

Deuteronomy 29:2-8

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As an introduction to an additional covenant, Moses reviewed some of the key events in Israel's history to motivate the Israelites to obey their Suzerain (Ruler) God.

Having concluded his address in Deuteronomy 27:1-29:1, summarizing the blessings and cursings Israel would inherit based on whether they were faithful to keep their promise to obey their covenant with God, Moses then began his next address starting here in v. 2 which extends to 30:20. This address appears to add an additional covenant that pertains to this generation as well as its descendants. The people agreed to ratify and abide by the covenant God gave Israel through Moses at Mount Horeb (Sinai) in Deuteronomy 26:17. This covenant is an addition.

The Apostle Paul treats this second covenant as an example of "righteousness based on faith" in Romans 10:6-10. In that passage, Paul quotes Deuteronomy 30:11-14 to illustrate that the righteousness based on faith starts in the heart, by believing what is true. Paul contrasts this with "righteousness which is based on law" and uses Leviticus 18:5, which he illustrates using this verse rooted in the first covenant received at Horeb. It could be that in this second covenant God is adding an emphasis on faith as the foundation for obedience, that Israel might gain the benefits of living in God's ways.

To begin this address, *Moses summoned all Israel* (v. 2). All of God's covenant people needed to hear the proclamation of the covenant and respond to it.

In this first section of this new address, *he said to them* things which were designed to motivate Israel to obey the Suzerain God. To do this, Moses does a survey of history. He reminded the people that they had *seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and all his servants and all his land* (v. 2). God sent ten plagues upon Egypt, and humbled Pharaoh (Exodus 8-11). All of Egypt suffered as a result of Pharaoh hardening his heart before God (Exodus 8:15, 32, 9:34).

They had personally witnessed all that the LORD had done to Egypt that led to their deliverance. This included *the great trials which* the eyes of the Israelites had seen (v. 3). An example of the *great trials* that they had experienced was at Massah, where they needed drinking water but found only bitter (Heb. “massâ”) water (Exodus 17:1-7). The LORD, in spite of their faithlessness, provided water for all Israel.

Along with trials, the LORD performed *great signs and wonders* to convince Pharaoh and Egypt to release the Israelites from slavery (Exodus 7-12). Those *great signs and wonders* included the ten plagues with which the Suzerain God afflicted the Egyptians. Then, after the tenth plague, Pharaoh released the Israelites. The LORD delivered His people from the hand of Pharaoh and the Egyptians using many *signs and wonders*. The plagues (Exodus 7-12), their enrichment at the hands of the Egyptians (Exodus 12:36), and the Red Sea crossing (Exodus 14) were events displaying the LORD’s sovereign care for Israel. Moses reminded Israel of God’s power that they had experienced. It was this same power that would enable them to enter and possess the Promised Land.

In spite of all of this, Moses told the Israelites that *to this day the Lord had not given them a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear* (v. 4). This statement seems to mean that though the Israelites saw what the LORD did on their behalf, they did not understand that only the LORD accomplished these things. They did not have insights and knowledge to fully comprehend God’s mighty acts in the past or the significance of God’s benefactions to them because God had not yet given them that capability. This is similar to the familiar statement of Sherlock Holmes to his friend Watson—“You see, but you do not observe.”

Israel needed to increase their faith. Moses is giving them ample cause to do so. Perhaps through a walk of faith, God would add the needed knowledge *to know* and *to see* and *to hear*.

In describing the predicament of the Jews in his day, Paul quotes this verse saying:

“What then? What Israel is seeking, it has not obtained, but those who were chosen obtained it, and the rest were hardened; just as it is written, God gave them a spirit of stupor, Eyes to see not and ears to hear not,

Down to this very day.”
(Romans 11:7-8)

It appears that God must open the mind and hearts of people to enable them to understand and appreciate His actions. The basic structure of this covenant, where God promises blessings for obedience, would indicate that the people have the capacity to obey. So it would seem that the *heart to know* and *the eyes to see* as well as the *ears to hear* are something God provides as a part of the blessing that attends obedience. Paul makes this argument in Romans, arguing that the starting place for living in righteousness is to live by faith (Romans 1:16-17; 9:30-31.)

The LORD reminded the people of Israel that He had *led them forty years in the wilderness* (v. 5). This was a judgment upon the generation that left Egypt. When they had disobeyed the LORD, He *made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until the entire generation of those who had done evil in the sight of the Lord was destroyed* (Numbers 32:13). Specifically, those of military age, twenty and older had to die prior to Israel being allowed to enter the land (Deuteronomy 2:16).

This forty years of wandering was a difficult and perilous experience because the *wilderness* was a land full of *fiery serpents and scorpions* (Deuteronomy 8:15-16). It was a hostile environment in other ways as well, including being devoid of food to eat or water to drink, not to mention enemies along the way.

However, through all of the forty years of wandering, the Suzerain (Ruler) God cared for His covenant people all the way through the *wilderness* and made sure they had all their basic needs at their disposal. He reminded the people that *your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandal has not worn out on your foot*. Earlier in Deuteronomy, Moses told the Israelites that their *foot* did not even swell during the *wilderness* journey because the Suzerain God was orchestrating every event in the life of His vassals (Deuteronomy 8:4).

This care by God makes clear that although Israel bore the consequences of their actions, God never rejected them from being His people. God chose and accepted Israel because He loved them (Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:7). This is a pattern throughout scripture, and reflects the reality that the gifts and calling of God are irrevocable (Romans 11:19).

In addition, the Suzerain God provided for Israel during their *wilderness* wandering. They *had not eaten bread or drunk wine or strong drink* (v. 6), but according to Deuteronomy 8, God fed His people with *manna*. Manna was a special food which Israel “did not know, nor did their fathers know” (Deuteronomy 8:3). It came to them directly from heaven (Exodus 16:4), from the LORD Himself. God’s purpose in all this was to show Israel that He was *the LORD* their God. He loved them, and provided for them, even while they were experiencing the negative consequences of their own choices.

Thus, all the trials and tribulations Israel had experienced throughout their wandering *in the wilderness* were meant to teach them to acknowledge the LORD as their Suzerain (Ruler) God and to live according to all His principles. God’s intent in instructing Israel was for their good (Deuteronomy 10:13). But God honors the ability for people to choose (Joshua 24:15). God desires people to choose what is in their best interest. God instructs people in a manner so as they might choose to walk in a way that is for their good. But He allows humans to decide their actions, and allows them to experience the consequences of those actions.

The LORD’s gracious protection of His people wandering in the wilderness extended to the battlefield when, after they *reached this place* (on the east side of the Jordan River), *Sihon the king of Heshbon and Og the king of Bashan came out to meet Israel for battle* (v. 7).

This is a reference to an event recorded in Deuteronomy 2:26-3:17. It happened that *Sihon with all his people came out to meet* the Israelites in battle at Jahaz, a city located somewhere between Heshbon and the wilderness of Kedemoth (see map on side bar). As the LORD had promised (Deuteronomy 2:31), He delivered Sihon over to the Israelites, so they *defeated him with his sons and all his people* (Deuteronomy 2:32-33).

Similarly, the Israelites defeated *Og the king of Bashan* (a kingdom east of the Jordan River) and with all his people. Israel *smote them until no survivor was left* (Deuteronomy 3:1-4). Israel’s victory was based solely upon obedience to the will of their Suzerain God who always fights for His people (Exodus 14:14). This reminder served to motivate God’s people to live in complete obedience to Him. This proves that He is trustworthy, and will keep His promise to bless Israel if they will keep the provisions of His covenant.

Moses reminded the Israelites that after these victories, they *took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of the Manassites* (v. 8). The *Reubenites* were descendants of the first son of Jacob by his wife Leah (Genesis 35:23). The *Gadites* were descendants of Jacob's son Gad by his maidservant, Zilpah (Genesis 35:26). The half-tribe of Manasseh, the first son of Joseph, consisted of two clans represented by Jair and Machir (Genesis 41:51). Thus, these tribes received their allotments of land east of the Jordan River. The details of the land distribution is clearly spelled out in Deuteronomy 3 (see map on sidebar).

Once again, the Israelites were encouraged to remain faithful to their sovereign LORD in light of His unfailing faithfulness to them. Moses is providing ample reason for Israel to believe God, to trust in Him, and to believe that His ways are for their best. Faith is the foundation for keeping the covenant with God, and gaining the blessings that come from obedience.

Biblical Text:

²And 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; ³the great trials which your eyes have seen, those great signs and wonders. ⁴Yet to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear. ⁵I 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. ⁶You 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. ⁷When 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; ⁸and we took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of the Manassites.