

Deuteronomy 30 Death and Life, Blessing and Curse; Choose Life

Some of the choices we make in life have long-term consequences. If we choose one way, we'll be miserable. If we choose another way, we'll enjoy a blessed life; we will flourish. And normally speaking, the basis of life or death, blessings or curses, is obedience to God. Gal 6:7-8.

In Deut 30, Moses is finishing up his long set of sermons to the Israelites. He puts the choice in front of Israel in very stark terms—(.19) life and death, blessing and cursing. They can enjoy life in the PL, or they can experience cursing and death. It's up to them; which would they rather have? He encourages them to “choose life, that both you and your descendants may live.”

Many of our decisions amount to life and death, blessings and cursings. If we want to enjoy life and avoid God's displeasure—if we want blessings and life rather than curses and death—we must love the Lord our God, obey his voice, and cling to him. This text should encourage us to remain faithful to the Lord.

This text contains some timeless principles that still apply to us today.

I. Repentance after rebellion leads to restoration.

A. .1end Moses foresees a time in the future where Israel rebels against God.

1. “all these things” will “come upon you.” Israel will experience the blessings God has promised as they enter and conquer the PL, but then they'll experience the curses Moses warned about at the end of chapter 28.
2. Israel will become complacent and disobedient, even idolatrous, after they settle in the PL.
3. Moses had warned the people about that repeatedly throughout the book of Deut. If they failed to maintain their covenant responsibilities, God would drive them out of the land. Especially if they got into idolatry, God would expel them.

Historically, the Assyrians, the Babylonians, and the Romans drove Israel out of the PL at different times. The Jewish people are still largely dispersed throughout the nations.

The worldwide Jewish population is about 15.7M, with about 7M living in Israel, 6.3M in the US, and the rest elsewhere.

4. .1end While in exile in other lands, Israel might “call [these things] to mind.” They might remember that God had promised to bless them if they obey his commandments.

B. .2 If Israel obeys his voice, they can return to the land. The Lord would restore their fortunes and regather them back to the land. Even after experiencing the threatened curses, Israel could still return to covenant faithfulness and once again enjoy God's blessings.

Note the conditions necessary for this:

1. .2 You return to the Lord. The word “return” (שׁוּב) often carries the idea of repentance in the OT.
 Repentance is turning from sin. When sinners repent, God relents. God delights in showing mercy.
 Repentance would lead to restoration. If Israel repents—even of idolatry—they could once again enjoy God’s blessings on them.
2. .2b You obey his voice. This has some further conditions as well.
 - a) According to all that Moses had commanded
 - b) You and your children – i.e., the entire nation
 - c) With all your heart and soul – i.e., sincerely
3. .3 If they sincerely repent of their sins, the Lord would bring them back from captivity, have compassion on them, gather them from all the nations, and restore them to the land.
Quote: The Hebrew phrase translated “bring you back from captivity” [vs. 3] signifies a total change, a return to a former state, and indicates that Israel would return to the position of being under the blessing of the Lord in their own land.¹
4. .4-5 Even if Israel is driven away to the farthest parts of the world, God would gather them up and bring them back. No matter how bad things got for the Jews, they could come back to the land if they repent and return to covenant faithfulness.
5. The idea of the regathering of Israel is a common theme in OT prophecy.
 Jeremiah 32:37 *Behold, I will gather them out of all countries where I have driven them in My anger, in My fury, and in great wrath; I will bring them back to this place, and I will cause them to dwell safely.*
 Along with a *physical* regathering would be *spiritual* renewal.
6. .6 God would circumcise their hearts—i.e., renew them spiritually so that they love God with their hearts and souls. This is something God will do. God will produce this sincere, inward renewal and revival. Israel would turn back to the Lord in true faith and commitment.
App: True revival and renewal, when it happens, is always produced by God, not by human efforts.
 Revival often begins with repentance—turning back to God. Only when people are humble and repentant will God send revival.

¹ Earl S. Kalland, “Deuteronomy,” in *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary: Deuteronomy, Joshua, Judges, Ruth, 1 & 2 Samuel*, ed. Frank E. Gaebelin, vol. 3 (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Publishing House, 1992), 187.

Personal renewal and revival begin with repentance.

7. .7 The curses Moses had mentioned will fall on their enemies.
Genesis 12:3 *I will bless those who bless you, And I will curse him who curses you; ...*
8. .8 The nation will once again obey God's voice and do his commandments.
9. .9 The nation will enjoy all the blessings that God had promised; covenant *blessing* will follow covenant *obedience*.
 - a) Success in work
 - b) Fertility in producing children
 - c) Productivity with livestock and land
 - d) God will rejoice over them.Jeremiah 24:6–7 *For I will set My eyes on them for good, and I will bring them back to this land; I will build them and not pull them down, and I will plant them and not pluck them up. 7 Then I will give them a heart to know Me, that I am the LORD; and they shall be My people, and I will be their God, for they shall return to Me with their whole heart.*
10. .10 Moses again lists the conditions—obey the voice of God, keep his commandments and statutes written in the law; turn to the Lord sincerely. Covenant blessings come from covenant faithfulness and obedience. If they remain loyal to God, they can expect abundant blessings.

Historically, we know that Israel returned to the land after 70 years of captivity in Babylon (c. 536 BC), and they did well for a while. But ultimately, they did *not* fulfill this prophecy of returning to the land and living there in obedience permanently. Israel was defeated by the Greeks and the Romans and then destroyed as a nation in 70 AD. They were exiled again.

Israel was reconstituted as a nation in 1948 and has persisted until today. It is under constant threat from nearly all of its neighbors. Israel is in the land, but, sadly, the nation remains in stubborn unbelief. The Jews as a whole have not returned to the Lord as described in vs. 2 or vs. 8. This regathering has never happened historically.

The *final* return to the land, a new heart and soul and permanent peace, will ultimately be fulfilled under the new covenant when Jesus returns. The final regathering of Israel will happen around the time of the 2nd Coming. Moses is looking far into the future with this prophecy.

We expect a future restoration and revival for the nation of Israel; these prophecies will be fulfilled; Israel as a nation will return to the Lord – “all Israel will be saved.”

App: For us, we can also return to the Lord after a time of unfaithfulness. When we repent, we can enjoy restoration to a right relationship with God. Cf. 1 John 1:9. Even after serious failure, we can still repent and return to faithfulness. God is merciful and gracious... When we repent, God relents.

However, after serious failure and repentance, it may be impossible to return to a former ministry position. Certain sins disqualify an individual for continued spiritual leadership.

- C. .11-14 Moses asserts that Israel knows God's expectations; God had clearly and repeatedly revealed these commands to Israel.
1. .11 they are not mysterious—too difficult to understand, hard to grasp; i.e., they understand God's commands.
 2. .12 they are not in heaven—beyond your reach; i.e., unattainable, inaccessible.
 3. .13 They are not beyond the sea—it's not at an unattainable distance, at the end of the world.
 4. .14 They are near you, in your mouth and heart—Israel was very familiar with this law. Moses had preached it to them for years. He had written it down for them. They knew it; they could recite it; they could understand it; they could do it.

Moses' point seems to be that Israel is capable of obeying God's law. They know it; they understand it; it is accessible to them; they've learned it. Obedience is possible. So there is no excuse of disobedience. If they go off into idolatry, it's their own fault. If God expels them from the land, it will be because they deserve it.

App: Likewise for us, God's word for us is readily accessible. We have free and easy access to the Bible—like never before. If we are disobedient, it's *not* because we are ignorant of God's commands. There are no excuses; we cannot plead ignorance.

And it's important that we *internalize* God's word—"in your heart." Once it's on the inside, we can "do it." We must adopt the principles of God's word personally so that we can obey them.

Good reason to memorize Scripture.

Ps 119:11 *Thy word have I hid in mine heart, that I might not sin against thee.*

Like the Israelites, we know God's word. We've heard it and read it. We've listened to preachers expound it. It's in our hearts and minds—or it should be. And our goal should be to obey it. If we deny it or neglect it, we should expect discipline/chastisement.

Trans: Repentance leads to restoration, and true restoration and renewal results in obedience to God's commands. There is no revival without repentance and renewed obedience.

If your spiritual life is not what it ought to be, perhaps you need to repent of sin and seek spiritual renewal.

II. .15-20 The choice amounts to life and good or death and evil.

Scholars have noted that this is the climax of the entire book. It's the end of Moses' sermons on the law. He sums up and concludes his messages by demanding a decision—what will Israel do with this exhortation to obey God's law?

Moses lays out a stark choice for Israel. They have two alternatives: life through obedience or death through disobedience. Moses appeals to the people one last time to choose life by obeying God's commands.

A. .15a Life and good will result from loving God and obeying his commands.

1. Life and good – i.e., prosperity and success in the PL will result from loyal obedience to God.
2. They had every opportunity to live under God's blessings in the PL. God guarantees it.

App: There are practical benefits to obedience. Life tends to work out better when we obey the rules that God gives us.

B. .17-18 But if your heart turns away into disobedience and especially toward idolatry, then the result will be death and loss of the PL.

1. Death and evil – i.e., adversity and destruction; eviction from the PL, a miserable existence as foreigners in foreign lands.
2. Their days in the PL would be few and miserable; they would perish under God's curses.
3. .18 If they worship false gods, God will destroy them. If they choose the idols of the pagans, they can expect nothing but death and destruction.

C. .19 Moses calls heaven and earth as witnesses against Israel. Creation itself bears witness that Moses has warned Israel about the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience.

.19b Here is the *grand finale* of the entire book, Moses' final exhortation to the people: "choose life, that both you and your descendants may live." Moses obviously wants the best for his people, and he holds out to them the prospects of all the blessings that God had promised. They could enjoy long life and prosperity in the PL if only they would remain loyal to God.

D. .20 Moses once more states the conditions for the blessed life. Life in the PL depends on whether they do this or not.

1. Love God
2. Obey his voice
3. Cling to him

If Israel remains faithful and loyal to God, God will allow them to dwell and prosper in the land that he promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

So Moses is setting this choice before the people—life or death, blessings or cursings. If you love God and obey his commands, you will enjoy abundant life. If you turn from God and become idolatrous, you'll experience cursing and death. So make the right choice.

That was true for Israel, and it's true for us today. Love for God results in commitment, loyalty, and faithfulness; it leads to obedience to God's commands. Obedience, in turn, leads to an abundant life here and now as well as confidence of a home in heaven.

On the other hand, a life of persistent, unrepentant disobedience leads to adversity, destruction, and ultimate death. There may be pleasure in sin temporarily, but the final result of an unrepentantly sinful lifestyle is spiritual death and eternal separation from God.

Like Moses, I urge all of us to "choose life." First, choose to be saved through repentance of sin and faith in Christ. And second, choose to live in repentance and obedience. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul that you may live (vs. 6end). Follow vs. 10.

.19-20 ... *therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live...love the Lord your God...obey his voice... cling to him, for he is your life and the length of your days.*