

INTRODUCTION TO DEUT. CHAPTER 29

The first words of this chapter are the contents of it, "These are the words of the covenant" (#De 29:1), that is, these that follow. Here is,

- I. A recital of God's dealings with them, in order to the bringing of them into this covenant, #De 29:2-8.
- II. A solemn charge to them to keep the covenant, #De 29:9.
- III. An abstract of the covenant itself, #De 29:12,13.
- IV. A specification of the persons taken into the covenant, #De 29:10,11,14,15.
- V. An intimation of the great design of this covenant against idolatry, in a parenthesis, #De 29:16,17.
- VI. A most solemn and dreadful denunciation of the wrath of God against such persons as promise themselves peace in a sinful way, #De 29:18-28.
- VII. The conclusion of this treaty, with a distinction between things secret and things revealed, #De 29:29.

Ver. 1. thru Ver. 9.

Now that Moses had largely repeated the commands which the people were to observe as their part of the covenant, and the promises and threatenings which God would make good (according as they behaved themselves) as part of the covenant, the whole is here summed up in a federal transaction. The covenant formerly made is here renewed, and Moses, who was before, is still, the mediator of it (#De 29:1): *The Lord commanded Moses to make it.* Moses himself, though king in Jeshurun, could not make the covenant any otherwise than as God gave him instructions. It does not lie in the power of ministers to fix the terms of the covenant; they are only to dispense the seals of it. This is said to be *besides the covenant made in Horeb;* for, though the covenant was the same, yet it was a new promulgation and ratification of it. It is probable that some now living, though not of age to be mustered, were of age to consent for themselves to the covenant made at Horeb, and yet it is here renewed. Note, Those that have solemnly covenanted with God should take all opportunities to do it again, as those that like their choice too well to change. But the far greater part were a new generation, and therefore the covenant must be made afresh with them, for it is fit that the covenant should be renewed to the children of the covenant.

- I. It is usual for indentures to begin with a recital; this does so, with a rehearsal of the great things God had done for them,
 1. As an encouragement to them to believe that God would indeed be to them a God, for he would not have done so much for them if he had not designed more, to which all he had hitherto done was but a preface (as it were) or introduction; nay, he had shown himself a God in what he had hitherto done for them, which might raise their expectations of something great and answering the vast extent and compass of that pregnant promise, that God would be to them a God.
 2. As an engagement upon them to be to him an obedient people, in consideration of what he had done for them.

II. For the proof of what he here advances he appeals to their own eyes (**#De 29:2**): *You have seen all that the Lord did.* Their own senses were incontestable evidence of the matter of fact, that God had done great things for them; and then their own reason was a no less competent judge of the equity of his inference from it: *Keep therefore the words of this covenant, #De 29:9.*

III. These things he specifies, to show the power and goodness of God in his appearances for them.

1. Their deliverance out of Egypt, **#De 29:2,3**. The amazing signs and miracles by which Pharaoh was plagued and compelled to dismiss them, and Israel was tried (for they are called *temptations*) whether they would trust God to secure them from, and save them by, those plagues.
2. Their conduct through the wilderness for forty years, **#De 29:5,6**. There they were led, and clad, and fed, by miracles; though the paths of the wilderness were not only unknown but untrodden, yet God kept them from being lost there; and (as bishop Patrick observes) those very shoes which by the appointment of God they put on in Egypt, at the passover, when they were ready to march (**#Ex 12:11**), never wore out, but served them to Canaan: and though they lived not upon bread which strengthens the heart, and wine which rejoices it, but upon manna and rock-water, yet they were men of strength and courage, mighty men, and able to go forth to war. By these miracles they were made to know that the Lord was God, and by these mercies that he was their God.
3. The victory they had lately obtained of Sihon and Og, and that good land which they had taken possession of, **#De 29:7,8**. Both former mercies and fresh mercies should be improved by us as inducements to obedience.

IV. By way of inference from these memoirs,

1. Moses laments their stupidity: *Yet the Lord has not given you a heart to perceive, #De 29:4*. This does not lay the blame of their senselessness, and sottishness, and unbelief, upon God, as if they had stood ready to receive his grace and had begged for it, but he had denied them; no, but it fastens the guilt upon themselves.

"The Lord, who is the Father of spirits, a God in covenant with you, and who had always been so rich in mercy to you, no doubt would have crowned all his other gifts with this, he would have given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see if you had not by your own frowardness and perverseness frustrated his kind intentions, and received his grace in vain."

Note,

(1.) The hearing ear, the seeing eye, and the understanding heart, are the gift of God. All that have them have them from him.

(2.) God gives not only food and raiment, but wealth and large possessions, to many to whom he does not give grace. Many enjoy the gifts who have not hearts to perceive the giver, nor the true intention and use of the gifts.

(3.) God's readiness to do us good in other things is a plain evidence that if we have not grace, that best of gifts, it is our own fault and not his; he would have gathered us and we

would not.

2. Moses charges them to be obedient: *Keep therefore, and do, #De 29:9*. Note, We are bound in gratitude and interest, as well as duty and faithfulness, to *keep the words of the covenant*.

Ver. 10. thru Ver. 29.

It appears by the length of the sentences here, and by the copiousness and pungency of the expressions, that Moses, now that he was drawing near to the close of his discourse, was very warm and zealous, and very desirous to impress what he said upon the minds of this unthinking people. To bind them the faster to God and duty, he here, with great solemnity of expression (to make up the want of the external ceremony that was used #Ex 24:4 &c.), concludes a bargain (as it were) between them and God, an everlasting covenant, which God would not forget and they must not. He requires not their explicit consent, but lays the matter plainly before them, and then leaves it between God and their own consciences. Observe,

I. The parties to this covenant.

1. It is the Lord their God they are to covenant with, #De 29:12. To him they must give up themselves, to him they must join themselves.

"It is his oath; he has drawn up the covenant and settled it; he requires your consent to it; he has sworn to you and to him you must be sworn."

This requires us to be sincere and serious, humble and reverent, in our covenant-transactions with God, remembering how great a God he is with whom we are covenanting, who has a perfect knowledge of us and an absolute dominion over us.

2. They are all to be taken into covenant with him. They were all summoned to attend (#De 29:2), and did accordingly, and are told (#De 29:10) what was the design of their appearing before God now in a body--they were to enter into covenant with him.

(1.) Even their great men, the captains of their tribes, their elders and officers, must not think it any disparagement to their honour, or any diminution of their power, to put their necks under the yoke of this covenant, and to draw in it. They must rather enter into the covenant first, to set a good example to their inferiors.

(2.) Not the men only, but their wives and children, must come into this covenant; though they were not numbered and mustered, yet they must be *joined to the Lord, #De 29:11*. Observe, Even little ones are capable of being taken into covenant with God, and are to be admitted with their parents. Little children, so little as to be carried in arms, must be brought to Christ, and shall be blessed by him, for *of such was and is the kingdom of God*.

(3.) Not the men of Israel only, but the stranger that was in their camp, provided he was so far proselyted to their religion as to renounce all false gods, was taken into this covenant with the God of Israel, forasmuch as he also, though a stranger, was to be looked upon in this matter as a *son of Abraham, #Lu 19:9*. This was an early indication of favour to the Gentiles, and of the kindness God had in store for them.

(4.) Not the freemen only, but the hewers of wood and drawers of water, the meanest drudge they had among them. Note, As none are too great to come under the bonds of the

covenant, so none are too mean to inherit the blessings of the covenant. In Christ no difference is made between *bond and free*, #Col 3:11. *Art thou called being a servant? Care not for it*, #1Co 7:21.

(5.) Not only those that were now present before God in this solemn assembly, but those also that were not here with them were taken into covenant (#De 29:15): *As with him that standeth here with us* (so bishop Patrick thinks it should be rendered) *so also with him, that is not here with us this day*; that is,

[1.] Those that tarried at home were included; though detained either by sickness or necessary business, they must not therefore think themselves disengaged; no, every Israelite shares in the common blessings. Those that tarry at home divide the spoil, and therefore every Israelite must own himself bound by the consent of the representative body. Those who cannot go up to the house of the Lord must keep up a spiritual communion with those that do, and be present in spirit when they are absent in body.

[2.] The generations to come are included. Nay, one of the Chaldee paraphrasts reads it, *All the generations that have been from the first days of the world, and all that shall arise to the end of the whole world, stand with us here this day*. And so, taking this covenant as a typical dispensation of the covenant of grace, it is a noble testimony to the Mediator of that covenant, who is *the same yesterday, to-day, and for ever*.

II. The summary of this covenant. All the precepts and all the promises of the covenant are included in the covenant-relation between God and them, #De 29:13. That they should be appointed, raised up, *established, for a people to him*, to observe and obey him, to be devoted to him and dependent on him, and that he should be to them a God, according to the tenor of the covenant made with their fathers, to make them holy, high, and happy. Their fathers are here named, *Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob*, as examples of piety, which those were to set themselves to imitate who expected any benefit from the covenant made with them. Note, A due consideration of the relation we stand in to God as our God, and of the obligation we lie under as a people to him, is enough to bring us to all the duties and all the comforts of the covenant.

III. The principal design of the renewing of this covenant at this time was to fortify them against temptations to idolatry. Though other sins will be the sinner's ruin, yet this was the sin that was likely to be *their* ruin. Now concerning this he shows,

1. The danger they were in of being tempted to it (#De 29:16,17):

"You know we have dwelt in the land of Egypt, a country addicted to idolatry; and it were well if there were not among you some remains of the infection of that idolatry; we have passed by other nations, the Edomites, Moabites, &c. and have seen their abominations and their idols, and some among you, it may be, have liked them too well, and still hanker after them, and would rather worship a wooden god that they can see than an infinite Spirit whom they never saw."

It is to be hoped that there were those among them who, the more they saw of these abominations and idols, the more they hated them; but there were those that were smitten with the sight of them, saw the accursed things and coveted them.

2. The danger they were in if they yielded to the temptation. He gives them fair warning: it was at their peril if they forsook God to serve idols. If they would not be bound and held by the precepts of the covenant, they would find that the curses of the covenant would be strong enough to bind and hold them.

(1.) Idolatry would be the ruin of particular persons and their families, **#De 29:18-21**, where observe,

[1.] The sinner described, **#De 29:18**. *First*, He is one whose *heart turns away from his God*; there the mischief begins, in the *evil heart of unbelief*, which inclines men to *depart from the living God* to dead idols. Even to this sin men are tempted when they are drawn aside by their own lusts and fancies. Those that begin to turn from God, by neglecting their duty to him, are easily drawn to other gods: and those that serve other gods do certainly turn away from the true God; for he will admit of no rivals: he will be all or nothing. *Secondly*, He is a *root that bears gall and wormwood*; that is, he is a dangerous man, who, being himself poisoned with bad principles and inclinations, with a secret contempt of the God of Israel and his institutions and a veneration for the gods of the nations, endeavours, by all arts possible, to corrupt and poison others and draw them to idolatry: this is a man whose fruit is *hemlock* (so the word is translated, **#Ho 10:4**) and *wormwood*; it is very displeasing to God, and will be, to all that are seduced by him, *bitterness in the latter end*. This is referred to by the apostle, **#Heb 12:15**, where he is in like manner cautioning us to take heed of those that would seduce us from the Christian faith; they are the weeds or tares in a field, which, if let alone, will overspread the whole field. A little of this leaven will be in danger of infecting the whole lump.

[2.] His security in the sun. He promises himself impunity, though he persists in his impiety, **#De 29:19**. Though he *hears the words of the curse*, so that he cannot plead ignorance of the danger, as other idolaters, yet even then he *blesses himself in his own heart*, thinks himself safe from the wrath of the God of Israel, under the protection of his idol-gods, and *therefore says*,

"I shall have peace, though I be governed in my religion, not by God's institution, but by my own imagination, to add drunkenness to thirst, one act of wickedness to another."

Idolaters were like drunkards, violently set upon their idols themselves and industrious to draw others in with them. Revellings commonly accompanied their idolatries (**#1Pe 4:3**), so that this speaks a woe to drunkards (especially the drunkards of Ephraim), who, when they are awake, being thirsty, *seek it yet again*, **#Pr 23:35**. And those that made themselves drunk in honour of their idols were the worst of drunkards. Note, *First*, There are many who are under the curse of God and yet bless themselves; but it will soon be found that in blessing themselves they do but deceive themselves. *Secondly*, Those are ripe for ruin, and there is little hope of their repentance, who have made themselves believe that they shall have peace though they go on in a sinful way. *Thirdly*, Drunkenness is a sin that hardens the heart, and debauches the conscience, as much as any other, a sin to which men are strangely tempted themselves even when they have lately felt the mischiefs of it, and to which they are strangely fond of drawing others, **#Hab 2:15**. And such an ensnaring sin is idolatry.

[3.] God's just severity against him for the sin, and for the impious affront he put upon God in saying he should have peace though he went on, so giving the lie to eternal truth, **#Ge 3:4**. There is scarcely a threatening in all the book of God that sounds more dreadful than this. O that presumptuous sinners would read it and tremble! For it is not a bug-bear to frighten children and fools, but a real declaration of the wrath of God against the ungodliness and the unrighteousness of men, **#De 29:20,21**. *First*, *The Lord shall not spare him*. The days of his reprieve, which he abuses, will be shortened, and no mercy remembered in the midst of judgment. *Secondly*, *The anger of the Lord, and his jealousy*, which is the fiercest anger, *shall smoke against him*, like the smoke of a furnace. *Thirdly*,

The *curses written* shall *lie upon him*, not only light upon him to terrify him, but abide upon him, to sink him to the lowest hell, **#Joh 3:36**. *Fourthly, His name shall be blotted out*, that is, he himself shall be cut off, and his memory shall rot and perish with him. *Fifthly, He shall be separated unto evil*, which is the most proper notion of a curse; he shall be cut off from all happiness and all hope of it, and marked out for misery without remedy. And *(lastly) All this according to the curses of the covenant*, which are the most fearful curses, being the just revenges of abused grace.

(2.) Idolatry would be the ruin of their nation; it would bring plagues upon the land that connived at this root of bitterness and received the infection; as far as the sin spread, the judgment should spread likewise.

[1.] The ruin is described. It begins with plagues and sicknesses (**#De 29:22**), to try if they will be reclaimed by less judgments; but, if not, it ends in a total overthrow, like that of Sodom, **#De 29:23**. As that valley, which had been like the garden of the Lord for fruitfulness, was turned into a lake of salt and sulphur, so should the land of Canaan be made desolate and barren, as it has been ever since the last destruction of it by the Romans. The lake of Sodom bordered closely upon the land of Israel, that by it they might be warned against the iniquity of Sodom; but, not taking the warning, they were made as like to Sodom in ruin as they had been in sin.

[2.] The reason of it is enquired into, and assigned. *First*, It would be enquired into by the *generations to come* (**#De 29:22**), who would find the state of their nation in all respects the reverse of what it had been, and, when they read both the history and the promise, would be astonished at the change. The stranger likewise, and the nations about them, as well as particular persons, would ask, *Wherefore hath the Lord done thus unto this land?* **#De 29:24**. Great desolations are thus represented elsewhere as striking the spectators with amazement, **#1Ki 9:8,9**; **Jer 22:8,9**. It was time for the neighbours to tremble when judgment thus *began at the house of God*, **#1Pe 4:17**. The emphasis of the question is to be laid upon *this land*, the land of Canaan, this good land, the glory of all lands, this land flowing with milk and honey. A thousand pities that such a good land as this should be made desolate, but this is not all; it is this *holy* land, the land of Israel, a people in covenant with God; it is Immanuel's land, a land where God was known and worshipped, and yet thus wasted. Note,

1. It is no new thing for God to bring desolating judgments upon a people that in profession are near to him, **#Am 3:2**.
2. He never does this without a good reason.
3. It concerns us to enquire into the reason, that we may give glory to God and take warning to ourselves. *Secondly*, The reason is here assigned, in answer to that enquiry. The matter would be so plain that all men would say, It was because they *forsook the covenant of the Lord God of their fathers*, **#De 29:25**. Note, God never forsakes any till they first forsake him. But those that desert the God of their fathers are justly cast out of the inheritance of their fathers. They went and *served other gods* (**#De 29:26**), gods that they had no acquaintance with, nor lay under any obligation to either in duty of gratitude; for God has not given the creatures to be served by us, but to serve us; nor have they done any good to us (as some read it), more than what God has enabled them to do; to the Creator therefore we are debtors, and not to the creatures. It was for this that God was angry with them (**#De 29:27**), and *rooted them out in anger*, **#De 29:28**. So that, how dreadful soever the desolation was, the Lord was righteous in it, which is acknowledged, **#Da 9:11-14**.

"Thus" (says Mr. Ainsworth) "the law of Moses leaves sinners under the curse, and *rooted out of the Lord's land*; but the grace of Christ towards penitent believing sinners plants them *again upon their land, and they shall no more be pulled up, being kept by the power of God,*" #Am 9:15.

[3.] He concludes his prophecy of the Jews' rejection just as Paul concludes his discourse on the same subject, when it began to be fulfilled (#Ro 11:33), *How unsearchable are God's judgments, and his ways past finding out!* So here (#De 29:29), *Secret things belong to the Lord our God.* Some make it to be one sentence, *The secret things of the Lord our God are revealed to us and to our children, as far as we are concerned to know them, and he hath not dealt so with other nations:* but we make it two sentences, by which, *First, We are forbidden curiously to enquire into the secret counsels of God and to determine concerning them. A full answer is given to that question, Wherefore has the Lord done thus to this land?* sufficient to justify God and admonish us. But if any ask further why God would be at such a vast expense of miracles to form such a people, whose apostasy and ruin he plainly foresaw, why he did not by his almighty grace prevent it, or what he intends yet to do with them, let such know that these are questions which cannot be answered, and therefore are not fit to be asked. It is presumption in us to pry into the *Arcana imperii--the mysteries of government*, and to enquire into the reasons of state which *it is not for us to know.* See #Ac 1:7; Joh 21:22; Col 2:18. *Secondly, We are directed and encouraged diligently to enquire into that which God has made known: things revealed belong to us and to our children.* Note,

1. Though God has kept much of his counsel secret, yet there is enough revealed to satisfy and save us. He has *kept back nothing that is profitable for us*, but that only which it is good for us to be ignorant of.
2. We ought to acquaint ourselves, and our children too, with the things of God that are revealed. We are not only allowed to search into them, but are concerned to do so. They are things which we and ours are nearly interested in. They are the rules we are to live by, the grants we are to live upon; and therefore we are to learn them diligently ourselves, and to teach them diligently to our children.
3. All our knowledge must be in order to practice, for this is the end of all divine revelation, not to furnish us with curious subjects of speculation and discourse, with which to entertain ourselves and our friends, *but that we may do all the words of this law*, and be blessed in our deed.