

The Book of Deuteronomy, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 17: The Covenant Renewed; Choose Life

Deuteronomy 29:1–30:20

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally this lesson must defend the genuineness of the gospel call against the Calvinistic teaching that fallen human beings cannot respond to God and that grace is given irresistibly to an unconditionally chosen few. Moses sets life and death before all Israel and commands them to choose, with heaven and earth as witnesses (30:19). This is not the language of an irresistible decree handed to a select remnant, but of a real choice set before responsible people who are genuinely able to answer. Paul confirms the abiding force of these words by applying them to the gospel of faith (Romans 10:6–10), and the New Testament everywhere commands all people to repent and believe (Acts 17:30; Mark 16:15–16).

The lesson must also handle the restoration promises rightly. The pledge that God will gather a scattered Israel when they return to Him (30:1–5) is not a blueprint for a future earthly political nation. It is fulfilled in Christ and His church, the true heirs of the promise (Galatians 3:29), and ultimately in the better, heavenly inheritance (Hebrews 11:13–16). The circumcision of the heart God promises (30:6) is fulfilled in the new covenant, where God writes His law on the hearts of His people.

Beyond the doctrine, this lesson aims at the formation of the student's will. The God who comes near is not content to be discussed; He asks to be chosen and loved and held fast. The teacher should help students stop treating obedience as impossibly hard or hopelessly distant, and instead hear God's nearness as the grace it is, then make the concrete, daily choice for life that the passage demands.

Question 1

Student Question:

Moses renews the covenant in Moab and reminds Israel that they had seen God's mighty works, yet "to this day the Lord has not given you a heart to understand" (29:2–4). At the same time he calls them to "keep the words of this covenant" (29:9). What does this tension teach us about the relationship between God's work and human responsibility?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Deuteronomy 29 holds a striking tension. Moses says God had not yet given Israel "a heart to understand" (29:4), and in the same breath he commands them to "keep the words of this covenant" (29:9). The two truths sit side by side without contradiction: God is at work, and the people are responsible. The Bible never lets us collapse one of these into the other.

The first truth humbles us. Whatever understanding and faith we have is not finally our own achievement; God opens hearts and gives sight, and Israel's slowness reminds us that spiritual perception is His gift. We do not pat ourselves on the back for understanding what others miss.

But the second truth keeps us from passivity. The very fact that Moses commands obedience means the people are able and obligated to obey. He does not say, "wait helplessly until God overrides your will". He says "keep the words of this covenant, that you may prosper". The call assumes a genuine ability to respond. God works, and we must work, and these are not rivals (Philippians 2:12-13).

We must be careful here not to read the verse as teaching that people simply cannot respond to God until He irresistibly enables a chosen few. The whole thrust of the chapters that follow, climaxing in "choose life", forbids that reading. God had given Israel ample evidence and ample revelation; their dullness was not an excuse but an indictment, and the remedy was to turn and keep the covenant He had plainly set before them.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's work and human responsibility are held together, not collapsed
- Spiritual understanding is God's gift, which humbles our pride
- God's commands assume a genuine ability to respond
- The passage is not teaching human inability or irresistible grace
- We work because God works in us (Philippians 2:12-13)

Discussion Prompts

- How do we honor both God's work and our responsibility without canceling either?
- Why does Moses command obedience if the people had not yet a heart to understand?
- Where are you waiting passively for God to do what He has called you to do?

Question 2

Student Question:

Moses warns against the person who hears the covenant curses and yet blesses himself in his heart, saying "I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart" (29:19). Have you ever quietly assumed you were safe in a sin God had warned you about? What does this verse expose in the human heart?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Moses describes a chilling figure: a man who hears all the covenant curses and yet "blesses himself in his heart, saying, I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart" (29:19). He has heard the warning and decided it does not apply to him. He has constructed a private theology of personal exemption.

This is one of the most common and dangerous moves the human heart makes. We hear God warn against a sin, and instead of trembling we tell ourselves a comfortable story: that we are different, that grace will surely cover it, that we can handle what destroyed others. We bless ourselves in a sin God has cursed.

What makes this so deadly is that it wears the costume of peace. The man feels safe. He has talked himself into a counterfeit assurance that quiets his conscience while he walks deeper into rebellion. Moses says God's anger will smoke against such a person (29:20), precisely because false peace is more dangerous than open fear; the frightened sinner may yet repent, but the self-assured one feels no need to.

Honesty here is the beginning of safety. We must ask whether we have any sin in which we have quietly pronounced ourselves exempt, any warning of God we have heard a hundred times and learned to wave away. Real assurance comes not from blessing ourselves in our sin but from turning from it to the mercy of God, where alone we are truly safe.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The heart's habit of declaring itself exempt from God's warnings
- False peace is more dangerous than honest fear
- Self-assurance in sin silences the conscience that should warn us
- Counterfeit assurance versus real assurance through repentance
- The need for honest self-examination before God

Discussion Prompts

- Is there a sin in which you have quietly told yourself you are the exception?
- Why is false peace more dangerous than open fear of God?
- Where does true assurance actually come from?

Question 3

Student Question:

"The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law" (29:29). What does this verse teach us about the limits of our knowledge and the sufficiency of what God has revealed?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Few verses are as freeing as Deuteronomy 29:29: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things that are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law". God draws a line between what He has kept to Himself and what He has made known, and He tells us which side of the line is our business.

There is humility in the first half. Much about God, His ways, His timing, His hidden purposes, remains His and His alone. We are not meant to crack every mystery or demand an answer to every why. Some things belong to the Lord, and a wise believer learns to leave them in His hands rather than torment himself over what God has chosen not to reveal.

But there is enormous responsibility in the second half. What God has revealed belongs to us, and it is given for a purpose: “that we may do all the words of this law”. Revelation is not given to satisfy curiosity but to be obeyed. We are accountable not for the secret things but for the plain ones, and the plain ones are more than enough to fill a life of glad obedience.

This guards us at both edges. It guards against the pride that demands to know what God has hidden, and against the laziness that ignores what God has clearly said while pretending to wait for more light. The revealed word is sufficient (2 Timothy 3:16–17). Our task is not to unlock heaven’s secrets but to do what God has already made clear.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God keeps some things hidden and reveals others
- Humility before God’s secret purposes
- Revelation is given to be obeyed, not merely studied
- We are accountable for the revealed, not the secret, things
- The sufficiency of God’s revealed word

Discussion Prompts

- What “secret thing” are you tormenting yourself over that you should leave with God?
- What revealed command are you neglecting while waiting for more light?
- How does this verse free you and call you at the same time?

Question 4

Student Question:

Moses promises that when Israel is scattered and then “returns to the Lord” with all their heart, God will restore them (30:1–5). How does this promise of restoration speak to your own seasons of wandering and return?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Moses looks past the coming exile to a homecoming. When Israel is scattered among the nations and then “returns to the Lord your God” with all their heart and soul, God promises to gather them and restore them (30:1–5). Even before they have failed, God has already pledged a way back.

There is deep comfort here for every wanderer. The promise assumes that Israel will stray, yet it does not end in abandonment. The moment they turn, God turns. He does not stand with arms

folded demanding a long penance; He runs to meet the returning heart. This is the same God who, in our Lord's parable, sees the prodigal "while he was still a long way off" and runs to him (Luke 15:20).

Many of us know the geography of wandering, the slow drift, the cold heart, the season when God felt far. This promise tells us that distance is never the final word for the one who turns back. The way home is always open, and the Father is always watching the road.

We must read the restoration rightly, though. This is not a blueprint for a future earthly political nation of Israel; the New Testament shows these promises fulfilled in Christ and His church, the true children of the promise (Galatians 3:29), and finally in the better, heavenly homeland the faithful sought (Hebrews 11:13–16). The pattern that abides for us is the unbreakable truth that God restores the returning heart, and that our truest homecoming is not to a plot of land but to Him.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God pledges restoration before Israel even fails
- The moment we turn, God turns toward us
- God restores the returning heart without demanding penance
- Restoration is fulfilled in Christ and His church, not a future earthly nation
- Our truest homecoming is to God Himself

Discussion Prompts

- What does this promise say to your own seasons of wandering?
- Why is it good news that God moves toward us the moment we turn?
- How does the New Testament help us read the restoration promise rightly?

Question 5

Student Question:

God promises, "the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart" (30:6). What does this image of a circumcised heart reveal about the kind of obedience God has always wanted, and how is it fulfilled in Christ?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God promises something deeper than outward reform: "the Lord your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul" (30:6). Circumcision was the covenant sign cut into the flesh; a circumcised heart is one with its hardness and resistance cut away, free to love God truly.

This image reveals what God has always wanted. He was never after mere external compliance, a body that went through the motions while the heart stayed cold. From the beginning the great commandment was to love Him with all the heart (6:5), and here God promises to do the very thing that makes such love possible, to deal with the stubbornness within.

It also exposes the limit of the old covenant. The law could command love but could not by itself create it; it could write rules on stone but not on hearts. So the promise points beyond Sinai to a better covenant, where God says, "I will put my law within them, and I will write it on their hearts" (Jeremiah 31:33; Ezekiel 36:26-27).

In Christ this promise is fulfilled. Paul says real circumcision is "of the heart, by the Spirit" (Romans 2:29), and that those in Christ have received a "circumcision made without hands" (Colossians 2:11). God Himself works in His new covenant people to soften and reshape the heart so that obedience flows from love. This is not a denial of human choice but its liberation; the heart freed from its hardness is finally able to choose and love God as it was made to.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God wants the heart, not mere external compliance
- A circumcised heart is one freed from hardness to love God
- The old covenant could command love but not create it
- The promise points to the new covenant written on hearts
- Fulfilled in Christ as circumcision of the heart by the Spirit

Discussion Prompts

- What does the circumcised heart show us about the obedience God desires?
- Why could the law command love but not by itself produce it?
- How does the Spirit work in a believer to soften and reshape the heart?

Question 6

Student Question:

Moses insists, "this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off" (30:11). When have you treated God's call as too hard to obey, and what would change if you really believed it was near and possible?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Moses presses a point we badly need to hear: "this commandment that I command you today is not too hard for you, neither is it far off" (30:11). God's call is not an impossible burden laid on people who cannot lift it. It is near, and it is doable.

We are remarkably skilled at excusing ourselves on the grounds of difficulty. The command to forgive, to be pure, to give generously, to speak truth, to put away a cherished sin, we tell

ourselves these are too hard, beyond us, unrealistic for someone in our situation. And in that word “too hard” we find a comfortable shelter from obedience.

Moses knocks the shelter down. The commandment is not too hard. That does not mean it costs nothing; it means it is genuinely within reach of a willing heart. God does not mock His people by commanding what they simply cannot do. He sets before them a real and possible obedience and calls them to it.

What would change if we actually believed this? We might stop negotiating with God’s clear commands, stop dressing up our unwillingness as inability, and start obeying the next plain thing He has set before us. The Christian, moreover, does not obey alone; the same Spirit who circumcises the heart strengthens the hand, so that with His help the command really is “not too hard” (Philippians 4:13).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God’s commands are not impossible burdens
- We hide our unwillingness behind the word “too hard”
- Obedience is costly but genuinely within reach of a willing heart
- Believing the command is possible frees us to obey
- The Spirit strengthens us so the command is not too hard

Discussion Prompts

- What command have you labeled “too hard” to avoid obeying it?
- What is the difference between something being costly and being impossible?
- How does the Spirit make obedience genuinely possible for the Christian?

Question 7

Student Question:

The word is “not in heaven” nor “beyond the sea” but “very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it” (30:12-14). Paul applies these very words to the gospel of faith in Romans 10:6-10. What does it mean that God has brought His saving word so near to us?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Moses paints the nearness of God’s word in unforgettable terms. It is not “in heaven”, so that someone must ascend to fetch it, nor “beyond the sea”, so that someone must cross over to get it. “The word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it” (30:12-14). God has not hidden life; He has brought it close.

This is grace. It would be one thing if salvation required us to climb to heaven or sail to the ends of the earth, achievements forever beyond us. Instead God closes the distance Himself. He puts

His word is within reach of an ordinary heart and an ordinary mouth, so that responding to Him is not a feat of heroism but a turning of the heart that is genuinely possible.

Paul seizes on these very words in Romans 10:6–10 and applies them to the gospel. “The word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith that we proclaim); because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved.” The same nearness Moses celebrated now describes the gospel: God has brought His saving word as close as our confession and our faith.

This guards us against any teaching that puts salvation out of reach, available only to a secretly chosen few who are irresistibly drawn. The gospel call is near, it is real, and it is for all. God has done the far-off work of redemption in Christ and laid the response close at hand: hear, believe, confess, repent, and be baptized into Christ (Acts 2:38; Romans 10:9–10). The word is near you so that you can do it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God brings His word near rather than leaving it out of reach
- The nearness of the word is grace, not human achievement
- Paul applies these words directly to the gospel of faith (Romans 10:6–10)
- The gospel call is near, real, and for all, not a secret few
- The response God asks is genuinely within reach

Discussion Prompts

- Why is the nearness of God’s word such good news?
- How does Paul’s use of this passage in Romans 10 deepen its meaning?
- How does this guard against the idea that salvation is out of reach for most?

Question 8

Student Question:

Moses frames the whole decision around love: “loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, and holding fast to him, for he is your life” (30:20). How does it change your obedience to know that at its heart God is asking for love, not mere compliance?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

When Moses reaches the summit of his appeal, he names what God is really after: “loving the Lord your God, obeying his voice, and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days” (30:20). Obedience is not the goal in itself; it is the overflow of love. God is asking, before anything else, for our hearts.

This transforms the whole feel of the covenant. We can imagine the law as a cold list of demands from a distant master, and we can obey it like sullen servants counting the cost. But

Moses will not let it stay there. Underneath every command is a Person who loves His people and asks to be loved in return. “Hold fast to him” is the language of a marriage, not a contract.

It changes our obedience too. Compliance without love is brittle and resentful; it does the minimum and looks for loopholes. Love-fueled obedience is glad and generous; it asks not “how little can I get away with” but “how can I please the One I love”. The same act of obedience is utterly different depending on whether love is behind it.

Our Lord drew this very truth to the surface: “If you love me, you will keep my commandments” (John 14:15). Love and obedience are not rivals; love is the root and obedience the fruit. Moses’ final word to Israel, and God’s word to us, is not merely “do this” but “love me, and out of that love, hold fast”.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Obedience flows from love, not bare duty
- Beneath every command is a Person who loves and asks for love
- “Hold fast to him” is covenant intimacy, not cold contract
- Love-fueled obedience is glad and generous, not brittle
- Christ teaches the same: love proves itself in obedience (John 14:15)

Discussion Prompts

- How does knowing God wants love first change the way you obey?
- What is the difference between obedience as duty and obedience as love?
- Where has your obedience become brittle compliance that needs the warmth of love?

Question 9

Student Question:

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life” (30:19). Some teach that fallen people cannot respond to God and that grace is irresistible, given only to a chosen few. How does this passage show instead that God genuinely sets the choice before people and that they are truly able and responsible to choose, and how does the gospel make the same genuine call?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

This is the towering verse of the whole book: “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live” (30:19). With heaven and earth summoned as witnesses, Moses places a genuine choice before the people and commands them to make it. Everything in the lesson has been building to this, and we must let it speak plainly.

Some teach that fallen human beings are so dead in sin that they cannot respond to God at all, that grace is irresistible and given only to an unconditionally chosen few, and that the rest are simply passed by, unable and never meant to answer. But that is not the language of Deuteronomy 30. You do not solemnly set life and death before people, command them to choose life, and call the universe to witness, if those people are in fact incapable of choosing. The whole scene assumes that the choice is real and that the hearers are genuinely able and responsible to make it.

Note carefully what the passage does and does not say. It does not flatter human beings as self-sufficient or deny that God works in hearts; we have already seen God promising to circumcise the heart (30:6). What it denies is the notion that people are mere passive blocks who cannot respond until an irresistible decree moves them. God comes near, He reveals, He pleads, He even works within, and then He sets the choice before responsible people and says “choose”. Grace enables and invites; it does not override the will or limit the offer to a secret few.

The gospel makes the very same genuine call, and Paul proves it by lifting these words straight into Romans 10. The word of faith is near; “if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead, you will be saved” (Romans 10:9). The New Testament everywhere commands all people, not a chosen fraction, to repent and believe: “God commands all people everywhere to repent” (Acts 17:30); “whoever believes and is baptized will be saved” (Mark 16:16); “let the one who desires take the water of life without price” (Revelation 22:17). The call is real, the call is universal, and people are truly able to answer it.

This is not a lonely human achievement; salvation is by God’s grace from first to last (Ephesians 2:8–9; Titus 2:11). But grace works by drawing, not by coercion, and the response it asks for is real. So we proclaim the gospel to every person with confidence, because the same God who set life before Israel sets it before the world in Christ, and to every hearer He still says, “choose life”. The dreadful and glorious truth is that the choice is genuinely ours, and we will answer for it.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God sets a genuine choice of life and death before responsible people
- Against Calvinistic inability and irresistible grace given to a chosen few
- The command to choose assumes a real ability to choose
- Grace enables and invites; it does not override the will
- Paul applies these words to the universal gospel call (Romans 10:6–10)
- The New Testament commands all people everywhere to repent and believe
- Salvation is by grace, yet the human response is real and required

Discussion Prompts

- Why does commanding people to “choose life” imply they are able to choose?
- How does Paul’s use of this passage confirm the genuine, universal gospel call?

- How do we hold together salvation by grace and the reality of human choice?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back across the renewed covenant, the secret idolater, the promise of restoration, the nearness of the word, and the call to choose life, name one specific choice the Lord Jesus is setting before you right now, and how He is forming you to choose life and hold fast to Him.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

We have walked with Moses through his last great appeal: the renewed covenant, the self-deceiving idolater, the secret and revealed things, the promise of restoration, the circumcised heart, the nearness of the word, and the ringing call to choose life. Now the choice becomes personal. What is the Lord setting before you?

Perhaps it is a sin you have quietly told yourself you are safe in, and the call is to stop blessing yourself in it and turn. Perhaps it is a command you have labeled “too hard”, and the call is to believe it is near and possible and simply obey. Perhaps it is a long season of wandering, and the call is to come home to the God who is watching the road.

Whatever it is, do not leave it abstract. “Choose life” is not a slogan to admire but a decision to make. Name the specific choice God has set before you this week, and choose Him. Hold fast to the One who is your life, and let the Lord Jesus, who came that we might have life abundantly, form in you a heart that chooses Him again and again.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Turning the call to choose life into a concrete personal decision
- Naming a specific sin, command, or wandering to address
- Refusing to leave “choose life” as an abstraction
- Holding fast to Christ who is our life
- Letting Jesus form a heart that keeps choosing Him

Discussion Prompts

- What specific choice is God setting before you this week?
- What is keeping you from simply choosing life and holding fast to Him?
- How is Jesus forming you into a person who chooses Him again and again?