CHOOSE LIFE!

Deuteronomy is the heart of the gospel, the foundational book of the Bible. God’s heart and gracious character are seen clearly here, along with His desire for us to live with Him forever in health and joy. Of all the chapters in Deuteronomy, chapter 30 captures the plan of salvation in such simple terms and calls us to a decision to choose God. God is life, and choosing Him is choosing life. It really is that simple. God has not made it complicated. The Torah is not far off or confusing. Unlike in many other religions, we are not left in doubt as to what God would have us do. And when we let God work in our hearts, the Torah is not hard either. Following God’s commands flows naturally from following God and basking in His salvation for us.

God’s greatest desire is to bless us, abundantly and eternally. God rejoices in His people, to prosper and multiply them. Despite our sin, God has compassion on us, and brings us back from where we were scattered due to our rebellion and the consequences of the covenant curses. This is grace par excellence: undeserved favor.

Ultimately, this chapter is all about the heart. God is not interested in obedience per se, but in a relationship with us. He knows that our only hope is to love Him with all our heart, but we cannot even do that on our own. So He does the heart circumcision necessary for us: this is the gospel in a nutshell.
Write out Deuteronomy 30:1–20 from the Bible translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out Deuteronomy 30:15–20. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
THE “NEW” COVENANT

Many sermons and books talk about the “new covenant” of grace that Jesus brings in contrast to the “old covenant” of legalism in the Old Testament. However, that concept is a complete misunderstanding of the Old Testament, especially of the “new covenant” mentioned in Jeremiah 31. There God promises to make a new covenant, but it is with Israel! And the reason a new covenant is needed is that the people have broken it and turned to disobedience (in Old Testament times) or legalism (in Jesus’ day), not because the covenant itself was legalistic. In fact, all the elements of the “new covenant” were there in every previous covenant God made with His people. These elements are a part of the everlasting covenant, which is the plan of salvation in totality. God will be their God, and they will be His people; God will write His law in their hearts; God will forgive their sins; and everyone will know God. Abraham had each of these elements in his covenant with God; so did David! And the Sinai covenant also contained each one, and now as the covenant is renewed here in Deuteronomy, all of those elements are present once again.

So it seems that the main reason that people see the new covenant as a New Testament thing is that they don’t actually read the Old Testament, or they only read parts of it with preconceived notions about what God is like there. Here in Deuteronomy 30, God has compassion on His people and forgives their sins, bringing them back from exile. Moses makes clear that the people need a heart circumcision (Deut. 10:16), but they cannot do it on their own, so God Himself will do it (Deut. 30:6), similar to the way He gives a new heart to His followers in Ezekiel 36. This new heart will enable His people to love Him with all their hearts! This is not legalism but grace and relationship! Love leads to obedience, and God rejoices in us as His people when we return to Him with all our hearts and choose to be His people. In addition, each person will know God personally, since He is our life (v. 20). We are to stick to Him like honey, and He will never let us go. All the elements of the “new covenant” are here in this chapter, as also through the rest of Deuteronomy. Unfortunately, the Israelites continued to break the covenant and reject God, turning to their own works to save them, shutting their hearts to God, refusing to get to know God, and rejecting Him as their God. This is why the new covenant was necessary, as a renewed covenant after the people had broken it again and again.
The Torah is not legalistic. If we are willing, God does the heart change that we need to love and serve Him faithfully (Deut. 30:6). But the meaning of love in the Old Testament is a covenantal commitment to live as God would have us to live. We are not robots, but we are also not passive observers. We are partners together with God. We have a choice to make. God has set before us life or death. God longs for us to choose life, but we have to choose for ourselves (vv. 15–19). God will not force us to choose Him. We are not automatically saved by being part of the covenant people.

It is easy to fall in one ditch or the other. We either try to work our way to heaven or we presume upon God’s grace and do whatever we want while assuming we will be saved no matter what. Neither is a love relationship. A true heart change and realization of God’s love will cause us to grow in ever deeper repentance and ever increasing joy as we allow God to show us what needs to change in our lives. The heart is the key, not the actions, as we see through many of the Bible characters whose lives are far from perfect, but whose hearts are right with God, and they are called God’s people.

Deuteronomy 30 also contains the future prediction of the exile to come, as well as the return to God and to their land (vv. 1–5). God knows the future and the choices we will make. However, He still pulls out all the stops to seek to turn us away from sin and rebellion. God and Moses urge and beg the people to choose life, and to not go the route of disobedience and rebellion and death. And yet, the incredible grace of God is that even though He knows they will utterly reject Him, yet He promises to bring them back and renew the covenant with them. This boggles the mind! One would think God would have given up on Israel already, as they have already been stubborn and rebellious so often. But God has immense patience and compassion, and He does not treat us as we deserve.

This should also bring us great comfort in our own journeys with God. Even though God’s ways are simple and clear, we are sinful and so often rebellious just like Israel. And yet, God will also have compassion on us, and change our hearts too.
What relationship do the following verses have with the primary passage?

Ezekiel 36:26–32
Joel 2:12–14
Deuteronomy 10:14–16
Ezekiel 18:23–32
Zephaniah 3:14–17
Jeremiah 32:26–42

What other verses come to mind in connection with Deuteronomy 30?

Review your memorized verse from Deuteronomy 30:1–20.
JESUS IS LIFE

Deuteronomy 30 points to Jesus in numerous ways. Yahweh is the One who has compassion on His people, even when they have rejected and betrayed Him. He does not leave us in the consequences of our betrayal, the covenant curses, but He promises to bring us back. And His punishments are redemptive, with the purpose of repentance and return (vv. 1–5).

Yahweh is also the one who prospers and multiples and blesses His people (vv. 5, 9, 16). This is God’s greatest desire. The curses are ultimately intended for God’s enemies, and He never wanted His own people to fall into that category (v. 7). Yahweh rejoices over His people, even sings over them (v. 9). God delights in redeeming and saving them. In addition, He takes responsibility to circumcise their hearts so that they will love and serve Him with all their hearts (v. 6). Jesus knows that we are incapable of even loving Him on our own, but He has made a way, through His own sacrifice, so that our hearts can be changed through His doing.

Yahweh’s instructions are simple and clear. They are not so far above us that we cannot understand them, and they are not so far away from us that we will never be able to find them, but they are very near (vv. 11–14). Indeed, God puts His words in our hearts and in our mouths, so that they become part of us. This is the process of sanctification, changing us so that we want to follow God, not out of legalism but out of joy and gratitude.

Finally, while Yahweh’s words are life, it is ultimately because they point to Him and come from Him, and He is life! God does not want us to die, but to live. He gives us the choice, because He longs for a true relationship, not robotic service. And He calls us to choose life, a cry that echoes time and again through the rest of the Old Testament and into the New Testament. As verses 17 and 18 make clear, it is our hearts that will turn away and lead us to death, not so much our acts of disobedience. So, Moses calls us to cling to Yahweh, “cling” being a word used for sticky honey, implying that we are to be so close that we will never let go. In this way, His life and love can flow through us and in us, changing our hearts and filling us with abundant joy!
THE CHARACTER OF GOD REVEALED IN CHRIST

“All the paternal love which has come down from generation to generation through the channel of human hearts, all the springs of tenderness which have opened in the souls of men, are but as a tiny rill to the boundless ocean when compared with the infinite, exhaustless love of God. Tongue cannot utter it; pen cannot portray it. You may meditate upon it every day of your life; you may search the Scriptures diligently in order to understand it; you may summon every power and capability that God has given you, in the endeavor to comprehend the love and compassion of the heavenly Father; and yet there is an infinity beyond. You may study that love for ages; yet you can never fully comprehend the length and the breadth, the depth and the height, of the love of God in giving His Son to die for the world. Eternity itself cannot reveal it. Yet as we study the Bible and meditate upon the life of Christ and the plan of redemption, these great themes will open to our understanding more and more.” (Ellen G. White, Testimonies for the Church, vol. 5 (Mountain View, CA: Pacific Press, 1889), 740.)

Consecration

“Many are inquiring, ‘How am I to make the surrender of myself to God?’ You desire to give yourself to Him, but you are weak in moral power, in slavery to doubt, and controlled by the habits of your life of sin. Your promises and resolutions are like ropes of sand. You cannot control your thoughts, your impulses, your affections. The knowledge of your broken promises and forfeited pledges weakens your confidence in your own sincerity, and causes you to feel that God cannot accept you; but you need not despair. What you need to understand is the true force of the will. This is the governing power in the nature of man, the power of decision, or of choice. Everything depends on the right action of the will. The power of choice God has given to men; it is theirs to exercise. You cannot change your heart, you cannot of yourself give to God its affections; but you can choose to serve Him. You can give Him your will; He will then work in you to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Thus your whole nature will be brought under the control of the Spirit of Christ; your affections will be centered upon Him, your thoughts will be in harmony with Him.

“Desires for goodness and holiness are right as far as they go; but if you stop here, they will avail nothing. Many will be lost while hoping and desiring to be Christians. They do not come to the point of yielding the will to God. They do not now choose to be Christians.

“Through the right exercise of the will, an entire change may be made in your life. By yielding up your will to Christ, you ally yourself with the power that is above all principalities and powers. You will have strength from above to hold you steadfast, and thus through constant surrender to God you will be enabled to live the new life, even the life of faith.” (White, Steps to Christ, 47, 48.)
inQuire

Share insights from this week’s memory verse and Bible study as well as any discoveries, observations, and questions with your Sabbath School class (or Bible study group). Consider these discussion questions with the rest of the group.

How is God’s law clear in comparison to the laws of other nations and religions?

How does true love result in willing obedience?

How have you experienced redemptive punishment in your own life?

How have you experienced grace (undeserved favor) in your life, like Israel did in being brought back from exile by God?

How do you see the choice between death and life manifested in your own circumstances and decisions?

What difference does it make in your life to think about God rejoicing over you?

How can you inspire your friends and family to choose life?