

April 7, 2019
Sunday Evening Service
Series: Deuteronomy
Community Baptist Church
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To Ponder . . .

Questions to ponder as you prepare to hear from Deuteronomy 29.

1. Where do we find the stipulations of God's covenant with Israel?
2. Whose idea was the covenant?
3. What is the New Covenant and what ratifies that covenant?
4. How should we treat the secret things of the Bible?
5. Why is chastening from the Lord good?

COVENANT RENEWAL Deuteronomy 29

Maybe there are times when you identify with David's discouragement when he wrote, *Save, O LORD, for the godly one is gone; for the faithful have vanished from among the children of man (Psalm 12:1)*. Diogenes was an ancient Greek philosopher, famous for cynicism. Legend holds that he once walked the streets of Athens in broad daylight holding a lamp up to the face of citizens he met. When asked what he was doing he replied, "I'm looking for an honest man." The irony of the story is that he and his father had been bankers but were exiled from the city when it was discovered they had been altering currency.

One of the sad traits of sinful humanity is that we are fickle. We are often quick to make commitments and slow to keep them. A new

job always looks so promising that we quickly sign on the dotted line, only to regret our decision when we run head-on into the harsh reality of the job. Before long we are looking at the greener grass of another job. Or we commit to relationships whether they are in marriage, clubs, friendships, or church, only to grow weary with familiarity and let the relationships die.

Because we know this is a propensity of humanity, we can better understand why God told Moses to gather the people of Israel together to remind them of the covenant He had made with their forefathers. As the people were preparing to enter the land that God had promised to give Abraham's posterity, they needed to recommit to the relationship into which God had brought them. The covenant was the basis of that relationship. The covenant set the boundaries and expectations of that relationship.

We modern Christians have an even more important covenant that we do well to remember and return to. You know that at least once each month we observe the Lord's Supper which reminds us of the price our Savior paid to purchase our eternal security. Each month we are reminded that Jesus Christ tells us that He gave us His body and that He established the new covenant through His shed blood. Because He paid such a high price, we should be faithful to the covenant. We should disdain our tendency to view our relationship with our Savior lightly. We need those times when we are drawn up short and pulled back into sweet fellowship with the Savior. That happens when we review the terms of the covenant and renew our commitment to it.

Review (vv.1-9).

A new covenant? That is almost the way the text seems to read. But we need to stop to consider what is meant by "these are the words of the covenant." *These are the words of the covenant that the LORD commanded Moses to make with the people of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant that he had made with them at Horeb (v.1)*. This is a transitional statement. The debate is whether the words in verse one are connected to what has preceded or with what comes after (29:2ff.). The setting for the words looks very similar to Deuteronomy 1:1-5 where we read things like, *These are the words*

that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan in the wilderness (v.1) . . . in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to explain this law (v.5).

It seems most likely that Moses meant that these are the words of the existing covenant. Probably verse one refers back to all that is recorded from two speeches Moses made (chapters 1-28). That being true, the reference is to the covenant that God made with His people at Mt. Sinai (Mt. Horeb) forty years earlier. Now throughout our study in Deuteronomy, we have learned how Moses reiterated the agreements and stipulations of the covenant.

The entire book of Deuteronomy leads to the challenge in chapter 29 for the people to humbly submit to the covenant because the God of the covenant is the faithful LORD. God's people should submit because this is a covenant with the faithful Lord (vv.2-9). The people knew He was faithful because they (or at the very least their parents) had witnessed the LORD's power. *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 to all his servants and to all his land, the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders" (vv.2-3).*

No doubt some of the people in the crowd had been eyewitnesses of God's plagues against the Egyptians. At the same time, many of the people in the crowd had been born during the forty years of wandering and had not witnessed the plagues in Egypt. However, they surely had heard firsthand accounts of God's faithfulness to deliver His people through miracles. Everyone was aware that God had kept His promise to deliver His people out from slavery to the Egyptians through His mighty displays of power. *"Pharaoh will not listen to you. Then I will lay my hand on Egypt and bring my hosts, my people the children of Israel, out of the land of Egypt by great acts of judgment" (Exodus 7:4).*

God's covenant was perfect. God's faithfulness to the covenant was flawless. Be that as it may, God's people didn't understand. So Moses pointed out, *But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear (v.4).* In spite of God's mighty miracles against Egypt, the people did not fully understand the scope of their redemption. In spite of God's faithful,

miraculous care for them for forty years, the people did not grasp the relationship they should have with Him because of His faithfulness.

The problem was that God did not give them a heart to understand because they did not submit to God. Oh, so it was God's fault that they didn't understand? It could be easy for us to blame God for us not enjoying a deep and rewarding fellowship with Him. We know from Paul's letter to the believers in Philippi that *it is God who works in us to will and to do His pleasure (Philippians 2:13)*. God does this through the ministry of God the Holy Spirit who teaches us from the Bible. And yet, God leaves His people responsible to respond correctly. This has been God's method since Adam and Eve failed to respond correctly in the perfectness of the Garden. Adam didn't respond to God correctly, even though he lived in the perfect environment. We don't always respond correctly even though we have fellowship with the perfect God.

God's people ought to understand God and ought to trust Him because God proves His faithfulness. Moses pointed out some of the multiple reasons why God's people should trust Him. First is the fact that the LORD provided basic needs for the multitude. Moses confessed, *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 (v.5).* Moses had seen it all. It was a miracle that the people's clothes and shoes did not wear out. But when we live in the midst of a miracle every day, it is easy for familiarity to breed contempt.

More than taking care of their clothing, because of God's care, *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 (v.6).* God proved that He is dependable and trustworthy. For forty years the people did not eat food made with human hands but ate miracle food called manna. In the wilderness, the people did not sustain themselves by planting vineyards, harvesting grapes and making wine. They drank miracle water from rocks as God provided.

And further still the LORD delivered the land to His people. *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 (vv.7-8).* Sihon and Og were significant kings ruling significant kingdoms. Israel

possessed no weapons to speak of and had no standing, trained army. But God worked through His people to bring about the miraculous defeat of those kings. Then God began the amazing process of distributing the Promised Land to His people. This generation had witnessed this and had been a part of this miracle.

In all these ways (and more) God was proving that He is faithful and so that His people can depend on Him. How often have we found God to be faithful in providing our basic physical needs? Even more so God is faithful to grow us spiritually. Do we not experience what Paul described in his letter to the Thessalonian folks? *Now may the God of peace himself sanctify you completely, and may your whole spirit and soul and body be kept blameless at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ. He who calls you is faithful; he will surely do it. (1Thessalonians 5:23-24)*

Ultimately, the LORD's faithfulness gives reason to obey. Moses drew that conclusion for the people. *Therefore keep the words of this covenant and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do (v.9).* There are three requirements regarding God's covenant. Implied is the fact that God required His people to know the words of the covenant. That is why Moses was rehearsing them. Those people were not nearly as privileged as we are to have personal written copies of God's covenant. Second, God required the people to keep the words of the covenant. That means that they were to guard, protect, keep watch over the words. Practically, and individually, that means that in your heart you don't allow anything to infect the truth. Applied to the nation as a whole, it required the people to hold the covenant purely against encroaching paganism. Third, God required His people to do the words. That meant that they were to live out the requirements of the covenant. This includes everything from Deuteronomy 1:1 to the present text.

God promised a reward for fulfilling His requirements toward the covenant. He promised that the people would experience prosperity in all they do. For Israel the most obvious prosperity was physical, material, financial. But those who walked in fellowship with God grew spiritually (i.e. Joshua, Caleb kind of people).

This is a critical need for the modern Church. We, the people of God, need to know the truth, the principles of the Bible. Having come to know His truths, we must guard them in our heart against infection

from the sinful philosophies of the world. Consider a side note of explanation on this. It is not so much the particular actions of the sinful world we need to guard against as it is the sinful thoughts and philosophies. The philosophies create new ways of sinning in every generation. If we know the truths and principles of the Bible and if we do them, God promises reward. Like the Old Testament setting, fleshly wisdom looks for material reward. But for us, God primarily gives spiritual reward—becoming more like Christ.

Renewal (vv.10-29).

The review of the covenant reminded the people of God's amazing agreement with them. Now it was time to do something about it. Now the people needed to enter into covenant (vv.10-15). That challenge effected everyone because all of God's people were present. Moses pointed out, *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 (vv.10-11).*

In this statement, the whole community of God's people were called to trust Him enough to commit to the covenant. And yet there is emphasis here on the individuals by the personal pronoun "your" (you) eleven times. That should remind us that the whole Church universal is privileged to be the Body of Christ, but we individuals make up that body.

All of God's people were present to review the covenant and all of God's people were expected to enter the covenant. The Lord invited them to enter the covenant. Moses told the people that they were all there, *so that you may enter into the sworn covenant of the LORD your God, which the LORD your God is making with you today (v.12).* Again, this is not a new covenant, but renewal of faithfulness to the covenant God had already established. Nothing changed with God's promises and standards since Mt. Sinai. The LORD cut out the covenant and then the LORD invited His people to step over into the agreement by an oath (commitment).

This was so vitally important because through the covenant, the Lord established His people. The people needed to enter into

agreement with God *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 (v.13)*. This covenant was the basis for anyone to become part of the people of God.

The same principle is especially true for modern believers. We enter the relationship as a child of God through the blood of Christ. God cannot be our God until we acknowledge the sins that separate us from Him. But having sins forgiven, entering into a relationship with God, we enjoy the fulfilling of all the promises God pours out through Christ. That is the principle given in 2 Corinthians 1:20, *For all the promises of God find their Yes in him. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory (2 Corinthians 1:20)*.

And the Lord's covenant is broader than the people could understand. Notice who Moses explained, *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 (vv.14-15)*. How could God offer the covenant with more people than who were present? God had offered His same covenant to the parents of these people and they rejected it. God offered His covenant to this generation, many of whom submitted to it, some who did not (i.e. Achan). And God continued to offer the covenant to future generations of Jews. That is what Moses meant by the words, *and with whoever is not here with us today*.

Entering into covenant with God was expected. Proving entrance through obedience was also expected (vv.16-29). Moses encouraged obedience to God by reminding the people of the evidence of the foolishness of sin the people had seen (vv.16-17). *"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 (vv.16-17)*. The Israelites' world was full of the evidence of sin. God's people had witnessed the popular activities and forms of worship that were wholly acceptable to people who rejected God. While those things were acceptable to sinners, they were detestable to God. What is detestable to God must be detestable to God's people.

Our culture also offers plenty of idols, material kind-of-stuff that our flesh naturally worships. Everything that and everyone who replaces God is abhorrent to God. We do well to regularly assess our relationship with God.

Avoiding those things that God calls abhorrent is important as we remember that God chastens His people (vv.18-21). Pagans can sin and God does not intervene in specific ways. Sin is the default mode of living for the majority of people in history and in the world. Sin brings natural consequences of pain and sorrow to the people who are owned by it.

But God does not respond to the sin of the children of the devil the same way He responds to His children when we sin. We remember from our communion services the principle that *when we are judged by the Lord, we are disciplined so that we may not be condemned along with the world (1 Corinthians 11:32)*.

God's relationship with His people is different. That is why Moses warned the people against turning away. *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 (v.18a)*. Often the individual who turns away from God influences others to do the same. That is why we encourage, test, rebuke, correct brothers and sisters. That kind of stubbornness is like poison. *Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit (v.18b)*. This is the same warning we find in the New Testament. *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 (Hebrews 12:15)*.

That kind of stubbornness results in wrong thinking. It is the thinking of *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" (v.19a)*. Safety is important to us (or at least to most people). But we are spiritually blind to think that we can live in stubbornness against God and be safe. God promises His people that stubbornness brings judgment. *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 (vv.19b-21).*

Finally Moses drew this lesson to a close by telling the people to remember the lessons about God's judgment against sin already revealed (vv.22-29). As God acted in the past, He can act again. Someone in that crowd might have wondered the same kind of thing people ask about today. "Would a God of love permit catastrophe?" The answer is still "Yes."

Moses described a particular catastrophe. *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 sicknesses 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, Admah, and Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in his anger and wrath – (vv.22-23).*

Observing that kind of unusual devastation will cause questions. *All the nations will say, "Why has the LORD done thus to this land? What caused the heat of this great anger?" (v.24).* The answer to that question is painful but simple. *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 worshiped 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" (vv.25-28).*

To avoid judgment against sin, God's people need to pay attention to what God has already revealed. *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 (v.29).* There was much about the future the people did not know. There was much about God's covenant relationship they did not grasp (cf. v.4). God held the people responsible for what He had revealed. If God did not reveal it, it was not necessary for them to know.

So, too, we find the strong desire to search out the secret things, to know the unknown, while at the same time ignoring the clearly revealed truth of the Bible. Mark Twain is credited with saying, "It is not the things which I do not understand in the Bible which trouble me, but the things which I do understand."

The child of God has come into the Father/child relationship through God's covenant. He made the rules that require us to confess sin, ask forgiveness, and trust the finished work of Christ to be sufficient to that end. Having come into the family of God, it is only right that we should live according to the character of God. If we choose to be stubborn against that standard, God will discipline us like the loving father disciplines his wayward child. If we can live in sin without discipline, we are in bigger trouble than we can imagine. We should rejoice to be so privileged as to live in covenant with God.