

Adult Teaching Resources

September 8, 2019



Season After Pentecost (June 16-November 24)

On the Road with Jesus

Luke 14:1-14 (RCL 1, 7-14) – “A Way to the Top”

Choices That Matter

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 – “Make the Right Choice!”

Jeremiah 4:11-28 (RCL 11-12, 22-28) – “Delay and You’ll Pay”

Jeremiah 8:18-9:3 (RCL 8:18-9:1) – “Go on and Grieve”

Jeremiah 32:1-15 (RCL 32:1-3a, 6-15) – “Never Give Up”

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Make the Right Choice!

Deuteronomy 30:15-20

FIT Teaching Guide

by David Woody

This adult teaching outline is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Bible Background

“Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him ...” Deuteronomy 30:19b-20a

Choose Life! Those words take me back to 1984 and Wham! – the pop music duo from England. George Michael wore a white t-shirt with those two words, written in black, block letters. It was an iconic image of a tumultuous time in our world.

While the t-shirt George Michael wore was in response to the AIDS epidemic, those two simple words carry great power over all the challenges we face. As people of faith, we have the opportunity to choose life in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Joshua—the God who loves us, redeems us, and who gave (and continues to give) us life.

Opening

After everyone arrives, share with the large group the “big switch” written by our Lesson Writer. We are making a shift from three months in Luke to the Old Testament.

With today’s passage coming from Deuteronomy, specifically dealing with following God’s laws and commands, ask your group:

What are the laws and commands you follow on a daily basis that guide your day-to-day living? (for example—traffic laws, moral codes, etc.)

What are the laws and commands you follow that guide you in your career/vocational path? (stay-at-home parents and retirees have laws and commands, too.)

What are the laws and commands you follow that guide your spiritual life?

Spend some time in discussion about these laws and commands, then move to the scripture passage.

Reading the Bible

What has been set before you? (life and prosperity, death and adversity)

What will be the reward for obeying the commandments of the Lord? (you shall live and become numerous, and God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess)

What will happen if your heart turns away, you do not hear, and you bow down to other gods? (you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess)

What has God set before you? (life and death, blessings and curses)

What should you choose so that your descendants may live? (life)

What does choosing life look like? (loving the Lord your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the Lord swore to give to our ancestors.)

Making Connections

To what in your life have you pledge your loyalty? How have you pledge it? How do others know of your loyalty?

What is your definition of a covenant? Do you have any covenantal relationships? What are they? How did they come about?

Why do you think it was so important for the people of the Old Testament to be in a covenant relationship with God? Do you think that type of covenant relationship is important for believers today? Why do you say that?

What is the most difficult decision you have had to make? Who had input on your decision? Where did you turn for guidance? What role did God have in your decision? What did you decide?

Our passage states that, “loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances” would lead to life and prosperity in the land, while those who turned to other gods would perish.” What do you believe will happen to you if to truly, totally, all-the-way follow God and observe God’s commandments, decrees, and ordinances?

How do your choices affect the lives of your family and those around you? How does your faith journey affect the relationship your descendants have with God?

Our Lesson Writer points out the repetitive words from this passage, “Note how repetitive the challenges are. Love God. Obey God. Hold fast to God. Avoid other gods. Do that and live long and happy lives. Turn away from God and meet the bad end of a short life.” If you were writing this section, how would you write it so that others would understand and take your words to heart?

Making Connections *continued*

Do you believe following God's commands and ordinances will give you financial riches and earthly successes? Why do you say that?

So What?

In the large group, ask this question for discussion and clarity of understanding with the passage.

What is the purpose for us, followers of God in the 21st century, to obey God's commands and ordinances? What is our reward? Is that reward, enough?

Guide your group, encouraging them to think about where we are as believers today and contrasting it to the Old Testament followers. God's people had Moses to lead them and had something tangible—the Promised Land—to work toward. Who is leading us? What do we have to work toward?

The Challenge

This week, follow God's commands and ordinances in everything you do.

Prayer

Loving God, thank you for the followers who have gone before us and given us the way to us as we make similar decisions that affect not only our lives, but the lives of those we love. Amen.

Digging Deeper

by Tony Cartledge

Digging Deeper is designed to support THE BIBLE LESSON by Tony Cartledge, printed in *Nurturing Faith Journal*. Watch for the “shovel” icon in the THE BIBLE LESSON, and then reference that item in this Digging Deeper resource. You can subscribe to either the digital or print edition of *Nurturing Faith Journal* to access the lessons. Please also ensure that each person in your class has a copy of *Nurturing Faith Journal* so they can prepare before the lesson.

Deuteronomy—The Deuteronomistic writers built their work on the theme of blessing and cursing, the premise being that God would bless the righteous and curse the wicked. Later writers in Judah used this same theology as the basis for the books of Joshua – 2 Kings (with the exception of Ruth), commonly known as the “Deuteronomistic History.” Their purpose was to explain the exile by showing that Yahweh had not been defeated or deserted his people. Rather, the exile was a natural result of Israel’s sinful ways that had been practiced over many years. Even Josiah’s revival, they concluded, was too little and too late to stop the impending invasion of the Babylonians, which was nothing more than God’s punishment for Israel’s errant ways.

Context—Here’s one way to outline the book of Deuteronomy.

Introduction and Moses’ First Sermon (1:1-4:43)

Historical review of the wilderness journey (1:6-3:29)

Exhortations to give heed (4:1-43)

II. Moses’ Second Sermon (4:44-26:19)

The giving of the law at Sinai (5:1-11:32)

Additional statutes and ordinances (12:1-25:19)

Rituals, and an interlude (26:1-27:26)

Conclusion (28:1-68)

III. Moses’ Third Sermon (29:1-30:20)

IV. Moses’ Last Days (31:1-34:12)

A final charge and the writing of the law (31:1-13)

The commissioning of Joshua as Moses’ successor (31:14-23)

The Song of Moses (31:30-32:47)

The blessing of Moses (33:1-29)

The death of Moses (34:1-12)

Horeb/Sinai—Different sources of the Pentateuch call the place of Israel’s initial covenant by different names. In Exodus, both the “Yahwist” (who calls God Yahweh) and the Priestly source use the term “Sinai,” while the “Elohists” source (which calls God “Elohim”) uses the term “Horeb.” The author of Deuteronomy, generally referred to as the “Deuteronomist,” also uses the term “Horeb.”

Digging Deeper *continued*

Heshbon and Bashan—Little else is known about these two reported kings. The land of Bashan was a hilly but fertile area east of the Sea of Galilee, known for its rich pasturage. Amos would later excoriate the luxurious lifestyle of the rich by describing them as “fat cows of Bashan” (Amos 4:1). Bashan extended southward to meet Heshbon, which was later controlled by the Ammonites. The northern part of this territory was then assigned to half of the tribe of Manasseh, and the southern part to the tribes of Reuben and Gad.

Across the sea—The writer’s claim that the word enabling Israel to keep the commandments and find life did not require a journey to the heavens or beneath the sea may recall familiarity with the Mesopotamian “Epic of Gilgamesh.” In it, a powerful king named Gilgamesh is distraught when his friend Enkidu dies, prompting him to go on a quest to find the key to eternal life. He ultimately comes to an island in the sea, where Utnapishtim, the Babylonian equivalent to Noah, told him of a plant beneath the sea that could give new life. Gilgamesh dove into the sea and retrieved the plant. But later lost it while bathing in a forest pool. A serpent ate the plant and slithered away, shedding its skin as if attaining new life.

Adding color—The NRSV translates v. 15 as “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity.” That gives a rather floral cast to the Hebrew’s straightforward “life and good or death and evil.” Prosperity is not quite the same thing as good, and adversity is not the same thing as evil. Good can lead to prosperity (though not always), and evil can lead to adversity – but good people may also face adversity.

The black-and-white portrayal of obedience = blessing and disobedience = cursing fits the rhetoric of the Deuteronomistic covenant, but does not reflect the realities of life.

The Hardest Question

by Tony Cartledge

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Did Moses really preach this sermon?

The book of Deuteronomy is shaped in the form of one or possibly three connected sermons that Moses reportedly delivered as Israel stood on the verge of entering the land of promise. As presented, it amounts to a lengthy challenge and farewell address from Moses before his death. The book includes a restating of the ten commandments, along with supplemental commentary and additional laws. This gave rise to its English name: “Deuteronomy” means “second law” (from Greek *deuteros* [second] *nomos* [law], used as a title in the Greek translation known as the LXX). The Hebrew name of the book is *haddebarim*, meaning “The Words,” because that is the first word in the book.

Deuteronomy is written as if these are the very words of Moses, who supposedly wrote them down as well. But did he? During Moses’ lifetime, so far as we know, Hebrew had not yet become a written language: the earliest proto-Hebrew inscriptions we have found are 200 years later than the time attributed to Moses. Traditions and stories associated with Moses, like the rest of the Pentateuch, were passed down in oral tradition for hundreds of years.

While the speeches in Deuteronomy may have roots in ongoing Mosaic traditions, it’s likely that they are the work of someone who lived long after Moses, constructing speeches designed to support the theological agenda of the priests in the late seventh and early sixth centuries, BCE. Purporting that Moses was responsible for the law would give the writing an added sense of authority.

The final edition of Deuteronomy was probably compiled during the exile, but an earlier version was known as early as 621 B.C., when it was “found” during renovations in the temple ordered by King Josiah and presented to the king as a book of law that had fallen from use and been lost. Josiah apparently used the teachings of this book as the basis for promoting a revival of Yahwism and various religious reforms in Judah (2 Kings 22-23).

Thus, while Deuteronomy is written as an address to Israelites who had not yet entered the land, it was mainly a message to people who had lived in the land for many years but were in danger of losing it – or had lost it already.

We do not live under the same covenant as Israel, but we can learn from Israel’s experience and profit from the challenge to serve God faithfully – not just to gain rewards, but because it is the right way of life.