CHOSE LIFE

If you are planning to be a parent one day or if you already have children, you must understand the importance of boundaries. Rules and guidelines exist to help the child learn what’s right and wrong, safe and dangerous, and later, what makes life good, productive, and worth living. As children get older and their intellectual abilities increase, so does the need to explain more of the rules. Parents can require obedience from their children up to a certain age, but children eventually gain the freedom to choose whether to obey. At that point, all parents can do is appeal to their children to make the right kinds of choices based on trust.

In Moses’ final days as the aged leader and spiritual father of Israel, he gave a series of sermons, recorded in the book of Deuteronomy, in which he laid out Israel’s history and God’s covenant stipulations, explaining in detail why a life with God is worth the commitment. As he concluded, he made a final appeal to His people, pointing out the two choices they had: life or death, good or evil. He urged them to choose life, to choose God, to choose love. God has no interest in forced relationships and mandated faithfulness. Only when we choose life, when we choose love and everything it entails, is true life—yes, eternal life—possible, and only then can all creatures be in harmony with each other and with their Creator.

This week’s study focuses on the concept of freedom of choice in the context of the great controversy.
Write out Deuteronomy 30:15–20 from the translation of your choice. If you’re pressed for time, write out verse 19. You may also rewrite the passage in your own words, or outline or mind-map the chapter.
TWO CHOICES, THREE OPTIONS?

The Bible presents life as a binary system: there's good and evil, right and wrong, life and death. While one choice doesn't necessarily determine our fate, it does influence our life's trajectory. One change in trajectory, however, can eventually lead to a destiny from which there is no return.

In his final appeal to God's people, Moses says that choosing God and His ways will result in life (Deut. 30:15), increased population (v. 16), general blessings (v. 16), longevity and fulfillment (v. 20), and lasting property ownership (v. 20). Wonderful benefits! Who wouldn't want all of these? In contrast, a choice against God, whether through a refusal to listen, being drawn away, or worshiping and offering service to anyone and anything that is not Yahweh (v. 17), will result in death, a shortened life (v. 18), and curses (v. 19). God allows both choices to exist. A life with God means a total commitment (v. 10). It means adjusting our direction in life, calibrating our attention away from the self and worldly influences, and making God the main priority in life—acknowledging Him as the very Source of life and truth.

He has even made provision for when our path in life leads us away from Him. Our life's trajectory is not immediately our destiny. Earlier, in Deuteronomy 30:1–3, God makes it clear that whenever and wherever people choose to return to Him, no matter how far they have deviated, He will accept their repentance and welcome them home with open arms. He is truly the good Father in the parable of the prodigal son (Luke 15:11–32).

Because God is the Creator and Source of life, there can be only two choices relating to eternity: perpetual existence with God, or nonexistence without God. A third option (i.e., eternal existence without God) is logically impossible because 1. God has a right to His Creation and nothing can hide from His presence, and 2. as the Sustainer of life, if He were to withdraw His presence, it would result in a withdrawal of lifeforce and make this option an impossibility.

Even so, a large amount of humanity seems to desire this impossible third option. Philosophies, religions, and spiritual concepts have been introduced that suggest alternative ways, promising some form of eternal or recurring existence without the God of the Bible. This would only be possible if we were gods ourselves and possessed original, unborrowed, underived life—which we obviously don't have. Such thinking led Lucifer to rebel against God, desiring that third option—desiring to become God Himself and change the rules that govern life in the universe. This attempted rebellion defies logic and destroys the only environment where love can exist and thrive.

As believers, we know that God, His Word, and His rules are all good and form the foundation for love. To tap into the life He desires for us both here on earth and forever on the new earth, we simply need to choose Him, for He is our life (Deut. 30:20).
COMMANDED TO LOVE

One of the ways Satan draws people away from choosing to love and serve God is by portraying Him as a tyrannical ruler and dictator, thus marring God’s character with false accusations. In his attacks, he especially enjoys twisting Scripture (e.g., Matt. 4:1–11). A surface reading of this week’s primary passage could yield questions regarding the nature of the relationship God desires with us and might easily be utilized by the enemy to sow doubts about God’s character. Deuteronomy 30:16 can come across as quite strong when Moses says, “I command you today to love the LORD your God,... to keep His commandments... and the Lord your God will bless you.” Since when can we command love? Commanded obedience to laws makes sense in the context of a citizen’s relationship with the government, but commanded love? And what happened to God’s mercy and grace? Since when do we receive blessings through our works of obedience? These are legitimate questions after reading the text.

As we’ve noted, Deuteronomy was Moses’ final appeal to God’s people, given just before he died. He reminded them of their most recent history—their exodus from Egypt, their covenant with Yahweh, their wilderness wanderings, and their learning and growing in understanding God’s will. It’s clear that he wasn’t speaking to individuals who know nothing about God but to a people well acquainted with the revealed truths of heaven (Deut. 29:29). With their own eyes they had seen God’s mighty hand move on their behalf through supernatural interventions and visible manifestations of His care, grace, glory, and presence. In other words, questioning God’s existence or doubting His worthiness to be worshiped would make no sense at this point in their journey. They were not at the beginning of their relationship with God but at a commitment renewal point, much like a married couple celebrates anniversaries and assures each other of their love not just once but again and again. The commandment to love God was Moses’ profound encouragement and strong, fatherly appeal to choose continual faithfulness to God because God had repeatedly proven Himself to be worthy and continually faithful to them.

So, what about the blessings and curses? We know from other passages that God cares about every creature and sends general blessings to all humanity (Matt. 5:45). In the dynamics of the great controversy, however, there are rules of celestial engagement and consequences to the right and wrong actions of free moral agents. For Israel, God’s special blessings could only be bestowed through the covenant and for the purpose of His glorification among the nations of the world. They had nothing to do with earned favor. On the one hand, the curses are an educational tool, a parenting method; on the other hand, they are simply God’s allowing the natural consequences of deliberate rebellion to take their course. When understood in their context, God’s blessings and curses and the command to love God truly are in full harmony with the gospel.
What relationship do the following verses have with Deuteronomy 30:15–20?

Mark 12:30, 31
Psalm 27:1
Joshua 24:14–28
Genesis 3:1–4
John 14:6
John 3:16

What other verses/promises come to mind in connection with the primary passage?
CHOOSING TO LIVE IS CHOOSING TO DIE

Life and death were probably at the forefront of the Israelites’ minds rather often while they lived in the rugged environment of the desert. The wilderness into which God led them was a harsh, deadly place. If it weren’t for God’s daily provisions (Exod. 16:1–21; Deut. 29:5), the people would not have survived. His presence provided life in a place of death. At the same time, if God hadn’t veiled Himself in the cloud by day and the fire by night, the Israelites would have been consumed in the immediate proximity of His glory and holiness. God wanted to be among His people. He provided the sanctuary and its system to help sinners find life, healing, and forgiveness in His presence. “And let them make Me a sanctuary, that I may dwell among them” (Exod. 25:8). God still wants to dwell among His people. His unveiled holy presence would bring certain death to today’s sinner just as it would to the Israelite, but in His infinite love and grace, He has once again found a way to separate the sin from the sinner: by taking death upon Himself. For both the Israelite and the modern believer, God’s unveiled presence means death, but His grace provides life.

Moses emphasized that to choose God is to choose life (Deut. 30:20). Jesus is Yahweh, the same Lord who led the people of Israel and walked with them, providing His blessings and protection (1 Cor. 10:1–4). Moses’ call to choose life echoes through Scripture and through the ages, appealing to you to choose Jesus Christ, “the way, the truth, and the life” (John 14:6). He is your salvation. He is your righteousness. He is your life! When we allow Jesus to circumcise our hearts, give us new hearts, and purify us from all sin, self-righteousness, and self-sufficiency, His holy presence can enter and remain, doing in us and for us all that we could never do for ourselves. Selfishness dies, and love lives. This process begins with a faith decision, a commitment of total surrender to God based on love. It continues throughout our lives as we invite His purifying holy presence, through the Holy Spirit, to access more and more of our beings each and every day (Luke 11:13). If we cling to Him, our (eternal) lives are secure. Yes, there is death on this side of heaven, but for all who believe, this death is just a type of sleep (John 11:11), an interlude between now and forever.

Satan’s biggest nightmare is Jesus living and thriving in our hearts. He hates people who, despite having joined his rebellion, choose to “defect” back to God (Rev. 12:17). He stops at nothing to ruin our experiences and to make life here as miserable as possible. How grateful we can be that when we choose Jesus, we are also choosing His benevolent protection (2 Thess. 3:3)! We can rest assured that even when He allows a blow from Satan to come near us, He will turn that blow into a victory (Rom. 8:28; 2 Cor. 13:8).
**inSight**

Review the memory verse. How does it apply to your life this week?

After this week's study of the passage, which trajectory are you choosing day to day? Life or death?

How will your daily decision for Christ impact your interactions with people in your life?

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**WEIGHT OF EVIDENCE**

“It is not the plan of God to compel men to yield their wicked unbelief. Before them are light and darkness, truth and error. It is for them to decide which to accept. The human mind is endowed with power to discriminate between right and wrong. God designs that men shall not decide from impulse, but from weight of evidence, carefully comparing scripture with scripture.” (Ellen G. White, *The Spirit of Prophecy*, vol. 2 [1877], 371.)

“The faith that is unto salvation is not a casual faith, it is not the mere consent of the intellect, it is belief rooted in the heart, that embraces Christ as a personal Saviour, assured that He can save unto the uttermost all that come unto God by Him. To believe that He will save others, but will not save you is not genuine faith; but when the soul lays hold upon Christ as the only hope of salvation, then genuine faith is manifested. This faith leads its possessor to place all the affections of the soul upon Christ; his understanding is under the control of the Holy Spirit, and his character is molded after the divine likeness. His faith is not a dead faith, but a faith that works by love, and leads him to behold the beauty of Christ, and to become assimilated to the divine character.... ‘And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live’ (Deuteronomy 30:6).

“It is God that circumcises the heart. The whole work is the Lord’s from the beginning to the end. The perishing sinner may say: ‘I am a lost sinner; but Christ came to seek and to save that which was lost. He says, “I came not to call the righteous, but sinners to repentance” (Mark 2:17). I am a sinner, and He died upon Calvary’s cross to save me. I need not remain a moment longer unsaved. He died and rose again for my justification, and He will save me now. I accept the forgiveness He has promised.’ ” (Ellen G. White, *Selected Messages*, vol. 1 [1958], 391, 392.)

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Read more inSight from the Spirit of Prophecy at www.inversebible.org/GC03-7
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.

What are some examples of choices that lead to life versus choices that lead to death? (Deut. 30:15–19)

How can we reconcile the idea of God’s sovereignty with the idea of individual choice?

How do the consequences of our choices affect not only us but also our communities and future generations?

Is there such a thing as too much freedom?

Why is it impossible for God to offer His creatures eternity without His presence?

How have you seen God bless those who are committed to Him?

How can we explain why it often seems like those who don’t follow God are blessed more than those who serve Him?

How many of God’s blessings are for now, and how many of them are for the future?