

With All Your Heart

Three Crucial Choices You Must Make

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Week 9

Deuteronomy 28:64-67; 30:11-20; 34:1-8

1. What is a choice you've made that changed the direction of your life?

As we near the end of Deuteronomy, we're going to focus on three crucial choices we must make. Here are the options. Will you choose . . . Hope or despair? Blessings or curses? Life or death?

When it comes to life's most important issues, God gives us a choice. The Hebrews wandered in the desert for 40 years. Now they were on the verge of entering the Promised Land. It was time to decide: Would they trust and obey God, or not? In chapter 28, God warned that if they forgot him and served other gods, he would scatter them among other nations.

Among those nations you will find no repose, no resting place for the sole of your foot. There the Lord will give you an anxious mind, eyes weary with longing, and a despairing heart. You will live in constant suspense, filled with dread both night and day, never sure of your life. In the morning you will say, "If only it were evening!" and in the evening, "If only it were morning!"—because of the terror that will fill your hearts and the sights that your eyes will see (Deuteronomy 28:65-67, NIV).

2. When have you experienced fear or anxiety from a feeling of constant dissatisfaction?

Verse 65 says God will "give you an anxious mind" and "a despairing heart." It's not that he wants us to worry. But anxiety can be a sign that something is wrong. If everything is going great, we tend to be complacent and self-satisfied. But when we're under stress, it makes us realize how much we need the Lord. And in those moments of stress, you have a choice--Will you choose Hope or Despair?

This seems obvious. We need hope like a fish needs water or like our lungs need oxygen. But the Bible says that without Christ, we are "without hope and without God in the world" (Ephesians 2:12). Our hope in Christ isn't just vague optimism or wishing on a star. It is confident expectation rooted in the real, historical fact that Jesus Christ rose from the dead. We serve a risen Savior.

- You don't have to wallow in despair.
- Choose hope! Read 1 Peter 1:3 and 1 Peter 3:15

In Deuteronomy 30, God asks the Israelites to renew the covenant they made with him 38 years earlier at Mt. Sinai. "This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses . . ." (Deuteronomy 30:19, NIV).

In those days, legal agreements laid out the benefits of keeping the covenant and the consequences of breaking it. In Deuteronomy 27, the 12 tribes of Israel gathered at two mountains located right across from each other. It's in Palestine, in the region known as the West Bank.

- Mount Gerizim was the mountain of blessing. Six tribes stood there to hear God's blessings for obedience.
- Across the valley, Mount Ebal was the mountain of cursing. The other six tribes of Israel stood on Mount Ebal and heard curses for disobedience.
- The priests and Levites stood in the valley between the mountains reading God's laws. After each blessing and curse, the tribes responded by saying "Amen."

The acoustics matter here. The valley between the two mountains acts like a natural amplifier, so voices carry. People on the opposite slopes could hear what was said on each side of the valley.

3. Which mountain would you want to be on . . . Blessings or Curses? What are some choices you have made that brought either blessings or consequences you later regretted?

Deuteronomy chapters 27 and 28 list one blessing and curse after another. The blessings are great to read. For example, Deut. 28:12-13. But the consequences of disobedience are painful to read. The curse list is long and scary: Like Deut. 27:18, 19 and Deut. 28:16, 19, 20, and 23.

Why are these chapters in the Bible? Well, it isn't to show that God is cruel. He's telling us the truth about sin and the world's brokenness. A lot of times in life, things just don't go right. Ever since the

Garden of Eden, the earth has been under a curse caused by sin. According to Romans 8, the universe is going through the pains of childbirth waiting for God to make all things new. So, we have earthquakes and heart aches, violence and viciousness. “Evil” is “Live” spelled backwards. The curse of sin has wrecked our environment, damaged our relationship with God, and messes up our relationships with others.

You might think that these curses only applied to the Hebrews in Moses’ day but take a look at what the Apostle Paul writes in the New Testament. “For all who rely on the works of the law are under a curse, as it is written: “Cursed is everyone who does not continue to do everything written in the Book of the Law” (Galatians 3:10, NIV). That’s a quote from Deuteronomy 27:26! “Do everything written in the Book of the Law.” Everything!

4. What thoughts come to mind when you hear that you are cursed for breaking even one of God’s laws?

If you think you are good enough to earn your own salvation, you’re wrong. The rule is, keep God’s whole law perfectly—or we’re under a curse. This is really bad news. We’ve all sinned and fall short of the glory of God.

But there’s good news. Look what the next verse in Galatians says. Christ redeemed us from the curse of the law by becoming a curse for us, for it is written: “Cursed is everyone who is hung on a pole” (Galatians 3:13, NIV). That’s another quote from Deuteronomy (21:23)! Jesus Christ took the curse for us. He bore our sins when he died on the cross. The very manner of his death—being nailed to a cross and lifted up on a pole or a tree—put him under a curse.

5. Jesus kept God’s law, but he suffered the penalty for breaking it. We have broken God’s law over and over again, but we escape the penalty. How does this truth impact your love for Jesus?

Have you made the choice to accept God’s blessings of forgiveness and grace? Jesus alone can remove the curse.

Mt. Gerazim, “Blessing Mountain,” is located north of Israel in a region called Samaria. A city was built there called Sychar. Today it’s known as Shechem or Nablus. According to John chapter 4, this is the place where Jesus sat down and talked with the woman at Jacob’s well. That well is still there. Jesus sat there between Curse Mountain and Blessing Mountain and promised a woman with a messy life that he could give her “living water” to drink.

God tell the prophet Jeremiah: "My people have committed two sins. They have forsaken me, the spring of living water, and have dug their own cisterns, broken cisterns that cannot hold water" (Jeremiah 2:13).

We all might be thirsty for God. But you can't quench your spiritual thirst by digging your own cisterns. They don't hold water.

- Materialism is a leaky cistern. It says, "indulge yourself" and fill the void with cars, money, and toys.
- Hedonism is a leaky cistern. It says, "enjoy yourself." Eat, drink, and be merry.
- Humanism is a leaky cistern. It says, "trust yourself." I don't need God.
- Workaholism says "push yourself." Stay so busy you don't have time to think about God.
- New Age-ism says, "worship yourself" and make up your own rules.

All of these "isms" lead to pessimism, where you just "resign yourself" and feel depressed. They are cracked, leaky cisterns that don't hold water. There's only one way to satisfy your spiritual thirst. David wrote, "O God, you are my God, earnestly I seek you; my soul thirsts for you, my body longs for you, in a dry and weary land where there is no water" (Psalm 63:1, NIV).

6. What leaky cisterns have you been digging that are keeping you from quenching your spiritual thirst?

Jesus said, "If anyone is thirsty, let him come to me and drink" (John 7:37, NIV). Does this seem hard to you? Read Deuteronomy 30:11-14, 19-20 NIV.

"Now choose life." Unless Jesus comes back first, we're all going to die. That's a fact. Deuteronomy chapter 34 tells how Moses died.

And Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said. He buried him in Moab...but to this day no one knows where his grave is. Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone. The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over (Deuteronomy 34:5-8, NIV).

We get to choose--will we die trusting and loving the Lord with all our heart, or will we die without him? What you believe determines how you grieve. What you believe determines how you live. 2,000 years ago, Christ chose to come to earth. And he chose to lay down his life for you. He said, "I have authority to lay [my life] down and authority to take it up again." That's the choice he made.

You can choose to believe and welcome Jesus Christ into your heart as your Savior and Lord. Why would you try to live without him? You don't get to choose when you are born, but you can choose to be born again is a choice you get to make. You can choose to repent of your sin and let God's will guide your life, instead of trying to do things your own way. You can be baptized in the name of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit, identifying with Christ in his death, burial, and resurrection, surrendering your life and your eternity to him.

7. If you have chosen to follow Jesus, how can you impact others in helping them make this choice?