

Becoming GOD's People

Focal Verses • Deuteronomy 29:2–15

Aim for Change

By the end of the lesson, we will: **KNOW** how God delivered His people from bondage and provided for them, **FEEL** peace when remembering how God provided for His people, and **COMMIT** to trusting God more.

In Focus

The year 1912 was a momentous one for the nation of South Africa. In that year, the African National Congress (ANC) was founded and one of the nation's most outstanding leaders, Walter Max Ulyate Sisulu, was born. In 1940, Sisulu ventured into politics by joining the ANC. In 1952, the ANC initiated the “Defiance Campaign,” which called for people to disregard all unjust laws peacefully. The White-led apartheid government cracked down on the ANC and other participants in the campaign, arresting more than 8500 people, including Sisulu. In 1960, the government passed legislation designed to maintain racial segregation. The government's apartheid policy of discrimination and segregation enraged the citizens of color in South Africa and other African nations. It also drew criticism from most other countries and economic embargoes from some. Under mounting civil unrest and global pressure, the South African government finally released Sisulu from prison on October 15, 1989. A year later, the government lifted the ban on the ANC. In April 1994, South Africa held its first election in which Blacks were allowed to vote. In the elections, Blacks finally gained control of the government.

In today's lesson, Moses reviews the history of the Israelites' deliverance from Egyptian bondage and God's provision for them during their wilderness wanderings. Why is it important to remember the challenges our communities have faced in the past?

Keep in Mind

“That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day.” (Deuteronomy 29:12, KJV)

KJV

Deuteronomy 29:2–15

2 And Moses called unto all Israel, and said unto them, Ye have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land;

3 The great temptations which thine eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles:

4 Yet the LORD hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.

5 And I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot.

6 Ye have not eaten bread, neither have ye drunk wine or strong drink: that ye might know that I am the LORD your God.

7 And when ye came unto this place, Sihon the king of Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, came out against us unto battle, and we smote them:

8 And we took their land, and gave it for an inheritance unto the Reubenites, and to the Gadites, and to the half tribe of Manasseh.

9 Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do.

10 Ye stand this day all of you before the LORD your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel,

11 Your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water:

12 That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day:

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13 That he may establish thee to day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

14 Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath;

15 But with him that standeth here with us this day before the LORD our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day.

NLT

Deuteronomy 29:2–15

2 Moses summoned all the Israelites and said to them, “You have seen with your own eyes everything the LORD did in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to his whole country—

3 all the great tests of strength, the miraculous signs, and the amazing wonders.

4 But to this day the LORD has not given you minds that understand, nor eyes that see, nor ears that hear!

5 For forty years I led you through the wilderness, yet your clothes and sandals did not wear out.

6 You ate no bread and drank no wine or other alcoholic drink, but he provided for you so you would know that he is the LORD your God.

7 When we came here, King Sihon of Heshbon and King Og of Bashan came out to fight against us, but we defeated them.

8 We took their land and gave it to the tribes of Reuben and Gad and to the half-tribe of Manasseh as their grant of land.

9 Therefore, obey the terms of this covenant so that you will prosper in everything you do.

10 All of you—tribal leaders, elders, officers, all the men of Israel—are standing today in the presence of the LORD your God.

11 Your little ones and your wives are with you, as well as the foreigners living among you who chop your wood and carry your water.

12 You are standing here today to enter into the covenant of the LORD your God. The LORD is making this covenant, including the curses.

13 By entering into the covenant today, he will establish you as his people and confirm that he is your God, just as he promised you and as he swore to your ancestors Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

14 But you are not the only ones with whom I am making this covenant with its curses.

15 I am making this covenant both with you who stand here today in the presence of the LORD our God, and also with the future generations who are not standing here today.”

The People, Places, and Times

God's Covenants with Abraham and His Descendants. These covenants are clear statements of God's purposes and intentions. God bound Himself by oath to honor all His promises. Through each covenant, God was saying, “I will be your God and you will be my people.” At the heart of these covenants were (1) the terms for God, (2) the terms for humans, and (3) a statement of cursings for breaking the covenant and blessings for keeping it.

God's terms include unbreakable promises. Our terms involve believing God's promises and acting on them through obedience to God's Word. It is our faith in God that brings the blessings of a covenant relationship with Him and the experience of His promises being fulfilled in our lives.

Some examples of covenants God made with His people are: 1. The Noahic Covenant (Genesis 9), 2. The Abrahamic Covenant (Genesis 12, 15, and 17), 3. The Mosaic Covenant (Exodus 20), 4. The Davidic Covenant (2 Samuel 7), and 5. The New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:33-34). Jesus Christ is the fulfillment of God's covenantal relationship with Israel that now includes all who are saved by grace through faith in Him.

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Background

The book consists of three farewell sermons delivered by the elderly Moses at the entrance to the Promised Land. In this message, the old prophet renewed the covenant for the sake of the new generation of Israelites. Moses knew he would not be allowed to go into the Promised Land, so he wanted to ensure that the new generation of Israelites kept God's Word close to their hearts and obeyed the Lord's instructions. A characteristic of Deuteronomy is the admonition to "remember," which appears 13 times in the book. The people are admonished to remember all of God's gracious works on their behalf and to obey all previously revealed truth.

In his first sermon, Moses recaps the history of God's deliverance of the Israelites from Egyptian bondage and His daily provision for them throughout their 40 years of wandering in the wilderness (Deuteronomy 1:1–4:40). In his second message, Moses restates the people's moral duties, describing how they should conduct themselves as God's people. It also emphasizes their ceremonial duties, such as sacrifices, and their civil and social duties related to the law and social justice (4:44–26:19). In the final sermon (27:1–30:20), Moses outlines the terms under which the Israelites would enter into the Promised Land.

At-A-Glance

1. Remember God's Provision
(Deuteronomy 29:2–8)
2. Respect God's Covenant (vv. 9–15)

In Depth

1. Remember God's Provision (Deuteronomy 29:2–8)

Moses called all the Israelites together to remind them of how God delivered them from slavery in Egypt and provided for them over the last 40 years. He begins by reminding them that they were eyewitnesses to God's triumph over Pharaoh, his subjects, and the entire country of Egypt. The Israelites had personally witnessed "the great temptations which thine eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles" (Deuteronomy 29:3). The word "temptations" would be better translated as "trials." Trials are not inherently bad situations; they are responses to external challenges. Signs are extraordinary occurrences that point to supernatural causes. Miracles are incidents whereby God temporarily overrides the laws of nature to accomplish His will. The ten curses of Egypt (Exodus 7:14–11:10) were all miracles designed as trials for the Egyptians and signs for the Israelites.

God's grace toward the Israelites did not end after their deliverance from slavery. During the 40 years of wilderness wandering, neither their clothes nor their shoes wore out (Deuteronomy 29:3-5). Instead of eating bread, they were fed with manna from heaven. Instead of drinking wine, they were provided with fresh water through a small tree (Exodus 15:22-25) and from stones (17:1-6; Numbers 20:1-11). God protected them from the might of kings bent on their destruction. The Israelites defeated Sihon, the king in Heshbon, and Og, king of Bashan (Numbers 21:21-35; Deuteronomy 29:7-8). The land of the two kings on the east side of the Jordan River was divided between the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and Manasseh after Israel defeated them. Moses reminds the people that God fought for them. Why is it important to remember that God fights for us?

2. Respect God's Covenant (vv. 9–15)

After rehearsing God's wondrous works on their behalf, Moses issues a two-part command: "Keep therefore the words of this covenant" and "do them" (v. 9). The Israelites are to gain knowledge of God's Word so that they can do God's Word. It is not enough to know; the Israelites must practice the instructions given to them by God. Moses emphasizes the solemnity of the occasion by reminding the people that they were standing in the very presence of God (v. 10). All the people—regardless of rank, gender, or social standing—

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were bound by the precepts of the covenant. This new generation was entering into the covenant even as the generation that perished in the wilderness had before them. The elements of the covenant were the same as those of the covenant God had made previously. The purpose of this gathering was to renew their agreement to the terms and conditions of the covenant.

Because God originally cut this covenant with Abraham (Genesis 15:9–21) and confirmed it with the first generation (Exodus 24:3–8), there was no need for any new animal sacrifice. Instead, God sealed the covenant with an oath. This oath bound God to carry out all His promises to the people. According to the writer of Hebrews, the oath also served as a reminder to future generations of the unchanging nature of God's promises (Hebrews 6:16–17).

In this oath, God promises two things: to be the God of His people and to prosper His people if they obey Him. Being God's people meant that the Israelites could depend on God for their protection, peace, and prosperity. Having the one true God as their God was an everlasting guarantee of God's close and personal presence among them and His unconditional love for them. These two promises are also foundational to the New Covenant (Jeremiah 31:31–34; also in Hebrews 8:8–10). This covenantal relationship was not just for those who had assembled to ratify it; it included the future generations of believers (Deuteronomy 29:14–15). What do God's concerns for future believers reveal about His character?

Search the Scriptures

1. How did Moses describe God's power in defeating Pharaoh and all of Egypt, thereby securing the freedom of the Israelites (Deuteronomy 29:3)?
2. Despite all they had witnessed, why did the Israelites not truly understand the significance of what God had done for them (v. 4)?
3. Which three groups inherited the land the Israelites had won in battle on the east side of the Jordan River (v. 8)?

Discuss the Meaning

1. How would you explain the difference between so-called common sense and spiritual discernment?
2. Many people limit prosperity to material blessings. What other ways can you think of that God might prosper those people who are in a new covenant relationship with Him?

Liberating Lesson

Like the Israelites, we need to remember our legacy and how God is still emancipating us and bringing us into the Promised Land. In times of trouble, we can rehearse how God provided when there was no other way. We can determine to love, trust, and obey Him because He is a God worthy to be praised. He is also faithful to His children. Write down some ways God has provided for you in your life, so that you can remember them better when tempted to forget.

Application for Activation

The foundational blessings of being God's people are the guarantees of peace, prosperity, and protection. Over the next week, prayerfully study Psalm 91. Then, make a list of how God has fulfilled these promises in your life.

More Light on the Text

Deuteronomy 29:2–15

2 And Moses called unto all Israel, and said unto them, Ye have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land.

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The term “all Israel” (Heb. kol-yisra’el, KOLE-yis-row-ALE) is the nation of Israel with all its members (cf. vv. 10–11). Moses addresses Israel as a united community. As they face the future, they are urged to recall the past and “all that the LORD did before [their] eyes in the land of Egypt” (v. 2; cf. Exodus 19:4). There are great lessons to be learned from the past. By saying, “Ye have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes,” Moses knew unquestionably that some of the people who stood before him had not seen those things personally. Most of those who saw them had died in the desert.

3 The great temptations which thine eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles.

The words “temptations,” “signs,” and “miracles” are also used in the Exodus narrative (Exodus 4:17; 7:3; 8:23; 10:1–2; 11:9–10). The word “temptations” (Heb. massa, mas-SAW) refers to the testing of Pharaoh through the plagues. The word “signs” (Heb. ‘oth, OTH) is any distinguishing mark, not necessarily of a strange or miraculous nature, which points beyond itself to the thing signified. The word “miracles” (Heb. mopet, mo-FET) refers to an unusual phenomenon that requires explanation. These terms refer to the plagues brought upon Egypt (cf. Deuteronomy 4:34; 6:22; 7:18-19).

4 Yet the LORD hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day. Those who witnessed the mighty acts of God did not understand them. They had lived amid many manifestations of divine care and power, but they lacked the deeper insight needed to discern the deeper significance behind the external events. They needed the understanding that only the Lord could give. The Lord had not given the people heart[s] (Heb. leb, LABE; the seat of man’s intellect and will; see Deuteronomy 15:10; Isaiah 6:10; Jeremiah 5:23) to perceive (Heb. yada, yaw-DAH) or to know. He had not yet given the people “eyes to see, and ears to hear” because they were incredulous and disobedient. They failed to recognize the deeds of the Lord (cf. Isaiah 6:9-10; Ezekiel 3:4–11; 2 Corinthians 3:12–18). We must learn from their example not to delay any longer, but to wake up and pay attention to the deeds of God.

5 And I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot. The address of Moses shifts to provide a direct quote from the Lord. It is a rhetorical description of God’s care and provision for His people. The people were to remember the 40 years when God guided them through the desert to humble them and test the state of their hearts (Deuteronomy 8:2). During this time, God marvelously provided for His people. Their clothes and shoes were not “waxen old” (Heb. balah, baw-LAW); literally, they did not “fall off from age” or “waste away through age” (Deuteronomy 8:4; Nehemiah 9:21).

6 Ye have not eaten bread, neither have ye drunk wine or strong drink: that ye might know that I am the LORD your God.

The Lord provided for the nourishment of His people. He fed them with manna. He intended to show them that man does not live by bread alone. The power to sustain life does not rest upon the nourishment of the body alone; life-giving power is found in every word that proceeds from the mouth of the Lord. His revealed will preserves life (see Deuteronomy 8:3; Isaiah 38:16). The verb “know” (Heb. yada, yaw-DAH) is used in the sense “to legally recognize or acknowledge” (see Exodus 33:12; Deuteronomy 9:24). Israel is called to acknowledge the providential care of the Lord and obey Him as their God.

7 And when ye came unto this place, Sihon the king of Heshbon, and Og the king of Bashan, came out against us unto battle, and we smote them: 8 And we took their land, and gave it for an inheritance unto the Reubenites, and to the Gadites, and to the half tribe of Manasseh.

Further evidence of the Lord’s care in the past years is pointed out. He gave strategic military victories to His people against all odds (Deuteronomy 2:26–3:12). The reference is to the conquest of areas to the east of the Jordan River (Numbers 21:21–35). The Lord took the land of people who were utterly corrupt and gave it to Israel (Leviticus 18:24–25; Deuteronomy 9:4–5). Three tribes inherited the land east of the Jordan River: Reuben, Gad, and the half tribe of Manasseh (Deuteronomy 3:12–22).

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9 Keep therefore the words of this covenant, and do them, that ye may prosper in all that ye do.

An appeal is made to the people to faithfully observe all the terms of the covenant (see 8:18) and to act wisely. Bear in mind, however, that the Lord Himself is the wisdom of His people and that the search for this wisdom brings prosperity and salvation (see Joshua 1:7–8). Thus, the covenant has an immediate appeal, a present relevance. It inspires renewed confidence in the God who meets their immediate needs.

10 Ye stand this day all of you before the LORD your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel.

The verb “stand” (Heb. natsab, naw-TSAB) has the reflexive meaning “you have taken your stand.” The same usage is found in Exodus 7:15 and 17:9. The covenant assembly is described in detail. The whole nation, without a single exception, stood before the Lord. The list starts with the tribal heads, the officials, and all the men of Israel. “Elders” (Heb. zagen, zaw-KANE) designates those traditionally responsible for the administration of justice in the community (Deuteronomy 16:18–17:7). The word “officers” (Heb. shoter, sho-TARE) refers to those who were administrative assistants to the judges (see 1:15).

11 Your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water.

The description of the covenant assembly continues with the children, the women, and the resident aliens. The word “stranger” (Heb. ger, GARE) or “sojourner” refers to a landless and therefore economically weak individual who for some reason is living either temporarily or permanently away from the land of their own tribe or people (see Deuteronomy 1:16; 5:14; 14:29). Usually a non-Israelite, he is regularly commended to the kindness of the people of God (see 14:29; 16:11, 14; 26:11). Finally, the

covenant assembly included the lowest servant, “the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water” (cf. Joshua 9:21, 23, 27). Although this person is socially lower class and responsible for the most menial tasks, they are important in the eyes of the Lord and are to be included as part of the covenant people (cf. Deuteronomy 10:17).

12 That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day.

The purpose of the assembly was to “enter into covenant with the LORD,” or literally, “that you may pass over into the covenant of the LORD” (see Genesis 15:17–18; 2 Chronicles 15:12). “To enter into” expresses entire entrance or to go entirely through. The word “oath” (Heb. alah,aw-LAW) also means “curse.” Covenants were always confirmed or accompanied by an oath (cf. Genesis 26:28; Ezekiel 17:18). The oath by which allegiance to the covenant was sworn involved a self-cursing formula to guard against disobedience. A person who enters a covenant places himself in a position where curses will fall upon him if he violates the covenant obligations. Here, the people are summoned to enter the covenant of the Lord, namely, to enter inwardly and make it an affair of the heart and life.

13 That he may establish thee to day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. 14 Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath;

The Lord, through the covenant, wanted to establish Israel as His people. “Establish” (Heb. qum, KOOM) means to exalt or set up (also in Deuteronomy 28:9). He wanted to be their God in accordance with the promise made to the patriarchs. The correlation between “a people unto himself” and “be unto thee a God” is a recurring theme in the Bible (cf. Exodus 19:5; Deuteronomy 26:17–18; 28:9). The covenant was made not only with those who were present. Its obligation extends beyond the generation that had direct and immediate experience of the Lord and His covenant.

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15 But with him that standeth here with us this day before the LORD our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day.

Both those who were present and their descendants were included in this covenant to become a blessing for all nations (cf. 5:2-3; John 17:20; Acts 2:39). Thus, present and future generations were to enter a covenant relationship with God. The genealogical continuity of the covenant proceeds from the Lord's faithfulness in extending His blessing to all who obey Him. Each new generation must renew the covenant for itself and respond to the Lord. They must accept His Word for themselves in "this day" or "today."

Daily Bible Readings

MONDAY

Exodus 32–34

Psalm 20

TUESDAY

Exodus 35–37

Psalm 21:1-7

WEDNESDAY

Exodus 38–40

Psalm 21:8-13

THURSDAY

Leviticus 1–4

Psalm 22:1-10

FRIDAY

Leviticus 5–7

Psalm 22:11-21

SATURDAY

Leviticus 8–10

Psalm 22:22-31

SUNDAY

Leviticus 11–13

Psalm 23