

NOW CHOOSE LIFE

Deuteronomy 12-30

Key verse 30:19

"This day I call heaven and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live."

The book of Deuteronomy was written for the next generation of Israelites who were not born in Egypt but in the desert. In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses first reminded the next generation of God's gracious guidance and care as they wandered in the desert from Mount Horeb in Sinai to the border of the promised land in Moab (chapters 1-3). Then Moses prepared their hearts to receive the Law by teaching them the most important principle: "Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." (Deuteronomy 6:4.5) Specifically, they could do this by obeying God's law, especially the Ten Commandments. Then they would experience God's blessing (Chapter 11). Today's text deals with the laws that Moses proclaimed to the Israelites (chapters 12-26). Knowledge and obedience to these laws is the basis for the covenant with God and for the choice between blessing and curse and life and death (chapters 27-30).

At the beginning of his revolutionary Sermon on the Mount, Jesus taught that he did not come to abolish the law, but to fulfill it: „I tell you the truth, until heaven and earth disappear, not the smallest letter, not the least stroke of a pen, will by any means disappear from the Law until everything is accomplished. Anyone who breaks one of the least of these commandments and teaches others to do the same will be called least in the kingdom of heaven, but whoever practices and teaches these commands will be

called great in the kingdom of heaven.“ (Mt 5:18,19)

We face the new year 2020 like the Israelites faced the promised land. I believe that it will be a historic year for each of us and for our ministry of discipleship education. I pray that today we can remember the law of God, renew our covenant with God and choose life.

I. Moses proclaims the Law of the Lord (Chapter 12-26:27)

Let's look at chapter 12, verse 1: "These are the decrees and laws you must be careful to follow in the land that the Lord, the God of your fathers, has given you to possess-as long as you live in the land." The laws that Moses proclaimed to the next generation, together with the commandments, formed the basis of the covenant with God and of life as God's people in the promised land. It is good that we study these laws through factual study. In this way we can get to know the most important contents and principles and transfer the holy law of God to the present time.

1) Provisions regarding the sacrifice (Chapter 12)

The Israelites should worship God not in the way of the Gentiles, but in God's way. For this they were to completely destroy the places of sacrifice of the Gentiles (1-3). Nor should they imitate the idolatry of the Gentiles, who burned even their sons and

daughters with fire (30:31). God does not want human sacrifices or great gifts. God desires burnt offerings, sacrifices, tithes, holy offerings, vows, and firstfruits (6). We have come to know these sacrifices and what they mean through Leviticus Bible study. God wanted the Israelites to offer the sacrifices in the place of God (5,11,14,26) rather than at their own discretion (8,13). This principle appears again and again in the following laws. This shows the importance of the spiritual center. God rejoices in a joyful sacrifice (7,12,18), in which the whole family, sons and daughters, servants and maidservants, and the servants of God, the Levites, participate. This is also a principle that is repeated in the following laws. Neither should the Israelites offer defective sacrifices to God (15:21; 17:1).

2) Warning against seduction to idolatry (Chapter 13; 16:21-17:7)

Idolatry is the breaking of the first two commandments of the Ten Commandments. Moses warned against the seducers to idolatry. They make the Israelites fall away from God, who had saved them from their old lives, and lead them away from the way of God as a royal priesthood and as a holy people (6,11). Such people the Israelites should not follow or obey under any circumstances (4,9). Also, they should deal with such people, whether they are false prophets and dreamers, brother, son, daughter or wife, or even a city, in a very consistent manner and put away evil from their midst.

3) Supply laws (14:1-21)

As children of God and as a holy people of God, the Israelites should not scratch themselves or modify their bodies (1,2). They should also observe the food laws.

4) Tithing (14:22-28; 26:12-15)

The gift of tithing was an absolute part of the laws that were the basis for the covenant of God as the people of God. By tithing, the Israelites learn to fear God throughout their lives (23). Through this, the

Israelites would experience God's blessing in all the works of their hand (24).

5) The Year for cancelling debts and the Release of Hebrew Slaves (15:1-18)

The Israelites were to cancel debts from their neighbor after seven years at the latest in the year of remission (2). In principle, the Israelites should not be poor; for if they obeyed God and kept all the commandments, they would experience God's blessing and would not borrow from others but lend to others (4-6).

The Israelites were not to exploit their slaves without end, but rather to release them in the seventh year with rewards, remembering that they had also been servants in the land of Egypt who had been redeemed by the intervention of God alone (12-15).

6) Sanctification of the firstborn and offering of the first fruits (15:19-22; 26:1-11)

The Israelites were not to use the firstborn of cattle and sheep for themselves (15:19), but to sanctify them to the Lord and offer them to God as sacrifice in the place of God (15:20). They were also to offer the firstfruits of all crops to God in the place of God as sacrifice (26:2), confessing and acknowledging that God in his one-sided grace had saved them from Egyptian slavery and led them into the land of promise (26:3-10).

7) Annual festivals (16:1-17)

According to the Book of Leviticus, there are seven annual feasts, but Moses' command to the Israelites to keep three main feasts on which they should appear before the Lord in the place of God.

The first main feast was the Passover and the Feast of Unleavened Bread, which lasted seven days. This enabled the Israelites to remember the miserable life in Egypt and the day of redemption (3).

The second main feast was the feast of weeks. The Israelites were allowed to give a voluntary gift by remembering that they

had been servants in Egypt (12).

The third main festival was the Feast of Tabernacles, which was celebrated after the harvest and lasted for seven days. This allowed the Israelites to give thanks for God's blessing and to share their gratitude with the rest of the people (15).

8) Provisions for kings (17:14-20)

The Israelites were not supposed to choose a king, but to set over themselves the king whom God would choose (15). This king was not allowed to be a stranger, but should be one of the brothers.

There were instructions for the king: He was not to lead the people back into Egypt, into the old life (16). He should neither have many wives nor collect much gold and silver (17). He should have the Word of God written in a book, always have it with him, read in it all his life to learn to fear the Lord and to keep and do all the words of the law and not deviate from them, neither to the right nor to the left (18-20).

According to these criteria, spiritual education through intensive Bible study, spiritual fellowship and spiritual discipline training is a royal education. Through spiritual education, God wants to raise our sheep and next generation as His royal priesthood and as the global leaders for this generation.

9) Right and false prophets (18:9-22)

The godless peoples practiced divination, clairvoyance, secret arts, sorcery, spells, necromancy and sign reading, even letting sons and daughters pass through the fire. In this way, the people of these nations tried to find out and influence the will of God. But these practices are an abomination to the Lord and the reason why the Lord drives out the godless nations. God's people do not need to resort to the practices of the godless nations, for God reveals Himself to them through His prophets who speak His word (18). God commanded His people to obey them (15).

10) Designation of free cities (19:1-13)

The Israelites were to designate three free cities (2,7). There someone could flee who had killed a person without intention (4-6).

But the murderer with intention should receive his just punishment for his murder (12). The murder committed with premeditation can be recognized by the hatred (11). Hate is not a harmless sin that leads to murder.

11) Against false witness (19:14-21)

God hates false testimony. A false witness is supposed to receive the treatment that he wanted to give his brother through his false testimony (19).

12) Laws of war (Chapter 20; 23:10-15)

In war the Israelites were not to trust in the size of their army or the number of their horses, but in the Lord who had led them out of the land of Egypt (1). If God were to give them victory over the nations that lived in the Promised Land, whose territory they would take over, they were to execute the ban on these nations (16-18) so that they would not be led to idolatry.

13) Laws for the protection of women and the purity of marriage (21:10-14; 22:13-23,1; 24:1-5)

A man was not allowed to separate from his wife except in the case of adultery (22:13-20). Adultery is sin before God and should be punished by death (22:21-24). If a man has entered into sexual intercourse with an unmarried woman, he must marry her and may not separate from her throughout his life (22:28-29). This law says that marriage has something to do with responsibility. Re-marriage to a married woman is an abomination to the Lord (24:4).

In addition to the above points, there are several other provisions (16:18-20; 17:8-13; 18:1-8; 21:1-9; 21:15-22:12; 23:2-9; 23:16-26; 24:6-22; chapter 25). These govern jurisdiction (16:18-20; 17:8-13), the right of priests and Levites (18:1-8), atonement for murder by unknown hand (21:1-9), the right of the firstborn (21:15-17), death penalty for

disobedient sons (21:18-21), burial of a hanged man (21:22-23), various regulations for the life of the people (22:1-12; 23:16-26), admission to the church of the Lord (23:2-9), rights of the weak and poor (24:6-22) and other protective provisions (25:1-6). The right of the firstborn is a double share of the inheritance (21:17). Genderism is an abomination to the Lord (22:5). Robbery is a sin worthy of death (24:7). The Amalekites, who attacked the Israelites and slew the weak and stragglers during the Exodus from Egypt, when Israel was in need, were to be wiped out (25:17-19). The Israelites were to keep the above commandments and then do them with all their heart and soul (26:16). Then they would be God's holy people, and God would make them supreme over all nations (26:19).

On entering the Promised Land, the Israelites were to write all the words of this Law on large stones and set them up on Mount Ebal (27:2-3) and hear the 12 curses (27:11-26), which are a summary of the major deadly sins of the Law.

II. Now choose life (Chapters 28-30)

Chapter 28 deals with the announcement of blessings and curses. Blessing and curse are not a coincidence or a question of life circumstances or individual ability. Blessing and curse are a consequence of obedience or disobedience to the Lord and all His commandments.

Let us look at verses 1 and 2: "If you fully obey the Lord your God and carefully follow all his commands I give you today, the Lord your God will set you high above all the nations on earth.

All these blessings will come upon you and accompany you if you obey the Lord your God:" What blessings would God bestow on His people if they obeyed the voice of the Lord and kept His commandments, not deviating from them to the right or to the left? God would bless them abundantly in all things (3-6,8,11-12). God would strike the

enemies before them (7). Above all, God would lift them up to be holy people, so that all nations would know the Lord and fear God (9,10). They would lend to other nations and become the head and always rise up (13,14).

Let's look at verse 15: "However, if you do not obey the Lord your God and do not carefully follow all his commands and decrees I am giving you today, all these curses will come upon you and overtake you: " The consequence of disobedience is very serious. God would destroy the Israelites by striking them with want, fear of enemies, fruitlessness, and all kinds of sickness and misfortune (20-42). They would sink deeper and deeper and become a tail (43,44). They would be ruled by an alien people for whom they would serve as slaves (48-52). They would descend into unbelievable poverty and misery (53-57). Finally, they would be scattered (64) and returned to Egypt (68). A life without obedience and spiritual discipline looks free and comfortable. But it is a terrible and cursed life.

In Moab, God made a covenant with the next generation of Israelites (chapter 29). A covenant is a firm relationship with clearly defined arrangements, benefits and punishments, like a marriage covenant. This covenant was replaced in the New Testament by the covenant of the blood of Jesus. Nevertheless, the character of the covenant has not changed. God does not want to live with his people in a flat-sharing relationship, but always strives to enter into a firm covenant with them.

The basis of the covenant was the grace of God, who had led his people out of Egypt and provided for them during the desert migration and gave them victory over their enemies (1-8).

The day when Israel entered into the covenant with God was a historic day. It was the covenant with God that elevated the people of Israel to the people of God (12). The conditions of the covenant were that the Israelites should not imitate the

abominations nor the idolatry of the Canaanite peoples (16,17). If the Israelites were to break the covenant, they would be struck by all the curses written in the book of Deuteronomy and be wiped out (19-27). How could the next generation live in the covenant with God as the blessed people of God? Let us read verse 29: "The secret things belong to the Lord our God; but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law."

Finally, Moses challenged the next generation of the people of Israel to choose between life and death (Chapter 30). The whole purpose of Deuteronomy was to give the Next Generation the basis to make the choice between life and death, or as Professor Werner Gitt put it, to make the choice between the death train and the life train. Let us read verse 19: "This day I call heaven and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live." What is the key to life?

1) The privilege of repentance. God knew that the Israelites would break the covenant, not because the demands of the covenant were too high, but because they rebelled against God in their hearts (29:18). As a result, they would be struck by all the curses that were already known to them before, and would be rejected and scattered by God. But there was a way out of the misery: In verses 1-10 the core words are "convert" (2,10) and "repent" (8). The word "repentance" means conversion to God. Repentance means that even with one's children one again obeys the voice of God and obeys God's commandments (2,8,10), with all one's heart and soul. Then God will restore his people, no matter how deeply they have sunk: First he will gather them out of dispersion and captivity (3-5). Then he will circumcise and heal their hearts (6). Finally he will remove all curses from them (7) and again bring blessings upon them (9). This is why we speak of the "privilege of repentance".

2) The key to life is to obey and do God's Word (14,16). To do God's word, one must study God's word. God's Word is not too high or too far away. It is a great privilege that our next generation and our sheep can study God's Word every week through Factual Study and one-to-one Bible study and apply it through testimony writing.

A young man wasted his life and material on gambling and youthful lust. He caused his parents great concern. But through a shepherd he was able to seize the privilege of repentance based on the word of Deuteronomy 6:5: "Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength." Instead of continuing to worship the idols of this world, he chose to study God's Word and obey God's Word. He chose the life of working with God's servant and God's people and grazing Jesus' sheep on campus. He was able to finish his Master's degree with the best grade and became a business manager in a start-up. He also became a very attractive marriage candidate. God is now guiding him through difficulties of some kind through the difficulties of his wife. I pray that he will hold on to Deuteronomy 6:5 and continue to choose life through obedience to God's calling and God's Word.

One teenager had a noise problem by making uncontrolled sounds. He was also a bad student. But through the word of John 1:8,9, he was able to take the privilege of repentance: "If we claim to be without sin, we deceive ourselves and the truth is not in us. If we confess our sins, he is faithful and just and will forgive us our sins and purify us from all unrighteousness." He repented of his desires and chose the life of accepting spiritual training as a 3rd generation missionary through early morning prayer, playing instruments and learning at school and obedience to his parents and grandparents. God blessed him to become an A student. During his year abroad in America, he kept up the early morning prayer and testimony letter by sending his Daily Bread or testimo-

ny home every day and every week. May God help him to choose life, namely the spiritual heritage, and grow as a servant of God and Bible teacher who does not let a word of God fall to the earth.

I wanted to become a doctor and a clinic director to overcome my human disadvantages as a foreigner. But God helped me to choose life with Ezra 7:10, namely to put my heart on it instead of making a career in the clinic, to study God's Word, to obey Him and grow as an excellent Bible teacher and spiritual director and to carry on the spiritual heritage of my parents. I was allowed to experience God's blessing and His best care in all things as I never dared to dream. I chose to continue to choose life by putting my heart and priority on serving the ministry of youth education, mobilizing the next generation, and the pioneering work of the medical school.

In today's text we have learned that we have everything we need to live a blessed life as a people of God. We have the Word of God and the commandments of God and the privilege of repentance. Let us choose life and enter into covenant with God by choosing to study and obey God's Word. May God establish and use our sheep and our next generation through Bible study and GLEF as God's people and spiritual leaders.