

All right. Let's open our Bibles tonight to Deuteronomy 29. We have, like I said, three more weeks - so, tonight and two weeks - and we'll be done with our favorite book of the Bible. Then, I don't know. We've run out of favorite books of the Bible, I guess. We are going to do a night of question-and-answer/communion night, and then we are going to spend 16 weeks in Hebrews 11 learning about the kind of faith that pleases God. A lot of talk about faith. But what kind, really, is the kind God wants to develop in your life? And the reason we're doing that is we will then come back with Joshua and go into the land. But the book of Joshua is really a book about faith, and so we want to be able to know what we're looking for. So that's kind of what lies ahead for us. Beginning August 3rd we'll be starting Hebrews 11.

So we're nearing the end. Moses spent (I know, we spent a lot longer) forty days delivering this book to the people. He talked about their past and their present and their future. And then this is actually the last night of sermonizing, if you will, or of Moses laying out for us certain imperatives that he wants us to remember. Next week it'll be Joshua and handing off the reigns to Joshua. Moses will teach the congregation of 2½ million a song that he wrote. He apparently came from a musical family; his sister wrote a song in Exodus 15, he wrote one here. Except this one was kind of a bummer song; this is all about "remember what you did wrong." But, anyway, we'll get to that in chapter 32. And then Moses will go off and die, and the people will fast and mourn for thirty days for his death, and then they'll go forward. So, we're pretty close, now, to the end.

Tonight, in chapters 29 and 30, it's an interesting picture because God, after all that He has brought them through - as Moses continues to encourage them - speaks to them about their failures to come in the future. And I thought, well, isn't that an interesting thing, that the Lord would start to address, to a people that were on the brink of doing something by faith, the failures that lie ahead and of the consequences that would come their way before they ever happened? I suspect that, as Moses listened to what God was saying, it must have grieved Moses' heart to stand before this people that he'd spent the last forty years with and to realize that he had brought them as far as he could. But even their going forward was not going to be without failure; and that he hears about all of the

stumbling. But all God said would come to pass - did. The blessings that God gave to His people would cause them, at times, to simply forget God or to take it for granted. "Yeah, we're blessed people. That's who we are." And so they forgot God. They didn't carefully follow His Words when things were going well. The warnings didn't really matter much to them, so they would oftentimes stumble and fall. And it was sin rather than faith that oftentimes dominates the landscape, as we go forward through the historical books, and it eventuated in captivity and suffering, idolatry that God needed to get rid of, and much national sorrow. Now God knew all this was coming; Moses did not.

But as the Lord, in this chapter and in the next, speaks of the failures, you realize immediately how we need God's help, don't we? Because I read this, and I think that's kind of like us. We've been so blessed, and yet we're just kind of floundering from time to time. We're not the most spiritual folks on the planet, are we, even though we have every right to be. God has done such great things in our lives. And in much the same way, even in the Old Testament, those who succeeded in their walks did so by faith. They didn't do so by performance; they did so by simply trusting God. And in the New Testament, you get to God's salvation through His Son, and it's available to all by faith. Come, be saved, be forgiven - by faith. Those in the Old Testament followed Him by faith, and, when they did, they found great strength and the ability to do what God says; and when they didn't, they found themselves on their faces, so to speak.

Well tonight God reestablishes a covenant, an agreement that He had made with their parents; one that would require the grace of God on His part and a genuine desire to please the Lord on theirs. If they were willing, He would enable. If they were wanting, He would make sure that it could take place. So, in chapter 30, God promises mercy and blessings to the faithful and all; and then, in chapter 31 next week, we'll see Joshua step forward to receive his directions from the Lord. So these are kind of the final words from Moses in regards to their walk with God.

But here's what you can learn, maybe more than anything else, in these two chapters; and that is that a relationship with God requires firsthand participation. In other words, it's got to be between you and the Lord. You can't really have a relationship based on what your mom and dad did, or what your friend told you, what the church down the street says happened. It has to be your personal kind of involvement. And we have faith in Him based on His track record. When we fail to remember it, or we marginalize His Word, then corruption sets in. That's exactly

what happens here. When we remember what God has done, then we are more than likely to look to Him for help in walking with Him. So it all comes down to never losing sight of the big picture - here's what God did, here's where He found me, here's where He took me, here's what He can do with me, I'm not going to be so strong, but He's strong when I am weak. And that's really what the lesson comes down to.

There was a fellow in the mid-1700's. Maybe you've heard of him. His name was Robert Robinson. And he gave his life to the Lord through the ministry of a guy named George Whitfield, and Whitfield led him to the Lord. It was kind of a dramatic life. At the age of 22, he was kind of a real party animal (for the 1700's), and he got saved. And he wrote lots of songs, and one of the songs he wrote was "Come, Thou Fount of Every Blessing." And the words in it were, "Come, thou fount of every blessing, tune my heart to sing Thy grace; streams of mercy, never ceasing, call for songs of loudest praise." And it became a hit. You can look it up. I mean, it was a best seller. The problem with Robert is he, a few years later, at the age of 27, walked away from the Lord and just kind of went back into the world, and he left the church for a life of decadence, and he spent the next twenty years living back out in the world. He was the Christian artist who got saved, had the number one hit and then disappeared. Twenty years later, when he was in his late forties, he was riding a stagecoach back to his house when a woman sitting next to him started crying, reading a book. And he said, "What is the deal?" And she said, "Oh, every time I read these verses from a song that I love, it makes me cry." And he said, "What are the words?" And she said, "They are, 'Prone to wander, Lord, I feel it, prone to leave the God I love.' " And he said, "I wrote those words twenty years ago." And it got him back to the Lord, in his relationship with God. And so she encouraged him that God's grace could bring him back, and she talked a lot about the prodigal son. In his testimony, he writes about how, for twenty years, he'd been hiding from God, and God sent a woman to find him and use his own words against him.

But that's kind of what these chapters are for. The Lord knows you're prone to wander. And we do. But we can come back. Right? God predicts it, He anticipates it, He tells us of it. But then He says, "But here's the grace to restore. If you'll walk with Me, I'll fix things up." So there's this perennial open door with God, isn't there, even with these children of Israel that we have just kind of lived and died with for so long.

Verse 1 of chapter 29 says this, "These are the words of the covenant which the LORD commanded Moses to make with the children of Israel in the land of Moab, besides the covenant which He made with them" (back at Mount Sinai) "in Horeb. Now Moses called all Israel and said to them: 'You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land - the great trials which your eyes have seen, the signs, and those great wonders. Yet the LORD has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day. And I have led you forty years in the wilderness. Your clothes have not worn out on you, and your sandals have not worn out on your feet. You have not eaten bread, nor have you drunk wine or similar drink, that you may know that I am the LORD your God.' " Now, Moses begins this final lecture, if you will, talking about the deal that God had made with their parents. Forty years earlier, or six weeks in - out of Egypt, they had come to Mount Sinai, and you remember that generation, don't you, that saw the mountains shaking and the earth erupting and the lightning and the fire in the sky, and they said to Moses, "You go talk to the Lord. Whatever He wants, we'll do." And the Lord said, "That's good. That's exactly what I'm looking for. And if you'll look to Me, then I'll do all of these things for you." And now Moses is looking back, "You remember." Well they weren't all there. Some of them were very young. Some of them hadn't been born. But if they weren't there, they had heard about what God had done in beginning to bring this people out; and what their advantage was they'd had forty years, now, of walking in the wilderness and watching God work - how He fed them every day, how they'd seen His glory and His power. What God had done in Egypt to Pharaoh, some of them would remember. But God wanted them to know that the supernatural work of God hadn't stopped in Egypt. They'd been walking around forty years in the same shoes. Now that could be a curse to some of you, but if you only have one pair of shoes, that's a blessing, isn't it? And they'd been wandering around - their clothes hadn't worn out. God had been firing food down at them from the heavens. Water had been poured out from a rock. "Look, God brought you this far."

But notice in verse 4 that He says something which may frighten you for a minute. He said, " 'The LORD has not given you a heart to perceive and eyes to see and ears to hear, to this very day.' " Though they could physically experience these things with their eyes, the insight that came because of them, to drive them to the right conclusion, had not really occurred to most of them. As is always the case, even the most solemn work of God can pass right before you and leave your heart untouched. Right? You see it in the book of Revelation, where the heavens break loose, and the judgment of God falls, and people cry out, "Hide us from the wrath

of Him who sits upon the throne" (Revelation 6:16). And then you read, "But with all of these things, they still would not repent" (Revelation 9:21, 16:9, 16:11). It isn't so much the miracles that draw us but the work of the Holy Spirit in the heart. Miracles brought Nicodemus to acknowledge that Jesus had come from God. He said that when He came that night, when he came in the evening under cover. "Rabbi, we know that You are a teacher come from God; for no one can do these signs that You do unless God is with him" (John 3:2). "We're sure that You're a Man from God." And the miracles caused him to perk up his ears, if you will; but he had to be told of the salvation God had planned. He still needed to hear of God's plan and act upon it by faith. He needed to be told of the new birth. And that came to him pretty slowly. "Oh, I don't know. Born again of my mother's womb. I'm an old guy. How's that going to work?" And he struggled with it. But the miracles drove him in.

Kind of the same way for these folks. There was this undeniable work of God around them. But yet the effect upon their lives, in relationship with God, was, for many of them, minimal. In fact, for the first generation, it was downright abysmal. They showed up and went (Numbers 13 & 14), "There're giants in the land, and there're big walls. I guess the God who fed us from the skies can't really handle this. The guy who drowned the Egyptian army behind us in the Red Sea and parted it in front of us, I guess He can't handle this." What they saw miraculously never got into their hearts to change their opinion about the Lord. In John 2:23-24, right before that Nicodemus story, it says that "In Jerusalem, during the feast, many believed in His name when they saw the signs which He did." They were drawn by the events. "But," it says, "Jesus did not commit Himself to them, because He knew all men."

It's interesting how miracles work. God had been doing these great things, and Moses reminds them of that. "You've seen all of these things," or, "You've heard about them and seen many more." Miracles draw interest. The Word of God saves. Right? And we need to know that. It has to be this personal response from our hearts to God's work. How we need to ask God to give us ears to hear and eyes to see because, to truly understand His ways, He's going to have to bend our will towards His and to give us spiritual discernment. In all of those letters to the churches (in Revelation 2 and 3), the seven that Jesus wrote, each of them had included in each message the words, "He who has an ear, let him hear what the Spirit says to the churches."

So don't get the feeling that God was hiding Himself from the people. "Oh, I'm not going to let you get it." Because you read verse 4, and you go, "The Lord's really to blame. He didn't let them get it." No, no, no. The Lord's more than willing to let you get it. But you've got to be willing to respond to what He's given you. And the divorce here was between what they saw and what it did to them, what they experienced and yet what it meant to them. So they forgot. The food came falling from the skies, and the people forgot. "Well, that's the way it always worked." "Wait, wait. What if God stops throwing sandwiches down to you? Then what happens? And who is this God that feeds you like this?" Had they remembered, they would have moved towards Him. The point is that we have to seek the Lord. And if we seek the Lord, God will give us the insight we need. But if we won't take what we've learned and act upon it, it really doesn't do us any good. I've seen people where they're praying, and God answers their prayers - miraculous; somebody gets healed, doors are opened, lives are changed. "Oh, I just love Jesus!" for a month and a half. And then they're off again. "What happened to the God who did such great things?" "I don't know.....what's He done for me lately?" Look, you can have great experiences that the Lord uses to show you who He is, but they never really stopped to consider and seek Him to illuminate their hearts. It just passed by them. "Open my eyes, Lord. I want to see Jesus." We sing that song. It's a good prayer. If we don't have firsthand encounters with Jesus, as the Lord, here, challenges them to relate to all that they had seen and heard personally, they're about to fail even though they're about to see even greater things going forward.

John was in his nineties when, in 1 John 1:1-3, he began his letter by saying, "That which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled, concerning the Word of life - the life was manifested, and we have seen, and bear witness, and declare to you that eternal life which was with the Father and was manifested to us - and we want you to have fellowship with Him like we do." John said, "I've touched Him, I've seen Him, I've heard Him, I've talked with Him, I've held Him, I know Him. I want you to know Him." He's writing this to a third and fourth generation group of saints, near the 100 A.D. mark. It's been sixty-plus years since Jesus was around. John still remembered it like it was yesterday. The church around him couldn't find Him. But he calls upon them to do that. Peter wrote to the scattered saints in 2 Peter 1:16, "For we did not follow cunningly devised fables when we made known to you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of His majesty." "We had a personal understanding."

And I think to the extent that you have a personal relationship with the Lord - not based on secondhand information, not based on, "That's what I read in a book, that's what the pastor said, that's what I heard on a tape, that's what the guy on the radio told me" - if you have firsthand information, you'll do fine. And that's really what God's call to these folks is here. "Look, God has given you so much. You've seen so much. Your clothes haven't worn out. Your sandals are on your feet. You've seen signs and great wonders. Your eyes have beheld them. Look, you've spent forty years not drinking wine or drinks. You've just had bread and water. And look how healthy you are. You've lived on manna and water." That's prison food! Bread and water. Well, the manna are more like Krispy Kreme donuts than water, but..... still. And somehow the information is there, but the condition of the heart doesn't move itself - which is why two people sit in church, and one hears from God, and the other misses it entirely, and one guy walks away going, "Isn't God great?" and the next guy goes, "I didn't get anything." "Did you get anything?" "Oh, yeah." "I didn't get anything." Because one's open to hear and to experience.

He says in verse 7 to them, " 'And when you came to this place, Sihon king of Heshbon and Og king of Bashan came out against us to battle, and we conquered them. We took their land and gave it as an inheritance to the Reubenites, to the Gadites, and to half the tribe of Manasseh.' " "Look, we're a nomadic traveling group of 2½ million people that took on two mighty kings, on their own turf, having their own armies and soldiers and armaments. And guess who won? We did! How do you think that happened?" And the guys go, "Because we're studs." "No!" (Laughing) "Dummy. Because you're His. Because you're His." If you remember the past, and look back and remember everything He's done, then you go forward. But when your mind becomes forgetful, your heart soon becomes ungrateful. And that was what the problem was going to be, and God was warning them here, and He was telling them, "Down the road, this is exactly the battle you're going to be fighting." "Do you suppose God has been with us through all of these things?" "Yes. He has. But, look, all of these miracles," and inwardly it hadn't called the people on their knees to know Him, to surrender. Jeremiah, when he spoke in the name of the Lord, in chapter 29:13, he says, "You will seek Me and find Me, when you search for Me with all your heart." That was the problem. It wasn't informational problems. We don't have informational problems. We've got inspirational problems. We don't have that relationship that God wants us to have. And He does. You can't go, "I don't know if He's real." Oh, you know He's real. You know what He's done in your life. You just can't put it to the side.

So, verse 9, " 'Therefore' " (here's a therefore, and wherever there's a therefore, you ask what is it there for?) " 'keep the words of this covenant, and do them, that you may prosper in all that you do.' " The correlation is very simple. You want to prosper, keep the Lord's command. And, "Because I've done this, you do that." It's not blind faith God calls you to. It's a reasonable response to what you know. All right? It's a reasonable response to what you know. God says, "Pray," and you go, "You know what I want." And the Lord says, "I want you to pray, and come and seek Me." You get to the New Testament, and you're called to Calvary, and you read about Jesus' death, and it says He was totally committed to saving you; now you be totally committed to following Him. "Keep the words of this covenant. Be faithful so I might prosper you in everything that you do." So don't be a careless follower. Don't be a dull hearer. Don't just be a meanderer. But move out according to what you know. And you know a lot, don't you? I think the church in America - it may not be the strongest, but it's the most well-taught church around. You can turn the radio on, the TV on, go anywhere - you'll get God's Word somewhere.

Verse 10, " 'All of you stand today,' " Moses says, " 'before the LORD your God: your leaders and your tribes and your elders and your officers, all the men of Israel, your little ones and your wives - also the stranger who is in your camp, from the one who cuts your wood to the one who draws your water - that you may enter into covenant with the LORD your God, and into His oath, which the LORD your God makes with you today, that He may establish you today as a people for Himself, and that He may be God to you, just as He has spoken to you, and just as He has sworn to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and Jacob.' " Look, the primary purpose of this covenant was to collectively have the people recognize that they belong to God. They're different. We're different, aren't we? We're in the world, but we don't belong to the world. This isn't your home. It's a good thing, isn't it? God has prepared a place for you. He's going to come get you. He's taking you there. It's going to be glorious. We're just passing through this place. So were these folks. He wanted to be their God. He cared for them. He wanted that relationship to continue. He wants to make the same deal with them, covenant-wise, that He had made with their fathers. It was up to them to respond in kind to the Lord who had been so kind to them. He'd brought them to the border, unharmed, protected, ready to go forward.

In fact, three times you will read the word "today" in these verses. "Stand today before the LORD and your little ones that you may enter in today," verse 12, and again "today," verse 13. So, three times God says, "I want to start this

relationship today." Not tomorrow, not later on. The only good change starts today. What did Paul say to the Corinthians? "Today is the acceptable time; today is the day of salvation" (2 Corinthians 6:2b). So, God wants to now make this deal. Moses is going. In the next couple of days, Moses is out, and the people are going to wait thirty days and go forward. "So, today, I want to make this deal like I made with your fathers. I've been faithful to you. Now today, you make a covenant to be faithful to Me." Verse 9, "That's what you need to apply," verses 1-8, "That's what you need to remember," and, "Today, let's make this covenant work."

Verse 14, " 'I make this covenant and this oath, not with you alone, but with him who stands here with us today before the LORD our God, as well as with him who is not here with us today." So here's an offer from God - not just to the Jews or to this nation but to those who will come after them, to the strangers who came out with them, even one day to the future, those of us who stand before God; all based on one covenant relationship - submission or obedience to God. Verse 16, " '(for you know that we dwelt in the land of Egypt and that we came through the nations which you passed by, and you saw their abominations and their idols which were among them - wood and stone and silver and gold); so that there may not be among you man or woman or family or tribe, whose heart turns away today from the LORD our God, to go and serve the gods of these nations, and that there may not be among you a root bearing bitterness or wormwood; and so it may not happen, when he hears the words of this curse, that he blesses himself in his heart, saying, "I shall have peace, even though I follow the dictates of my heart" - as though the drunkard could be included with the sober. The LORD would not spare him; for then the anger of the LORD and His jealousy would burn against that man, and every curse that is written in this book would settle on him, and the LORD would blot out his name from under heaven.' " The Lord says to them, "Look, you've seen how detestable the lives of the heathen have been - the false gods. I don't want one of you to turn that way. I don't want one wicked heart to depart from a relationship with Me. I don't want anyone to end up there. If you develop a kind of attitude," verse 18, "that says, 'I know what God says, but I'm just going to do what I want,' then you're really not going to get away with it." Isn't that what He says? Verse 19, "If you just say, 'I'm going to still have peace. I'm going to ignore God, but I'm going to still have peace. I'm still going to have my way,'" and the Lord says, "No way are you going to have your way!" God can't spare someone who takes that attitude. It brings His wrath. There's no life for you there, so God makes sure that you know that.

The word "wormwood," by the way, in verse 18, is a plant that grows in the Mideast. In fact, the Greek word for wormwood is "**absinthe**." Those of you who used to drink, "**absinthe**" was sometimes called wormwood. You can't get it in America today. You can still drink it in England if you like. But it gets you kind of loopy. But it's a poison that starts in the root of a tree, and it eventually spreads to the whole plant. And God says, "Look, idolatry will not only ruin your life, it'll defile everything in your life." It is the biblical equivalent to "you're reaping what you sow." You get involved with that kind of life, you're going to ruin yourself; and you're going to think you're getting away with it, but you're not. God is so good. "I want to make a deal with you. I've done so much for you. I want you to obey and listen to Me and follow Me. You remember how you got here. You saw what I did to the lives of the people who you've overthrown." How often do you suppose verse 19 happens in people's lives? They hear God's warning, and they say things like, "Well, that's good for others, but I'm the exception." Right? "And I rationalize my behavior as though somehow drunk and sober go together." It's a pretty good analogy - like being punch drunk. You believe it, but your senses have gone.

So the Lord says, prophetically, in verse 21, " 'And the LORD would separate him from all the tribes of Israel for adversity, according to all the curses of the covenant that are written in this Book of the Law, so that the coming generation of your children who rise up after you, and the foreigner who comes from a far land, would say, when they see the plagues of that land and the sicknesses which the LORD has laid on it: "The whole land is brimstone, salt, and burning; it is not sown, nor does it bear, nor does any grass grow there, like the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah, Admah, Zeboiim, which the LORD overthrew in His anger and His wrath." All nations would say, "Why has the LORD done so to this land? What does the heat of this great anger mean?" Then the people would say: "Because they have forsaken the covenant of the LORD God of their fathers, which He made with them when He brought them out of the land of Egypt; for they went and served other gods and worshipped them, gods that they did not know and that He had not given to them. Then the anger of the LORD was aroused against this land, to bring on it every curse that is written in this book. And the LORD uprooted them from their land in anger, in wrath, and in great indignation, and cast them into another land, as it is to this day." The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.' " Now, look, they're just getting ready to in by faith, and God's talking about leaving and getting cast out and getting taken into another land and being overthrown. And you go, "Really?!" But prophetically, God

looks forward. Right? "If you don't follow Me, you can lose your land. You can be scattered. Even the heathen will stand around and go, 'What happened to these guys?' And someone's going to stand up and say, 'Well, these guys failed to walk with their God, and their God judged them.' "

Now look, verse 29, at the end of this - right in the middle of what seems to be a pretty prophetic and down kind of a statement, would say God doesn't explain everything to us. There are some things that we can't understand. But cause and effect, we can; reason and origin, we can. So, if you end up in that place, the dealing of God with His nation and His people, the connection between national obedience, national rebellion and consequences, then you should know that that's why it is. There's a connection between the two, isn't there? Lest you think you need to hunt out the hidden things, verse 29.....maybe you've found ministries - there're a couple of them that are pretty popular today who make their living searching out hidden things in the Bible. "Hey, did you read that word? Well, if you spell it backwards, stand on your head, and hold it just so, you can say Jesus." "Oh, I never saw that!" And they get these secret, hidden insights from places. Look, God would just have you look at the cover, I think. Right? He's given you all you need to know to live for Him. He's told you the consequences of not walking with Him. It's not hidden when you know the obvious.....when you know the obvious.

You know, the land of Israel, historically, laid waste for hundreds of years; I mean, hundreds of years. In fact, even the Turks came in for a time, and they actually denuded the whole land of every tree on the land. They just cut them down. When Israel went back into the land in 1948, they almost immediately started a process that's been going on almost 68 years now where, if you come into Israel, you can plant a tree with your name on it; and the nation is filled with trees. The land is being restored, and we're being prepared to be taken up, aren't we? So, here's a prophecy of losing the land and falling into disregard, captivity and dispersion. And yet God makes a promise, "You walk with Me, and repentance is available, restoration is available." It applies personally, but it also applies to the nation. So, "No one is in the dark here. Blessings follow those who follow Me, and curses follow those who don't." I can tell you tonight - that's certainly still the case. You walk with God, you're going to be blessed. Is life going to be easy? Nope. Not going to have any tears? Oh, you'll have plenty. But your life will be right where God wants you to be. But write Him off, and doom waits. It worked itself out for the people; it'll work itself out like that for you.

Chapter 30:1 - and here's the blessing of coming back to the Lord because He's just given us this very sad, "Here's what's waiting for you across the line." Verse 1, " 'Now it shall come to pass, when all these things come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God drives you, and you return to the LORD your God and obey His voice, according to all that I command you today, you and your children, with all your heart and with all your soul, that the LORD your God will bring you back from captivity, and have compassion on you, and gather you again from all the nations where the LORD your God has scattered you. If any of you are driven out to the farthest parts under heaven, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you. Then the LORD your God will bring you to the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it. He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live.' " I'm so glad chapter 30 is here. Chapter 29 is a bummer. But to this word of doom and captivity and scattering and POW to the nations of the world, and even the heathen explaining what happened to the church - God's people, God has this glorious promise (verse 2) that repentance and obedience, when they realize how far they've moved from God, God will bring them back. Now here's the deal. Remember the covenants? The covenant between God and Abraham regarding the land was unconditional. By that I mean it didn't matter what the people did. "The land is yours." You read to the end of the Book, the land is the children of Israel's. God gave them the land; and far more than they possess today. Right? Ten times what they possess today. But God made that promise - unconditionally.

To Moses, though, the relationship was conditional, and the condition was, "You be faithful, I'll bless you where you're at. You become unfaithful, and I'll take you to where people live who want to live the way you want to live in my land. You want to worship false gods, you can't do it here. You want to live the ungodly life, let Me take you where people do that sort of thing, and you can taste and see what kind of life that brings you; and then, in that captivity, you'll go, 'I hate this. This was a really dumb move. I want to go back.' " And the Lord says, "When you come back with everything you've got, I'll be there to fix you up." Pretty good news. Pretty good news if, tonight, you're far away from the Lord, and you've been way too far away, and you've been way too long away. God will restore. He remembers His promise. The promise is unconditional. And I would say to you that, in that same regard, your salvation is unconditional. You give your life to Christ, He'll finish the

work that He's begun (Philippians 1:6). No one will snatch you from His hand (John 10:29). He'll present you faultless before the throne (Jude 24). That's unconditional. However, the life of peace and joy and rest, as a believer in the Spirit, is very conditional. You don't walk with God, you won't have peace, you won't have joy. "Will I make it to heaven?" Oh, you'll make it. You'll make it miserably, but you'll make it. But you'll get there. There's an unconditional promise. But God would like you to have a life that's filled with joy. But I want you to notice from these verses - God is ever ready to restore those who will come back. The door is always open. You can't walk out. The door doesn't slam behind you. Right? Isaiah 55:7 says, "Let the wicked forsake his way, and the unrighteous man his thoughts; let him return to the LORD, and He will have mercy on him; and to our God, for He will abundantly pardon." That's good news, isn't it? Now, we won't necessarily forgive people that quickly. But He will. We like to keep records of wrongs, and, "I've been mad at you for years, and you did me wrong, and I'll never forgive you." God's not about that at all. He's a forgiving God. If we will go to Him. "If we confess our sins, He is faithful and just to forgive us our sins and to cleanse us from all unrighteousness" (1 John 1:9).

Back in Matthew 24, the Lord talks about (as Jesus talked about) the coming days, about the last days; the Lord quotes this promise out of Deuteronomy about God gathering Israel from all of the corners of the earth. What we see today in Israel, I believe, is the beginning of that fulfillment. None of the Jews have come back repenting. They're back in the land for a various bunch of other reasons; 55% of every Jew alive on the planet lives in Israel now, 25% of them live in New York. But they're headed home. There're more and more going home every year. Are they there because they're sorry for their sins? No. But God is beginning to gather them into the land, and Jesus will one day gather all of the nation back into the land in repentance and faith. And Zechariah will say, in chapter 12:10, that "the Spirit of grace and supplication will be poured out, and they will look upon Him whom they have pierced, and they will mourn for Him as an only son, and they will grieve for Him as one who grieves for a firstborn." And Paul says to the Romans, in chapter 11:26, "All Israel" (at that time) "will be saved." So there's coming a time when the land itself, the people, are going to turn back to God, and He's going to do exactly what God promised here to them. God promises (in verse 6) to change the heart, to turn them fully to the love of God. There will be a national conversion in Israel when the Lord returns. There is not one there today, I'll guarantee you. It's a very religious place - secularly religious.

Verse 7 says, " 'Also the LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecute you. And you will again obey the voice of the LORD and do all His commandments which I command you today. The LORD your God will make you abound in all the work of your hand, in the fruit of your body, in the increase of your livestock, and in the produce of your land for good. For the LORD will again rejoice over you for good as He rejoiced over your fathers, if you obey the voice of the LORD your God, to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this Book of the Law, and if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.' " Look, it is obedience that brings protection and blessing. To bless your life - that's the will of God. But there's an "if." You've got to follow Him. Just like today. You're going to heaven if you have Jesus. But your life will be at peace when you have Jesus completely in your life. Right? That's the promise. So, I think Pastor Chuck used to teach Jude 20, where Jude writes, "Praying in the Holy Spirit, keep yourselves in the love of God, looking for the mercy of our Lord Jesus Christ unto eternal life," and he used to say, "You've got to live your life under the spout where the blessings come out." If you keep yourself where God can bless you, that's what God will do. That's what He wants to do. That's the will of God.

Look what He says in verse 11, " 'For this commandment which I command you today is not too mysterious for you, nor is it far off. It is not in heaven, that you should say, "Who will ascend into heaven for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" Nor is it beyond the sea, that you should say, "Who will go over the sea for us and bring it to us, that we may hear it and do it?" But the word is very near you, in your mouth and in your heart, that you may do it.' " The Lord's argument with the people is God's will comes to us in understanding terms, and it's within arm's reach. Right? It's not out of reach. It's not hidden somewhere, "Oh, I wish I knew what the will of God is." Great. Read your Bible. God has put His Word in our hearts. We know what we ought to do. We can't claim ignorance. God's not hiding in some obscure, mystical place that you need a password to get in. He's not in Tibet in a cave somewhere with a guru. He's just given us His Word and sent His Spirit. No one's going to be able to stand before God in heaven one day and go, "I didn't get it. I didn't understand it. You should have written it more clearly." It's going to be a hard argument. "Believe in Jesus, and you shall be saved, you and your house" (Acts 16:31). That's not too hard to understand. That's even easy if you don't speak English, I'm pretty sure. So, Paul quotes verse 14 when he writes to the Romans, there in chapter 10:4, about "Christ is the end of the law for righteousness to everyone who believes." And then he quotes this very word, "The

word is near you, in your mouth and in your heart (that is, the word of faith which we preach)" (Romans 8:8). God has made you able to respond. All you have to do is be willing. How close, indeed, are you to the Lord? We are not saved by some difficult task that can be performed only by a few. God's made it easy. "If you confess with your mouth the Lord Jesus and believe in your heart that God has raised Him from the dead, you will be saved" (Romans 10:9). Not too complicated. Not too difficult. The way of life is simple, understood by all. The genius can get it, the small child can get it. God is as close as what you do with your next breath. You say, "Oh, I feel a billion miles away from God." Well that's not true. He's right there. Just call on His name. Surrender to Him. It's a matter of choice, isn't it? So the Lord calls on them, here, to choose and tells them of the simplicity of His work. "The word is very near you, it's in your mouth, it's in your heart. So just act upon it."

" 'See,' " He says in verse 15, " 'I have set before you today life and good, death and evil,' " (now, you might have thought it should read "life and death, good and evil," but it's the same thing; life is good, death is evil) " 'in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments, His statutes, and His judgments, that you may live and multiply; and the LORD your God will bless you in the land which you go to possess. But if your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish; you shall not prolong your days in the land which you cross over the Jordan to go in and possess.' " Look, it's your choice. And I would say to you tonight - it's your choice. Choose life or choose death. But understand you know what you're picking. Right? You set God aside, you don't love Him, you don't listen to Him, you can be in church every week, but if you don't listen, death is coming down your road. It's going to follow you wherever you go. But if you choose life, you follow God's Word, life will come, and life will be sustained. He says in verse 17, " 'If your heart turns away so that you do not hear, and are drawn away, and worship other gods and serve them, I announce to you today that you shall surely perish.' " Worship anything you choose, and hope for the best; it's only going to get worse. You can't say God didn't warn you.

So He says in verse 19, " 'I call heaven and earth as witnesses today against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing; therefore choose life, that both you and your descendants may live; that you may love the LORD your God, that you may obey His voice, and that you may cling to Him, for He is your life

and the length of your days; and that you may dwell in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.' "

Now the very next chapter, Moses just says, "I am old, and I can't get around so good." Unfortunately, eight verses later you read, "He died healthy." I don't know. But he's had enough now. This is it, man. This is all he this is his last sign-off word. "Pick a side. You're going forward. You've gotten here with miraculous words and miraculous works. Somehow those things haven't touched your heart enough for you to really be devoted to the Lord. But today God wants to make a deal with you. He wants you to look what He's done, and you start to follow Him. And you can belong to Him as your parents belonged to Him. And you can make a choice now. They made the wrong choice. You make the right choice. Cling to Him. He's your life and your length of days." That's not too great of a demand, is it? God's not asking you to do great things. Just love Him. And by loving Him, He means obey Him and follow Him.

Submitted by Maureen Dickson

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