bitterness Is allowed to develop It can lead to destruction Falling upon all And if this were to happen All the curses That have been mentioned In the preceding chapter Would fall upon Israel And the next generation Would look at the destruction Of the people And wonder at the cause Of such a devastation

They would learn That it was the result Of the people's Abandonment of the covenant And turning to other gods Gods whom they had not known The final verse Of the chapter The secret things Belong to the Lord our God But the things That are revealed Belong to us And to our children forever That we may do All the words of this law Has been taken In a number of different senses Some have suggested That the secret things Refer to sins As we see in Psalm 19 verse 12 Who can discern his errors Declare me innocent From hidden faults Or Psalm 90 verse 8 You have set our iniquities Before you Our secret sins In the light of your presence However I think It is more likely That it refers To the larger hidden purposes And works of the Lord In history There is much That Israel may be tempted To speculate about Especially when considering Their future And the inscrutable ways And intentions of the Lord Yet what they need to know Has been very clearly Revealed to them So that they might Faithfully observe the law

[9 : 19] And know fellowship With the Lord It doesn't depend Upon speculations Hebrews chapter 12 Verses 5 to 15 Allude to Deuteronomy Chapter 29 verse 8 It describes the same Sort of discipline Of the Lord Designed to lead To faithfulness And the concern About the threat Posed to the entire community From unaddressed Bitter roots of rebellion Those verses read And have you forgotten The exhortation That addresses you as sons My son Do not regard lightly The discipline of the Lord Nor be weary When reproved by him For the Lord Disciplines the one he loves And

chastises every son Whom he receives It is for discipline That you have to endure God is treating you as sons For what son is there Whom his father Does not discipline If you are left Without discipline In which all have participated Then you are illegitimate Children And not sons Besides this We have had earthly fathers Who disciplined us And we respected them Shall we not much more Be subject to the

Father of spirits And live For they disciplined us For a short time As it seemed best to them But he disciplines us For our good That we may share His holiness For the moment All discipline seems painful Rather than pleasant But later it yields The peaceful fruit Of righteousness To those who have been Trained by it Therefore lift your Drooping hands And strengthen your weak knees And make straight paths For your feet So that what is lame May not be put out of joint But rather be healed Strive for peace With everyone And for the holiness Without which No one will see the Lord See to it That no one fails To obtain the grace of God That no root of bitterness Springs up And causes trouble And by it Many become defiled The themes of this passage In Hebrews Are very similar To the passage We have just read In the book of Deuteronomy In Deuteronomy 29 Moses' concern is that Israel does not Regard lightly The discipline of the Lord They have been taught By the Lord Through his discipline The experience Of the wilderness The experience Of his provision for them His judgments upon them Should have taught them Lessons about faithfulness That will stand them In good stead in the land What might have seen Merely punitive Can from this vantage point Be seen to have been Educative God is dealing with Israel As his son And it is important That those lessons Be internalised And guarded jealously That Israel not forget What it has been taught And that it ensure That no one within The community Stray from what God has taught them Because they know The devastating effects If they are not careful A question to consider What are some of the Secret things That we must leave With the Lord And some of the Revealed things That we should devote Our attention to Most closely