

'Until Right Now, This Very Day'

Charles Whitaker (1944-2021)
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Please be turning to Deuteronomy 29. Analyzing the book of Deuteronomy, commentators are want to divide the book into sections which span chapters. So, Fenton identifies *Twelve Orations*, as he calls them, while Fox posits five sections. Fox writes that his fourth section, Deuteronomy 29 and 30, “appear [s] to be extraneous in the context of Deuteronomy’s basic structure. Perhaps it is a later addition.” Nothing could be further from the truth, for these two chapters are not isolated, but are profoundly integrated, thematically part-and-parcel of the book as a whole.

Today, let us take a look at Deuteronomy 29 and 30 as a unit. I will begin by quoting Deuteronomy 29:1-4. I am using the *Jubilee Bible*, which captures the essential meaning so well:

Deuteronomy 29:1-4 (Jubilee) These are the words of the covenant, which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the sons of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them in Horeb. Moses, therefore, called unto all Israel and said unto them, you have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, unto Pharaoh and unto all his slaves and unto all his land, the great trials which your eyes have seen, the signs and those great miracles. Yet the LORD has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear until today.

The *Common English Bible* uses the term “until this very moment.” *Young’s Literal Translation* uses “till this day.” I have entitled my comments using the verbiage adopted by *The Message*: “Until right now, this very day.” Well, exactly what was going to happen on that very day?

As we work through these two chapters, we will see four salient themes, each theme containing two opposing elements, and none of them foreign to the book as a whole.

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1. The theme of today, with its counterpart, the future, the generations of tomorrow. The word “today” appears 17 times in these two chapters.
2. The theme of land: “This land,” before which Moses’ audience stood that very day, poised to enter after Moses died, as well as “that land,” the land to which God would exile future generations of Israelites.
3. The theme of covenant, with its attendant blessings and curses. The noun “covenant” appears seven times in chapter 29.

As background, chapter 27 narrates the ratification of this covenant at Moab, on the two mountains, Ebal and Gerizim. The next chapter, 28, contains the recitation of the blessings and curses. For the sake of continuity, Moses, at Deuteronomy 29:1 as well as at Deuteronomy 30:1, briefly looks back to these two chapters, serving to integrate Fox’s so-call “extraneous” section with the book as a whole.

4. Last, but certainly not least, is the theme of knowledge, some of which God has revealed, some of which currently remains hidden.

The peoples’ lack of perception “until that day,” as verse 4 indicates, implies that before that day ended, things would change. Midway through the two chapters, at Deuteronomy 29:29, Moses returns to this theme, broaching it in the contexts of the today-and-tomorrow theme as well as the concept of obedience to the covenant.

Let us look briefly at verse 29.

Deuteronomy 29:29 (Jubilee) The hidden things of the LORD our God are uncovered unto us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

Moses is saying that the purpose of God’s revelation is to enable us—and those after us—to live the way He lives, obeying His law.

We will pursue these four themes as we read on. Let us drop down to verses 10-15.

Deuteronomy 29:10-15 (Jubilee) You are standing today, all of you, before the Lord your God: the heads of your tribe, 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, 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 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. 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.

In verse 15, Moses extends the effect to this “sworn covenant” to cover those “not here with us today,” that is, to future generations. They were signatory to the covenant in the same sense that Levi, though unborn, tithed to Melchizedek. As we will come to see, Moses considers himself to be speaking to all Israelites, across the years, across the continents.

Along that line of thinking, notice Moses’ rhetoric in verse 13 particularly, where God states His intention to establish Israel as His people, that He may be their God. This echoes New Covenant rhetoric, as expressed at Jeremiah 31:33 and elsewhere. You see, Moses speaks to those under the New Covenant as well. He speaks to us.

That brings us to Deuteronomy 29:18. I will read verses 18, 20 and 21, reading this time from the *New English Translation*.

Deuteronomy 29:18, 20-1 (NET) Beware that the heart of no man, woman, clan, or tribe among you turns away from the Lord our God today to pursue and serve the gods of those nations. . .

Deuteronomy 29:20-21 (NET) The Lord will be unwilling to forgive him, and his intense anger will rage against that man; all the curses written in this scroll will fall upon him and the Lord will

obliterate his name from memory. The Lord will single him out for judgment from all the tribes of Israel according to all the curses of the covenant written in this scroll of the law.

Before I move on to verse 22, I want to call out the concept of judgment to you. Hang on to that. Later, Moses will again stress that God will judge scattered Israel according to the curses He mentions in Deuteronomy 28.

In verse 22, God finally gets into the theme of land, as He continues to weave together the notion of today—the people standing before Moses, poised to enter the land, and the notion of future generations.

Deuteronomy 29:22-23 (NET) The generation to come—your descendants who will rise up after you, as well as the foreigner who will come from distant places—will see the afflictions of that land [Please, notice, “that land.” We will come back to that shortly] and the illnesses that the Lord has brought on it. The whole land will be covered with brimstone, salt, and burning debris; it will not be planted nor will it sprout or produce grass. It will resemble the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboiim, which the Lord destroyed in his intense anger.

Rightly translated, the term “that land” only appears once in the book of Deuteronomy—right here in verse 22. The term “this land,” using a different Hebrew pronoun, appears seven times in Deuteronomy, always referring to the Land of Promise and/or to Transjordan.

In verse 22, Moses, in the chapter’s first reference to Israel’s lands, as it were, jumps over the audience standing before him—jumps over making any reference to this land—the land the Israelites were soon to enter. When he starts talking about the Israelites’ land, Moses begins by talking about a “generation to come,” a future generation in “that land”—another land. What land is that? Well, of course, it is the land Moses mentioned in the blessings and curses discourse just a chapter earlier.

Deuteronomy 28:63-64 (NET) . . . You will be uprooted from the land you are about to possess. The Lord will scatter you among all nations, from one end of the earth to the other.

That is the land to which God would ultimately exile apostate, idolatrous Israel. And “that land,” he says, will come to look like Sodom. (Think about it: America is becoming filled with Sodomites; eventually and inevitably, it only makes sense that America will come to look like the land of Sodom as well.)

Now, beginning in verse 24 and continuing through verse 28, God gives the Gentiles a voice. These verses express the thoughts Gentiles will have when they see Israel’s destruction—but, in which land? Will the Gentiles be talking about the destruction in that land—the land of exile—or in this land—the Promised Land? Let us take a look.

Deuteronomy 29:24 (NET) Then all the nations will ask, “Why has the Lord done all this to this land?”

This land, not that land, as in verse 22. God has switched and is now speaking about this land, the term which always, in the book of Deuteronomy, refers to the Promised Land. Continuing with the Gentile’s questions:

Deuteronomy 29:24-26 (NET) What is this fierce, heated display of anger all about?” Then people will say, “Because they abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their ancestors, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. They went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods they did not know and that He did not permit them to worship.

So, verse 22 speaks of “that land,” and verse 24 speaks of “this land.” What is so intriguing about the Gentile’s comments concerning the destruction they witness is the level of knowledge they exhibit. By the time in history of which Moses speaks (in the last days), God will have apparently revealed some things to the Gentiles. The Gentiles know God brought the ancestors of these people out of Egypt at one point in her history; they know about the covenant; they know about Israel’s apostasy and her idolatry. They know God uprooted her from their lands. How did they come to this knowledge? Is it because of the witness of God’s church? This is conjectural, yes, but something to think about.

Continuing now at verse 27, where the interplay between the concept of “this land” and “that land” becomes even more intriguing. Verse 27, where the Gentiles are still speaking:

Deuteronomy 29:27 (NET) That is why the Lord’s anger erupted against this land, bringing on it all the curses written in this scroll.

As a good interlinear will indicate, the Hebrew of verse 27 actually reads this way: “Against this land, against that land!” (I am not going into the grammar there only to say that grammatical constructions referring to both *this* and *that* land appear there.) The grammar leaves the translators perplexed. Some translations use only *this*, others only *that*. It appears that Moses is saying that the Gentiles recognize that Israelites living in the Promised Land, as well as those living in the scattered lands—those of the United States and Canada, Australia, and so forth—are under a curse for disobedience to the covenant.

These Gentiles, at that point of time, have a substantial amount of information. It is also clear that Moses is speaking to two peoples: He is speaking to his proximate audience, ready to enter the Promised Land, “this land.” And, he is also addressing future generations, those Israelites who will come sooner or later to live in “that land,” a land of exile. In other words, as I stressed earlier, Moses makes it plain in this important passage about the covenant that God is speaking to all Israelites, wherever and whenever.

Even this early in their history, Israel manifested a blindness which penetrated to bone and marrow. Its sure sign is always the same: Over-reliance on the externals of the covenant. The historical fact of the covenant—you see, the fact that it was made—becomes more important in their minds than the ethical obedience of its terms. Over and over again, Israelites assert their misplaced confidence that God will never abandon them. After all, they are the covenant folk. They remember the fact of the covenant, but forget about its terms. With some people, it becomes an ethnic thing: They alone of all the families of the earth possess the oracles of God. In this, Israel feels secure, as a “Linus-blanket.” So, the northern tribes refused to believe Amos when he warned them, “Prepare to meet your God.” The southern tribes were no better, even having witnessed the deportation of

their northern brothers. They refused to accept God's explicit instruction, recorded at Jeremiah 7, which I will just read to you.

Jeremiah 7:3-4 "Amend your ways and your deeds, and I will let you dwell in this place. [Note, this place] Do not trust in these lying words: 'The temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord, the temple of the Lord are these.'"

At verse 8, God points out that trusting in such lying, deception, avails nothing. The Temple burned—and burned again.

Modern Israelites manifest the same problem. Ad nauseam evangelicals claim to be under the New Covenant—though of course they are not really, but they steadfastly refuse to obey the law, claiming it is nugatory—that is, of no value to them; pointless; done away.

Additionally, many—though not all—white nationalists, including those on the Chautauqua circuit today, lecturing here and there, evidently have roots in, and even active links to, various identity groups. These identity groups recognize that the people of the United States are Israelites. They do not quite have it all right: You see, they commonly teach that America will never be conquered because we are Israelites—people of the covenant. They make a lot of that, in fact. They never let anyone forget that the *b-r-i-t* of the proper noun Britain derives from the Hebrew word for covenant.

But, for all that, their ideas fly in the face of history, for what nation has never fallen? What sinful nation? Their teachings represent gross abuse of the concept of American exceptionalism, because America is not exempt from God's judgment.

In sum, all these sort are of those who carouse in the goodness of God while overlooking His severity, failing fundamentally to understand that God is a judging God. He will judge "according to all the curses of the covenant," as we read there in verse 21. He respects none over another, but punishes sin of any folk, as Proverbs 14:34 indicates: "Sin is a reproach to any people." Hiding behind the historical fact of the covenant without displaying fealty to its terms does not cut it with God.

Moses ends chapter 29, as I mentioned earlier, by telling the people that God is the Revelator, both today and tomorrow, and that He reveals so people can “obey all the words of this law.”

Moses started chapter 29 asserting that the peoples’ eyes would be blind “until this very day;” he needed to get quite a bit more said. It is my guess that he dived right in to chapter 30. We will do likewise.

Deuteronomy 30:1, again I am reading from the *New English Translation*. Notice that Moses leads off by referring to the blessing and curses of chapter 28, according to which God will judge, as we saw earlier. As I read through these verses, notice how Moses continues to stress the themes of land, today, as well as future generations. Verse 1:

Deuteronomy 30:1 (NET) “When you have experienced all these things, both the blessings and the curses I have set before you, you will reflect upon them in all the nations where the Lord your God has banished you.”

The verb “reflect” there is the Hebrew verb *shuv*. It is not a rare word, appearing as it does over a thousand times in the Old Testament, 31 times in the book of Deuteronomy. It means to return; to restore; to reverse; to revoke. It means to go back. Its first use is at Genesis 3:19, where God speaks of Adam’s return to the dust of the ground. God says the exiled Israelites will come to the point that the information contained in Deuteronomy 28 will return to mind and they will turn it over in their thoughts—for their good.

In Deuteronomy 30:1-10, the verb *shuv* appears no less than seven times. It is repeated so often, so rapidly, the concept of turning must be important. As I read, notice that, sometimes Israel does the returning, sometimes God does it. There is a reciprocal relationship at work here.

Deuteronomy 30:2 (NET) “Then, if you and your descendants turn to the Lord your God and obey Him with your whole mind and being just as I am commanding you today.”

There is the second occurrence of *shuv*. The idea is that the people will turn to God, that is, repent, as they reflect on the blessings they once enjoyed, and the curses they are now experiencing.

Importantly, while it is not explicit here, other scriptures such as II Timothy 2:25, point out that it is God who initiates or grants repentance. It is a gift. At John 14:26, Christ teaches us that a function of God's Holy Spirit is to "bring to your remembrance all that I have said to you." God will kickstart the whole restoration process by bringing Deuteronomy 28, the blessing and the curses, to the mind of Israelites. (Perhaps that will be through the witness of the church.) That is how vitally important Deuteronomy 28 is to the whole process—an importance that was not lost on Herbert Armstrong.

Let us continue in verse 3, reading through verse 10. If Israel repents and obeys,

Deuteronomy 30:3-6 (NET) "the Lord your God will reverse [*shuv*, number 3, something which He does] your captivity and have pity on you. He will turn [*shuv*, number 4, again, something which God does] and gather you from all the peoples among whom He has scattered you. Even if your exiles are in the most distant land, from there the Lord your God will gather you and bring you back. Then He will bring you to the land your ancestors possessed, and you also will possess it; He will do better for you and multiply you more than He did your ancestors. The Lord your God will also cleanse. . .

The translators are a bit shy, coy, here. Cleanse is actually the regular Hebrew verb for circumcise. The reference is obviously to the New Covenant. Continuing:

Deuteronomy 30:6-9 (NET) . . . [circumcise] your heart and the hearts of your descendants so that you may love Him with all your mind and being and so that you may live. Then the Lord your God will put all these curses on your enemies, on those who hate you and persecute you. You will return [there is the 5th occurrence of

shuv, something Israel does in this case] and obey the Lord, keeping all His commandments I am giving you today. The Lord your God will make the labor of your hands abundantly successful and multiply your children, the offspring of your cattle, and the produce of your soil. For the Lord your God will once more. . .

Once more is the 6th occurrence of *shuv*, connected with the concept of rejoicing.

Deuteronomy 30:9-10 . . . (NET) God will once more rejoice over you to make you prosperous just as He rejoiced over your ancestors, if you obey the Lord your God and keep His commandments and statutes that are written in this scroll of the law. But you must turn [*shuv*, number 7, done by Israel] to Him with your whole mind and being.”

Israel’s restoration is a huge theme of the Major Prophets. But in the book of Deuteronomy, this passage is God’s principal revelation of His restorative action to Israel. He touches on restoration at Deuteronomy 4:30, where *shuv* also occurs, incidentally, but he does not elaborate there much.

Having set forth this revelatory information before his audience, and applying it to future generations as well, Moses is ready to make a bold assertion. Verse 11, reading from the *Easy-to-Read Version*. The translators I think really catch the essence of what Moses was saying.

Deuteronomy 30:11 (ETRV) “This command that I give you today is not too hard for you. It is not a secret hidden in some far away land.”

Through Moses, God has now revealed it to those folk and to us, to the end that all may obey God’s law. Continuing in [verse 12](#):

Deuteronomy 30:12-13 (ETRV) “This command is not in heaven so that you should say, ‘Who will go up to heaven for us and bring

it to us, so that we can hear and do it?' This command is not on the other side of the sea so that you should say, 'Who will go across the sea for us and bring it to us, so that we can hear it and do it?'"

God's revelation is with the people, in whatever land they may be. Theirs were the oracles of God. Moses continues at verse 14:

Deuteronomy 30:14 (ETRV) "No, the word is very near to you. It is in your mouth and in your heart. So you can obey it."

Remember, that is why God reveals things, so that people can obey His commandments. Moses then concludes the chapter, setting before the people a choice.

Deuteronomy 30:15-16 (ETRV) "See, I have set before you today life and good, death and evil. If you obey the commandments of the Lord your God that I command you today, by loving the Lord your God, by walking in His ways, and by keeping His commandments and His statutes and His rules, then you shall live and multiply, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to take possession of it."

Skipping to verse 19:

Deuteronomy 30:19-20 (ETRV) "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, loving the Lord your God, obeying His voice and holding fast to Him, for He is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."

Of course, Christ ultimately authored these words. Later, He averred, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." See also Paul's comment at Colossians 3:4, where he asserts that Christ is our life.

By the time that day was over, the Revelator, the Being who became Jesus Christ, had made known to the people—and to those after—His great powers of restoration, His commitment to restore, His promise to restore. That was the hope of Israel. The people then—and their descendants forever—had all the information they needed to make the right choice. While they did not and do not believe that God is their life, their knowledge “not being mixed with faith,” yet they had all the information necessary to make the right choice.

No, there is nothing extraneous at all about Deuteronomy 29 and 30. That was one important day in Israel’s history!