



**Adult Sunday School Lesson Summary for August 30, 2009
Released on Wednesday, August 26, 2009**

"The Promise of Life"

Lesson Text: Deuteronomy 30:1-10

Background Scripture: Deuteronomy 30:1-20

Devotional Reading: Joshua 24:14-24

Deuteronomy 30:1-10

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.

4 If any of thine be driven out unto the outmost parts of heaven, from thence will the Lord thy God gather thee, and from thence will he fetch thee:

5 And the Lord thy God will bring thee into the land which thy fathers possessed, and thou shalt possess it; and he will do thee good, and multiply thee above thy fathers.

6 And the Lord thy God will circumcise thine heart, and the heart of thy seed, to love the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul, that thou mayest live.

7 And the Lord thy God will put all these curses upon thine enemies, and on them that hate thee, which persecuted thee.

8 And thou shalt return and obey the voice of the Lord, and do all his commandments which I command thee this day.

9 And the Lord thy God will make thee plenteous in every work of thine hand, in the fruit of thy body, and in the fruit of thy cattle, and in the fruit of thy land, for good: for the Lord will again rejoice over thee for good, as he rejoiced over thy fathers:

10 If thou shalt hearken unto the voice of the Lord thy God, to keep his commandments and his statutes which are written in this book of the law, and if thou turn unto the Lord thy God with all thine heart, and with all thy soul.

Today's Aim

Facts: to study what the covenant says about the return of the Jews to their homeland and the relationship they will have with God at that time.

Principles: to be aware that the Lord has a permanent love for His chosen people and Gentile believers that will find ultimate fulfillment in the final regathering.

Application: to urge everyone to accept God's saving grace and prepare to enjoy the blessings of God's covenant.

Introduction

Have you ever been disappointed because someone broke a promise? Sadly, this is an all too common experience. While sometimes the promise broken may be considered trivial by the one who made it, the person on the receiving end of a broken promise can be devastated. This is especially true with children. But adults also experience great pain when those they love deeply break a promise to them.

Concerning God's promises, however, we must be careful not to appropriate for ourselves promises that were never made to us! Some promises were made to specific people for a limited time, such as some made to the apostles (cf. Mark 6:7-13). On the other hand, there are promises of a general nature that extend to all people. For example, God promised never again to destroy the entire world with a flood (Gen. 9:15).

This week's lesson contains just a few of the many promises that were made to God's chosen people.

Lesson Background

The history of ancient Israel reveals a pattern of apostasy and rebellion, with sporadic repentance and reform woven in. Apostasy eventually led to the exiles of 722 and 586 BC. But all that is many centuries in the future from the standpoint of today's lesson (about 1406 BC).

By the time apostasy and rebellion come in those centuries of the distant future, it will be "nothing new." The Israelites of Moses' day have already proven their eagerness in that regard (compare Exodus 32; Numbers 14, 16). They are indeed "a stiff-necked people" (Exodus 32:9). Yet God knows how forgiveness and restoration will happen, even many centuries before those exiles occur.

Restoration (Deuteronomy 30:1-5)

1. What is the general context of this part of Deuteronomy?

Moses is addressing the Israelites on the plains of Moab, just before their entry into the promised land (Deuteronomy 1:5; 29:1). This address continues Moses' third speech of this covenant renewal book. Moses is turning his attention to a future time when Israel will have been driven from the promised land. Moses uses this prediction to encourage his audience to obedience in the present (28:63-67; 29:28).

Moses has already set before the Israelites the alternatives of curses for disobedience to the covenant commands (Deuteronomy 28:15-68) and blessings for faithfulness and obedience to them (28:1-14; see also 11:26-28; 30:15, 19). The subsequent history of Israel reflects that the sad outcome for disobedience does indeed come to pass. The prediction of exile means that the harsh curses will (or should) bear on every sphere of Israel's existence.

During their time of captivity, the Jews would recall the blessings and curses pronounced upon them at Mount Ebal. Being reminded of God's Word would ultimately bring about their redemption and return (see Nehemiah 8). The desire for blessing is a natural human longing. Unfortunately, the desire to want blessings on our own terms seems equally natural.

2. Although not yet in the Land of Promise, what is anticipated after entering Canaan? (v. 2)

For violating the covenant, those of the (future) southern kingdom of Judah will be exiled to Babylon. That will happen about 820 years after Moses speaks these words. The Israelites will *return unto the Lord* only after God "gets their attention" through this tragedy. The return from exile will not be merely a physical return to

the promised land, but also a spiritual return to God. Indeed, a spiritual return is a condition of the physical return.

The primary way the Israelites will *obey* the *voice* of God in exile will be to renounce idolatry permanently. Even though Israel will be tempted to adopt new gods via Greek and Roman expansions, idolatry will never again be a prominent feature of Israelite practice after the Babylonian exile.

3. What would motivate the Lord to bring Israel back to their land? (vs. 3-5)

The Israelites will need God's help to get back to their land because in exile they will be under the thumb of a foreign power. God's help will come only after the people seek Him (Deuteronomy 4:29). God's decision to *turn thy captivity* will be a response to, and consequence of, Israel's return to Him. The word *then* in this verse follows after the actions of verses 1 and 2. God indeed will grant forgiveness and restoration. But first Israel will have to call back to mind the words of the covenant.

Deuteronomy 30:1–10 thus functions as a forgiveness clause in the covenant. It offers a second chance after the covenant is violated. God's *compassion* is seen in His readiness to forgive sin, to replace judgment with grace (Deuteronomy 13:17; 2 Kings 13:23; Isaiah 14:1). Part of God's motivation for forgiveness is His promises to the patriarchs (Deuteronomy 4:31; 7:12; Micah 7:18–20). Repentance and recommitment to the covenant can result in restoration because of God's character.

As the prophet Jeremiah said, "It is of the Lord's mercies that we are not consumed, because his compassions fail not. They are new every morning; great is thy faithfulness" (Lam. 3:22-23).

4. Which should be the more important motivator in serving God: the desire to have a blessing or the desire to avoid being cursed? Why?

The choices "to have" and "to avoid" look to the future. But the best way to approach this question is to start with a look at the past: we already *have* been blessed! The blessing of Christ came into the world long before any of us were born. None of us served God in order that He might grant that blessing.

Becoming a Christian means having the promise of eternal life—there is no greater blessing than this. We serve God in gratitude for this accomplished fact. Concerning earthly blessings, we acknowledge that God "maketh his sun to rise on the evil and on the good, and sendeth rain on the just and on the unjust" (Matthew 5:45).

Repentance (Deuteronomy 30:6-8)

5. What is the meaning of having a circumcised heart? (v. 6a)

Physical circumcision was instituted as a covenant sign (Genesis 17:1–14; compare Acts 7:8). For ancient Israelites to be circumcised physically is to be recognized as being part of God's covenant people. This sign is tied to the possibility of receiving the blessings promised in the covenant.

However, the fact that circumcision identifies God's people of the covenant can lead to a false confidence. This confidence is unfounded because God's physically circumcised people still have to honor God in their inmost being. This is referred to as circumcision of the *heart*—a spiritual circumcision, if you will (Deuteronomy 10:16; Jeremiah 4:4; 9:25, 26; Romans 2:25–29; Colossians 2:11). Being physically circumcised is not sufficient in and of itself to retain God's covenant blessings.

To have one's heart circumcised includes putting away stubbornness toward God (Leviticus 26:41, 42). The state of uncircumcision in the Old Testament is a figure of speech for the wicked and godless (1 Samuel 14:6; 31:4; 2 Samuel 1:20; Isaiah 52:1; Ezekiel 32:17–32; compare Acts 7:51). After the exile demonstrates that

God's people need help in keeping God's laws, it is God himself who *will circumcise thine heart*.

This promise implies that God will strip from their hearts the impediments that make them dull and unresponsive to His commands. Thus God is committing himself to do what Israel herself has been called to do (Deuteronomy 10:16). The language before us resembles the later language of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, two of the exilic prophets. The language anticipates the new covenant (see Hebrews 8:8–10, quoting Jeremiah 31:31–33). God's promise to remove the impediments to obedience provides encouragement that the pattern of sin and punishment can be counteracted.

6. How would repentance be evidenced among the returning Israelites (vs. 6b-8)?

One of the hallmarks of true repentance is a willingness to obey God. When asked which commandment was the greatest, Jesus replied "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and with all thy soul, and with all thy mind" (Matthew 22:36, 37). That reference to Deuteronomy 6:5 looks very much like what we see here in 30:6b.

That Israel would "return and obey the voice of the Lord, and do all his commandments" (Deut. 30:8) anticipates a genuine change of heart on their part. "Though their hearts were wretchedly hardened, yet the grace of God could soften and change them; and then, though their situation was deplorably miserable, the providence of God would redress all their grievances" (Henry, Matthew Henry's Commentary, Zondervan).

Now, the curses Israel had to endure due to their disobedience would be put on their enemies who oppressed them during captivity (v.7). Though God used those nations to chastise Israel, He puts those curses on those nations due to their wickedness.

Replenishment (Deuteronomy 30:9-10)

7. In what ways did God promised that He was going to bless Israel? (v. 9)

Earlier in his speech to the Israelites, Moses set before the people first the blessings that God will give them if they obey His covenant (Deuteronomy 28:1–14). Then he noted the curses that will ensue if they do not obey (28:15–68). Many of the general curses in that chapter are a reversal of the general blessings of that same chapter.

The verse before us recalls these general blessings by reiterating the threefold fruitful bounty and fertility with respect to one's body, livestock, and land (compare 28:4, 11). God will once again *rejoice over* His people. He will once again seek their well-being. This reverses the curse of 28:63 as well. Blessing finally can predominate.

8. Why is obedience so important to God (v. 10)?

Although blessings can once again predominate, the first word *if* of this verse makes it clear that these future blessings are contingent on faithful obedience. One must still hear and obey (*hearken unto*) the Word of God and keep His commandments.

The connection between loving God and keeping His commandments is vital (see Deuteronomy 6:5; 1 John 5:3). Grudging obedience is not good enough. The qualifier *with all thine heart, and with all thy soul* calls for sincerity. True and consistent obedience to God's commandments flows from the dedicated heart and soul.

Conclusion

The same choice that confronted Israel confronts us today. Will we wholeheartedly commit ourselves to obey God's commandments to yield the hope of blessing, or will we ignore His voice and invite His wrath? If we commit ourselves in obedience to Him, we know that He has enabled us in Christ Jesus to be faithful.

We have an advantage: we have the record of history to warn us. Various kings instituted idolatry in northern Israel (1 Kings 12:28-30; 16:30-33; 2 Chronicles 11:14, 15; etc.). For these sins the northern kingdom was sent into exile; thousands of her citizens were deported into captivity. Likewise, kings of southern Judah practiced idolatry and broke the commandments (2 Kings 8:16-18; 21:1-18; 2 Chronicles 21:5-7; etc.). The southern kingdom too was sent into exile. This happened in three distinct stages, but the people didn't allow themselves to be taught the lessons of stages one and two.

"Now these things were our examples, to the intent we should not lust after evil things, as they also lusted" (1 Corinthians 10:6). To shun God invites being shunned by God in return. When we decide for God, we decide for blessing.

Practical Points

- 1.** The promise of restoration to full fellowship with God is one that never expires (Deut. 30:1-3).
- 2.** No matter how far we stray, God can bring us back to Him (v. 4).
- 3.** The promise of land was for Israel; the promise of a divine work in the heart is for everyone (vs. 5-6)!
- 4.** Evildoers who are prospering now are on borrowed time (v. 7).
- 5.** No matter what trials or difficulties we may go through, in the end there is no better life than what is offered to us by the grace of God (vs. 8-10).

Prayer

Heavenly Father, we are surrounded by so many distractions! These cause us to walk by sight rather than by faith. But You are there. You always are, and You always will be. Lift our vision to You today so that we can hear Your voice and obey Your commandments. In Jesus' name. Amen.

Thought to Remember

Choose God all over again.

Anticipating Next Week's Lesson

Next quarter we will be looking at "**Covenant Communities.**" We will eventually look at the new covenant using New Testament passages.

The first unit looks at leaders in the Old Testament covenant communities. Joshua, Gideon, Ezra, and Nehemiah will be covered. Prepare for next week by reading Joshua 1:11-18.

Lesson Summarized By

Montario Fletcher
Jesus Is All Ministries
www.jesusisall.com

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