

MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

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A Study for Judaism • Christianity • Islam

DOCUMENT 290

A ROOT BEARING POISON AND WORMWOOD

A Covenant Deep Dive into Deuteronomy 29:18: the *shoresh poreh rosh ve-la'anah* (a root bearing poison and wormwood)

What Is the Root, What Are the Poison and the Wormwood, Who Says “I Shall Have Peace,” Is This the “Root of Bitterness” of Christian Teaching, and What Is the Covenant Community to Do About It? — A Three-Religion Covenant Response

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The Message is Sent to the World

REACHING JUDAISM, CHRISTIANITY, AND ISLAM

✧ JUDAISM	✝ CHRISTIANITY	✧ ISLAM
This verse is read aloud in the synagogue every year, on the Sabbath before the New Year, in the portion called <i>Nitzavim</i> (“ <i>You are standing</i> ”). Rashi explains the root as a man or a woman, a family or a tribe that “fruitfully produces and increases wickedness in your midst.” Nachmanides reads it of the generations to come: “the father is the root and the son is the twig.” The Mishnah refuses the same presumption in its own words: “I will sin, and the Day of Atonement will atone” (Yoma 8:9). The Tanakh speaks	The Letter to the Hebrews takes up this verse through the old Greek translation: “lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by it many be defiled” (Hebrews 12:15). Peter uses the same words of Simon the sorcerer: “the gall of bitterness” (Acts 8:23). In much modern preaching and counseling the “root of bitterness” has come to mean resentment or unforgiveness held in the heart. In the Torah the root is a person, a family, or a tribe whose heart turns from Yahweh to other gods, and who says, “I shall have	The Qur’an sets two trees side by side. A good word is like a good tree “whose root is firm,” and an evil word is like an evil tree “uprooted from the surface of the earth, having no stability” (Q. 14:24–26). It names a bitter tree that “comes forth in the root of Hell” (Q. 37:64), and it records the same presumption this passage condemns: “The Fire will not touch us except for a few numbered days. Say: Have you taken a covenant with God?” (Q. 2:80). The Tanakh places the root inside the covenant

first. It says who the root is, what it bears, and who deals with it.	<i>peace.</i> ” The written text says what the root is and what its fruit is.	assembly itself, on the day the covenant is sworn.
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DOCTRINAL AUTHORITY — STANDING RULE OF MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

The sole binding authority of Miqdash Bethel Covenant Institution is the *Tanakh* — the written covenant of **Yahweh**. No Talmudic tractate, Church council decree, papal encyclical, hadith collection, or extra-biblical tradition carries doctrinal weight equal to or greater than the written Torah. Where any tradition conflicts with the written covenant, the written covenant governs without exception. The Talmud, New Testament, and Qur’an are cited as historical reference and comparative witness — never as superseding authority. Miqdash Bethel uses the Written Tanakh as its sole source for four reasons: it is the only text Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all recognize as originally given by **Yahweh**; it predates and underlies the Talmud, New Testament, and Qur’an, so testing those traditions against it follows the evidentiary direction of **Deuteronomy 19:15** — the earlier witness governs the later commentary; every later tradition that departs from the Tanakh does so by addition or reinterpretation, never by overturning the text itself, so the text remains the fixed standard; and **Yahweh**’s own words declare the covenant unchanging (Malachi 3:6; Psalms 119:89), making the written covenant — not evolving institutional interpretation — the only stable ground for doctrine. All three great covenant traditions — Judaism, Christianity, and Islam — are addressed simultaneously and equally in every Miqdash Bethel document, because **Yahweh**’s covenant belongs to every nation that will receive it. The **Deuteronomy 19:15** two-or-three-witness evidentiary standard governs all textual claims in this document.

HOW TO READ THIS DOCUMENT

This document applies the sole authority of the written *Tanakh* to five questions about **Deuteronomy 29:18**: what the root is, what the poison and the wormwood are, who the man is who says “*I shall have peace,*” whether this is the “*root of bitterness*” of Christian teaching, and what the covenant community is to do about a root in its midst. **Yahweh** (יהוה) and **Elohim** (אֱלֹהִים) appear in bold throughout. Tanakh books and personal names are given in English. Hebrew transliterations appear in **bold italic** with the English meaning in parentheses at every occurrence. Scripture references are bold. Verse numbers follow the English version; where the Hebrew numbering differs, it is given in brackets on first citation. In **Deuteronomy 29** the Hebrew number is one less than the English throughout, so the verse studied here is 29:18 in English Bibles and 29:17 in Hebrew Bibles. Scripture is rendered in a literal working translation from the Hebrew. Each finding is graded under the two-or-three-witness

standard as **Corroborated** (two or more independent Tanakh witnesses), **Single witness**, or **Not in the text**. Three audiences are addressed simultaneously: Judaism, Christianity, and Islam. Rabbinic commentary, the Aramaic Targum, the old Greek translation, the Dead Sea Scrolls, New Testament texts, church teaching, the Qur'an, and hadith are cited as historical and comparative reference — not as binding authority. The Written Tanakh governs all conclusions.

TANAKH BOOKS CITED IN THIS DOCUMENT

DIVISION	BOOKS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Torah	Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, Deuteronomy	The verse and its chapter; the oath and its curses; the laws of the one who turns to other gods; the fringe; the Song of Moses; the household gods of Jacob's house; the promise of return
Nevi'im (Prophets)	Joshua, Judges, 1 Samuel, 1 Kings, 2 Kings, Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel, Hosea, Amos, Obadiah, Micah, Zephaniah, Malachi	Achan; Micah and the tribe of Dan; Solomon, Jeroboam, and Manasseh; the poison and the wormwood in the prophets; the false word of peace; the uprooting and the replanting
Ketuvim (Writings)	Psalms, Proverbs, Job, Ruth, Lamentations, 2 Chronicles	The stubborn heart; the hidden faults; the root of the righteous; the bitter of soul; the wormwood tasted; Manasseh heard

COMPARATIVE TEXTS CITED — HISTORICAL AND COMPARATIVE REFERENCE ONLY

CATEGORY	TEXTS CITED	PURPOSE IN THIS STUDY
Ancient translations and scribal marks	Septuagint (Greek) Deuteronomy 29:18–19 ; Aramaic Targum Onkelos on the same verses; the dotted letters of the Hebrew text at Deuteronomy 29:29 ; the raised letter at Judges 18:30	How the oldest translation rendered the root and the last clause of verse 19, and where the phrase <i>“root of bitterness”</i> began; what the scribes marked
Dead Sea Scrolls	Community Rule (1QS) 2:11–18	Jewish readers before the church who wrote this passage into their own covenant oath

New Testament	Matthew 7:17–19; 15:13; Acts 8:23; Romans 6:1; 1 Corinthians 5:6; 1 Thessalonians 5:3; Hebrews 12:15–17; Jude 4; Revelation 8:10–11	Where the New Testament takes up the verse; its own warnings against presumption; the picture of the leaven and of the plant
Rabbinic literature	Mishnah Yoma 8:9; Talmud Sanhedrin 43b; Shevuot 39a; Rashi, Ibn Ezra, and Nachmanides on Deuteronomy 29:18–19	The root as persons who multiply wickedness; the three readings of the hard clause; the generations to come; mutual responsibility for what is revealed
Church teaching	Westminster Confession 18.1; Catechism of the Catholic Church 2092; modern <i>“root of bitterness”</i> counseling; <i>“generational curse”</i> teaching	False hopes and presumption named by the churches themselves; the popular readings tested in Section IX
Qur’an and hadith	Q. 2:10; 2:80; 4:48; 6:164; 7:99; 14:24–26; 37:62–66; Sahih al-Bukhari 2493	The two trees; the bitter tree; the presumption of a covenant people; the parable of the ship; no soul bears another’s burden

I. FRAMING THE QUESTION — ONE VERSE, ONE WARNING, FIVE QUESTIONS

I-A. The Questions as They Are Usually Asked

Deuteronomy 29:18 is one of the shortest warnings in the Torah and one of the most borrowed. Its picture of a root that bears poison and wormwood passed into the old Greek translation, from there into the New Testament as a *“root of bitterness,”* and from there into sermons, counseling rooms, and prayer meetings around the world. The verse itself is read far less often than the phrase that grew out of it. The questions put to this Institution are direct:

First: what is the root? Is it a feeling, a sin, a spirit, or a person?

Second: what is the poison and the wormwood that it bears?

Third: who is the one who says, *“I shall have peace,”* and why is his case treated so severely?

Fourth: is this the *“root of bitterness”* of Christian teaching, which is usually explained as resentment and unforgiveness?

Fifth: what is the covenant community to do about a root in its midst, and what is each person to do about his own heart?

This study builds on earlier work in the Library and does not repeat it. Doc 238 (*Delivered and Kept*) called on the two verses that follow this one as its first witness that covenant standing can be forfeited. Doc 264 (*As the Sin of Divination*) quoted the root once and listed the *sherirut lev (stubbornness of heart)* of verse 19 in its vocabulary of rebellion. Doc 284 (*A Heart of Flesh*) set that same stubborn heart among the Tanakh's names for the heart of stone. Doc 247 (*I Have Not Spoken in Secret*) read the closing verse of the chapter, on the hidden and the revealed things. Doc 287 (*On the Four Corners*) studied the fringes, which are given so that Israel will not go about after its own heart. None of them stopped on verse 18 itself. The present document reads the verse word by word, follows its two plants through every place the Tanakh names them, follows the root through Israel's history, tests the "*root of bitterness*" teaching against the text, and refines five points in the earlier material (Section XIII).

I-B. The Questions in the Tanakh's Own Terms

Three facts about the text come before any answer.

The numbering. English Bibles count this verse as 29:18. Hebrew Bibles count it as 29:17, because they attach the first verse of the English chapter to chapter 28. This study follows the English numbering. The verse studied here is the one that names the root. The verse after it, English 29:19, is the one that says "*I shall have peace.*"

The sentence does not end at the verse. Verse 18 is a warning with no main clause of its own: "*lest there be.*" The thought runs on through verse 19 (what the man says), verses 20 and 21 (what **Yahweh** does), and verses 22 to 28 (what becomes of the land). The verse cannot be read alone.

The setting is an oath. The warning is spoken on the day Israel enters into *berit (covenant)* and *alah (oath / sworn curse)* with **Yahweh** in the land of Moab (**Deuteronomy 29:1, 12** [Hebrew 28:69; 29:11]). It is a clause in a covenant, addressed to an assembly. It is not private counsel on the management of feelings.

The questions therefore become:

1. What does the verse say, to whom, and at what moment?
2. Whom does the Hebrew call the root, and why a root?
3. Where else does the Tanakh name these two plants, and what do they stand for there?
4. What does the man of verse 19 believe about the covenant, and how does **Yahweh** answer him?
5. What does the chapter give to **Yahweh** alone, and what does it give to the community?

Every finding below is graded. A finding is **Corroborated** when two or more independent Tanakh witnesses carry it (**Deuteronomy 19:15**). It is **Single witness** when only one text carries it. It is **Not in the text** when it is taught but the Tanakh does not say it.

II. THE TEXT — ONE SENTENCE IN FOUR VERSES

II-A. The Hebrew and a Working Translation

פְּנִי־יִשׁ בְּכֶם אִישׁ אוֹ-אִשָּׁה אוֹ מִשְׁפָּחָה אוֹ-שִׁבְטָא אֲשֶׁר לִבּוֹ פָּנָה הַיּוֹם מֵעַם יְהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ לְלַכֵּת לַעֲבֹד
אֶת-אֱלֹהֵי הַגּוֹיִם הָהֵם פְּנִי־יִשׁ בְּכֶם שָׂרֵשׁ פָּרָה רֹאשׁ וְלַעֲנָה

“Lest there be among you a man or a woman, or a family or a tribe, whose heart is turning today from Yahweh our Elohim, to go to serve the gods of those nations; lest there be among you a root bearing poison and wormwood.” (Deuteronomy 29:18 [Hebrew 29:17])

וְהָיָה בְּשִׁמְעוֹ אֶת-דִּבְרֵי הָאֵלָה הַזֹּאת וְהִתְבָּרַךְ בְּלִבּוֹ לֵאמֹר שְׁלוֹם יִהְיֶה-לִּי כִּי בִשְׁרָרוֹת לִבִּי אֵלֶךְ לַמַּעַן
סְפוֹת הָרָוָה אֶת-הַצְמָאָה

“And it shall be, when he hears the words of this oath, that he blesses himself in his heart, saying, ‘I shall have peace, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart’ — so as to sweep away the watered with the thirsty.” (Deuteronomy 29:19 [Hebrew 29:18])

לֹא-יֵאבֹדָה יְהוָה סִלַּח לוֹ כִּי אַז יַעֲשֶׂן אֶף-יְהוָה וְקִנְאָתוֹ בְּאִישׁ הַהוּא וּרְבָצָה בּוֹ כָּל-הָאֵלָה הַכְּתוּבָה בַּסֵּפֶר
הַזֶּה וּמָחָה יְהוָה אֶת-שְׁמוֹ מִתַּחַת הַשָּׁמַיִם

“Yahweh will not be willing to pardon him; for then the anger of Yahweh and His jealousy will smoke against that man, and every curse that is written in this book will crouch upon him, and Yahweh will blot out his name from under heaven.” (Deuteronomy 29:20 [Hebrew 29:19])

וְהִבְדִּילוֹ יְהוָה לְרָעָה מִכָּל שְׁבִטֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל כָּל־אֱלוֹת הַבְּרִית הַכְּתוּבָה בַּסֵּפֶר הַתּוֹרָה הַזֶּה

“And Yahweh will separate him for evil out of all the tribes of Israel, according to all the curses of the covenant that is written in this book of the Torah.” (Deuteronomy 29:21 [Hebrew 29:20])

One Hebrew word stands behind both **“oath”** in verse 19 and **“curse”** in verses 20 and 21: **alah** (**oath** / **sworn curse**), אֱלָה. It is an oath that carries its own penalty. The last clause of verse 19 is difficult, and Section VI-D sets out the two ways it can be read.

II-B. Where the Verse Stands

The verse is one step in a chapter that has an exact order.

#	VERSES	WHAT IS SAID
1	29:1–9	The covenant in the land of Moab, besides the covenant at Horeb. Israel has seen the signs in Egypt, yet <i>“Yahweh has not given you a heart to know ... to this day.”</i>
2	29:10–13	All stand before Yahweh today: heads, tribes, elders, officers, every man of Israel, the little ones, the wives, and the sojourner in the camp, from the wood-cutter to the water-drawer, to enter the covenant and the oath.
3	29:14–15	The covenant and the oath are made also <i>“with him who is not here with us today.”</i>
4	29:16–17	You know how we lived in Egypt and passed through the nations. You saw their detestable things and their idols: wood and stone, silver and gold.
5	29:18	Lest there be among you one whose heart is turning to those gods: a root bearing poison and wormwood.
6	29:19	He hears the oath and blesses himself in his heart: <i>“I shall have peace.”</i>
7	29:20–21	Yahweh will not be willing to pardon him. The curses crouch upon him, his name is blotted out, and he is separated for evil.
8	29:22–24	The generation to come and the foreigner see a land of brimstone and salt, like Sodom, and the nations ask why.
9	29:25–28	Because they forsook the covenant and served other gods, Yahweh uprooted them from their soil.
10	29:29	The hidden things belong to Yahweh . The revealed things belong to us and to our children, to do all the words of this Torah.

Three features of this order govern everything that follows.

First, the warning looks back. It is tied to what comes before it by the word ***“for”***:

“for you know how we lived in the land of Egypt ... and you saw their detestable things and their idols” (Deuteronomy 29:16–17 [Hebrew 29:15–16]).

What the eye has seen, the heart can turn toward. The root is fed by a memory.

Second, the warning looks inward. It does not speak of an army or a foreign nation. It says ***“among you,”*** and it says it twice.

Third, the warning looks forward. The oath takes in “*him who is not here with us today*” (Deuteronomy 29:15 [Hebrew 29:14]), the ruin is seen by “*your children who rise up after you*” (Deuteronomy 29:22 [Hebrew 29:21]), and the chapter ends with “*us and our children forever*” (Deuteronomy 29:29 [Hebrew 29:28]). A root is a thing with a future.

II-C. The Shape of the Verse

The verse has two halves, and both begin with the same three words: *pen yesh bakhem (lest there be among you)*, פֶּן־יִישׁ בָּכֶם.

FIRST HALF — PLAIN SPEECH	SECOND HALF — THE PICTURE
“ <i>Lest there be among you</i> ”	“ <i>lest there be among you</i> ”
a man or a woman, or a family or a tribe	a root
whose heart is turning today from Yahweh our Elohim	bearing
to go to serve the gods of those nations	poison and wormwood

The second half says in a picture what the first half says in plain words. Hebrew speech does this constantly: the second line restates the first. The root is therefore not a third thing standing beside the person and the idolatry. The root is the man, the woman, the family, or the tribe whose heart is turning. **What the root bears is what that turning produces.**

Two more details belong to the shape. The first half names four circles, each wider than the one before: *ish* (a man), *ishah* (a woman), *mishpachah* (a family / clan), and *shevet* (a tribe). And the verb is a participle, *poneh* (is turning), פֹּנֶה. The heart has not finished turning. It is turning *ha-yom* (today), on the very day the oath is sworn.

II-D. The Old Translation and the Marks of the Scribes

Because this Institution holds to the oldest text available, three facts about the transmission of the passage should be stated plainly. They are textual history. They carry no doctrinal weight.

The Greek of verse 18. The old Greek translation, made in Egypt before the common era, renders the last words of the verse as a root “*springing up in gall and bitterness.*” The Hebrew names two plants. The Greek put “*gall*” and “*bitterness*” in their place, and the plants were lost. This is where the English phrase “*root of bitterness*” begins, and Section IX tests what was later built on it.

The Greek of verse 19. The same translation renders the hard last clause as a warning “*lest the sinner destroy the sinless along with him.*” The oldest translators understood the Hebrew verb as sweeping away. They did not read it as adding.

The dots at verse 29. In the Hebrew manuscripts a row of dots stands above the words “*to us and to our children*” in **Deuteronomy 29:29**. The Tanakh does not explain them, and this study builds nothing on them. They show that the scribes marked the place where the chapter hands the revealed things to the community.

Finding — the text: the phrase *shoresb poreh rosh ve-la’anah* (*a root bearing poison and wormwood*) occurs once in the Tanakh: **Single witness (Deuteronomy 29:18)**. The thing it names, a member, a household, or a tribe of the covenant people turning to other gods, is **Corroborated (Deuteronomy 13:6–13 [Hebrew 13:7–14]; Deuteronomy 17:2–3; Judges 18:30)**. That the root is something other than the person whose heart turns is **Not in the text**.

III. THE WORD STUDY — WHAT THE HEBREW SAYS

The vocabulary of the four verses is exact. The table sets out the terms this study relies on.

HEBREW TERM	STRONG’S	CORE MEANING	KEY TEXT
<i>pen (lest)</i> , פֶּן	H6435	A warning of what may happen and must be guarded against. It is not a prediction.	Genesis 3:3; Deuteronomy 8:11; 29:18
<i>shoresb (root)</i> , שָׂרֵשׁ	H8328	The hidden, living part from which a plant grows; of a people, its source and its staying power	Deuteronomy 29:18; Isaiah 37:31; Proverbs 12:3; Malachi 4:1 [Hebrew 3:19]
<i>parab (to bear fruit)</i> , פָּרָה; here <i>poreh (bearing)</i> , פָּרָה	H6509	To be fruitful. It is the verb of “ <i>be fruitful and multiply.</i> ”	Genesis 1:28; Deuteronomy 29:18; Isaiah 11:1
<i>rosh (poison / poison-plant)</i> , ראש, also written רוש	H7219	A bitter, poisonous plant; its juice; the venom of serpents. Twelve occurrences.	Deuteronomy 29:18; 32:32–33; Hosea 10:4; Psalms 69:21 [Hebrew 69:22]

HEBREW TERM	STRONG'S	CORE MEANING	KEY TEXT
<i>la'anah (wormwood)</i> , לְעֵנָה	H3939	A very bitter plant; bitterness that comes at the end. Eight occurrences.	Deuteronomy 29:18; Proverbs 5:4; Amos 5:7; Lamentations 3:15
<i>levav (heart)</i> , לֵב	H3824	The seat of thought, will, and decision	Deuteronomy 29:18–19; 30:17
<i>panah (to turn)</i> , פָּנָה; here <i>poneh (is turning)</i> , פָּנָה	H6437	To turn the face. It is the Torah's verb for turning to idols.	Leviticus 19:4; Deuteronomy 30:17; 31:18; Hosea 3:1
<i>mishpachah (family / clan)</i> , מִשְׁפָּחָה	H4940	The clan: larger than a household, smaller than a tribe	Deuteronomy 29:18; Joshua 7:14
<i>shevet (tribe)</i> , שֵׁבֶט	H7626	A tribe; also a rod or staff	Deuteronomy 29:18, 21; Judges 18:30
<i>alah (oath / sworn curse)</i> , אָלָה	H423	An oath with a curse attached; the sanction of a covenant	Deuteronomy 29:12, 19–21; Hosea 10:4
<i>bitbarekb (to bless oneself)</i> , הִתְבָּרַךְ	H1288	The reflexive of “ <i>bless</i> ”: to count oneself blessed; to pronounce a blessing over oneself	Genesis 22:18; Deuteronomy 29:19; Isaiah 65:16; Jeremiah 4:2
<i>shalom (peace / wholeness)</i> , שָׁלוֹם	H7965	Wellbeing, safety, wholeness	Deuteronomy 29:19; Jeremiah 6:14; 23:17
<i>sherirut lev (stubbornness of heart)</i> , שְׁרִירוֹת לֵב	H8307	Firmness or hardness of heart; walking by one's own counsel. Ten occurrences, always with “ <i>heart</i> .”	Deuteronomy 29:19; Psalms 81:12 [Hebrew 81:13]; Jeremiah 7:24; 23:17
<i>safah (to sweep away / to add)</i> , סָפָה	H5595	Two senses in the Tanakh: to sweep away, and to add	Genesis 18:23; Isaiah 30:1; Deuteronomy 29:19
<i>ravah (watered)</i> , רָוָה, and <i>tseme'ah (thirsty)</i> , צָמְאָה	H7302 / H6771	Soaked or well watered; dry or thirsty	Deuteronomy 29:19; Isaiah 58:11; Jeremiah 31:12

HEBREW TERM	STRONG'S	CORE MEANING	KEY TEXT
<i>salach (to pardon)</i> , סָלַח	H5545	To forgive. In the Tanakh only Yahweh is its subject.	Exodus 34:9; Deuteronomy 29:20; 2 Kings 24:4; Isaiah 55:7
<i>ravats (to crouch / to lie down)</i> , רָבַץ	H7257	To lie down as an animal lies; to crouch	Genesis 4:7; Deuteronomy 29:20
<i>machab (to blot out)</i> , מָחָה	H4229	To wipe out, to erase	Exodus 32:33; Deuteronomy 29:20; Psalms 51:1 [Hebrew 51:3]
<i>bivdil (to separate)</i> , הִבְדִּיל	H914	To set apart. Elsewhere it is the word for Israel set apart to Yahweh .	Leviticus 20:24, 26; Deuteronomy 10:8; 29:21
<i>natash (to uproot)</i> , נָתַשׁ	H5428	To pull up by the roots	Deuteronomy 29:28; 1 Kings 14:15; Jeremiah 1:10; Amos 9:15
<i>ba-nistarot (the hidden things)</i> , הַנִּסְתָּרוֹת, and <i>ba-niglot (the revealed things)</i> , הַנִּגְלוֹת	H5641 / H1540	What is concealed, and what has been uncovered	Deuteronomy 29:29; Psalms 19:12 [Hebrew 19:13]

Six lexical observations govern what follows.

First, *pen (lest)* makes the verse a warning and not a sentence. The same word guards the tree in the garden, “*lest you die*” (**Genesis 3:3**), and guards Israel’s memory in the land, “*take heed to yourself, lest you forget Yahweh your Elohim*” (**Deuteronomy 8:11**). A warning is given so that the thing warned of will not happen. No one in the assembly is named.

Second, a *shoresh (root)* is the part of a plant that no one sees. It is at work long before anything shows above the ground, and it outlives the cutting of what does show:

“there is hope for a tree, if it is cut down, that it will sprout again ... though its root grows old in the earth” (**Job 14:7–8**).

The Tanakh uses the word for the source and the future of a people. The remnant of Judah ***“shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward”*** (Isaiah 37:31).

Of the wicked it is said that the day ***“will leave them neither root nor branch”*** (Malachi 4:1), and of Ephraim, ***“their root is dried up; they shall bear no fruit”*** (Hosea 9:16).

A root is a fitting picture for a turning of the heart: it is hidden, it is alive, and it is patient.

Third, *poreh* (bearing) is the Tanakh’s word for blessing and increase. It is the verb of the first blessing, ***“be fruitful and multiply”*** (Genesis 1:28), of the fruitful vine (Psalms 128:3), and of Joseph the fruitful bough (Genesis 49:22). The verse takes that word and gives it to a poison plant. Sin in this verse is not barren. It reproduces. The same two words meet once more, in the promise of the righteous Branch: ***“and a shoot from his roots shall bear fruit”*** (Isaiah 11:1), וְנִצָּחַן מִשְׁרָשָׁיו יִפְרֶה. The Tanakh knows two fruitful roots (Section XI).

Fourth, *rosh* (poison / poison-plant) and *la’anah* (wormwood) are the names of plants. They are not names of feelings. Section V follows them through every place they occur.

Fifth, *panah* (to turn) is the Torah’s standing verb for the first movement toward an idol:

“Do not turn to the idols” (Leviticus 19:4);

“but if your heart turns away” (Deuteronomy 30:17);

“they have turned to other gods” (Deuteronomy 31:18);

“they turn to other gods” (Hosea 3:1).

The word pictures a face turning. In this verse the idolatry has not yet reached the hands or the knees. It is a direction in which the heart is facing.

Sixth, *alah* (oath / sworn curse) names the covenant by its penalty. The chapter uses the word five times (Deuteronomy 29:12, 14, 19, 20, 21). The curses ***“written in this book”*** include the twelve appointed for Mount Ebal, and the first of the twelve falls on the man who makes an image ***“and sets it up in secret,”*** to which all the people are to answer ***“Amen”*** (Deuteronomy 27:15). The root of verse 18 is the man that the first curse describes: an idol kept out of sight, in someone who answers ***“Amen”*** with everyone else.

IV. WHO IS THE ROOT?

IV-A. The Verse Names It

The verse answers its own riddle. The two halves say one thing, and the first half is in plain words: the root is:

“a man or a woman, or a family or a tribe, whose heart is turning today from Yahweh our Elohim, to go to serve the gods of those nations” (Deuteronomy 29:18).

Nothing in the Hebrew allows the root to be lifted out of that sentence and made into something else.

The Torah describes the same person in two other places, and the wording is close.

“If there is found in your midst ... a man or a woman who does what is evil in the eyes of Yahweh your Elohim, transgressing His covenant, and has gone and served other gods and bowed down to them ...” (Deuteronomy 17:2–3)

“If your brother, the son of your mother, or your son or your daughter, or the wife of your bosom, or your friend who is as your own soul, entices you in secret, saying, ‘Let us go and serve other gods’ ...” (Deuteronomy 13:6)

All three passages have the same sin, serving other gods. All three place it inside Israel: *“among you,” “in your midst.”* Deuteronomy 13 also widens by circles as Deuteronomy 29:18 does, from a prophet (Deuteronomy 13:1) to the nearest family (Deuteronomy 13:6) to a whole city (Deuteronomy 13:13). One difference matters, and Section VIII returns to it. In Deuteronomy 13 and Deuteronomy 17 the thing has been spoken or done, and witnesses can testify to it. In Deuteronomy 29:18 it is still in the heart.

IV-B. Four Circles: Man, Woman, Family, Tribe

A man or a woman. The verse names both, and it gives neither a larger share. The law of Deuteronomy 17:2 uses the same pair. When Jeremiah confronted the refugees in Egypt, the answer came from *“all the men who knew that their wives were burning incense to other gods, and all the women who stood by,”* and the women added that they had not done it without their husbands (Jeremiah 44:15, 19). Doc 235 (*The Two Inclinations*) showed that the Tanakh addresses the heart of man and woman alike. This verse is one more witness.

A family. Idolatry in the Tanakh lodges in households. Rachel carried her father’s *teraphim* (*household idols*) out of Haran hidden in a camel’s saddle (Genesis 31:19, 34). Micah of Ephraim kept *“a house of gods”* (Judges 17:5). Gideon’s ephod *“became a snare to Gideon and to his house”* (Judges 8:27).

A tribe. The children of Dan *“set up the carved image for themselves,”* with a hired priesthood, *“until the day of the captivity of the land”* (Judges 18:30).

The verse climbs from one person to a twelfth of the nation. It does not say *“all Israel,”* because on that day all Israel is standing in the covenant. The rest of the chapter does say it: “they forsook the covenant” (Deuteronomy 29:25). That is the distance a root can travel.

IV-C. “Whose Heart Is Turning Today”

The turning begins where no one sees it. Nothing in the man’s outward conduct has to change. He is standing in the assembly with everyone else, and he will hear the words of the oath with everyone else. The Torah says the same thing about the order of idolatry in other places: first the heart, then the feet.

“Take heed to yourselves, lest your heart be deceived, and you turn aside and serve other gods and bow down to them.” (Deuteronomy 11:16)

“But if your heart turns away, and you do not hear, and you are drawn away and bow down to other gods and serve them ...” (Deuteronomy 30:17)

The Hebrew of the second verse is *ve-im yifneh levavkha (but if your heart turns away)*, וְאִם־יִפְנֶה לְבַבְךָ. It has the same verb and the same noun as **Deuteronomy 29:18**. The history of the kings shows the order in one life. Of Solomon the text says first that *“his wives turned his heart after other gods”* (**1 Kings 11:4**), and only then that he built the high places (**1 Kings 11:7**). Ezekiel says of the elders who sat before him, *“these men have set up their idols upon their heart”* (**Ezekiel 14:3**). They were sitting in front of a prophet of **Yahweh** when it was said.

IV-D. Why a Root?

The Torah could have said *“a seed”* or *“a weed.”* It said a root, and five things about a root explain the choice.

It is hidden. The man blesses himself *“in his heart”* (**Deuteronomy 29:19**). The image is set up *“in secret”* (**Deuteronomy 27:15**). The elders of Israel did their worship *“in the dark, each man in his chambers of imagery, for they say, ‘Yahweh does not see us’”* (**Ezekiel 8:12**).

It is alive and patient. A root grows for a long time before anything breaks the ground.

It bears after its kind. Every plant in the creation account yields seed *“after its kind”* (**Genesis 1:11–12**; see Doc 244, *After Its Kind*). A poison root does not bear grapes.

“You have plowed wickedness, you have reaped injustice, you have eaten the fruit of lies” (**Hosea 10:13**).

“They shall eat of the fruit of their own way” (**Proverbs 1:31**).

It spreads. The verse itself moves from a man to a family to a tribe, and the chapter moves from the tribe to the land.

It outlives the one who planted it. The oath takes in *“him who is not here with us today”* (**Deuteronomy 29:15**). Jeremiah says of the Baals that *“their fathers taught them”* (**Jeremiah 9:14** [**Hebrew 9:13**]). The command against images speaks of the third and fourth generation *“of those*

who hate Me” (Exodus 20:5). Section IX-C shows what this does and does not mean for the children.

Finding — who the root is: the root of Deuteronomy 29:18 is a person, a household, or a tribe inside the covenant people whose heart turns from Yahweh to other gods. The verse states it, and two further laws describe the same person: **Corroborated** (Deuteronomy 29:18; 13:6; 17:2–3). That the turning begins in the heart before it is seen is **Corroborated** (Deuteronomy 11:16; 30:17; 1 Kings 11:4; Ezekiel 14:3). That both sexes are named without distinction is **Corroborated** (Deuteronomy 29:18; 17:2; Jeremiah 44:15).

V. THE POISON AND THE WORMWOOD — WHAT THE ROOT BEARS

V-A. Two Plants

Rosh (*poison / poison-plant*) is a plant of the open field. Hosea says that judgment “*springs up like poison in the furrows of the field*” (Hosea 10:4).

It has berries or clusters, for the Song of Moses speaks of “*grapes of poison*” (Deuteronomy 32:32). Its juice makes a drink, *mei rosh* (*poison-water*), three times in Jeremiah (Jeremiah 8:14; 23:15; 9:15 [Hebrew 9:14]). The same word is used for the venom of serpents (Deuteronomy 32:33; Job 20:16). Hemlock, the colocynth gourd, the poppy, and henbane have each been proposed, and the lexicons leave the question open. The King James word “*gall*” comes by way of the Greek translation and names no plant at all.

La'anah (*wormwood*) is generally identified with the grey, strong-smelling wormwood shrubs of the dry country, whose taste is intensely bitter. The Tanakh never describes the plant. It always uses it as a figure, and the figure is of bitterness that arrives at the end: the lips of the forbidden woman “*drip honey ... but her end is bitter as wormwood*” (Proverbs 5:3–4).

One plant kills and the other embitters. Named together, they say that what this root yields is deadly, and that it is bitter to those who have to eat it.

Finding — the two plants: that *rosh* (*poison / poison-plant*) is a poisonous plant and *la'anah* (*wormwood*) a bitter one is **Corroborated** (Hosea 10:4; Deuteronomy 32:32–33; Jeremiah 9:15; Proverbs 5:4; Lamentations 3:15). That *rosh* (*poison*) is hemlock, or the poppy, or any one named species is **Not in the text**.

V-B. Every Place the Tanakh Names Them

Rosh (*poison*) occurs twelve times and **la'anah** (*wormwood*) eight. They stand together five times. The table lists every occurrence.

#	TEXT	POISON	WORMWOOD	WHAT IS SAID
1	Deuteronomy 29:18	Yes	Yes	The root in the covenant assembly bears them.
2	Deuteronomy 32:32	Yes	—	<i>“Their grapes are grapes of poison; their clusters are bitter.”</i> The vine is from the stock of Sodom.
3	Deuteronomy 32:33	Yes	—	<i>“Their wine is the venom of serpents, and the cruel poison of asps.”</i>
4	Hosea 10:4	Yes	—	False oaths in the making of a covenant: <i>“judgment springs up like poison in the furrows of the field.”</i>
5	Amos 5:7	—	Yes	<i>“You who turn judgment to wormwood, and cast righteousness to the ground.”</i>
6	Amos 6:12	Yes	Yes	<i>“You have turned judgment into poison, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood.”</i>
7	Jeremiah 8:14	Yes	—	<i>“Yahweh our Elobim ... has given us poison-water to drink, because we have sinned against Yahweh.”</i>
8	Jeremiah 9:15	Yes	Yes	For walking after the stubbornness of their heart and after the Baals: <i>“I will feed this people wormwood, and give them poison-water to drink.”</i>
9	Jeremiah 23:15	Yes	Yes	The same sentence on the prophets, <i>“for from the prophets of Jerusalem pollution has gone out into all the land.”</i>

#	TEXT	POISON	WORMWOOD	WHAT IS SAID
10	Lamentations 3:5	Yes	—	<i>“He has built against me, and surrounded me with poison and hardship.”</i>
11	Lamentations 3:15	—	Yes	<i>“He has filled me with bitter things; He has sated me with wormwood.”</i>
12	Lamentations 3:19	Yes	Yes	<i>“Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and the poison.”</i>
13	Proverbs 5:4	—	Yes	The forbidden woman: <i>“her end is bitter as wormwood.”</i>
14	Psalms 69:21	Yes	—	<i>“They gave me poison for my food, and for my thirst they gave me vinegar to drink.”</i>
15	Job 20:16	Yes	—	The wicked man: <i>“he shall suck the poison of asps.”</i>

One note on rows 2 and 3. The Song of Moses speaks there of a people whose vine is *“from the vine of Sodom,”* and readers differ on whether the lines describe Israel gone astray or Israel’s enemies (Deuteronomy 32:28–33). On either reading, the Song names the same poison three chapters after the warning, and it ties that poison to Sodom, as Deuteronomy 29:23 does.

V-C. What the Fruit Is

Set side by side, the fifteen texts show four crops from the one root.

Other gods. This is the verse’s own answer. The root is a heart turning *“to go to serve the gods of those nations”* (Deuteronomy 29:18), and the chapter’s verdict on the nation is that *“they went and served other gods”* (Deuteronomy 29:26 [Hebrew 29:25]).

Judgment turned to poison. Three of the texts are about the courts. Amos charges those *“who turn judgment to wormwood”* (Amos 5:7) and says, *“you have turned judgment into poison, and the fruit of righteousness into wormwood”* (Amos 6:12). Hosea ties it to covenant oaths sworn falsely: אָלוֹת שָׁוָא כָּרַת בְּרִית, *alot shav, karot berit* (swearing empty, cutting a covenant) (Hosea 10:4). When a people turns from Yahweh, the first thing to turn bitter is justice. Amos even

uses the word “*fruit*,” *peri* (*fruit*), from the same root as *poreh* (*bearing*). The root bore, and this is what it bore.

The sweet thing that ends bitterly. Wormwood is the taste of the end, not of the beginning (**Proverbs 5:3–4**). That is why the man of verse 19 can say “*peace*.” So far he has tasted only the honey.

The word of false peace. Jeremiah’s second use of the pair falls on the prophets who tell the stubborn that no evil will come (**Jeremiah 23:15–17**). Section VI-E reads that passage in full.

V-D. The Bearer Is Fed His Own Fruit

The fullest answer to **Deuteronomy 29:18** in the whole Tanakh is in Jeremiah.

“Because they have forsaken My Torah which I set before them, and have not listened to My voice nor walked in it, but have walked after the stubbornness of their heart, and after the Baals, which their fathers taught them — therefore thus says Yahweh of hosts, the Elohim of Israel: Behold, I will feed this people wormwood, and give them poison-water to drink.”
Jeremiah 9:13–15

Every key word of **Deuteronomy 29:18–19** is in these three verses: *sherirut libbam* (*the stubbornness of their heart*), שְׁרִירוֹת לִבָּם; the other gods; *la’anah* (*wormwood*); and *mei rosh* (*poison-water*), מֵי־רֹאשׁ.

The question Jeremiah has just asked, “*Why is the land ruined and laid waste like a wilderness?*” **Jeremiah 9:12**, is the question the nations ask in **Deuteronomy 29:24**. And the verse that follows is the uprooting: “*I will scatter them among the nations*” **Jeremiah 9:16**.

Jeremiah is reading his own generation by this chapter. What Moses warned of with “*lest*,” Jeremiah reports with “*because*.” And the sentence fits the sin. The people who bore poison and wormwood are given poison and wormwood to eat and to drink.

The book of Lamentations records how it tasted:

“He has sated me with wormwood ... Remember my affliction and my wandering, the wormwood and the poison” (**Lamentations 3:15, 19**).

It also records that wormwood was not the last word:

“This I call back to my heart, therefore I have hope: the kindnesses of Yahweh, that we are not consumed” (**Lamentations 3:21–22**). Doc 148 examined that passage.

Finding — the poison and the wormwood: in the Tanakh they stand for the fruit of a people’s turning from Yahweh, above all false worship, justice made bitter, and a false word of peace:

Corroborated (Deuteronomy 29:18; Amos 5:7; 6:12; Hosea 10:4; Jeremiah 23:15–17). They stand also for the judgment that answers it, given back in kind: **Corroborated** (Jeremiah 8:14; 9:15; 23:15; Lamentations 3:15, 19). That they stand for resentment or an unforgiving spirit is **Not in the text** (Section IX).

VI. THE VOICE OF THE ROOT — “I SHALL HAVE PEACE”

VI-A. He Hears, and He Blesses Himself

Verse 19 does not describe an ignorant man. It begins, *“when he hears the words of this oath.”* He has heard every word. What he does next is given in one rare verb: *hitbarekh* (he blesses himself), וְהִתְבָּרַךְ.

Elsewhere in the Tanakh people *“bless themselves”* by someone greater than themselves. The nations bless themselves by the seed of Abraham (Genesis 22:18; 26:4). They bless themselves in Yahweh (Jeremiah 4:2). *“He who blesses himself in the land shall bless himself by the Elohim of truth”* (Isaiah 65:16). This man blesses himself *“in his heart.”* He is the one who is blessed, and he is the only source of the blessing.

The covenant sets two things before Israel: *“See, I set before you today a blessing and a curse”* (Deuteronomy 11:26). The man of verse 19 writes himself a third: the curse for others, the blessing for me, and my own way kept. His words in Hebrew are שְׁלוֹם יִהְיֶה-לִּי כִּי בִשְׁרִירֹת לִבִּי אֵלֶךְ: *shalom yihyeh li, ki bi-sherirut libbi elekh* (peace shall be mine, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart).

VI-B. He Is Not Alone

The Tanakh keeps a record of what people say where only Yahweh hears.

WHO	WHAT HE SAYS TO HIMSELF	TEXT
The prosperous Israelite	<i>“My power and the might of my hand have made me this wealth.”</i>	Deuteronomy 8:17
Israel entering the land	<i>“Because of my righteousness Yahweh has brought me in.”</i>	Deuteronomy 9:4
The man of the oath	<i>“I shall have peace, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.”</i>	Deuteronomy 29:19
Micah of Ephraim, with an idol in his house	<i>“Now I know that Yahweh will do me good, because I have a Levite as priest.”</i>	Judges 17:13

WHO	WHAT HE SAYS TO HIMSELF	TEXT
The wicked man	<i>“I shall not be moved ... El has forgotten; He hides His face; He will never see.”</i>	Psalms 10:6, 11
Babylon	<i>“I am, and there is none besides me ... No one sees me.”</i>	Isaiah 47:8, 10
Edom	<i>“Who will bring me down to the ground?”</i>	Obadiah 3
The men settled on their lees	<i>“Yahweh will not do good, nor will He do evil.”</i>	Zephaniah 1:12

Every line in the table is a form of assurance. The man of **Deuteronomy 29:19** is the most dangerous of the eight, because he stands inside the covenant and uses the covenant itself as his cover. He does not say there is no **Elohim**. He says the **Elohim** of this covenant will be at peace with him whatever he does.

VI-C. The Stubbornness of the Heart — All Ten Places

Sherirut (*stubbornness*), שְׁרִירֻת, occurs ten times in the Tanakh, and every time it is joined to the word “*heart*.” It comes from a root that means to be firm or hard.

#	TEXT	WHO WALKS BY IT	WHAT COMES OF IT
1	Deuteronomy 29:19	The man who blesses himself	He is not pardoned; his name is blotted out.
2	Psalms 81:12	Israel, who would not listen	<i>“So I sent them away in the stubbornness of their heart, to walk in their own counsels.”</i>
3	Jeremiah 3:17	The nations, until they are gathered to Jerusalem	A promise: they <i>“shall no longer walk after the stubbornness of their evil heart.”</i>
4	Jeremiah 7:24	The fathers, from the day they left Egypt	<i>“They went backward and not forward.”</i>
5	Jeremiah 9:14	Judah, after the Baals	Wormwood and poison-water; scattering

#	TEXT	WHO WALKS BY IT	WHAT COMES OF IT
6	Jeremiah 11:8	The fathers under the covenant	<i>“I brought upon them all the words of this covenant.”</i>
7	Jeremiah 13:10	<i>“This evil people, who refuse to hear My words”</i>	They <i>“shall be like this waistband, which is good for nothing.”</i>
8	Jeremiah 16:12	<i>“Each one after the stubbornness of his evil heart”</i>	<i>“I will hurl you out of this land”</i> (16:13).
9	Jeremiah 18:12	The people, in their own words: <i>“It is hopeless! We will walk after our own plans.”</i>	They choose it knowingly.
10	Jeremiah 23:17	Everyone to whom the prophets say, <i>“No evil shall come upon you”</i>	Wormwood and poison-water for the prophets (23:15)

Four things stand out.

First, eight of the ten are in Jeremiah. The prophet of the uprooting returns again and again to the word of **Deuteronomy 29:19**.

Second, the word names firmness. The stubborn heart is not a confused heart, and it is not a weak one. It has made up its mind. In **Jeremiah 18:12** the people say so themselves.

Third, one of the ten is a promise. A day is coming when even the nations *“shall no longer walk after the stubbornness of their evil heart”* (Jeremiah 3:17).

Fourth, the Torah gives a daily remedy for exactly this. The fringe is worn *“so that you may look upon it and remember all the commandments of Yahweh and do them, and not go about after your own heart and your own eyes”* (Numbers 15:39). Doc 287 studied that command. The fringe is given to the eyes, and the warning of **Deuteronomy 29:18** is tied to what the eyes saw in Egypt.

VI-D. The Hard Clause — Two Honest Readings

Verse 19 ends with five Hebrew words that have been read in more than one way: לְמַעַן סְפוֹת הָרָוָה אֶת־הַצִּמְאָה, *lema'an sefot ha-ravah et ha-tseme'ah* (so as to sweep away the watered with the thirsty). The difficulty is the verb, which has two meanings in the Tanakh.

Reading One — to sweep away. The verb is the one Abraham uses at Sodom,

“Will You indeed sweep away the righteous with the wicked?” (Genesis 18:23),

and the one Moses uses at the tents of Korah, *“lest you be swept away in all their sins”* (Numbers 16:26).

On this reading *“the watered and the thirsty”* means everything and everyone: the green land and the dry, the one who did not turn and the one who did. The clause states the result of the man’s walk. His ruin does not stop with him. This reading fits what follows, where a whole land is ruined, and it is how the oldest translation took the words (Section II-D).

Reading Two — to add. The same verb means *“to add”* in Isaiah, *“so as to add sin to sin”* (Isaiah 30:1), and in Numbers, *“to add yet more to the burning anger of Yahweh”* (Numbers 32:14). The King James Version follows this sense: *“to add drunkenness to thirst.”* On this reading the man piles one thing on another, indulgence on craving, or sin on sin.

Both readings stand on the Hebrew. In both, the peace the man promised himself in private turns out to be a harm that grows. Neither softens the next verse.

Finding — the last clause of verse 19: its exact sense is not settled, and two readings are possible. This study follows the first because of its fit with the rest of the chapter, and marks that as a judgment and not a certainty. That the clause lessens the man’s guilt on either reading is **Not in the text.**

VI-E. The False Peace Becomes a Pulpit

Jeremiah heard the sentence of **Deuteronomy 29:19** again, centuries later. By then it was no longer in one man’s heart.

אֲמָרִים אָמֹר לְמִנְאֲצֵי דְבָר יְהוָה שְׁלוֹם יִהְיֶה לָּכֶם וְכָל הַלֵּךְ בְּשִׁרְרוֹת לְבָבוֹ אָמְרוּ לֹא-תָבֹא עֲלֵיכֶם רָעָה
“They say continually to those who despise Me, ‘Yahweh has spoken: You shall have peace’; and to everyone who walks in the stubbornness of his heart they say, ‘No evil shall come upon you.’” (Jeremiah 23:17)

The man of the oath said *shalom yihyeh li* (*peace shall be mine*). The prophets of Jerusalem say *shalom yihyeh lakhem* (*peace shall be yours*). Only the pronoun has changed. What began as one man’s private blessing has become a ministry, and it is delivered in the Name of Yahweh. Two verses earlier the sentence on those prophets is given in the words of **Deuteronomy 29:18**: *“Behold, I will feed them wormwood and make them drink poison-water, for from the prophets of Jerusalem pollution has gone out into all the land”* (Jeremiah 23:15).

Jeremiah is not the only witness. *“They have healed the wound of My people lightly, saying, ‘Peace, peace,’ when there is no peace”* (Jeremiah 6:14).

“They have misled My people, saying, ‘Peace,’ when there is no peace” (Ezekiel 13:10).

The heads of Jerusalem *“lean on Yahweh and say, ‘Is not Yahweh in our midst? No evil shall come upon us’”* (Micah 3:11).

“All the sinners of My people shall die by the sword, who say, ‘The evil shall not overtake or meet us’” (Amos 9:10).

The rulers of Jerusalem say, *“We have cut a covenant with death ... the overflowing scourge, when it passes through, shall not come to us”* (Isaiah 28:15).

Doc 238 (Section V-B, Witness Six) examined the Temple sermon, where the people say *“We are delivered!”* and go on as before (Jeremiah 7:9–10).

Yahweh’s own word on the subject is short: *“There is no peace, says Yahweh, for the wicked”* (Isaiah 48:22).

Finding — the voice of the root: the one who hears the sanctions of the covenant and promises himself peace while he walks by his own heart is condemned, in the Torah and in the Prophets: Corroborated (Deuteronomy 29:19–20; Jeremiah 23:17; Micah 3:11; Amos 9:10). That standing among the covenant people is itself a protection for the one who walks so is Not in the text (Deuteronomy 29:19–21; Jeremiah 7:9–10).

VII. THE VERDICT AND THE UPROOTING

VII-A. What Yahweh Says He Will Do

Verses 20 and 21 make five statements about the man who blesses himself. Each uses a word that stands in a well-known place elsewhere.

#	THE HEBREW	THE STATEMENT	WHERE ELSE THE WORD STANDS
1	<i>lo yoveh Yahweh selo’ach lo</i> (<i>Yahweh will not be willing to pardon him</i>)	He is refused pardon.	The same two verbs meet again: <i>“Yahweh was not willing to pardon”</i> the innocent blood shed by Manasseh (2 Kings 24:4).
2	<i>ye’shan af Yahweh ve-qin’ato</i> (<i>the anger of Yahweh and His jealousy will smoke</i>)	Anger and jealousy burn against <i>“that man.”</i>	<i>“Yahweh, whose name is Jealous”</i> (Exodus 34:14). The word belongs to the command against other gods.

#	THE HEBREW	THE STATEMENT	WHERE ELSE THE WORD STANDS
3	<i>ve-ravetsah bo kol ha-alah (every curse will crouch upon him)</i>	The curses of the book lie down on him like an animal.	<i>“Sin is crouching at the door”</i> (Genesis 4:7).
4	<i>u-machah Yahweh et shemo (Yahweh will blot out his name)</i>	His name is wiped out from under heaven.	<i>“Whoever has sinned against Me, him I will blot out of My book”</i> (Exodus 32:33).
5	<i>ve-hivdilo Yahweh le-ra’ah (Yahweh will separate him for evil)</i>	He is singled out from all the tribes.	<i>“I have separated you from the peoples, to be Mine”</i> (Leviticus 20:26).

Three things should be noticed.

First, in every one of the five statements the one who acts is **Yahweh**, or His anger, or His curse. No elder, no court, and no neighbor is given anything to do in these two verses. Section VIII takes that up.

Second, the third statement recalls Cain. He was told that sin crouched at his door and that he could rule over it (**Genesis 4:7**). The man of verse 19 has opened the door and invited it in.

Third, the fifth statement turns Israel’s own election around. *Hivdil (to separate)* is the word for Israel set apart from the nations to belong to **Yahweh** (**Leviticus 20:24, 26**). The man who hid himself among the tribes is separated out of the tribes. He wanted to be an exception, and he was made one.

The weight of the first statement must be felt. This is the **Elohim** who proclaims His own name as *“forgiving iniquity and transgression and sin”* (**Exodus 34:7**), and who *“will abundantly pardon”* (**Isaiah 55:7**). The difference is not the size of the man’s sin. The promise in Isaiah is to the wicked man who will *“forsake his way”* and *“return to Yahweh.”* The man of verse 19 has done neither. He has arranged to keep his way and to have the pardon as well. The Torah draws the same line between the sin done in error and the sin done *“with a high hand”* (**Numbers 15:27–31**), and Doc 238 (Section V-B) set out both. Even here the door is not shut on the one who turns. The next chapter opens with return (**Deuteronomy 30:1–3**), and Manasseh himself, the king whose bloodshed **Yahweh** would not pardon in Judah, was heard when he humbled himself (**2 Chronicles 33:12–13**).

VII-B. From the Root to the Land

At verse 22 the chapter changes its subject without announcing it. Verses 20 and 21 speak of *“that man.”* Verse 22 speaks of *“the plagues of that land.”* Verse 25 says *“they forsook the covenant.”* The steps can be set out in order.

#	THE CIRCLE	WHAT THE TEXT NAMES	VERSE
1	A heart	<i>“whose heart is turning today”</i>	29:18
2	A man or a woman	<i>“a man or a woman”</i>	29:18
3	A family	<i>“or a family”</i>	29:18
4	A tribe	<i>“or a tribe”</i>	29:18
5	The land	<i>“the plagues of that land ... brimstone and salt, a burning”</i>	29:22–23
6	The people	<i>“they forsook the covenant ... and Yahweh uprooted them from their soil”</i>	29:25–28
7	The generation to come	<i>“your children who rise up after you”</i>	29:22

The chapter does not say in one sentence that the ruin of the land grew out of the one man’s root. It sets the two side by side and joins them with its own plant language. In verse 18 there is a root that bears. In verse 23 there is a land that *“is not sown, and does not sprout, and no grass comes up in it.”* In verse 28 there is a people pulled up by the roots:

וַיִּתְּשֵׁם יְהוָה מֵעַל אֲדָמָתָם בָּאֶף וּבְחֵמָה וּבִקְצָף גָּדוֹל

“And Yahweh uprooted them from their soil, in anger and in wrath and in great fury.”
(Deuteronomy 29:28 [Hebrew 29:27])

The verb is *natash* (*to uproot*). The people who kept a poison root among them are themselves uprooted. And the ruined land is *“like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah and Zeboim”* (Deuteronomy 29:23 [Hebrew 29:22]), which is where the Song of Moses says the poison vine came from (Deuteronomy 32:32).

It came to pass, and the Tanakh recorded it in the chapter’s own words. The prophet Ahijah said of the northern kingdom:

“He will uproot Israel from this good soil which He gave to their fathers ... because they have made their Asherim ... And He will give Israel up because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he sinned and which he made Israel to sin.” (1 Kings 14:15–16)

The verb is the same, שָׁחַט, and so is the shape: one man’s sin, and a nation uprooted. Of Judah, Jeremiah says that the question of **Deuteronomy 29:24** will be asked and answered word for word:

“And many nations will pass by this city, and they will say each to his neighbor, ‘Why has Yahweh done thus to this great city?’ And they will say, ‘Because they forsook the covenant of Yahweh their Elohim, and bowed down to other gods and served them.’” (Jeremiah 22:8–9)

Finding — the uprooting: that a turning of heart left in a people ends in the uprooting of that people is **Corroborated** (**Deuteronomy 29:18–28**; **1 Kings 14:15–16**; **Jeremiah 9:13–16**; **22:8–9**). The chapter joins the one man to the ruined land by its order and its imagery. It does not state the link in a single sentence.

VII-C. The Uprooting Is Not the End

The very next chapter begins, *“And it shall be, when all these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse ... and you return to Yahweh your Elohim ... then Yahweh your Elohim will turn your captivity and have compassion on you, and will gather you again”* (**Deuteronomy 30:1–3**). It goes on:

“And Yahweh your Elohim will circumcise your heart and the heart of your seed, to love Yahweh your Elohim with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.” (**Deuteronomy 30:6**)

The passage that began with a heart turning away ends, a page later, with a heart circumcised. The prophets promise the replanting in the same verb:

“I will plant them and not uproot them” (**Jeremiah 24:6**); *“I will plant them upon their soil, and they shall no more be uprooted from their soil which I have given them”* (**Amos 9:15**).

Doc 259 (*Two Sticks in One Hand*) examined the regathering, and Doc 284 examined the changed heart.

VIII. THE HIDDEN AND THE REVEALED — WHO DEALS WITH THE ROOT?

VIII-A. The Verse That Closes the Chapter

הַנְּסִתָּרִית לַיהוָה אֱלֹהֵינוּ וְהַנִּגְלִית לָנוּ וּלְבָנֵינוּ עַד-עוֹלָם לַעֲשׂוֹת אֶת-כָּל-דִּבְרֵי הַתּוֹרָה הַזֹּאת

“The hidden things belong to Yahweh our Elohim, and the revealed things belong to us and to our children forever, to do all the words of this Torah.” (Deuteronomy 29:29)

This verse is usually quoted alone. In its place it closes a chapter about a sin that begins hidden in a heart (verses 18 and 19) and is answered by **Yahweh**’s own hand (verses 20 and 21). Read there, it divides the work. What is hidden, including what is in a neighbor’s heart, belongs to **Yahweh**. What is revealed belongs to us and to our children, and what we are given to do with it is the Torah.

The verse is brief, and it does not define its own terms. Doc 247 read it of what **Yahweh** has not revealed about Himself, and that reading stands. The reading given here rests on the chapter around the verse and on the Tanakh’s use of the same word for hidden faults:

“Cleanse me from hidden faults,” מְנַסְתָּרוֹת נִקֵּי, mi-nistarot naqqeni (from hidden things cleanse me) (Psalms 19:12).

The two readings do not conflict.

VIII-B. What Belongs to Yahweh: the Heart

The Tanakh is consistent about who can see a heart.

“For You, You alone, know the heart of all the children of man.” (1 Kings 8:39)

“If we had forgotten the name of our Elohim, or spread out our hands to a strange god, would not Elohim search this out? For He knows the secrets of the heart.” (Psalms 44:20–21 [Hebrew 44:21–22])

“Man looks at the eyes, but Yahweh looks at the heart” (1 Samuel 16:7).

“I, Yahweh, search the heart” (Jeremiah 17:10).

Ezekiel says of the man who sets up idols in his heart and then comes to inquire of a prophet,

“I, Yahweh, will answer him Myself, and I will set My face against that man” (Ezekiel 14:7–8).

It follows that no person, no elder, and no assembly is given authority to pronounce another person's heart a root. The Torah provides no trial for thoughts. In **Deuteronomy 29:20–21** only **Yahweh** acts.

VIII-C. What Belongs to the Community: What Is Revealed

When the turning comes out into the open, when it is spoken, or done, or reported, the Torah gives a procedure, and the procedure is careful.

ELEMENT	THE HIDDEN THING	THE REVEALED THING
Where it is	<i>“In his heart”</i> (Deuteronomy 29:19)	<i>“It is told you, and you hear of it”</i> (Deuteronomy 17:4)
Who knows it	Yahweh	Witnesses
What is required	Nothing is asked of the community.	<i>“You shall inquire, and search out, and ask diligently; and behold, if it is true and the thing is certain ...”</i> (Deuteronomy 13:14 [Hebrew 13:15])
The standard of proof	None is given, because no human court tries it.	<i>“On the mouth of two witnesses or three witnesses”</i> (Deuteronomy 17:6; 19:15)
Who acts	Yahweh: <i>“Yahweh will separate him”</i> (Deuteronomy 29:21)	The appointed court at the gate (Deuteronomy 17:5)

As with every capital law of the Torah, **Deuteronomy 13** and **Deuteronomy 17** assume a functioning covenant court, which no assembly today possesses or may claim. Doc 264 (Section VI-D) said the same of the law of the rebellious son. What remains for every community is the principle: act only on what is revealed, test it before acting, and never try the heart.

The book of Joshua shows the principle kept. When the tribes east of the Jordan built a great altar, the rest of Israel feared exactly what **Deuteronomy 29:18** warns of.

They said, *“Is the iniquity of Peor too little for us?”*

and *“Did not Achan the son of Zerah commit a breach of faith ... and wrath fell on all the congregation of Israel?”* (Joshua 22:17, 20).

They were right to fear a root. But they sent Phinehas and ten chiefs to ask before they struck (**Joshua 22:13–14**). The answer was that the altar was a witness and not a rival (**Joshua 22:26–27**), *“and it was good in their eyes”* (Joshua 22:30). Doc 264 (Section VII) examined that account.

VIII-D. What Belongs to Each Person: His Own Heart

The only heart a person is told to search is his own, and even then he asks **Yahweh** to do the searching.

“Search me, O El, and know my heart; test me, and know my thoughts; and see if there is any grievous way in me, and lead me in the way everlasting.” (Psalms 139:23–24)

“Who can discern his errors? Cleanse me from hidden faults. Keep back Your servant also from presumptuous sins; let them not rule over me.” (Psalms 19:12–13)

Hidden faults and presumptuous sins are the two halves of **Deuteronomy 29:18–19**: the root that no one sees, and the man who says *“I shall have peace.”* David turns both into a prayer.

Finding — who deals with the root: the turning of a heart is judged by Yahweh alone: Corroborated (Deuteronomy 29:20–21, 29; 1 Kings 8:39; Jeremiah 17:10; Ezekiel 14:7–8).

The community acts only on what is revealed, after inquiry and on the word of witnesses: **Corroborated** (Deuteronomy 13:14; 17:4–6; 19:15; Joshua 22:13–30). That **Deuteronomy 29:18** authorizes anyone to name another person a *“root”* on suspicion is **Not in the text**.

IX. WHAT THE ROOT IS NOT — THREE CLAIMS TESTED

IX-A. *“The Root of Bitterness Is Resentment”*

The teaching should be stated fairly. In a great deal of Christian preaching, pastoral counseling, and prayer ministry, the *“root of bitterness”* is an old hurt or an unforgiven offense held in the heart. It is said to spring up and defile many unless it is dug out, and it is dug out by forgiving the offender. The teaching rests on the wording of the Greek translation as it reached English through the New Testament. Those texts are listed in the Comparative Texts table and weighed in Section XII. They carry no authority here. In this section the teaching is tested against the verse. The question is narrow and fair: is it in the text?

#	WHAT THE TEACHING NEEDS	WHAT THE TEXT SAYS	GRADE
1	The root is a feeling.	The root is <i>“a man or a woman, or a family or a tribe”</i> (Deuteronomy 29:18).	Not in the text
2	The sin is unforgiveness toward another person.	The sin is a heart turning <i>“from Yahweh our Elohim, to go to serve the gods of those nations”</i> (Deuteronomy 29:18).	Not in the text

#	WHAT THE TEACHING NEEDS	WHAT THE TEXT SAYS	GRADE
3	Bitterness is the root.	The root bears. Poison and wormwood are its fruit and not its seed (Deuteronomy 29:18), and the bitterness comes last (Proverbs 5:4).	Not in the text
4	The bitter-hearted person is the danger.	The danger is a man who is at peace: <i>“I shall have peace”</i> (Deuteronomy 29:19). The Tanakh’s <i>“bitter of soul”</i> are sufferers who bring their bitterness to Yahweh : Hannah (1 Samuel 1:10), Naomi (Ruth 1:20), and Job (Job 10:1). A different Hebrew word is used of them, <i>mar</i> (<i>bitter</i>). It is never <i>rosh</i> (<i>poison</i>) or <i>la’anah</i> (<i>wormwood</i>).	Not in the text
5	The cure is to forgive the offender.	The cure the passage gives is return to Yahweh and a circumcised heart (Deuteronomy 30:2, 6).	Not in the text

What the teaching has right. The Torah does forbid the grudge and the silent hatred:

“You shall not hate your brother in your heart ... you shall not take vengeance, nor bear a grudge” (**Leviticus 19:17–18**).

“Do not say, ‘I will do to him as he has done to me’” (**Proverbs 24:29**).

Doc 273 (*Not in Your Heart*) studied that law. **Unforgiveness is a covenant fault**. It is forbidden by its own commandment, and not by this verse.

What the borrowed reading costs. A verse that warns a covenant people against idolatry sheltered under a false peace is spent on another subject, and its own warning goes unheard. A congregation can be searched diligently for resentment and never once be asked what gods it serves.

IX-B. “The Root Is the One Who Asks Hard Questions”

The phrase is sometimes turned on a member who questions a leader or a teaching: he is said to have ***“a root of bitterness.”*** The verse describes the opposite person. Its root is the one who turns from **Yahweh** to other gods. It is not the one who turns from a teacher to the text. The Torah commands Israel to test even a prophet whose sign comes true (**Deuteronomy 13:1–3** [Hebrew 13:2–4]), and it tells them how to know a word **Yahweh** has not spoken (**Deuteronomy 18:21–22**). The mark of the root, moreover, is the sentence ***“I shall have peace.”*** A person who is troubled enough to ask is not the man of verse 19.

IX-C. *“The Root Is a Bloodline”*

Because the verse says *“family”* and *“tribe,”* and because a root reaches into the generations, some teach that the idolatry of ancestors lies on their descendants as an inherited curse, to be broken by special prayers or rites. Tanakh says four things about it.

Children do learn their fathers’ gods. Jeremiah speaks of *“the Baals, which their fathers taught them”* (Jeremiah 9:14), and the command against images speaks of the third and fourth generation *“of those who hate Me”* (Exodus 20:5). The visiting falls on generations that go on in the same hatred.

No child is bound. *“Fathers shall not be put to death for sons, nor sons for fathers; each shall be put to death for his own sin”* (Deuteronomy 24:16).

Ezekiel describes the son who *“sees all the sins of his father which he has done, and sees, and does not do likewise”*:

that son *“shall not die for the iniquity of his father”* (Ezekiel 18:14, 17).

When the earth swallowed Korah, *“the sons of Korah did not die”* (Numbers 26:11).

No family is safe by descent. The priest of Micah’s idol, and then of Dan’s, was a Levite (Judges 17:7–13; 18:30). In the Hebrew manuscripts the name of his grandfather is written with one letter raised above the line, so that it can be read *“Manasseh,”* or without that letter, *“Moses.”* If the older reading is Moses, the first idol-priest of a tribe was the grandson of the man who spoke Deuteronomy 29:18. The text does not settle it, and this study builds nothing on it. That he was a Levite is certain.

The remedy for inherited idols is not a rite. It is to put them away and turn: *“Put away the gods which your fathers served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve Yahweh”* (Joshua 24:14). *“Cast away from you all your transgressions ... and make yourselves a new heart and a new spirit”* (Ezekiel 18:31).

Finding — the three claims: that the root of Deuteronomy 29:18 is resentment or unforgiveness is **Not in the text**; that the grudge is forbidden by its own law is **Corroborated** (Leviticus 19:17–18; Proverbs 24:29). That the root is the one who questions a teacher is **Not in the text** (Deuteronomy 13:1–3; 18:21–22). That the idolatry of ancestors binds a descendant who does not walk in it is **Not in the text** (Deuteronomy 24:16; Ezekiel 18:14–17; Numbers 26:11).

X. THE ROOT IN ISRAEL’S STORY — FIVE WITNESSES

The warning of Moab was tested in the generations that followed. Five accounts show the root at work, and the fifth shows what was done about it.

Witness One — Achan: the thing buried under the tent. Achan’s sin was not idolatry, but its shape is the shape of the verse: one man, one forbidden thing, hidden in the ground, and a whole people struck. **Yahweh** did not say *“Achan has sinned.”* He said, *“Israel has sinned”* (Joshua 7:11), and thirty-six men had already died at Ai (Joshua 7:5). The search went by tribe, then by clan, then by household, then man by man (Joshua 7:16–18). Those are the circles of **Deuteronomy 29:18**, walked in reverse to find the root. Achan’s confession ends, *“they are hidden in the earth in the midst of my tent”* (Joshua 7:21). A generation later Israel still remembered what it meant: *“that man did not perish alone in his iniquity”* (Joshua 22:20). It should be noticed that **Yahweh** revealed the hidden thing. No one found it by suspicion (Joshua 7:10–15).

Witness Two — Micah and Dan: woman, man, house, tribe. A mother dedicates her silver *“to Yahweh”* for *“a carved image and a molten image”* (Judges 17:3), the very pair that is cursed in **Deuteronomy 27:15**. Her son Micah keeps *“a house of gods”* (Judges 17:5). He hires a Levite and says, *“Now I know that Yahweh will do me good, because I have a Levite as priest”* (Judges 17:13). That is **Deuteronomy 29:19** in a narrative: an idol in the house and peace in the heart, in the Name of **Yahweh**. Then the tribe of Dan carries off the image and the priest, and *“the children of Dan set up the carved image for themselves ... until the day of the captivity of the land”* (Judges 18:30). All four circles appear in order, a woman, a man, a household, and a tribe, and the last words of the account are the uprooting.

Witness Three — Solomon and Jeroboam: a heart turned, a nation uprooted. *“His wives turned his heart after other gods”* (1 Kings 11:4). *“His heart had turned from Yahweh”* (1 Kings 11:9). The kingdom was torn, and Jeroboam set up the calves, *“and this thing became a sin”* (1 Kings 12:30). The verdict was the uprooting of Israel *“because of the sins of Jeroboam, which he sinned and which he made Israel to sin”* (1 Kings 14:16). Two centuries later the book of Kings looks back and says the same: *“Jeroboam drove Israel from following Yahweh, and made them sin a great sin ... until Yahweh removed Israel from before His face”* (2 Kings 17:21–23).

Witness Four — Manasseh and Judah: not willing to pardon. *“Manasseh led them astray, to do more evil than the nations”* (2 Kings 21:9). When Judah fell, the reason was given in the words of **Deuteronomy 29:20**: וְלֹא־אַבָּהּ יְהוָה לִסְלֹחַ, *ve-lo avah Yahweh lislo’ach (and Yahweh was not willing to pardon)* (2 Kings 24:4). Yet the man himself was heard when he humbled himself (2 Chronicles 33:12–13). One man’s return and a people’s consequence run on separate tracks, as Doc 238 (Section VI-E) showed.

Witness Five — those who dug it out. The Tanakh also records people who found a root and removed it.

WHO	WHERE THE ROOT WAS	WHAT WAS DONE	TEXT
Jacob	In his own household: <i>“the foreign gods that are in your midst,”</i> Rachel’s stolen household idols among them	He said, <i>“Put away the foreign gods,”</i> and he buried them under the terebinth at Shechem.	Genesis 31:19; 35:2–4
Joshua	In the covenant people, one generation after Moab	He said, <i>“Put away the foreign gods that are in your midst, and incline your heart to Yahweh.”</i>	Joshua 24:23
Gideon	His own father’s altar of Baal	He pulled it down by night, at the command of Yahweh .	Judges 6:25–27
Asa	His own house: Maacah, the queen mother	He removed her from her office, and cut down her image and burned it.	1 Kings 15:13
Hezekiah	A holy thing turned into an idol: the bronze serpent of Moses	He broke it in pieces.	2 Kings 18:4
Josiah	The whole land, and the house of Yahweh itself	He heard the book, tore his garments, and removed them.	2 Kings 22:11; 23:4–6

Four lessons stand out.

First, each of them began at home: his own household, his own father, his own mother, his own Temple.

Second, each dealt with a revealed thing: an image, an altar, an object. None of them tried hearts.

Third, the command joins the hand and the heart. Joshua does not say only *“put away.”* He says, *“and incline your heart to Yahweh”* (Joshua 24:23). An idol removed from the house with the heart still turned toward it is a root left in the ground.

Fourth, no one is past the warning. Gideon pulled down his father’s altar, and in his old age made an ephod, *“and all Israel whored after it there, and it became a snare to Gideon and to his house”* (Judges 8:27).

Finding — the witnesses: that one hidden turning brings harm on many is **Corroborated** (Joshua 7:5, 11; 22:20; Judges 18:30; 1 Kings 14:16). That the remedy is to put away what has been

revealed, beginning in one's own house, and to incline the heart to **Yahweh** is **Corroborated** (Genesis 35:2–4; Joshua 24:23; 1 Kings 15:13; 2 Kings 23:4–6).

XI. THE OTHER ROOT — WHAT YAHWEH PLANTS, AND THE WAY BACK

XI-A. Israel Was Planted

The poison root is not a foreign weed that blew in from outside. Israel itself is a planting of **Yahweh**: *“You brought a vine out of Egypt; You drove out nations and planted it ... it took deep root and filled the land”* (Psalms 80:8–9 [Hebrew 80:9–10]).

The prophets ask what became of it. *“I planted you a choice vine, wholly a true seed. How then have you turned before Me into the degenerate shoots of a foreign vine?”* (Jeremiah 2:21).

“He looked for it to yield grapes, and it yielded stinking grapes” (Isaiah 5:2).

The root of **Deuteronomy 29:18** is what the planted vine becomes when its heart turns. That is why the Song of Moses can speak of a vine *“from the vine of Sodom”* growing where **Yahweh**'s vineyard should be (**Deuteronomy 32:32**).

XI-B. Two Men and Two Roots

Jeremiah sets two men side by side, and nearly every line answers to **Deuteronomy 29**.

ELEMENT	THE MAN WHOSE HEART TURNS	THE MAN WHO TRUSTS
The heart	<i>“whose heart turns aside from Yahweh”</i> (Jeremiah 17:5); <i>“whose heart is turning today from Yahweh”</i> (Deuteronomy 29:18)	<i>“who trusts in Yahweh, and whose trust Yahweh is”</i> (Jeremiah 17:7)
The word spoken over him	<i>“Cursed is the man”</i> (Jeremiah 17:5); <i>“every curse ... will crouch upon him”</i> (Deuteronomy 29:20)	<i>“Blessed is the man”</i> (Jeremiah 17:7)
The plant	<i>“like a shrub in the desert”</i> (Jeremiah 17:6); a root bearing poison and wormwood (Deuteronomy 29:18)	<i>“like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream”</i> (Jeremiah 17:8)
The ground	<i>“a salt land, and not inhabited”</i> (Jeremiah 17:6); <i>“brimstone and salt”</i> (Deuteronomy 29:23)	By the water (Jeremiah 17:8)

ELEMENT	THE MAN WHOSE HEART TURNS	THE MAN WHO TRUSTS
The fruit	<i>“He shall not see when good comes”</i> (Jeremiah 17:6).	<i>“It shall not cease from bearing fruit”</i> (Jeremiah 17:8).
Who knows which he is	<i>“The heart is deceitful above all things ... I, Yahweh, search the heart”</i> (Jeremiah 17:9–10).	The same

The passage in Jeremiah ends where **Deuteronomy 29** ends, with **Yahweh** searching the heart *“to give to each according to his ways, according to the fruit of his deeds”* (Jeremiah 17:10).

The word is again *peri (fruit)*. Other witnesses say the same of the good root.

The righteous man is *“like a tree planted by streams of water, that yields its fruit in its season”* (Psalms 1:3). *“The root of the righteous shall not be moved”* (Proverbs 12:3).

XI-C. The Promise to the Uprooted

Yahweh does not leave the uprooted people without a root. *“The surviving remnant of the house of Judah shall again take root downward and bear fruit upward”* (Isaiah 37:31).

“In days to come Jacob shall take root; Israel shall blossom and bud, and they shall fill the face of the world with fruit” (Isaiah 27:6).

Hosea gives the promise in the two words of **Deuteronomy 29:18**, root and fruit:

“I will heal their backsliding; I will love them freely ... I will be like the dew to Israel; he shall blossom like the lily, and strike his roots like Lebanon ... Ephraim, what have I to do any more with idols? ... From Me your fruit is found.” (Hosea 14:4–5, 8 [Hebrew 14:5–6, 9])

The Hebrew is וַיִּךְ שְׂרָשָׁיו כְּלִבְנוֹן, *ve-yakh shorashav ka-Levanon* (and he shall strike his roots like Lebanon), and מִמֶּנִּי פֶרְיֶךָ נִמְצָא, *mimmenni peryekha nimtsa* (from Me your fruit is found). The root is healed, the idols are gone, and the fruit comes from **Yahweh**.

XI-D. How the Bitter Is Made Sweet

Israel met bitter water three days after the sea. *“They could not drink the waters of Marah, for they were bitter ... and he cried out to Yahweh, and Yahweh showed him a tree, and he threw it into the waters, and the waters were made sweet. There He set for them a statute and a judgment, and there He tested them”* (Exodus 15:23–25).

The verb for “*showed*” is *vayyorehu* (*and He showed him / taught him*), from the same root as the word Torah. The first lesson of the wilderness was that what is bitter is healed by what **Yahweh** shows, and the text ties it at once to statute and judgment.

XI-E. For the Household and the Assembly

THE MARK OF THE ROOT	THE COVENANT PRACTICE THAT ANSWERS IT	TEXT
A heart turning unseen	Ask Yahweh to search it, and keep His commandments before the eyes.	Psalms 139:23–24; Numbers 15:39
What the eye has seen among the nations	Do not inquire after their gods, and do not bring their things into the house.	Deuteronomy 12:30; 7:26
<i>“I shall have peace”</i>	Fear always. Do not presume pardon.	Proverbs 28:14; Psalms 19:13
A hidden thing in the household	Put it away, beginning at home.	Genesis 35:2–4; Joshua 24:23
A word of false peace from a teacher	Test it by the Torah, whoever speaks it.	Jeremiah 23:16–17; Isaiah 8:20
A revealed turning in the assembly	Inquire diligently, require witnesses, and leave the heart to Yahweh .	Deuteronomy 13:14; 19:15; 29:29
The children who are “ <i>not here today</i> ”	Teach them the revealed things.	Deuteronomy 6:6–7; 29:29
A root already grown	Return. He heals and He replants.	Deuteronomy 30:1–6; Hosea 14:4–8

Finding — the other root: **Yahweh** promises to heal the turning and to replant those who return: **Corroborated** (Deuteronomy 30:1–6; Hosea 14:4–8; Isaiah 27:6; 37:31; Amos 9:15). The one who trusts in **Yahweh** is the tree whose root bears good fruit: **Corroborated** (Jeremiah 17:7–8; Psalms 1:3; Proverbs 12:3).

XII. THREE-RELIGION AUDIT — HOW EACH TRADITION READS THE ROOT

The table sets the three traditions against the Tanakh’s own findings. Comparative texts are cited as historical reference only, in keeping with the standing rule of this document.

ELEMENT	☆ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	☩ ISLAM
Teaching today	The passage is read every year in the portion <i>Nitzavim</i> , on the Sabbath before the New Year. Rashi: the root is a man or a woman, a family or a tribe that <i>“fruitfully produces and increases wickedness in your midst,”</i> and the self-blessing is the thought, <i>“These curses will not come upon me.”</i> The Aramaic Targum renders the root as a person who thinks of sin. The Mishnah states the same refusal of presumption: <i>“I will sin, and the Day of Atonement will atone: the Day of Atonement does not atone”</i> (Yoma 8:9).	Hebrews 12:15 quotes the verse from the Greek: <i>“lest any root of bitterness springing up cause trouble, and by it many be defiled.”</i> It goes on at once to Esau, who sold his birthright (Hebrews 12:16–17). Peter tells Simon the sorcerer, <i>“you are in the gall of bitterness and the bond of iniquity”</i> (Acts 8:23). In modern preaching and counseling the <i>“root of bitterness”</i> usually means resentment or unforgiveness. Revelation names a falling star <i>“Wormwood,”</i> which turns a third of the waters bitter (Revelation 8:10–11), after the image of Jeremiah 9:15 .	The Qur’an does not cite the verse. It sets two trees side by side: a good word is like a good tree <i>“whose root is firm and whose branches are in the sky,”</i> and an evil word is like an evil tree <i>“uprooted from the surface of the earth, having no stability”</i> (Q. 14:24–26). It names the bitter tree of Zaqqum, which <i>“comes forth in the root of Hell”</i> (Q. 37:62–66). It speaks of those in whose hearts is a disease (Q. 2:10), and it holds that God does not forgive the setting up of partners with Him (Q. 4:48).
Other voices	Nachmanides reads the root of the generations not yet born: <i>“the father is the root and the son is the twig.”</i> Ibn Ezra records three readings of the last clause of verse 19, and ties <i>“this curse”</i> to the secret image of Deuteronomy 27:15 . Before the church,	The New Testament has its own forms of the root principle: <i>“a little leaven leavens the whole lump”</i> (1 Corinthians 5:6); <i>“every plant which My heavenly Father has not planted will be rooted up”</i> (Matthew 15:13); <i>“the bad tree bears bad fruit”</i>	The Qur’an records the presumption of a covenant people: <i>“The Fire will not touch us except for a few numbered days. Say: Have you taken a covenant with God?”</i> (Q. 2:80). It asks, <i>“Do they feel secure from the plan of God? None feels secure</i>

ELEMENT	☆ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	✡ ISLAM
	the community of the Dead Sea Scrolls wrote this passage into its own covenant ceremony, as a curse on the member who enters <i>“with the idols of his heart”</i> (Community Rule 2:11–18). The Talmud draws from the closing verse the rule that all Israel are sureties for one another in what is revealed (Sanhedrin 43b; Shevuot 39a).	(Matthew 7:17). The churches divide over assurance (Doc 238). The Westminster Confession warns of those who <i>“vainly deceive themselves with false hopes and carnal presumptions of being in the favour of God”</i> (18.1). The Catholic Catechism defines presumption as <i>“hoping to obtain his forgiveness without conversion”</i> (2092). Some prayer ministries read the root as an inherited <i>“generational curse.”</i>	<i>from the plan of God except the losing people”</i> (Q. 7:99). A well-known hadith compares a community to people on a ship: if those below are left to bore a hole in the hull, all drown together (Sahih al-Bukhari 2493). The Qur’an also says, <i>“no bearer of burdens bears the burden of another”</i> (Q. 6:164).
Covenant strength	Keeps the verse’s own subject: idolatry inside the covenant people, hidden in the heart, and presumption on the covenant. Read the root as persons and not as a mood. Read the passage in public, to everyone, every year, as Deuteronomy 29:10–15 requires.	In its own setting Hebrews 12:15 keeps the Torah’s subject. It warns a covenant community that one member’s falling away can defile many, and its example is a man who despised his birthright. It is not a man who nursed a grudge. Acts 8:23 is spoken to a man who wanted the things of God for sorcery. The New Testament’s warnings against presumption (Romans 6:1; Jude 4; 1 Thessalonians 5:3) match Deuteronomy 29:19 .	The two trees give the Tanakh’s own picture: a firm root and a root pulled up (Jeremiah 17:5–8; Deuteronomy 29:28). The refusal of false security matches Deuteronomy 29:19 . The ship is the water swept away with the thirsty. Q. 6:164 agrees with Deuteronomy 24:16 that no child bears a father’s guilt.
Covenant departure	Nachmanides explains the word <i>“woman”</i> by saying that a woman is more easily led. The verse gives no such	The popular reading of the root as resentment is Not in the text (Section IX-A). It is not in Deuteronomy, and	The Qur’an applies the presumption of Q. 2:80 to the Children of Israel. The Torah speaks it to every

ELEMENT	☆ JUDAISM	† CHRISTIANITY	✱ ISLAM
	reason, and it names the man first (Deuteronomy 17:2; see Doc 235). His saying that <i>“from a sweet root no bitter plant will issue”</i> goes beyond the text, and he acknowledges the objection from Ezekiel 18:10. Rashi and the Targum give one reading of the last clause of verse 19 as its meaning, where the Hebrew allows two.	read in context it is not in Hebrews either. The Greek wording dropped the two plants and the idolatry, and the phrase came loose from the verse. <i>“Once saved, always saved,”</i> taught as security whatever the walk, is the sentence of Deuteronomy 29:19 (Doc 238, Section V-B). <i>“Generational curse”</i> rites go beyond Deuteronomy 24:16 and Ezekiel 18:14–17. Where the <i>“root of bitterness”</i> is used to silence a member’s questions, the verse is turned against the people it protects.	covenant assembly, and any community that says <i>“we are the saved people”</i> stands under Deuteronomy 29:19, the Muslim community no less than any other. The Name Yahweh is absent. The Torah’s promise that the uprooted people will be planted again in their own soil (Deuteronomy 30:1–5; Amos 9:15) is not repeated.
Covenant witness	The oldest Jewish reading says what this study finds: the root is the person who multiplies wickedness in the midst of the people, and the man who blesses himself is refused.	Read from the Tanakh outward, the New Testament’s own use of the verse is a warning against apostasy and presumption inside the assembly. The churches already have the Torah’s meaning in their own Scriptures. It needs only to be read with the verse it quotes.	A third tradition confirms three things the verse teaches: that false worship is a root, that it bears after its kind, and that no people may promise itself peace while it walks by its own heart.

XIII. CORRECTIONS TO EARLIER LIBRARY MATERIAL

The Library’s rule is that its own earlier work is tested by the same standard as everyone else’s. Five points in earlier studies need correction or refinement.

Correction 1 — the verse numbers in Doc 238. Doc 238 (Section V-B, Witness One) cites this passage by the English numbering, as **Deuteronomy 29:18–20**. Its Three-Religion Audit (Section VII) cites the same passage as *“Deuteronomy 29:17–19,”* which is the Hebrew numbering, without saying so. Both places should read **Deuteronomy 29:18–20**. Doc 238 also begins its treatment at verse 19 and does not examine the root of verse 18; the present document supplies it.

Correction 2 — “spreads bitterness” in Doc 264. Doc 264 (Section III-F) describes the root as *“one man’s stubborn heart that spreads bitterness through a people.”* The verse names a man or a woman, a family or a tribe, and what the root bears is poison and wormwood: false worship and its judgment. It is not bitterness of feeling (Section IX-A). The sentence should read: *“a man or a woman, a family or a tribe, whose turning of heart to other gods spreads through a people.”* The point Doc 264 draws from the verse, that rebellion spreads, stands.

Correction 3 — the numbering in Doc 229. Doc 229 (Section II-B and its Scripture Index) cites *“Devarim 29:3”* for the heart that understands. That is the Hebrew numbering. Under the Library’s present rule the reference is **Deuteronomy 29:4** [Hebrew 29:3].

Correction 4 — the closing verse of Doc 189. Doc 189 closes with the words *“Therefore fear Yahweh and serve Him in sincerity and in truth ... cleave to Him, for He is your life,”* and gives the reference as **Deuteronomy 30:20**. The first half is from **Joshua 24:14**. Only the second half is from **Deuteronomy 30:20**. The reference line should name both verses.

Correction 5 — “not inherited by birth” in Doc 189. Doc 189 (Section II-C) reads **Deuteronomy 29:14–15** as an offer, and says the covenant *“is not inherited automatically by birth; it is entered by acceptance of the terms.”* The verse says more than that. The covenant and the oath are made *“with him who is not here with us today,”* so the generations to come are bound by the oath before they are born. Both halves should be stated: every Israelite is born under the oath, and every one must still choose (**Deuteronomy 30:19**). The wording is left for the Founder’s decision.

XIV. SEVEN COVENANT DECLARATIONS ON THE ROOT AND ITS FRUIT

Per the **Deuteronomy 19:15** standard, no doctrine may stand on a single text. Each declaration below draws on more than one witness.

#	COVENANT DECLARATION	BASIS
I	The root of Deuteronomy 29:18 is a person: a man or a woman, a family or a tribe, inside the covenant people, whose heart turns from Yahweh to other gods.	Deuteronomy 29:18; 13:6; 17:2–3; Judges 18:30
II	The turning begins in the heart, unseen. It bears after its kind, and it spreads from one to many and from one generation to the next.	Deuteronomy 29:18, 22; 11:16; Ezekiel 14:3; Jeremiah 9:14; Joshua 22:20
III	Poison and wormwood are the fruit of that turning: false worship, justice made bitter, and a false word of peace. They are also the judgment that answers it.	Amos 5:7; 6:12; Hosea 10:4; Jeremiah 9:13–15; 23:15–17
IV	No one may promise himself peace under the covenant while he walks in the stubbornness of his heart. Yahweh refuses that man.	Deuteronomy 29:19–21; Jeremiah 23:17; Micah 3:11; Amos 9:10; Numbers 15:30–31
V	A root left in a people ends in the uprooting of the people. Yahweh promises to plant again those who return.	Deuteronomy 29:22–28; 1 Kings 14:15–16; Jeremiah 22:8–9; Deuteronomy 30:1–6; Amos 9:15
VI	The hidden things belong to Yahweh , and He alone tries the heart. The community acts only on what is revealed, after inquiry and by witnesses. Each person asks Yahweh to search his own heart.	Deuteronomy 29:29; 1 Kings 8:39; Jeremiah 17:10; Deuteronomy 13:14; 19:15; Psalms 139:23–24
VII	The root of this verse is not resentment, not a questioner, and not a bloodline. Its remedy is to put away what has been revealed, beginning at home, and to incline the heart to Yahweh , who makes another root bear good fruit.	Deuteronomy 24:16; Ezekiel 18:14–17; Genesis 35:2–4; Joshua 24:23; Jeremiah 17:7–8; Hosea 14:4–8

XV. THE COVENANT RESPONSE — WHAT THE TANAKH SAYS TO THE ONE WHO ASKS

Behind a question about this verse there is usually a person. It may be someone who has been told that his grief is a “*root of bitterness*” defiling the congregation. It may be someone who has been called a root for asking a question, or someone who fears a curse in his family line. It may be someone who has begun to wonder about the peace he has promised himself.

Tanakh's answer is fivefold.

First: read the verse before the phrase. The root is a person whose heart turns from **Yahweh** to other gods (Deuteronomy 29:18). If you are wounded and grieving, you are Hannah and Naomi, and you are not the root. Bring your bitterness to **Yahweh** as they did (1 Samuel 1:10; Ruth 1:20), and keep the law against the grudge for its own sake (Leviticus 19:17–18).

Second: ask what gods. The verse puts one question to every assembly: is there among us a heart turning toward what the nations serve? In Moab the answer was wood and stone, silver and gold (Deuteronomy 29:17). The question does not expire, and each generation must name its own.

Third: do not bless yourself. No membership, no lineage, no teacher, and no past obedience is left to walk by your own heart. *“I shall have peace”* is the one sentence in the chapter that **Yahweh** answers with the words *“not willing to pardon”* (Deuteronomy 29:19–20). Take your peace from His word, or do not take it at all (Isaiah 48:22).

Fourth: leave your neighbor's heart to Yahweh, and begin at home. The hidden things are His (Deuteronomy 29:29). What is yours is what has been revealed in your own house. Put it away, as Jacob did (Genesis 35:2–4), and teach your children the revealed things (Deuteronomy 6:6–7).

Fifth: return, and be planted. The chapter after the uprooting is the chapter of return (Deuteronomy 30:1–6). *“Search me, O El, and know my heart”* (Psalms 139:23). *“I will heal their backsliding ... From Me your fruit is found”* (Hosea 14:4, 8).

Yahweh did not warn Israel of the root in order to make a people of accusers. He warned them so that each one would look to his own heart, put away what he had seen among the nations, and become the other tree: planted by water, with a root that bears good fruit.

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“Blessed is the man who trusts in Yahweh, and whose trust Yahweh is. He shall be like a tree planted by water, that sends out its roots by the stream; it shall not fear when heat comes, and its leaf shall be green; in the year of drought it shall not be anxious, and it shall not cease from bearing fruit.”

Jeremiah 17:7–8 — The Written Covenant of Yahweh

MIQDASH BETHEL COVENANT INSTITUTION

DOCUMENT 290 • A ROOT BEARING POISON AND WORMWOOD • OCTOBER 2026

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THE MESSAGE IS SENT TO THE WORLD

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