

January 24, 2021

Blessings/Curses & Life/Death

Deuteronomy 27-30

BIBLE IN A YEAR READING PLAN

Jan 17	Genesis 48-50	Jan 21	Exodus 10-12
Jan 18	Exodus 1-3	Jan 22	Exodus 13-15
Jan 19	Exodus 4-6	Jan 23	Exodus 16-18
Jan 20	Exodus 7-9	Jan 24	Exodus 19-21

Lesson Idea: God calls us to be obedient to receive blessings instead of curses and life instead of death.

Overview of Deuteronomy 27-30

Today we will focus on the call to choose either blessings or curses that concludes Moses' instructions to the wilderness community as they prepared to go into the Promised Land. That call is found in chapter 30, but chapters 27-29 enumerate what those blessings and curses would look like, and what would determine which they received from the hand of the Lord. This overview will share the thrust of those chapters to prepare us for the message of chapter 30. But we encourage you to read through all of them to catch a greater understanding of what is at stake for God's people.

- **Deuteronomy 27-28:**

In chapter 27, Moses commanded the people to have a time of worship when they crossed the Jordan River into the Promised Land. They were to set up altars, divide the tribes between Mount Ebal and Mount Gerizim, and have them pronounce what God said would lead to blessings or curses. This was to be an impressive presentation of the great consequences of obedience or disobedience.

In chapter 28 the first 14 verses enumerated all the ways they would be blessed by God if they would be obedient to Him. But the next 53 verses (v 15-68) warned them about the curses that would multiply against them if they rebelled against the Lord and sought after other gods. **Deuteronomy 28:63-67** sums it up like this:

63 And it will come about that, just as the LORD rejoiced over you to be good to you, and make you numerous, so will the LORD rejoice over you to wipe you out and destroy you; and you will be torn away from the land which you are entering to possess. 64 Furthermore, the LORD will scatter you among all the peoples, from one end of the earth to the other; and there you will serve other gods, made of wood and stone, which you and

your fathers have not known. 65 Among those nations you will find no peace, and there will be no resting place for the sole of your foot; but there the LORD will give you a trembling heart, failing of eyes, and despair of soul. 66 So your lives will be hanging in doubt before you; and you will be terrified night and day, and have no assurance of your life. 67 In the morning you will say, 'If only it were evening!' And at evening you will say, 'If only it were morning!' because of the terror of your heart which you fear, and the sight of your eyes which you will see.

These warnings were given to the nation of Israel, but I can't help but see the parallel for Christians. As people abandon the Lord or just ignore Him, their hearts become overtaken by fear of the terrors of this world. But those who draw near to Christ Jesus hear Him say:

Peace I leave with you; my peace I give to you. Not as the world gives do I give to you. Let not your hearts be troubled, neither let them be afraid. (Luke 14:27)

- **Deuteronomy 29**

Moses emphasized how God had cared for His people even in the wilderness, but that they still were not grateful and completely loyal to Him. **Verses 4-5** explain how they did not possess the heart, eyes, and ears of the Lord to understand the miracle of the forty years of provision:

4 Yet to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to know, nor eyes to see, nor ears to hear. 5 And I have led you in the wilderness for forty years; your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandal has not worn out on your foot.

Moses knew that the people in the future would not remain faithful. He warned them that God would bring curses upon the land for their disobedience. Their punishment would be so severe that the nations around them would notice and be surprised. **Verses 24-29** warn:

24 All the nations will say, 'Why has the LORD done all this to this land? Why this great outburst of anger?' 25 Then people will say, 'It is because they abandoned the covenant of the LORD, the God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt. 26 And they went and served other gods and worshiped them, gods that they have not known and whom He had not assigned to them. 27 Therefore, the anger of the LORD burned against that land, to bring upon it every curse which is written in this book; 28 and the LORD uprooted them from their land in

anger, fury, and in great wrath, and hurled them into another land, as it is this day.'

29 "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our sons forever, so that we may follow all the words of this Law.

Verse 29 states a foundational truth: that God knows things that we do not and cannot. He is all-knowing (omniscient) and fathoms all mysteries, while we are very limited in our knowledge. But God reveals what He wants us to know, and those revelations are eternal and belong to us because He has given them to us. We are called to follow them and teach His truths to our sons and all future generations.

- **Deuteronomy 30**

In chapter 30, Moses shares both hope and challenge. He assures them that if they fall under some future judgment of the Lord for their disobedience, that they can receive forgiveness and restoration. They would need to *return and obey*, and the Lord would *restore*.

Deuteronomy 30:1-14 Restoration Promised

1 "So it will be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have placed before you, and you call them to mind in all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you, 2 and you return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul in accordance with everything that I am commanding you today, you and your sons, 3 then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. 4 If any of your scattered countrymen are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. 5 The LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will be good to you and make you more numerous than your fathers. 6 "Moreover, the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the hearts of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and all your soul, so that you may live. 7 And the LORD your God will inflict all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. 8 And you will again obey the LORD, and follow all His commandments which I am commanding you today. 9 Then the LORD your God will prosper you abundantly in every work of your hand, in the children of your womb, the offspring of your cattle, and in the produce of your ground, for the LORD will

again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers; 10 if you obey the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul.

11 "For this commandment which I am commanding you today is not too difficult for you, nor is it far away. 12 It is not in heaven, that you could say, 'Who will go up to heaven for us and get it for us, and proclaim it to us, so that we may follow it?' 13 Nor is it beyond the sea, that you could say, 'Who will cross the sea for us and get it for us and proclaim it to us, so that we may follow it?' 14 On the contrary, the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may follow it.

Moses told the people that if they ever found themselves crushed by the Lord's judgment and scattered because of it, they could still be restored. He put the responsibility on them to repent. Verse 2 told them to *return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul in accordance with everything that I am commanding you today, you and your sons...*

Repentance involves not just feeling sorry for sin and turning from it; complete repentance is returning to an obedient walk in the ways of the Lord. They were a redeemed and chosen people; the Lord demanded obedience.

There's a long-standing debate about grace and works that tries to put the emphasis on one side or the other. We know that we cannot do any works to earn our salvation or receive extra favor from the Lord – it is all a grace gift from a loving God. But once we have been redeemed, the Lord expects His people to live in humble obedience out of gratitude for that grace and according to the call of service in His Kingdom (see Ephesians 2:8-10). God has given us His Word and His Spirit so that we can discern right from wrong. He expects us to walk in His righteousness and His holiness. When we fail to do that, He calls us to *return* to Him and *obey* Him with everything we are and everything we have. Again, this reminds us that Jesus summed up the Law and the Prophets by telling us our first priority was to *love the Lord your God with all your heart and soul and mind* (Matthew 22:37).

Verse 3 promises that the Lord God would *restore* His people as a result of their repentance. The word "restore" is actually the same Hebrew word (*shub*) as the word "return" in verse 2. Basically, God says "if you will return to Me, I will return to you." This promise is repeated several times in the Bible (such as Isaiah 19:22;

Jeremiah 15:19; Zechariah 1:3; Malachi 3:7; James 4:8). God promised to gather them from their scattered locations and be good to them (v 5). He did this after the Babylonian captivity (6th century B.C.) and Israel responded with a renewed dedication.

In verse 6 Moses also prophesied about something that would only be completely fulfilled through the sacrifice of Jesus and the indwelling of the Holy Spirit. Moses said that God would “circumcise” their hearts so that they would be able **to love the LORD their God with all their heart and soul, so that they may live.** Moses had previously told the people to circumcise their hearts and not to “stiffen their necks” (Deut 10:16).

J.G. McConville in the *New Bible Commentary* writes about God’s activity in this spiritual circumcision:

The new element is that the Lord is seen here taking a decisive new part in their fortunes. It will be by his power that they will be restored to their land. (This is the meaning, in effect, of the phrase *restore your fortunes*; v 3, see also Je. 29:14; 30:3.) Not only this, however, but he will create in them a new ability to be faithful. This is implied by the phrase: *The LORD your God will circumcise your hearts* (6); the same figure of speech in 10:16 had simply been an exhortation. In some mysterious way the Lord will renew the relationship to make his people faithful (though their own need to repent is not bypassed; v 2). This is without lessening the need for their real obedience; they are still responsible for their life with him. The point may be understood in the light of the NT teaching about the role of the Holy Spirit in enabling Christians to overcome their sinful nature (Rom. 8:9-27; Gal. 5:16-25). (J.Gordon McConville, *New Bible Commentary on Deuteronomy*)

Jeremiah prophesied about a day when circumcision would be inward and spiritual not physical (Jer 4:4; 31:33; 32:39), as did Ezekiel in chapters 11 and 36. Paul spoke about the circumcision of the heart in Romans 2:25-29 and Colossians 2:11.

Romans 2:25-29 *25 For indeed circumcision is of value if you practice the Law; but if you are a violator of the Law, your circumcision has turned into uncircumcision. 26 So if the uncircumcised man keeps the requirements of the Law, will his uncircumcision not be regarded as circumcision? 27 And he who is physically uncircumcised, if he keeps the Law, will he not judge you who though having the letter of the Law and circumcision are a violator of the Law? 28 For he is not a Jew who is one outwardly, nor is circumcision that which is outward in the flesh. 29 But he is a Jew who is one inwardly; and*

circumcision is of the heart, by the Spirit, not by the letter; and his praise is not from people, but from God.

Colossians 2:11 *...and in Him you were also circumcised with a circumcision performed without hands, in the removal of the body of the flesh by the circumcision of Christ...*

Verse 9 includes another promise by God for those who are obedient—God will cause them to prosper. This idea has been appropriated in a large section of the modern church as the “prosperity gospel.” They teach that God has obligated Himself to bless us financially if we can name and claim His promises. God makes general promises of well-being and success to the nation of Israel as they walk in His holiness. But to try to relate that to the individual’s wealth pushes it past its limits.

The areas in verse 9 that God promised to bless were all areas of well-being and wholesome life, not wealth and riches. The Lord promised to abundantly prosper their work, their wombs, their livestock, and their crops—all the things they needed for sustenance and joy. This is not a promise to enlarge a person’s bank account. God promised to provide a homeland where they could experience peace and the type of prosperity that promoted what we would call “home.” Instead of looking for riches from the Lord, we should serve Him faithfully, because only He can provide peace and satisfaction and family and wholeness. That’s really what people desire today—the “good life.” According to the Bible, the only way to have the “good life” is to have a “God life.” The Lord must be our center; and when He is, we will experience His blessing. Moses emphasized this again in verse 10 by explaining their part:

10 if you obey the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul.

Verses 11-14 explain that these concepts of obedience and holiness are not too difficult to be grasped. God has made His demands and character so clear, that Moses says they are *very near*, even *in their mouths*. But just because they could speak the Words of God and have a head knowledge of His requirements did not mean that they were righteous. They still had to obediently keep them. J.A. Thompson in the *Tyndale Commentary* says:

God’s will expressed in the covenant did not require deep searching among the mysteries of the universe, for it was as near as hearing and seeing and had been revealed plainly to Israel (29:29). Hence, being in Israel’s

mouth and understanding (heart), it was something that could be acted upon: *you can do it* (cf. Isa. 45:19). Even if there were secrets yet to be revealed, Israel could now enjoy life by loving God and by loyally obeying his covenant. They need not wait to comprehend the universe in order to begin to live. (Thompson, *Tyndale Commentary on Deuteronomy*)

These verses are quoted in the New Testament by Paul in regard to the simplicity and nearness of faith and salvation. In **Romans 10:6-13** Paul writes:

6 But the righteousness based on faith speaks as follows: "DO NOT SAY IN YOUR HEART, 'WHO WILL ASCEND INTO HEAVEN?' (that is, to bring Christ down), 7 or 'WHO WILL DESCEND INTO THE ABYSS?' (that is, to bring Christ up from the dead)." 8 But what does it say? "THE WORD IS NEAR YOU, IN YOUR MOUTH AND IN YOUR HEART"—that is, the word of faith which we are preaching, 9 that if you confess with your mouth Jesus as Lord, and believe in your heart that God raised Him from the dead, you will be saved; 10 for with the heart a person believes, resulting in righteousness, and with the mouth he confesses, resulting in salvation. 11 For the Scripture says, "WHOEVER BELIEVES IN HIM WILL NOT BE DISAPPOINTED." 12 For there is no distinction between Jew and Greek; for the same Lord is Lord of all, abounding in riches for all who call on Him; 13 for "WHOEVER WILL CALL ON THE NAME OF THE LORD WILL BE SAVED."

This is the message we get to proclaim to the world—that Jesus has brought God's great salvation near through His death and resurrection. Moses knew the people would become disobedient even as he shared God's Words with them. But now, through Jesus, we can have a righteousness apart from the law through a heart that believes what our mouths confess—that the risen Jesus is Lord.

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 Choose Life

15 "See, I have placed before you today life and happiness, and death and adversity, 16 in that I am commanding you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, so that you may live and become numerous, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to take possession of it. 17 But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but allow yourself to be led astray and you worship other gods and serve them, 18 I declare to you today that you will certainly perish. You will not prolong

your days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and take possession of it. 19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have placed 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 close to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, so that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them."

It is hard to add anything to what Moses wrote in the concluding verses of chapter 30. This has been the whole message of Deuteronomy. Simply put, you have a choice today to follow the Lord and receive life from the Life Giver; or choose your own path which leads to death. Proverbs repeats a statement a few times that says: *There is a way that seems right to a man, but the end thereof is death* (Prov 14:12; 16:25; see also Romans 6:21). This is true in both the natural (or physical) and the spiritual sense. We know from the full revelation of the Old and New Testaments that every path that does not follow Christ ends in death and destruction.

Thompson reminds us:

The appeal to choose between life and death is common in the Old Testament (Josh. 24:14–24; Jer. 8:3; 21:8, etc.). In the book of Proverbs this appeal has a strong individual sense (Prov. 8:35; 11:19; 12:28; 13:14), whereas in Deuteronomy the appeal is to the whole nation. Even so, the individual was not so swallowed up in the community that he could avoid personal responsibility. Indeed, these final verses (15–20) are expressed in the second singular....

The emphasis on free choice associated with love and obedience towards God is not peculiar to Deuteronomy (cf. Josh. 24:14–16), nor indeed is it unique for Israel. Ready comparison may be made with the New Testament. We have noticed that Paul quotes from verses 11–14 in Romans 10:6–8. But the call to choose (believe, follow) and to obey comes in a variety of contexts in the New Testament (e.g. Matt. 19:17; John 3:36; 6:35; Rom. 6:12–18; 15:18; cf. Rom. 12:1, 2). (J.A. Thompson, *Tyndale*)

We do well to heed the voice of the Holy Spirit as He calls through Moses:

19 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have placed before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live!