

**THE MOST IMPORTANT DECISION**  
**Deuteronomy 30:11-20**

**Dr. Howard Batson**  
**First Baptist Church**  
**Amarillo, Texas**  
**July 7, 2019**

You are a contestant on the game show “Deal or No Deal.” And Howie Mandel (he’s got a great name, doesn’t he?) poses the question to you: “Are you going to make a deal with the banker, or do you want to eliminate some more briefcases?” The briefcases, 26 in total, have cash value from one penny to \$1 million.

As briefcases are eliminated, the banker seeks to cut a deal to limit her losses, and, in turn, you can be sure you go home with some money. “\$64,000,” the banker offers. Deal or no deal?

Your eyes look down at the buzzer. Do you push it? Game over – no longer a chance to win a million, but at least you can cut your mortgage in half. Standing in the cheering section, your mom (she’s always been the conservative one) urges you to take the money and run. “But honey, it’s your decision in the end.” Your Uncle Ted, however, who loves Vegas and the horse track, urges you to keep playing the game in order to make the illusive million.

Howie’s waiting. What do you decide? You’re torn between two choices.

Deal or no deal?

The doctor walks into the hospital room and says you need surgery. But the risks are high, and you only have a sixty percent chance of making it through the surgery because of your delicate condition. If you don’t have the surgery, however, you have a high probability of having a heart attack. Tough choice. Tough decision. Which option will you choose?

Surgery or no surgery?

The president of the United States talks to his Cabinet, whispers in secret to his Secretary of State. He has to make a decision that will affect the whole world. His decision will cost lives, money, and may even cost him his presidency. Do we go to war? He listens to the public opinion polls, talks to his advisors, and makes innumerable phone calls to leaders of other nations. But in the end, the decision is his. After all, he is the commander-in-chief. Tough decision.

To act or not to act?

If you’re a person who doesn’t like decisions, I’ve got some bad news for you. Today you are going to make a decision more important than any of the decisions described above. Today, Moses is going to pose to you the most important question you have ever been asked. The danger of reading Deuteronomy 30, the danger of hearing the sermon this morning, is that it puts you at the

proverbial “fork in the road,” the point of making a decision. Moses poses the question and wants to know, “What are you going to do? What are you going to choose?”

I didn’t realize before I prepared for this sermon just how much decision making was considered a field of the academy. For example, I discovered there is a journal called the *Journal of Multi-Criteria Decision Analysis*. There is a journal named the *Journal of Behavioral Decision Making*. There is a journal named *Group Decision and Negotiation*. A journal named *Decision Support Systems*. And one entitled *Organizational Behavior and Human Decision Processes*. There is even one entitled *Medical Decision Making*. And, finally, *Decision Sciences*.

Decision making can really be tough. **Edward R. Dayton, in an article entitled “Good Decision Making,” said avoiding decision making is one of the biggest time wasters around. In fact, he said that in many cases any decision is better than no decision. To go to the left or to the right or to conscientiously stand still is better than standing at the intersection of indecision. He said if you get the decision right 50 percent of the time, you actually have a pretty good average. (www.troublewith.com, Focus on the Family, excerpted from *Tools for Time Management* by Edward R. Dayton)**

So, how do you make a good decision?

The experts say:

1. Make sure the decision is yours to make and not a decision that belongs to someone else.
2. Define as specifically as possible the decision that needs to be made.
3. Write down the alternatives that you can think of.
4. Ponder which alternative “fits” you.
5. Don’t rely too much on “expert” information. Remember, experts are human beings, too, with their own prejudices.
6. Be careful not to only hear what you want to hear or see what you want to see.
7. And finally, go with your gut. Have you ever made a decision only to have it followed by a major stomach ache or headache? It’s your body talking to you, the experts say. Our brains are constantly taking in more information than we can consciously process. If you turn to your intuition, you actually make better decisions in the long run.

Sometimes it honestly is really hard to know which way to go. (*Have three boxes of various sizes up on stage, nicely gift-wrapped in various colors – maybe one a gift bag and two gift boxes. Call Robby up to make a decision. Have two of them with worthless gifts and only one of them with a gift of value.*)

Robby is sweating. He’s wringing his hands. His pondering which way to turn. But only one decision is correct. Only one decision brings happiness.

We all come to that moment of necessary decision making.

The passage found in Deuteronomy 29:1 through 30:10 presents us with a second covenant. In the first four chapters of Deuteronomy, we are told of ancient Israel's difficult journey to the border of the Promised Land. In chapters 5-28 we are provided with a fresh statement of God's law, including God's Ten Commandments and statutes. As the Israelites bound themselves at Mount Sinai to keep the commandments, the generation now standing on the border of the Promised Land is asked to recommit itself to live in the soon-to-be-taken land in a way that promotes God's blessing.

Unfortunately, however, the passage we didn't read in chapter 30 (verses 1-10) anticipates a future time when ancient Israel's disobedience will have brought on the curse of the covenant, resulting in the scattering of God's people among foreign nations. The central hope of these verses, however, is found in Israel's returning to God and obeying God's commandment, thus being restored to prosper in the Promised Land.

Having set forth the catastrophe of covenant disobedience and the blessing of keeping God's commandments before the people, using the terms of judgment and exile, Moses now, in verse 11 to the end of this chapter, comes back to the present and calls upon Israel to choose obedience, to choose a blessing rather than a curse. To choose life.

### **I. The clarity of the covenant (30:11-14).**

Moses wanted the people to understand, having just laid out the commandments and statutes of God in chapters 5-28, that knowing what God requires is not a difficult task. He sounded much like **Mark Twain who once said, "Most people are bothered by those passages of scripture they do not understand, but the passages that bother me the most are those I do understand."** (Barbara Schmidt, ed., "Mark Twain Quotations," quoted in [www.positiveatheism.org/hist/quotes/twain.htm](http://www.positiveatheism.org/hist/quotes/twain.htm))

We may find God's commandments challenging, but let us not hide under any sense of uncertainty in regard to what God expects from His people. We, too, understand what God requires of us as the Israelites understood what God required of them. Disobedience is at the heart of our problem, not a lack of understanding.

He begins in verse 11, "for this commandment." Moses uses the word "commandment" in a way that represents the entire covenant, all of God's commandments and expectations. He uses that word in the book of Deuteronomy to represent the whole of God's requirements in many different places – chapter 4, 5, 7, 8, 11, 13, 15, 26, 28, and here in chapter 30. Unlike the removed pagan deities who are not intimate with their worshipers, God is close. God is near and has made His expectations clear. The Hebrew text in verse 11 literally reads this way: For this commandment which I command you today is not "too wonderful." Moses was saying that God's commandments are not beyond your reach, not beyond your ability to comprehend.

You know what God wants you to do.

Even as God is near, so are His commandments. God has not shrouded or hidden His covenant from ancient Israel in some heavenly place of safekeeping. The transcendent glory of the heavens

does not camouflage the covenant. Look at verse 12. We don't have to ascend to heaven to retrieve God's word. Rather, God has already brought His commandments down to us.

I am often perplexed by folks who are looking for hidden codes or secrets in scripture. There is nothing hidden about what God wants or expects of His people. It's right here. The commandments are clear. You don't have to unscramble or decode the Ten Commandments or the statutes of God. You don't have to fly up into the heavens to find them. God has put them before His people. Not only do you not have to ascend to the heavens, you don't have to go to the depths of the sea (v. 13). The commandments are not in the sea. Rather, His word is near.

Look at verse 14. "...[A]lready in your mouth and in your heart that you may observe it." You know right from wrong. You know what God expects. You've already put it into the memory of the heart. You have pronounced the words of God's commandments with your lips. They are here.

By saying the covenant was both in their mouths and in their hearts, Moses was reflecting back to the Shema. "The words...shall be on your heart, and you shall teach them diligently to your sons and shall talk of them when you sit in your house and when you walk by the way, when you lie down and when you rise up" (6:6-7).

## **II. Choose life (30:15-20)**

Having proclaimed the clarity of the covenant in verses 11-14, in verses 15-20 Moses calls upon them to choose life. Look at verse 15. "I set before you today the two choices, life and prosperity or death and adversity. If you choose, if you decide to go down the road of obedience to God's commandments, that decision will lead to life and prosperity. If you choose to disobey God's commandments, it will lead to death and adversity."

I have often thought that life – I know there are some uncontrollables – but life is, in many ways, the sum total of a series of a lifetime of decisions.

If life is a series of the sum total of our decisions, then God's word, the Bible, is a collection of people poised at the point of decision. The choice presented here is reflective of that already given to the first generation of ancient Israelites at Sinai (Exodus 19:5-8; see also Joshua 24:14-18; 1 Samuel 12:19-25; 1 Kings 18:21, 39; Matthew 16:24; Mark 8:34; Luke 18:22). Should the Israelites choose to keep the commandments of God, they are in essence choosing life. They are choosing to live life fully and to multiply in the land that God has given to them.

The often repeated choice between life and death is presented to individuals in the Book of Proverbs. Here, however, the question is posed to a whole people, to the whole community. Nonetheless, the nation's choice would be a tapestry woven by the choices of individual Israelites. In fact, Moses actually uses the second person singular form of the pronoun "you" in verses 15-20.

God never requires robotic obedience from his people. It's an amazing thing that God made us with the power to decide, to choose to go against Him. God doesn't want us to obey Him simply

out of fear or primarily out of a sense of obligation. His desired motivation for our obedience is love. If we love the Lord, then obedience will follow.

Look at verse 16.

I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in His ways, and to keep His commandments and statutes and His judgments.

Moses places love for God and obedience side by side. Look at verse 20. “By loving the Lord your God, by obeying His voice, by holding fast to Him...”

A heart turned toward God is a heart that longs to please the Lord. Should the Israelites grow cold in their hearts toward God and be enticed by other gods, the results would be disastrous. Instead of the blessing, they will receive a curse. Instead of thriving, they will perish. Moses implored the people to love God, to choose life.

You’ve made a lot of important decisions. “Who will be my wife?” “Who will be my husband?” “What job, what career will I seek after?” “What city am I going to live in?” “Which house am I going to buy?”

Of all the decisions you have ever made in life, you have never made a decision more important than the one Moses is asking you to make today. We’re called upon by this passage to choose between life and death, between loving God and ignoring God. Between blessing and curse.

The Bible is, indeed, a collection of stories about whether the characters chose obedience or chose disobedience, chose to accept God or reject God. Adam, for example, fully understood God’s prohibition about eating fruit from a particular tree in the garden. Adam, nonetheless, ate the forbidden fruit. Adam chose death. Adam chose disobedience.

From this first human character forward, we have a record of choices. Noah, unlike Adam who was disobedient, heeded God’s seemingly outlandish command to construct a big boat. Genesis 6:22 says, “Thus Noah did; according to all God had commanded him, so he did.” When the Lord told Abraham to “Go forth from your country,” he obeyed (Genesis 12:-4). Saul, the first king of ancient Israel, disobeyed God by sparing Agag, the king of the Amalekites, and the best of the sheep and the oxen. God rejected him, saying, “I regret that I have made Saul king, for he has turned back from following Me, and has not carried out My commands” (1 Samuel 15:11).

When the biblical characters choose to be obedient to God, they receive a blessing. Likewise, on the contrary, when they choose disobedience, the characters in this tapestry of stories experience a tragic end.

The New Testament is the same way. We find characters at the moment of decision. The rich young ruler hears the command of Jesus, “Go and sell all you possess, and give to the poor, and you shall have treasure in heaven, and come and follow Me.” He, nonetheless, chooses to go his own way, and hanging his head low, walks away – rejecting Jesus, rejecting obedience.

Jesus Himself, in the New Testament, is the ultimate example of choosing obedience, of choosing to love God. Yet we bear in mind that His obedience leads to the cross.

Following the stories of scripture, we do discover, however, that the characters who choose obedience are not ultimately disappointed or shamed. For example, Christ chooses obedience. And though He is crucified, He also experiences a glorious resurrection.

Joshua said in the Old Testament, “Choose for yourselves today whom you will serve.” Jesus, in the New Testament, calls to Peter and Andrew to “follow Me and I will make you fishers of men.” Scripture often places people at the point of decision.

Moses opened his first speech in this book with, “See, I have placed the land before you; go in and possess the land” (1:8). Now, at the close of his speeches, we hear the repeated theme: “I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life...” (30:19). Between this opening speech and closing speech, the commandments of God have been laid out. Not hidden in heaven, but laid out.

This chapter has an interesting ending. In Exodus when the people are asked to choose, they say they will be obedient. In Joshua 24, when he says, “Choose this day whom you will serve,” they say, “We’re going to follow God. We’re going to follow the Lord.” But we never get an answer from the people in Deuteronomy. They don’t commit themselves to a relationship to God or to obedience.

Why does the writer leave the people silent? I think he wants you to answer the question for yourself. The response is not a past act of yesterday. The question is answered by you, by me, today. You know what God expects. What are you going to choose?