

היום ליהנה אלהיך כי-באת  
אשר נשבע יהוה לאבותינו  
4 ולקח הפהן השנא מידך  
מזבח יהוה אלהיך;  
5 וענית ואמרת לפני יהוה אלהיך  
אבד אבי וירד מצרימה ונני  
מעט ויהי-שם לגוי גדול  
6 וירעו אתנו המצרים  
עלינו עבדה קשה: ונמאס  
אלהי אבותינו וישמע  
וירא את-ענינו ואת-עמלנו ויאמר  
8 וירצאנו יהוה ממצרים ויד  
נטויה ובמרא גדל ובאחות  
9 ויבאנו אל-המקום הזה ויבא  
הארץ הזאת ארץ זבת חלב  
10 ועתה הנה הבאתי ואת-ראש  
האדמה אשר-נתתה לי ויהוה

the Aramean sought to destroy

the land of Israel.

giving a brief history of Israel and  
God, the farmers now turn to  
the way they express their feeling  
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Israel in the first person plural  
history of God's benefactions  
to the first person singular,  
saying that they personally are par-

the first fruits.

the worshiper's  
summarizes the his-  
identity and has found  
Pesah Haggadah. One  
set liturgy, in addition  
across barriers of time and  
of themes we might

26 When you enter the land that the LORD your God is giving you as a heritage, and you possess it and settle in it, <sup>2</sup>you shall take some of every first fruit of the soil, which you harvest from the land that the LORD your God is giving you, put it in a basket and go to the place where the LORD your God will choose to establish His name. <sup>3</sup>You shall go to the priest in charge at that time and say to him, "I acknowledge this day before the LORD your God that I have en-

Moses' Second Discourse, Part 3: The Laws Given in Moab (continued)

## TWO LITURGICAL DECLARATIONS (26:1-15)

When farmers bring the first fruits to the Temple each year, and after they give the poor tithe every third year, they are to make certain declarations. These declarations (and the declaration of 21:7-9) are the only instances in the Torah that present the precise wording that must be recited in a layman's address to God. They convey what Deuteronomy wished the farmers to find meaningful in these ceremonies.

### THE FIRST-FRUIT CEREMONY (26:1-11)

The first-fruits ceremony leads the farmers from a recognition of the land's fertility to an awareness of God's guidance of the Israelites from their beginnings, freeing them from oppression and giving them the land. The change in the focus of a religious ceremony from exclusive attention to God's role in nature to an emphasis on God's role in history is one of the most significant original features of the Bible. The declaration spoken by the farmers evokes the very heart of monotheism, which acknowledges God as the power behind all phenomena, historical as well as natural.

2. The farmer, the typical Israelite, is being addressed. The context suggests that farmers brought their first fruits individually. No date is specified for bringing them, and it probably var-

כה והיה כִּי-תבוא אל-הארץ אשר  
יהוה אלהיך נתן לך נחלה וירשתה  
וישבת בה: <sup>2</sup> ולקחת מראשית | כל-פרי  
האדמה אשר תביא מארצך אשר יהוה  
אלהיך נתן לך ושמית בשנא והלכת  
אל-המקום אשר יבחר יהוה אלהיך  
לשכן שמו שם: <sup>3</sup> ובאת אל-הכהן אשר  
יהיה בימים ההם ואמרת אליו הגדתי

ied for different farmers, depending on their work load, the species that each grew, and the date of the harvest of each species in each part of the country.

**some of every first fruit** Some of every species must be brought, not only those that 18:4 assigns to the priests. Because the first fruits are a token gift, no specific amount is prescribed. The Talmud states that the minimum quantity is one-sixtieth of the crop, with no maximum. According to the Talmud, a farmer who sees the first ripe fruit of each species ties a cord or blade of grass on it for identification.

**I acknowledge** The Hebrew can be understood in one of two ways: "By this declaration I acknowledge" or "By bringing the first fruits I acknowledge." In the latter case, the act of giving the first fruits constitutes an acknowledgment, tangible proof that the farmer has entered the Land.

**the LORD your God** The farmer is addressing the priest. The Lord, of course, is the farmer's God as well, as the chapter states several times. People would often say "your God" or "so-and-so's God" when speaking to, or about, priests, prophets, and kings, because their offices were established by God and they were considered especially close to Him.

of curses on those who would depart from the

tered the land that the LORD swore to our fathers to assign us."

<sup>4</sup>The priest shall take the basket from your hand and set it down in front of the altar of the LORD your God.

<sup>5</sup>You shall then recite as follows before the LORD your God: "My father was a fugitive Aramean. He went down to Egypt with meager numbers and sojourned there; but there he became a great and very populous nation. <sup>6</sup>The Egyptians dealt harshly with us and oppressed us; they imposed heavy labor upon us. <sup>7</sup>We cried to the LORD, the God of our fathers, and the LORD heard our plea and saw our plight, our misery, and our oppression. <sup>8</sup>The LORD freed us from Egypt by a mighty hand, by an outstretched arm and awesome power, and by signs and portents. <sup>9</sup>He brought us to this place and gave us this land, a land flowing with milk and honey. <sup>10</sup>Wherefore I now bring the first fruits of the soil which You, O LORD, have given me."

**5. my father** It could refer to Jacob, who went down to Egypt; it could be collective, referring to Jacob's entire family, who went with him; or it could refer to all the ancestors, Abraham and Isaac as well as Jacob and his sons.

**fugitive** Could also mean "perishing" or "straying."

**Aramean** Probably refers to the fact that the ancestors of the Israelites came from the region known as "Aram alongside the River." The recitation contrasts the homeless beginnings of the Israelites with their present possession of a fertile land. In the *Pesah Haggadah*, a well-known *midrash* interprets these words to

היום ליהוה אלהיך כי-באתי אל-הארץ אשר נשבע יהוה לאבותינו לתת לנו:

<sup>4</sup> ולקח הכהן הטנא מידך והניחו לפני מנבח יהוה אלהיך:

<sup>5</sup> וענית ואמרת לפני יהוה אלהיך ארמלי

אבד אבי ויגר מצרימה ויגר שם במתי מעט ויהי-שם לגוי גדול עצום ורב:

<sup>6</sup> וירעו אתנו המצרים ויענונו ויהנו עלינו עבדה קשה: <sup>7</sup> ונצעק אל-יהוה

אלהי אבותינו וישמע יהוה את-קלנו וירא את-ענינו ואת-עמלנו ואת-לחצנו:

<sup>8</sup> ויוצאנו יהוה ממצרים ביד חזקה ובזרע נטויה ובמרא גדל ובאותות ובמפתים:

<sup>9</sup> ויבאנו אל-המקום הזה ויתן-לנו את-הארץ הזאת ארץ זבת חלב ודבש:

<sup>10</sup> ועתה הנה הבאתי את-ראשית פרי האדמה אשר-נתתה לי יהוה

האדמה אשר-נתתה לי יהוה

mean, "Laban the Aramean sought to destroy my father."

**9. this place** The land of Israel.

**10.** After reciting a brief history of Israel and speaking about God, the farmers now turn to speak to God. In this way they express their feeling that they stand directly in God's presence. Then, after speaking of Israel in the first person plural while describing the history of God's benefactions to Israel, they switch to the first person singular, expressing the feeling that they personally are participating in that history.

**which You, O LORD, have given me** Refers to the soil, not to the first fruits.

**5.** The words that the farmer utters here and in verse 3 are called "The First-Fruits Recitation" in the Mishnah, which requires that it be said in Hebrew. At first those who were able to recite it on their own did so, while those who could not were assisted by a prompter. When the latter group, out of embarrassment, ceased to bring their first fruits, the procedure was changed so that everybody was led by a prompter (M Sot. 7:2-3, Bik. 3:7).

This is a rare instance of the Torah prescribing the precise words of a prayer rather than

leaving it to the inspiration of the worshiper's own heart. This recitation summarizes the historical basis of Jewish identity and has found a featured place in the *Pesah Haggadah*. One of the advantages of a set liturgy, in addition to uniting all Jews across barriers of time and space, is that it reminds us of themes we might not think of on our own.

**10-11.** Gratitude and generosity do not seem to come naturally to most people. Most of us must be taught to remember to thank God for our good fortune and must learn through ex-

You shall leave it before the LORD your God and bow low before the LORD your God. <sup>11</sup>And you shall enjoy, together with the Levite and the stranger in your midst, all the bounty that the LORD your God has bestowed upon you and your household.

<sup>12</sup>When you have set aside in full the tenth part of your yield—in the third year, the year of the tithe—and have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, that they may eat their fill in your settlements, <sup>13</sup>you shall declare before the LORD your God: "I have cleared out the consecrated portion from the house; and I have given it to the Levite, the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow, just as You commanded me; I have neither transgressed nor neglected any of Your commandments: <sup>14</sup>I have not eaten of it while in mourning, I have not cleared out any of it while I was

והנחתו לפני יהוה אלהיך והשתחוית לפני יהוה אלהיך: <sup>11</sup>ושמחת בכל הטוב אשר נתן לך יהוה אלהיך ולביתך אתה והלוי והגר אשר בקרבך: <sup>12</sup>כי תכלה לעשר את כל מעשר תבואתך בשנה השלישית שנת המעשר ונתתה ללוי לגר ליתום ולאלמנה ואכלו בשעריך ושבועו: <sup>13</sup>ואמרת לפני יהוה אלהיך בערתי הקדש מן הבית וגם נתתיו ללוי ולגר ליתום ולאלמנה ככל מצותך אשר צויתני לא עברתי ממצותיך ולא שכחתי: <sup>14</sup>לא אכלתי באני ממנו ולא בערתי ממנו בטמא

**11. you shall enjoy** That is, you shall celebrate all the bounty. The celebration takes the form of a festive meal at the sanctuary.

**the stranger in your midst** The farmers, whose ancestors sojourned as strangers in Egypt where they were oppressed, now provide generously for the strangers in their land.

#### THE TITHE DECLARATION (vv. 12–15)

Every third year, when farmers have removed all the tithe from their premises and have given it to indigents and to Levites (see 14:28–29), they are to make a formal declaration before God that they have divested themselves of all the portions of the crop that must be donated and have not violated their sanctity by handling or using them improperly. Then they are to pray for God's continued blessing of the land and the people of Israel.

**13. before the LORD your God** The worshippers address God from their hometowns, either at their home, at wherever they deposit the tithe, or at some local place of prayer.

perience the satisfaction of sharing our bounty with others.

**12.** The first tithe goes to the Levites, to maintain Israel's spiritual core. The second tithe is consumed in Jerusalem, to teach us to celebrate our good fortune in God's presence and in the presence of our fellow Israelites.

**cleared out** Not held back the slightest amount.

**the consecrated portion** The poor tithe. Even though it is not brought to a sanctuary, it is to be treated as holy until it is handed over for distribution to the poor. Giving it to the poor is no less a sacred purpose than bringing it to the sanctuary.

**You commanded me** The first-person formulation expresses the idea that God commanded the farmer personally, not only his or her ancestors. This wording is part of the liturgy's attempt to enhance the farmers' feeling of personal involvement in the history of their people.

**commandments** That is, about the tithe in 14:28–29. It is not a blanket claim of virtue, but a statement about the obligation that has just been discharged.

**14.** The requirement to declare full compliance with the tithe obligation is also found in the ancient Hittite "Instructions for Temple Officials." There the herdsmen responsible for deliv-

Once in three years, the second tithe is given to the poor, to perfect Israelite society by minimizing poverty [Hirsch].

**13. I have . . . [not] neglected any of your commandments** I have not performed any of these *mitzvot* mindlessly, perfunctorily, without feeling (*S'fat Emet*).

impure, and I have not deposited any of it with the dead. I have obeyed the LORD my God; I have done just as You commanded me. <sup>15</sup>Look down from Your holy abode, from heaven, and bless Your people Israel and the soil You have given us, a land flowing with milk and honey, as You swore to our fathers."

<sup>16</sup>The LORD your God commands you this day to observe these laws and rules; observe them faithfully with all your heart and soul.

<sup>17</sup>You have affirmed this day that the LORD is your God, that you will walk in His ways, that you will observe His laws and commandments

ולא־נִתַּנִּי מִמֶּנִּי לְמֵת שְׁמַעְתִּי בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵי עֲשִׂיתִי כְּכֹל אֲשֶׁר צִוִּיתִנִּי: <sup>15</sup>הִשְׁקִיפָה מִמַּעַן קֹדֶשְׁךָ מִן־הַשָּׁמַיִם וּבִרְךָ אֶת־עַמְּךָ אֶת־יִשְׂרָאֵל וְאֶת־הָאֲדָמָה אֲשֶׁר נָתַתָּה לָּנוּ כְּאֲשֶׁר נִשְׁבַּעְתָּ לְאַבְרָהָם אָרֶץ זָבַת חֶלֶב וְדָבָשׁ: ס

<sup>16</sup>הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ מִצִּוְךָ לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת־הַחֻקִּים הָאֵלֶּה וְאֶת־הַמִּשְׁפָּטִים וְשִׁמְרָתָם וְעָשִׂיתָ אוֹתָם בְּכָל־לִבְּךָ וּבְכָל־נַפְשְׁךָ: <sup>17</sup>אֶת־יְהוָה הָאֱמֶרְתָּ הַיּוֹם לֵהוֹיֹת לְךָ לֵאלֹהִים וּלְלַכֵּת בְּדַרְכָּיו וּלְשֹׁמֵר חֻקָּיו וּמִצְוֹתָיו וּמִשְׁפָּטָיו וּלְשִׁמֵּעַ בְּקוֹל: טו

ering cattle offerings to the temple must declare on oath, when they bring the cattle, that they have not misappropriated any of the cattle that were due.

**mourning** Mourners, who become impure from being in the same tent as a dead body, from handling it during burial, or from contact with others who have become impure in one of these ways, would defile any food they touched.

**impure** The tithe would be defiled if handled by someone who is in a state of impurity.

**deposited any of it with the dead** To feed their spirits. The ancients believed that the living can assist the spirits of the dead by providing them

with food and drink. This widespread belief was also found among Jews in Second Temple times and later. The Torah does not forbid the practice, but because contact with the dead is ritually defiling, it prohibits the use of the tithe for it.

**just as You commanded me** Regarding the tithe.

**15. Your holy abode, from heaven** In some biblical passages, God's "abode" is the Temple. Here, "heaven" emphasizes the Deuteronomic idea that His abode is heaven, not the Temple.

**bless** With bountiful crops and prosperity.

**Your people Israel** Farmers are not to ask for their own prosperity but for that of the entire nation.

#### Moses' Second Discourse, Part 4:

#### Conclusion to the Covenant Made in Moab (26:16–28:69)

##### MUTUAL COMMITMENTS (26:16–19)

The laws in all their detail are now concluded. This passage sums up Israel's duty to obey them wholeheartedly and underscores the fact that, beyond being mere items of a legal code, they are the very basis of the relationship that God and the people Israel have established. It not only is an emotional or spiritual association but also entails mutual obligations with consequences.

**16. commands you this day** Moses, speaking at God's command, has referred to "this day" throughout his address (e.g., 4:8, 15:5, 19:9). According to 1:3, the address was delivered on the first day of the 11th month (later known as *Sh'vat*) in the 40th year after the Exodus.

**these laws and rules** That Moses has just finished presenting (12:1–26:15).

**17. you have affirmed** The most probable interpretation of the unique form of this Hebrew verb (rendering its *hiph-il* form not as causative but intensive). God and Israel have each proclaimed acceptance of the other as parties to the covenant and have proclaimed specific commitments to each other. The principles agreed to are strongly reminiscent of the earlier covenant at Horeb (Mount Sinai), which this reaffirms.

**that the LORD is your God** The counterpart to this phrase in verse 18 is "that you are . . . His people." This pair of phrases is the classic expression of the covenant relationship (see 29:12).

**you will walk in His ways** This clause and the remainder of the verse are virtually a definition of what it means to accept the Lord as God. In short, it requires action as well as intellectual assent.

and rules, and that you will obey Him. <sup>18</sup>And the LORD has affirmed this day that you are, as He promised you, His treasured people who shall observe all His commandments, <sup>19</sup>and that He will set you, in fame and renown and glory, high above all the nations that He has made; and that you shall be, as He promised, a holy people to the LORD your God.

**27** Moses and the elders of Israel charged the people, saying: Observe all the Instruction that I enjoin upon you this day. <sup>2</sup>As soon as you have crossed the Jordan into the land that the LORD your God is giving you, you shall set up large stones. Coat them with plaster <sup>3</sup>and inscribe upon them all the words of this Teaching. When you cross over to enter the land that the

<sup>18</sup> ויהיה האמירה היום להיות לו לעם סגולה כאשר דבר-לך ולשמר כל-מצותיו: <sup>19</sup> ולתתך עליון על כל-הגוים אשר עשה לתהלה ולשם ולתפארת ולהיתך עם-קדש ליהוה אלהיך כאשר דבר: ס

**כז** ויצו משה וזקני ישראל את-העם לאמר שמר את-כל-המצוה אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום: <sup>2</sup> ויהי ביום אשר תעברו את-הירדן אל-הארץ אשר-יהוה אלהיך נתן לך והקמת לך אבנים גדולות ושדת אתם בשיר: <sup>3</sup> וכתבת עליהן את-כל-דברי התורה הזאת בעברך

**18. as He promised you** When He first proposed to enter into a covenant with you (Exod. 19:5).

**19.** This verse defines what it means to be God's treasured people.

**high above all the nations** That is, He will make Israel more famous, praised, and glorified

than any other nation, as a result of the abundant prosperity and victory over enemies that Israel will enjoy.

**holy people** Sacrosanct, inviolable; a nation that others harm at their peril (see Exod. 19:6). For another implication of the notion of Israel's sanctity, see 7:6 and 14:2,21.

## CEREMONIES TO MARK ISRAEL'S ARRIVAL IN THE LAND (27:1-26)

The covenant relationship with God is so vital for Israel's existence in the Promised Land that it must be reaffirmed formally as soon as the Israelites arrive there.

### MONUMENTS AND AN ALTAR (vv. 1-8)

**1. Moses and the elders** Only here is Moses joined by the elders in instructing the people. Similarly in verses 9-10, Moses is joined by the priests in charging the people to obey the commandments. Because these two groups would be the leaders of the people in their daily civil and religious affairs after Moses' death, they are in the best position to ensure continued adherence to his teachings.

**Instruction** Hebrew: *ha-mitzvah*; the instructions given in Deuteronomy, the Teaching (v. 3), not a specific law.

**2. As soon as you have crossed** Literally, "on the day when you cross." This is loosely understood to mean "once you have crossed," not nec-

essarily on the same day. According to verse 4, these instructions are to be carried out on Mount Ebal; that site—some 30 miles (50 km) and more than 4000 feet (1200 m) uphill from where the Israelites would cross the Jordan—could not be reached on the same day that the Jordan is crossed.

**Coat them with plaster** If the text was engraved through the plaster into the stone, the white plaster would highlight the dark color of the letters. It is also possible that the plaster served as a clean surface for writing in ink or paint. Writing over plaster was common in Egypt where even outdoor inscriptions would last a long time because rain is infrequent there.

**3.** This ceremony dramatizes Israel's obligation to live by God's Teaching. Its performance shortly after entering the land is a prerequisite for further penetration into the land. The text says that all the words of the Teaching (chapters 12-26, and perhaps chapters 1-11 and 28) are to be inscribed, placing no limit on the size or

LORD your God is giving you, a land flowing with milk and honey, as the LORD, the God of your fathers, promised you—<sup>4</sup>upon crossing the Jordan, you shall set up these stones, about which I charge you this day, on Mount Ebal, and coat them with plaster. <sup>5</sup>There, too, you shall build an altar to the LORD your God, an altar of stones. Do not wield an iron tool over them; <sup>6</sup>you must build the altar of the LORD your God of unhewn stones. You shall offer on it burnt offerings to the LORD your God, <sup>7</sup>and you shall sacrifice there offerings of well-being and eat them, rejoicing before the LORD your God. <sup>8</sup>And on those stones you shall inscribe every word of this Teaching most distinctly.

<sup>9</sup>Moses and the levitical priests spoke to all

למען אשר תבא אל-הארץ אשר-יהוה  
אלהיך | נתן לך ארץ זבת חלב ודבש  
כאשר דבר יהוה אלהי-אבותיך לך:  
<sup>4</sup>והיה בעברכם את-הירדן תקימו את-  
האבנים האלה אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם  
היום בהר עיבל ושרת אותם בשיד:  
<sup>5</sup>ובנית שם מזבח ליהוה אלהיך מזבח  
אבנים לא-תניף עליהם ברזל: <sup>6</sup>אבנים  
שלמות תבנה את-מזבח יהוה אלהיך  
והעלית עליו עולת ליהוה אלהיך:  
<sup>7</sup>וזבחת שלמים ואכלת שם ושמחת  
לפני יהוה אלהיך: <sup>8</sup>וכתבת על-  
האבנים את-כל-דברי התורה הזאת  
באר היטב: <sup>9</sup>

וידבר משה והפזנים הללוים אל כל-

number of steles (stone slabs) to be used. Two steles, each the size of the stele on which the laws of Hammurabi were written, easily could contain more than Deuteronomy.

**4. Mount Ebal** Just north of Shechem, it is the highest mountain in the vicinity. It rises 3083 feet (940 m) above sea level, 1200 feet (360 m) above the valley in which it stands, and commands a view of most of the Promised Land. Shechem was the site of Abraham's first stop in Canaan and the first place in Canaan where God spoke to him and identified the land as the one He would give to Abraham's descendants.

**5.** An altar is to be built, sacrifices are to be offered, and the people are to celebrate the erecting of the steles inscribed with the Teaching. These sacrifices are part of a one-time ceremony. Thus there is no conflict with Deuteronomy's restriction of sacrificial worship to Jerusalem, because that was to take effect only later (see 12:8–12).

**stones** In their natural state, uncut, following the command of Exod. 20:22. An Israelite altar of uncut stones has been found in excavations at Arad in the Negeb. Similar altars from earlier

times have been discovered at Canaanite sites as well.

**iron tool** Hebrew: *barzel*; literally, "iron." Here it refers to a chisel.

**6–7.** The two types of offerings mentioned in these verses are the same as those brought at the conclusion of the covenant at Mount Sinai (see Exod. 24:5)

**offerings of well-being** These offerings (*sh'lamim*) are in the category of sacrifices in which most of the flesh was eaten by the worshiper. Hence they were appropriate for a festive occasion.

**8. those stones** Mentioned in verses 2–4, not those of the altar. This verse repeats the requirement that the stones be inscribed with the Teaching. By making the point both before and after the provision about the altar, the text makes clear that the terms of the Teaching, not the sacrifice, constitute the heart of the ceremony.

#### AN APPEAL FOR OBEDIENCE (vv. 9–10)

The Israelites are now concluding the Moab covenant (see 28:69) that will be reaffirmed later in ceremonies at Mounts Ebal and Gerizim. By pre-

#### CHAPTER 27

**6. build the altar . . . of unhewn stones**  
Eloquent, polished prayer is like hewn, pol-

ished stone. Here the "unhewn" (literally, "whole") stones represent the inarticulate yearning of a sincere heart—which God prefers (Buber).

Israel, saying: Silence! Hear, O Israel! Today you have become the people of the LORD your God: <sup>10</sup>Heed the LORD your God and observe His commandments and His laws, which I enjoin upon you this day.

<sup>11</sup>Thereupon Moses charged the people, saying: <sup>12</sup>After you have crossed the Jordan, the following shall stand on Mount Gerizim when the blessing for the people is spoken: Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, Joseph, and Benjamin. <sup>13</sup>And for the curse, the following shall stand on Mount Ebal: Reuben, Gad, Asher, Zebulun, Dan, and Naphtali. <sup>14</sup>The Levites shall then proclaim in a loud voice to all the people of Israel:

<sup>15</sup>Cursed be anyone who makes a sculptured or molten image, abhorred by the LORD, a

יִשְׂרָאֵל לֵאמֹר הַסִּכֶּת | וּשְׁמַע יִשְׂרָאֵל  
הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה נִהְיִיתָ לְעָם לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ:  
<sup>10</sup>וּשְׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וַעֲשִׂיתָ  
אֶת־מִצְוֹתָיו מִצְוֹתָיו וְאֶת־חֻקָּיו אֲשֶׁר אֲנֹכִי  
מֵצִוְךָ הַיּוֹם: ס

<sup>11</sup>וַיִּצַּו מֹשֶׁה אֶת־הָעָם בַּיּוֹם הַהוּא  
לֵאמֹר: <sup>12</sup>אֵלֶּה יַעֲמִדוּ לְבָרֶךְ אֶת־הָעָם  
עַל־הָר גֵּרִזִּים בְּעֶבְרָתָם אֶת־הַיְיָ  
שְׁמֵעוֹן וְלִי יִהְיֶה וַיִּשְׁכַּר וַיִּוֹסֵף  
וּבְנֵי־מֶן: <sup>13</sup>וְאֵלֶּה יַעֲמִדוּ עַל־הַקְּלָלָה בְּהָר  
עֵיבָל רְאוּבֵן גָּד וַאֲשֶׁר וּזְבוּלָן דָּן וְנַפְתָּלִי:  
<sup>14</sup>וְעֵנִי הַלְלוּם וְאָמְרוּ אֶל־כָּל־אִישׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל  
קוֹל רֶם: ס

<sup>15</sup>אֲרוּר הָאִישׁ אֲשֶׁר יַעֲשֶׂה פֶסֶל וּמַסֵּכָה

scribing these ceremonies here, in the midst of the conclusion of the covenant in Moab, Moses makes it clear that the later ceremonies are a reaffirmation of the Moab covenant (itself a reaffirmation of the Horeb covenant), not a new one.

**9. Silence! Hear** This is the first time that the appeal to hear is preceded by a call for silence. Absolute concentration is required at the awesome moment of solemn promises and warnings they are about to hear, when Israel becomes the people of God covenanted to Him.

**Today you have become the people of the LORD** Other passages in the Torah suggest that this took place earlier, at the time of the Exodus or at Mount Sinai (e.g., Exod. 6:6-7, 19:5-6; Deut. 4:20,34). There were varying views as to when the Israelites actually became God's people.

#### PROCLAIMING BLESSINGS AND CURSES (vv. 11-13)

When the 12 tribes of Israel arrive in the Promised Land, they are to proclaim the blessings and the curses—the divinely imposed consequences of either obeying or disobeying the terms of the Covenant—at Mounts Gerizim and Ebal. Such blessings and curses are integral elements of ancient Near Eastern covenants. The best known biblical examples are found in Lev. 26 and Deut. 28.

**12-13. on Mount Gerizim . . . on Mount Ebal** North and south of Shechem. The precise location where the tribes were to stand is not given, but their pronouncements would be most audible if they stood on the slopes of the moun-

tains rather than on their peaks (which are 2.2 miles [3.5 km] apart). The text indeed says that the blessings and the curses shall be recited "on," not "atop," the mountains.

**the blessing for the people is spoken** Literally, "to bless the people."

**And for the curse** Literally, "And these shall stand for the curse." A circumlocution to avoid saying that the tribes would actually curse the people.

#### CURSES FOR SECRET SINS (vv. 14-26)

Verses 14-26 refer to a different ceremony from that prescribed in verses 11-13, although it may have been intended to be performed on the same occasion. This ceremony consists only of curses. The 11 specific sins mentioned here (the 12th sin is all-inclusive) often escape detection because, as Ibn Ezra and Rashbam note, commonly they are committed in secret or it is difficult for their victims to publicize them. The intent of this ceremony is to discourage such offenses by providing for their punishment by God. A curse is pronounced on those who commit them, and the people express their assent by responding "Amen," which also constitutes an oath to avoid these acts.

**14. Levites** They act here in their priestly role. Although blessings and curses by any individual could be effective, those uttered by priests and prophets were thought to possess particular potency.

**15. Cursed** Those who commit these sins are destined for divinely imposed misfortune, such as

craftsman's handiwork, and sets it up in secret.—And all the people shall respond, Amen.

<sup>16</sup>Cursed be he who insults his father or mother.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

<sup>17</sup>Cursed be he who moves his fellow countryman's landmark.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

<sup>18</sup>Cursed be he who misdirects a blind person on his way.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

<sup>19</sup>Cursed be he who subverts the rights of the stranger, the fatherless, and the widow.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

<sup>20</sup>Cursed be he who lies with his father's wife, for he has removed his father's garment.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

<sup>21</sup>Cursed be he who lies with any beast.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

תועבת יהוה מעשה ידי חרש ושם  
בסתר וענו כל־העם ואמרו אמן: ס  
ארור מקלה אביו ואמו ואמר כל־העם  
אמן: ס

ארור מסיג גבול רעהו ואמר כל־העם  
אמן: ס

ארור משגה עור בדרך ואמר כל־העם  
אמן: ס

ארור משה משפט גר־יתום ואלמנה  
ואמר כל־העם אמן: ס

ארור שכב עם־אשת אביו כי גלה בנה  
אביו ואמר כל־העם אמן: ס

ארור שכב עם־כל־בהמה ואמר כל־  
העם אמן: ס

childlessness, the death of children, slavery, and the calamities listed in Deut. 28.

**image** Any kind of idol, whether of the Lord or any other deity.

**craftsman's handiwork** The fact that idols are made by mortals is the Torah's most telling argument against their divinity.

**in secret** To avoid detection. The Torah, which seems to expect that open idolatry would be stigmatized and punished by the sinner's contemporaries, here seeks to deter idolatry practiced in secret. The archaeological evidence indicates that idols were indeed rare in ancient Israel. Very few have been found in Israelite sites compared to those of neighboring peoples.

**Amen** The ancient Greek translation of this word is, "Let it be so." The term, derived from the root meaning "firm" (אמן), expresses assent to what someone has just said. As the Talmud puts it, "Answering 'Amen' after an oath is equivalent to pronouncing the oath with one's own mouth" (BT Shevu. 29b).

**16. insults** Treats them disrespectfully. The crime is not limited to verbal insults and would include the actions of a rebellious son (Deut. 21:18–21).

**17.** This curse is based on the prohibition against moving landmarks (19:14). Because this crime is committed in secret, and fear of detection is not as effective a deterrent as in the case of other crimes, ancient literature is replete

with curses and warnings of divine punishment against those who commit it. Babylonian boundary stones were inscribed with curses directed against those who would move them or alter their inscriptions. The crime was a direct affront to God because property was assigned by lot, which was believed to be directed by God and expressive of His will.

**18.** The same principle is expressed in Lev. 19:14. Similarly, Egyptian wisdom literature teaches: "Do not laugh at a blind man or tease a dwarf, nor injure the affairs of the lame."

**19. the stranger, the fatherless and the widow** Because they do not have power to prosecute or defend their rights, the Torah often points out that God is their protector, as in 10:18.

**20.** Unlike 23:1, which refers only to his father's former wife, this could refer to his current wife and even to the sinner's own mother. Only sexual relations are mentioned here. Marriage to a father's former wife, which is prohibited in 23:1, is inherently a public act and hence irrelevant in this context. The laws of Hammurabi likewise oppose a man's having intercourse with his step-mother after his father's death. In the Hittite laws, it is a crime only if the father is still alive.

**21.** Bestiality is not uncommon, especially in rural areas. The Hittite laws prohibit it only with certain animals but not others. Ancient Near Eastern myths sometimes describe sexual intercourse between gods and animals.



22Cursed be he who lies with his sister, whether daughter of his father or of his mother.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

23Cursed be he who lies with his mother-in-law.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

24Cursed be he who strikes down his fellow countryman in secret.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

25Cursed be he who accepts a bribe in the case of the murder of an innocent person.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

26Cursed be he who will not uphold the terms of this Teaching and observe them.—And all the people shall say, Amen.

22 אָרוּר שֶׁכֵּב עִם-אָחִיתוֹ בֵּת-אָבִיו אֹ

בֵּת-אִמּוֹ וְאָמַר כָּל-הָעָם אָמֵן: ס

23 אָרוּר שֶׁכֵּב עִם-חֲתָנִתּוֹ וְאָמַר כָּל-הָעָם

אָמֵן: ס

24 אָרוּר מִכָּה רֵעֵהוּ בְּסֵתֶר וְאָמַר כָּל-

הָעָם אָמֵן: ס

25 אָרוּר לֹקֵחַ שֹׁחַד לְהַכּוֹת נַפֶּשׁ דָּם נָקִי

וְאָמַר כָּל-הָעָם אָמֵן: ס

26 אָרוּר אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יִקִּים אֶת-דִּבְרֵי

הַתּוֹרָה-הַזֹּאת לַעֲשׂוֹת אוֹתָם וְאָמַר כָּל-

הָעָם אָמֵן: פ

28 Now, if you obey the LORD your God, to observe faithfully all His commandments

כח וְהָיָה אִם-שָׁמַעְתֶּם בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיךָ לַשְׁמֹר לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת-כָּל-

22. *whether daughter of his father or of his mother* This explanatory phrase makes it clear that one may not have sexual relations with, and hence may not marry, even a half-sister. Marriage with a half-sister from a different mother was permitted at one time. Thus Abraham told Abimelech that Sarah was his half-sister, and David's daughter Tamar told his son (her half-brother) Amnon that David would permit them to marry (see Gen. 20:12; 2 Sam. 13:13). The practice was also known in Greece and Arabia. There were brother-sister marriages in Egypt and in Phoeni-

cia, found mostly among the royalty.

24. *strikes down* Hebrew: *makkeh*, which can refer either to lethal or to nonlethal blows.

25. Refers to a judge who accepts a bribe to condemn an innocent defendant to death.

26. The final curse refers to all other provisions of the Teaching and constitutes an oath to uphold the entire Teaching. If this ceremony was to be performed at Mount Ebal, at the same time as the other ceremonies in this chapter, "this Teaching" may refer to the copy of the Teaching inscribed on the stones that stood nearby.

# THE CONSEQUENCES OF OBEDIENCE AND DISOBEDIENCE (28:1-68)

This chapter details the consequences of Israel's obeying or disobeying the terms of the covenant that Moses reviewed in chapters 5-26. Promises and threats such as these are well known in the Bible and elsewhere in ancient Near Eastern literature. See Comment to 27:11-13.

In this chapter, "blessing" and "curse" do not refer to promises and threats but to the benign and the destructive forces that blessings and curses

call for. They are almost personified by the verbs used to depict them; they "come," "pursue," and "overtake" (vv. 2,15,22,45), and God "lets [them] loose" (vv. 8,20, cf. 32:24). True personification of these forces, however, is absent in Deuteronomy, which avoids any suggestion of independent supernatural powers other than God. Instead, the blessings and the curses are treated as impersonal forces under God's absolute control.

26. The Talmud derives a positive principle from this verse, inferring that one who does uphold the Teaching (i.e., Torah) will be blessed. This applies even to those in-

dividuals who never studied and never taught but give financial support to those who study Torah (JT Sot. 7:4; Barukh Halevi Epstein).

which I enjoin upon you this day, the LORD your God will set you high above all the nations of the earth. <sup>2</sup>All these blessings shall come upon you and take effect, if you will but heed the word of the LORD your God:

<sup>3</sup>Blessed shall you be in the city and blessed shall you be in the country.

<sup>4</sup>Blessed shall be the issue of your womb, the produce of your soil, and the offspring of your cattle, the calving of your herd and the lambing of your flock.

<sup>5</sup>Blessed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

<sup>6</sup>Blessed shall you be in your comings and blessed shall you be in your goings.

<sup>7</sup>The LORD will put to rout before you the enemies who attack you; they will march out against you by a single road, but flee from you by many roads. <sup>8</sup>The LORD will ordain blessings

מִצְוֹתָיו אֲשֶׁר אֲנִי מְצַוֶּה הַיּוֹם וְנִתְּנָה  
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ עָלֶיךָ עַל כָּל-גּוֹי הָאָרֶץ:  
<sup>2</sup>וּבָאוּ עֲלֶיךָ כָּל-הַבְּרָכוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וְהִשְׁיִגְךָ  
כִּי תִשְׁמָע בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ:

<sup>3</sup>בְּרֹךְ אַתָּה בְּעִיר וּבְרֹךְ אַתָּה בַּשָּׂדֶה:

<sup>4</sup>בְּרֹךְ פְּרִי-בִטְנְךָ וּפְרִי אֲדָמָתְךָ וּפְרִי

בְּהֶמְתְּךָ שֹׁגֵר אֶלְפֶיךָ וְעִשְׂתָּרוֹת צֹאנְךָ:

<sup>5</sup>בְּרֹךְ טַנְאֶךָ וּמִשְׁאֲרֶתְךָ:

<sup>6</sup>בְּרֹךְ אַתָּה בִּבְאֹךְ וּבְרֹךְ אַתָּה בְּצֵאתְךָ:

<sup>7</sup>וְיָתֵן יְהוָה אֶת-אִבְיֶיךָ הַקָּמִים עָלֶיךָ

נֹגְפִים לְפָנֶיךָ בְּדֶרֶךְ אֶחָד יֵצְאוּ אֵלֶיךָ

וּבִשְׁבָּעָה דְרָכִים יָנוּסוּ לְפָנֶיךָ: <sup>8</sup>יֵצֵו יְהוָה

#### THE BLESSINGS FOR OBEDIENCE

(vv. 1-14)

1. Moses reviews the conditions and the promises of 26:16-19 regarding the covenant now being made in Moab and then spells out the consequences that will ensue if the Israelites are loyal or disloyal to it.

2. The promise of 26:19 is conditional. The Israelites are not promised automatic special treatment. They must earn it. To make this clear, the condition is repeated here.

3. *Blessed* Prosperous.

*city . . . country* These opposites express a totality, meaning that wherever you live and work, your undertakings will prosper.

5. *basket . . . kneading bowl* These containers were used for gathering produce and preparing bread. The blessing means that the harvest will be abundant and that food will be plentiful.

6. *comings . . . goings* Literally, "entering and going out." Abravanel takes blessedness in these activities to mean safety in traveling to and from the city, a common theme in descriptions of blessing and prosperity.

7. *by a single road* They will be too numerous and confident to bother separating their forces for safety.

*by many roads* Literally, "by seven roads." The enemy will scatter in every direction. Seven is often used to express a complete number.

#### CHAPTER 28

2. *take effect* Literally, "overtake you." Sometimes God intends to bless us, but we are so busy running after success that the blessings cannot catch up to us. Instead of chasing after fulfillment, perhaps we need to slow down and let the good things of life catch up to us (*Ha-amek Davar*).

3. In the city, God will reward you for your service to the community. In the country, God will reward you for sharing the harvest of your

fields with the poor and the needy (Deut. R. 7:5).

*Blessed shall you be in the city* May your home be in a good neighborhood, close to the synagogue, surrounded by good neighbors (BT BM 107a).

6. Here "comings" and "goings" may refer to business dealings, for the previous blessings refer to material well-being (Deut. R. 7:5). Prosperity brings its own dangers; this blessing asks that God guard us from the temptations that wealth occasions (*Ha-amek Davar*).

for you upon your barns and upon all your undertakings: He will bless you in the land that the LORD your God is giving you. <sup>9</sup>The LORD will establish you as His holy people, as He swore to you, if you keep the commandments of the LORD your God and walk in His ways. <sup>10</sup>And all the peoples of the earth shall see that the LORD's name is proclaimed over you, and they shall stand in fear of you. <sup>11</sup>The LORD will give you abounding prosperity in the issue of your womb, the offspring of your cattle, and the produce of your soil in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers to assign to you. <sup>12</sup>The LORD will open for you His bounteous store, the heavens, to provide rain for your land in season and to bless all your undertakings. You will be creditor to many nations, but debtor to none.

<sup>13</sup>The LORD will make you the head, not the tail; you will always be at the top and never at the bottom—if only you obey and faithfully observe the commandments of the LORD your God that I enjoin upon you this day, <sup>14</sup>and do not deviate to the right or to the left from any of the commandments that I enjoin upon you this day and turn to the worship of other gods.

<sup>15</sup>But if you do not obey the LORD your God

אתה את הברכה באסמך ובכל משלח ידך וברכך בארץ אשר יהיה אליהך נתן לך: <sup>9</sup> ויקימך יהוה לו לעם קדוש כאשר נשבע לך כי תשמר את מצוות יהוה אליהך והלכת בדרכיו: <sup>10</sup> וראו כל עמי הארץ כי שם יהוה נקרא עליך ויראו ממך: <sup>11</sup> והותרך יהוה לטובה בפרי בטן ובפרי בהמתך ובפרי אדמתך על האדמה אשר נשבע יהוה לאבותיך לתת לך: <sup>12</sup> ויפתח יהוה לך את אוצרו הטוב את השמים לתת מטר ארצה בעתו ולברך את כל מעשה ידך והלוית גוים רבים ואתה לא תלוה:

<sup>13</sup> ונתתך יהוה לראש ולא לזנב והיית רק למעלה ולא תהיה למטה כי תשמע אל מצוות יהוה אליהך אשר אנכי מצוה היום לשמר ולעשות: <sup>14</sup> ולא תסור מכל הדברים אשר אנכי מצוה אתכם היום ימין ושמאל\* ללכת אחרי אלהים אחרים לעבדם: ס

<sup>15</sup> והיה אם לא תשמע בקול יהוה

v. 14. מלא ר

**8. barns** Namely, stores, granaries such as silos, underground storage pits, and storehouses.

**9. the LORD . . . the LORD your God** These two ways of referring to God are used throughout the chapter. When acts of divine reward and punishment are described, God is called simply "the LORD." The full phrase, "the LORD your/our God," is reserved for passages that refer to the Israelites' duty of obeying God or refer to His gift of the Land. It has the connotation of "the LORD, who has kept His promises to you and whom you are obligated to obey."

**if you keep** The conditional nature of Israel's sanctity is repeated.

**10. the LORD's name** Israel is known as "the

people of the LORD" (*am YHVH*). The connection between God's name and protection is expressed in prayers that appeal to God for security on the grounds that the supplicant is called by His name.

**11. abounding** That is, surpassing. Because of the surplus, Israel will be able to lend to other nations and it never will need to borrow (v. 12).

**12. store** The ancients pictured rain, snow, hail, wind, and other natural phenomena as kept in celestial storehouses that God opens as needed.

**creditor to many nations** Because of your surplus wealth.

**14.** The promises end with a final reminder that they depend on a key condition: that the Israelites shun all other gods.

**10. peoples . . . shall stand in fear of you** Not that they will be afraid of you, but

that they will learn from you how to fear (i.e., revere) God (Vilna Gaon).

אלהיך לשמ  
וחקתיו אש  
עליך כל-הק  
16 ארור אתה  
17 ארור טנא  
18 ארור פרי  
אלפיה ועש  
19 ארור א  
בצאתך:  
20 ישלח יה  
המהומה  
ידך אשר ת  
מהר מפני  
21 ידבק יח  
אתך מעל  
לרשתה:  
ובקדחת  
ובשדפון  
23 והיו ש  
והארץ א  
את-מטר  
יגר עליה  
25 יתגר יח

refer to the  
(v. 38-42)  
prayers.  
in God's  
Deuteronomy

afflictions  
terms refer  
various

rain and

will be  
stirred up

to observe faithfully all His commandments and laws which I enjoin upon you this day, all these curses shall come upon you and take effect:

<sup>16</sup>Cursed shall you be in the city and cursed shall you be in the country.

<sup>17</sup>Cursed shall be your basket and your kneading bowl.

<sup>18</sup>Cursed shall be the issue of your womb and the produce of your soil, the calving of your herd and the lambing of your flock.

<sup>19</sup>Cursed shall you be in your comings and cursed shall you be in your goings.

<sup>20</sup>The LORD will let loose against you calamity, panic, and frustration in all the enterprises you undertake, so that you shall soon be utterly wiped out because of your evildoing in forsaking Me. <sup>21</sup>The LORD will make pestilence cling to you, until He has put an end to you in the land that you are entering to possess. <sup>22</sup>The LORD will strike you with consumption, fever, and inflammation, with scorching heat and drought, with blight and mildew; they shall hound you until you perish. <sup>23</sup>The skies above your head shall be copper and the earth under you iron. <sup>24</sup>The LORD will make the rain of your land dust, and sand shall drop on you from the sky, until you are wiped out.

<sup>25</sup>The LORD will put you to rout before your enemies; you shall march out against them by

אלהיך לשמר לעשות את כל מצותיו וחקתיו אשר אנכי מצוה היום ובא עליך כל הקללות האלה והשיגוף:

<sup>16</sup> ארור אתה בעיר וארור אתה בשדה:

<sup>17</sup> ארור סנאך ומשארתך:

<sup>18</sup> ארור פרי בטןך ופרי אדמתך שגר

אלפיה ועשתרות צאנך:

<sup>19</sup> ארור אתה בבאך וארור אתה

בצאתך:

<sup>20</sup> ישלח יהוה בך את המארה את

המחמה ואת המגערת בכל משלח

ידך אשר תעשה עד השמדך ועד אבדך

מהר מפני רע מעלליך אשר עזבתני:

<sup>21</sup> ידבק יהוה בך את הדבר עד בלתו

אתך מעל האדמה אשר אתה בא שמה

לרשתה: <sup>22</sup> יפכה יהוה בשחפת

ובקדחת ובדלקת ובחרחול ובחרב

ובשדפון ובירקון ורדפוך עד אבדך:

<sup>23</sup> והיו שמיה אשר על ראשך נחשת

והארץ אשר תחתיך ברזל: <sup>24</sup> יתן יהוה

את מטר ארצך אבק ועפר מן השמים

יגר עליך עד השמדך:

<sup>25</sup> יתנך יהוה נגף לפני איבך בדרך

#### THE CURSES FOR DISOBEDIENCE (vv. 15-68)

The remainder of the chapter, like the threats in Lev. 26, is known as the *Tokhehah*, or "Warning" (literally, "rebuke") in postbiblical sources. As in the Leviticus passage, the threats are more numerous than the promises.

#### FIRST GROUP (vv. 15-44)

**20. calamity** Hebrew: *m'erah*; literally, "curse." The antonym of "blessing" in verse 8. It probably refers to drought and plant-destroying pests (as in Mal. 3:9-11).

**panic** Refers to the tumult and confusion caused by war, social disorder, and pestilence.

**frustration** Hebrew: *mig-eret*; literally, "ob-

struction, encumbrance." Here it may refer to the drought (vv. 23-24) and crop failure (vv. 38-42) resulting from God's rejection of their prayers.

**forsaking Me** Here Moses speaks in God's name, as sometimes happens in Deuteronomy (see v. 68).

**21. pestilence** A virulent epidemic.

**22.** The exact nature of the seven afflictions listed in this verse is uncertain. The terms refer to symptoms that could stem from various causes.

**23.** The sky will be too hard to yield rain and the soil too hard to plow.

**24.** In the absence of rain, the land will be exposed to duststorms and sandstorms stirred up from the waterless soil.

a single road, but flee from them by many roads; and you shall become a horror to all the kingdoms of the earth. <sup>26</sup>Your carcasses shall become food for all the birds of the sky and all the beasts of the earth, with none to frighten them off.

<sup>27</sup>The LORD will strike you with the Egyptian inflammation, with hemorrhoids, boil-scars, and itch, from which you shall never recover.

<sup>28</sup>The LORD will strike you with madness, blindness, and dismay. <sup>29</sup>You shall grope at noon as a blind man gropes in the dark; you shall not prosper in your ventures, but shall be constantly abused and robbed, with none to give help.

<sup>30</sup>If you pay the bride-price for a wife, another man shall enjoy her. If you build a house, you shall not live in it. If you plant a vineyard, you shall not harvest it. <sup>31</sup>Your ox shall be slaughtered before your eyes, but you shall not eat of it; your ass shall be seized in front of you, and it shall not be returned to you; your flock shall be delivered to your enemies, with none to help

אחד תצא אליו ובשבעה דרכים תנוס לפניו והיית לזעזוע לכל ממלכות הארץ: <sup>26</sup> והייתה נבלתך למאכל לכל-עוף השמים ולבהמת הארץ ואין מחריד:

<sup>27</sup> יככה יהוה בשחין מצרים ובעפלים ובשחורים ובגרב ובחרס אשר לא-תוכל להרפא:

<sup>28</sup> יככה יהוה בשגעון ובעיוון ובתמהון לבב: <sup>29</sup> והיית ממשש בצהרים באשר ימשש העור באפלה ולא תצליח את-דרכיך והיית אף עשוק וגזול כל-הימים ואין מושיע:

<sup>30</sup> אשה תארש ואיש אחר ישגלה ישכבנה בית תבנה ולא-תשב בו כרם תטע ולא תחללנו: <sup>31</sup> שורך טבוח לעיניך ולא תאכל ממנו חמורך גזול מלפניך ולא ישוב לך צאנך נתנות לאיביך ואין

**25. horror** Instead of respectful fear (v. 10), you will inspire horror in those who witness your ruinous defeat.

**26.** In the ancient world, lack of burial was regarded as a fate worse than death. It was believed that the spirits of the unburied would never find admittance to a resting place in the netherworld.

**27. Egyptian inflammation** The 6th of the Ten Plagues in Egypt, perhaps skin anthrax (see Exod. 9:8-12).

**28. madness** Ranting and carrying on wildly.

**blindness** Because the other two afflictions in this verse are psychological, this may be a metaphor for stupefaction or disorientation. In some ancient Near Eastern texts, fear in the face of battle is described as blurring of eyesight.

**29. in the dark** Ibn Janah takes the phrase to mean, "you will grope at noon [as if] in darkness, like a blind man."

**abused and robbed** "Abused" refers to maltreatment and being cheated out of one's property; "robbed," to robbery and extortion. In the light of verses 30-33, they must refer to oppression by conquerors.

**none to give help** Refers to kings, officials, or others who could save the oppressed and to military leaders who could give the nation relief from foreign assailants.

**30.** The most important personal achievements, those that constitute grounds for draft deferment (see 20:5-7), will be worthless.

**will enjoy her** The unvocalized letters of the text (ישגלנה) mean "will rape her." Because that verb (שגל) was considered too vulgar for public reading in the synagogue, another verb is read in its place, literally meaning "will lie with her" (*yishkavennah*).

**31.** The extortion of another's ox or ass is a proverbial example of oppression.

**29. as a blind man gropes in the dark** Isn't a blind man equally disadvantaged both in daylight and in darkness? In daylight, he can hope

that others will see him and help him. In the dark, however, there will be "none to give help" (BT Meg. 24b).

דברים כח כי  
לך מושיע: <sup>32</sup>  
אחר ועיניך  
היום ואין ל  
וכל-יגיעך  
והיית רק  
<sup>34</sup> והיית מוש  
תראה: <sup>35</sup>  
הברפים ועל  
להרפא מכה  
<sup>36</sup> יולך יהוה  
תקים עליך  
ואבתריך ועב  
ואבן: <sup>37</sup> והי  
בכל העמים  
<sup>38</sup> ורע רב ת  
כי יחסלנו  
ועבדת יי  
תאכלנו הת  
גבולך ושמן  
בנים ובנות

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hot, dry cli-  
most impor-  
ing the skin,  
will be frus-  
be. Children

you. <sup>32</sup>Your sons and daughters shall be delivered to another people, while you look on; and your eyes shall strain for them constantly, but you shall be helpless. <sup>33</sup>A people you do not know shall eat up the produce of your soil and all your gains; you shall be abused and downtrodden continually, <sup>34</sup>until you are driven mad by what your eyes behold. <sup>35</sup>The LORD will afflict you at the knees and thighs with a severe inflammation, from which you shall never recover—from the sole of your foot to the crown of your head.

<sup>36</sup>The LORD will drive you, and the king you have set over you, to a nation unknown to you or your fathers, where you shall serve other gods, of wood and stone. <sup>37</sup>You shall be a consternation, a proverb, and a byword among all the peoples to which the LORD will drive you.

<sup>38</sup>Though you take much seed out to the field, you shall gather in little, for the locust shall consume it. <sup>39</sup>Though you plant vineyards and till them, you shall have no wine to drink or store, for the worm shall devour them. <sup>40</sup>Though you have olive trees throughout your territory, you shall have no oil for anointment, for your olives shall drop off. <sup>41</sup>Though you beget sons and

לך מושיע: <sup>32</sup>בְּנֶיךָ וּבָנֹתֶיךָ נִתְּנִים לְעַם אַחֵר וְעֵינֶיךָ רֹאוֹת וְכָלוֹת אֲלֵיהֶם כָּל-הַיּוֹם וְאֵין לְאֵל יָדָּךְ: <sup>33</sup>פְּרִי אֲדָמָתְךָ וְכָל-יִגְיַעֲךָ יֹאכַל עִם אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַעְתָּ וְהָיִיתָ רַק עֲשׂוּק וְרָצוּץ כָּל-הַיָּמִים: <sup>34</sup>וְהָיִיתָ מְשֻׁגָּע מִמַּרְאֵה עֵינֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר תִּרְאֶה: <sup>35</sup>יִכְבֶּה יְהוָה בְּשַׁחֲתִין רֶגַע עַל-הַבְּרָכִים וְעַל-הַשְּׁקָמִים אֲשֶׁר לֹא-תוּכַל לְהִרְפָּא מִכָּפָּה וּרְגֶלְךָ וְעַד קַדְקֶדְךָ: <sup>36</sup>וְיֹלֶךְ יְהוָה אֹתְךָ וְאֶת-מֶלֶכְךָ אֲשֶׁר תָּקִים עֲלֶיךָ אֶל-גּוֹי אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יָדַעְתָּ אֶתָּה וְאַבְתִּיךָ וְעַבְדְּתָם שָׁם אֱלֹהִים אֲחֵרִים עֵץ וְאֶבֶן: <sup>37</sup>וְהָיִיתָ לְשִׁמָּה לְמַשָּׁל וּלְשִׁנְיָה בְּכָל-הָעַמִּים אֲשֶׁר-יִנְהַגְךָ יְהוָה שָׁמָּה: <sup>38</sup>וְרַע רַב תּוֹצִיא הַשָּׂדֶה וּמַעֲט תִּקְטֹף כִּי יִחְסְלוּ הָאֲרָבָה: <sup>39</sup>בְּרָמִים תִּטֵּעַ וְעַבְדְּתָהּ וַיֵּין לֹא תִשְׁתֶּה וְלֹא תִאָּגֵר כִּי תֹאכְלוּ הַתִּלְעָת: <sup>40</sup>וַיִּתִּים יִהְיוּ לְךָ בְּכָל-גְּבוּלְךָ וְשִׁמֹן לֹא תִסּוֹף כִּי יִשָּׁל זִיתְךָ: <sup>41</sup>בָּנִים וּבָנוֹת תּוֹלִיד וְלֹא-יִהְיוּ לְךָ כִּי

**32. delivered to another people** They will be sold as slaves to a foreign land, so that their parents will never see them again.

**your eyes shall strain for them** Literally, "your eyes shall run out [of tears] over them."

**35.** Suggested diagnoses include universalized eczema, smallpox, "joint leprosy," and psoriasis.

**36.** The Israelites will be exiled from their land. The partial or complete deportation of defeated populations was a common practice in the ancient world, to provide laborers or slaves for the conqueror or to break the resistance of rebellious peoples.

**unknown to you or your fathers** You will feel completely alien there.

**37. consternation** You will be a source of consternation, or shock, to those who see your condition.

**proverb** People will refer to you when they wish to give an example of horrid catastrophe.

**byword** An object of repeated discussion.

**all the peoples to which the LORD will drive you** The northern Israelites and the Judahites were exiled to various lands by their original captors, and migrated yet farther afterward.

**38. consume it** The crop. Locusts are types of grasshoppers that migrate in immense groups and constitute one of the world's most devastating natural disasters. The daily food consumption of a large swarm is equivalent to that of 1.5 million people.

**39. worm** The larva of some type of moth such as the grape-leaf folder, whose larvae defoliate grapevines; or the grape moth or berry moth, whose larvae eat the grapes.

**40. oil for anointment** In the hot, dry climate of the Middle East, one of the most important uses of olive oil was for anointing the skin, a necessary act of personal hygiene.

**41.** The act of raising children will be frustrated just as the raising of crops will be. Children

daughters, they shall not remain with you, for they shall go into captivity. <sup>42</sup>The cricket shall take over all the trees and produce of your land.

<sup>43</sup>The stranger in your midst shall rise above you higher and higher, while you sink lower and lower: <sup>44</sup>he shall be your creditor, but you shall not be his; he shall be the head and you the tail.

<sup>45</sup>All these curses shall befall you; they shall pursue you and overtake you, until you are wiped out, because you did not heed the LORD your God and keep the commandments and laws that He enjoined upon you. <sup>46</sup>They shall serve as signs and proofs against you and your offspring for all time. <sup>47</sup>Because you would not serve the LORD your God in joy and gladness over the abundance of everything, <sup>48</sup>you shall have to serve—in hunger and thirst, naked and lacking everything—the enemies whom the LORD will let loose against you. He will put an iron yoke upon your neck until He has wiped you out.

<sup>49</sup>The LORD will bring a nation against you from afar, from the end of the earth, which will swoop down like the eagle—a nation whose lan-

יִלְכוּ בַשָּׁבִי: <sup>42</sup>כָּל-עֵצְךָ וּפְרִי אֲדָמָתְךָ יִירָשׁ הַצִּלְצָל:

<sup>43</sup>הַגֵּר אֲשֶׁר בְּקִרְבְּךָ יַעֲלֶה עֲלֶיךָ מֵעֵלָה מֵעֵלָה וְאַתָּה תִרְדַּד מִטָּה מִטָּה: <sup>44</sup>הוּא יִלְוֶךָ וְאַתָּה לֹא תִלְוֶנּוּ הוּא יִהְיֶה לְרֹאשׁ וְאַתָּה תִּהְיֶה לְזָנָב:

<sup>45</sup>וּבָאוּ עֲלֶיךָ כָּל-הַקְּלָלוֹת הָאֵלֶּה וַיִּרְדְּפוּךָ וְהִשְׁיִגוּךָ עַד הַשְׁמֵדָה כִּי-לֹא שָׁמַעְתָּ בְּקוֹל יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ לְשִׁמֹּר מִצְוֹתָיו וְחֻקֹּתָיו אֲשֶׁר צִוָּךָ: <sup>46</sup>וְהָיוּ בָךְ לְאוֹת וּלְמוֹפֶת וּבְזִרְעֶךָ עַד-עוֹלָם: <sup>47</sup>תַּחַת אֲשֶׁר לֹא-עֲבַדְתָּ אֶת-יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ בְּשִׂמְחָה וּבְטוֹב לֵבָב מְרֹב כֹּל: <sup>48</sup>וְעַבַדְתָּ אֶת-אֲבִיךָ אֲשֶׁר יִשְׁלַחְנֶנּוּ יְהוָה בָּךְ בְּרָעֵב וּבְצָמָא וּבְעִירָם וּבְחֹסֶר כֹּל וְנָתַן עַל בְּרִזְלְךָ עַל-צוּאָרְךָ עַד הַשְׁמִידוֹ אֶתְּךָ:

<sup>49</sup>יֵשָׁא יְהוָה עֲלֶיךָ גּוֹי מֵרָחֵק מִקְצֵה הָאָרֶץ כַּאֲשֶׁר יִדְאָה הַנֶּשֶׁר גּוֹי אֲשֶׁר

and crops are also associated in the blessings of 28:4 and 7:13, and in the curses of verses 31–33.

**42.** Either the fields will be ravaged by destructive insects (such as grasshoppers or katydids) or, after the captivity of the children (v. 41), there will be too few people to work the fields, which then will be overrun by insects. These would include mole crickets, which eat roots though they do not cause large-scale aboveground destruction.

**43.** The economic collapse will be so calamitous that resident aliens, who normally are poor and dependent on Israelites, will prosper more than the Israelites and be in a position to make loans to them and thereby achieve economic superiority. Contrast the blessing of verses 12–13.

#### SECOND GROUP (vv. 45–57)

**46. signs and proofs** Of the guilt of this sinful generation, as elaborated in 29:21–27.

**48.** The punishment is the precise reversal of the prior situation (v. 47). This will make the justice of the punishment obvious.

**iron yoke** The yoke is a familiar, not always unfavorable, metaphor expressing submission to the rule of gods and kings in the ancient Near East. Here, however, the context is punitive. Because yokes were normally made of wood, an iron yoke implies an exceptional burden or unbreakable servitude.

**49. a nation . . . from afar** No specific nation is meant. The enemy will be utterly alien to Israel, even stranger than the “people you do not know” of verse 33. It will come from so far away that its language will be unintelligible, unlike Israel’s close neighbors who spoke languages similar to Hebrew.

**like the eagle** Or the griffon vulture. The simile refers to the suddenness, speed, and power of the attack.

**47. you would not serve . . . in joy** Ingratitude keeps us from true devotion to God. The image

here is not of refusing to worship, but of worshipping grudgingly (Hayyim of Volozhin).

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the Amorites

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guage you do not understand, <sup>50a</sup> a ruthless nation, that will show the old no regard and the young no mercy. <sup>51</sup> It shall devour the offspring of your cattle and the produce of your soil, until you have been wiped out, leaving you nothing of new grain, wine, or oil, of the calving of your herds and the lambing of your flocks, until it has brought you to ruin. <sup>52</sup> It shall shut you up in all your towns throughout your land until every mighty, towering wall in which you trust has come down. And when you are shut up in all your towns throughout your land that the LORD your God has assigned to you, <sup>53</sup> you shall eat your own issue, the flesh of your sons and daughters that the LORD your God has assigned to you, because of the desperate straits to which your enemy shall reduce you. <sup>54</sup> He who is most tender and fastidious among you shall be too mean to his brother and the wife of his bosom and the children he has spared <sup>55</sup> to share with any of them the flesh of the children that he eats, because he has nothing else left as a result of the desperate straits to which your enemy shall reduce you in all your towns. <sup>56</sup> And she who is most tender and dainty among you, so tender

לֹא-תִשְׁמַע לְשׁוֹנוֹ: <sup>50</sup> גֹּי עֶז פָּנִים אֲשֶׁר  
לֹא-יִשָּׂא פָנִים לְזָקֵן וְנָעַר לֹא יִחַן:  
<sup>51</sup> וְאָכַל פְּרִי בְהֶמְתָּךְ וּפְרִי-אֲדָמָתְךָ עַד  
הַשְׂמֶדֶךְ אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יִשְׁאִיר לָךְ דָּגֶן תִּירוֹשׁ  
וְיִצְהָר שֹׁגֵר אֶלְפִיךָ וְעִשְׂתֶּרֶת צֹאנְךָ עַד  
הָאֲבִידוֹ אִתָּךְ: <sup>52</sup> וְהָצַר לָךְ בְּכָל-שְׁעָרֶיךָ  
עַד רֵדַת חֲמֹתֶיךָ הַגְּבוּהוֹת וְהַבְּצֻרוֹת אֲשֶׁר  
אַתָּה בָטָח בָּהֶן בְּכָל-אֶרֶץךָ וְהָצַר לָךְ  
בְּכָל-שְׁעָרֶיךָ בְּכָל-אֶרֶץךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן יְהוָה  
אֱלֹהֶיךָ לָךְ: <sup>53</sup> וְאָכַלְתָּ פְרִי-בִטְנְךָ בִּשְׂרָ  
בְנֶיךָ וּבְנֹתֶיךָ אֲשֶׁר נָתַן לָךְ יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
בַּמְצוֹר וּבַמְצוֹק אֲשֶׁר-יֵצִיק לָךְ אִיָּבֶךָ:  
<sup>54</sup> הָאִישׁ הַרֵךְ בָּךְ וְהָעַגְגָּ מֵאֹד תִּרְעַע עֵינָיו  
בְּאֲחִיו וּבְאִשְׁתּוֹ חֵילוֹ וּבִיתוֹ בְּנָיו אֲשֶׁר  
יִוָּתֵר: <sup>55</sup> מִתַּת יָד לְאֶחָד מֵהֶם מִבֶּשֶׂר בְּנָיו  
אֲשֶׁר יֹאכַל מִבְּלִי הַשְׂאִיר-לוֹ כֹּל בַּמְצוֹר  
וּבַמְצוֹק אֲשֶׁר יֵצִיק לָךְ אִיָּבֶךָ בְּכָל-  
שְׁעָרֶיךָ: <sup>56</sup> הָרֹכֵחַ בָּךְ וְהָעֶנְזָה אֲשֶׁר לֹא-  
נִסְתָּה בְּהִרְגָלָהּ הָצַג עַל-הָאָרֶץ מִהִתְעַנֵּג

**50. ruthless** Literally, "harsh of face." Alludes to the enemy's shameless brutality in treating the old and the young.

**51.** The list of what the enemy will consume is the same as the list of blessings promised in verse 4, with one omission, "the issue of your womb." In the grisly climax of the invasion, that blessing will be consumed by Israel itself (v. 53).

**52. shut you up** Literally, "press you," "distress you."

**in all your towns** There will be no place to escape.

**until every . . . wall . . . has come down** Until the enemy has breached the walls with battering rams and has razed them.

**in which you trust** A warning against misplaced trust. If the people disobey God, powerful

fortifications will provide no more protection than they did for the Canaanites and the Amorites (see 1:28, 3:5, 9:1).

**53.** Besieged and starving, the people will lose every vestige of compassion, and they will resort to cannibalism. (Under such circumstances, cannibalism has taken place throughout history; ancient cases are reported from Samaria, Jerusalem, and elsewhere in the Near East.)

**54. spared** Children whom he has not yet slaughtered and eaten.

**56-57.** The most pampered of women will likewise turn to the most loathsome of foods and guard it jealously. Newly delivered mothers will secretly devour their newborn along with the afterbirth to avoid sharing them with their husbands and older children.

**53. you shall eat . . . the flesh of your sons and daughters** One commentator, unable to bear the horrifying literal meaning,

takes this to mean: "In old age, you will have to depend on your children to feed and sustain you."



and dainty that she would never venture to set a foot on the ground, shall begrudge the husband of her bosom, and her son and her daughter, <sup>57</sup>the afterbirth that issues from between her legs and the babies she bears; she shall eat them secretly, because of utter want, in the desperate straits to which your enemy shall reduce you in your towns.

<sup>58</sup>If you fail to observe faithfully all the terms of this Teaching that are written in this book, to reverence this honored and awesome Name, the LORD your God, <sup>59</sup>the LORD will inflict extraordinary plagues upon you and your offspring, strange and lasting plagues, malignant and chronic diseases. <sup>60</sup>He will bring back upon you all the sicknesses of Egypt that you dreaded so, and they shall cling to you. <sup>61</sup>Moreover, the LORD will bring upon you all the other diseases and plagues that are not mentioned in this book of Teaching, until you are wiped out. <sup>62</sup>You shall be left a scant few, after having been as numerous as the stars in the skies, because you did not heed the command of the LORD your God. <sup>63</sup>And as the LORD once delighted in making you prosperous and many, so will the LORD now delight in causing you to perish and in wiping you out; you shall be torn from the land that you are about to enter and possess.

<sup>64</sup>The LORD will scatter you among all the peoples from one end of the earth to the other, and there you shall serve other gods, wood and

ומרר תרע עינה באיש חיקה ובבנה ובבתה: <sup>57</sup>ובשליטה היוצת \* מבין רגליה ובבניה אשר תלד פירותאכלם בחסר-כל פסתר במצור ובמצוק אשר יציק לך איבה בשעריך:

<sup>58</sup>אם-לא תשמר לעשות את-כל-דברי התורה הזאת הפתובים בספר הזה ליראה את-השם הנכבד והנורא הזה את יהוה אלהיך: <sup>59</sup>והפלא יהוה את-מפתך ואת מכות ורעה מכות גדלות ונאמנות וחלים רעים ונאמנים: <sup>60</sup>והשיב בך את כל-מדינה מצרים אשר יגרת מפניהם ודבקו בך: <sup>61</sup>גם כל-חלי וכל-מפה אשר לא כתוב בספר התורה הזאת יעלם יהוה עליך עד השמדה: <sup>62</sup>ונשאריתם במתי מעט תחת אשר הייתם ככוכבי השמים לרב כילא שמעת בקול יהוה אלהיך: <sup>63</sup>והיה כאשר-שש יהוה עליכם להיטיב אתכם ולהרבות אתכם בן ישיש יהוה עליכם להאביד אתכם ולהשמיד אתכם ונסחתם מעל האדמה אשר-אתה בא-שמה לרשתה:

<sup>64</sup>והפיצה יהוה בכל-העמים מקצה הארץ ועד-קצה הארץ ועבדת שם

v. 57. חסר א'

*dainty* Pampered, indulged.

*would never venture to set a foot on the ground* She was accustomed to being carried on a litter or a portable chair or to riding in a carriage.

### THIRD GROUP (vv. 58-68)

**58. If you fail to observe** To prevent the lengthy list of threats from inducing hopeless resignation, Moses again reminds the Israelites that the curses are conditional.

**Name** God's name is synonymous with God's being. This is a common usage in the Bible,

especially in poetry. One loves and fears God's name—and blesses, thanks, and praises it—while sinners scorn and revile it.

**59. strange** Literally, "great." That is, unusually severe.

**60.** God will afflict the Israelites with the sicknesses of Egypt, from which He had promised to protect them if they would obey Him (see 7:15; Exod. 15:26).

**61. plagues that are not mentioned** Ancient Near Eastern documents often conclude with statements like this to indicate that the document stands for more than it contains.

stone, whom neither you nor your ancestors have experienced. <sup>65</sup>Yet even among those nations you shall find no peace, nor shall your foot find a place to rest. The LORD will give you there an anguished heart and eyes that pine and a despondent spirit. <sup>66</sup>The life you face shall be precarious; you shall be in terror, night and day, with no assurance of survival. <sup>67</sup>In the morning you shall say, "If only it were evening!" and in the evening you shall say, "If only it were morning!"—because of what your heart shall dread and your eyes shall see. <sup>68</sup>The LORD will send you back to Egypt in galleys, by a route which I told you you should not see again. There you shall offer yourselves for sale to your enemies as male and female slaves, but none will buy.

<sup>69</sup>These are the terms of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to conclude with the Israelites in the land of Moab, in addition to the covenant which He had made with them at Horeb.

**65. no peace** Even in exile, the Israelites will find no relief from the terrors left behind at home.

**despondent spirit** Literally, "a parched throat." A symptom of grief or depression.

**68.** The final reversal of history: the Israelites will be returned to Egypt.

**a route which I told you you should not see again** In 17:16, God said, "You must [or will] not go back that way again"; and in Exod. 14:13 He promised, "The Egyptians whom you see today you will never see again." With this punishment, God will rescind that promise.

**I told you** Here Moses speaks in God's name, as in verse 20. According to 17:16, it was God who made this promise.

**offer yourselves for sale** Their crushing poverty in Egypt will force them to find sustenance by selling themselves as slaves.

**none will buy** The text gives no reason for the refusal, which represents the ultimate irony and tragedy: the Egyptians, who once declined to

אלהים אחרים אשר לא ידעת אתה ואבותיך עץ ואבן: <sup>65</sup> ובגוים ההם לא תרגיע ולא יהיה מנוח לכף רגלך ונתן יהוה לך שם לב רגז וכליון עינים ודאבון נפש: <sup>66</sup> והיו חייך תלאים לך מנגד ופחדת לילה ויום ולא תאמין בחייה: <sup>67</sup> בבקר תאמר מי יתן ערב ובערב תאמר מי יתן בקר מפחד לבבך אשר תפחד וממראה עיניך אשר תראה: <sup>68</sup> והשיבך יהוה | מצרים באניות בדרך אשר אמרתי לך לא תסיף עוד לראותה והתמפרתם שם לאיביך לעבדים ולשפחות ואין קנה: ס

<sup>69</sup> אלה דברי הברית אשר צוה יהוה את משה לכרת את בני ישראל בארץ מואב מלבד הברית אשר כרת אתם

בחייה בחרב: פ

free the Israelites from slavery, will now refuse to take them back as slaves.

#### CONCLUSION TO THE COVENANT (v. 69)

According to 4:13 and 5:2–19, the covenant at Horeb consisted of the Decalogue. The laws and teachings, promises and warnings outlined in chapters 6–26 and 28, constituting the terms of the present covenant made in Moab, were given by God to Moses privately. Moses first communicated them to the people in Moab in the long address just concluded (4:44–28:68), and then had the people commit themselves by covenant to observe them. Deuteronomy, however, regards these laws given in Moab as implicitly part of the Horeb covenant, because they are the direct continuation of God's words at Horeb, and the people had pledged there to observe them (5:24). This means that the covenants of Horeb and of Moab are virtually identical. The covenant to be made at Shechem (chap. 27) is also identical to the one made at Moab.

**67. because of what your heart shall dread** Bad as the reality will be, you will fear that the future will be worse. Fear of misfor-

tune is often worse than the actual misfortune, as our imaginations conjure up all sorts of dreadful experiences we may feel we deserve.

**29** Moses summoned all Israel and said to them:

You have seen all that the LORD did before your very eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his courtiers and to his whole country: <sup>2</sup>the wondrous feats that you saw with your own eyes, those prodigious signs and marvels. <sup>3</sup>Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a mind to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear.

<sup>4</sup>I led you through the wilderness forty years; the clothes on your back did not wear out, nor did the sandals on your feet; <sup>5</sup>you had no bread to eat and no wine or other intoxicant to

**כט** ויקרא משה אל-כל-ישראל ויאמר אליהם

אתם ראיתם את כל-אשר עשה יהוה לעיניכם בארץ מצרים לפרעה ולכל-עבדיו ולכל-ארצו: <sup>2</sup>המסות הגדולת אשר ראו עיניך האותות והמפתים הגדלים ההם: <sup>3</sup>ולא-נתן יהוה לכם לב לדעת ועינים לראות ואזנים לשמע עד היום הזה:

<sup>4</sup>ואולם אתכם ארבעים שנה במדבר לא-בלו שלמתיכם מעליכם ונעלה לא-בלתה מעל רגלך: <sup>5</sup>לחם לא אכלתם

*Moses' Third Discourse: A Summons to Ratify the Covenant Made in Moab (29:1-30:20)*

Moses has presented all the terms of the second covenant to the people (4:44-26:19, 28). He now summons them to ratify it and concludes by stating that what he is offering Israel as a nation is the opportunity to choose between life and death (30:15-20).

**BASIS OF THE COVENANT (29:1-8)**

Moses reminds the people about the Exodus, which lies at the heart of the covenant, just as he did when God first offered the covenant to the Israelites at Mount Sinai.

**1. summoned** Literally, "called." "Summoned" implies that Moses had dismissed the people after his previous address, perhaps to allow them time to reflect on it so that they could enter the Covenant in full awareness of the solemnity of their action. If "called" is meant literally, it could mean that he simply continued proclaiming to the people on the same occasion as before.

**You have seen . . . before your very eyes** In Deuteronomy, Moses frequently stresses that he is appealing to the people on the basis of their own personal experience.

**2. feats . . . signs and marvels** The plagues inflicted on Egypt.

**3. Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a mind to understand** Better: "But the LORD did not give you a mind to understand until today." Verses 6-7 indicate that now, after 40 years, the Israelites have shown that they finally understand and trust in God's power.

**4. I led you** Moses speaks for God, as in 28:20 and elsewhere.

**did not wear out** God reminds Israel that His providence in the wilderness had an educational purpose. Having seen that Israel was incapable of recognizing His power behind the events of the Exodus (v. 3), God fed them by supernatural means for 40 years to overcome their spiritual obtuseness.

**5. Israel survived on manna, quail, and water provided directly by God.**

**that you might know that I the LORD am your God** God's supernatural providence—His ability to make food out of any substance (8:3)—taught the Israelites that He controls all natural phenomena.

**CHAPTER 29**

These eight verses allow this *parashah* to end on a favorable note, rather than leave us with the series of bone-chilling curses reverberating in our souls.

**3. to this day the LORD has not given you a mind to understand** "The ability to understand, to see or hear the divine significance of events, may be granted or withheld from man. One may see great wonders but remain entirely insensitive" (Heschel).

וינן ושקר לא  
אני יהוה אלו  
בפסוק 6 ותבאו אל-  
מלך-חשובון  
למלחמה ו  
ונתנה לנחל  
שבט המוש  
הברית הוא  
תשפילו את

led that they had  
in God's power.  
t their trust was

ast 40 years have  
ential condition  
Covenant.

drink—that you might know that I the LORD am your God.

<sup>6</sup>When you reached this place, King Sihon of Heshbon and King Og of Bashan came out to engage us in battle, but we defeated them. <sup>7</sup>We took their land and gave it to the Reubenites, the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh as their heritage. <sup>8</sup>Therefore observe faithfully all the terms of this covenant, that you may succeed in all that you undertake.

**6. this place** Transjordan. For Sihon and Og battled with Israel at Jahaz and Edrei, respectively (2:32; 3:1), not in the Plains of Moab where Moses is speaking.

**we defeated them** The willingness of this generation to wage war against both Sihon and Og—in contrast to the previous generation's fear

וַיֵּין וְשָׁכַר לֹא שָׁתִיתֶם לְמַעַן תִּדְעוּ כִּי  
אֲנִי יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵיכֶם:

וַתָּבֹאוּ אֶל-הַמָּקוֹם הַזֶּה וַיֵּצֵא סִיחֹן  
מֶלֶךְ-חֶשְׁבֹן וְעוֹג מֶלֶךְ-בָּשָׁן לִקְרֹאתָנוּ  
לְמִלְחָמָה וַנִּגְבָּם: <sup>7</sup>וַנִּקַּח אֶת-אַרְצָם  
וַנִּתְּנָהּ לְנַחֲלָה לְרֵאוּבֵנִי וּלְגָדִי וּלְחֻצֵי  
שֵׁבֶט הַמְּנַשִּׁי: <sup>8</sup>וְשָׁמַרְתֶּם אֶת-דִּבְרֵי  
הַבְּרִית הַזֹּאת וַעֲשִׂיתֶם אֹתָם לְמַעַן  
תִּשְׁכַּלּוּ אֶת כָּל-אֲשֶׁר תַּעֲשׂוּן: פ

of fighting the Amorites—revealed that they had indeed gained a mature trust in God's power. Their victory showed them that their trust was justified.

**8.** The experiences of the past 40 years have taught the Israelites that the essential condition for success is adherence to the Covenant.

וְשֹׁד מַלְכִּים  
וַיִּדְעַת  
כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה  
וְגִאֲלָה אֲבִיר  
17 תַּחַת הַנֶּחֱסִים  
וְתַחַת הַבְּרָחִים  
וְתַחַת הָעֵצִים  
וְתַחַת הָאֲבָבִים  
וְשִׁמְתִּי פֶקֶד  
וְנִגְשִׁיךְ עֶדְקָה  
18 לֹא-יִשְׁמַע  
עוֹד חֶמְסָם בְּ  
שֹׁד וְשֹׁבֵר  
בְּגִבּוּלֶיךָ  
וְקִרְאָתִי יִשְׁמַע  
וְשַׁעֲרֶיךָ תִּפְתָּח

19 לֹא-יִהְיֶה  
לְאֹר יוֹמָם  
וּלְלֵילָה הַיָּמָה  
לֹא-יִאֲרֶה  
וְהִיזֶה-לָךְ  
וְאַל-יִהְיֶה לְךָ  
20 לֹא-יִבְּרוּ  
וַיִּרְחֹק לֹא  
כִּי יִהְיֶה  
וְשָׁלְמוּ יָמֶיךָ  
21 וְעַמְּךָ  
לְעוֹלָם  
נִצֵּר מִטַּעַן  
מִעֲשֵׂה יָד  
22 הַקָּטָן

seen light and  
in and death;  
(4-6-7).

And their silver and gold as well—  
For the name of the LORD your God,  
For the Holy One of Israel, who has glorified  
you.

<sup>10</sup>Aliens shall rebuild your walls,  
Their kings shall wait upon you—  
For in anger I struck you down,  
But in favor I take you back.  
<sup>11</sup>Your gates shall always stay open—  
Day and night they shall never be shut—  
To let in the wealth of the nations,  
With their kings in procession.

<sup>12</sup>For the nation or the kingdom  
That does not serve you shall perish;  
Such nations shall be destroyed.

<sup>13</sup>The majesty of Lebanon shall come to  
you—  
Cypress and pine and box—  
To adorn the site of My Sanctuary,  
To glorify the place where My feet rest.

<sup>14</sup>Bowing before you, shall come  
The children of those who tormented you;  
Prostrate at the soles of your feet  
Shall be all those who reviled you;  
And you shall be called  
"City of the LORD,  
Zion of the Holy One of Israel."

<sup>15</sup>Whereas you have been forsaken,  
Rejected, with none passing through,  
I will make you a pride everlasting,  
A joy for age after age.

<sup>16</sup>You shall suck the milk of the nations,

בְּסֹפֶם וּזְהָבָם אֲתָם  
לְשֵׁם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ  
וּלְקֹדֶשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל כִּי פִאֲרָךְ:  
10 וּבְנוּ בְנֵי-נֹכַח חֻמֹּתֶיךָ  
וּמַלְכֵיהֶם יִשְׁתַּחֲוּ  
כִּי בְקֶצֶפִי הִפֵּיתִיךָ  
וּבְרִצּוֹנִי רִחַמְתִּיךָ:  
11 וּפִתְחוּ שַׁעְרֶיךָ תָמִיד  
יוֹמָם וּלְיָלָה לֹא יִסָּגְרוּ  
לְהָבִיא אֵלֶיךָ חֵיל גּוֹיִם  
וּמַלְכֵיהֶם נְהוֹגִים:

12 כִּי-הִגּוֹי וְהַמַּמְלָכָה  
אֲשֶׁר לֹא-יַעֲבֹדוּךָ יֵאָבְדוּ  
וְהַגּוֹיִם חָרֹב יִחָרְבוּ:

13 כְּבוֹד הַלְבָנוֹן אֵלֶיךָ יָבוֹא  
בְּרוֹשׁ תִּדְהָר וּתְאֲשׁוּר יִחְדּוּ  
לְפָאֵר מְקוֹם מִקְדָּשִׁי  
וּמְקוֹם רַגְלֵי אֲכַבֵּד:

14 וְהִלְכוּ אֵלֶיךָ שְׁחוֹחִים  
בְּנֵי מַעֲנִיךָ  
וְהִשְׁתַּחֲוּ עַל-כַּפּוֹת רַגְלֶיךָ  
כָּל-מִנְאֲצִיךָ  
וְקִרְאוּ לָךְ  
עִיר יְהוָה  
צִיּוֹן קֹדֶשׁ יִשְׂרָאֵל:  
15 תַּחַת הַיּוֹתֵף עֲזוּבָה  
וּשְׁנוּאָה וְאֵין עוֹבֵר  
וְשִׁמְתִּיךָ לְגֵאוֹן עוֹלָם  
מִשׁוֹשׁ יוֹר וְדוֹר:  
16 וַיִּנְקֹתָ חֶלֶב גּוֹיִם

**15. forsaken, / Rejected** These verbs hint at the motif of Zion as banished bride, which is developed explicitly in the third and the seventh haftarot of consolation.

Suckle at royal breasts.

And you shall know

That I the LORD am your Savior,

I, The Mighty One of Jacob, am your Redeemer.

<sup>17</sup>Instead of copper I will bring gold,

Instead of iron I will bring silver;

Instead of wood, copper;

And instead of stone, iron.

And I will appoint Well-being as your government,

Prosperity as your officials.

<sup>18</sup>The cry "Violence!"

Shall no more be heard in your land,

Nor "Wrack and ruin!"

Within your borders.

And you shall name your walls "Victory"

And your gates "Renown."

<sup>19</sup>No longer shall you need the sun

For light by day,

Nor the shining of the moon

For radiance [by night];

For the LORD shall be your light everlasting,

Your God shall be your glory.

<sup>20</sup>Your sun shall set no more,

Your moon no more withdraw;

For the LORD shall be a light to you forever,

And your days of mourning shall be ended.

<sup>21</sup>And your people, all of them righteous,

Shall possess the land for all time;

They are the shoot that I planted,

My handiwork in which I glory.

<sup>22</sup>The smallest shall become a clan;

וְשׁוּד מְלָכִים תִּינָקִי

וְיָדַעְתָּ

כִּי אֲנִי יְהוָה מוֹשִׁיעֶךָ

וְגֹאֲלֶךָ אֲבִיר יַעֲקֹב:

<sup>17</sup>תַּחַת הַנְּחֹשֶׁת אָבִיא זָהָב

וְתַחַת הַבַּרְזֶל אָבִיא כֶּסֶף

וְתַחַת הָעֵצִים נְחֹשֶׁת

וְתַחַת הָאֲבָנִים בַּרְזֶל

וְשִׁמְתִי פְקֻדְתְּךָ שְׁלוֹם

וְנִגְשִׁיךָ צְדָקָה:

<sup>18</sup>לֹא-יִשְׁמָעַ

עוֹד חֲמָס בְּאַרְצֶךָ

שֹׁד וְשָׁבֵר

בְּגִבּוֹלֶיךָ

וְקָרָאתָ יְשׁוּעָה חוֹמֹתֶיךָ

וְשַׁעְרֶיךָ תִּהְיֶה:

<sup>19</sup>לֹא-יִהְיֶה-לְךָ עוֹד הַשֶּׁמֶשׁ

לְאֹר יוֹמָם

וּלְנֶגַה הַיָּרֵחַ

לֹא-יֵאִיר לְךָ

וְהָיָה-לְךָ יְהוָה לְאֹר עוֹלָם

וְאַלֹהֶיךָ לְתַפְאֲרָתְךָ:

<sup>20</sup>לֹא-יָבוֹא עוֹד שִׁמְשֶׁךָ

וְיִרְחֶךָ לֹא יֵאָסֵף

כִּי יְהוָה יִהְיֶה-לְךָ לְאֹר עוֹלָם

וְשָׁלְמוּ יָמֶי אֲבִלְךָ:

<sup>21</sup>וְעַמֶּךָ כָּלָם צְדִיקִים

לְעוֹלָם יִירָשׁוּ אֶרֶץ

נָצָר מִטְעוּ מִטְעֵי

מַעֲשֵׂה יָדֶי לְהַתְּפָאֵר:

<sup>22</sup>הַקָּטָן יִהְיֶה לְאֵלָךָ

<sup>20</sup> This prophecy transcends the need for natural light. Compare Isa. 30:26: "The light of the sun shall become sevenfold . . . when the LORD binds up His people's wounds." (Earlier and later

prophets exploited the contrast between light and darkness to dramatize a time of doom and death; see Amos 5:18-20, 8:9-10; Zech. 14:6-7).

The least, a mighty nation.  
I the LORD will speed it in due time.

והצעיר לגוי עצום  
אני יהוה בעתה אחישנה: ט

**22. I the LORD will speed it in due time** A paradox to earlier commentators—for if redemption will occur “in due time,” what does “will speed it” mean? The Hebrew words of the phrase were, therefore, read as if separated: “I [the LORD] will speed it” if the people have merit, but if they do not have merit, redemption will come “in due time” (BT Sanh. 98a, see Rashi). On the other hand, the word order in the Hebrew text puts “in due time” before “I will speed it.” This prompted Radak to explain: When redemption comes “in due time,” God “will speed it” to a complete conclusion.

The two interpretations represent two theological poles concerning redemption. According to the first interpretation, human merit may hasten God's hand. According to the second, redemption is a divine mystery whose “time” is not influenced by human actions (see Gen. R. 65:12). Messianic movements in Jewish history have often swung between these two poles.

נצביו  
אֲתֶם נְצִבִים  
אֱלֹהֵיכֶם רִאִי  
וְשִׁטְרֵיכֶם כָּל  
נְשִׁיכֶם וְגִרְךָ  
עֲצִיר עַד שְׁאֵן  
יְהוָה אֱלֹהֶיךָ וְ  
שְׁנֵי כֹרֶת עִמָּךְ הָ  
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