

The Book of Deuteronomy

Lesson 17: The Covenant Renewed; Choose Life -- Deuteronomy 29:1–30:20

There is a moment that comes to every person, sometimes more than once, when the whole of life seems to gather itself into a single choice. Joshua would later call it standing at a crossroads; here Moses calls it standing before life and death. The old prophet, near the end of his long road, gathers Israel one last time in the plains of Moab. He is not introducing new laws. He is renewing the covenant, pressing it into their hearts, and setting before them, with all the urgency of a dying man's last words, the most important decision a human being can make.

We sometimes imagine that the great spiritual questions are far away and hard, reserved for scholars and saints, written in languages we cannot read and hidden behind doors we cannot open. Moses says the opposite. "The word is very near you. It is in your mouth and in your heart, so that you can do it" (30:14). God has not made obedience a riddle. He has not hidden life on some mountaintop or across some sea. He has brought it close, near as your own breath, and laid the choice squarely in your hands.

And that nearness is grace. It would be a terrible thing if God set life before us and then made us unable to choose it, if He commanded "choose life" while secretly withholding the ability to obey. But Moses knows the God he serves, and he speaks with the confidence of a man who believes his hearers can actually respond. "I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life" (30:19). That is not the language of a closed door. It is the language of an open hand.

So this lesson is about a choice, your choice. It is about a God who comes near, who circumcises hearts, who promises to take back a wandering people the moment they turn to Him, and who looks each of us in the eye and says, in effect, "the road forks here, and you are able to choose. Choose life, that you and your children may live". Let us listen carefully, because He is still saying it.

Group Discussion: Moses insists that the word of God is "very near", not far off or too hard. Why do we so often act as if obeying God were impossibly difficult or hopelessly out of reach, and how does this passage answer that feeling?

Personal Reflection: Moses sets before each person the genuine choice of life or death. Where in your own life right now is God setting a real choice before you, and what is keeping you from simply choosing life?

Read Deuteronomy 29:1–30:20

Study Questions

1. 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?
2. 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?
3. "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?
4. 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?
5. 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?

6. 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?
7. 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?
8. 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?
9. “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?
10. 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.

Digging Deeper

Reflect on these passages: Romans 10:6–10, where Paul applies the nearness of the word to the gospel of faith and confession; Joshua 24:14–15, Joshua’s parallel call to choose whom you will serve; Ezekiel 36:26–27, God’s promise of a new heart fulfilled in the new covenant; Acts 17:30, God commands all people everywhere to repent; Hebrews 3:7–8, today, if you hear his voice, do not harden your hearts

More studies available on ChurchOfChristBibleStudies.com