

Covenant Renewal

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[0 : 00] Our text today comes from Deuteronomy 29. You can find it on page 199 of the Marine Pew Bibles or page 151 of the Crown Pew Bibles.

I'll be reading from the ESV, which will be projected on the screen behind me. The Covenant Renewed at Moab 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.

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, of Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great trials that you saw, the signs, the great wonders.

But to this day, the Lord has not given you a heart to understand, 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, you have not drunk wine or strong drink, that you may know that I am the Lord your God.

[1 : 24] And when you came to this place, Sihon, king of Heshbon, and Og, king of Bashan, came out against us in battle, but we defeated them. We took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of the Manassites.

Therefore, keep the word of this covenant and do them, that you may prosper in all things. You are standing here today, all of you, before the Lord your God, the heads of tribes, your elders, and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones, and the sojourner who is in your camp, from the one who chops wood to the one who draws 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 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, 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 the detestable things, their idols of wood and stone, of silver and of gold, which were among them.

Beware, lest there be any 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.

[3 : 08] Beware, lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, one, when he hears the word of the 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 the moist and the 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 the book of law. And the next generation, the children who rise up after you and the foreigner who comes from a far land will say, when they see the afflictions of the 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, and overthrow like Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zedulim, which the Lord overthrew in his anger.

All the nations will say, why has the Lord done this to this land? What caused the heat of his great anger? Then people will say, it was because they abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their fathers, which he had made with them when he brought them out from the fruit, and went and served other gods and worshipped them, gods whom they had not known and whom they had not allotted to them.

Therefore, the anger of the Lord was kindled against the land, bringing upon it all of 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 to this day.

[5 : 01] 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 the law.

This is the word of the Lord. Let's pray. Dear God, you've given us your word to light our paths. You've called us to be holy as you are holy.

You've called us to be a covenant people and made us right with you through the blood of your Son. Please be with us now as we spend this time reflecting on your word and what it means now.

May the words of my mouth and the meditations of our heart be pleasing to you. Amen. 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 them, that we may do all the words of the law.

By the time we get to Deuteronomy, God had been revealing himself to his people in many different ways. God had spoke to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, promising to give them the land, make them a numerous people, and bless all of the families of the earth through them.

[6 : 23] God met Jacob as he returned to the land and wrestled with him before he crossed the Javach and reconciled with Esau, renaming him Israel, one who struggles with God.

And I think God winked when he gave him this name, knowing how much Israel would struggle with God through their history. After the patriarchs, God revealed himself to Moses in a burning bush, calling him to lead his people, Israel, out of captivity, back to their own land, the land that God had promised to their forefathers.

God revealed himself in signs and wonders, in the plagues he sent on Egypt, and imparting the sea of reeds, so that Israel could pass safely on dry ground. And God revealed himself in thunder and lightning and thick cloud on Mount Sinai when he spoke to Moses and gave him the law.

And now here, on the plains of Moab, on the edge of the promised land, God was speaking through Moses, reminding the people of Israel of what God had done for them, and the covenant for a relationship that they had committed to.

God revealed himself more and more to his people as his plan of salvation unfolded. Some aspects of God's salvation plan remained hidden for a time until God chose to reveal them to his people.

[7 : 46] God's revelation finally found its climax in the birth, life, death, and resurrection of Jesus Christ and the institution of a new covenant. This new covenant was like the old in that it was for everyone who pleaded to God, but it was new in that Christ did for us what we could not do for ourselves by being perfectly obedient to God and serving as a substitutionary sacrifice that we might be restored to him.

God revealed himself to Israel through his covenant at Sinai and its renewal on the plains of Moab and after they had entered the promised land at Shechem. God revealed himself again through Christ, our Lord, his Son, who instituted a new covenant.

God reveals himself in his plan for salvation through his covenants old and new. In the book of Deuteronomy, God was renewing his covenant with the new generation that was preparing to enter the promised land.

Deuteronomy begins, these are the words that Moses spoke to all Israel beyond the Jordan in the wilderness. Moses spoke to the people of Israel according to all that the Lord had given him in commandments to them.

Beyond the Jordan in the land of Moab, Moses undertook to explain this law. The new generation needed the covenant renewed and the law explained because at best, they had all been children when the law was originally given at Sinai 40 years before.

[9 : 17] Many of them had likely been born during their time of wilderness wandering. And so, through the first 28 chapters of Deuteronomy, God, through Moses, renews the covenant with his people, Israel.

And to emphasize its importance, it's repeated again in miniature here in Deuteronomy 29. And as with other covenants in ancient Near East, it starts by rehearsing their shared history between the Lord and Basil, between God and the people of Israel.

Moses reminds the people of what the Lord did before their eyes in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, the great trials that their eyes saw, the signs and great wonders.

God had heard the people's cries from bondage in Egypt and raised up Moses to be God's mouthpiece and to lead the people out of slavery in Egypt. When Pharaoh's heart was hardened, God worked wonders to push the Egyptians to let God's people go.

Even before God had sent all the plagues on the Egyptians, before sending the eighth plague in Exodus 10, God tells Moses that the signs he was sending were things that he would tell to his children and to his grandchildren so that they would know that he was the Lord.

[10:38] God's wonders continued when he led his people through the Sea of Reeds on dry ground, drowning the Egyptian army behind them once the Israelites had safely passed through. When he led them through a pillar of fire during the night and a pillar of cloud during the day.

And when he descended on Mount Sinai in power in a thick cloud with trumpet blasts, thunder, lightning. Moses reminds the people how God led them 40 years through the wilderness.

Their clothes had not worn out on them and their sandals had not worn off their feet. They had not eaten bread and they had not drunk wine or small drink or strong drink.

God sustained them in the dry and barren land of void, life. They didn't eat bread because God had provided them bread from heaven, manna, they didn't eat drinks, strong drink because God had given them water out of rocks and made bitter waters sweet.

Moses reminds the people how God gave them victory over Sihon, the king of Heshbon, and Og, the king of Bashan, when they came out against them in battle. Israel defeated them and took their land and gave it for an inheritance to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Esau.

[11:53] These early victories east of the Jordan were such a defining moment for the people of Israel that they're brought up repeatedly through Deuteronomy and are enshrined in the Psalms.

And after the conquest of the promised land under Joshua, the Israelites are reminded again of who gave them the victory. In Joshua 24, shortly before his death, Joshua reminds the people what God did for them.

Then I brought you to the land of the Amorites who lived on the other side of the Jordan. They fought with you and I gave them into your hand. You took possession of the land and I destroyed them before you.

I sent the hornet before you which drove them out before you, the two kings of the Amorites. It was not by your sword and your bow I gave you a land in which you had not labored and cities that you had not built and you dwelt in.

And though, as we will see, it seemed like the Israelites were quick to forget all of the things that the covenant God had done for them, their enemies in the land weren't.

[13:01] They had seen what God had done to Egypt. They had seen what God had done to the kings east of the Jordan. In Joshua 2, Rahab tells the spies how the people of Jericho greatly feared the Israelites.

The people of Jericho had heard of how God rescued the Israelites from Egypt. and gave them victory over Sihon and Og. In contrast, to the people of Israel who would quickly forget, Rahab recognized God's power and knew him for who he was.

For the Lord your God, he is the God of the heavens above and of the earth beneath. Rahab promised to deal kindly and faithfully with the spies as if, in return, they did the same for her.

And Rahab, submitting to God, joined his covenant people and was reckoned in the genealogy of Jesus, an outsider being enfolded into God's covenant community.

We see in Rahab's inclusion in the covenant people of God just how inclusive the covenant community could be. This is what the next section of Deuteronomy 29 gets at.

[14:07] But before we get there, there's one more thing to note in the section on the shared history. In the middle of the passage, we get an explanation for why God did all these signs and wonders to his people.

And it's pretty obvious. so that they would know that he is the Lord their God. God's works were on display. He showed his great might. He showed that he was the Lord of all creation through the

plagues changing rivers to blood, blacking out the sky, parting the sea and providing water from rocks and bread from heaven.

But God knew who he was dealing with. He knew how fickle human hearts could be. Though the people of Israel had seen great wonders, future trials would soon make them forget, just as they had for the rebellious generation that had died in the wilderness, they would look back on their time in Egypt with rose-colored glasses and reminisce about sitting around pots of meat.

God saw this. He saw that they didn't have hearts to understand, eyes to see, or ears to hear. But that didn't stop him from reminding his people of what he had done for them.

And so, on the plains of Moab before entering the promised land, God, through Moses, was renewing his covenant to his people. And defining who his people were, who the second party of the covenant was, was what came next.

[15 : 35] And there are two things that stand out here. First, God's covenant people spanned the entire social strata, from the heads of tribes and elders all the way down through the sojourners, woodchoppers, and water carriers, and everyone in between.

It didn't matter where you stood in society. What mattered was covenant fidelity. This is something that the prophet Isaiah gets at when he prophesies about the inclusion of the eunuchs and foreigners in Isaiah 56.

He says, And the foreigners who join themselves to the Lord to minister to him, to love the name of the Lord, and to be his servants. Everyone who keeps the Sabbath and does not profane it holds fast my covenant.

These I will bring to my holy mountain and make them joyful in my house of prayer. Their burnt offerings and sacrifices will be accepted on my altar.

For my house shall be called a house of prayer of all people. The Lord who gathers the outcasts of Israel declares, I will yet gather others to him beside those already gathered.

[16 : 47] God's covenant with Israel spanned the social strata and included non-Israelites even from the beginning. The second thing that stands out is that God's covenant people spanned time.

We see this in verses 14 and 15. Moses says, it is not with you alone that I make this sworn covenant, but with whoever is standing with us today before the Lord our God, and with whoever is not here today with us.

What Moses is getting at here is how the covenant transcends time. It's not something made solely with the generation of Israelites that are entering the promised land. In fact, earlier in Deuteronomy, we almost see a blurring between the current generation and the previous generation.

In Deuteronomy 5, the lines get so blurred when Moses says, God's covenant is an everlasting covenant.

The promise started with Abraham and was carried forward in God's people through their time in Egypt, through the Exodus, the wilderness wanderings, the people of God who were standing on the plains of Moab, renewing the covenant, and beyond.

[18 : 25] It was a covenant that was to be renewed every seven years once the people were settled in the promised land so that each new generation remembered what God had done for them and what it meant to be faithful to God.

This is emphasized by the use of first and second person pronouns throughout the entire chapter. The covenant is for you. This is your covenant.

This is our covenant. The listener or reader in each succeeding generation would hear it and feel as if they were there, as if they were part of all of the generations that came before.

They would feel as if Moses was speaking directly to them. He was. As we move to the second half of the chapter, we get the summary of what would happen to the people if they did not keep up their side of the covenant.

This is probably why Mia picked the delightful photo, pre-photo for the sermon. So thank you for that. Here we get the two-part warning.

[19 : 26] First, against turning away from the Lord to serve the gods of the nations. and second, against harboring a root that bears good. Israel's track record had not been great.

Not long before, while they were on those very same plains of Moab waiting to enter the promised land, the people of Israel had been seduced by the Moabites and Midianites to sacrifice and bow down to Baal.

You'd have to imagine that that was on the minds of the people standing there renewing the covenant. It was an all-too-real temptation that their brethren had recently fallen to. But there was the second warning as well, the warning against the root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit. Someone who may outwardly go through the motions, but in their heart goes their own way, not submitting to God's covenant. The writer of Hebrews gives a similar warning in Hebrews 12 when he warns people against failing to obtain the grace of God.

He warns about a root of bitterness that springs up. Rather than being someone that blesses themselves in the heart and walks in their stubbornness, what God's people required to keep their end of the covenant was a circumcised heart so that they would love the Lord with all of their heart. [20 : 42] But, unfortunately, we all know where things went from there. Israel had already had a rough track record in covenant fidelity. Throughout their time in the wilderness, they had regularly grumbled to Moses because of a lack of food and water.

While Moses was receiving original tablets from God, the people were making a gold-fleden calf and worshipping him. After God had given them victory over Sihon and Og, they were quickly seduced into worshipping Baal.

Even after they were established in the promised land, it didn't take long for them to turn from him to other gods. We see this through the cycle of the judges, the people turning away from God again and again facing his judgment in the invading nations.

We hear the common refrain that there was no king in Israel and everyone did what was right in their eyes. They did what was right in their eyes rather than obeying the covenant, obeying the God that had done so much for them.

The covenant laws that Moses repeated to them as they prepared to enter the land, and Joshua repeated to them once they were in their land at Shechem after their victory over Jebiko. And things didn't get better once they finally had that king that they were with.

[21 : 58] Their first king, Saul, did as he saw fit rather than obeying God's commands. Not long after that, the kingdom peaked with King David, the man after God's own heart, but it was all downhill from there.

The kingdom split, and over time, more and more kings did what was evil in the sight of the Lord rather than following the footsteps of their forefather David, until eventually God made good on his covenant curse, uprooting them from the land and casting them into another land, sending them into exile.

All along the way, God had used prophets as his mouthpiece to call his wandering people back to covenant fidelity, not just obeying the letter of the law, but having circumcised hearts to honor the true spirit in which it was intended.

In Jeremiah 31, the prophet spoke of a new covenant. Behold, the days are coming, declares the Lord, when I will make a new covenant with the house of Israel and with the house of Judah, not like the covenant that I made with your fathers on the day when I took them by the hand out of the land of Egypt.

My covenant that you broke, though I was their husband, declares the Lord, for this is the covenant that I will make with the house of Israel after those days, declares the Lord.

[23 : 20] I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts. I will be their God, and they shall be my people. And no longer shall each one teach his neighbor and each his brother, saying, Know the Lord, for they shall know me, from the least of them to the greatest, declares the Lord, for I will forgive their iniquity, and I will remember their sin.

This is the new covenant, a new revelation from the Lord that we remember, that we'll remember and repeat when we take communion next week.

The covenant instituted through Christ's coming and living a perfect life and dying on the cross, rising from the dead, and ascending to the right hand of the Father so that we might live. the covenant that he told his followers about and commemorated to the Lord's Supper. So, as we take the bread and the cup next week, remember that it is the Lord, remember what it is that the Lord has done for us, how he has done things that we could not do for ourselves, how he has rescued us from our sin and death.

Moses' expectations were low after he renewed the covenant with Israel on the cusp of entering his land. He told them that they would fail. He knew that the people could not keep up their end of the covenant, but God had more things to reveal.

[24 : 50] In the revelation of his son, he instituted a new covenant, giving us the gift of the Spirit, circumcised hearts, so that we might love the Lord. So, if you were sitting here this morning and you felt that root of bitterness growing in your heart, if you've blessed yourself in your heart saying that you'll be safe that you walk in the stubbornness of your heart, the time of Lent is a time of repentance and renewal.

Our Lord and Savior, Jesus Christ, made the ultimate sacrifice so that we might be restored to him. Turn to him now, repent and believe, and receive his free gift of grace.

Let's pray. Dear God, we thank you for the gift of your word. We praise you that since before creation, you had a plan for salvation.

We praise you for the gift of your son and the sacrifice that he made on the cross so that we could be reconciled to you. We praise you for the gift of your spirit sent to do your sanctifying work in our hearts.

we lift up this prayer to you in your holy name. Amen.