

Deuteronomy 30:19

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:

Analysis

I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both thou and thy seed may live:

This climactic verse presents Israel with the fundamental choice that determines their destiny. Moses calls heaven and earth as witnesses (edim, עדים), invoking the cosmos itself to testify to the covenant (cf. 4:26; 31:28; 32:1). This ancient Near Eastern treaty formula made the universe itself a legal witness to the agreement.

The choice is stark: life and death, blessing and cursing. These are not abstract theological concepts but concrete historical realities—obedience leads to prosperity in the land, while disobedience brings exile and destruction. The Hebrew construction emphasizes divine gift ('I have set before you') while maintaining human responsibility ('choose').

The imperative uvacharta bachayim (ועתָרֶת בְּחֵי, 'choose life') makes explicit what should be obvious—yet human perversity often chooses death. The purpose clause 'that thou and thy seed may live' shows covenant thinking: choices affect not just individuals but entire generations. Theologically, this verse reveals:

1. human moral agency and responsibility
2. the real consequences of covenant faithfulness or rebellion

3. God's desire for human flourishing
4. the communal nature of covenant choices.

Historical Context

Deuteronomy is set in the plains of Moab in the eleventh month of the fortieth year after the Exodus (1:3), just before Israel crosses the Jordan. The generation that left Egypt has died in the wilderness except Joshua and Caleb. Moses addresses their children who will inherit the promises.

The historical setting involves preparation for conquest of Canaan, a land divided among city-states with syncretistic Canaanite religion. Archaeological evidence shows these cities engaged in Baal worship, sacred prostitution, and child sacrifice. Israel's strict monotheism and ethical standards would have been revolutionary.

The covenant structure parallels ancient Near Eastern vassal treaties, particularly Hittite suzerainty treaties from the 14th-13th centuries BCE. These included: preamble, historical prologue, stipulations, deposit provisions, witnesses, and blessings/curses. Deuteronomy follows this pattern, presenting Yahweh as divine King entering covenant with His vassal people. Understanding this helps explain the book's structure and emphases on loyalty, exclusive worship, and covenant sanctions.

Related Passages

Psalm 19:1 — Heavens declare God's glory

Genesis 1:1 — Creation of heavens and earth

Study Questions

1. How does this verse deepen understanding of covenant relationship between God and His people?

2. What does this passage reveal about God's character, and how should that shape worship and obedience?
3. How can the principles in this verse be faithfully applied in contemporary Christian life without mere legalism?

Interlinear Text

בְּמִינִים	בָּאָרֶץ	בְּמִינִים
I call	this day	heaven
H5749	H3117	H8064
and death	against you that I have set	before
H4194	H5414	H6440
		blessing
		H1293
		and cursing
		H7045
וְקַלְלֵה	בְּבָרֶךְ	לְפָנֶיךָ
and	against	before
death	you	you
		are
		blessing
		H1293
		and
		cursing
		H7045
וְרָאֵתֶךָ	אַתָּה	תְּחִי
therefore	choose	life
H977	H2416	H4616
		may live
		H2421
תְּחִי	אַתָּה	תְּחִי
life	thou	thou
H2233	H2233	H2233

Additional Cross-References

Deuteronomy 30:15 (Parallel theme): See, I have set before thee this day life and good, and death and evil;

Deuteronomy 11:26 (Sin): Behold, I set before you this day a blessing and a curse;

Psalms 119:30 (Parallel theme): I have chosen the way of truth: thy judgments have I laid before me.

Proverbs 8:36 (Sin): But he that sinneth against me wrongeth his own soul: all they that hate me love death.

Deuteronomy 30:1 (Sin): And it shall come to pass, when all these things are come upon thee, the blessing and the curse, which I have set before thee, and thou shalt call them to mind among all the nations, whither the LORD thy God hath driven thee,

1 Timothy 5:21 (Parallel theme): I charge thee before God, and the Lord Jesus Christ, and the elect angels, that thou observe these things without preferring one before another, doing nothing by partiality.

Luke 10:42 (Parallel theme): But one thing is needful: and Mary hath chosen that good part, which shall not be taken away from her.

Jeremiah 32:39 (Parallel theme): And I will give them one heart, and one way, that they may fear me for ever, for the good of them, and of their children after them:

Deuteronomy 4:26 (Parallel theme): I call heaven and earth to witness against you this day, that ye shall soon utterly perish from off the land whereunto ye go over Jordan to possess it; ye shall not prolong your days upon it, but shall utterly be destroyed.

Psalms 119:173 (Parallel theme): Let thine hand help me; for I have chosen thy precepts.