

## **Survey, Interpretation, Evaluation, Application Deuteronomy 29-34**

### **A. Main Units**

- I. Entering into the Covenant (29-30)
- II. Moses Prepares for Transition (31-34)

The first main unit reflects Moses calling the people to enter into the covenant God is making with them on this day, urging them to obey the covenant and warning them not to disobey it.

The second main unit reflects a time of transition when Moses prepares the people for new leadership under Joshua, writes a prophetic song of warning so the people can remember to obey, prophesies blessings over each tribe, and goes to his death.

### **Sub-Units**

- I. Entering into the Covenant (29-30)
  - A. Obey the Covenant (29)
  - B. Doable Commandments (30)
- II. Moses Prepares for Transition (31-34)
  - A. Joshua Commissioned (31)
  - B. Moses' Song (32)
  - C. Moses' Blessing and Death (33-34)

### **B. Structural Relationships**

#### **1. Climax**

This section (29-34) is a connector between the giving of statutes and ordinances that preceded it and the people's movement into the promised land that will follow. The climactic structure of this section moves that transition forward. The author begins this section with a call to obey the covenant (29). He bridges the text from law in the abstract to exhortation: that the law is doable (30), and that the people should not turn away from God, or things will not go well (29-32). The author is moving the reader from the abstract law to the actual living of the law in the promised land.

Joshua's commissioning (31) raises the climactic development, as this is a hands-on action of transition to a new life in the promised land. The people will move forward under new leadership, and this is really happening, no longer just being anticipated. Moses' Song (32) intensifies the warnings that turning away from God will not go well. The warnings are heightened because the author prophesies that the people will turn away (31). The Song (32) also moves the climactic development forward because this is a song the people will carry with them into the promised land, to help them stay focused on God and not stray. As the climactic structure moves forward, the reality in the

promised land becomes more concrete. The climactic development is intensified as Moses speaks a blessing over each of the tribes of Israel (33), both anticipating his death (34) and sending them into their new life in the promised land. The entire Chapter 33 is part of the climax of this section, but the specific climactic verses are the final verses of that chapter: 33:26-29, which is a prophetic promise of God's hope for Israel and is here elevated above the more dismal prophecies that precede it in this section.

### **Interpretive Questions**

How does this unit reach its climax in 33:26-29? How does this climactic development shed light on the climactic passage and the material leading to it? Why does the author include this climax? What are the implications of this climax?

### **Strategic Area**

Verses 33:26-29 represent the height of blessing and hope for obedience and relationship with God in the promised land.

## **2. Contrast**

The author builds this section on several contrasts: life/death, obedience/disobedience, blessing/curse, and following God/other gods. The contrasts show what is at stake concerning the people's relationship with God. The people are at a turning point, entering a new land. Their past indicates their propensity for disobedience of God. They are warned to recognize that these stark contrasts will be operating in their future as a faith community in their new land, and the stakes are high (life/death and relationships with God).

Through this structure of contrasts, the author shows that the people must be intentional, daily, about their choices. The contrasts show that the decision is in the hands of the people (obedience/disobedience, following God/other gods), and that God will respond to either choice (blessing/curse). The author also uses this structure of contrasts to show that making a decision "for" something is making a decision "against" something. There is no halfway. Choosing to follow other gods is choosing not to follow God. Choosing disobedience is not choosing obedience.

### **Interpretive Questions**

What major differences does the author emphasize here between life/death, obedience/disobedience, blessing/curse, following God/following other gods? What is the precise and specific meaning of each difference? Why does the author deal with these differences as he does? What are the implications of this contrast?

### **Strategic Area**

Verses 30:15-20 bring these contrasts together as a turning point for the people as they prepare to enter the promised land.

### **3. Interrogation**

Through the structure of Interrogation, the author shows how God gives many solutions to the problem of the people's tendency toward rebellion – *if* the people choose to accept these solutions. In Chapter 29, the solution of covenant with God is offered. In Chapter 30, solutions are offered of simplified (doable) commandments, warnings, and a chance to return to God. In Chapter 31, the solutions are offered of Joshua's leadership, as well as reading the law out loud so the people will really hear with every part of their being. In Chapter 32, a solution is offered in the form of a warning song for the people to remember to stay focused on God and not turn to other gods. In Chapter 33, prophetic blessings over each tribe are offered as a solution.

### **Interpretive Questions**

What is the meaning of the problem presented here (the people's tendency toward rebellion)? How is this problem solved (in the many ways God makes available as highlighted in this section)? What are the major elements involved in the movement from problem to solution? What is the meaning of each element? Why does the author include this interrogation? What are the implications of this interrogation?

### **Strategic Area**

Verses 30:15-20 demonstrate the essential qualities of the solutions offered, in terms of simplicity, warnings, covenant, and the opportunity to follow God despite a history of disobedience and rebellion.

### **4. Causation with Contrast**

The author includes a structure of causation, reiterating how serving other gods leads to death (29-32). The author develops and reiterates this causation through warnings, reminders, and a description of consequences (death), along with an expectation that the people will follow other gods despite these warnings. Through the structure of causation, the author connects death with serving other gods and life with serving God, so a contrast between death and life as well as a contrast between serving other gods and serving God is built into this causal structure. The author builds choice into the causal trajectory, so the reader understands that the causation (following other gods) will lead to the effect (death), but a choice can be made to opt out of that trajectory by avoiding the causal trigger and choosing not to follow other gods.

## Interpretive Questions

How does the cause (serving other gods) produce the effect (death)? What are the major elements involved in this movement from cause to effect? What is the meaning of each element? Why does the author include this causation? What are the implications of this causation?

What major differences does the author emphasize here between serving other gods versus serving God, and between death and life? What is the precise and specific meaning of each difference? Why does the author deal with these differences as he does? What are the implications of this contrast?

## Strategic Area

Verses 30:15-20 include both the causal link (30:17-18) and the contrast (30:16,20 contrasted with 30:18), as well as the invitation to opt out (30:16, 19-20) of this causal trajectory by rejecting the causal trigger (30:17).

## 5. Recurrences

- a. “Witness” language (30:19; 31:19, 21, 28).
- b. Other gods (29:18, 25-26; 30:17; 31:16, 18, 20; 32:15-18, 21).
- c. Warnings (29:18-28; 30:17-19; 31:16-29; 32:15-25).

## Interpretive Questions

What is the primary meaning of these recurring elements? How do the individual occurrences relate to and shed light on each other? Why does the author include these recurrences? What are the implications of these recurrences?

## Strategic Area

Verses 30:15-20 includes each type of recurrence listed above.

## C. Literary Form

Teaching and instruction; prophetic warnings; poetry; blessings; narrative.

## D. Atmosphere

The atmosphere is a mixture of anticipation of the promised land and heaviness from the many prophetic warnings not to disobey God, including the indications that the people will disobey. The atmosphere is sober in that the people are preparing for a challenging new life in a new land, without the leader (Moses) who got them this far.

They don't know what they will encounter; they know God will be with them; they remember His mighty acts; yet they still have a disobedient nature. The atmosphere is thus serious and sobering, with the hint of anticipation, the possibility for blessing, and the hope for flourishing.

### E. Detailed Observation

1. Give primary attention to chs. 29–32.
2. Interpret 30:15-20 in some detail and relate significant features of this paragraph to the larger context of Deuteronomy and the Pentateuch as a whole.

Verse	Observation	Inference
30:15	"See" is active, indicates that the people are called to take notice of what is about to be shared.	It is easy for the people to think they have heard all these words before and therefore let the words pass by and miss the importance of what is being said. It is not to be taken for granted that the people will get this right unless they intentionally take note and pay attention.
30:15	Moses is speaking (continued from 29:2). He has just told the people these commandments are doable (30:11-14).	Moses demonstrates that he is with the people and for the people. Since he is speaking on behalf of God, he is also demonstrating he is with and for the people.
30:15	These realities have been "set" before the people ("you," masculine singular, i.e., Israel).	God has deliberately given the people a choice and has made that choice evident to them. Israel needs to make these choices not only as individuals but also together as a community.
30:15	The words are not given in contrasting pairs but rather in pairs based on positive or negative identification. The positive is given first, thus emphasized.	God desires and intends the positive outcome for His people.
30:15, 19	The words in 30:15 are similar to (but not entirely the same as) the words in 30:19. However, in 30:19 the pairs of words are given as contrasts. The people's choice is directly mentioned in 30:19, after being demonstrated by the contrasting descriptions in 30:16-17.	The positive groupings reflect God's desire for the people. The contrast reflects more closely how significant the people's choice is and that it could go either way.
30:16-18	Obedience to God is the key to which outcome of 30:15 will result.	Obedience to God makes the difference between life and death.

30:19	The people are told to choose life. Moses does not hide what is at stake if they do not choose life. The simplicity of the choice and the prompting of the answer confirms the ease of obedience Moses claims in 30:11-14.	The people determine their fate by how they respond to God. God is not capricious. He is very clear about what is at stake and what it takes to have life instead of death. He is also very clear about which option He wants them to choose. He makes it simple to decide.
30:16-18	Here the author explains exactly what to do in order to choose life (3:19).	God teaches His people how to live.
30:19	The author uses “witness” language, including a contrast between witness “against” the people and “set before you” on Moses’ part.	If the people “miss” this and make the wrong decision, it is on them. They have been given every opportunity to make the right decision and live.
30:19	Walton explains that in calling on heaven and earth as witnesses (language typical of ANE treaties), the author suggests that this covenant extends beyond human life (175).	This covenant with God has implications bigger than the immediate faith community. In the context of God’s promise to Abram in Genesis 12:3 to bless all people on earth through him, the larger implications can be seen.
30:16	RSV includes a phrase attributed to the Greek that does not appear in the Hebrew. Hebrew begins this verse with אשר. I am not sure of the specific use of אשר as it connects verse 16 to 15, or how that affects the meaning, except that this verse in Hebrew commands Israel to follow what is commanded in this verse in order to live.	
30:16	The outcome of “life” from verse 15 is connected with loving God (mentioned first), walking in God’s ways, and keeping His commandments, statutes, and ordinances.	The ability to live derives from loving God and walking in His ways. It is not a sense that He simply returns life for obedience. Rather, there is something qualitative in loving God and walking in His ways that leads to and undergirds, even defines life. This brings to mind Genesis 2:17 in which death entered in upon disobedience to God. Death was comprehensive and affected all humanity and creation from that time forward. It wasn’t a punishment but a state of

		being that derived from choosing not to align with God who is the source of life.
30:16	Loving God and walking in His ways precedes (and is separate from) keeping His commandments, even though both of those are also part of His commandments.	Keeping God’s commandments involves more than literal obedience to specific statutes. It also involves a heart attitude of devotion to God and aligning oneself with His ways in all aspects of life, not just in certain situations addressed by His law.
30:16, 19	Choosing life affects the well-being of the community’s descendants. The choice of life is offered so that they may multiply and so that their descendants will live. There is a divine intentionality connected with offering the people the opportunity to choose life.	Disobedience has generational consequences. God desires that future generations will also have a relationship with Him.
30:17	“Hear” seems to reflect back to 28:1, 15 as to whether or not the people will obey God’s voice. “Hear” is also repeated in other parts of Deuteronomy, also in the context of obedience to God (6:3-4; 9:1).	Disobedience must not be viewed in a passive or detached way as a simple disregard for a specific law. Rather, disobedience must be viewed as it really is: directly turning away from God’s voice. This brings to mind Genesis 3:6 when Adam did expressly what God told him not to do (Gen 2:17).
30:17-18	Despite the many types of commandments, statutes, and ordinances given in Deuteronomy, the difference between life and death hinges on not turning away from God and worshiping and serving other gods. This theme is repeated in Deuteronomy 29, 31, and 32 as well.	Loving God and walking in His ways can only be done with single-minded devotion and wholly giving oneself to God. There is no way to half-love God or half-walk in His ways. It’s all or none.
30:17	The emphasis is on the “heart” specifically turning away.	A relationship with God reflects what is in the heart.
30:16, 20	Verse 20 adds a more continuous aspect to what is taught in verse 16. Loving God brings life (30:16), but life is also characterized by loving God (30:20).	It is not enough just to profess love for God and gain life. A life devoted to God will be expressed by ongoing love of God.
30:20	Life is defined as loving, obeying, and cleaving to God.	Nothing apart from total devotion of one’s total being to God may be considered life.

30:20	The author emphasizes that God's voice specifically is to be obeyed. The implied contrast, especially amid the discussion of following other gods, is that the voice of other gods should not be listened to if Israel desires to choose life.	It is conceivably possible to follow a statute of God while listening to another god. Following statutes is not enough to stay complete in line with God.
30:20	The cluster of three verbs emphasizes that the person is to be surrounded and committed to God in all aspects of life: giving one's heart only to God, responding only to His voice, and literally attaching one's whole life to God. The representation includes heart/mind, ears, and hands, indicating the person holistically.	Relationship with God requires total commitment. To stay in relationship with God and not stray requires total and constant focus on Him.
30:20	The author reminds the people of God's promise to their forefathers. The possibility for life and blessing that He sets before them is part of that promise that she is fulfilling.	God is faithful to His covenant. A covenant is a two-way relationship. Choosing life is part of the people's call to be faithful to God's covenant.
30:17	"Drawn away" emphasizes the people's propensity to be lured away from God, distracted, attracted to other seemingly "good" things (in contrast to the "good" of 30:15). Hearing is (by its contrasting negative use) the antidote, in part, to keep from being drawn away. However, this is only one part. Included in this cluster is the heart actively turning away. So it is not just the people's propensity to be lured away, but also their action of turning their hearts away that brings a wedge between life and death. Verse 20 offers a strong, active verb cluster (antidote) in response to the passive cluster (problem) of verse 17.	The people need to be aware of their weaknesses in their relationship with God and need to take very specific measures to stay faithful to God. Passivity will not work.
30:18	The author contrasts the people's ability to enter and possess the land (despite their fears and doubts on this matter) with the declaration that they will die if they choose not to stay faithful to God. There is another layer here in that God is literally giving	It is not the people's own strength that will cause them to take the land and live. It is only by God's power that any of this will happen. If the people are tempted to rely on their own military power to conquer the land, they are turning away from the

	them the land because of His promise to their forefathers (30:20). Their ability to enter, possess, and live all comes from God.	very power of God that will cause them to actually live in the land.
30:15	The author has made life and good synonymous, while death and evil are synonymous. In the context of this paragraph, “good” is equated with life, blessing, and God, and not with turning away to serve other gods.	From God’s perspective, evil does not characterize life. Good characterizes life. Genuine “good” does not come from other gods or characterize the life lived serving them.
30:18	“Perish” in this verse does not indicate immediate death because in this verse they still live. This brings to mind Gen 3:7-8 in which death was not immediate, though it was prophesied. Perishing comes from turning to other gods.	There is another quality of “perish” here beyond immediate physical death. God is the source of life and there is a deeper meaning to what it means to be alive. Other gods cannot give life.
30:16, 19	These two verses mention “blessing” only in association with God. In verse 16, God gives blessing. In verse 19, God (through Moses) sets blessing as a choice before the people. These two verses bracket the discussion that turning to other gods means death. In verse 19, death is equated with curse and blessing with life. In the context of this whole paragraph, blessing is equated with dwelling in the new land with life and length of days, in other words, a total state of being that God intends and desires for the people.	Other gods do not bring a genuine state of blessing.
30:19	“Witness” language is also used later in Deuteronomy (31:19, 21, 28). The larger context is the people’s rebellious tendencies toward God. The language of “witnessing” indicates that God’s anger and/or the absence of His blessing toward the people is not because of His doing, but rather because of their rebellion.	The image of “witnessing” against the people’s rebellion resonates with Genesis 2:8-17, in which the author clearly shows how much God provided for the flourishing of people. The death and loss that followed was the result of the people’s rebellion, not a lack on God’s part. (Isaiah 5 comes to mind as well in God’s lavish provision for His garden.)
30:17-18	Worship of other gods leads to the people perishing. The warning against following other gods is	It is within the covenant relationship that the people experience God’s blessings. The rise of evil as a

	repeated in 31:16-18. The bad consequences that result are associated with the people breaking their covenant with God (31:16). Evil and destruction come because God turns His face from the people (31:17-18).	result of the people turning away from God brings to mind the rise and flourishing of evil in response to the people's rebellion during the time of Genesis 5:1-4.
30:16	Obedience to God is associated with the people multiplying in the new land. God's intention to multiply the people can be seen in Deuteronomy 1:10 as well as in Genesis 1:28.	God's intent from the beginning was for people to multiply and flourish in the land. Because evil and death work against this, the people need to turn to God as their source of life and blessing.
30:15, 19	The people are given a choice between life and death. This reflects the choice God presented to the first man in Genesis 2:16-17. God's preference is expressed in both instances: In Genesis 2:17, the command not to eat of the tree that will result in death; in Deuteronomy 30:19, the command to choose life.	God's desire and plans for the people to live and flourish requires a partnership decision from the people as well. God tells them what they should decide, and why, but He does not force life on them. The decision is theirs. They can choose death. God does not withhold information from the people. He makes the choices and consequences very clear.
30:19, 20	The witnessing language, the outcome offered in exchange for obedience, and the reference to the promises made to the people's forefathers represents a fulfillment of God's covenant with Abraham in Genesis 15:11-19 and the new covenant between God and His people to which they are called to respond in Deuteronomy 29:12-13. The covenant requirements are simple and spelled out: Deuteronomy 10:12-13.	God has kept His covenant promises, and a covenant relationship with God is still available to the people, if they choose to participate. While a covenant with God requires love and obedience on the part of the people, God provides everything the people need to live in wholeness and blessing with Him.
30:16	The call to love God, walk in His ways, and keep His commandments is an important theme in Deuteronomy (6:5; 10:12-13; 11:1, 13) that speaks of total devotion to God.	Abraham and Noah can be seen as examples of total devotion to God, especially in Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac and Noah's sacrifice to God upon exiting the ark after everything around him (except for his family and some animals) had been destroyed.
30:17	The people's propensity to seek after	God is willing to make a covenant

	<p>other gods is repeated throughout Deuteronomy 29-32. Their propensity to turn from God is evident even in the moment when God was making a covenant with them and they sought a molten calf to worship (Exodus 32:7-10).</p>	<p>with the people even in their rebellion. However, it is the people's rebellion that removes them from the peace and blessing of life in the covenant relationship with God. Relationship with God is two-way. If the people don't participate, they remove themselves from His participation.</p>
30:15	<p>In the context of Genesis 1:9, 12, 18, 21, 25, 31, what God creates is good and God is the source of all life. It is clear that God intended to give His creation good and life. Yet in Deuteronomy 30:15, the people have to choose between good and evil, death and life.</p>	<p>The people can choose to accept God's gifts of life and good, or they can reject these things and choose death and evil.</p>
30:19	<p>In the larger context of the Pentateuch, all these rebellious years later, God is still offering people a choice of life with Him.</p>	<p>God is persistent in calling people to life.</p>
30:19	<p>In light of a similar choice offered in the Garden of Eden (Genesis 2:16-17), God allows people to choose what He offers or to choose to go against what He offers.</p>	<p>Disobedience to God is not only going against Him but also going against the fullness of life He offers. For God, it is important that people make their own choice.</p>
30:17	<p>The author notes that the "heart" is what turns away from God. This is also reflected in Genesis 6:5 in which the heart has become entirely inclined to evil. The heart is also discussed in Deuteronomy 10:12 (a person is to serve God with his whole heart) and Deuteronomy 6:5-6 (a person is to love God with his whole heart and to carry His commandments upon the heart); and in a negative sense as the place where self-righteousness can take root (Deuteronomy 9:4).</p>	<p>The human heart is inclined toward evil. The only way to prevent the heart becoming filled with evil is to set the heart entirely on God at all times and give every part of the heart to God for all time.</p>
30:16-18	<p>The author warns of the dangers of serving other gods, in contrast to obeying the commandments of God. This warning can be understood in the context of Deuteronomy 5:7 and Exodus 20:3. This commandment is</p>	<p>Lack of faithfulness to God pulls people away from the life they would otherwise find within His covenant. There is a deeper meaning to "life" than mere existence. The meaning relates to</p>

	given first, and thus it is emphasized. Complete faithfulness to God is the first requirement of this covenant relationship with Him. Deuteronomy 30:20 further explains that complete faithfulness to God “means life.”	the fullness of life that is only available in a completely devoted relationship with God. This also brings to mind Genesis 3:22-24 in which eating the forbidden fruit did not result in immediate death, in the sense of ceasing to exist; but it did result in being removed from the presence of God and the tree of life.
30:19	The choice of life and covenant with God is extended not only to the current generation but also to their descendants. God’s interest in descendants can also be seen in His promise to Abram (Genesis 12:2, 18), God’s provision of the appropriate wife for Isaac (Genesis 50-51), God’s blessing of Jacob (Genesis 32:22-30), God’s restoration and provision for Joseph’s family (Genesis 50:19-21), as well as the author’s emphasis on teaching God’s ways to the children (Deuteronomy 6:7 and Exodus 12:26-27).	God’s desire is to be in relationship with people forever. Even though the generations continue to rebel, He continues to extend an offer of relationship. God wants a relationship with His kids as numerous as the stars. Every person who is born is a child of God. He desires a relationship with each one.

## F. Commentaries

**Block, Daniel I. *Deuteronomy. The NIV Application Commentary. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 2012. Kindle edition. 706-717.***

God’s covenant requirements are “not unknowable, unreasonable, incomprehensible, or impossible” (706). This confirms my observation that God discloses everything the people need to know to follow Him and withholds nothing from them. God reveals Himself to the people (717). Block confirms my observation that the choice resides with the people (711).

Moses reiterates two choices he has presented repeatedly, and now urges the people to make the right choice (709); this presentation is given in a wisdom style (710). Block notes that the omission in verse 15 [added in the Greek, as mentioned in the RSV] assumes the reader would fill in that Israel is to obey the commands (710).

Block confirms my observation that movement away from YHWH is what leads to death (710). He also notes that the phrase “I declare to you this day” in verse 18 “adds solemnity to the warning” (710). The verbs of verse 20 define what it means to choose life (711). He describes “covenant commitment” as love (711).

Block notes that “life” has both quantitative and qualitative aspects, confirming my observation that there is qualitatively more to understanding what “life” means in this context, and that this has to do with the wholeness and well-being of the people intrinsic to being in relationship with God.

Block sets up an interesting and contrasting set of questions: “Yahweh always keeps his word; the question here is, will the people keep theirs?” (711). This confirms my observation that the response to God’s faithfulness and promise is up to the people.

**Gerbrandt, Gerald E. *Deuteronomy. Believers Church Bible Commentary.* Harrisonburg, VA: Herald Press, 2015. Ebook edition. 463, 477-482.**

This section of Deuteronomy (29-30) is distinct in its focus on the covenant which indicates the people belong to God and He becomes the God of Israel (463). This enhances my observation about the special nature of relationship and the people’s wholeness in relationship with God that has to do with the covenant.

God has delivered the people and fulfilled His promise to their forefathers. The people’s response is to give Him their complete loyalty and live in His ways (463). This confirms my observations that the people’s required response is made very clear and requires total devotion to God.

Blessing lies inside the covenant, death outside (463).

Gerbrandt notes that the choice presented to Israel is stark, confirming my observation that the choice is made very clear and has high stakes (477).

Gerbrandt notes the repeated mention of “life” (477).

Deuteronomy 30:15-20 ends with a focus on God’s promise (this confirms my observation that God has not given up on the people) and notes the significance of longevity of the promise – just because God has fulfilled the promise given to the forefathers doesn’t mean God is ending the good consequences of the promise. The promise continues to deliver to the descendants. The promises hold a “life-giving force” (478). This is another dimension of the reference to descendants than the ones I noted.

When the people focus their love entirely on God, that love is what makes the commandments doable (481). That is a significant observation and a key to understanding this passage.

## **G. Synthesis**

- The positive groupings reflect God’s desire for the people. The contrast reflects more closely how significant the people’s choice is and that it could go either way. God’s intent from the beginning was for people to multiply and flourish in the land. Because evil and death work against this, the people need to turn to God

as their source of life and blessing. Obedience to God makes the difference between life and death. Love for God makes obedience possible (Gerbrandt, 481).

- God is not capricious. He is very clear about what is at stake and what it takes to have life instead of death. He is also very clear about which option He wants them to choose. He makes it simple to decide. God teaches His people how to live.
- The people determine their fate by how they respond to God. If the people “miss” this and make the wrong decision, it is on them. They have been given every opportunity to make the right decision and live. God has deliberately given the people a choice and has made that choice evident to them. Israel needs to make these choices not only as individuals but also together as a community. The people can choose to accept God’s gifts of life and good, or they can reject these things and choose death and evil.
- This covenant with God has implications bigger than the immediate faith community. In the context of God’s promise to Abram in Genesis 12:3 to bless all people on earth through him, the larger implications can be seen.
- The ability to live derives from loving God and walking in His ways. It is not a sense that He simply returns life for obedience. Rather, there is something qualitative in loving God and walking in His ways that leads to and undergirds, even defines life. This brings to mind Genesis 2:17 in which death entered in upon disobedience to God. Death was comprehensive and affected all humanity and creation from that time forward. It wasn’t a punishment but a state of being that derived from choosing not to align with God who is the source of life. Nothing apart from total devotion of one’s total being to God may be considered life. There is another quality of “perish” here beyond immediate physical death. God is the source of life and there is a deeper meaning to what it means to be alive. Other gods cannot give life. Other gods do not bring a genuine state of blessing.
- Keeping God’s commandments involves more than literal obedience to specific statutes. It also involves a heart attitude of devotion to God and aligning oneself with His ways in all aspects of life, not just in certain situations addressed by His law. A relationship with God reflects what is in the heart.
- Disobedience has generational consequences. God desires that future generations will also have a relationship with Him.
- Disobedience must not be viewed in a passive or detached way as a simple disregard for a specific law. Rather, disobedience must be viewed as it really is: directly turning away from God’s voice. This brings to mind Genesis 3:6 when Adam did expressly what God told him not to do (Gen 2:17). Disobedience to

God is not only going against Him but also going against the fullness of life He offers. For God, it is important that people make their own choice.

- It is not enough just to profess love for God and gain life. A life devoted to God will be expressed by ongoing love of God. Loving God and walking in His ways can only be done with single-minded devotion and wholly giving oneself to God. There is no way to half-love God or half-walk in His ways. It's all or none. Relationship with God requires total commitment. To stay in relationship with God and not stray requires total and constant focus on Him.
- It is conceivably possible to follow a statute of God while listening to another god. Following statutes is not enough to stay complete in line with God.
- God is faithful to His covenant. A covenant is a two-way relationship. Choosing life is part of the people's call to be faithful to God's covenant. God's desire and plans for the people to live and flourish requires a partnership decision from the people as well. God tells them what they should decide, and why, but He does not force life on them. The decision is theirs. They can choose death. God does not withhold information from the people. He makes the choices and consequences very clear.
- The people need to be aware of their weaknesses in their relationship with God and need to take very specific measures to stay faithful to God. Passivity will not work. The human heart is inclined toward evil. The only way to prevent the heart becoming filled with evil is to set the heart entirely on God at all times and give every part of the heart to God for all time. It is easy for the people to think they have heard all these words before and therefore let the words pass by and miss the importance of what is being said. It is not to be taken for granted that the people will get this right unless they intentionally take note and pay attention.
- It is not the people's own strength that will cause them to take the land and live. It is only by God's power that any of this will happen. If the people are tempted to rely on their own military power to conquer the land, they are turning away from the very power of God that will cause them to actually live in the land.
- From God's perspective, evil does not characterize life. Good characterizes life. Genuine "good" does not come from other gods or characterize the life lived serving them.
- The image of "witnessing" against the people's rebellion resonates with Genesis 2:8-17, in which the author clearly shows how much God provided for the flourishing of people. The death and loss that followed was the result of the people's rebellion, not a lack on God's part. (Isaiah 5 comes to mind as well in God's lavish provision for His garden.)

- It is within the covenant relationship that the people experience God's blessings. The rise of evil as a result of the people turning away from God brings to mind the rise and flourishing of evil in response to the people's rebellion during the time of Genesis 5:1-4.
- God has kept His covenant promises, and a covenant relationship with God is still available to the people, if they choose to participate. While a covenant with God requires love and obedience on the part of the people, God provides everything the people need to live in wholeness and blessing with Him.
- Abraham and Noah can be seen as examples of total devotion to God, especially in Abraham's willingness to sacrifice Isaac and Noah's sacrifice to God upon exiting the ark after everything around him (except for his family and some animals) had been destroyed.
- God is willing to make a covenant with the people even in their rebellion. However, it is the people's rebellion that removes them from the peace and blessing of life in the covenant relationship with God. Relationship with God is two-way. If the people don't participate, they remove themselves from His participation.
- Lack of faithfulness to God pulls people away from the life they would otherwise find within His covenant. There is a deeper meaning to "life" than mere existence. The meaning relates to the fullness of life that is only available in a completely devoted relationship with God. This also brings to mind Genesis 3:22-24 in which eating the forbidden fruit did not result in immediate death, in the sense of ceasing to exist; but it did result in being removed from the presence of God and the tree of life.
- Moses demonstrates that he is with the people and for the people. Since he is speaking on behalf of God, he is also demonstrating God is with and for the people. God desires and intends the positive outcome for His people. God is persistent in calling people to life. God's desire is to be in relationship with people forever. Even though the generations continue to rebel, He continues to extend an offer of relationship. God wants a relationship with His kids as numerous as the stars. Every person who is born is a child of God. He desires a relationship with each one.

## H. Evaluation

### 1. Truth Statement

It is not enough just to profess love for God and gain life. A life devoted to God will be expressed by ongoing love of God. Loving God and walking in His ways can only be done with single-minded devotion and wholly giving oneself to God. There is no way to half-love God or half-walk in His ways. It's all or none.

To stay in relationship with God and not stray requires total commitment and constant focus on Him. People need to be aware of their weaknesses in their relationship with God and take very specific measures to stay faithful to God. Passivity will not work. Faithfulness to God is not something people can take for granted. The human heart is inclined toward evil. The only way to prevent the heart from becoming filled with evil is to set the heart entirely on God at all times and give every part of the heart to God for all time.

## **2. Immediate Context**

The text is directed to the Jewish faith community. The text assumes that its audience desires to be in relationship with God on an ongoing basis. The text also assumes that its readers desire to live in ways that are pleasing to God. They understand that without God's help (in this case, through the Torah), they are not able to please Him. The text also assumes that the audience is committed to worshiping only the one true God of Israel. This text intends to warn the audience to keep their hearts purely focused on God and to realize they have a propensity to stray, not only as individuals but also as a faith community.

The only limitation I would see in the application of this text is that there is a sense woven through this text of taking steps and measures to stay focused on God (e.g., Torah) that would not apply completely in a New Testament context. The focus on God and walking in all His ways would still apply, but it would be less works-based and more Spirit-focused, i.e., participating with the Holy Spirit in the ongoing process of transformation and producing good fruit.

## **3. Canon**

### **Deuteronomy**

Deuteronomy 29-32 includes a prominent theme of the propensity of people to turn away from God and not to serve Him with single-minded devotion. Deuteronomy 5-11 reminds the people to stay diligently and intentionally focused on God in all that they do and to commit to being faithful to God alone. Deuteronomy 6:5-6 calls for loving God with the person's whole heart, holding nothing back. The relationship with God and faithfulness to God begins with the heart.

### **Old Testament**

**Psalm 1** reflects the contrast between total commitment and focus on God, with devotion to walking in God's ways and the need to continue meditating on His Word, and the antithesis of turning against God, a path that leads to destruction. The key distinction between the two is the total focus and devotion to God, filling oneself with the things of God. This psalm reflects an ongoing process of devoted commitment in active

relationship with God. It also reminds the reader of how easy it would be to go the wrong way if a person's focus is taken off of God.

**1 Samuel 12:20-25** covers ground similar to what is found in the truth statement above. The readers are reminded that in the face of evil they have done, they should turn to God with their whole hearts, and serve God faithfully with their whole hearts. If they don't, they will perish. It is easy for this people to turn away from God toward idols. But God wants them to turn toward Him. The people are called to walk in the ways of God, to focus on His ways, and to revere and honor God.

**Jeremiah 17:9** reminds readers that the heart is deceitful and wicked. This reiterates the importance of keeping the heart focused on God and not allowing the heart to fill up with evil.

### New Testament

**Mark 7:6-23** begins with Jesus' reference to Isaiah about worshiping God in vain, giving lip service but not heart surrender. Jesus tells the Pharisees that evil begins in the heart and defiles a person from the inside. He notes their dullness in not seeing this truth, which confirms the truth statement that faithfulness to God cannot be taken for granted and the people need to be aware of their weaknesses in this relationship with God.

**Romans 6:11-14** talks about not allowing sin to reign and be a person's master, but rather to die to sin and come alive in Christ. A person is to offer every part of herself to God, and no part to sin. She is to die to sin completely and allow God to use her as an instrument of His righteousness.

**James 3:1-12**, while focusing on the tongue and not the heart, talks about a similar principle. This passage demonstrates that there is no halfway in relationship with God. The tongue has a propensity to speak evil and curses. Fresh and rancid water cannot flow from the same spring.

### 4. Evaluative Synthesis

It is not enough just to profess love for God and gain life. A life devoted to God will be expressed by ongoing love of God. Loving God and walking in His ways can only be done with single-minded devotion and wholly giving oneself to God. There is no way to half-love God or half-walk in His ways. It's all or none.

To stay in relationship with God and not stray requires total commitment of heart/mind, body, soul, and spirit in every aspect of life. People need to be aware of their weaknesses in their relationship with God and be intentional to stay faithful to God. Passivity will not work. Faithfulness to God is not something people can take for granted. The human heart is inclined toward evil. The only way to prevent the heart from becoming filled with evil is to set the heart entirely on God and allow Him to transform the heart by His Spirit.

## **I. Application**

### **Mission**

This text understands that God's mission reaches into the world to give His love and to draw people into a loving relationship with Him. For insiders, this text is a reminder that the first priority in mission to the world is God's desire for a loving relationship with people. The text envisions a people in mission partnership with God who are able to embody His love and model what a loving relationship with God looks like.

Wholehearted devotion to God will enable insiders to share His love rather than share bitterness, of which there is too much in the world, and much comes from within communities of God.

For outsiders, this text invites them to join a mission that is totally based in the love of God. It invites them to become sold-out to a mission that is, in turn, sold-out in love to God. It invites them to an authentic way of living in the world and interacting with others. It also offers involvement in a mission that is all about speaking genuine love and peace from the depths of the heart, rather than spewing bitterness and hatred.

### **Community**

For insiders, this text envisions a community that is devoted to serving only God, and not to serving other idols. Life within this community should reflect freedom from bondage to ungodly idols, whatever they may be. Love for God should shape all thoughts, activities, words, and interactions. The community should be growing in wholeheartedly serving God and understanding what that looks like in every facet of community life. The community should be made up of individuals who are actively and intentionally seeking transformation in partnership with the Holy Spirit, so that their hearts will reflect the love of God and not hatred, bitterness, or other aspects of deception and evil. The community should be committed to interacting with each other on the basis of a love that is devoted to God.

For outsiders, they are invited to join a community that is founded on giving undivided love to God. They should visibly see in this community how this love, directed toward God, affects everyone around them. As outsiders receive this genuine expression of love that comes from genuine loving service to God, they will want to become people who can express that same kind of love because it is a love that is unlike anything else on this earth.

### **Holiness**

For insiders, this text invites a change of heart through transformation in partnership with the Holy Spirit. This text calls insiders to step out of denial about the condition of their hearts, and step into the need for continual transformation, so that their hearts can reflect God's love instead of manifestations of evil. Insiders must be willing to align

themselves with making God the sole focus of their love, so that in turn they can be filled with His love for others. Insiders must be willing to have their lives completely changed by their relationship with God, knowing that lip service is not enough, but that the total commitment of their hearts is required for life.

For outsiders, this text invites them to live a life that produces the fruit they desperately want to see and have tried to manifest unsuccessfully on their own – genuine love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, gentleness, faithfulness, and self-control. By aligning with the vision embraced by this text, they would begin to affect their atmosphere with the kind of love that is found only in the presence of God. People would see the difference and ask them, “What is different about you?” As they begin to experience more of the presence of God in their midst because of the changes in their hearts, they will be amazed at how God works in challenging situations and relationships and how they are able to stay in peace no matter what difficulties come their way.

### **Jail Ministry Context**

The women in the jail often think they are sold out to God, but the way they live their lives does not reflect this. They are also often in denial about the condition of their hearts. They believe they embody some of the fruits of the Spirit (often they think they embody all of them), but the fruit of their lives is quite different. The first steps for them, inspired by this text, would be to count the cost of what devoting their heart and lives to God looks like, and deciding whether or not they want to make that commitment. Then they need a realistic perspective on what that commitment will look like in their lives. They also need a reality check on the condition of their hearts. They need to examine the fruit of the lives and see if it reflects God’s ways or the ways of evil. They need to be careful not to whitewash what is truly evil. After all, their hearts and their relationships with God are at stake.

#### **a. Missional Insight**

The women will need to recognize that a genuine relationship with God requires a total commitment of their hearts/minds and lives in ways that will radically change their lives.

#### **b. Attitudinal Alignment**

The women need to decide that they will realign their priorities to care (with all that they are) for God and His priorities. Their love for Him has to define the rest of their lives.

#### **c. Plan of Implementation**

The first action step is to measure their devotion to God. How would they rate it? What evidence would they use? The second action step is to examine the condition of their hearts. Are they producing fruit of the Spirit? What evidence would they use? The third action step is to decide if they are willing to align their hearts with God 100% and stay in

this relationship at this level of commitment for the rest of their lives. If yes, they need to decide what personal steps they need to take in order to make that commitment and walk it out. They also need to ask each other for help with accountability, to regularly assess how they are doing with their commitment to God and what might need to change.