

**May 3, 2020 - Deut. 29:1-29 - Covenant on the Plains of Moab**  
**Torah Reading: Deuteronomy 29:1-29 - Covenant on the Plains of Moab**  
**Psalm 143-144**  
**Haftarah: Joshua 24:1-8, 12-13**

### **The Covenant on the Plains of Moab**

Rashi - [Why is the list of curses in chapter 28 juxtapositioned opposite this Torah reading full of promises and blessings?] Because when Israel heard these ninety-eight curses [delineated in Ki Tavo], besides the forty-nine [curses] stated in Leviticus (26:14-38), they turned pale, and said, "Who can possibly endure these?" [Thereupon,] Moses began to appease them.

The Sages explain this discourse in **Deuteronomy 29-30** was spoken by Moses on the day of his death. (Compare Joshua's address to Israel just before he died in **Joshua 24**)

**Deuteronomy 29:1** - "These are the words of the covenant, which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb."

The Jewish Bible puts the first verse of this chapter as the last verse of the previous chapter, indicating that the covenant at Moab was merely a renewal and updating of the covenant at Sinai (**Exodus 24:3-8**).

No blood sacrifices were offered (as in Exodus 24:8), which were usual in ratifying a brand new covenant. But this is hinted at in **Deuteronomy 29:12-13** with reference to "passing through" the covenant (see below).

But there are differences between what is said here and what was said at Mt. Sinai. The generation of Sinai had turned rebellious and perished in the wilderness. With a new generation of Israelites on the verge of entering the Promised Land, the covenant on the plains of Moab had greater blessings and promises of grace included. Also it encompasses not only Israelites but Gentile strangers and proselytes, even slaves. Women and children are specifically included, and in this way it points toward the New Covenant in the Times of Messiah discussed by the later prophets, in which "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female: for ye are all one in Christ Jesus." (**Galatians 3:28**)

This covenant was even for those "not here with us this day," which Rashi says refers to coming future generations. Thus, the covenant includes us, in the form of the New Covenant sealed by the sacrifice of Christ on the cross.

**Deuteronomy 29:2-3** - "And Moses called unto all Israel, and said unto them, Ye have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land; The great temptations (trials) which thine

eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles:"

Despite all they had seen, they never grasped the spiritual significance:

**Deuteronomy 29:4** - "Yet the LORD hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day."

The rabbis were troubled by the indication that God would control whether people heard and perceived. Their go-to position was that "All is in the hands of heaven, save the fear of heaven." i.e. man had the capability and a responsibility to respond with repentance and faith.

In fact, both are correct. From our human point of view, it is up to us to choose to follow God, to obey Him, or - from a New Testament viewpoint - to pick up our cross. On the other hand, it is also clear that this faith is a gift from God, and can't be understood or responded to without intervention by the Holy Spirit.

- **Proverbs 20:12** - "The hearing ear, and the seeing eye, the LORD hath made even both of them."

And yet, idolatry can shut them both up:

- **Psalms 115:5-8** - concerning idols : "...eyes have they, but they see not: They have ears, but they hear not...They that make them are like unto them; so is every one that trusteth in them."

- **1 Corinthians 1:18** - "For the preaching of the cross is to them that perish foolishness; but unto us which are saved it is the power of God."

- **1 Corinthians 2:14** - "But the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God: for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned."

"Men are ever blind even in the brightest light, until they have been enlightened of God" (Calvin).

In fact, God has ensured that not just the Jews, but natural man, Adam in the flesh, can never understand:

This verse in Deuteronomy reappears all over the Bible, so it must be pretty important.

Quoted by the Prophets:

- **Isaiah 6:9-10** - "And he said, Go, and tell this people, Hear ye indeed, but understand not; and see ye indeed, but perceive not. Make the heart of this people fat, and make their ears heavy, and shut their eyes; lest they see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and convert, and be healed."

- **Ezekiel 12:2** - "Son of man, you are living in a rebellious house. They have eyes to see but do not see, and ears to hear but do not hear, for they are a rebellious house."

... and by Jesus:

- **Luke 8:10** - "And he said, Unto you it is given to know the mysteries of the kingdom of God: but to others in parables; that seeing they might not see, and hearing they might not understand."

... and by Paul, announcing that salvation was being opened to the Gentiles:

- **Acts 28:26-27** - "And when they agreed not among themselves, they departed, after that Paul had spoken one word, Well spake the Holy Ghost by Esaias the prophet unto our fathers, Saying, Go unto this people, and say, Hearing ye shall hear, and shall not understand; and seeing ye shall see, and not perceive For the heart of this people is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes have they closed; lest they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them. "

### **God's Preservation of Israel**

**Deuteronomy 29:5-6** - "And I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot. Ye have not eaten bread, neither have ye drunk wine or strong drink: that ye might know that I am the LORD your God."

Miraculous preservation of covering for their bodies and protection of their feet as they walked. They ate manna, and drank water from the rock. - All for the purpose of showing them that "I am the LORD your God." Making clothes and shoes, producing wine and bread all included human effort. God sustained them without their effort.

**Deuteronomy 29:7-8** - "And when ye came unto this place, Sihon the king of Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, came out against us unto battle, and we smote them: And we took their land, and gave it for an inheritance unto the Reubenites, and to the Gadites, and to the half tribe of Manasseh."

Their first enemies blocking their entrance the Promised Land had been defeated,, as a foretaste of what was to come. The acquisition of the land had already begun for the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh.

These provisions God also provides for us now:

- In the "wilderness" of this world, God provides clothing for us:

- **Isaiah 61:10** - "I will greatly rejoice in the LORD, my soul shall be joyful in my God; for he hath clothed me with the garments of salvation, he hath covered me with the robe of

righteousness”

Midrash Rabbah: Rabbi Eleazar asked whether Israel’s clothes did not need washing. Rabbi Simeon ben Jose replied that the pillar of cloud rubbed against them and whitened them. Rabbi Simeon ben Jose said that the clothes that they wore were those with which the ministering angels had invested them at Mount Sinai, and therefore they did not grow old. Rabbi Simeon ben Jose noted that just as when a snail grows, its shell grows with it, so therefore their clothes would never be outgrown. Nor did the clothes ever have an ill smell, because as **Song of Solomon 4:11** says, “And the smell of your garments is like the smell of Lebanon.”

- He gives us shoes (**Ephesians 6:15** - “And your feet shod with the preparation of the gospel of peace”)

- He gives us bread and wine to drink “in remembrance of Him” (**1 Corinthians 11:23-26**).

- In Him we conquer our spiritual enemies (**Romans 8:37** - “Nay, in all these things we are more than conquerors through him that loved us.”)

- We can acquire the land our spiritual enemies have possessed (**2 Corinthians 10:4-5** - “Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ”)

- We inherit the Promised Land and enter into the Rest

- **Joshua 1:13** - “The LORD your God hath given you rest, and hath given you this land.”

- **Hebrews 4:11** - “Let us labour therefore to enter into that rest...”

**Deuteronomy 29:9** - "Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do."

The Jerusalem Targum and the Septuagint have, "that ye may understand all that ye do"

Scripture regards one who teaches Torah to a neighbor's child as though he himself had created the words of the Torah (Babylonian Talmud Sanhedrin 99b).

God also emphasizes this later to Joshua:

- **Joshua 1:8** - "This book of the law shall not depart out of thy mouth; but thou shalt meditate therein day and night, that thou mayest observe to do according to all that is written therein: for then thou shalt make thy way prosperous, and then thou shalt have good success."

(See also **Psalm 1:2-3**)

**Deuteronomy 29:10** - "You stand this day all of you before the LORD your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, Your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water:"

None of them were allowed to consider themselves as exempt from the terms of that national compact, lest any lapsing into idolatry might prove a root of bitterness (**verse 18**), spreading its noxious seed and corrupt influence all around (compare **Hebrews 12:15**). - *Jamieson-Fausset-Brown Bible Commentary*

**Deuteronomy 29:12-13** - "That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day: That he may establish thee to day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob."

Rashi - "that you may enter into the covenant": [lit.] "that you may pass through (*`abar*) the covenant." This was the method of those who made covenants: They would set up a demarcation on one side and a demarcation on the other, and [the respective parties of the covenant] "passed through" between [these partitions], as the verse says, "[when] they cut the calf in two and passed between its parts" (Jer. 34:18).

Or, like Abraham at his "horror of great darkness" (**Genesis 15**) when he sacrificed and divided the carcasses of the animals, and God "passed between" the pieces as Abraham slept.

**Deuteronomy 29:14-15** - "Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; But with him that standeth here with us this day before the LORD our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day:"

Compare **John 20:29** - "Jesus saith unto him, Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed."

- **John 10:16** - "And other sheep I have, which are not of this fold: them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice; and there shall be one fold, and one shepherd."

### **Warning Against Idolatry**

**Deuteronomy 29:18-19** - "Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations; lest there should be among you a root that beareth gall and wormwood; And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst:"

The warning is to both presumptuous hypocrites and self-deluded sinners, who would like to believe there is "Peace, peace" when there is no peace.

Yet "There is no peace," says the LORD, "for the wicked." (**Isaiah 48:22**)

And the scriptures are clear that nothing can be hidden from God:

- **Hebrews 4:13** - "Neither is there any creature that is not manifest in his sight: but all things are naked and opened unto the eyes of him with whom we have to do."

"To add drunkenness to thirst" - The Hebrew meaning is to "add the watered to the thirsty."

It is a parable of two adjoining fields, according to the 15th-century *Akedat Yitzchak* (Binding of Isaac), one "thirsty" and always needing water, and the other "watered" always having enough. The thirsty field is always bound to get the benefit of the watering of the adjoining field. In the same way, the person described who thinks the curses will not come upon him for disobedience imagines that because he is living as a part of the community, which will be "watered" or blessed, so the blessing will also bleed over to bless him.

But the opposite is true - because of his rebellion, the whole community will suffer the curses.

The New Testament example is the case of Ananias and Sapphira, who lied to the Holy Spirit (**Acts 5:1-11**).

### **The 'Root of Bitterness' from Unexposed Idolatry**

Quoted in the New Testament:

- **Hebrews 12:15** - "Looking diligently lest any man fail of the grace of God; lest any root of bitterness springing up trouble you, and thereby many be defiled"

To "fall short of the grace of God" means to rely on self effort instead of totally on God - to "turn away from the Lord your God." We will turn toward our idols to boost our human effort or increase our sense of worth, our success, or to provide us our proverbial daily "corn, wine and oil," thinking God either can't or won't, believing that "the Lord has forsaken the earth" and can do neither good nor ill.

### **The Penalty**

**Deuteronomy 29:20-21** - "The LORD will not spare him, but then the anger of the LORD and his jealousy shall smoke against that man, and all the curses that are written in this book shall lie (settle down) upon him, and the LORD shall blot out his name from under heaven. And the LORD shall separate him unto evil out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant that are written in this book of the law:"

The problem is that we are all constantly being tempted by our inner idols into rebellion against God.

- **James 2:10** - "For whosoever shall keep the whole law, and yet offend in one point, he is guilty of all."

Our only hope is repentance and the cross -

- **Galatians 3:13** - "Christ hath redeemed us from the curse of the law, being made a curse for us: for it is written, Cursed is every one that hangeth on a tree"

### **Penalty on the Nation - Deuteronomy 29:22-28**

The presumptuousness of this one man could lead to disaster for the whole nation. These verses condense the national curses already stated in Chapter 28.

A new detail is the sobering comparison with "the overthrow of Sodom, and Gomorrah, Admah, and Zeboim, which the LORD overthrew in his anger, and in his wrath" (**Deuteronomy 29:23**) Those cities were destroyed forever.

### **Secret and Revealed Wisdom**

**Deuteronomy 29:29** - "The secret things belong unto the LORD our God: but those things which are revealed belong unto us and to our children for ever, that we may do all the words of this law."

"the secret things" = "*ha-nistarot*" from *çâthar* or *sthar* - hidden, covered, concealed, veiled

The Jews generally interpreted "secret things" and what follows as relating to the "secret sins" like that described in verses 18-19, particularly idolatry, and the punishment for them. Aben Ezra said, "He that commits idolatry secretly, his punishment is by the hand of heaven (solely from God and immediately); he that commits it openly [and is thus "revealed"] lies upon us and upon our children to do as is written in the law"

The rabbis felt it was unfair for God to punish the whole nation for the secret thoughts of one individual that no one would be able to know about to stop or prevent.

Rashi - [In answer to this, God says:] "I will not punish you for the hidden things!" [i.e.,] because "[The hidden things] belong to the Lord, our God," and He will exact punishment upon that particular individual [who sins in secret]. However, "the revealed things apply to us and to our children" [that is, we are responsible for detecting the sins committed openly in our community, and] to eradicate any evil among us.

In the Hebrew manuscript, there are little extraneous dots over each letter in the words "to us and our children." Rashi explains that this always denotes an exclusion of some

sort. "In our context, our Rabbis teach us that the exclusion refers to the period prior to the crossing of the Jordan." So even for open sins [which were not brought to judgment, God] did not punish the whole community - until Israel crossed the Jordan. For then, they accepted upon themselves the oath at Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal, and thereby [formally] became responsible for one another (Sanh. 43b).

(Similarly, any personal leaven retained after the sixth hour of Passover Eve becomes the responsibility of the whole community.)

### Hidden Mysteries

Looking deeper, the "secret things" also refer to the high providence of God, which is beyond human understanding.

The same word *ha-nistarot* (in its Aramaic form) is used in the Book of Daniel when he interpreted the dream of Nebuchadnezzar:

- **Daniel 2:22** - "He revealeth the deep and secret things (*"ha-nistarot"*): he knoweth what is in the darkness, and the light dwelleth with him."

By the time of the Essene community who wrote the Dead Sea scrolls a few hundred years before Christ, the phrase *"ha-nistarot"* in **Deuteronomy 29:29** was understood to refer to hidden mysteries known only to the sect community, while "revealed" referred to scriptural Torah Law known to all.

God has revealed much spiritual knowledge to His people, but He hasn't revealed everything. We couldn't handle it.

- **Psalms 131:1** - "LORD, my heart is not haughty, nor mine eyes lofty: neither do I exercise myself in great matters, or in things too high for me"

- **Isaiah 55:8-9** - "For My thoughts are not your thoughts, nor are your ways My ways," says the LORD. "For as the heavens are higher than the earth, so are My ways higher than your ways, and My thoughts than your thoughts."

- **Ecclesiastes 3:11** - "He has made everything beautiful in its time. He has also set eternity (*olam*) in the hearts of men, yet they cannot fathom the work God has done from beginning to end."

- **Colossians 2:2-3** - "to the acknowledgement of the mystery of God, and of the Father, and of Christ; in whom are hidden all the treasures of wisdom and knowledge."

- **Psalms 139:6** - "Such knowledge is too wonderful for me, too lofty for me to attain."

- **Romans 11:32-33** - "For God has consigned all men to disobedience so that He may have mercy on them all. O, the depth of the riches of the wisdom and knowledge of God! How unsearchable His judgments, and untraceable His ways!"

But Christ *has* been revealed to us - the Way, the Truth and the Life, the Light of the world - that through Him by faith we may "do all the words of this law," which ultimately speak of Him (**John 5:39**), and which He fulfilled.

*That* mystery God wants all to know - "the eternal purpose which he purposed in Christ Jesus our Lord," and the "breadth, and length, and depth, and height" of the love of Christ "which passeth knowledge." (**Ephesians 3:16-19**)

### **Unfathomable Works**

How God does His work in our fallen world while balancing justice and mercy, ensuring His sovereignty while allowing us the free choice of whether to follow Him, simply lies beyond the reach of our speculation and constitutes the "secret things" which belong to God.

Job posed a question: "...how should man be just with God?" (**Job 9:2**). The cross is God's answer to that. But Job also declared that God "doeth great things past finding out; yea, and wonders without number." (**Job 9:10**)

Like Job we can and will continue to question and seek answers, but in the end we hit a wall at the "secret things" and must submit to this limitation with humility.