

BE REPENTANT

Deuteronomy 30:1-10, 15-20

According to Albert Einstein “Insanity is doing the same thing over and over again and expecting a different result.” I wonder if we could conclude that people who are not insane and think logically would be those who figure out that they should do something different or change directions if they don’t want to continue to have bad results or missed objectives? Maybe we should add that they need to actually implement the change after they discover the truth. I’m not sure what is more tragic: the person who doesn’t have a clue as to what to do or the person who knows what to do but will **not** take the needed action to correct a problem.

If we could picture life in a one-dimensional frame of reference, then it would be characterized by a line. A line has direction and length and if we are alive and on the line, then whatever we do will move us in one of two directions. We could call the end points of the line good and evil, heaven and hell, God and Satan, blessings and curses, or prosperity and destruction. If what we are doing is moving us toward the destruction end of the line, then sanity would instruct us to change. We should change our behavior so that we are moving toward prosperity. Insanity would have us continue to move in the direction of destruction. This change of direction is what repentance is all about.

A question that people have been asking from the beginning is how can I know if I am going in the right direction? If you were going to visit someone and had their house number on a certain road, then you would first find the road and then look for the house number. If the intersection of the road was in an isolated area and there were no other houses around or anything else that had any direction signs, then how would you know whether to go left or right at the intersection? Usually we would make a guess and start in one direction. If the road was rough or it was uphill that would not give you any clue as to whether you were going in the right direction or not. What you need is to see at least two house numbers along the way. This should tell you if you are going toward or away from your destination. This trial and error way of finding a destination is the way many people live. What is really needed is a road map with house numbers shown on the map. The problem most people have is that they may not even have a map and those who do are reluctant to consult it until they are totally lost.

Moses warned the children of Israel that they needed to follow the map God had given them as they navigated through life. He pointed out the dangers of relying on their own guidance ideas of what was right and wrong. In chapter 28 of Deuteronomy he had told them what they could expect if they went in the right direction and what they could expect if they went contrary to God’s ways. The end result of going in the wrong direction was being banished from the land God was giving them. That’s what most of us would call “bad news.” The good news part of the message was that there was still hope of restoration if they would turn around and head back in the right direction.

Repentance is Possible – 30:1-5

¹“So it shall be when all of these things have come upon you, the blessing and the curse which I have set before you, and you call *them* to mind in all nations where the LORD your God has banished you, ² and you return to the LORD your God and obey Him with all your heart and soul according to all that I command you today, you and your sons, ³ then the LORD your God will restore you from captivity, and have compassion on you, and will gather you again from all the peoples where the LORD your God has scattered you. ⁴“If your outcasts are at the ends of the earth, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there He will bring you back. ⁵“The LORD your God will bring you into the land which your fathers possessed, and you shall possess it; and He will prosper you and multiply you more than your fathers. Deuteronomy 30:1-5 (NASB95)

I think we could call Moses a realist more than an optimist. After outlining and defining blessings that would result from obedience and curses that would follow from disobedience, he then told them that they (or their descendants) would experience both situations over the course of time. We can have the best of intentions to do the right thing but, realistically, there will be times when we will make wrong choices. In the case of Israel, there were many instances where they drifted (or even ran away) from paths of righteousness and then repented and came back. The problem with such “yo-yo” behavior is that the general trend is usually downward until there is a collapse and drastic measures are needed to get back on track. As you know, collapse eventually took the form of the nation practically disappearing and some of the people being carried away in exile and many others being dispersed among the other nations.

There was an optimistic element in the prophetic message Moses shared with the people and that was the promise that God would restore them even after they had collapsed if they would repent and turn back to God and walk in His ways. It is important to notice that the restoration would be something that God would carry out; however, His action on their behalf was not without condition. Simply stated: repentance is a condition for restoration.

You can find all kinds of speculation as to when the restoration would take place and who would be involved and what is the extent of the restoration. We have a tendency to think that this prophecy was in reference to the return from Babylon. The problem with this being the main event was that it did not involve those who were scattered to the ends of the earth. The return from Babylon was limited to those who were in Babylon. There is also a conflict in that the restoration that happened around 500 BC did not result in a prosperity that was greater than what their fathers had experience under David and Solomon.

Some argument could be made that this prophecy was in reference to the event that began at Pentecost in the first century. Many Jews from various parts of the world had come to Jerusalem for the festival and a large number of them repented and turned back to God. This was the birth of the church and as it spread throughout the world many others became part of what God was doing. If this is what Moses meant, then the “land” and the “prosperity” mentioned in verse five would be limited to the spiritual realm and not necessarily include the physical realm.

Other possibilities have been mentioned and one is the restoration of modern day Israel. One might question the extent to which those who have returned to the land have actually repented and turned back to following the paths of righteousness. We also might wonder if the prosperity and growth of the people have exceeded what was experienced in the time of David and Solomon. Of course, one might also argue that it is still developing and we haven’t seen the final outcome.

Many tend to favor a “yet to happen” interpretation that would associate the fulfillment of this prophecy with the Second Advent of the Messiah and the millennial reign of Christ in Jerusalem.

How would such a restoration be any different than what had happened in previous times when they repented and then fell away in multiple cycles? What would be different this time?

God Works in Repentant Hearts – 30:6-8

⁶“Moreover the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, to love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, so that you may live. ⁷“The LORD your God will inflict all these curses on your enemies and on those who hate you, who persecuted you. ⁸“And you shall again obey the LORD, and observe all His commandments which I command you today. Deuteronomy 30:6-8 (NASB95)

It seems obvious that the spiritual significance of verse six that refers to the heart being

circumcised is essentially the removal of the fleshly nature through the death of the “old man.” Just as this does not mean the physical heart that is to be altered, the “descendants” are most likely not a reference to physical descendants but spiritual descendants or those who would also be born anew of the Spirit of God. If the subject matter is spiritual rather than physical, then might we also conclude that the promise “so that you may live” would be a reference to “spiritual life” rather than physical life?

If we put these promises and descriptions together, then a logical outcome would be that this is a reference to salvation that comes from faith in Christ as God’s provision for redemption and release from the law of sin and death. A question remains as to whether this salvation is to happen “one soul at a time” or if there is going to be some mass conversion that will happen for the descendants of Israel at the Second Advent of Christ? We know that it happened to many Jews during the first century and it also happened to many who were from the “other nations” who accepted God’s plan of salvation.

If we factor in what Paul said about the eventual salvation of the Jews as written in chapters 9 and 10 of his letter to the church at Rome, we can see that his expectation was that, one day, they would see the light and that they would **not** continue in their unbelief. When this occurs then “all Israel will be saved.”

Notice the progression of what will occur. We find first the removal of the fleshly nature which removes the enmity that we had with God’s Spirit. Having removed the hostility, we are now open to receive the grace of God and we then respond in love and devotion to God with the totality of our being. This brings us into compliance with the first group of the Ten Commandments; that is, we are to love the Lord with all our heart and all our soul. Such love results in obedience to His commandments, principles, and statutes which (when followed) produce abundant life. This is the same message Jesus gave in John 10:10 when He said “I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it more abundantly.”

The prophecy of Moses also included what would happen to those who had been persecuting the dispersed children of Israel. As had happened in most of the cases where God had used other nations to afflict Israel, these had been overly zealous in their oppression of the Jews. Because they had dealt harshly with them, God would bring punishment on these enemies of Israel. We could make the argument that the same judgment for disobedience to the commandments of God that came upon the children of Israel would fall on others who live in a way that was contrary to the principles contained in the laws and statutes that God had given through Moses. Such disobedience is simply a logical outcome of the fallen human nature that is driven by selfishness, pride and greed.

On the other hand, those who had experienced the removal of the carnal nature (circumcision of the heart) would live in harmony with the commandments, precepts and principles of God’s kingdom. The logical outcome of such an alignment is that God blesses them.

God Blesses the Repentant – 30:9-10

⁹“Then the LORD your God will prosper you abundantly in all the work of your hand, in the offspring of your body and in the offspring of your cattle and in the produce of your ground, for the LORD will again rejoice over you for good, just as He rejoiced over your fathers; ¹⁰if you obey the LORD your God to keep His commandments and His statutes which are written in this book of the law, if you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and soul. Deuteronomy 30:9-10 (NASB95)

I don’t think that this is anything mysterious but just the predictable outcome of doing the right things in the right way and for the right reasons. We find in the Proverbs that the “fear of

the Lord is the beginning of wisdom.” Wise behavior is nothing more than living life in a way that is in harmony with the character of God. Nothing honors God more than showing our love for Him by obedience. Since we are not robots, then obedience is a choice we make.

Life Comes Down to a Choice – 30:15-20

¹⁵ “See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, and death and adversity; ¹⁶ in that I command you today to love the LORD your God, to walk in His ways and to keep His commandments and His statutes and His judgments, that you may live and multiply, and that the LORD your God may bless you in the land where you are entering to possess it. ¹⁷ “But if your heart turns away and you will not obey, but are drawn away and worship other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today that you shall surely perish. You will not prolong *your* days in the land where you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess it. ¹⁹ “I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, the blessing and the curse. So choose life in order that you may live, you and your descendants, ²⁰ by loving the LORD your God, by obeying His voice, and by holding fast to Him; for this is your life and the length of your days, that you may live in the land which the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, to give them.” Deuteronomy 30:15-20 (NASB95)

We make many decisions about how we will live our lives. Many of the choices have prosperity or destruction implications and some literally have life or death implications. If we base our decisions on the council of the Word of God then we are choosing the path of life. If we reject God’s council, then we take the path that leads to death. Many would claim that to categorize all of life’s choices as “good or evil,” that results in “life or death” and “blessing or curses” is simplistic. After all, they argue, there is some good in the worst of us and some evil in the best of us that every situation has some good and some “bad” aspects. From a human perspective, these are legitimate concerns. However, IF we will define “good” as “doing what God has commanded us to do” and define “evil” as “any other way,” then some (maybe most) of the complexity of life can be simplified.

It is helpful for us to understand that Moses was not teaching that the Israelites were justified by obeying the Law. Justification is an imputed benefit that results from faith. We have seen in other passages that Abraham believed God and that was accounted (imputed) to him as righteousness (justified). In the same way our salvation comes from trusting in (believing) what God has said and done for us in Christ. However, to benefit from this position that we have in Christ, we must be involved in the process called sanctification. This process requires our involvement and participation. This idea is very much in line with the point Moses was making and that is “their full enjoyment of life would depend on their obeying God’s Word.” Even though no one can be justified by the Law, a believer will be blessed by walking in the principles of the kingdom of God.

Sanctification is an active participation and cooperation with the Holy Spirit as He is working in us to transform us into the image of Christ. Those who are passive and undisciplined are like the people of Israel who disregarded what God had instructed and were drawn away to adopt the philosophies and practices of other “religions” (bowing down to other gods). Such behaviors will eventually lead to failure in life and result in loss of freedom and, in some cases, ends in death. We can also benefit from the message of Moses to “always choose the way of life.”