

Deuteronomy 30:15–20

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-30/deuteronomy-3015-20>

Moses concludes the chapter (and his last address to the Israelites) by appealing to Israel to choose wisely (each day) between life and death. He reminds Israel that obedience leads to prosperity and life, and disobedience leads to adversity and death.

Starting in v. 15, Moses concluded his addresses (starting in 1:6) with a final exhortation to choose the way of life. He begins by commanding the Israelites to see (v. 15). This word (Heb. “rā’ā,” possibly “observe carefully” or “understand”) is used here to get the people to pay close attention to what was being said. He then told them that he had set *before* them today two alternatives.

The first alternative would lead to *life and prosperity* in the Promised Land. Here, it repeats what the LORD had promised earlier (Deuteronomy 29:9, 30:5). The notion of “life” in this context likely refers to the quality of life, rather than the mere presence of life. The phrase *life and prosperity* would indicate that by choosing to follow in obedience to the two covenants Moses had laid out in Deuteronomy 5:1 through 30:14, Israel can expect to live a life of abundance in all respects.

By following the covenant, Israel will have community health. This would be a natural consequence of choosing to love one another as they love themselves (Leviticus 19:18). They would have familial health, for the same reason, as well as because they taught this self-governing approach toward life to their children (Deuteronomy 6:4-9). They would also have economic and commercial abundance; a society that tells the truth and protects one another’s property lays the foundation for a vibrant economy. On top of the natural consequences, God promised to add abundance, through cooperative weather and protection from enemies (Deuteronomy 28:7,11-12).

If Israel chooses the path of disobeying God’s covenant, it would lead to *death and adversity*. The Hebrew word for *adversity* is “ra’,” usually translated as “evil,” “misery,” or “distress.” The phrase *death and adversity* includes the biblical notion of death as separation. Disobeying the covenant commands

would lead to Israel being separated from the blessings of a self-governing society. In place of love and care for one another would be envy and exploitation. In place of honesty and collaborative industry would be distrust and isolation. Additionally, God would add supernatural chastisement in the form of adverse weather and invasion. Part of the *death and adversity* would ultimately be loss of physical life and freedom to foreign invaders.

Moses summarized what was involved in choosing the way to *life and prosperity* with three infinitive statements, making clear that this was to be an ongoing, daily choice:

- *to love the Lord your God,*
- *to walk in His ways and*
- *to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments* (v. 16).

To love the Lord your God, in this context, was to commit to live in obedience to the LORD Himself. Such a love for God was not only a strong affection for Him but also an expression of submission to His covenantal stipulations (6:4; 11:1; 30:16). This *love* inferred a trust that God's ways were for Israel's good (Deuteronomy 6:24, 8:16; 10:13). *To love* God would include believing that God is who He says He is, and that His promises are real and true. This trust would give way to an obedience rooted in the belief that following God leads to the best possible outcome.

This love was to be the appropriate response to the LORD because He is the compassionate and gracious God who restored Israel and brought them back to the Promised Land (30:1–5). This was a demonstration of God's assertion that He chose Israel to be His people apart from their choices. He chose them simply because He loved them (Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:7-8).

To walk in His ways is to live in accordance with His laws, to live in a manner that would lead to great flourishing of the Israelite community. Such a walk describes Israel's response to the covenantal laws of God, manifested by a sense of dynamic, mutual engagement. If Israel was to *love the Lord*, and recognize that He alone is *God*, then they would recognize that God's blessings were real and true. They would understand that to substitute their own ways, or to listen to the voice of others, was a path of destruction.

To keep God's commandments and His statutes and His judgments is to follow all the covenantal stipulations that are prescribed in the covenant document.

These commands, and this charge to choose wisely, mark the three pillars of self-governance reflected in God's covenant:

- Rule of Law: God made the world and all cause-effect. Only God makes cause-effect. It will not be altered by humans or anyone else.
- Consent of the Governed: God gave Israel the choice. They would decide for themselves whether or not to be blessed. In order to be blessed, they had to believe that loving others as themselves was in their best interest (Leviticus 19:18; Mark 12:31).
- Private property: Each person got to choose for themselves what to do with their lives and possessions. They were not to be coerced or abused.

The purpose of God making the covenant, which made it clear what choices led to blessing, was so that the Israelites might *live and multiply, and that the Lord their God might bless them in the land* of promise. By living in the self-governing manner under the covenant, Israel would acknowledge God as reigning over them (1 Samuel 8:7). In doing so, they would choose a way forward that had the best natural consequences, and would gain additional blessings from God for trusting Him.

Doing these three things (*love, walk, keep*) would result in a prosperous life in the Promised Land. This has always been God's desire for Israel (Deuteronomy 4:1; 5:33; 6:2; 8:1; 16:20).

This command is similar to the promise made in the book of Revelation:

"Blessed is he who reads and those who hear the words of the prophecy, and heed the things which are written in it; for the time is near."

(Revelation 1:3).

Revelation 1:3 offers a great blessing to anyone who 1) reads 2) will hear (understand and agree to) and 3) heed (obey) what is written in Revelation. This is similar to Moses's admonition to Israel to choose to heed the words of God's covenant with them, in order that they might be blessed. Revelation admonishes God's people to be faithful witnesses, and not fear loss, rejection, or even death. God promises great rewards for anyone who overcomes and is a faithful witness (Revelation 1:3; 2:7, 11, 17, 26-29; 3:5, 13, 21; 22:7, 12). It

makes clear that these blessings will be lost if New Testament believers are not faithful witnesses.

As with Israel and New Testament believers, both are God's precious possession because He loved them, independent of their choices (Deuteronomy 4:37; 7:7-8; John 3:14-16; Romans 5:1; 8:38-39). But also as with both Israel and New Testament believers, God gave them a clear decision to make, with clear consequences, then leaves them to choose which path they will take. This pattern began in the Garden of Eden when God gave Adam a clear choice, then left him and Eve to choose whether to follow the path of life or death (Genesis 2:16-17).

In contrast to the blessings Israel will receive for walking faithfully in God's covenant commands, Moses declared to the people that they would *surely perish if* they turned away from worshiping the Suzerain God and refused to obey His laws. In this case, it is likely that God is saying that Israel will *perish* from remaining in the land, as well as *perish* from gaining the promised benefits of the covenant. The word translated *perish* is translated "ruined" in Numbers 21:29. That idea seems to fit here, since God promised that when a future generation rebelled from the covenant, God would exile them from the land (Deuteronomy 29:28) then cause them to return (Deuteronomy 30:1-5). That makes clear that many in Israel would survive physically through Israel's chastisement. The idea rather seems to be that all the great blessings God intended for Israel would be "ruined" if Israel chose the path of disobedience.

They certainly would be ruined if they were *drawn away to worship other gods and serve them* (v. 17). In other words, the Israelites would be severely judged if they worshipped pagan gods and made offerings to them as a way to honor them. Moses told them that this practice of idolatry would *not prolong your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it* (v. 18), meaning the Promised Land. The people would *perish* from the land, and suffer the cursings, which were the agreed-upon consequences for violating the terms of the covenant.

What follows next initially appears to begin to set up a sort of signing ceremony. However, the offer ends up being open-ended; it seems Israel will decide each day whether to obey God's commands.

Moses then appealed to *heaven and earth* to witness the choice that Israel would make. Just as important contracts are made in the presence of witnesses in modern times, so now Moses calls witnesses to this additional covenant. But in this case Moses calls witnesses that will be present to observe future generations, as this additional covenant is to be perpetual, applying both to this second generation from leaving Egypt, as well as future generations from this point onward (Deuteronomy 29:1, 14-15). The witnesses Moses calls are *heaven and earth*.

Moses makes clear that Israel has to make a binary choice. They can choose to follow the covenant, or not follow. The consequences were clear. If they followed the terms of the covenant, they would gain the consequence of *life*. If they did not follow the terms, they would get *death*.

Moses had *set before* them a clear choice: *life and death, the blessing and the curse* (v. 19). This is a restatement of what he declared in Deuteronomy 4:26. Ancient Near East treaties often called witnesses to testify, and here both *heaven and earth* would be permanent witnesses from one generation to the next to testify on God's behalf when His covenant was violated. It seems that each day, *heaven and earth* will witness whether Israel decides to follow in God's ways, and gain His blessings.

Moses urged the Israelites to *choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants*. Moses desires this second generation, to whom he is giving his address to *choose life*. That is because Moses wants them to have the blessings and fulfillment of living an abundant life.

This offer is also made to the *descendants* of this second generation. That means that they will have to decide each day whether to follow in God's ways and receive His blessings as well.

The choice the people of Israel had to make was one of life or death. It appears that here Moses is making it clear that this is a daily choice. Will Israel believe, confess, and do the things God commands? If they do they will be greatly blessed. If they do not, they will not be blessed. They will have substantial adverse consequences instead.

Interestingly, in this additional covenant there is no ask and answer as to whether the people agreed to the covenant, as with the covenant God made with the first generation at Horeb (Exodus 19:8) which was ratified by the

second generation here in Deuteronomy (Deuteronomy 26:17). It appears that this additional covenant is to be kept perpetually, day by day, by believing, confessing and doing the tenants of the law (Deuteronomy 30:14).

This might be why the apostle Paul used Deuteronomy 30 to illustrate the New Testament walk of faith as being the path to gain the experience of righteousness (see commentary on Deuteronomy 30:11-14).

To make sure Israel understood what it meant to choose life and how this could be accomplished, Moses summarized the covenant requirements in three important statements:

- *by loving the LORD your God,*
- *by obeying His voice, and*
- *by holding fast to Him (v. 20).*

In each case, the verb is expressed in perfect tense (*loving, obeying, holding*) which again indicates that this choice is to be made daily, on an ongoing basis.

The Israelites were to love the LORD with all their heart and soul because He is their Suzerain (or Ruler) (Deuteronomy 6:5; Mark 12:29). They were to obey His voice, meaning that they were to always pay close attention to and follow His covenantal instructions. They were to hold fast (Heb. "dābaq," "follow closely") to Him, resulting in not being led away by the false claims of foreign gods and idolatry. These foreign gods would promise benefit, but deliver death.

Faithfully doing these three things, *loving the LORD, obeying His voice, and holding fast to Him* would yield great benefits and would allow God's people to live long *in the land which the LORD swore to their fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them*. God made it plain that a future generation would violate the terms of His covenant with Israel, and be exiled from the land (Deuteronomy 30:17-18). Israel will always be God's people, and God would restore them to the land when they repented (Deuteronomy 30:1-5). However, God makes it clear that it is His desire that each generation walk faithfully, and obey His covenant law, that they might be blessed. That is God's desire, but each generation will make a choice, and experience the consequences of that choice.

Biblical Text:

¹⁵ See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; ¹⁶ in that I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the Lord your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong *your* days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. ¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, ²⁰ by loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the Lord swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.