

Choose Life!



SABBATH—NOVEMBER 13

READ FOR THIS WEEK'S LESSON: Genesis 2:8, 9, 15–17; John 3:16; Deuteronomy 30:15–20; Deuteronomy 30:1–10.

MEMORY VERSE: “ ‘Today I am giving you a choice of [between] two ways. And I ask heaven and earth to be witnesses of your choice. You can choose life or death. The first choice will bring a blessing. The other choice will bring a curse. So choose life! Then you and your children will live’ ” (Deuteronomy 30:19, ERV).



Sandy wants to live so much. But she puts her hope for life in the wrong place.

A 22-YEAR-OLD WOMAN NAMED SANDY is very sick. She has a growth in her brain. The doctors can do nothing to save her. But Sandy does not want to die.

So, Sandy makes a plan. After she dies, her head will be frozen in a barrel filled with a special liquid. This liquid will stop her brain from decaying and rotting. Her brain will wait in the liquid for 50 years, 100 years, 1,000 years or more until a scientist invents a way to load her brain into a computer. Then Sandy can “live” on, maybe forever.

This story is very sad. A young person is going to die before she has a chance to really live. Sandy wants to live so much. But she puts her hope for life in the wrong place. She chooses a plan that will fail in the end.

This week, we continue our study of Deuteronomy. We will look at the chance God gives us to choose life. If we want this gift, we must accept it in the way that God offers it to us.

THE TREE OF LIFE (Genesis 2:8, 9, 15–17)

Did any of us ask to be here? None of us did, any more than we chose where we were born or who our parents were.

We can say the same thing about Adam and Eve. They did not choose for God to make them any more than a leaf, a rock, or a mountain chose to be made. God gave us life anyway. What makes us different from other things God made? God made rocks and amoebas. Amoebas are tiny animals you can see only under a microscope. Rocks and amoebas do not have free choice. But we do. God did not make rocks and amoebas as copies of Himself. But we are copies of God.

At the same time, we did not choose for God to make us. God does offer us a choice about the life He gives us. We can choose to have everlasting life in Him. We can have this life because Jesus died on the cross for us.

What two choices does God give Adam about life? Read Genesis 2:8, 9, 15–17 and Genesis 3:22, 23 for the answer.

“The tree of life grows in the middle of Eden. The fruit from this tree makes human life continue forever. If Adam stays obedient to God, Adam will continue to eat from this tree whenever he wants. Then he will live forever. But Adam sins. So, God forbids Adam to eat from the tree of life anymore. Adam will die. God announces to Adam: ‘I used dust to make you, and when you die, you will become dust again’ ” [Genesis 3:19, ERV]. This punishment shows that when Adam dies, nothing will be left of his life on this earth.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, pages 532, 533, adapted.

Right from the start, the Bible shows that God gives us a choice: everlasting life, or death. We cannot wake up again from this death.

Do you see that the tree of life shows up again in the last book of the Bible? Read Revelation 2:7 and Revelation 22:2, 14. Maybe God wants us to remember that we always were meant to eat from the tree of life. But we lost that blessing because of sin. After God solves the sin problem, we will eat from this tree again. First, we must choose life. We have Jesus to thank for making this choice possible.

How do we choose life or death by the choices we make every day?

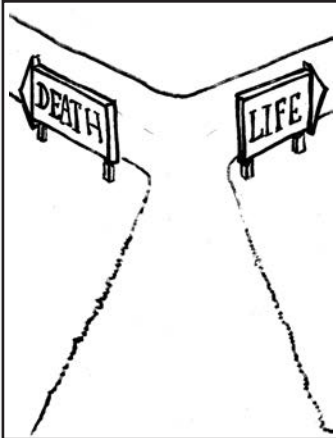


God forbids Adam from eating from the tree of life anymore.

ONLY TWO CHOICES (John 3:16)

All through the Bible, God gives us two choices: life or death.

Read the verses below. What two choices do you see in each of these verses? In some verses, the choices may be plain to see. In other verses, you may see only a hint.



We can choose everlasting life. Or we can choose the death we can never wake up from.

John 3:16 _____

Genesis 7:22, 23 _____

Romans 6:23 _____

Romans 8:6 _____

1 John 5:12 _____

Matthew 7:24–27 _____

In the end, we have only two choices. Remember, too, we are part of the worldwide war between good and evil. God will end this war sometime in the future. Then sin, Satan, evil, lawbreaking, and fighting against God will end forever. Before that time, each one of us will have made a personal decision for life or death. We can choose everlasting life. God first planned for us to have this life before He made the earth. Or we can choose the death we can never wake up from. Paul talks about what will happen to the people who choose this death: “They will be destroyed forever. They will be shut out of heaven. They will never see the glory [shining beauty] of the Lord’s strength” (2 Thessalonians 1:9, NIV).

What choice will we make? That decision rests with each of us. We have the choice before us: life or death.

Think some more about the choice we must make between everlasting life and the death that ends our lives forever. Why, then, is the Bible truth about hell so comforting? Some people believe hell is a place where lost people burn forever. What awful picture does this false idea give us about God if we believe He burns sinners forever in the fires of hell?

BLESSINGS AND CURSES (Deuteronomy 30:15–20)

Near the end of Deuteronomy, Moses finishes giving the people a long talk about the evil things that will happen to them if they disobey the Lord. Then Deuteronomy 30 starts with a promise. God will save His people after they disobey Him and are sent to live in another country.

But first, the people of Israel must confess their sins and turn from their evil ways.

Read Deuteronomy 30:15–20. What two choices does Moses put before the people? How do these choices show the same idea we see all through the Bible?

The Lord puts one of two choices before His people. The Lord gave Adam and Eve the same choice in Eden, too. The Hebrew words for “good” (**tov**) and for “evil” (**ra’**) in Deuteronomy 30:15 are the same Hebrew words used in Genesis. Moses uses these words to talk about the tree of the knowledge of “good” (**tov**) and “evil” (**ra’**). These words help us see that Adam and Eve have only one of two choices. They will choose to serve the Lord and live. Or they will choose death. The choice is the same for us, too. We can choose life, good, and blessings. Or we can choose death, evil, and curses. In the end, God offers His people only the good. But if the people turn away from God, then they will get bad things. Their bad choice will cause God to remove His special protection from them.

We see here, as we have seen before, that free choice is very important. Without this important Bible truth, we really cannot understand much of the rest of the Bible.

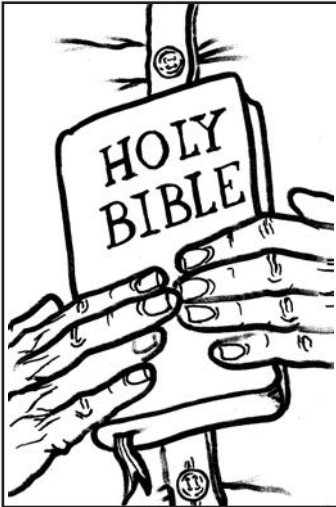
So, the Lord is really saying to His people, “I have given you free choice. Choose life, choose the good, choose blessings. Do not choose death, evil, and curses.”

We know the correct choice, right? The answer is easy, of course. But what happened? Israel chose the wrong thing again and again. We should learn from their poor example. Israel shows us what can happen in our own lives if we do not give ourselves fully to the Lord and choose life.

Read Deuteronomy 30:20. Do you see the connection in this verse between love and obedience? What must Israel do to be obedient to God? How can we follow this same rule in our own lives today?



Israel shows us what can happen in our own lives if we do not give ourselves fully to the Lord and choose life.

NOT TOO HARD FOR YOU (Deuteronomy 30:1–10)

The word is very near to you. It is in your mouth and in your heart.

Deuteronomy 30 starts with the Lord telling His people what will happen if they confess their sins and turn from their evil ways. God offers them many wonderful promises!

Read Deuteronomy 30:1–10. What promises does God give the people if they turn back to Him? What do these promises show us about the mercy and forgiveness of God?

For sure, the children of Israel felt comforted by these promises. God will show the people His love when they turn back to Him. Then His people will love Him back. They will show their love for God by being obedient to everything He tells them to do.

Read Deuteronomy 30:11–14. What does the Lord say to His people in these verses? What important promise does God make in these verses? What New Testament verses can you think of that show this same promise?

Look at the beautiful language the Lord uses in these verses and the powerful words He uses to share the thoughts in His heart. The Lord does not ask His people to do anything too difficult: “ ‘This command that I give you today is not too hard for you. It is not a secret hidden in some far away land. This command is not in heaven so that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us and bring it to us, so that we can hear and do it?” This command is not on the other side of the sea so that you should say, “Who will go across the sea for us and bring it to us, so that we can hear it and do it?” No, the word is very near to you. It is in your mouth and in your heart. So you can obey it’ ” (Deuteronomy 30:11–14, ERV). What is the Lord saying here? He says, You know My command well enough to tell it to other people. My command also is in your heart. So, you know that you must do it. You have no excuse for not obeying Me. “God will help us do everything He asks us to do.”—Ellen G. White, *Christ’s Object Lessons*, page 333, adapted.

After the Lord gives the people His command, His people are told to choose between life and death. If His people have faith, and they choose life, they will have life.

Are things any different for us today?

A QUESTION OF WORSHIP (Deuteronomy 4:19)

What made Israel different from the people around them? Worship. Worship is one of the most important parts of the agreement between God and His people. Only Israel worshiped the Lord. The people around them worshiped false gods, who were not really gods at all. The Lord announces: “ ‘Look! I am the One! There is no other God except me’ ” (Deuteronomy 32:39, NIV).

Read Deuteronomy 4:19; Deuteronomy 8:19; Deuteronomy 11:16; and Deuteronomy 30:17. What same warning do you see in all these verses? Why is this warning so important to the people of Israel?

Thousands of years ago, the Israelites lived around people whose way of life, beliefs, ideas, and actions went against the worship of the Lord. So, the people of God always needed to be careful not to let the “gods” of this earth become their gods, too.

Our God is the same as “a fire that burns everything up. He wants you to worship only him” (Deuteronomy 4:24, NIV; read also Deuteronomy 5:9 and Deuteronomy 6:15). Only God is worthy of our worship. Again, we see we must make a choice: we must choose to worship the Lord. He brings us life, good things, and blessings. Or we will worship another god. This choice brings us evil, curses, and death.

Read Revelation 13:1–15. How is worship shown in these verses? Compare these verses with Revelation 14:6–12. How do both sets of verses from Revelation show us the same warning in Deuteronomy against false worship?

Of course, Revelation and Deuteronomy show us different times in history. But both books raise the same important questions: Will people worship God and have life? Or will they give in to pressure, turn away from God, and choose death? In the end, each person must look in his or her heart for the answer. God did not force His people to follow Him in the desert. God will not force us today. Revelation 13 shows us that the sea-animal power uses force to make people obey. God works only by love.

How can we be sure that we are not turning away from Jesus for some other god?



Our God is the same as “ ‘a fire that burns everything up’ ” (Deuteronomy 4:24, NIV).



All humans suffer the penalty for the sin of Adam.

ADDITIONAL THOUGHT: God gave Israel a choice. God gives us the same choice, too. The important word here is choice. A false belief in Christianity teaches we do not have free choice. This teaching says that God chose some people to be lost and burn in hell forever. The Bible teaches we will decide by our own free choice if we will live or die. If someone makes the wrong choice, they will not burn in a never-ending lake of fire.

“ ‘When you sin, the pay you get is death. But God gives you the gift of eternal [everlasting] life. That’s because of what Christ Jesus our Lord has done’ (Romans 6:23 [NirV]). God will give His people life. Evil people will get death. Moses announced to Israel: ‘Today I’m giving you a choice. You can have life and success. Or you can have death and harm [suffering and disaster]’ (Deuteronomy 30:15 [NirV]). What is this death Moses talks about? This death is not the same death God announced to Adam after he sinned. All humans suffer this penalty for the sin of Adam. The death Moses talks about in this verse is named ‘the second death’ [Revelation 20:6, ERV]. This death is different in every way from everlasting life.”—Ellen G. White, *The Great Controversy*, page 544, adapted.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS:

- ① Does God punish people here and now for not obeying His law? Or does punishment just happen naturally when people sin? Or is the answer a little bit of both? Or is there a time when one explanation is more correct than the other explanation? How do we understand this topic?
- ② Look at the Bible verses in the Ellen G. White quote. What do these verses teach us about God and the power over sin He gives us?
- ③ Read Romans 10:1–10. In these verses, Paul uses verses from Deuteronomy 30:11–14 to explain how Jesus saves us by faith. Why do you think Paul uses these verses? Pay special attention to Romans 10:10. What is Paul saying in this verse?
- ④ What are ways the people around you and their views, beliefs, and interests can lead you into false worship if you are not careful?

PRAYER OF FAITH IN DALLAS

I needed hope. God gave me hope in a way I did not expect.

For the past two years, I went every week to a public library in Dallas, Texas. There, I worked on my PhD. Often, I saw a homeless man, Gerald, who often read in the library lobby. He always asked me for money when he saw me. I never gave him money. But I always shared with him the food I brought. I tried hard to be his friend and talk to him. But he always got angry. Maybe he was angry because I never gave him money.

When I went to the library, I saw Gerald on the stairs. He was very upset.

“What is wrong, Gerald?” I asked.

He told me he needed God.

At first, I was not sure if Gerald meant what he said. We talked about the plan of God to save us sinners. I asked Gerald if he wanted to accept Jesus into his life as Lord and Savior.

“Yes!” Gerald said.

I led Gerald in prayer to accept Jesus.

After that day, I did not see Gerald for six months.

Then, shortly before the Thanksgiving holiday in late November, I saw my homeless friend when I walked into the library.

I waited for Gerald to ask me for money. But he did not ask me for anything.

He gave me the biggest smile I ever saw on his face. He told me how God had been working in his life for the past half year.

Then Gerald showed me his Bible.

I was filled with joy! We prayed together. Then Gerald ended our prayer with the most beautiful prayer for me.

As we said goodbye, I took money from my pocket. I handed it to Gerald. “Happy Thanksgiving, Gerald!”

Ruber Leal works as Family Ministries manager at the Texas Conference of Seventh-day Adventists. This story shows Mission Purpose number 2 of the “I Will Go” plan for the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Purpose number 2 is: “We will help make the Adventist church grow strong in new ways in large cities. We will share Jesus with people from non-Christian religions.” Learn more at IWillGo2020.org.

INSIDE
Story
by RUBER LEAL



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