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Discipline and Torah
4: 25-31

Torah and discipline DIG: What were ADONAI's expectations of the covenant He cut with Isra'el? What does it mean to cut a covenant? What is God's main concern here? What is significant about God calling heaven and earth as witnesses? Which generation is Moses addressing here? What were the implications of breaking the covenant? How can Ha'Shem's discipline still be seen today for the Jews? What is Ha'Shem promise to Isra'el in the far eschatological future? What is the only way to find YHVH?

REFLECT: A life of ease has ruined many people. Have you become too complacent with God? If so, what are your next steps to rekindle your relationship? Without discipline can there be any love? Can a parent really love their children if they refuse to discipline them? What is the result when a child grows up with no blessing? With no discipline? Why do you need both? How has God blessed your life? In the long run, how has God's discipline benefited you? A life of ease has ruined many people. Have you become too complacent with God? What does it mean for your daily life to seek God with all your heart and soul?

After the strong warning against idolatry, Moses now spells out the consequences of neglecting that warning. He passionately warns the Israelites against complacency.

ADONAI made a **covenant** with **His people** and **He** expected **them** to keep it. The word **covenant** is used at least twenty-seven times in **Deuteronomy** and comes from the Hebrew word *berith*, which can be translated *to eat bread.* The action involved in **covenant** making uses the phrase **cut a covenant** (see the commentary on **Genesis, to see link click Eg – I am the LORD, Who Brought You Out of Ur of the Chaldeans to Give You This Land**). In the Near East, when people formed a **covenant** or treaty that they would help and protect each other **(Genesis 26:26-35)**, they *broke bread* together. When **YHVH** established **His covenant** with **the generation of the Exodus, Moses and Aaron, Nadab**

and Abihu, and the seventy elders of Isra'el *broke bread* before **Ha'Shem** on Mount Sinai (see the commentary on **Exodus En – The Covenant Meal with the God of Isra'el**). The terms of **the covenant** were simple: If Isra'el obeyed **God's statutes** (Hebrew: *hachukkim*, meaning *to write into law permanently*) and **ordinances** (Hebrew: *hammishpatim*, meaning *a judgment of the court*), **He** would bless **them**; however, if **they** disobeyed, **He** would **discipline them**. Even so, **He** would show **His** love for **them** in both **the blessing** and **the discipline** (see the commentary on **Hebrews Cz – God Disciplines His Children**).[127]

The discipline of Isra'el (4:25-28): Moshe would elaborate on the details of the warnings of **the covenant** later (see **Fa – The Warnings of the Covenant**), but here **he** warned this **second generation** if **they** did not obey **the Torah**, **they** would face godly **discipline**. **They** would be punished, scattered, and destroyed as a nation if **they** didn't take **their covenant** responsibilities seriously. **When** (Hebrew: *ki*) **you father children and children's children and have been in the** Promised **Land a long time, and you become prosperous and complacent, and you act corruptly and make a graven image in the form of anything and do evil in the sight of ADONAI your God, provoking Him to anger (4:25).** It is noteworthy that the text, here, opens with the word **when** (*ki*) and not **if** (Hebrew *im*). **This led the rabbis to assert that, in addition to warning, this verse also contains a prediction that after 852 years (the numerical value of** *venovshantem,* meaning *and have remained long***) the Israelites would be exiled. Actually, the destruction of the Temple** (see the commentary on **The Life of Christ Mt – The Destruction of Jerusalem and the Temple on Tisha B'Av in 70 AD**)**, and subsequent exile, took place after 850 years. But the sages taught that ADONAI, in His mercy, brought upon them the predicted retribution two years earlier to prevent the complete fulfillment of the prophecy, for you will certainly be destroyed.**

When the families were settled, **Moshe** was concerned that **they** would become complacent about **their** relationship with **ADONAI**. **He** realized that the battles on

the other side of the Jordan would result in honor and victory. But **he** feared that a complacent attitude would set in when things were going well. It was then that **the Israelites** were prone to forget **God**.[128]

*Dear Heavenly **Father, You** are such a wonderful and loving **Father**! May we never forget how much pain **Your** sacrifice of love for us cost you when **You** gave your **Son** as the sacrifice for our sin **(John 1:29, Second Corinthians 5:21)**. May our hearts never become complacent but instead grow in joy and praise over how wonderful **You** are- all wise, all powerful, full of mercy and love! We love **You!** In **Your** holy **Son's** name and power of resurrection. Amen*

Then **YHVH** declared: **I call heaven and earth to witness against you today (4:26a). Isaiah** began **his** prophecy by calling the same two **witnesses: Listen! Heavens, and hear, earth, for ADONAI has spoken (Isaiah 1:2a).** And from there followed with one of the strongest indictments against **the Jews** and what **they** had done with what **God** had given **them**. But by the time of **Isaiah** it was already too late. How hard it must have been for **Moshe** to know in advance that **the nation** that **he** had led for forty years would fail.

These **witnesses** were permanent and unchanging, in contrast to the fickleness of mankind. When that happened **Moses** warned **that you will certainly be carried off quickly from the Land you are crossing over the Jordan to possess. You will not prolong your days on it, for you will certainly be destroyed (4:26b). Moshe** wanted **Isra'el** to understand that if **covenantal** faithfulness was missing, **Isra'el** had no claim to **the Land**. There was no divinely granted right to **the Land they** were entering without faithfulness to **the covenant**. If **they** violated **their** relationship with **YHVH, their** relationship with, or enjoyment of, **the Land** would be interrupted as well.[129]

The implications of breaking **the covenant** are now given: **ADONAI will scatter you among the peoples,** and three-thousand-five-hundred years later **the Jews** are still living his prophecy. In **4:16-19**, **Moshe** shows how **idolatry** reverses the divine order of creation. In a similar fashion, **the godly discipline** promised for rebellion represents a reversal of the Abrahamic **covenant**. **YHVH** promised to provide **a** great **Land** and **a** great **people**. However, **the LORD** also promised that **He** would drive **His people** out from **the Land** and drastically reduce **their** population if **they** practiced **idolatry** in rebellion against **Him**. **And you will be left few in number among the nations where ADONAI will drive you (4:27). The Holy Land occupies a special position in the relationship between**

YHVH and His people. Since this relationship cannot exist anywhere else in the world, the mere presence of Israelites in the diaspora is equal to serving strange gods. The rabbis declared, "Whoever dwells outside the Holy Land is regarded as if he worships idols" (Ketub. 11ob).

And once in the diaspora, **there you will serve man-made gods of wood and stone, which do not see or hear or eat or smell (4:28).** There, **the Israelites** would once again choose to serve pagan **gods**. But **they** would discover the impotence of those **gods** (see the commentary on **Jeremiah Ao – I Planted You Like a Choice Vine, from the Very Best Seed**). If those gods could not perform the equivalent of even basic human functions, what hope was there of any saving power from them? The mightiest **gods** of Babylon, far from being any assistance to their worshipers in their hour of need, couldn't even rescue their own fallen **idols** (see the commentary on **Isaiah Ig – Bel Bows Down, Nebo Stoops Low and They Go Off Together to Captivity**). Consequently, if **Isra'el**, knowing a **God** who had **carried them on eagle's wings (Exodus 19:4),** wanted to go after **gods they** would have to carry **themselves**, then **they** had a hard lesson ahead.[130]

However, there were two positive side-effects to the warning. First, if the people were **disciplined** through disobedience, the consequences of **their** actions would drive **them** back to **God**. Secondly, even in the midst of the warning, there is an element of hope. Though **the people** might be unfaithful, **ADONAI** would remain faithful.[131]

The election of Isra'el (4:29-31): This came right after **Moses** spoke of **their** failures and dispersion as if **he** knew of those who would come and falsely claim ownership of **the covenants** of **God**. Here, **Moshe's** pleading **for his people** is timeless. No place would be too far and no time too distant for **Isra'el** to come back to **YHVH**. **But from there you will seek ADONAI your God and you will find Him, when you seek Him with all your heart and with all your soul (4:29).** Even in the midst of **disciplining His chosen people**, **ADONAI** will not forget **them**.

In **the far eschatological future**, during the last **three days** of the Great Tribulation **(Hosea 6:1-3)**, **Isra'el** come back to **ADONAI . . .** and **ADONAI** will come back to **Isra'el** (see the commentary on **Revelation Ev – The Basis of the Second Coming of Jesus Christ**) and set up **His thousand-year Messianic Kingdom** (see the commentary on **Revelation Fh – The Dispensation of the Messianic Kingdom**). **YHVH** declared: **When you are in distress and all these**

things have come on you, in the latter days you will return (Hebrew: *shub*, meaning *to repent, return,* or *to turn back to something or someone good*) **to ADONAI your God and listen to His voice (4:30).** This verse is a serious blow to the heretical Hebrew Roots Movement (see the commentary on **Galatians Ak – The Hebrew Roots Movement: A Different Gospel**) and Replacement Theology which believes that all the promises to **Isra'el** have been transferred to the Church.

For ADONAI your God is a merciful (Hebrew: *rahum*, refers to *the tender compassion of a mother toward her helpless infant*) **God**. So even if **Isra'el forgets her God, He will not abandon her or destroy her, or forget the covenant with her fathers that He swore to them (4:31).** One feature of **God's covenant** with **Isra'el** that differed from the usual political treaties of that day was the provision that a rebel could repent, **return**, and be forgiven. The prospect of beginning a new obedience and blessing was promised to these **chosen people** (see **Bf – God's Chosen People**). In ancient political treaties, rebellion was seldom treated with **mercy**, even if the offending party repented. But **God's** nature is vastly different from that of human rulers. **His mercy** is equal to **His** might.[132]