

## Session 12: Deuteronomy 27-30

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This is Dr. Cynthia Parker and her teaching on the book of Deuteronomy. This is Session 12, Deuteronomy 27 - 30.

### **Introduction & Suzerain-Vassal Treaties**

We are looking at chapters 27 to 30. Now, we just finished off the law code, and so just to place within the larger book, the big picture of Deuteronomy, you may recall at the very beginning, when we talked about the structure of Deuteronomy, we named it several different ways we could talk about the book of Deuteronomy being organized. One of them was a suzerain-vassal treaty.

And we looked at the basic general layout of treaties of Hittite and Assyrian treaties that have been found and how they seem very similar to the way that the book of Deuteronomy is organized. Well, part of that treaty is to list the things, the stipulations that both parties are agreeing to. That is what we were just covered in the law code, chapters 12 through 26.

Now we've entered into the blessings and the curses. So, what happens when the vassal is obedient to the treaty or when they break away and are rebellious of the treaty? Now also part of that law code structure is a covenant ratification or a reading out loud of the covenant again. Sometimes annually, people would have to get up and repeat this covenant and remind themselves of this covenant. Well, we also get that in these chapters, so Deuteronomy somewhat blends those two things together. So, we're going to go up first at chapters 27, and 28 and then we'll work our way into 29 and 30.

## **Deuteronomy 27**

So, we're going to notice in 27 that there's a little bit of a break in just the flow, the structure of the book. Actually, it would be much smoother if we read from chapter 26 directly into chapter 28. In both of those chapters, Moses is the primary speaker. He is the one who is getting up and giving instructions, chapter 27 seems to take a step back, a little bit, and it feels somewhat out of place. But 27 is the one that is giving us the instructions for what it is that the Israelites are supposed to do when they go into the land.

### **Setting Up the Large Stones on Ebal**

So, starting in chapter 27, verse one, it says, "Then Moses and all the elders of Israel." So, we have now switched, and we're in this third person. It's the hand of the editor that seems to be quite obvious in this part of the chapter. "So, then Moses and the elders of Israel charged, the people saying, 'Keep all the commandments which I command you today. So, it shall be on that day when you cross the Jordan to the land which the Lord your God gives you, that you shall set up for yourself large stones, and coat them with lime and write on them all the words of this law when you cross over. So that you may enter the land which the Lord your God gives you a land flowing with milk and honey, as the Lord, the God of your fathers, has promised you.'"

So, if we pause for a second in verse 2, when it says, "It shall be on that day when you cross the Jordan." Everything seems to be very immediate. As soon as you cross the Jordan, as soon as your feet are in the land, this is what you should do. Set up stones, and write these words on the stone. It makes it sound like as soon as they put their feet on dry land on the other side of the Jordan, they should do these things.

Now when we get to verse 4, it says, "So, it shall be when you cross the Jordan, you shall set up on Mount Ebal." So, it recognizes when you cross the Jordan up on Mount Ebal, this ceremony is going to happen. Well, Ebal is a good day, day and half journey, and if you read through the histories of Joshua and Judges, you know it takes the Israelites a little while to get into the land. They have to kind of fight their way into the land. So, we have to read this time frame with a little bit of a grain of salt. So, it sounds immediate, but there it is more an issue of priority. So, not immediately as soon as your feet are on dry land, this needs to be at the forefront of your mind. As soon as you get into the land, it is going to be important for you to ratify the covenant.

Now why is it that they have to erect large stones and coat them with plaster? Well, maybe for a couple of reasons. Let me first show you a picture of stones. These are not the stones. We don't have the stones from Ebal and Gerizim; these particular stones are being talked about. But we do have other places in the land where very large stones were found. And so, just as a visual example, I'd like to show you a picture.

This is from another place in the country, and these large stones actually predate the Israelites. So, these are much closer to the time of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob than the time of the entrance of the Israelites into the land. But what you can see, especially if you're comparing the people in the picture to the large stones behind them, you can see how large they are. This is probably the type of stone that is being talked about here for this particular ceremony. So, go erect large stones.

Now, why stones? Well, maybe a couple of reasons, one is your eyes are immediately drawn to the stones in the picture because they are an unusual thing on the landscape. So, it doesn't take very much as you're walking around to

come and notice a stone of that size standing upright. It seems unusual. So, it acts as a very good memory marker for you.

And then you have the words of this teaching that are written on that stone. Well, it says the words written here in plaster so that you can very distinctly see the words are something significant for us to be remembering. And writing on stone, these teachings also has the connotation of the enduring authority of these words,

So, write on stone. Now what are these words of this teaching that are being written? It's hard for us to know. A lot of words can fit on a stone like this. In fact, we have the laws of Hammurabi, and he has a very large stela as well with all of his laws written on it. And there are more words on that stela than the words that are in the book of Deuteronomy. So, it could be the entire book of Deuteronomy is to be written on that stela.

Or, it could be, just the teachings of the law code from 12 to 26. It's hard for us to know, but we get the gist of the significance of this celebration. Go, erect something that becomes very obvious on the horizon line, the enduring authority that the words of this teaching have.

So, if we go back to the text, in verse 4 again, "So, it shall be when you cross the Jordan, you shall set up on Mount Ebal these stones as I am commanding you today and you shall coat them with lime. Moreover, you shall build there an altar to the Lord your God, an altar of stones. You shall not wield an iron tool on them, you shall build the altar of the Lord your God of uncut stones, and you shall offer on it burnt offerings to the Lord your God, and you shall sacrifice peace offerings and eat there and rejoice before the Lord your God."

Again, we get another one of those hints that these religious celebrations are truly celebrations, feasts, and festivals. They are the people gathering together and eating with God in their midst.

So, then we get a little bit of a break. We get the hand of the editor one more time. And now it seems like Moses and the elders are once more standing on the Eastern side of the Jordan River. "Then Moses and the Levitical priests spoke to all of Israel saying, 'Be silent and listen, O Israel. This day, you have become a people for the Lord your God this day.'" What is interesting, as we could say but didn't, is that they become the people of the Lord their God at Mount Sinai. Well, Mount Sinai was the original giving of the covenant. Now, we have Moses and the elders who are standing on the eastern side of the Jordan saying, "This day you have become," which has led many scholars to say there must have been a covenant ratification ceremony that happens there on the eastern side of the Jordan. But then, when they go into the land, and they're standing at Ebal and Gerizim, they will once more ratify the covenant, and on that day, they will become. It's not a matter of they weren't actually God's people before, but it is solidifying in the heads of the people that I'm this day with this covenant to enduring memory into the future. This day, you are God's people.

### **Covenant Ratification on Ebal and Gerizim**

So, in verse 11, "Moses also charged the people on that day, saying, 'When you cross the Jordan, these shall stand on Mount Gerizim to bless the people, and he lists out six of the tribes for the curse they shall stand on Mount Ebal, and he lists the other six tribes. So Ebal and Gerizim and I showed you a picture of both Ebal and Gerizim previously when we were talking about Deuteronomy 11. We talked about how significant it is to bring to the forefront of the Israelites' minds the covenant that they've made with their God to have something visual

in their land that every time they pass Ebal and Gerizim, they remember the blessings of Mount Gerizim, the curses of Mount Ebal.

### **Deuteronomy 28-29**

When we get to chapter 26, this is when we get a list of the blessings and the curses. So, the end of chapter 27 just gives us curses. So, it's missing the blessings.

So, we're going to skip on to chapter 28. So in chapter 28, we're looking at 28 and also 29 together. We can actually organize this information in two different ways. There are blessings and curses, but then there are also promises and threats. And we will notice that these blessings and curses many of them are agricultural. Many of them have something to do with the land--this blessing. Now this should not come as a surprise to us at all because, as we've been looking through Deuteronomy, a lot of the blessing the people are receiving from God is the gift of their land. So, we have this projecting forward, how awesome, how amazing this land can be. It could be an Eden of sorts where everything is organized the way that God would like for it to be organized.

Part of that is having the land produce like the way Eden did the bounty of the land. So, we get this picture in Deuteronomy what we've seen so far as the land's potential can be such that the relationship between God and his people, the people and other people around them, and the people to the land all work together in harmony.

And so, when we get to the blessings and curses, it should not surprise us that the land is involved here because the land will demonstrate both the blessing and the curse. When is the land is being cared for and thus being fruitful, and when is everything about society and place broken and shattered, in which case the land will also mimic that.

So, we see this aspect of the land, the natural environment. But we also see that there's still the relationship between Israel and the nations. Now, when we talked about Deuteronomy 4, we actually read how if Israel goes into the land and remembers, it is a land that is in the middle of all the trade routes. If you remember this image, we talked about this again at the beginning of this lecture series. So, if Israel is going into this land and all the trade routes from all the surrounding nations are coming through this land, then Israel ideally can reflect God's character on the world stage so that other people can see what the character of God is like.

So, here in chapter 28, we will then also notice that the blessings and the curses are noticed by the people groups around them. So, this idea is that Israel does not act in isolation. Israel is very well placed on the much larger world landscape.

### **Blessings and Curses**

So, let's think about this idea; let's go back to the idea that there are two parts, the blessings and curses. So, these types of blessings and curses would be things as we start with in chapter 28. So, things like verse three, "Blessed you will be in the country. Blessed you shall be in the city. Blessed you shall be in the country. Blessed shall be the offspring of your body and the produce of your ground and the offspring of your beasts, the increase of your herd, and the young of your flock. Blessed be your basket and you're kneading bowl." Those are good examples of blessed, so it is blessed straight through.

So, what about the curses? Well, down in verse 16, "Cursed shall you be in the city. Cursed shall you be in the country. Cursed shall be your basket, and you're 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 flocks." You see the positive and the exact negative, the blessings and the curses.

### **Promises and Threats**

Well, we also have these promises and threats. So, these are different; then they don't start with blessed and curse. They just talk about the effects of the people's actions. So, for instance, we'll start in verse 7. "The Lord shall cause your enemies who rise up against you to be defeated before you. They will come out against you one way and will flee before you seven ways. The Lord will command the blessing upon you in your barns and all that you put your hand to. He will bless you in the land which the Lord your God gives to you. 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 his ways. So, all the people of the earth will see that you were called by the name of the Lord and will be afraid of you."

So, you hear this. If you obey these commands, these are the things and these are the blessings or promises that are coming your way. And we see again the recognition that the other nations will notice that there's an interaction. So those nations who go against Israel will be scattered, and other nations will see that God has blessed his people.

Well, what about on the flip side the threats? We have something as we see in verse 22, "The Lord will smite you with the consumption and with fever and with inflammation and with fiery heat, and with the sword, and with blight and with mildew, and they will pursue you until you perish. The heaven, which is over your head, shall be bronze; the earth, which is under you, iron. The Lord will make the rain of your land powder and dust." So, remember from chapter 11 God

is the one who gives the early in the latter rains. The rains that are necessary for the land to produce. So, in this case, the rain will be withheld.

"And it shall come down on you until you are destroyed. The Lord shall cause you to be defeated before your enemies. You will go out one way against them, but you will flee seven ways before them. And you will be an example of terror to all the kingdoms of the earth." So again, as with the blessings and curses, so with the promises and the threats, it comes in the form of agriculture. Their place being blessed or their place being shattered and destroyed. And it comes in the form of the example that they are to the nations. Either they win that when they go in conflict against the nations where they're set up as an example or the nations, the following people, will surround them and smite them.

Now it is not uncommon for prophets later to then look back at these law codes and say, these are coming upon us because we have broken the covenant with God. These are the red flags that are supposed to stand up and say, "These are the warning signals. You have stepped out of line. You need to bring to the forefront of your mind the history of who God is and who you are as his people."

So, they're meant to be something of warning signals of what will happen as well as the natural consequences of their choices.

### **Curses Continued**

As we start, I'll skip, I'll read a little bit of the very end of chapter 28, and then we'll move into chapter 29. In verse 45, it says, "So all these curses shall come on you and pursue you and overtake you until you are destroyed because you would not obey the Lord your God by keeping his commands and his statutes, which he commanded you. They shall become a sign and a wonder on you and your descendants forever because you did not serve the Lord your God,

with joy with a glad heart, for the abundance of all things. Therefore, you shall serve your enemies, whom the Lord will send against you, in hunger and thirst and nakedness and in the lack of all things. He will put an iron yolk on your neck until he has destroyed you."

So, we get those two verses, in verses 47 and 48, the contrast between what happens when you serve the Lord and when you turn away from serving the Lord, you will end up serving other nations.

Now, if you were to count up the blessings and the curses, you would find the curse section to be extraordinarily really long. So, why is that? There's not one-for-one equality here. The emphasis on the curses is a way to help motivate the people to follow the commandments of God. So, the emphasis on these are all the things that potentially could go wrong, as a way to say, "So please be extra careful so that you remember the covenant with the Lord your God."

### **Deuteronomy 29 – Ratification Ceremony – retelling history**

As we get closer to chapter 29, we now have more information about this ratification ceremony that should happen. Every Israelite is supposed to participate in this. It's not just the men. It's not just the landowners. It's not just the wealthy. It's not a representative of the community. It's the whole entire community.

And there is this recognition as Deuteronomy has recognized throughout the whole book that Israel might fail. So, we have already, again in chapter 29, this idea that Israel will likely fail to recognize God in their midst, and then we're going to have this contrast with Sodom and Gomorrah and a promise of exile.

So, let's take a look at those. So, in chapter 29, "These are the words of the covenant which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the sons of

Israel, in the land of Moab, besides the covenant, which he had made with them at Horeb. Moses summoned all of 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 of the servants and all of this land, the great trials with your eyes have seen those great signs and wonders.' This should be very familiar to you. As we have worked our way through the book of Deuteronomy, that has been the consistent thing that we have looked back on and said, God is their warrior God. He has already done these great things. They just need to remember.

"Yet to this day, the Lord has not given you a heart to know nor eyes to see nor ears to hear. I've led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you. And your sandal has not worn out on your foot." So, again a reference back to chapter 8 of Deuteronomy.

"You've not eaten bread, nor have you drunk wine or strong drink, in order that you might know that I am the Lord your God. When you reached this place, Sihon, the King of Heshbon, and Og, the king of Bashan, came out to meet us for battle, but we defeated them, and we took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, the Gadites and half the tribe of Manassehites. So keep this word of the covenant, to do them that you may prosper in all that you do."

So, we're starting to see how these end chapters in Deuteronomy are starting to pick up themes we saw in the very first chapters of Deuteronomy. So we're kind of reaching this nice conclusion as we're retelling the history of the people.

### **Recognition of Future Generations**

So in verse ten, it says, "You stand today, all of you before the Lord your God, your chiefs, your tribes, your elders, your officers, even the men of Israel,

your little ones, your wives, the alien, who is within your camps, from the one who chops your wood, to the one who draws your water that you may enter into covenant with the Lord your God, and into his oath which the Lord your God is making with you today, in order that he may establish you today as his people. And then he may be your God just as he spoke to you, and he swore to your fathers to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Now, not with you alone am I making this covenant and oath, but both with those who stand here with us today in the presence of the Lord our God and with those who are not yet with us here today." So, there is a recognition for future generations.

As we skip down, now we start to get to this recognition that the Israelites might be unfaithful and that when they do, there are consequences to that. And now, we're going to pick up this idea of Sodom and Gomorrah. So let me read that, and we can talk a little bit about that section.

### **Sodom and Gomorrah Parallel**

So, I'm going to start in verse 22, "Now the generation to come, your sons to rise up after you and the foreigner who comes from a distant land when they see the plagues of the land and diseases with which the Lord has afflicted it will say, 'all its land is brimstone and salt, a burning waste, unsewn and unproductive and no grass grows in it, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zebulon, which the Lord overthrew in his anger, and in his wrath. And all the nations will say, 'Why has the Lord done thus to this land and why this great outburst and anger?'"

So, what we see in this verse is, again, the idea that Israel is on the much larger international scene that other nations will come and see. But this time, instead of coming and seeing the way that Israel is reflecting their God, they come and see a destroyed land, a land of brimstone and salt. So, brimstone and

salt are the complete opposite of the land of milk and honey. It's unproductive land. So, instead of this land which should be a land of plenty, this land will be one that is destroyed.

The mention of Sodom and Gomorrah is also quite interesting. It's a nice little head nod back to Genesis 14. So back to the very beginning of the Pentateuch. So, Genesis 14 and other chapters afterward bring out Sodom and Gomorrah and the activities of the people in Sodom and Gomorrah.

If we were to study Sodom and Gomorrah in great detail, we would notice that when God tells Abraham he is going to destroy Sodom and Gomorrah, it is because of the outcry of the oppressed. So, we think of Sodom and Gomorrah, and sometimes people associate sexual sins with them, which could be part of the case. But it is because they have oppressed the people, and there's an unfair economic system that is set up. And because of that, the outcry of the oppressed, just like the outcry of the Israelites when they were oppressed before Egypt, the outcry has gone up. So, this reference back to Sodom and Gomorrah here is in reference to when the Israelites go into their land, which should be prosperous and fruitful. If they go in and fail to adhere to the commands of God, the cries of the oppressed will be heard, and God will respond as he has consistently responded throughout history. And even their land, this gift of land that has been given to the Israelites, will be taken away from them.

### **A Hopeful Conclusion – Deuteronomy 30**

If the book of Deuteronomy were to end here with chapter 29, it would be really quite a sad way to end the book. It feels very hopeless, and it feels like there is nothing to hold on to. It feels like we're ending with the failure to recognize God in the midst of his people.

But there is hope. So, just like the latter prophets, they always will talk about the potential danger that is at hand. There is a comma, but the hope that is to come and in chapter 30, Is that hope for us

So, when we look at chapter 30, what we're going to see is there is a revised hope because restoration is possible. And in the first couple of verses, we're going to pay attention to these words of repenting, returning, and restoring because these three words end up being a key trilogy of an idea that is repeated throughout the whole rest of the Old Testament books, all the way through the prophets, all the way to the very end even to Malachi, which is the last book before we enter the New Testament.

### **Circumcision of the Heart**

We're going to look again at circumcision of the heart. Now, we have seen this before, we looked at this, and we talked about this in chapter 10 of Deuteronomy, where the people were called to circumcise their hearts to be humble. But here, we're going to see how God will actually circumcise their hearts. So, we're going back to having a heart of flesh instead of a hard heart of stone.

And we're going to see that we're leaving the Israelites with a choice, and the choice is between life and good and death and evil.

So read with me in chapter 30, starting with verse one. "So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessings and the curses, which I have set before you, and you call them to mind." The Hebrew word is actually one that is; it's like a swerving motion, a returning back onto yourself. So it's a recognition that you have gone astray. "When you return back to your senses, in all the nations where the Lord, your God has banished you, and you return to the Lord your God and obey him with all of your heart and soul

according to all that I command you today, you and your sons. Then the Lord your God will restore you from captivity and have compassion on you and will gather you again from all of the peoples where the Lord your God has scattered you." This has echoes of Jeremiah chapter 3 in it.

"If your outcasts are at the end of the earth, from there, the Lord your God will gather you. And from there, he will bring you back." There is no distance that is too far, that is beyond the reach of God to pull his people back and to offer this restoration to his people.

In verse 6, it says, "Moreover the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your descendants to love the Lord your God with all of your heart, with all of your soul so that you may live."

### **God's Word Given to His People**

I'm going to skip down to verse 11. It says, "For this commandment, which I command you today, is not too difficult for you, nor is it out of reach. It is not in heaven that you should say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us and get it for us and make us hear it that we may observe it, nor is it beyond the sea that you should say, who will cross the sea for us to get it for us and make us hear it that we may observe it?'"

So, this law is something that is actually possible to be enacted, and the commands of God or not something is hidden. They're not mysterious. You don't have to use sorcerers or incantations or have false prophets who go and seek and try to figure out the mysteries in order to bring them to you. In contrast, God has spoken to his people. He has given his law, his teachings, and his greatest hints at how to survive and be fulfilled by humanity in this place that he is giving them. He has given it to them. So they don't have to seek out the mysteries of life. So, there is this idea. It's right here. It's tangible right in front of you.

## **The Knowledge of Good and Evil and Their Choice**

So, in verse 14. "But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart that you may observe it. See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death in adversity." Well, that's my translation, and I'd be curious what your translation says. The actual Hebrew is "I've set before you today life and good, death and evil."

No, these are interesting contrasts because when we think of when was the last time we heard this choice of good and evil that is being presented to humans, maybe just, maybe your hearing echoes in the back of your mind, especially since I keep saying there are Genesis connections in Deuteronomy. Maybe I have led you there. But this is good and evil. This may actually be a reference back to the Garden, when there is a tree of the knowledge of good and evil, and the people in the Garden had a choice.

And so, too, the people here at the entrance as they enter the land have a choice, and it is their actions and what they do that either gives them life which is good, or death and evil. And here to be in mind as well that death and evil, it can be the physical death, but it is also the death via the exile being ripped away from the place to which you have been rooted.

So, in verse 16, "In that I command you today to love the Lord your God, walk in his ways, to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments that you may live and multiply, that the Lord your God may bless you in the land where you were entering to possess."

## Calling of Witnesses

I'm going to skip now to verse 19 because in verse 19, we have a call for witnesses to this that is being declared to the people. "So I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I've set before you life and death, the blessings and the curses. So, choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, by loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, and by holding fast to him. For this is your life and the length of your days, which you live in the land, which the Lord swore to your fathers to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob."

So, with that, we're going to close out our ceremonies that are taking place right at the edge of the land and then go in and take the ceremonies to Ebal and Gerizim, the blessings and the curses, the recognition that Deuteronomy knows is real that they will probably walk away.

And yet the hope that there is still going to be restoration that is possible. So, life and death, good and evil, blessings and curses are on the table. It is for them to choose.

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