

The 'Evangelical Covenant' of Moses

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ROMANS 10 shows that Moses presented a second, contrasting covenant in Deuteronomy 29 – 30. Here is that famous 'evangelical covenant'.

This article will sweep through *Deuteronomy 29 – 30* to demonstrate that it records how Moses presented an 'evangelical covenant' which was set beside and distinct from the covenant of Sinai, the latter being a 'works' covenant that could only condemn. (This is how Paul expounds it in *Romans 10*.)

Chapter 29

Verse 1: 'These are the words of the covenant, which the Lord commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, *beside* the covenant which he made with them in Horeb.' The Hebrew for 'beside' means apart from Sinai, not by way of repetition or confirmation. Here is a distinct, contrasting, different covenant. Did the people wait 38 years after they entered the wilderness before salvation by grace was revealed to them? No, because as Moses virtually says in this chapter – 'Have I not been preaching this to you for years?' The demands of the law and the mercy of grace ran side by side. They were distinctive systems, and it was clear that God was saying to the people: 'If you will not have grace and mercy, you are left with the perfect fulfilment of my law – Do this and live. And you cannot do it.'

Verses 2-3: 'And Moses called unto all Israel, and said unto them, Ye have seen all that the Lord did before your eyes in the land of Egypt unto Pharaoh, and unto all his servants, and unto all his land; the great temptations [*trials*] which thine eyes have seen, the signs, and those great miracles.' If you were reasonable people, God seems to say, you would have listened to Moses and repented years ago. You have had the record of mighty things. Most of you did not taste them yourself, for you are a subsequent generation, but you knew of them. However, you are an unreasonable people, and have never been stirred to desire the Lord or his forgiveness.

Verse 4: In what is surely entirely evangelical language Moses declares – ‘Yet the Lord hath not given you an heart to perceive, and eyes to see, and ears to hear, unto this day.’ ‘It takes a work of grace,’ he effectively says. ‘It takes a work of the Holy Spirit to open the blind eyes, illuminate the spirit, melt the heart, incline the will, and it has not happened to you. You are unconverted people. You have no spiritual life in you. If people were reasonable they would have responded to the evidence, and the mighty things that your forebears tasted and knew.’

Verses 5-6: ‘I have led you forty years in the wilderness: your clothes are not waxen old upon you, and thy shoe is not waxen old upon thy foot. Ye have not eaten bread.’ You have not been able to plough fields or harvest. You have been in a wilderness, fed by the miraculous manna from on high – ‘that ye might know that I am the Lord your God’.

Moses expounds the depravity and ingratitude of man. Much of modern evangelicalism has come to accept the idea that social and compassionate labours are equal to the proclamation of the Gospel. Some make them more important than Gospel Truth. This is more or less what the Lausanne message says, and teachers like Dr Tim Keller, along with many other famous names. They imply that the Gospel has no power unless you pave the way with social works, feed the poor, impress the people and so on.

While we all believe in compassionate works as most helpful fruits of salvation, the Gospel does not depend upon them, and here is Moses explaining this. He tells them they had the miracles, the food from on high, the ‘everlasting’ footwear and their clothing preserved, but they were as insensitive, untouched and unmoved as ever. God’s social provision was infinitely more lavish than anything that we can do, but did not in their case open hearts.

Verses 7-9 speak of the great military deliverances and advances, and Moses then says – in so many words – ‘In the light of all this I am going to urge you to receive and depend upon this further covenant, “that ye may prosper [*lit* – *see all things clearly*] in all that ye do”.’

Verses 10-11: ‘Ye stand this day all of you before the Lord your God; your captains of your tribes, your elders, and your officers, with all the men of Israel, your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that is in thy camp...’ – that is, including your pagan servants. This will be a different covenant, says Moses, embracing people as individuals, whether children of Israel or not. It will be for individuals from the

highest to the lowest, and you must individually respond. This is not a national but a personal covenant.

Verses 12-13: ‘That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the Lord thy God, and into his oath, which the Lord thy God maketh with thee this day: that he may establish thee to day for a people unto himself, and that he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers.’

The gracious covenant and promise delivered to Abraham will be for a very personal relationship with God.

Verses 14-15: ‘Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; but with him that standeth here with us this day before the Lord our God, and also with him that is not here with us this day.’

God, says Moses, will deal graciously, not only with Israelites who come to him, and choose him (Joshua 24.15 and John 15.16), but with others also, and future generations, dealing with them as individuals (note the repeated ‘him’).

Verse 18: ‘Lest there should be among you man, or woman, or family, or tribe, whose heart turneth away this day from the Lord our God.’

Now the pearls of sheer grace begin to fall thickly with words such as – ‘whose heart turneth away’. Moses, as an ambassador of grace, moves to the point. This will be a covenant that deals with the heart; not – Do this and live – but ‘whose heart turneth away’. These are solemn words of warning that true religion is not a matter of achievement or ceremony but of heart.

Verse 19: ‘And it come to pass, when he heareth the words of this curse, that he bless himself in his heart, saying, I shall have peace, though I walk in the imagination of mine heart, to add drunkenness to thirst.’

This covenant, says Moses, demands sincere repentance and embracing of forgiveness. It is about finding true acceptance with God, and not presumptuous confidence.

Verse 20: ‘The Lord will not spare him, but then the anger of the Lord and his jealousy shall smoke against that man.’

That man, we note, not plural men, for this is about the hearts of individuals. ‘And all the curses that are written in this book shall lie upon him, and the Lord shall blot out his name from under heaven.’ There is, Moses warns, a coming judgement.

And the warnings continue to the end of the chapter, for without transforming grace all are lost. But then comes chapter 30 where the language of grace flows in an irresistible tide.

Chapter 30

Verses 1-2: ‘And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the Lord thy God hath driven thee, and shalt return unto the Lord thy God, and shalt obey his voice...with all thine heart, and with all thy soul...’ Here most fully expressed is the evangelical language of Moses. It speaks of obedience with all the heart and with all the soul so that captivity may be turned. This is not about works, but about heart belief.

Verse 3: ‘That then the Lord thy God will turn thy captivity, and have *compassion* upon thee...’ Surely this refers to mercy – the forgiving love of God by grace.

Verse 6: ‘And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.’ Have we not preached these words? Moses is not talking about circumcision in the body; he is speaking of something quite distinct, namely circumcision or cleansing of the heart, a new, *given* love for the Lord, and life in the soul. Can any doubt that he is describing evangelical conversion, not cultish compliance?

Verse 8: ‘And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the Lord, and do all his commandments which I command thee this day.’ Of course, Moses would make clear that those who sincerely turn to the Lord would strive to keep his law, but the ‘commandments’ which he refers to here are the ones he mentions in this evangelical covenant, namely that people should seek cleansing of their heart, and life. He refers to God’s call to faith and repentance and the seeking of mercy. This is not ‘Do this and live’ (the covenant of works) but conviction of sin, repentance and faith (the covenant of grace). It is not Sinai, but Moab. Sinai was not an administration of grace but of works, but grace was strapped alongside, so that Paul would contrast the two, calling one the ‘righteousness which is of the law’ and the other ‘the righteousness which is of faith’ (*Romans 10.5-6*).

Verse 9: ‘And the Lord thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand...for the Lord will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers’ – that is Abraham and Isaac and Jacob, who stood by faith in evangelical relationship with God.

Verse 10: ‘If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes’, that is to preserve and observe them, but as a fruit of evangelical conversion and transformation, for this is the sense of the next sentiment – ‘If thou turn unto the Lord thy God *with all thine heart, and with all thy soul.*’

What a contrast this is. The key words ring out, ‘Turn! Heart! Soul!’ This is pure Gospel, pure grace.

Verse 11: And now read a crowning appeal by Moses, quoted by Paul in *Romans 10*, who virtually calls it the preaching of Christ: ‘For this commandment which I command thee this day, it is not hidden from thee, neither is it far off.’ It is not hidden or kept from you, nor is it difficult, says Moses. He implies he had preached it for years. It is not something only the learned or the priests or the doctors of the law can understand. It is not something that belongs to far off sages, that you have to travel far to the East to find. It is not far from you, for it is right here in this covenant of grace.

Verse 12: ‘It is not in heaven, that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it [*down*] unto us?’ Over 1,400 years later Paul would apply this more distinctly, but at the very least they were evidently taught that you did not have to ask the priests to obtain it for you, because you could secure it for yourself by personal repentance and faith. ‘Access to the blessings of the covenant of grace is very near to you.’

Verse 14: ‘The word is very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it.’ In this so-distinctively evangelical appeal to the people Moses is saying, ‘What I describe to you is not the demands of the law, precious and important as they are, and conscientious as we must be to obey them. We cannot by works be accepted by God. What he calls us to “perform” is only the utterance of a word from the mouth, that is a prayer from the heart. It is a prayer for pardon and life from a believing heart, nothing more or less.’ This covenant is entered by simply addressing the Lord in faith that the coming Messiah will take away sin.

Verse 15: Here is the great appeal to souls made by Moses, warning the people of the fatal consequences of putting their confidence in the broken covenant of works, and calling them to the covenant of grace and of life. ‘See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil...’

Verse 16: ‘In that I command thee this day to *love* the Lord thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments.’

Evangelical life with gratitude, indebtedness, love and strength brings voluntary obedience to the law, and blessing without measure.

Verses 17-18: ‘But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them; I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land.’

This call of Moses here is all to do with the *heart*, and a sincere walk with God. Moses has said that the people (or most of them) have not yet tasted and known true spiritual experience. Sinai could not impart it; only the power of grace could secure it. The great lawgiver had evidently said these things to them before, over the 38 years, and can say that they were not hidden from them. But now his ministry draws to a close, and his appeal becomes yet more urgent. He calls for ‘witnesses’ and proceeds...

Verse 19: ‘I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.’ Readers may have read about how George Whitefield would end some of his sermons with words to this effect: ‘In the judgement I shall be called to witness against you that this day, this hour, I preached Christ to you, and grace, and you would not hear.’ He followed the steps of Moses – ‘I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death...therefore choose life.’ Some Calvinists recoil from those words: ‘Choose life’. But the call is right and true, because it is the will of God that the vast majority of his elect should come to him by an intelligent, conscious process in which they are brought to feel their need of him, and long for his salvation. And though it is unquestionably the Holy Spirit who regenerates the heart, and opens the eyes, bringing the sinner under conviction of sin, and inclining the will, they will be consciously persuaded by the reasonings of the Gospel, and personally brought to the point whereby they freely choose Christ. It is all God’s doing, but in such a way that we seemingly voluntarily embrace Christ and salvation.

May I repeat the point – we do not choose for ourselves, but because by regeneration the Lord opens our eyes and puts life within us, and so we grasp our need, and Christ’s work on Calvary, and repent, and believe. In this miracle of grace the preacher is given privileged instrumentality in appealing to hearts, wooing sinners, presenting grace, and pressing the lost to Christ. But the preacher knows that salvation is entirely due to the work of the Spirit within the soul.

The theology of Moses is perfect, obviously, for he speaks under the inspiration of God, and accordingly he makes the plea of the evangelical covenant, just as we do today.

Verse 20: ‘That thou mayest love the Lord thy God, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land.’ What words these are – obey, life, eternity! Could Moses have preached this magnificent call to eternal life from the pulpit of Sinai or works? Surely only from the pulpit of grace, mercy and life through the promised Messiah could he have done so. And this is how our Baptist forebears with Independents or Congregationalists (in the main) saw it. In another century the innovations of dispensationalism seized the imaginations of many, but the two-covenant theology of the seventeenth century never completely disappeared. And now, effective new champions have appeared.

Read more about the personal spiritual benefits of understanding God’s covenants: [The Value of Covenants](#).