

God's Ultimatum Regarding Obedience

Lesson Scope: Deuteronomy 27-30

Lesson Focus

In this lesson, Moses makes a personal appeal to the generations that grew up during the wilderness wanderings. He appeals to the people on the basis of God's mighty, repeated acts of provision and deliverance (29:1-10).

Most of the Israelites had no memory of God's previous renewal of the covenant at Mount Sinai, which was a renewal of the covenant made with Abraham. This covenant of redemption is the focus of God's Word from Genesis to Revelation.

God held before His people the opportunity to enter into covenant with Him for their good and blessing. He invited and commanded their right response, but He would not force it upon them against their will. Their voluntary choice, based on faith and love, would bring unimaginable blessing. No one can remain neutral in the presence of God's revelation. Our response will bring us life or death, blessing or cursing.

Read the entire lesson scope, but especially study chapters 29 and 30 to get the background of the lesson. This instruction was given to Old Testament saints, but the principles transcend the Old Covenant. Follow the progression of the lesson as it relates to the choice to obey or disobey. We are all given the ability to choose to obey God or to disobey, but we cannot choose the consequences of that choice.

Lesson Aim: To see the involvements of our choice to obey or disobey.

Theme Verse: Deuteronomy 30:19. I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live.

Lesson Text

A Covenant People

Deuteronomy 29:1 ¹ These *are* the words of the covenant, which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, beside the covenant which he made with them in Horeb.

Deuteronomy 29:11-15 ¹¹ Your little ones, your wives, and thy stranger that *is* in thy camp, from the hewer of thy wood unto the drawer of thy water: ¹² That thou shouldest enter into covenant with the LORD thy God, and into his oath, which the LORD thy God maketh with thee this day: ¹³ That he may establish thee to day for a people unto himself, and *that* he may be unto thee a God, as he hath said unto thee, and as he hath sworn unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. ¹⁴ Neither with you only do I make this covenant and this oath; ¹⁵ But with *him* that standeth here with us this day before the LORD our God, and also with *him* that *is* not here with us this day:

An Instructed People

Deuteronomy 29:29 ²⁹ The secret *things belong* unto the LORD our God: but those *things which are revealed belong* unto us and to our children for ever, that *we* may do all the words of this law.

Deuteronomy 30:1-3 ¹ And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call *them* to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee, ² And shalt return unto the LORD thy God, and shalt obey his voice according to all that I command thee this day, thou and thy children, with all thine heart, and with all thy soul; ³ That then the LORD thy God will turn thy captivity, and have compassion upon thee, and will return and gather thee from all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath scattered thee.

Deuteronomy 30:11 ¹¹ For this commandment which I command thee this day, it *is* not hidden from thee, neither *is* it far off.

Deuteronomy 30:14-16 ¹⁴ But the word *is* very nigh unto thee, in thy mouth, and in thy heart, that thou mayest do it. ¹⁵ See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil; ¹⁶ In that I command thee this day to love the LORD thy God, to walk in his ways, and to keep his commandments and his statutes and his judgments, that thou mayest live and multiply: and the LORD thy God shall bless thee in the land whither thou goest to possess it.

A Warned People

*Deuteronomy 30:17-20*¹⁷ But if thine heart turn away, so that thou wilt not hear, but shalt be drawn away, and worship other gods, and serve them;¹⁸ I denounce unto you this day, that ye shall surely perish, *and that ye shall not prolong your days upon the land, whither thou passest over Jordan to go to possess it.*¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, *that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:*²⁰ That thou mayest love the LORD thy God, *and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them.*

Questions for Study

A Covenant People

1. Why did Israel need a covenant at this time if they had made a similar one at Horeb?
2. Would refusing to enter a covenant with God have freed Israel from the curse? Explain.
3. On what occasions should we be making covenants with God?

An Instructed People

4. For what purpose would God drive Israel out of their land to live among the nations?
5. How can God's people avoid the typical cycle of forsaking Him and then repenting?

A Warned People

6. What abiding principle confronted Israel in Deut. 30:19-20?
7. In what ways does our choice to obey or disobey God affect the eternal destiny of our posterity?

Analyzing the Passage

Oath (Deut. 29:12, 14) refers to the curse that came to a person who broke the covenant.

Driven (Deut. 30:1) indicates that God would actively remove them from their land if they broke the covenant. To "call them to mind" (Deut. 30:1) is to remember. God would drive them into other lands not to destroy them but to bring them to their senses.

"It is not hidden from thee" (Deut. 30:11). God was not deceptive or vague

about what He expected from His people.

"If thine heart turn away" (Deut. 30:17) points to the real cause of disobedience—a heart that is not loyal to God.

God's covenant is a covenant of love (Deut. 30:16). This covenant teaches God's love for His people and His people's love for God. God loves us and will continue to love us as we respond with loving devotion. But if we refuse Him, He will respond in wrath and judgment.

Principles and Applications

A Covenant People

1. The choice to obey or disobey is a spiritual choice (Deut. 29:1, 10). Obedience to revealed truth opens man's heart to perceive what physical ears cannot hear and what physical eyes cannot see (John 7:17). This choice to obey or disobey God's commands leads either to greater spiritual illumination or to spiritual darkness.

2. Everyone needs to decide, for or against God (Deut. 29:10-11). It did not matter whether a person was a hewer of wood, a drawer of water, or a noble in Israel; he needed to make a personal choice to follow God. The covenant that their parents had made with God did not automatically cover the next generation.

The choice to follow God is an ongoing one. Looking back to covenant-making times will never get us to the Promised Land if we fail in choosing daily to keep that commitment.

3. To choose God involves a voluntary commitment to enter into a covenant with Him (Deut. 29:12-13). God will not force us to follow Him or to do His will. God did not compel Pharaoh to let Israel go, but Pharaoh could not control the consequences of his choice. God sets before us the opportunity and responsibility to choose to follow Him.

4. Our choice affects future generations (Deut. 29:14-15). If we choose God's way, our posterity has the privilege of being taught about God and avoiding many sinful habits. If we choose to reject the covenant, our posterity will grow up lacking both the knowledge and experience of the Biblical way of life. God's call to them likely will be drowned out by pleasures and worldly cares.

An Instructed People

5. To disobey God's covenant results in alienation from Him (Deut. 30:1). To disobey God is to choose another master—a grievous insult to the One who has done so much for us. To live without God is to have a restless in-

ner void, to have no source of help in trouble, and to have no hope for the future. What a bleak and meaningless existence!

6. God will turn to those who turn to Him (Deut. 30:1-3). Israel often drifted away from God, but when they repented, He extended mercy, compassion, and restoration (Psalm 107:17-21). How easily we stray from the path of truth! But our loving Shepherd is ready to forgive us when we sincerely repent and seek His face.

7. The requirements and conditions of the covenant are clearly given and must be obeyed (Deut. 30:11, 14). God has given a clear and final revelation of His will in His Word. We need not be in doubt or confusion about what He expects of us. As we bow in humility to His sovereign lordship, the blessings of the covenant will be ours.

8. Love for God needs to motivate our choice to obey Him (Deut. 30:15-16). Love is more than an emotion; it is a choice and a commitment. Willing surrender is the ultimate expression of our love to God (John 14:15; 1 John 5:3). A servant who obeys only when his master is present or when he fears the wrath of the master does not bring glory to his master as one who willingly obeys and seeks to serve. If we truly love and respect our Master, we will choose to obey Him.

A Warned People

9. Disobedience to God affects men in this life and in the future (Deut. 30:17-18). Disobedience sets man on a downward course that influences all of his earthly life and also his destiny. That choice influences his family and friends as well. One's first deviation from God's will is no indication of how far down he will go. God may place roadblocks in the path of the wayward to help him face reality. Even the reaping for disobedience is a loud call to repent and change course. Now is the day of salvation; tomorrow the sinner may be in eternity and beyond hope.

10. God is the divine witness of our choices and will relate to us according to what we choose (Deut. 30:19-20). Every person is limited to the same two choices—for God or against Him. The spiritual state of others is not always clear to us, but God knows the heart with all its desires and attitudes. He will judge accordingly.

Important Teachings

1. The choice to obey or disobey is a spiritual choice (Deut. 29:1, 10).
2. Everyone needs to decide for or against God (Deut. 29:10-11).

3. To choose God involves a voluntary commitment to enter into a covenant with Him (Deut. 29:12-13).
4. Our choice affects future generations (Deut. 29:14-15).
5. To disobey God's covenant results in alienation from Him (Deut. 30:1).
6. God will turn to those who turn to Him (Deut. 30:1-3).
7. The requirements and conditions of the covenant are clearly given and must be obeyed (Deut. 30:11, 14).
8. Love for God needs to motivate our choice to obey Him (Deut. 30:15-16).
9. Disobedience to God affects men in this life and in the future (Deut. 30:17-18).
10. God is the divine witness of our choices and will relate to us according to what we choose (Deut. 30:19-20).

Answers to Questions

1. Why did Israel need a covenant at this time if they had made a similar one at Horeb?

This was another generation. Each generation must personally choose to serve God. The reality is that the child of God needs to choose daily to keep the covenant he has made with God.

2. Would refusing to enter a covenant with God have freed Israel from the curse? Explain.

No. Refusing to covenant with God is choosing to disobey Him, and it brings the resultant curse.

3. On what occasions should we be making covenants with God?

At baptism we make a public covenant with God to renounce sin, Satan, the works of darkness, and our own carnal will. Every baptism we attend should be a recommitment to that covenant. Every morning we ought to make a covenant to obey God in the new day He has granted us.

4. For what purpose would God drive Israel out of their land to live among the nations?

God drove them out of their land as part of the curse for turning away from Him.

5. How can God's people avoid the typical cycle of forsaking Him and then repenting?

God provides sufficient grace so that we need never fall. We must continually consider our inherent weakness and humbly seek divine grace to live

in obedience to our covenant.

6. What abiding principle confronted Israel in Deut. 30:19-20?

Disobedience brings death, but obedience brings life. God gave Adam and Eve life but warned them of death if they disobeyed. In our lesson today, Moses holds forth the same principle. Galatians 6:7, 8 presents this principle as reaping what we sow.

7. In what ways does our choice to obey or disobey God affect the eternal destiny of our posterity?

Our choice to obey God will give our children the advantage of knowing about God and being in circumstances that favor making the right choice. They will have a godly example to follow. They will not be exposed to as much sin and temptation. But, like Israel, their parents cannot choose for them. If we choose to disobey God, all the aforementioned aids will not be available to our children, and we could be the cause of their eternal ruin.

Summarizing the Lesson

"Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, to execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.... But ye, beloved, building up yourselves on your most holy faith, praying in the Holy Ghost, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life" (Jude 14-15, 20-21).

Research Guide

1. Exodus 21:1-6 shows us a beautiful type of how our love should cause us to serve God.
2. Look up the references found in a topical Bible under "Obedience—Enjoined" and "Disobedience to God—Denunciations Against" for your own inspiration.