

YESTERDAY, TODAY, AND TOMORROW: TENSION REGARDING A CHANGED HEART IN DEUTERONOMY

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Abstract: *The book of Deuteronomy seems to contain contradictory messages. On the one hand, Moses tells the children of the exodus generation how to avoid the mistakes of their parents and thereby become a blessing to the nations. He often gives the impression that the children have an open future. On the other hand, Moses is convinced that the children will break Yahweh's covenant and forfeit their privilege to remain in the Promised Land. He not only tells the children to circumcise their hearts in the narrative world of Deuteronomy 10:10 as if they can do this today, but he also announces that Yahweh will have to circumcise their hearts in the future after the exile. The children, of course, will no longer be alive. By means of a redemptive-historical perspective, this article tries to resolve the tension between these apparently contradictory messages. Could the children experience circumcised hearts today? Yes, by means of proleptic grace.*

Key words: *circumcision, covenant, Deuteronomy, grace, new, proleptic, today*

Tension runs throughout the book of Deuteronomy, and it centers on the frequent appearance of the word **הַיּוֹם** (*today*). While standing on the east side of the Jordan River (Deut 1:1), Moses repeated the Sinaitic commandments (4:44–46) for the children of the exodus generation and gave the impression that they could obey those commandments today (4:40)—that is, during their lifetime—and thereby model a redeemed community to the surrounding nations (4:5–8).¹ At the same time, Moses also used Hebrew masculine forms, both singular and plural, of the pronoun *you* when reviewing the events of the exodus generation (1:19–46; 9:7–24). Singular number in Hebrew can have a collective sense.² In Deuteronomy, the collective sense refers to Israel as a whole, not only at one moment but also across generations. Meanwhile, the plural forms in Deuteronomy emphasize the need for individuals to commit themselves to Moses's instruction to the group.³ In other words, the instruction that was given to the group must be owned and obeyed by individuals in the group; otherwise, the group will not act in a unified way. Conse-

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¹ References to Scripture reflect the versification in English Christian Bibles. In some cases (such as Deuteronomy 29), the Hebrew text has a different numbering.

² Ronald J. Williams and John C. Beckman, *Williams' Hebrew Syntax*, 3rd ed. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 2007), §2.

³ Daniel I. Block, *Deuteronomy*, NIVAC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2012), 114; J. G. McConville, "Singular Address in the Deuteronomic Law and the Politics of Legal Administration," *JSOT* 97 (2002): 26–27.

quently, the children were addressed as if they had participated in these events, including the sinful actions of their parents.

Conflating the stories of two generations indicated positively that the children joined their parents in the mission of being a kingdom of priests (Exod 19:6; Deut 14:2; 26:18–19) among the nations. Conflation also suggested pessimistically that the children were no different than their parents.⁴ If they were not making the same mistakes now or today, they would eventually. In fact, Moses indicated toward the end of Deuteronomy that the children and their descendants would disregard Yahweh's covenant so much that Yahweh would have to evict them from the Promised Land (28:63; 30:1; 31:27–29). What would become of the mission then?

Readers of Deuteronomy cannot help but wonder what the author meant to convey by this tension. Did the children have an open future, or would their today and tomorrow look much the same as their parents' yesterday? Could they present an effective witness to Yahweh's uniqueness among the gods of the ancient Near East (4:7, 26:19), or would their neighbors who worshiped those gods have greater influence on them (4:25–28; 31:19–22; 32:15–18)? Could they circumcise their hearts today (10:15–16) in the pre-exilic narrative world of Deuteronomy 1:1, or would Yahweh be able to circumcise the hearts of later generations only after the exile (30:1–6)?⁵ This article will try to answer these questions. It will begin by looking at verses in Deuteronomy that optimistically hold out the possibility of obeying the law “today.” Then it will consider other verses that pessimistically expect disobedience “tomorrow.” A redemptive-historical solution that takes into account the proleptic nature of grace in the new covenant will be offered. In other words, this article will suggest that OT saints could experience a changed heart before the first coming of Jesus.

I. OPTIMISM TODAY

In Deuteronomy 6:6, Moses tells the children of the exodus generation that Yahweh's commandments, first given at Mount Sinai, should be on their hearts. In other words, the commandments should be internalized so that they change a person from the inside out. Consequently, keeping Yahweh's commandments would

⁴ Paul A. Barker says, “Generational conflation is a feature of Deuteronomy designed to existentialise [convey the immediate urgency of] the decision facing the hearer-reader, but also giving the suggestion that the new generation is no different from its predecessor.” Paul A. Barker, *The Triumph of Grace in Deuteronomy: Faithless Israel, Faithful Yahweh in Deuteronomy*, Paternoster Biblical Monographs (Eugene, OR: Wipf & Stock, 2006), 26. See also Ronald E. Clements, *The Book of Deuteronomy: A Preacher's Commentary*, Epworth Commentaries (Peterborough, UK: Epworth, 2001), xxi–xxii.

⁵ Kenneth J. Turner responds to the tension by asking, “Will Israel obey in the long run? More importantly, will Israel be able to obey?” He then says, “Scholars debate whether Deuteronomy is optimistic or pessimistic on the matter.” He opts for a more pessimistic view. Kenneth J. Turner, “Deuteronomy's Theology of Exile,” in *For Our Good Always: Studies on the Message and Influence of Deuteronomy in Honor of Daniel I. Block*, ed. Jason S. DeRouchie, Jason Gile, and Kenneth J. Turner (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2013), 212.

become a person's default setting.⁶ Because Moses says that he is giving the commandments today, the implication is that the children can experience the internalization now. If they hear the commandments read by the priests, meditate on them, and talk about them at home or elsewhere, God will mysteriously write them on the hearts of his people. His commandments, then, should move from the ear to the heart and from the heart to the hands. Movement of God's commandments from the ear to the heart results in the transformation of character. Transformed character, in turn, produces transformed conduct that advances God's mission for his people. A person in whom Yahweh has replaced spiritual hardness with spiritual tenderness wants to live for the honor of Yahweh by doing what Yahweh says. This whole process is called the fear of Yahweh in Deuteronomy 6:13. The objective revelation of Yahweh's mighty deeds and instruction calls for the subjective response of trust in his greatness and goodness on the one hand and obedience to his revealed will on the other.

Although the exodus generation as a whole did not trust Yahweh, especially when the spies made their report (1:32; 9:23), Moses addressed the children as if their choices were not determined by those of their parents. Moreover, Deuteronomy 1:36 mentions one parent, Caleb, who followed Yahweh fully (ESV) or wholeheartedly (NIV).⁷ Caleb, along with Joshua (1:38), comprised a faithful remnant within a larger, faithless group. Together, they anticipated the distinction that later writers would make between the biological and spiritual descendants of Abraham (Isa 10:20–22; Jer 23:3; 31:7; Amos 5:15; Rom 2:28–29; 9:6). Moses's point throughout Deuteronomy is that the children of the exodus generation can join that remnant today. The solidarity among the generations does not consist of determinism toward failure but of opportunity for success (Deut 5:33).⁸ Nothing is holding back today's generation from following Yahweh fully in thought, word, and deed. Each generation and each individual within a generation has an open future.⁹ Even so, each member of each generation is confronted with the same decision

⁶ Steven R. Coxhead says, "Having God's law in the heart means that God's law has become an integral part of the person's psyche, governing his or her behavior." Steven R. Coxhead, "The Cardiogramographic Work of the Spirit in the Old Testament," *WTJ* 79 (2017): 80.

⁷ For the occurrences of נָצַח in Numbers 14:24 and Deuteronomy 1:36, *HALOT* (1:584) suggests "to remain true to." Numbers 14:24 contrasts Caleb with the other members of the exodus generation by saying that he had a different רוּחַ (spirit, predisposition) within him. This רוּחַ enabled him to remain true to Yahweh. According to Block, having a different רוּחַ is another way of saying that a person has a circumcised heart. Block, *Deuteronomy*, 77.

⁸ Barker says, "The conflation of generations in Deuteronomy is not absolute. A distinction is made between the generations which suggests new possibilities and hope." Barker, *Triumph of Grace*, 28.

⁹ Patrick D. Miller says, "Deuteronomy is always aimed at the next generation. It takes the present (next) generation back to the past and brings the past afresh into the present. The children are now the ones before whom all the choices are laid, and some day their children will be there and the divine instruction will confront them (e.g., 30:2). Can they learn afresh what it means to love the Lord wholeheartedly?" He later adds, "The covenant made with the Lord is not restricted to the one immediately present. The covenant is open-ended and includes those beyond this time and place, people who were not present when the covenant was first made and even generations unborn. By this means, the covenant is open to later generations who read and were addressed by these words." Patrick D. Miller, *Deuteronomy*, IBC (Louisville: John Knox, 1990), 107, 209.

that faced Caleb: to believe Yahweh's promises and obey his instruction or to shrink back from both. For this reason, Caleb is an example to follow, not an anomaly to admire.¹⁰

The internalization of God's objective revelation is mentioned again in Deuteronomy 10:12–20. Here, however, Moses told the children to circumcise their hearts (10:16) so that they would be no longer stiff-necked or stubborn as their parents had been.¹¹ In theory, external circumcision pointed to an internal change from stubbornness to submissiveness. In practice, external circumcision involved the removal of the foreskin, and internal circumcision necessitated the removal of hindrances to obedience by avoiding the forbidden practices of the surrounding nations on the one hand and keeping Yahweh's commandments on the other. As the sign of Yahweh's covenant with his people, circumcision set apart both the man who bore it on his body and those who lived with him. Together, they had the privilege and responsibility of living distinctly so as to fulfill their covenantal mission of being a kingdom of priests.¹² Deuteronomy 10:19 mentions one way that the Israelites could bless their neighbors. A redeemed people who were once oppressed aliens in Egypt should readily open their hearts to others who live on the margins. Such kindness can be done "today" (10:13).

According to Deuteronomy 10:12, a circumcised heart fears Yahweh, walks in his ways, loves him, serves him unreservedly, and obeys his commandments. These effects of a circumcised heart are integral parts of the piety of the old covenant (2 Cor 3:14), or first covenant (Heb 8:7), and will be discussed below. For now, what is evident from Deuteronomy 10 is that first covenant religion did not consist only of behavioral conformity to a list of rules. The heart was also involved. If Jeremiah 31:33 announced that a new covenant would write the law on the heart, the first covenant already assumed that God changed people from the inside out. As they heard the law of Moses and asked God to bless that hearing to their edification, God changed their hearts and strengthened their hands. The children of the exodus generation could think as God thinks, love what God loves, and act as God acts. The command to circumcise the heart—along with the related commands to fear, walk, love, serve, and obey—did more than anticipate a future reality that was unattainable during the lifetimes of the children. Those commands assumed that a transformed heart with the accompanying obedience for the sake of mission was possible "today" in the narrative world of Deuteronomy 1:1.

¹⁰ J. Gary Millar says, "Caleb is held out as the man who made the right decision, and therefore becomes an appropriate role model for the new generation in its attempts to redress the failures of the past." J. Gary Millar, *Now Choose Life: Theology and Ethics in Deuteronomy*, NSBT 6 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1998), 71.

¹¹ The command to circumcise the heart is one of several commands in Deuteronomy 10:12–11:32. Barker considers it "the key to the fulfillment of the others." Barker, *Triumph of Grace*, 102.

¹² John D. Meade argues that just as Egyptian circumcision set apart royalty and clergy for service to the deity, so Israelite circumcision was supposed to set apart all males and their families as a kingdom of priests. John D. Meade, "Circumcision of the Heart in Leviticus and Deuteronomy: Divine Means for Resolving Curse and Bringing Blessing," *SBJT* 18 (2014): 62–63, 72, 80.

Moreover, Deuteronomy 6:7 and 11:19 mention the covenantal instruction of children (i.e., the grandchildren of the exodus generation). Moses knows that the next generation will not instinctively be familiar with Yahweh's covenant and automatically practice it. Children may know how to act selfishly from birth, but they must be taught how to live for the advancement of God's mission for his world, which is to develop creation's potential for the praise of God and the benefit of all creatures. The point, though, is that Deuteronomy 6:7 and 11:19 assume an ability to learn. Deuteronomy agrees with Proverbs that parents can tell their children how to live successfully in God's world by making good choices for the right reasons and thereby reaping favorable consequences. The warnings in Deuteronomy do more than predict unavoidable disaster in the future. They also encourage godly thinking and behaving "today" in the narrative world of Deuteronomy 1:1. The God of Deuteronomy can work in concert with his Word to change people.

The possibility of internalization "today" is further seen in Deuteronomy 30:11–16. There Moses tells the children in the narrative world of Deuteronomy 1:1 that Yahweh's commands are not too difficult for them to keep. Why? Because the commandments have been written on the heart and can be verbalized by the mouth as evidence (fruit) of internal change (root). God's commandments are not shut up in an inaccessible box inside the tabernacle. They are not on the other side of the Red Sea or even beyond the peak of Mount Sinai in heaven. Instead, they are so close that the children can know Yahweh's will inside and out. In other words, their actions can be consistent with their beliefs. Keeping God's commandments can become second nature, with the result that the children do not have to break the first covenant and go into exile. They can choose life today (30:19).

Such internal transformation and external effects can be seen, for example, in the daughters of Zelophehad, whose story frames the account of the children of those who came out of Egypt and died in the wilderness (Num 27:1–11; 36:1–12).¹³ These daughters provide a contrast to the exodus generation whose story sadly ends in Numbers 25. Though the parents had allowed circumstances to shake their faith, these daughters believed that God could and must overcome their circumstances. In the face of a dilemma (their father had no sons to inherit his patrimony), their faith never wavered, and so they approached Moses for a ruling. The other descendants of the exodus generation would have to manifest similar resolve. As seen throughout the historical books of the OT, other members of the first covenant (Boaz, Hannah, Abigail, the Shunammite woman, the unnamed servant girl of Naaman's wife, Josiah) kept Deuteronomy 10:12. They displayed the internal and external change that Jeremiah later attributed to the new covenant. New covenant

¹³ While the books of the Pentateuch can be read as discrete literary units, they also tell a continuous, though incomplete, story about the fulfillment of God's promises to Abraham. The positive example of the daughters of Zelophehad (and Caleb) in the book of Numbers does not contradict the largely negative assessment of the descendants of the exodus generation in the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy 1:36 (along with Numbers 14:24) credits Caleb with having a tender heart. If he could remain true to Yahweh, so could others.

spirituality was possible under the first covenant. It was even possible for Gentiles, such as Ruth.

The Psalms reinforce this positive view of the first covenant. According to Psalm 1:2–3, the law is a stream of life-giving water that enables God’s people to bear fruit in the form of sanctification and mission. In Psalm 37:31 and 119:11, the psalmist affirms that the law is in his heart, keeping him from the destructive conduct and consequences of the wicked. Psalm 119:18 and 20 add that the psalmist was consumed with longing for God’s law. If this psalmist calls the law a lamp that illumines his way (119:105), he also says that he will obey God’s law forever (119:44, 112) so as to avoid the wrong path (119:128). Indeed, obedience has been his practice (119:56, 101). Deuteronomy 10:20 tells God’s people to cling to God, and the psalmist says in Psalm 119:31 that he clings to God’s law. These psalms agree with Deuteronomy 31:14 that keeping the first covenant was possible before Jeremiah ever announced a new covenant.¹⁴ Moreover, these verses indicate that people who lived under the first covenant did not live under a heavy burden of guilt or legalism. The first covenant did not make them feel like wretched sinners, nor did they necessarily think that keeping the first covenant was the way to win God’s favor.¹⁵

Because the first covenant is also called the law of Moses (e.g., Josh 8:31), it is worth noting that the Hebrew word for law (תּוֹרָה) can also mean “instruction” or “guidance.” Moreover, the verbal root (הָרָה) means to “point out,” “show,” “give directions,” or “teach.” These other meanings of the noun and verb account for why the OT never considers the first covenant burdensome. The first covenant has a positive and encouraging purpose, which must be appreciated before explaining the tension in Deuteronomy. The first covenant never asserted or assumed that God’s regenerating and sanctifying grace was inaccessible to OT saints. They could and did experience the transformation of their hearts by the Spirit of God. Moreover, OT saints never thought that the original purpose of the law was to make them aware of their sin. For an OT saint, God had taken the initiative to reveal himself to Abraham and Moses. Therefore, OT saints knew that divine grace precedes human faith. These saints further knew that God had a worldwide mission for his people and that obedience to God’s commands was the way to perform that mission (Deut 4:5–14). So why the tension in Deuteronomy?

¹⁴ James M. Hamilton says, “Nevertheless, there is evidence that there were people under the old covenant who did delight in the law of the Lord (see Psalm 119), which indicates that there has always been ‘a remnant according to the election of grace’ (cf. Rom 11:5).” James M. Hamilton, “The Glory of God in Salvation through Judgment in Deuteronomy,” *SBJT* 18 (2014): 24.

¹⁵ For other points of view, see Barker, *Triumph of Grace*, 176–81; Daniel I. Block, *How I Love Your Torah, O LORD! Studies in the Book of Deuteronomy* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2011), 4–5; Block, *The Triumph of Grace: Literary and Theological Studies in Deuteronomy and Deuteronomistic Themes* (Eugene, OR: Cascade, 2017), 51; Jason S. DeRouchie, “From Condemnation to Righteousness: A Christian Reading of Deuteronomy,” *SBJT* 18 (2014): 112–13; David R. Murray, “Our View of the Old Testament,” *Puritan Reformed Journal* 2 (2010): 5.

II. PESSIMISM TODAY AND TOMORROW

Whereas some verses in Deuteronomy indicate that the children can circumcise their hearts “today,” Deuteronomy 30:6 pushes circumcision of the heart into the future after the enactment of the final covenantal curse of exile. God says that he will circumcise hearts after he restores his people from captivity (30:3). So then, the exile is a given in Deuteronomy. In the narrative world of Deuteronomy 1:1, Moses knows that the Israelites have disobeyed and will disobey (9:24; 31:16, 20, 27, 29). They are not able to circumcise their hearts because they insist on resisting God and going their own way. Moses leaves no doubt in 29:27 and 31:17 that God will respond to Israel’s unfaithfulness by progressively enacting the curses listed in 28:15–28. The final curse of exile is mentioned as a possibility in 29:28 and as a certainty in 30:1. The children and grandchildren of the exodus generation were no more faithful to Yahweh “today” than the exodus generation was “yesterday.” The Israelites were supposed to bless the nations, but Yahweh’s judgment of his people will cause the nations to wonder why a God who is said to be merciful and gracious turned against his people (29:24; cf. 9:28). If an angry and vindictive Yahweh is no different from the other gods of the ancient Near East, Israel’s mission is jeopardized, and Yahweh’s reputation is damaged. Because Yahweh has linked his holy name with unfaithful Israel, God’s just judgment will bring dishonor to his name. The nations will doubt his resolve and/or power to keep his promises. This intolerable situation will necessitate compassion (30:3; 32:36) and atonement (32:43) in the future. The descendants of the exodus generation will not be able to fix this problem on their own.

Meanwhile, Deuteronomy 29:4 curiously makes Yahweh, not the children, responsible for the unchanged hearts that necessitated the exile. Here is the mysterious tension between divine sovereignty and human volition that the Christian Bible never explains. Yahweh did not disobey for the Israelites. They made their own decisions and reaped the consequences. Nevertheless, Yahweh could have intervened with sovereign grace before the exile but apparently chose not to do so.¹⁶ Instead, he will wait until after the exile to soften hardened hearts.¹⁷ Readers can understandably wonder if this book gives contradictory information about the in-

¹⁶ Of course, 29:4 may reflect Moses’s perspective (and not God’s) after spending forty (2:7) frustrating years with the parents and their children. In this book, Moses is evidently bitter about not being able to enter the Promised Land (1:37; 3:26; 4:21), and he blames the Israelites. While Moses acted inappropriately in Numbers 21:10–11, he might not have done so if, nearly thirty-eight years earlier (10:11), the exodus generation had not shrunk back from the spies’ report (13:31–14:4). During the intervening years, though, Moses became convinced that future generations of Israelites would persist in the stubbornness of the first and second generations. The so-called Deuteronomistic History (Joshua–Kings) may confirm his prediction, but it (along with Ruth and Chronicles) also records instances of faithfulness. These instances indicate that divine grace changed people, just as it had Caleb.

¹⁷ Regarding Deuteronomy 29:4, DeRouchie says, “According to his purposes, in order to show us our need for Jesus, God created a covenant where he called for the right things but did not overcome the rebel spirit of the majority.” DeRouchie, “From Condemnation,” 109. Of course, the children of the exodus generation could not have known about this larger purpose of God. More problematic for this view, though, is that God overcame the rebel spirit of some, just as he has in NT times.

ternalization of Yahweh's commandments. Could pre-exilic Israelites, including the children of the exodus generation, have circumcised their hearts "today" as Deuteronomy 10:16 commanded?

In one sense, the answer is "no" because the first covenant could not, by itself, transform the heart. It was, in fact, never meant to do so. The first covenant was given after the exodus generation put their faith in the lamb's blood on their doorposts. That act indicated their trust in Yahweh's promise not only to pass by their house without killing the firstborn son inside but also to deliver from Pharaoh's oppression that involved the economic injustice of slave labor, the political injustice of genocide, the social injustice of targeting young boys, and the religious injustice of denied worship.¹⁸ After the exodus, the exodus generation received the law, which told them how to live quite differently from the ancient Near Eastern worldview that Pharaoh represented. The law, however, did not regenerate them and transform their hearts. Neither did the blood of the Passover lambs atone for their sin (Heb 10:4). While the first covenant could talk about substitutionary atonement and internal transformation, it could not actually effect them.¹⁹ Only Jesus, according to the NT, can offer an efficacious sacrifice, and only the Spirit of God can transform the heart by applying the active and passive obedience of Jesus. So then, the grace that changes the heart was not part of the first covenant but of the new covenant in Jesus's blood (Luke 22:20). Divine grace comes only through Jesus (John 1:17) because only his satisfaction of divine justice can make grace possible (John 1:29).²⁰ From a historical point of view, the work of Jesus and his Spirit is the new feature of the new covenant. It would seem, then, that God's future circumcision of the heart could not benefit the children of the exodus generation. The children unfortunately lived too soon in human history.

¹⁸ Christopher J. H. Wright, *Knowing Jesus through the Old Testament*, 2nd ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2014), 41.

¹⁹ Regarding Deuteronomy 29:1–3, Millar says, "The problem of Israel is highlighted and yet no solution is offered. In fact, it is made plain that laws in and of themselves can offer no solution—for laws cannot open minds or eyes or ears." Millar, *Now Choose Life*, 173. George Eldon Ladd adds, "The old covenant of Law consisted of commands written on tables of stone, which could only declare the will of God but not provide the power to sinful women and men to obey God's will." George Eldon Ladd, *A Theology of the New Testament*, rev. ed. (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1993), 550. See also Barker, *Triumph of Grace*, 191.

²⁰ Regarding John 1:17, Christopher A. Maronde says, "The νόμος does not have χάρις και ἀλήθεια in itself, but instead it testifies to the one who is χάρις και ἀλήθεια incarnate, Jesus Christ." Christopher A. Maronde, "Moses in the Gospel of John," *CTQ* 77 (2013): 29. Mathias Rissi adds, "What God's people possessed before the appearance of Jesus, namely the law, had not the power to produce salvation. To be sure, the law is taken quite seriously as a gift of God (the passive verb [ἐδόθη] describes God's action). Yet what it ... could not do was bring about the realization of saving grace, which was fulfilled in Jesus, and upon which also the people of the Old Covenant were already dependent." Mathias Rissi, "John 1:1–18 (The Eternal Word)," *Int* 31 (1977): 400. It may also be noted that truth comes through Jesus because "he is the full revelation and embodiment of the redemptive purpose of God." Ladd, *Theology*, 303.

III. BACK TO OPTIMISM BY MEANS OF PROLEPSIS

In another sense, though, circumcision of the heart was possible. John Calvin is helpful at this point. He said, “The Fathers, who were formerly regenerated, obtained this favor through Christ, so that we may say ... that it was transferred to them from another source. The power, then, to penetrate into the heart was not inherent in the law, but it was a benefit transferred to the law from the gospel.”²¹ Another name for this transfer is proleptic grace. From a historical point of view, OT saints proleptically experienced new covenant reality. Understanding how requires an explanation of the words *proleptic* and *grace*.

Grace, the more familiar word, is often popularly defined as unmerited favor. When a person receives grace, he or she gets a favor or benefit that he or she does not deserve. Grace is never earned. It is always a gift that the recipient freely obtains from the giver. Grace is related to mercy but is not its equivalent. To receive mercy entails not getting a disfavor or punishment that one deserves. Mercy is being spared of one’s just deserts. Salvation, or a right relationship with God, has always come by grace and mercy. God graciously gives sinners the forgiveness that they do not deserve and mercifully spares them from the judgment that they do deserve. Both grace and mercy originate in the compassion of the giver not the merit of the recipient. Grace and mercy, however, do not come cheaply. By not treating sinners as their sins deserve, God does not deny his justice. Rather, he accepts a substitutionary payment for sin’s penalty. In fact, the Christian Bible teaches that God goes so far as to make the payment and satisfy his own justice. Grace and mercy, then, cost God dearly.

Meanwhile, *proleptic*, the less familiar word, has to do with anticipation and even foretaste. To experience something proleptically is to encounter it ahead of time. A future reality or event reaches back in time and affects earlier happenings in some way or another. The “not yet” impinges on the “already” so that the past or present is colored, shaped, or defined by the certainty of what is yet to come. There is even something progressive and organic about a proleptic relationship. If the earlier event anticipates the later, the later event emerges or grows out of the earlier. In other words, the two events exist on a continuum. Movement along the continuum leads to the full realization of that which is experienced proleptically.

Putting the two words together, proleptic grace is grace received and enjoyed ahead of time. What makes the grace possible still lies in the future, but the effects and benefits are nevertheless felt before the efficacious or grace-giving event has occurred in history. Proleptic grace enables a person to live in the present as if he or she were living in the future. Future reality and values are lived out in the present. With proleptic grace, the future is to some extent or another now, and real change that owes its power to the future can occur in the present.²²

²¹ John Calvin, *Commentaries on the Book of the Prophet Jeremiah and the Lamentations* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1981), 131.

²² For more on proleptic grace, see Sinclair Ferguson, *Preaching Christ from the Old Testament*, PT Media Papers 2 (London: Proclamation Trust, 2002), 15–17.

If proleptic grace has to do with how OT saints were saved, what, from an OT vantage point, is the grace-giving event of the future? According to the NT, “the prophets, who spoke of the grace that was to come to you, searched intently and with the greatest care, trying to find out the time and circumstances to which the Spirit of Christ in them was pointing when he predicted the sufferings of Christ and the glories that would follow” (1 Pet 1:10–11 NIV). The prophets may not have fully understood how God would work out his plan of salvation, but they nevertheless looked beyond their own time for the source of redeeming grace. They believed that God would come in the future and provide an act of redemption more definitive than animal sacrifice. According to John 1:17, “the law [for sanctification and mission] was given through Moses; grace and truth [for regeneration, forgiveness, and sanctification] came through Jesus Christ” (NIV).²³ What was not in some way available to the prophets through the first covenant became available in Jesus.²⁴ Hence, proleptic grace is an OT concept. It is not experienced in NT times. When Jesus announced that the kingdom of God is near (Matt 4:17; Mark 1:15) and that this cup is the new covenant in his blood (Luke 22:20), he signaled that the source of grace was no longer future. It had arrived in him. So then, if grace was received by OT saints, its source was nevertheless the future incarnation of God’s Son. The first and new covenants may speak of the circumcision of the heart, but the first covenant “could not create that for which it called.”²⁵ Changing the heart was never its purpose.

Nevertheless, saying that the first covenant could not change the heart is not the same as saying that first covenant members could not have changed hearts. In his book on theology and ethics in Deuteronomy, Millar says that “a subversive strand ... gradually overturns any confidence that God’s covenant people are capable of consistently living up to his ideal.”²⁶ He adds, “God’s people may be bound to fail today, but they are not trapped in failure, for God’s solution is coming.”²⁷ Millar, however, does not explain how the future solution will help the children of the exodus generation. They will be long dead by the first coming of Jesus.

Other scholars who make similar statements about a future solution face the same dilemma. For example, DeRouchie says, “Within Deuteronomy, the superseding of the old by a greater covenant is signaled in at least two overlapping ways, both of which make much of Jesus: (1) the prediction of a prophet like Moses whose word would be heeded, and (2) the explicit promise of new covenant rela-

²³ Sanctification involves law and grace because God’s people (by their obedience to the law) and God (by the indwelling of the Holy Spirit) contribute to it.

²⁴ William Hendriksen says, “But there were two things which the law as such did not supply: *grace* so that transgressors could be pardoned and helped in time of need, and truth, i.e., the *reality* to which all types pointed. Christ by his atoning work finished both. He *merited* grace and he *fulfilled* the types.” William Hendrickson, *Exposition of the Gospel according to John*, New Testament Commentary (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1953), 89.

²⁵ Jason C. Meyer, *The End of the Law: Mosaic Covenant in Pauline Theology*, NAC Studies in Bible and Theology 6 (Nashville: B&H, 2009), 230.

²⁶ Millar, *Now Choose Life*, 179.

²⁷ Millar, *Now Choose Life*, 181.

tionship following the exile and return to the land.”²⁸ What happens to people who lived before the exile? Moreover, Meade says, “The ease of keeping the Torah was not a reality tied to the circumcision of the Abrahamic and Sinai covenants; rather, it was a reality predicted to accompany the circumcision of the heart and the new covenant at the second [i.e., spiritual as opposed to geographic] stage of the return from exile.”²⁹ Again, what hope did pre-exilic Israelites and Gentiles have for their personal change during their lifetime? Meanwhile, Kyle B. Wells says, “Until this [God’s circumcision of the heart] occurs, any requirement for Israel to turn is at best a reminder of a promise instilling hope and at worst a condemning critique leading to despair.”³⁰ How hopeful is a promise for people who will not live long enough to experience its transforming power? Then there is this perplexing admission of proleptic grace from Turner who otherwise takes a pessimistic approach to Deuteronomy’s tension:

Certain individuals like Caleb (I would include, at least, Joshua and Moses) appear already to possess what the nation as a whole lacks: a circumcised heart. We know, that within the divine plan, the nation will only receive this after the exile (30:6), but since Yahweh is the only one who must give such a heart (see 29:3 [4]), perhaps he chooses to dispense it to certain individuals beforehand. Those positive examples of faithfulness, then, would serve both to condemn the nation for its lack and to offer hope by pointing to the reality that awaits all Israel in the future.”³¹

Why would proleptic grace be available to some and not to all, and how would it give hope to those who will not be alive to experience God’s provision of grace for his people in the future? Something more needs to be said.

Barker even uses the word *proleptically* with reference to the relationship of 30:15–20 (an exhortation to present obedience) to 30:6 (the promise of future circumcision) and so implies that OT saints, on the basis of what God would do in the future, could experience a circumcised heart with concomitant obedience.³² Nevertheless, Barker so emphasizes (or thinks that Deuteronomy emphasizes) divine initiative and human inability that he ignores what Deuteronomy 1:36 says about Caleb’s heart, except to opine that this verse “does not explain why Caleb is exempt from punishment.”³³ He further regards other instances of covenantal faithfulness as rare exceptions.³⁴ Barker’s use of the word *proleptically* indicates once again that more needs to be said. The failure of OT saints may not have been as inevitable or widespread as Barker repeatedly insists. Moreover, the imperatives throughout Deuteronomy, including the laws in chapters 12–26, suggest that the

²⁸ DeRouchie, “From Condemnation,” 110.

²⁹ Meade, “Circumcision of the Heart,” 78.

³⁰ Kyle B. Wells, *Grace and Agency in Paul and Second Temple Judaism*, NovTSup 157 (Leiden: Brill, 2015), 33.

³¹ Turner, “Deuteronomy’s Theology,” 218.

³² Barker, *Triumph of Grace*, 200, 206.

³³ Barker, *Triumph of Grace*, 15n50.

³⁴ Barker, *Triumph of Grace*, 129, 169, 214. See also Turner, “Deuteronomy’s Theology,” 214.

experience of proleptic grace could and did produce holy living.³⁵ If Abraham's family was supposed to be a blessing to the rest of the world (Gen 12:3; 18:18; Exod 19:6; Deut 4:6), only God knows how many Gentiles came to faith because of the faithfulness of pre-exilic Israelites.

So then, Deuteronomy may look beyond itself for full realization of God's promises, but first covenant members were not bound to fail "today." Hearts could and did undergo change in OT times. Before Jesus accomplished anyone's salvation in the first century CE, the Holy Spirit was already at work to apply the benefits of Jesus's active and passive obedience to those who believed what God had said through his prophets. The Spirit did this proleptically through the types and shadows of the law that anticipated the work of Jesus (Heb 10:1). As seen in Caleb, the daughters of Zelophehad, Boaz, and the psalmist, OT saints (who lived under the first covenant) experienced internal transformation that produced righteous conduct. Meanwhile, NT saints are saved retrospectively, that is, after Jesus died, rose, and ascended. In the mind of God, however, Jesus was slain before creation (2 Tim 1:9; 1 Pet 1:20), and all saints receive the life-changing benefit of his work after the fact of God's eternal decree. Redemptive power comes only from Jesus, to whom the first covenant typologically pointed. From the beginning of human history, what God would ultimately do in Jesus could immediately address the human condition. If biblical salvation has always been by grace through faith in Jesus and if a person cannot be saved without the Spirit's application of the work of Jesus, then Jesus is the secret (Deut 29:29) or the mystery (Eph 6:19; Col 1:25–27) that resolves the tension in Deuteronomy.³⁶ By means of his active and passive obedience in time and space, he historically circumcised people's hearts after the exile, but this historical work was made possible in eternity past by God's decision to redeem.³⁷ Consequently, God could impute Jesus's righteousness to Jews and Gentiles who lived before the first coming of Jesus. Along with Jews and Gentiles who live between the two comings of Jesus, they could experience positional righteousness (justification) and experiential righteousness (sanctification).

³⁵ Contra Barker, *Triumph of Grace*, 107–8.

³⁶ In its immediate context, Deuteronomy 29:29 responds to the failure of the renewal of the Mosaic covenant with the children of the exodus generation in verses 1 and 9–15. For Brueggemann, the secret things refer to "the future YHWH yet intends, and to the ways in which YHWH will bring this rejected people into its undeserved future." Walter Brueggemann, *Deuteronomy*, AOTC (Nashville: Abingdon, 2001), 264–65. The secret things, according to Hamilton, refer to "Yahweh's sovereign plan in which Israel will experience everything Moses is describing," including the future circumcision of the heart in 30:6. Hamilton, "Glory of God," 29. Meanwhile, J. G. Millar identifies the secret things as "God's ultimate covenant," which is the new covenant in Jesus's blood (Luke 22:20). J. G. Millar, "Deuteronomy," in *New Dictionary of Biblical Theology*, ed. T. Desmond Alexander et al. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 2000), 164.

³⁷ Block says, "The sacrifice of Jesus Christ provides the basis for God's establishment of any relationship with him, pre-Abraham, under the Israelite covenant, and in our own time after the incarnation. When First Testament believers presented their offerings in faith and with pure hearts, like we, they too experienced the atoning work of Christ (planned before the foundation of the world)." Block, *Triumph of Grace*, 84.

Of course, NT saints struggle just as much as OT saints to keep God's commandments. For this reason, what Coxhead says about the "limited cardionomographic activity of the Spirit during the old covenant age" is unconvincing. So also is what he says about "the old covenant conundrum."³⁸ NT saints can be every bit as challenged as OT saints to obey God's commandments. Paul admitted his own struggle to do the good that he wanted to do and avoid the evil that he wanted to avoid (Rom 7:14–24). Moreover, he was no less frustrated with the Corinthians than Moses was with the exodus generation. Yes, "Jesus died so that Israel and the nations would no longer break covenant with God,"³⁹ but the so-called tension between what God has already done at Jesus's first coming and what he will yet do at Jesus's second coming provides a necessary corrective to a sharp distinction between the first and new covenants.

One other matter requires consideration in this section. John 7:39, which says that the Spirit had not been given before Jesus's glorification (i.e., his death and resurrection), would seem to argue against the possibility of proleptic grace. In the absence of proleptic grace that changes the heart, either no one was saved in OT times, or salvation (regeneration and sanctification) occurred without the work of the Spirit.⁴⁰ Few scholars seem to be comfortable with these possibilities, and so many of them suggest that OT saints did not experience the internal ministry of the Spirit as richly as NT saints.⁴¹ For example, Ladd says, "However, it is clear that under the new covenant, the work of the Spirit would involve a new inwardness. The Spirit will do a work within the hearts of the redeemed that will go far beyond anything previously experienced." Other than to suggest that this new inwardness would enable NT saints "to impart streams of life-giving power to others," Ladd does not specify what going "far beyond anything previously experienced" will entail.⁴² Of course, OT saints could, by the power of the Holy Spirit, be a blessing to each other and to outsiders just as much as NT saints can.⁴³ Boaz is the stellar example.

³⁸ Coxhead, "Cardionomographic Work," 82–83, 88, 91–92.

³⁹ Coxhead, "Cardionomographic Work," 92.

⁴⁰ James M. Hamilton argues for a third possibility, namely, that OT saints were regenerated by God's Spirit (circumcised in heart) but not indwelt by God's Spirit. James M. Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence: The Holy Spirit in the Old and New Testaments*, NAC Studies in Bible & Theology 1 (Nashville: B&H, 2006), 3–4, 25, 33, 35, 45, 47. Instead, the Holy Spirit lived among OT saints in the temple, which had a sanctifying effect (41). Moreover, the Spirit came upon certain individuals to empower them for specific tasks (27–28, 54–55). So then, when John 7:39 says that the Spirit had not yet been given, his indwelling and sanctifying work, not his regenerating or authorizing work, is in view (114, 117–118). This distinction seems unlikely in view of the reference in v. 38 to the efflux of water. If the water symbolizes God's redeeming grace, inflowing water would symbolize regeneration, but outgoing water has to do with mission. John 7:39 does not deny the internal transformation of the hearts of OT saints.

⁴¹ Hamilton provides a review. Hamilton, *God's Indwelling Presence*, 13–18.

⁴² Ladd, *Theology*, 331–32.

⁴³ On whether the river of God's redeeming grace flows from Jesus and his Spirit to the believer for his or her regeneration or from the believer to others for their regeneration, see J. R. Greene, "Integrating Interpretations of John 7:37–39 into the Temple Theme: The Spirit as Efflux from the New Temple," *Neot* 47 (2013): 345–50; Zane C. Hodges, "Rivers of Living Water: John 7:37–39," *BSac* 136 (1979): 242–43.

Hebrews 11:39–40 affirms that people in OT times had saving faith in God’s promises. Moreover, “God’s word,” according to Coxhead, “can only penetrate a person’s heart by the power of the Holy Spirit. Thus, in relation to the situation that existed under the old covenant, there is only one conclusion that can be drawn: God’s law was present in the hearts of the faithful remnant of Israel because it was inscribed there by God’s Spirit.”⁴⁴ So then, John 7:39 must be read in light of proleptic grace and the progressive revelation of the Trinity in NT times. OT saints had little, if any, understanding of the triune nature of God. The OT may have references to the Spirit of God, but these references do not associate the Spirit of God with the Son of God. In other words, OT saints did not know that the Third Person of the Trinity applied the redemptive work of the Second Person to those who put their trust in that redemptive work. Only with the passage of time did Jesus’s listeners in John 7:37–38 come to know what God already knew. For this reason, later readers of John 7:39 must recognize the limited understanding of Jesus’s original listeners in the narrative world of John 7:37–38. From their point of view at this moment in human history, there was no Third Person of the Trinity who applied the redemptive work of the Second Person of the Trinity. After Jesus’s hermeneutics lesson in Luke 24 and Peter’s sermon in Acts 2, they had a better understanding of the economic Trinity (the relationship of the three Persons of the Trinity to the plan of salvation), but in the narrative world of John 7 they do not yet have this understanding.⁴⁵ Their lack of understanding, however, does not mean that the Holy Spirit was not already involved with the internal transformation of OT saints.⁴⁶

IV. THE EFFECTS OF A CIRCUMCISED HEART

An earlier section of this article noted that a circumcised heart, according to Deuteronomy 10:12–13, involves some effects or corollaries. Internal transformation leads to fearing Yahweh, walking in his ways, loving him, serving him unreservedly, and obeying his commandments. These effects resemble the fruit of the Spirit in Galatians 5:22–23 because they proceed from and therefore evidence a changed heart.

Two of these effects, fearing and loving, might seem to be mutually exclusive. People do not tend to love what they fear; rather, they try to avoid it. The fear of

⁴⁴ Coxhead, “Cardionomographic Work,” 82.

⁴⁵ According to Donald A. Hagner, the resurrection is “a lens that makes possible what is ultimately a more accurate understanding of Jesus. Now matters that had to remain implicit in the time of the ministry of Jesus can be made explicit. One sees retrospectively what one could not see in the rush and heat of the moment.” Donald A. Hagner, *The New Testament: A Historical and Theological Introduction* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 2012), 118.

⁴⁶ Frank Thielman says, “Because [John’s] Jesus is eternally one with the Father, he can reveal God’s words and deeds more fully than anyone else. This enables eternal life and judgment to be detached from the future and to move back into the present on the basis of one’s response to Jesus.” Frank Thielman, *Theology of the New Testament: A Canonical and Synthetic Approach* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2005), 179. The proleptic activity of the Spirit, “whom the Father will send in my name” (John 14:26), made the response possible before and during Jesus’s first coming.

Yahweh, however, is not the same as fright or terror. Yahweh does not want people to cower and cringe before his anger and caprice. Nor does he want them to dread the unknown that might be due to his secrecy or incomprehensibility. He does not delight in scaring people. So the fear of Yahweh has to do with something else, namely, relationship. First, fear of Yahweh begins with knowledge of God's objective revelation (Deut 4:10; 31:12–13; Ps 19:9). The God of the first covenant has not left humans to grope after him. Instead, he has revealed himself in creation, history, and prophecy (i.e., the interpretation of history). A theologian would say that God has made himself known in general and special revelation. The fear of Yahweh, then, involves intellectual content that is readily available. Fearing God begins with getting to know him as he has identified himself through deed and word. In this regard, a relationship with God resembles a relationship with any other person. Second, fear involves subjective submission to the objective revelation (Deut 6:13; 13:4; Prov 15:33). Fear moves from the intellect to the heart or volition. Knowledge of what God has done and said should produce awe, respect, and trust.⁴⁷ The God of Deuteronomy mysteriously appeared at Mount Sinai in blazing fire and smoky clouds. Observers below could hear his voice but could not see him (4:11). Exodus 19:16–19 adds that a trumpet blasted and the mountain shook as Yahweh descended. The whole scene demonstrated the otherness and supremacy of God, leaving the Israelites with no doubt about their status as very junior partners in this relationship. The Israelites might admire and appreciate Yahweh for their deliverance from Egypt, but they should also realize that they can never relate to him as equals. Bill T. Arnold observes that “love prevents terror and fear prevents irreverent familiarity.”⁴⁸ God's people should always be convinced of his good intention for them, but they should not expect him to tell them everything.

Meanwhile, the reference to loving God in Deuteronomy 10:12 recalls what is said in 6:5 about loving God with all of one's heart, soul, mind, and strength. If love is a deliberate choice more than an uncontrollable feeling, then loving God with heart, soul, mind, and strength means being intentionally committed to him in every area of life. When a bride and groom pledge their love to each other, they hold nothing back “for better or worse, for richer or poorer, in sickness and in health.” They promise to give everything, saying in effect, “I will be there for you, no matter what.” Love for God is similar. Everything, regardless of circumstances, is done consciously for his pleasure and glory. As big and powerful as Yahweh was at Sinai, he demonstrated his care and reliability in Egypt and on the way to Sinai. Therefore, his people could take the reasonable risk of responding in kind. If he was there for them, they could be there for him. They could be loyal even if they did not fully understand what God was doing in the individual events of their lives.

⁴⁷ DeRouchie says, “Furthermore, the progression *teaching* → *hearing* → *fearing* → *obeying* emphasizes that the Godward fear that produces dependent and productive living results only from God's gracious disclosure of himself and his will in a way that captures the hearts of his people.” DeRouchie, “From Condemnation,” 92.

⁴⁸ Bill T. Arnold, “The Love-Fear Antinomy in Deuteronomy 5–11,” *VT* 61 (2011): 567.

As for the other effects of a circumcised heart, walking in God's ways means to imitate God. To imitate God, a person first must know who God is and what he does. For the children of the exodus generation, both could be learned from God's revelation through Moses. A person who would imitate God must follow his example in the narratives and obey his commands in the laws. Most of the laws appear in Deuteronomy 12–26, but these are grounded in the recollection of the experience of divine grace during the events of the exodus.⁴⁹ Moreover, Deuteronomy 10:17–19 says that Yahweh does not show partiality or accept bribes. Rather, he defends orphans, widows, and aliens. In other words, he looks out for those who, because of being landless in an agrarian society, are cut off from the means of production and are more susceptible to deprivation. The children of the exodus generation could imitate Yahweh by not taking advantage of the less fortunate or even ignoring them. As Boaz would later demonstrate in the book of Ruth, they could use their resources to enrich others and include them in Yahweh's covenantal community. They could empathize with the needy because their parents and they had similarly been disfranchised in Egypt and in the wilderness. So then, there was an inseparable link between the character of Israel's God and the just and compassionate society that Israel was supposed to model. Walking in Yahweh's ways entailed mission because Yahweh's people who had been treated so well by him could not but treat others similarly. Their mission was to display a redeemed alternative to the business-as-usual of their polytheistic neighbors.

Serving God wholeheartedly entails knowing what he wants and working to make it happen. Nevertheless, knowing what someone wants and providing it can occur dispassionately. A servant may not want the same outcome as the master but still goes through the motions to produce it. Serving wholeheartedly involves wanting what God wants and being passionately devoted to achieving it. So then, the one who serves God is not divided in his or her loyalty to God. Moreover, there is no such thing as part-time service that can be turned on and off. Wholehearted service involves persevering consistency in thought, word, and deed.

All of this is to say that a person cannot claim to fear, imitate, love, or serve God and then disobey him. God's commandments reveal his heart—what he cares about and what he wants. Human disobedience indicates disinterest in what God wants and interest in something else. When someone wants something so much that he or she is willing to disregard God's commands, then that something has at that moment become an idol, which can be feared, imitated, loved, and served in place of Yahweh (Deut 4:15–19; 11:16). While Deuteronomy warns of idolatry and even assumes that God's people as a whole will succumb to it, the recollection of Caleb's devotion in Deuteronomy 1:36 encourages readers of Deuteronomy, both before and after the first coming of Jesus, to experience a circumcised heart and its effects "today" in their lifetime. Because of prophetic grace, Deuteronomy's vision

⁴⁹ The exodus is frequently recalled in Deuteronomy. See 5:6; 6:20–23; 7:18–19; 8:1–2, 14–15; 11:1–7; 13:5, 10; 15:15; 16:3, 12; 17:16; 20:1; 23:4–5; 24:18, 22; 26:5–10; 29:2–9.

of spiritual and moral formation is not beyond their attainment. They can love God and neighbor at any time in redemptive history.

V. CONCLUSION

In the narrative world of Deuteronomy 1:1, the children of the exodus generation can seemingly circumcise their hearts today (before the exile), but God will have to circumcise them tomorrow (after the exile). This ostensible contradiction is caused by the different understandings of time that Deuteronomy's divine and human authors have. On the one hand, God knew, as the NT reveals, that his incarnate Son, Jesus, would have to take up the mission that Israel was unable to perform. On the other hand, the Israelites may have known that God was working out a redemptive plan, but they could not see how it would end (1 Pet 1:10–12). Nor did they know what God had decreed about Jesus in eternity past. How, then, did an omniscient God communicate with finite creatures? He wrote a book that leaves the tension unresolved but assures its readers that he is in control (Deut 2:7; 33:26–29). They did not need to know everything that he knows. Indeed, exhaustive knowledge of his secrets (29:29) would confuse them more. God therefore told them just enough about yesterday and near tomorrow's failures to keep them honest. He also told them just enough about far tomorrow's solution to give them hope. Much of the book, though, invites the reader to live faithfully and missionally today, the only day that humans can make such a decision.⁵⁰ Moreover, Moses's repetition of the word *today* told the children that they had to make a decision about whether to repeat the mistakes of their parents or to learn from them. Moses may not have been able to explain proleptic grace, but he knew that Yahweh had a secret (29:29). That secret somehow made a future reality (circumcision of the heart) possible in the narrative present of Deuteronomy 1:1. The prophet like Moses (Deut 18:15; Acts 3:22) would provide more explanation at a later time. Until then, the children had enough information to make their decision today. Of course, the same decision confronts Christian readers of Deuteronomy who similarly walk by faith today in the tension between the "already" (the redemptive work that God began at Jesus's first coming) and the "not yet" (the redemptive work that God will finish at Jesus's second coming).

⁵⁰ Millar says, "Today' Israel is given a chance not merely to undo the mistakes of the past, but to realize the potential of an exciting future." Millar, *Now Choose Life*, 83. He later adds, "Today is the day for Israel to decide" (92). Meanwhile, Richard D. Nelson says, "Deuteronomy confronts every serious reader with a moment of existential decision, the choice of whether to accept or reject its claim over one's life. This moment of decision is always 'today,' always on the threshold of new possibilities for richer life." Richard D. Nelson, *Deuteronomy: A Commentary*, O'TL (Louisville: Westminster John Knox, 2002), 11–12. See also Clements, *Book of Deuteronomy*, 47.