

## Pine Knoll Sabbath School Study Notes

### Fourth Quarter 2021: *Present Truth in Deuteronomy*

### Lesson 8 “Choose Life”

#### Read for this week’s study

Genesis 2:8, 9; Romans 6:23; 1 John 5:12; Deuteronomy 30:1–20; Romans 10:6–10; Deuteronomy 4:19; Revelation 14:6–12.

#### Memory Text

“ ‘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’ ” (Deuteronomy 30:19, NKJV).

#### Lesson Outline from Adult Sabbath School Study Guide

- I. Introduction
- II. The Tree of Life
- III. No Middle Ground
- IV. Life and Good, Death and Evil, Blessings and Cursing
- V. Not Too Hard for You
- VI. A Question of Worship
- VII. Further Study

#### Questions and Notes for Consideration

##### Facilitator: Daniel Duda

1. “This week, as we continue in Deuteronomy, we will look at the choice of life, and the opportunity given us to choose life, but to choose it on the terms that God, the Giver and Sustainer of life, has graciously offered.” (Sabbath afternoon)
2. The outline of the lesson is: Beginning with Adam & Eve in the Garden of Eden, God presented humankind with a clear choice between good and evil represented there by the ‘tree of life’. (Sunday’s lesson) With these two choices, there is no middle ground (Monday’s lesson) and that applies to the people of Israel at the time that Deuteronomy was given (Tuesday’s & Wednesday’s lesson) and our time (Thursday’s lesson) when we are warned against false worship (Revelation 13:1-15; 14:6-12 cf. Deuteronomy 4:19; 30:17). Therefore, we need to make a careful and right choice to avoid false worship and thus “choose life”.
3. We receive the greatest benefit from chapter 30 when we see how and where it is placed in the book of Deuteronomy. The whole book is an **invitation to know God**,

given to a new generation 40 years after the event of the Exodus. Moses tells them that they can get to know God through: **memory** (chs. 1-4 – life with God after the Exodus), **worship** (chs. 5-11 – how to live as God’s people), **law** (chs. 12-26 – specific instructions about this life); and **covenant** (chs. 27-34 – preparing the nation for life after Moses died).

4. What is the result of reading Deuteronomy 30 if we don’t understand its proper context? We might read it as a recipe for prosperity and miss the invitation to know God! What is the context of the memory text? Clearly, it is framed as ancient Near Eastern treaties/covenants invoking witnesses. Why is the covenant context so crucial? What is it supposed to teach Israelites (and us)? How can we create a safe environment where relationships can grow and develop without the fear of being criticized or belittled at the first sight of imperfection?
5. Why is an understanding of the law presented as something good and attainable in Deuteronomy 30:11-14? Yet when Moses looks into the future, he foresees that some other measure will be needed (Deuteronomy 31:20-21; cf. 28:15-68; 29:19-28). There seems little hope of people’s obedience and yet Moses can foresee a future for them as God’s people (30:2-4.6)! How do these words ensure that exile and curse are not the final outcome?
6. The answer is that the Lord himself will accomplish the change of heart. He will do for Israel what they could not accomplish for themselves. As the result of this act, their hearts will be turned toward their covenant God. We do not learn from Deuteronomy how this will be accomplished, only that it will be accomplished. How do Jeremiah, Ezekiel, and Isaiah further develop this idea?
7. How is this fulfilled in the New Testament according to Romans 10:6-9, 7-10? How does Jesus, the ultimate Word from God, become flesh and live in the mouths and hearts of believers? What does it mean to confess with our mouths that Jesus is the Lord, in contrast with people trying to obey the law on their own? Why do you think he used these verses from Deuteronomy? What point is Paul making?
8. What choices do we have today? How does what Jesus accomplished on the cross, forever bind people to their covenant God and write God’s law on their heart?
9. How can we extend this invitation to know God to those who do not know him yet? What role does God’s grace play in this?

### Thoughts from Graham Maxwell

I wonder if tonight we could think back in imagination to the very dramatic events of that first week of this earth’s history. The war had begun already in heaven. Satan had already leveled his charges and his accusations. One-third of the angels had already agreed with him that God is not worthy of our love and our trust.

Right in the middle of that devastating crisis, God invites his family to watch him as he creates yet another world—this time, ours. How easily he could have created our world with a snap of his fingers, in just an instant of time. But in the dramatic and significant setting of the Great Controversy, he chose this time to do it in six twenty-four hour days. On the first day, all he said was “Let there be light.” That’s all. And then days two, three, four, five, as God in unhurried majesty and drama unfolded his plans for our earth. By the sixth day, what a beautiful place this was. Where now were Satan’s charges that God was selfish?

I mean, look at the freedom. He created us in his own image with power to think and to do. And we know from human history that he created us free to either love and trust him, or hate him and spit in his face, because it has been done. And he created us able to do it! God even allowed Satan to approach our first parents at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. And he didn’t hide that tree in some dark corner of the garden; he put it right in the middle near the Tree of Life, so that Adam and Eve would see it every time they came to that other tree. Look in Genesis 2:9: “In the middle of the garden were the tree of life and the tree of the knowledge of good and evil.” (NIV)

Of course the God we know could be trusted not to allow our first inexperienced parents to be tested more than they were able to resist. You know he would not do that. And so Satan was only allowed to approach them at the Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. Adam and Eve were warned not to risk a confrontation with their wily foe. Isn’t that the meaning of that famous key text, next on the list, in 1 Corinthians 10:13? “But God keeps his promise [or God can be trusted], and he will not allow you to be tested beyond your power to remain firm.” (GNT)

You see, that tree was not put there as a test of obedience—an arbitrary test of obedience. That tree was put there to help them, to protect them. The Tree of the Knowledge of Good and Evil was not placed there before sin, but after sin. If it was before sin, it was an arbitrary test. After sin, it was to help them and protect them like every other one of God’s gracious laws. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, Conversations About God, #10, “The Reminder of the Evidence” recorded March 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/10MMCAG>*

Paul says people have been looking everywhere else but to the true God for help and he notes how religious the world has been. These heathen people, the Gentiles, have been very religious; it’s just that they haven’t been worshiping the true God. Neither have the Jews been worshiping the true God. They may call him by the right name, and they may go to the right church, and they may worship him on the right day, with the right food in their stomachs, and a

right offering in the offering plates, but they may still be worshipping the wrong God. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series Romans, chapter 5, recorded October 1977, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:* [http://pkp.cc/9MMROMANS66 \(Part 1\)](http://pkp.cc/9MMROMANS66) [http://pkp.cc/10MMROMANS66 \(Part 2\)](http://pkp.cc/10MMROMANS66)

A most significant verse about God is in Isaiah 29:13. What was wrong with their worship? They were busy with their worship. Just as when Jesus came, they were never more religious. They tithed, they health-reformed, they kept their Sabbaths, they memorized the scriptures. But it wasn't doing them any good! Jesus quotes this later on in Isaiah 29:13: "The Lord said: 'Because this people draw near with their mouth.'" Remember he also says, "Who requires you to trample my courts?" They came, and Amos says they sang a lot. "They honor me with their lips, while their hearts are far from me."

The heart is where a man does his thinking, his best thinking! Amos continues, "And their fear of me", and that is their reverence, their worship of me, "is but a commandment of men learned by rote." Unthinking, mechanical worship is an utter insult to our intelligent, gracious God. And it doesn't do us any good! It destroys us to simply do these things because we're supposed to. And if we Adventists, when we're asked why we do something or don't do it—if all we can say is, "Well, because God said so, and I believe it, and that's all there is to it," that's something learned by rote. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, The Picture of God in All 66 – Isaiah, recorded 1982, Riverside, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct links:*

\*Audio links to the West Covina series recorded in 1984:

[http://pkp.cc/33MMPOGIA66 \(Part 1\)](http://pkp.cc/33MMPOGIA66) [http://pkp.cc/34MMPOGIA66 \(Part 2\)](http://pkp.cc/34MMPOGIA66)

Graham: The third angel's message? It's significant that the last great message from the angels is about the destruction of the wicked.

Lou: It has some pretty strong language.

Graham: Very strong language. It seems to me, it's God's last message of warning and the invitation before the end. And things have become so desperate that he raises his voice that high. It would be like a father walking with his son up in the mountains, and the son is getting closer and closer to the cliff. At first the father says, "Son, stop right where you are." But he doesn't hear. He raises his voice, but the wind is blowing it away. So finally the father at the top of his lungs shouts to the boy, you know, "Stop where you are!!" And on the trail a group following say to themselves, "Listen to that heartless father bellowing at his poor little boy."

Later on when they get closer and learn the truth they say, “Forgive us; we misunderstood.” I think many of us may owe God an apology. I’m glad he’s raised his voice. We needed it.

Lou: Revelation 14 is something that tells us about how dangerous the cliff is.

Graham: In the strongest terms in all Scripture. But I like the fact that the one who wrote that, is the one who wrote, “There is no fear in love. Perfect love casts out all fear.” This is the beloved disciple. He knew what he was doing. So we can understand that God is love and still understand the need for earthquake, wind and fire.

Lou: Graham, you alluded to this matter of hell, and someone has raised this question: “Since most Christian believers have some idea of a form of hell, some kind or other, where did that idea of hell come from? It seems to be so prevalent throughout Christianity.”

Graham: One of the first Christian documents that describes hell is the *Revelation of St. Peter* which is in the *New Christian Apocrypha*. And I don’t think there’s a single copy of that in the room tonight. That’s a very detailed description. It antedates Dante’s *Inferno* by many centuries. And in there it tells you exactly what will happen to you. For example, if your prevailing sin was lying, you might be hung by your tongue over a hot flame. If perchance some other organ of the body was your instrument in sin, you might be similarly tortured. I mean, it’s very detailed.

But I think the real origin of this is the belief in Satan’s lie in the Garden of Eden that we’re immortal. Because if we are immortal and we’re not all going to be saved, then some are going to be immortally lost; which means that some **have** to go somewhere else. We either go to heaven to enjoy the bliss of the hereafter, or we go to some other deprived place, which to some is a place of sulfurous flames. God has no choice, since the soul is immortal anyway. I believe that a combination of the immortality of the soul, which the devil taught in the Garden of Eden, combined with his caricature of God as a destroying God, has produced the doctrine of hell. And I don’t think anything has turned more people against God than the doctrine of eternal torment in hell.

Lou: So it’s another example of Satan’s success in giving us a false picture of God and creating fear.

Graham: Yes. Going back to, “The day you eat thereof, you will die.” He twisted that. {Graham Maxwell. Excerpt from the audio series, *Conversations About God*, #9 with Lou Venden, “There Is No Need to Be Afraid of God” recorded March 1984, Loma Linda, California} *To listen to the entire audio of the above reference, click on the following direct link: <http://pkp.cc/9MMCAG>*

## Further Study with Ellen White

Created to be “the image and glory of God” (1 Corinthians 11:7), Adam and Eve had received endowments not unworthy of their high destiny. Graceful and symmetrical in form, regular and beautiful in feature, their countenances glowing with the tint of health and the light of joy and hope, they bore in outward resemblance the likeness of their Maker. Nor was this likeness manifest in the physical nature only. Every faculty of mind and soul reflected the Creator’s glory. Endowed with high mental and spiritual gifts, Adam and Eve were made but “little lower than the angels” (Hebrews 2:7), that they might not only discern the wonders of the visible universe, but comprehend moral responsibilities and obligations. {Ed 20.2}

After the earth was created, and the beasts upon it, the Father and Son carried out their purpose, which was designed before the fall of Satan, to make man in their own image. They had wrought together in the creation of the earth and every living thing upon it. And now God said to His Son, “Let us make man in our image.” {TMK 13.2}

Though created innocent and holy, our first parents were not placed beyond the possibility of wrong-doing. God might have created them without the power to transgress His requirements, but in that case there could have been no development of character; their service would not have been voluntary, but forced. Therefore He gave them the power of choice—the power to yield or to withhold obedience. {Ed 23.1}

The knowledge which God did not want our first parents to have was a knowledge of guilt. And when they accepted the assertions of Satan, which were false, disobedience and transgression were introduced into our world. This disobedience to God’s express command, this belief of Satan’s lie, opened the floodgates of woe upon the world. Satan has continued the work begun in the Garden of Eden. He has worked vigilantly, that man might accept his assertions as proof against God. He has worked against Christ in His efforts to restore the image of God in man, and imprint in his soul the similitude of God. {1SM 214.2}

The whole universe will have become witnesses to the nature and results of sin. And its utter extermination, which in the beginning would have brought fear to angels and dishonor to God, will now vindicate His love and establish His honor before the universe of beings who delight to do His will, and in whose heart is His law. Never will evil again be manifest. Says the word of God: “Affliction shall not rise up the second time.” Nahum 1:9. The law of God, which Satan has reproached as the yoke of bondage, will be honored as the law of liberty. A tested and proved creation will never again be turned from allegiance to Him whose character has been fully manifested before them as fathomless love and infinite wisdom. {GC 504.1}

God does not force the will or judgment of any. He takes no pleasure in a slavish obedience. He desires that the creatures of His hands shall love Him because He is worthy of love. He would have them obey Him because they have an intelligent appreciation of His wisdom, justice, and

benevolence. And all who have a just conception of these qualities will love Him because they are drawn toward Him in admiration of His attributes. . . . {GC 541.3}

The destiny of the wicked is fixed by their own choice. Their exclusion from heaven is voluntary with themselves, and just and merciful on the part of God. {GC 542.2}

It is beyond the power of the human mind to estimate the evil which has been wrought by the heresy of eternal torment. The religion of the Bible, full of love and goodness, and abounding in compassion, is darkened by superstition and clothed with terror. When we consider in what false colors Satan has painted the character of God, can we wonder that our merciful Creator is feared, dreaded, and even hated? The appalling views of God which have spread over the world from the teachings of the pulpit have made thousands, yes, millions, of skeptics and infidels. {GC 536.2}

But when men pass the limits of divine forbearance, that restraint is removed. God does not stand toward the sinner as an executioner of the sentence against transgression; but He leaves the rejectors of His mercy to themselves, to reap that which they have sown. {GC 36.1}

It is not that God sends out a decree that man shall not be saved. He does not throw a darkness before the eyes which cannot be penetrated. But man at first resists a motion of the Spirit of God, and, having once resisted, it is less difficult to do so the second time, less the third, and far less the fourth. Then comes the harvest to be reaped from the seed of unbelief and resistance. {FLB 58.5}

On the other hand, every ray of light cherished will yield a harvest of light. Temptation once resisted will give power to more firmly resist the second time; every new victory gained over self will smooth the way for higher and nobler triumphs. Every victory is a seed sown to eternal life. {FLB 58.6}

God destroys no man; but when a man stifles conviction, when he turns from evidence, he is sowing unbelief, and will reap as he has sown. As it was with Pharaoh, so it will be with him; when clearer light shines upon the truth, he will meet it with increased resistance, and the work of hardening the heart will go on with each rejection of the increasing light of heaven. In simplicity and truth we would speak to the impenitent in regard to the way in which men destroy their own souls. You are not to say that God is to blame, that he has made a decree against you. No, he is not willing that any should perish, but that all should come to the knowledge of the truth, and to the haven of eternal bliss. No soul is ever finally deserted of God, given up to his own ways, so long as there is any hope of his salvation. God follows men with appeals and warnings and assurances of compassion, until further opportunities and privileges would be wholly in vain. The responsibility rests upon the sinner. By resisting the Spirit of God today, he prepares the way for a second resistance of light when it comes with mightier power; and thus he will pass from one stage of indifference to another, until, at last,

the light will fail to impress him, and he will cease to respond in any measure to the Spirit of God. {RH, February 17, 1891 par. 2}

When Christ took human nature upon Him, He bound humanity to Himself by a tie of love that can never be broken by any power save the choice of man himself. Satan will constantly present allurements to induce us to break this tie—to choose to separate ourselves from Christ. Here is where we need to watch, to strive, to pray, that nothing may entice us to *choose* another master; for we are always free to do this. But let us keep our eyes fixed upon Christ, and He will preserve us. Looking unto Jesus, we are safe. Nothing can pluck us out of His hand. In constantly beholding Him, we “are changed into the same image from glory to glory, even as by the Spirit of the Lord.” 2 Corinthians 3:18. {SC 72.1}

Through the ministry of the angels the Holy Spirit is enabled to work upon the mind and heart of the human agent and draw him to Christ. . . . But the Spirit of God does not interfere with the freedom of the human agent. The Holy Spirit is given to be a helper, so that man may cooperate with the Divine, and it is given to Him to draw the soul but never to force obedience. {TMK 57.2}

God had power to hold Adam back from touching the forbidden fruit; but had He done this, Satan would have been sustained in his charge against God’s arbitrary rule. Man would not have been a free moral agent, but a mere machine (RH June 4, 1901). {1BC 1084.2}

Our will is not to be forced into co-operation with divine agencies, but it must be voluntarily submitted. Were it possible to force upon you with a hundredfold greater intensity the influence of the Spirit of God, it would not make you a Christian, a fit subject for heaven. {MB 142.1}

It is not the plan of God to compel men to yield their wicked unbelief. Before them are light and darkness, truth and error. It is for them to decide which to accept. The human mind is endowed with power to discriminate between right and wrong. God designs that men shall not decide from impulse, but from weight of evidence, carefully comparing scripture with scripture (*Redemption: or the Miracles of Christ*, pp. 112, 113). {1BC 1120.5}

Christ does not drive but draws men unto Him. The only compulsion which He employs is the constraint of love. {MB 127.1}

The work of Christ is to redeem, to restore, to seek and to save that which was lost. If we are connected with Christ, we also are partakers of the divine nature and are to be laborers together with God. We are to bind up the bruised and wounded soul; and if a brother or a sister has erred, we are not to join with the enemy in destroying and ruining, but to work with Christ to restore such a one in the spirit of meekness. {HP 291.2}

Angels do not come to the earth to denounce and to destroy, to rule and to exact homage, but are messengers of mercy to cooperate with the Captain of the Lord's host, to cooperate with the human agents who shall go forth to seek and save the lost sheep. Angels are commanded to encamp round about those who fear and love God. {LHU 207.3}

The Holy Spirit will not compel men to take a certain course of action. We are free moral agents; and when sufficient evidence has been given us as to our duty it is left with us to decide our course. {RH, July 17, 1888 par. 4}

The only condition upon which the freedom of man is possible is that of becoming one with Christ. "The truth shall make you free;" and Christ is the truth. Sin can triumph only by enfeebling the mind, and destroying the liberty of the soul. Subjection to God is restoration to one's self,—to the true glory and dignity of man. The divine law, to which we are brought into subjection, is "the law of liberty." James 2:12. {DA 466.5}

It is no part of Christ's mission to compel men to receive Him. It is Satan, and men actuated by his spirit, who seek to compel the conscience. Under a pretense of zeal for righteousness, men who are confederated with evil angels sometimes bring suffering upon their fellow men in order to convert them to their ideas of religion; but Christ is ever showing mercy, ever seeking to win by the revealing of His love. He can admit no rival in the soul, nor accept of partial service; but He desires only voluntary service, the willing surrender of the heart under the constraint of love. {AA 541.1}

With untold love our God has loved us, and our love awakens toward Him as we comprehend something of the length and breadth and depth and height of this love that passeth knowledge. By the revelation of the attractive loveliness of Christ, by the knowledge of His love expressed to us while we were yet sinners, the stubborn heart is melted and subdued, and the sinner is transformed and becomes a child of heaven. God does not employ compulsory measures; love is the agent which He uses to expel sin from the heart. By it He changes pride into humility, and enmity and unbelief into love and faith. {MB 76.3}

In striking contrast to the wrong and oppression so universally practised were the mission and work of Christ. . . . He planned a government which would use no force; His subjects would know no oppression. . . . Not as a fierce tyrant did He come, but as the Son of man; not to conquer the nations by His iron power, but "to preach good tidings unto the meek;" "to bind up the brokenhearted, to proclaim liberty to the captives, and the opening of the prison to them that are bound;" "to comfort all that mourn" (Isaiah 61:1, 2). He came as the divine Restorer, bringing to oppressed and downtrodden humanity the rich and abundant grace of Heaven, that by the power of His righteousness, man, fallen and degraded though he was, might be a partaker of divinity. . . . {AG 14.3}

God has given us the power of choice; it is ours to exercise. We cannot change our hearts, we cannot control our thoughts, our impulses, our affections. We cannot make ourselves pure, fit for God's service. But we can choose to serve God, we can give Him our will; then He will work in us to will and to do according to His good pleasure. Thus our whole nature will be brought under the control of Christ. {MH 176.2}