

LEADER GUIDE

DEUTERONOMY

A CHALLENGE TO A NEW GENERATION

GOD'S COVENANT RENEWED

BIG IDEA: The decisions we make will influence what others say of the Lord.

DATE: Sunday, July 26, 2026

SCRIPTURE: Deuteronomy 29:1-21

OPENING QUESTION

Our lives are made up of a thousand small decisions that shape our trajectories. What are some life altering decisions you have made – for better or worse? How did it impact the direction of your life?

As Deuteronomy nears its end, Moses tells the people of Israel that their decisions will affect more than their destinies alone. Their decisions – and ours – will influence generations who come after them.

SETTING THE STAGE

Deuteronomy 29-30 records the final of Moses's three speeches. Today's study focuses on chapter 29, in which Moses begins a call to response. Israel must do something with all they have heard. His warning to them – and us – is sobering. The predictor of faithfulness, and consequently blessing, is not knowledge; it is obedience. Knowing God's commands does not guarantee that we will finish well.

When God establishes a covenant, it involves both trust and love. The Bible indicates that His covenants are more like a parent to a child rather than a physician to his patients. If your child fails to show up to a scheduled meal, you are going to seek to find that child, because you care for that son or daughter. The covenant in Deuteronomy 29 does not replace the one God made with the Israelites at Horeb (Mt. Sinai); it reinforces the one made 40 years earlier. The covenant at Horeb involved the giving of the law. This additional covenant relates to the land.

This generation of Israelites would have been children and teenagers when they witnessed the first covenant. Except for Moses, Joshua, and Caleb, the oldest people in the nation would have been about 60 years old. Even as they wandered in the wilderness for 40 years, God miraculously took care of them. Can you imagine wearing the same pair of shoes for 40 years? What would it be like to wear a coat that still seemed new after you had worn it for 40 years? And yet, in spite of these miracles, the people were still afflicted with spiritual dullness. Moses observed, "Yet to this day the Lord has not given you a mind to understand, eyes to see, or ears to hear" (29:4).

SCRIPTURE READING

Deuteronomy 29:1-21 (CSB)

These are the words of the covenant that the LORD commanded Moses to make with the Israelites in the land of Moab, in addition to the covenant he had made with them at Horeb. ² Moses summoned all Israel and said to them, "You have seen with your own eyes everything the LORD did in Egypt to Pharaoh, to all his officials, and to his entire land. ³ You saw with your own eyes the great trials and those great signs and wonders. ⁴ Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a mind to understand, eyes to see, or ears to hear. ⁵ I led you forty years in the wilderness; your clothes and the sandals on your feet did not wear out; ⁶ you did not eat food or drink wine or beer—so that you might know that I am the LORD your God. ⁷ When you reached this place, King Sihon of Heshbon and King Og of Bashan came out against us in battle, but we defeated them. ⁸ We took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh. ⁹ Therefore, observe the words of this covenant and follow them, so that you will succeed in everything you do.

¹⁰ "All of you are standing today before the LORD your God—your leaders, tribes, elders, officials, all the men of Israel, ¹¹ your dependents, your wives, and the resident aliens in your camps who cut your wood and draw your water— ¹² so that you may enter into the covenant of the LORD your God, which he is making with you today, so that you may enter into his oath ¹³ and so that he may establish you today as his people and he may be your God as he promised you and as he swore to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. ¹⁴ I am making this covenant and this oath not only with you, ¹⁵ but also with those who are standing here with us today in the presence of the LORD our God and with those who are not here today.

¹⁶ "Indeed, you know how we lived in the land of Egypt and passed through the nations where you traveled. ¹⁷ You saw their abhorrent images and idols made of wood, stone, silver, and gold, which were among them. ¹⁸ Be sure there is no man, woman, clan, or tribe among you today whose heart turns away from the LORD our God to go and worship the gods of those nations. Be sure there is no root among you bearing poisonous and bitter fruit. ¹⁹ When someone hears the words of this oath, he may consider himself exempt, thinking, 'I will have peace even though I follow my own stubborn heart.' This will lead to the destruction of the well-watered land as well as the dry land. ²⁰ The LORD will not be willing to forgive him. Instead, his anger and jealousy will burn against that person, and every curse written in this scroll will descend on him. The LORD will blot out his name under heaven, ²¹ and single him out for harm from all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant written in this book of the law.

DISCUSSION

SUSTAINED BY GOD'S SOVEREIGNTY

READ: Deuteronomy 29:1-8

What things did the Lord do for Israel during Moses' life?

The Lord preserved His people so completely that their shoes never wore out – for forty years! He literally gave them food from the sky in the middle of a wilderness. Yet, despite these provisions and protections, Israel was not inclined to understand, see, or hear Him. Throughout Deuteronomy, Moses called them to obedience and warned them against disobedience. But what are we to do with verse 4, which states the Lord did not give them the mind, eyes, or ears to respond to Him faithfully? Was Israel's past and future disobedience somehow God's fault? To that

we can emphatically say no! But we're still left wondering, why did Moses (under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit) phrase it this way?

Despite all the things God did, how did Israel continue to respond?

Eugene Merrill explains it like this in the CSB study Bible:

"He [God] had not forced them to believe against their will, but he had given them every opportunity and inducement to believe. It is at this point that divine sovereignty and human choices intersect. God makes his truth available to all people, but they can choose to harden themselves against it and thus deny themselves its blessings."

In the mystery of God's redemptive work, Israel's persistent failure to obey the Lord was because the gift of God's Spirit had not yet been fully given. God's law is limited in what it can do for us. Our sinful hearts are so corrupt that the law itself can't change them. Only the Spirit of God can change our corrupt hearts. Deuteronomy 29:4 points to this truth.

SET APART FOR GOD'S SERVICE

READ: Deuteronomy 29:10-15

With whom was this covenant made? Whom does it include?

Everything Moses imparted to Israel called them to respond in covenant obedience. And this covenant obedience was not a one-time event. The Lord's covenant would be for future Israelites as well. Fidelity to God's commands was both an individual and a collective concern. While God's covenant was with the people of Israel collectively, upholding national faithfulness was the responsibility of people individually. The decisions of one person could affect the health of the entire nation. Verse 18 lists both individual people (man, woman) and collective groups (clan, tribe), warning them against turning their hearts away from the Lord. This decision – whether of an individual or an entire tribe – was poisonous. Idolatry would prove to be lethal.

ABANDONING THE COVENANT

READ: Deuteronomy 29:16-21

ASK: How would you describe the mindset of the person in this verse? What is the relationship between that person's actions and the stability of the nation?

Scripture truly does read and discern our hearts (Heb. 4:12-3). The individual in verse 19 has (arrogantly) decided God's Word doesn't apply to her, that she is "exempt" from the consequences of disobedience and will still live in peace. We're thousands of years removed from ancient Israel, but we see this mindset at work still today. We might use phrases like "following my heart" or "living my truth," but if our hearts or "our truth" lead us to disobey the Lord, we too have falsely believed we can be both spiritually stubborn and personally fulfilled.

Can you think of a time or scenario when you believed God's Word and ways didn't apply to you? What was the result?

How have you seen the spiritual decisions of one person in your family affect the rest of the family?

Sin always deceives. Two of its subtle lies are, "I'm not hurting anyone else," and "My situation is different." But the hard truth is that individual sins have collective consequences. Rebellion has ripple effects, sometimes well beyond our lifetimes. What the Lord had done through the exodus, and would do through the conquest of Canaan, testified to His power – this God was unlike any other. But how Israel lived in obedience to His covenant was also a testimony. Their faithfulness would have led the nations to ask questions about the Lord. Remember, the law of the Lord and the society it created were unlike the laws of pagan nations and the societies they created. On the other hand, Israel's disobedience would be a testimony of a different kind.

The price for Israel's rejection of the Lord would be enormous, and its consequences would be visible even centuries later.

God does not want us living in shame and regret. We can confess where we have strayed from His path, repent, and make a renewed commitment to follow Him.

We may not fully understand why God does or allows some things in our lives. We may never even know the why behind His commands. But we know enough to choose obedience, to recognize right from wrong, and to be accountable to God. Like the chapter before it, Deuteronomy 29 is a warning. Disobedience and the consequences it brings are not inevitable. But neither are obedience and the blessings it brings. We have to choose. And the choices we make now have ripple effects far beyond us.

RESPONSE

Spend some time in honest conversation with the Lord. Don't rush, this could be a moment that marks a new way of thinking – and ultimately a new trajectory – for your life. What do you hope future generations will say about the Lord because of you? What story about God is your life telling? Is there anything in your life that needs to change in light of what you want your testimony to be? What choices will you make today to start moving in that direction?

COMMENTARY

Almost 3,400 years ago, Israel's great leader Moses used some of the last words he spoke on earth to lead the Israelites to make a commitment to the essential matters of the faith. After delivering stern words to the people he had led for 40 years, he called all Israelites to commit themselves wholeheartedly to the twin tasks of affirming and living out their commitment to the one true God.

Deuteronomy 29:1-9

Two different opinions exist regarding the best way to connect the words found in 29:1 with its context. In Hebrew and ancient Greek versions of the Old Testament, the opening verse of chapter 29 is actually included in the previous chapter as 28:69. This suggests that traditional Judaism understood this verse to be the ending point to the body of material extending through the first 28 chapters. In other words, ancient Judaism counted the biggest chunk of the Book of Deuteronomy as the words of the covenant the LORD commanded Moses to make with the Israelites in the land of Moab (29:1). This covenant is said to be in addition to the one God had made with them at Horeb, which is recorded in Exodus 19:3 through Numbers 10:10. Far from replacing the earlier agreement, it reinforces the one God established 40 years earlier at Mount Sinai (the more popular name for Mt. Horeb).

On the other hand, modern versions of the Bible renumbered this verse as 29:1, connecting it with the material found in chapters 29–30. This change causes the material in chapters 29–30 to count as the “second covenant.” Since these two chapters summarize many of the ideas found in the previous sections of Deuteronomy, this change has the effect of emphasizing the need to stay faithful to the truths and teachings of the covenant Israel made with the Lord at Mount Sinai. It doesn’t create any noteworthy tensions with the traditional view.

Sometime after Moses had pronounced the blessings and curses of chapter 28, he **summoned all Israel** in a massive sacred assembly (29:2). Before a group that might easily have exceeded a million people (see Num. 26:51), Moses then delivered his final passion-filled plea to the people he had shepherded for 40 years.

In keeping with the fact that this was his last time to address the people, Moses brought in references to many different events he and the rest of the covenant people had experienced together. And as a great spiritual leader, he interpreted those experiences theologically. For example, as he thought back to his first days as the God-appointed leader over Egypt’s Hebrew slaves, he saw the series of events that led to their exodus from Egypt as nothing less than mighty acts of God. It was not mere chance that had caused the Hebrew slaves to be freed from the bonds of their Egyptian overlords; it was what **the Lord did in Egypt to Pharaoh, to all his officials, and to his entire land** (29:2). And the Israelites in that assembly should know it was so, because they had **seen it with their own eyes** (29:2). Like Moses, they had seen **the great trials and those great signs and wonders** (29:3)—what we usually call the 10 plagues (see Ex. 7:14–12:33)—that climaxed in their departure from Egypt.

Sadly, however, the Israelites did not see the events in Egypt as Moses saw them. Though as children the people had been eyewitnesses to each of the Lord’s miraculous acts, Moses declared that **to this day the LORD had not given them a mind to understand** the significance of those events, nor had He given them spiritual **eyes to see, or ears to hear** their true meaning (29:4). Moses’ complaint closely resembled one that both the prophet Isaiah (Isa. 6:9–10) and Jesus (Matt. 13:14–15) made regarding spiritually dull Israelites in their generations. Like many modern atheists and agnostics who can look at God’s amazing works in nature and fail to see any evidence of the Lord’s power, intelligence, or wisdom, so the ancient Israelites failed to connect the dots linking God with the Egyptian signs and wonders.

Moses moved beyond the people’s childhood years in Egypt to speak of the **40 years** Moses **led them in the wilderness** (29:5). He reminded them that during those trial-filled years God had taken care of them; their **clothes** and the **sandals** on their **feet did not wear out** (29:5). With literally each step they took the Israelites were reminded that the God who had helped them with the huge things—like giving them freedom from slavery from the world’s most powerful nation—was also the One who was sufficient for the little things—like protecting their feet from hot sand. Israel’s God met His people at every level of need.

In a desert, a land where there were no fields or vineyards to produce needed food or drink for millions of God’s people, Israel should have died within days. And they would have, if the Lord had not provided daily miracles on their behalf. Though the covenant people had **not eaten bread or drunk wine** or strong drink (29:6) during their 40 years in the wilderness, God had met their needs. He provided manna from heaven (Ex 16:13–15,35; Ps. 78:24–25; John 6:31; 1 Cor. 10:3) and water from the rock (Ex. 17:6; Ps. 78:15–16; Neh. 9:15; Isa. 48:21; 1 Cor. 10:4) that sustained them for decades. The Lord performed this amazing work for a reason: so that Israel would **know that He is Yahweh their God** (29:6). God acted on Israel’s behalf both in Egypt and in the desert to confirm His

existence and to reveal His character to them in eternally memorable ways.

The Lord had supplied His people with needed clothing, food, and drink. But to survive their journey to the promised land, Israel needed something more—protection from attacking enemies. Moses reminded the Israelites that God had delivered on this front as well. After the Israelites **came** to the **place** (29:7) where they were currently encamped, that is, the region east of the upper end of the Dead Sea, **Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan came out against Israel in battle** (29:7; see Num. 21:23-24,33-35). And with God's help, the Israelites **defeated** them (29:7). Israel **took possession of their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and half the tribe of the Manassites** (29:8; see Num. 32:33). (A related *Biblical Illustrator* article, "Reuben, Gad, and East Manasseh," is on the CD-ROM.)

With this brief history lesson Moses had made a couple of key points. First, since their childhood days in Egypt God's people had often found themselves facing needs that far exceeded their personal resources. Second, in every instance God not only knew Israel's needs, He took care of them—often in supernatural ways. These things being true, the most reasonable choice that the Israelites could make for both their present and their future was to maintain and strengthen their relationship with the God who loved them and had unceasingly cared for them. To do this Israel must **observe the words of this covenant and follow them**; in so doing they would **succeed** (29:9; see 28:1-14). What's more, the success would not be limited to just one narrow zone of life; God's people would experience His blessing **in everything** they would **do** (29:9).

Deuteronomy 29:10-15

Moses, the 120-year-old patriarch who had been Israel's leader for 40 years, sensed that he was only days from his death (see 31:1-2), and Israel's elder statesman was keenly aware of the importance of the moment. Standing before that crowd of more than a million people who were poised to enter the promised land, this would be the final time he would address all the different subgroups at one time. It was a complex assemblage, but Moses knew each part of it well; the nomadic community that Moses had led through the desert consisted of at least seven descending layers of power, beginning with the **leaders** of the **tribes** (29:10), an elite group that probably consisted of a dozen men (see Num. 1:4-16) who had oversight over the tens of thousands of people in their individual tribes. Beneath them were the **elders** (29:10); these would have been the gray-bearded heads of family groups that made up the tribes. Next were the **officials** (29:10)—probably younger leaders who assisted the elders in the tasks associated with leading the clans. After that would have been **all the men of Israel** (29:10)—the hundreds of thousands of adult males that filled Israel's military ranks. The remaining social layers of the Israelite community included the **children**—a probable reference to the underage males—as well as the men's **wives** (29:11). The least socially powerful subgroup in the congregations consisted of non-Israelites, referred to as the **foreigners** in the camp. Many, if not most of these, functioned as servants who performed such tasks as providing the community with **wood** and **water** (29:11), vital resources needed for carrying out the Israelites' daily religious sacrifices.

The group Moses addressed was diverse, consisting of the powerful and the powerless, the elderly and the young, men and women, Israelites and Gentiles. But in spite of their obvious differences, all who gathered before Moses on that day were bound together with a single common element that overcame and eliminated all their differences; they all counted **the LORD**—the Hebrew word here is "Yahweh"—as their **God** (29:10).

But something else also held the people together as they stood before the Lord and Moses on that day, a common purpose. They had assembled to **enter into the covenant of the LORD** their **God**

(29:12). And they had done so at God's invitation. Graciously, the Lord Himself was making a formal commitment with that congregation, bidding them to **enter into His oath** (29:12). And as they followed Him in this, He would **establish** them as **His people** (29:13). The Hebrew verb translated *establish* is used elsewhere in the Torah to convey the meaning of "ratifying an already existing agreement"; in other words, the Lord was not making a first-time commitment to the Israelites on this occasion. Instead, He was confirming the relationship that had been in existence for more than five hundred years, since the days of Israel's forefathers, **Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob** (29:13).

At the same time, the Lord was doing something new and different in the midst of that sacred assembly; He was extending the ancient **covenant** and **oath** (29:14) to the generation that was standing there with Moses **in the presence of the LORD** (29:15) at the promised land's borders. God deeply yearns to connect with people of every generation. He wanted a deep, wholehearted relationship with those He had freed from Egypt and sustained for 40 years through the desert.

But God also wanted more than that; He wanted to make a connection with those who were not yet there at that solemn assembly (29:15). That is, God wanted the covenant that had stretched from Abraham to Moses to extend into the future also—to link with a generation not yet born.

Deuteronomy 29:16-21

Throughout his long and distinguished life, Moses had interacted with people from many different cultural groups. While he and the other Hebrews **lived in the land of Egypt** (29:16), they had been surrounded by a society that worshiped gods believed to control different aspects of nature and oversee certain virtues. Their gods were often expressed in images of animals as well as grotesque combinations of animal and human forms. When the Israelites **passed through the nations where they traveled** on their way to the promised land (29:16), they met up with pagan cultures heavily involved in fertility cults and the worship of gods thought to control geographic regions and natural forces. These exotic religions had much to attract those who knew them—sensual experiences with priests and priestesses, drunken festivals, the promise of power over the forces of nature, and enticing **images and idols** (29:17) that were worshiped as gods. But all of it was **detestable** (29:17) to Yahweh, the only true God.

The pagan idols were made **of wood and stone**, often overlaid with **silver and gold** (29:17); the most expensive of them would have been made only of precious metals. These idols were believed by the pagans to be the embodiment of powerful spirit beings. The physical presence of that man-made object in a temple gave visible evidence to those who worshiped that their god was real and that he or she was among them. Many of the idols were small enough to be held by a person, and if carried, could give worshipers the sense that their god was actually with them. Because of this, idols could give people the sense of increased spiritual power and confidence.

But there was a profound problem with idols; they were lifeless lies. No matter how expertly crafted they may have been, no matter how impressive their form, they could do nothing to help those who worshiped them. What idols did do was keep people from putting their faith in the only God who could help them. Idols created a false hope that set people up for ultimate failure. They also robbed the Lord God of His rightful place in the lives of those who worshiped them. And Yahweh, who is the one and only Lord God, had a big problem with that.

Therefore, Moses solemnly warned His congregation in the desert to **be sure there was no man, woman, clan, or tribe among them whose heart would turn away from the LORD their God** (29:18). The fact that pagan nations inhabited every land around Israel meant that idols would

always be a ready source of temptation. But that did not change the fact that every Israelite must turn away from the Lord to **worship the gods of those nations** (29:18). Some Israelites might be tempted to say, "Idolatry isn't for me, but if one of my neighbors wants to worship some piece of wood, who am I to judge?" The Lord seems to have anticipated that attitude, for He warned the Israelites to **be sure there was no root of idolatry among them bearing poisonous and bitter fruit** (29:18). Spiritually speaking, every Israelite was to be his brother's—or sister's—keeper. The warning was appropriate; according to the author of 1 Kings, Israel's Northern Kingdom was removed from the promised land centuries later because "they served idols" (2 Kings 17:12).

Some within the Israelite community might reject worshiping the idols of pagan nations but also not choose to worship the Lord. They would choose a third way—their own. In a perverse way someone could hear the words of this oath against idolatry and **follow** his own **stubborn heart** (29:19). People like this might smugly think to themselves that they would **have peace**—the term (Hebrew *shalom*) could also be translated "prosperity" or "health"—even though they would follow their own stubborn heart (29:19) and not the ways of the Lord.

But Yahweh sternly warned anyone who might adopt this line of thought that they would not get by with it; extremely serious consequences would result. The Lord informed His people in advance that He would not be willing to excuse or **forgive** anyone for rejecting their Maker. **Instead, His** anger and jealousy would burn against that person, and every curse that Moses had written in the **scroll** would **descend on him** (29:20). What's more, the Lord would blot out his name under heaven, and single him out for harm (29:20-21).

And the ripple of consequences would affect the entire nation, not just the guilty person. Seemingly "private" sins have a sinister way of creating highly public consequences, and the Lord affirmed that this would certainly be the case for God-rejecting individuals. In fact, their sin would **lead to the destruction of the well-watered land as well as the dry land** (29:19). Every part of the promised land, from the productive grain fields of the north to the desert-like regions south and west of the Dead Sea would be under a divine curse, carried out by God either directly or by means of enemy armies.