



# *Leaves* From the Tree

*Studies from God's Word*

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



DEUTERONOMY 28 - 32

## Deuteronomy 28

***28:1-2, 13-14 - "Now it shall be, if you diligently obey the LORD your God, being careful to do all His commandments which I command you today, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. All these blessings will come upon you and overtake you if you obey the LORD your God: ... The LORD will make you the head and not the tail, and you only will be above, and you will not be underneath, if you listen to the commandments of the LORD your God, which I charge you today, to observe them carefully, and do not turn aside from any of the words which I command you today, to the right or to the left, to go after other gods to serve them."***

The book of Deuteronomy reaches a critical point in this chapter. As the book opened in chapter one, we saw that it was designed by the Lord as a retelling of the Law of God. Israel is now at the very end of their forty year wilderness journey from Egypt to the Promised Land. The Lord had revealed His Law from Mount Sinai in the first year of their journey. An entire generation has passed since that time. Before taking Israel across the Jordan River into Canaan, the Lord reminds the hearts and minds of His people regarding His standards. The purpose of this retelling of the Law is that the Lord is renewing the covenant between Himself and Israel. The covenant is a formal bond between the Lord and His people which establishes, not just that there is a relationship between them, but identifies the nature of that relationship. The covenant describes the relationship as one of obligation and accountability. In other words, when the Lord makes a people His own and draws them into covenant relationship, those people a new level of obligation toward the Lord and accountability toward Him. Covenant relationship is the farthest thing from a relationship of convenience.

Chapter 28 details for us the blessings and the cursings of the covenant. These are often called the sanctions of the covenant. In a legal document (and Deuteronomy is a legal document as a restatement of God's Law), the sanctions are the rewards and penalties associated with either keeping or breaking the law. The Lord wants His people to understand that while our relationship with Him is a relationship based upon His love, mercy and grace toward us, that He also imposes sanctions upon us for a purpose. The sanctions are a necessary component of our relationship with the Lord because He is committed to changing us. Sanctions only are of value when there is the possibility of change in the person(s) being sanctioned. If there is no hope for change, then the sanction would have no redemptive benefit. The Lord's purpose for us is that we would be continually changed to become more like His Son. However, there is also the possibility of change in the wrong direction. It is possible to change for the worse, not for the better. The sanctions of the covenant are a powerful training tool the Lord has designed into the covenant to train us to change in the right direction.

The first lesson to learn in relationship to the sanctions of the covenant is that they teach us that the blessing of the Lord which we all desire and enjoy are conditional blessings, not unconditional as many teachers claim today with good intentions, but wrong perspectives. An unconditional blessing would be one in which the Lord gave to His people no matter what they thought, said or did. An unconditional blessing would remain constant even if the person sinned and rebelled against the Lord. Because there is a strong emphasis today by many on God's love as unconditional, many have erroneously concluded that the blessings of the Lord are also unconditional. This opening section of the chapter makes clear that His blessings are conditional. The wording that would identify these blessings as conditional would be some kind of if-then phrase. An if-then condition in the covenant works like this; if a certain condition is fulfilled by the believer, then the Lord will grant to that believer the blessing promised.

The Lord declares that if Israel diligently obeys Him and is careful to do all His commandments, then the Lord will cause all His blessings to come upon them. The implication is that then, and only then will Israel experience the blessings of the Lord described in this chapter. As a needed word of clarification, we must distinguish this from the concept of earning the blessing of the Lord. Israel's obedience does not earn the blessing. God's blessing is always given by His grace (unmerited or undeserved favor). Yet, the blessing is only given when Israel obeys. This is not because Israel earns the blessing by obedience, but because the Lord wants to deeply associate blessing with obedience. He wants to pour out His blessing upon His people, but He will not bless them as they disobey and rebel. So, He chooses to only bless when they obey to train them to associate the blessing (approval) of the Lord with the behavior (obedience) that the Lord wants to develop in His people.

One thing we should learn from this instruction in this chapter is the great value the Lord places upon the obedience of His people. Our obedience is so significant in His perspective that He will move heaven and earth to bless us when we obey to impact our hearts in the hope that we will grow to value obedience above our own preferences, desires, and choices. At the same time, the Lord is willing to withhold blessing from those He dearly loves, and apply strong and painful lessons (curses) to their lives until they learn that disobedience is not worth the cost. It is valuable to notice the preponderance of curses in proportion to the blessings in this chapter. There are fourteen verses devoted to a detailed description of the blessings of covenant obedience here. Compare that to the fifty-four verses devoted to an exhaustingly detailed description of the curses (judgments) of covenant disobedience. This disparity in the amount of verses focused upon each aspect shows us that, left to ourselves the natural tendency of all people is to do what they want even when they know it is in disobedience to the Lord. The greater element in training any child is a firm hand in disciplining their tendency to disobey.

***28:9-11 - "The LORD will establish you as a holy people to Himself, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. So all the peoples of the earth will see that you are called by the name of the LORD, and they will be afraid of you. The LORD will make you abound in prosperity, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your beast and in the produce of your ground, in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers to give you."***

The Lord chose to use the relative national and personal conditions of prosperity and poverty to train the hearts of Israel to obey Him as their life pattern. The Lord promised to pour out such a tremendous blessing upon Israel in comparison with all the other nations of the world as a way to cement Israel in a lifestyle of obedience and also to appeal to the normal desires of the nations by creating a hunger in them for the kind of blessing they saw displayed in Israel. The prosperity in view here was a natural prosperity of land, produce, herds, flocks, homes, and finances. In other words, the Lord promised to bless the economy of Israel beyond that of every other nation if Israel lived in obedience to Him. There are some Christian teachers that have taken these promises and tried to apply them in a strict literal interpretation to our Christian lives today. Their conclusion is that if a believer obeys the Lord today that the Lord has promised to make them rich and naturally prosperous. This teaching has a strong appeal to many because of the natural desire that most people have for the comfort and enjoyment that natural riches provide. However, we need to recognize the shift from Old Covenant to New Covenant as it affects our application of these sanctions today.

The Lord has promised to all believers today that He will make us prosperous and rich if we obey Him, but it is not necessarily financial wealth that we will experience. "Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ," (Ephesians 1:3). We are blessed with every possible blessing by God in Christ, but the kind of blessings that we receive have shifted in the New Covenant from natural blessings to spiritual blessings. This does not mean that we are missing out if God does not make us millionaires. Spiritual blessings are greater than natural blessings. Which would you rather be as the enduring condition of your daily life: rich or joyful? Would you rather drive a new Mercedes or have a satisfying peace with God? The spiritual blessings of the Lord upon our lives as Christians today are meant by the Lord to attract the attention of the world that is struggling and starved for true love, joy and peace with God.

***28:15-20 - "But it shall come about, if you do not obey the LORD your God, to observe to do all His commandments and His statutes with which I charge you today, that all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: Cursed shall you be in the city, and cursed shall you be in the country. Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl. Cursed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground, the increase of your herd and the young of your flock. Cursed shall you be when you come in, and cursed shall you be when you go out. The LORD will send upon you curses, confusion, and rebuke, in all you undertake to do, until you are destroyed and until you perish quickly, on account of the evil of your deeds, because you have forsaken Me."***

The Lord uses the same wording for the experience of the curses as He does for the experience of the blessings. In both cases the sanction of the covenant will "come upon you and overtake you." The point of the word overtake is that there will be no escape from these sanctions. When the person obeys the Lord, He will cause His blessings to overtake them. Every direction they turn they will be caught and overwhelmed by the blessing of the Lord. In the same way, when they disobey, every direction they turn they will be caught and overwhelmed by the curse. The sanction is described like a predator hunting the person down from which there is no hiding or escape. This imagery emphasizes that the sanctions of the covenant are not under human control. The blessings and the curses are the sovereign work of God in the life circumstances of His people. The blessings are sent by the Lord, they do not just spontaneously or accidentally occur. Just so, the curses are sent by the Lord. The wording of the event being sent by the Lord infers that the experience of the blessing or the curse is like a message to our hearts sent by God. The message in the curse is necessary because the person under the curse of the Lord's judgment is a person that is not listening to the Lord's less painful messages. The person that refuses to listen when the Lord speaks will have to hear Him speak through one or more of the painful circumstances detailed in this chapter.

***28:49-52 - "The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, as the eagle swoops down, a nation whose language you shall not understand, a nation of fierce countenance who will have no respect for the old, nor show favor to the young. Moreover, it shall eat the offspring of your herd and the produce of your ground until you are destroyed, who also leaves you no grain, new wine, or oil, nor the increase of your herd or the young of your flock until they have caused you to perish. It shall besiege you in all your towns until your high and fortified walls in which you trusted come down throughout your land, and it shall besiege you in all your towns throughout your land which the LORD your God has given you."***

Twice in the future of the nation will the prophetic warning of this passage be played out in agonizing reality. After generations of stubborn rebellion against

God and His word, and after ignoring His messengers, the prophets, Israel would experience the devastating curse of conquest by foreign nations. The Lord's warning here is aimed at identifying how this will happen. The Lord will bring a nation against His own people to swoop down on them like an eagle swoops down on its prey. Hundreds of years after this warning was written, the Lord stirred the nation of Assyria to invade Israel and utterly conquer them. The Assyrians carried the ten northern tribes of Israel away into slavery because those tribes refused to obey the Word and ways of the Lord. Later, the Lord stirred the empire of Babylon to swoop down upon the remaining two southern tribes and carry them away into captivity for the same reason. This passage was no theoretical warning merely showing the way God felt about the rebellion of His people. The Lord was (and is) so committed to His people walking in righteousness that he even was willing to destroy His own holy nation in order to train their hearts in this.

***28:63-64 - "It shall come about that as the LORD delighted over you to prosper you, and multiply you, so the LORD will delight over you to make you perish and destroy you; and you will be torn from the land where you are entering to possess it. Moreover, the LORD will scatter you among all peoples, from one end of the earth to the other end of the earth; and there you shall serve other gods, wood and stone, which you or your fathers have not known."***

The description in this passage of how the Lord responds to the patterns of obedience and disobedience He finds in His people is open to misunderstanding. The wording that the Lord "will delight over you to make you perish and destroy you" in the same way that He had previously delighted over them to bless them can easily be misinterpreted. This does not mean that the Lord enjoys hurting His people when they need to be disciplined in their rebellion. There are many other passages that describe for us how the Lord is grieved when we disobey Him. It is not that the Lord takes pleasure in spanking us, or that He delights in our pain. The concept communicated here is rather that the Lord is as deeply motivated to discipline His people when they disobey as He is to bless them when they obey. He wants us to understand that it is not that He blesses us wholeheartedly, but that He only disciplines us half-heartedly. Since His goal and purpose is to conform us to the likeness of Christ, He is equally motivated in the blessing and the curse. The blessing serves His purpose to encourage us to continue to obey like Christ. The curse serves an equally valuable purpose by painfully training us to stop disobeying.

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## Deuteronomy 29

***29:2-4 - "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 to Pharaoh and all his servants and all his land; the great trials which your eyes have seen, those great signs and wonders. Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear."***

The Lord addresses through Moses the accountability of Israel to Him because of all He had done for them until this point. The Lord had already blessed Israel above every other nation in the world. They were the specially treasured recipients of His powerful redemptive works. They had witnessed the Ten Plagues, or judgments that the Lord poured out upon Egypt. They saw first hand when He opened the Red Sea before them and caused them to cross over on dry ground. They observed Him provide bread from heaven for forty years in the wilderness in the gift of daily manna. More than once they saw the Lord bring a river of fresh water from the rock in the desert when there was no natural source for drinking water. All of those many signs and wonders were done by the Lord in the eyes of Israel for both a practical and spiritual purpose. The practical purpose met the need of the moment. The spiritual purpose was even greater than the natural purpose though. The Lord designed each one of these signs and wonders as a message intended to instruct and impact the hearts of Israel.

Because the Lord had blessed Israel with far greater expressions of His signs and wonders than any other nation, Israel was held to a higher standard of accountability. This principle of greater revelation creating greater accountability is important for every believer to understand. "From everyone who has been given much, much will be required; and to whom they entrusted much, of him they will ask all the more." (Luke 12:48). These signs and wonders were not intended by the Lord to be like a spiritual fireworks show which evoked oohs and ahhs from Israel, but left them unchanged after the show was over. The message in the miracles was that Israel should live more obedient, faithful, God honoring lives because of all they had witnessed of the power of God. Sadly, it was a common occurrence for Israel to see an awesome display of God's power such as in the opening of the Red Sea, and almost immediately afterward to complain and grumble toward the Lord with a perspective that the Lord was not concerned about their well being.

Moses lived through the recurrence of this pattern in Israel's relationship with the Lord. Throughout the previous forty years Moses saw Israel miss the point of the miraculous works of God again and again. Here, Moses is looking back over this forty year pattern of repeated failure and he comes to grip with an uncomfortable conclusion. "Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear." This is an inspired evaluation. Israel's issue with missing the point was ultimately a heart issue. God had overwhelmed them with awesome spiritual and tangible evidence of His goodness, love, and commitment



toward them in His many signs and wonders, yet they saw these things without really seeing them. They saw the actual events as they happened, but never saw what that event really meant. They heard the words of God in the declaration of the Law, but never really heard what they meant. They had eyes, but did not really see and ears but never really heard. There is only one reason why this was so for them, and remains so for most people even today. I have repeatedly experienced sharing more than sufficient evidence of the truth of the Lord, the Bible, and salvation with a person who was intelligent and normally able to understand incredibly difficult concepts in other areas of life, only to have them fail to grasp even the most simple Biblical concept with understanding. The reason this happens is not an issue of intellectual capacity, but heart condition.

Jesus explained the real issue for us. "Jesus answered and said to him, 'Truly, truly, I say to you, unless one is born again he cannot see the kingdom of God.'" (John 3:3). Spiritual sight is not a function of our natural eyes, but of our heart. The inability to see and understand what we should from the works of God is due to the condition of our heart. The heart of a person that has not been born again filters everything they see and interprets it in the wrong way. As an example; God made the world and everything in it to display His glory as its Creator. The person that has been born again sees the works of God in His creation and is able to recognize His glorious fingerprints in everything He has made. The person that has not been born again looks at the exact same things and sees a cosmic coincidence, or evolutionary process, or the work of some false god of their own imagination. The new birth is a necessary prerequisite to see and hear clearly the messages of the Lord in all His works. Even Israel, which was given so much, could not see what they should see because the Lord had not given them new hearts in the new birth. This is why Jesus insisted on the absolute necessity of the new birth. "Do not be amazed that I said to you, 'You must be born again.'" (John 3:7).

***29:16-20 - "(for you know how we lived in the land of Egypt, and how we came through the midst of the nations through which you passed; moreover, you have seen their abominations and their idols of wood, stone, silver, and gold, which they had with them); so that there will not be among you a man or woman, or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of those nations; that there will not be among you a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood. It shall be when he hears the words of this curse, that he will boast, saying, 'I have peace though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart in order to destroy the watered land with the dry.' The LORD shall never be willing to forgive him, but rather the anger of the LORD and His jealousy will burn against that man, and every curse which is written in this book will rest on him, and the LORD will blot out his name from under heaven."***

This section is a warning for Israel aimed at alerting the nation to a future danger. The specific danger in view here is that once they conquer and settle the

Promised Land that any one person, family or tribe among them would become like "a root bearing poisonous fruit and wormwood." The Lord gives a similar New Covenant warning in the book of Hebrews. "See to it that no one comes short of the grace of God; that no root of bitterness springing up causes trouble, and by it many be defiled;" (Hebrews 12:5). The root of bitterness in Hebrews is equivalent to the poisonous root of wormwood in Deuteronomy. Wormwood is an herb that is poisonous in high concentrations. This connection helps to clarify that the passage in Hebrews is not warning merely about people who are emotionally bitter. The bitterness in view here is a dangerous poison to the spiritual health of the people of God.

The specific poison that calls for this warning is described further on in this passage in Deuteronomy. "It shall be when he hears the words of this curse, that he will boast, saying, 'I have peace though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart...' The kind of person described here is arrogantly rebellious toward the Lord and has dangerously convinced themselves that they can turn away from the Lord, turn to the false gods of the nations, and disregard the laws of God and continue to enjoy peace with God in spite of their disobedience. The concern of this warning is not so much for the arrogant person affected, but for all the people around that person that are in danger of being influenced by them. This kind of spiritual arrogance which disregards the holiness of God and ignores His righteous standards is like a deadly disease which infects an otherwise healthy body. Unless recognized and treated, the disease will spread throughout the body. Israel in the Old Covenant and the church in the New Covenant must be on guard against such deadly spiritual influences that erupt in their midst.

The Lord's response toward this kind of person is fearful and permanent. When the Lord declares that He will never be willing to forgive such a one, we can be sure of the level of seriousness to have stirred such a strong response in Him. There is no greater description of deserved judgment than to proclaim that every curse written in the Law will rest upon this person. Even further, the Lord will blot out their name from under heaven. This is similar to the warning of deadly consequences that Paul issued to those that turned from the truth of the gospel of Christ and arrogantly twisted the message of salvation into false gospel. "I am amazed that you are so quickly deserting Him who called you by the grace of Christ, for a different gospel; which is really not another; only there are some who are disturbing you and want to distort the gospel of Christ. But even if we, or an angel from heaven, should preach to you a gospel contrary to what we have preached to you, he is to be accursed! As we have said before, so I say again now, if any man is preaching to you a gospel contrary to what you received, he is to be accursed!" (Galatians 1:6-9).

***29:29 - "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, that we may observe all the words of this law."***

We should be clear about the secret things of the Lord compared to the revealed things from this verse. The context which precedes this verse involves a description of the future consequences that Israel will face as a nation because of their continuing disobedience toward the Lord. Moses prophetically anticipates a future time when the land of Israel will lie devastated by the outpoured judgments of the Lord. Strangers will pass through the land and wonder how such a blessed and beautiful land could have become such a wasteland. The answer given will identify this result as the work of God, and not any natural disaster. Because Israel was hearing these words of future devastation before they even entered into the Promised Land, the normal response would have been for their natural curiosity to want to know when, where and how this would happen in detail. The Lord did not provide a detailed answer to their curiosity. Instead, this single verse about the secret and revealed things is His response.

The point of this verse is this; it was not necessary for Israel to know the details of their future failures and when exactly the Lord would respond in judgment to their rebellion. The reason the Lord does not give Israel such information is that it would not benefit them to know, and instead would only tempt them to abuse that knowledge. If Israel knew that judgment would come on a specific date, they would be inclined to complacently delay their repentance and obedience until just before that date. The Lord answers that His future dealings with them are among the secret things that belong only to Him. We don't need details of the future in order to live as we should in the present. The emphasis for us is placed on the things that have been revealed. The revealed things are the words of God. What God has caused to be written for us in the Scriptures belong to us forever. The revealed words of God become our responsibility. The contrast between future knowable but hidden things and present revealed things shows us that the Lord has already blessed us with everything necessary to live God pleasing lives. "Grace and peace be multiplied to you in the knowledge of God and of Jesus our Lord; seeing that His divine power has granted to us everything pertaining to life and godliness, through the true knowledge of Him who called us by His own glory and excellence. For by these He has granted to us His precious and magnificent promises..." (II Peter 1:2-4).

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## Deuteronomy 30

***30:1-3 - "And when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, and return to the LORD your God, you and your children, and obey his voice in all that I command you today, with all your heart and with all your soul, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, and he will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you."***

The previous chapter ended with a somewhat mysterious reference by the Lord to secret things that belong only to Him. That statement came after a description of a serious future failure by Israel in its relationship with the Lord and the judgment of the Lord that would result in Israel being uprooted from the land. This portion beginning chapter 30 helps to clarify the meaning of the Lord's reference to the secret things. In this passage, the Lord describes this future judgment upon Israel as a certain thing. It would happen in Israel's future exactly as the Lord described it would. This was not one of many future possibilities in an uncertain future based upon statistical probabilities and "chance." The future was and is known to the Lord. When these life shaking and nation shattering events happened, Israel would be inclined to conclude that their lives were spinning out of control. That would be true in one sense as the events that would seize hold of their lives would prove just how little control they had over their own life circumstances. At the same time, they needed to learn that all of these things were under control of the Lord.

The key to understanding these future events would be experienced in a moment of spiritual comprehension in the midst of circumstances of covenant judgment. Israel would experience this moment of comprehension when they would "call them to mind" only after being led away captive into the nations that the Lord would use to discipline them and they spiritually awoke to remember that all of this happened as the Lord had warned in the curses of the covenant. What we should see here is the evidence of the sovereignty of God at work in the hearts of His people. Because the Lord's purpose required holiness of His people, and judged them when they chose to violate His holy standards, it was inevitable that they would experience the full weight of the curses of the Law for their rebellion. The mystery was not that Israel would sin and be judged, but in how the Lord could somehow still accomplish His great plan of redemption through such a disobedient and rebellious people. In order for the plan of salvation to be fulfilled as prophecy required, the people of God must be established in the Promised Land at the arrival of the Messiah. However, if Israel was never restored from captivity, that plan could not be fulfilled.

God's sovereignty is the greater theme woven into this description of future restoration of His people to insure His purpose for them will not be ultimately

frustrated. The restoring work of God would begin by causing them to call to mind the blessings and curses of the covenant in their future circumstance of captivity. That remembrance of their covenant accountability would lead to a repentant heart response and a renewed desire to return to the Lord. When the Lord stirred them to return with all their heart and soul to Him, then He promised to restore their circumstances by gathering them out of the nations of their captivity and once again bringing them back to the Promised Land. This entire scenario was not just a theoretical possibility or empty threat. They would live through this. The Babylonian conquest and captivity of the Jews, followed by their eventual return to the land are historical testimony to the hand of God upon their lives. In and through all these events the one key element is the purpose of God and His sovereignty to accomplish that purpose in spite of Israel's weakness and failures.

***30:6 - "And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live."***

This is a critical verse in the Law of God. There was one great problem with the Law. It was a perfect expression of God's holy standards and without flaw in itself. However, the Law is described by Paul as having a weakness. "For God has done what the law, weakened by the flesh, could not do. By sending his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh and for sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, in order that the righteous requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh but according to the Spirit." (Romans 8:3-4). This is the one great weakness of the Law of God. It revealed God's holy standards to His people, but it could not cause them to live according to that standard. The weakness of the Law was the spiritual weakness of the people of God to keep it. The Law perfectly pointed out what to do, but was not able to cause the people to obey it. It was the weakness of the people of God as fallen people who were inclined to disobey and rebel that was the problem. Even a perfect law must be considered weak if no one keeps it.

This verse introduces the one and only solution to the problem of the weakness of the Law. God had two options available to Him to solve this dilemma of Israel's pattern of Law breaking. The first option would be to change the Law by lowering His standards. Since Israel constantly struggled to keep God's laws, He could lower the standard to match their imperfect righteousness. This would be similar to what a teacher does in school when they grade a test on the curve. They lower the standard to accommodate the weakness of the students. This option was out of the question in this case though because the purpose of the Law of God is to reveal God's righteousness and holiness to us. If He were to lower the standards of the Law it would corrupt our perception of His holiness.

The only other solution to the problem of repeated failures by the people to keep the Law is not to change the Law, but to change the people. The real problem was not with the Law itself, but with the people. The Lord gives one of the first

hints in this verse of the spiritual solution He would provide to this problem. The Lord would do something dramatic in the hearts of His people when He restored them from their captivity and gathered them back to the Promised Land. What the Lord would do in them was to perform heart surgery. The surgery in view was spiritual, not physical. He would circumcise their hearts. This description points both backward and forward in time. It points backward to Abraham and what the Lord commanded him to do when He first established His covenant with Abraham. The Lord commanded Abraham to be circumcised in his flesh. This was a permanent change in Abraham's body signifying that he belonged to the Lord from that point forward. However, that physical cut in his body was only ever intended to symbolize a future spiritual circumcision belonging to a new and greater covenant.

"For no one is a Jew who is merely one outwardly, nor is circumcision outward and physical. But a Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter." (Romans 2:28-29). "In him also you were circumcised with a circumcision made without hands, by putting off the body of the flesh, by the circumcision of Christ," (Colossians 2:11). God's solution to the problem of human sin and disobedience to His Law is to change the heart of the person by a spiritual heart surgery. We also call this heart surgery the new birth, or being born again. This is where the Lord removes the old heart which was inclined to sin, and replaces it with a new heart which is inclined to love, obey and honor Him. One of the great lessons of the Law of God is to teach us the need for a new heart.

***30:9-14 - "The LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your womb and in the fruit of your cattle and in the fruit of your ground. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, as he took delight in your fathers, when you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep his commandments and his statutes that are written in this Book of the Law, when you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul. For this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, 'Who will ascend to heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, 'Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?' But the word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it."***

In their restoration to the Promised Land following their spiritual awakening and repentance, the Lord promised to once again make them abundantly prosperous in all of their life circumstances. What we should notice in this section is the description of the Lord's heart attitude in this restoration of blessing for His people. When they repented and returned to Him, He promised to bless them in a particular way. He would once again "take delight" in prospering them. He would not grudgingly bless them while remembering their previous disobedience



and failures. He would gladly bless them as if they had never sinned. This is the depth and extent of the Lord's forgiveness of His people when they truly repent from their hearts. He does not hold anything back in restoring His blessing in their lives. A wonderful example of this delighted response of the Lord to His repentant and returning people is in the response of the father in the parable of the prodigal son. When the son finally came to his senses and returned to his father's home with a heart of real repentance, the father rushed out to meet him, kissed him, and poured out the full blessing of his household upon him. This is the deep mercy and amazing grace of God toward us.

As Israel would return to the Lord at this future point, they would wonder what would be necessary to enable them to remain faithful to the Lord from that point forward. The Lord anticipates their question and focuses their attention where it belongs. The questions that are asked in this passage are the questions Israel would ask at that point of restoration in the future. Would they need to travel to heaven to hear a special message from God that would enable them to remain faithful to Him? Would they need to travel across the sea to find the answer there? The answer to both of these rhetorical questions is a resounding, no! God's message is not found in a difficult to reach location (across the sea), or even an impossible to reach location (heaven). God's message for the rest of their lives, and all they would ever need to know to obey God and please Him was already close at hand. The only message they would ever need was what He had and would reveal to them in His Word.

Paul quotes this portion from Deuteronomy and applies it to God's message in Christ. "For Moses writes about the righteousness that is based on the law, that the person who does the commandments shall live by them. But the righteousness based on faith says, "Do not say in your heart, 'Who will ascend into heaven?'" (that is, to bring Christ down) or "'Who will descend into the abyss?'" (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead). But what does it say? "The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart" (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved." (Romans 10:5-9). The point is that God has not provided any other answer for us than Christ.

***30:19-20 - "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."***

As Israel stands poised to enter the Promised Land, the Lord brings them to a critical point of life choice. He wants them to understand that while He is ultimately in charge of their lives, that each of them has been given the



responsibility by the Lord to make a choice about the direction of their lives. Their choice will become the basis for how their life unfolds from this point. There are only two possible choices. One choice will lead to life and blessings. The other choice will lead to death and curses. The irony of this moment is in considering why anyone who is given such a choice would choose option number two. Why would anyone choose death and curses over life and blessings? The answer is that no one would choose death and curses if all that was involved with the choice was the result. The point is that these two sets of future life experiences are both tied to their relationship with His Law. The choice to obey the Law will lead to life and blessing. The choice to disobey the Law will lead to death and cursing. No one would prefer death and cursing if they could have life and blessing without having to obey the Law.

### **Questions from Deuteronomy 29:**

**Question:** Deut.29:29 refers to secret things. Is this pertaining to the things to come that are not clearly revealed by details in the Bible like the second coming of the Lord?

**Answer:** Yes, the secret things would include details of future events in God's plan that He has not chosen to reveal to us. The timing of the Second Coming of Christ is one of those secret things that no person knows or can know in advance.

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### **Deuteronomy 31**

***31:1-6 - "So Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel. And he said to them, "I am a hundred and twenty years old today; I am no longer able to come and go, and the LORD has said to me, 'You shall not cross this Jordan.' It is the LORD your God who will cross ahead of you; He will destroy these nations before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua is the one who will cross ahead of you, just as the LORD has spoken. The LORD will do to them just as He did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when He destroyed them. The LORD will deliver them up before you, and you shall do to them according to all the commandments which I have commanded you. Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the LORD your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you."***

The end of Israel's journey through the wilderness signals the end of Moses' life. Moses is now 120 years old and he will not join the younger generation of Israel as they cross the Jordan River and enter the Promised Land. The Lord's discipline for the disobedience of Moses when he struck the rock in frustration requires that he die in the wilderness. The death of Moses under this

circumstance of the Lord's judgment is not an ideal death for one who was of such great importance in the plan of God, but his death was not meaningless or wasted. There are at least three spiritual principles that the death of Moses under these circumstances serves to emphasize.

First, his death is a reminder of the seriousness of the sin of disobedience. In our generation especially, we tend to focus all our attention on the mercy and grace of God and overlook that He is also a God of judgment. The Lord will not allow Himself to be treated with contempt and He still attaches serious consequences to our disobedience (especially so in certain key areas of His commands). Paul had to remind the disobedient church in Corinth that several of their church members had endured serious illness because of their disobedience, and some in the church had even died for this reason. "For this reason many among you are weak and sick, and a number sleep." (I Corinthians 11:30). When Paul refers to a number of the Corinthian believers sleeping, he is using a common word picture in that day for death.

The second purpose highlighted by the death of Moses is the principle that spiritual leaders are not above the law. There is an all too common practice in our society that people who rise to positions of authority and influence tend to take advantage of their position of privilege. The abuse of power for personal advantage is a temptation most find difficult to resist. Even in religious institutions this same pattern of sinful abuse is often practiced by the leaders in charge. Jesus directed His most withering rebukes to the religious leaders of His day that knew the laws of God, but used their knowledge to take advantage of others while excusing themselves from the requirements of the law. The death of Moses is a direct commentary from the Lord on this kind of thing. The message of the Lord is that He will personally hold accountable those who hold positions of spiritual leadership over His people. Moses did not "get away" with more than Israel, He got away with less. The Lord held Moses to a stricter, not more lenient standard. This principle carries into the New Covenant. "Let not many of you become teachers, my brethren, knowing that as such we will incur a stricter judgment." (James 3:1).

The third benefit of the death of Moses was a reminder to Israel of the true center of their life. Throughout the forty years of their journey, Israel had come to rely on Moses. Even though he was the target of many of their complaints at their worst moments, Moses was still their only leader, and Israel had come to depend on him for everything. His death would force Israel to remember that their true leader, provider and protector was the Lord and not Moses. The plan of God did not begin with Moses and it would not end with him. Moses could not and would not bring Israel into the Promised Land because it was not Moses that made the promise to Abraham over 400 years before. It was the Lord's promise and it would be the Lord that would fulfill His promise. The death of Moses was like when a child is weaned from its comforting supply of milk. Israel would have to learn to trust the Lord rather than leaning on Moses to trust the Lord for them.

***31:9-13 - "So Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and to all the elders of Israel. Then Moses commanded them, saying, "At the end of every seven years, at the time of the year of remission of debts, at the Feast of Booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing. Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law. Their children, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live on the land which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess."***

Before he died, Moses completed one of his most important assignments from the Lord. He finished writing the Law. The Law included the five books that begin our Bible; Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers and Deuteronomy. These five books would form the spiritual foundation of the holy nation of Israel. The significance of what God had revealed to Moses, and what Moses wrote by God's direction stretches far beyond that one generation of Israel. This Law would be the basis for the covenant connection between the Lord and His people for all succeeding generations of Israel, and continues to serve as the basis for our own relationship with God today.

When Moses finished writing the Law, he gave it to the spiritual leaders of Israel to keep and preserve as a sacred trust for all the generations to follow. This trust was one of the few responsibilities that Israel faithfully maintained throughout the years. Each generation of leaders protected and preserved the scrolls of the Law. As the scrolls eventually aged and wore out, they were carefully copied word for word and letter for letter. Each copy was meticulously checked and rechecked by other priests trained for this responsibility. The goal was for each generation of God's people to have a readable and accurate written record of the words God had originally revealed to Moses.

The Lord commanded Israel to gather together in a great assembly once every seven years. In conjunction with the Feast of Booths, the leaders responsible for keeping the scrolls of the Law were to bring out the scrolls and read the entire Law out loud to all of Israel. The audience for this reading was all the men, women, children and resident aliens in the land. In other words, since the Law applied to all of their lives as the standard of God, everyone was to hear it read together. The purpose of this reading was to remind everyone of the words of God. They did not have the privileged access we have today to their own copy of the Word of God. I personally own probably 30 copies of the Bible in various translations both in print and in software. I can open the Bible whenever I choose and read it. For these people, the only copy of the Bible was preserved by the priests in the tabernacle. This periodic reading of the Law was the only access to hear the words of God that they had.

***31:19-22 - "Now therefore, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the sons of Israel; put it on their lips, so that this song may be a witness for Me against the sons of Israel. For when I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and are satisfied and become prosperous, then they will turn to other gods and serve them, and spurn Me and break My covenant. Then it shall come about, when many evils and troubles have come upon them, that this song will testify before them as a witness (for it shall not be forgotten from the lips of their descendants); for I know their intent which they are developing today, before I have brought them into the land which I swore." So Moses wrote this song the same day, and taught it to the sons of Israel."***

The song that is referenced in this passage is written for us in the next chapter of Deuteronomy. It is referred to as the Song of Moses. This is not a popular song for entertainment purposes. It was a song inspired by the Lord and revealed to Moses for the worship of Israel. It is interesting that the Lord chose to communicate these concepts in the format of music. The purpose of speaking to Israel in the form of a song was to make the words more easily remembered by Israel. Since they did not have regular access to read the Scriptures for themselves, the song provided a way for them to easily remember the core message of the covenant. Music is a useful memory aid. Singing important information makes it easier to remember than speaking it.

Moses was to teach this song to Israel. The Lord wanted each generation to learn the song from their parents and in turn to pass it on to their own children. The Lord appointed this song as a critically necessary point of accountability against inevitable future failure by Israel. The Lord gives a clear prophetic announcement here about Israel's spiritual wanderings in the years to come. When (not if) they turn away from the Lord and turn to various false gods of the nations around them, this song would become an anchor point. The time would come when the hearts of the people would drift so far from the Lord that the song would only remain as a cultural habit. But when they sang it, the Lord would use the content of the lyrics to remind them of Him and His ways, and to convict them of their disregard for Him. They would forget Him, but they would not forget the song, and using the song, the Lord would spark again in them the fire of their covenant relationship with Him.

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## Deuteronomy 32

***32:1-5 - "Give ear, O heavens, and let me speak; And let the earth hear the words of my mouth. Let my teaching drop as the rain, My speech distill as the dew, As the droplets on the fresh grass And as the showers on the herb. For I proclaim the name of the LORD; Ascribe greatness to our God! The Rock! His work is perfect, For all His ways are just; A God of faithfulness and without injustice, Righteous and upright is He. They have acted corruptly toward Him, They are not His children, because of their defect; But are a perverse and crooked generation."***

This is the song of Moses that the Lord inspired Moses to write for a critical time in the future. Israel's relationship with the Lord had been shaky throughout the forty year wilderness journey due to Israel's tendency to base their commitment to the Lord on the relative comfort of their circumstances. However, as shaky as things had been, the relationship between the Lord and Israel would deteriorate to a severe degree in the generations to follow. The Lord gave this song to His people to speak to them at that lowest moment when their hearts were not listening to Him in the words of the Law any longer. This communication in song would be remembered and would be used by the Holy Spirit to awaken in their rebellious and distant hearts the conviction of the Lord. It was a song of mercy and grace from the Lord for their restoration. It was similar to how the Lord will use a well known hymn of faith to convict hearts that are not listening to any preacher or open declaration of the Word of God. It is interesting how the song Amazing Grace for instance can convict even the hardest of hearts when no other spiritual communication will even be heard.

The song has several sections to it. As a whole, the purpose of the song is to convict the wayward hearts of Israel and to lead them back to the Lord. It begins with an interesting declaration directed not to Israel, but to the heavens and the earth, as though they should listen to this song. The heavens and the earth are seen in a special role in the beginning of the song. They are called to hear the song as two witnesses. The scene that the Lord is setting here is that He is calling Israel to accountability in a legal setting. The issue at hand is that the Lord and Israel have a covenant relationship. The Lord has been faithful to the covenant, but Israel has not. The Lord is bringing Israel to justice and calls two witnesses as required by the Law to hear the case between the Lord and Israel. The witnesses the Lord calls to hear the case are the heavens and earth. The concept is that all of creation has seen the faithfulness of the Lord and the unfaithfulness of Israel.

The first section of the song is concerned with establishing the case for the Lord in this relationship and testifying to His character and track record in the course of the relationship. In times of trial in the wilderness, when Israel was upset about their circumstances, the people would complain about the Lord and what He had done for them, or failed to do according to their desires and expectations. These

complaints were the accusations of their hearts against the Lord. They accused Him of not caring for them as He should have. The Lord answers their accusations in the opening of the song. Moses declares that only greatness should be ascribed to God. Any description of Him and His actions that in any way diminishes His greatness must be answered with the truth. The Lord's character and works are on trial here. An accurate examination of the evidence will come to this conclusion; the Lord's work is perfect, all His ways are just, He is a God of faithfulness without injustice and is righteous.

There is failure in the relationship, but the failure belongs 100% on the record of Israel and 0% on the record of the Lord. They are the ones that acted corruptly toward Him. Their accusations were really self-incriminating. It amazes me when believers fall into this same pattern as Israel, and presume to call the Lord's character and actions into question when some circumstance in their lives did not go the way they thought that it should. If we really believe the Lord is even capable of capricious and unrighteous actions, we should not be shocked that we struggle to worship a God with such flaws.

***32:9-10 - "For the LORD'S portion is His people; Jacob is the allotment of His inheritance. He found him in a desert land, And in the howling waste of a wilderness; He encircled him, He cared for him, He guarded him as the pupil of His eye."***

Jacob represents all of Israel in this portion. Israel enjoyed the special privilege of covenant connection with the Lord because the Lord found them and chose them as His own. Israel did not find the Lord, He found them. The distinction is key. All of the initiative in the covenant relationship between the Lord and His people rests with the Lord and not them. Had He not sought them out and found them, they would have remained lost and wandering in the howling waste of the wilderness of this world. He sought them out and chose them as the special objects of His attention and love. He encircled them and in the same way He encircles our lives. The encircling of the Lord means that He is greater than us and that His presence overshadows our entire life. He is above us, beneath us, in front of us, behind us, to the left and the right of us. His presence with all of the gracious blessings that flow from Him is the dominant reality of our lives. The New Testament way of describing this concept is Paul's repeated description of the believer living "in Christ."

The truth of our covenant relationship with Him is that His care for us is far greater than we can imagine. Where ever we go and what ever we may encounter, His encircling care for us is the story of our lives. Moses uses a wonderful word picture in this passage to capture the extent of the Lord's intimate care for His people. "He guarded him as the pupil of His eye." The phrase "pupil of His eye" is the word picture. Older translations use a more familiar phrasing for this concept. It was formerly called the "apple of His eye." That poetic phrase has always been known to describe that which is most prized and valued by the one



caring for the other. Moses is describing the depth of the Lord's care for His people. However, the original meaning of the word picture is somewhat lost in our translations. The pupil of the eye is a technically correct translation of the language, but it misses the point. Literally, the way this was originally communicated, the word picture refers to the "little man of the eye." The little man of the eye was the tiny reflection in the pupil of the eye of the other person when they looked at the first person in close proximity to them. The imagery of the word picture describes the Lord in such close proximity to Israel that they could be seen as the little man reflected in the eyes of the Lord. To see such a reflection in another person's eyes requires an almost nose to nose closeness. Moses is declaring that the Lord guarded Israel with such close and intimate care.

***32:11 - "Like an eagle that stirs up its nest, That hovers over its young, He spread His wings and caught them, He carried them on His pinions."***

Moses now enlists another word picture to further describe the Lord's relationship to His people. In this word picture the Lord compares Himself to an eagle. A mother eagle is in view here. She has given birth to her young which are the people of Israel. All the expected care of a mother for her young is included in this picture, but a specific element of a mother eagle's care is the focus in this picture. When a mother eagle prepares for her young, she first builds a nest for her eggs. Usually a high and hard to reach spot is chosen for the nest to make it inaccessible to predators. The mother eagle will gather sticks and twigs and build a nest large and strong enough to sustain the weight of a growing brood of young eagles. Then on top of the sticks, the mother eagle will gather leaves and other softer materials from the surrounding environment to create a cushion between her young chicks and the prickly ends of the sticks and twigs of the nest. Not content with that level of comfort, the mother eagle will then sacrificially pluck the soft down feathers with her beak from her own chest to create a snuggly lining for the nest to lay under her eggs. The newly hatched chicks will enjoy the special comfort of this nest until the time eventually comes for them to learn to fly.

In order for the young eaglets to leave the nest of their comfort, the mother eagle must forcefully nudge them toward maturity. Without that nudge, the young eaglets would be content to remain in their downy home being fed on cue by their mother forever. To nudge them, the mother eagle spreads her great wings and rises directly above the nest. From there she hovers and flaps her wings. The turbulence created by her wings blows all the down and then the leaves underneath out of the nest. Only the prickly sticks remain. This is motivation enough for the young eagles to venture out for their first flight. The mother is willing to discomfort her own children in order to cause them to stretch their own wings and grow. Then, when her young take that leap out of the nest, she swoops beneath them to provide a living safety net for their fall. She will over and over bear them back up to the nest until they learn how to fly and not just fall.



The image is all about the relationship of the Lord with Israel. It is the same for our own relationship with Him. Our common experience as we come to know the Lord is the warm and fuzzy comfort of the Lord's special care for us in the early days of our walk with Him. The more we grow up spiritually, the more it seems that we encounter progressively discomfiting circumstances. We should not interpret the increasing difficulty of our circumstances as evidence of the Lord's diminishing care. Instead we should understand that the Lord is using the circumstance to cause us to grow. The discomfort is actually an evidence of His love for us, but it is a love that refuses to allow us to remain in immaturity.

***32:48-52 - "The LORD spoke to Moses that very same day, saying, "Go up to this mountain of the Abarim, Mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab opposite Jericho, and look at the land of Canaan, which I am giving to the sons of Israel for a possession. Then die on the mountain where you ascend, and be gathered to your people, as Aaron your brother died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people, because you broke faith with Me in the midst of the sons of Israel at the waters of Meribah-kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin, because you did not treat Me as holy in the midst of the sons of Israel. For you shall see the land at a distance, but you shall not go there, into the land which I am giving the sons of Israel."***

This exchange is a private word from the Lord to His special servant Moses. We are allowed to listen in on what the Lord says to Moses so that we can understand something of the ways of God in His dealings with His servants. Moses was the greatest among all the children of Israel. Yet, as the leader of the people and the representative of the Lord, Moses was not allowed greater freedom to violate the Lord's standards. Instead he was held to a higher standard of accountability. This word from the Lord concerned the timing and circumstances of the death of Moses. It expresses a disciplinary judgment of the Lord in the life of Moses. The discipline was that Moses was restricted from personally entering the Promised Land. Moses had looked for forty years with hope and anticipation to the day that he would set foot on the land that God had promised to Abraham. This judgment from the Lord made clear that Moses would not be allowed to go with Israel across the Jordan River into the land. The Lord sent Moses to the summit of Mount Nebo which overlooked the crossing point into Canaan. From there, the Lord allowed Moses to look across and see with his own eyes, the land of promise, but he would die there on Nebo.

The reason the Lord pronounced and carried out this judgment upon Moses was deserved. Moses had disobeyed the clear command of the Lord in a moment of great frustration with Israel. Moses ruined the symbolic actions of the Lord by striking the rock twice to bring forth water for the complaining Israelites to drink. That rock spiritually represented Christ. Years before, the Lord had commanded Moses to strike the rock with the rod of God to bring forth water for Israel. The symbolism represented the judgment of God in the death of Christ on the cross. The single striking of the rock was meant to picture the necessity of the death of

Christ for our salvation. However, when Moses later struck the rock twice, he was communicating in symbol that more than the one death of Christ was necessary for our salvation. God judged the disobedience of Moses and the corruption of His spiritual type in the striking of the rock by excluding Moses from the experience of the Promised Land.

This instruction of the Lord for Moses leading to his death shows us that the Lord is compassionate and merciful toward His servant even when He is judging him. The Lord sent him up the mountain to bless Moses with a personal glimpse of the Promised Land. Though he was not allowed to go there himself, this experience confirmed to his heart the certainty of the Lord's faithfulness to take Israel where they had together been working to lead for the last forty years. It's a poignant final scene of the life of the Lord's mostly faithful servant as he walks up the slopes of Nebo knowing his life and mission are reached the end. His last sight before he closes his eyes in death is of the land of God's promise.