

Deuteronomy 31:28

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to record against them.

Analysis

Gather unto me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers—Moses assembled Israel's leadership for final testimony. **That I may speak these words in their ears**—direct, personal communication to those responsible for leading after his death. **And call heaven and earth to record against them**—the covenant lawsuit invoked cosmic witnesses. The Hebrew *a'idah* (אִידָּה, 'I will cause to witness') used legal terminology for summoning testimony in court proceedings.

Calling heaven and earth as witnesses appears in Moses's song (Deuteronomy 32:1) and throughout prophetic literature (Isaiah 1:2, Micah 6:2). Creation itself testified to covenant violations—the land vomited out inhabitants who defiled it (Leviticus 18:25-28), heaven withheld rain during drought judgments (1 Kings 17:1), earth opened to swallow rebels (Numbers 16:31-33). This poetic-legal device emphasized the cosmic significance of covenant faithfulness—relationship with God affected all creation, not merely personal spirituality.

Historical Context

Delivered circa 1406 BC in Moses's final gatherings with Israel's leadership. The elders and officers bore responsibility for implementing Torah in their tribes and clans after Moses's death. Ancient Near Eastern treaties similarly invoked divine witnesses (pagan gods) to enforce covenants. Israel's innovation: heaven and earth themselves—God's creation—witnessed, avoiding polytheistic implications while

emphasizing universal accountability. The prophets later prosecuted covenant lawsuits using this witness-formula, showing Israel's guilt was established beyond dispute.

Related Passages

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Study Questions

1. Why does the covenant invoke creation (heaven and earth) as witnesses? What does this cosmic scope reveal?
2. How does creation's involvement in covenant consequences (drought, famine, abundance, peace) demonstrate God's sovereignty?
3. What role does creation play in Christian eschatology—judgment, renewal, the new heavens and earth?

Interlinear Text

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Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 32:1 (Word): Give ear, O ye heavens, and I will speak; and hear, O earth, the words of my mouth.

Deuteronomy 4:26 (Parallel theme): I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed.

Deuteronomy 30:19 (Parallel theme): 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:

Luke 19:40 (Parallel theme): And he answered and said unto them, I tell you that, if these should hold their peace, the stones would immediately cry out.

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