

Deuteronomy 32:47

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life: and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land, whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.

Analysis

Moses concludes his instruction with a solemn declaration emphasizing Scripture's vital importance. The phrase *ki lo-davar req hu mikkem* (כִּי לֹא־צָבֵר קַיְלָה הוּא מִקְּמָה) 'for it is not a vain thing for you') uses *req* (רֹקֶם), meaning empty, worthless, or idle. God's Word isn't trivial, optional, or peripheral to life—it's essential. The emphatic assertion *ki hu chayyeikhem* (כִּי הוּא חַיְכֶם) 'because it is your life') identifies Torah with life itself. Not merely a guide to life or aid for living, but life's very essence. This echoes Deuteronomy 8:3 ('man does not live by bread alone but by every word from God's mouth') and anticipates Jesus' declaration, 'I am the way, the truth, and the life' (John 14:6) and 'My words are spirit and life' (John 6:63).

The purpose clause *uvadavar hazeh ta'arikhu yamim al-ha'adamah* (בְּפִזְבָּר הַזֶּה תִּאֲרִיכוּ יָמִים עַל־הָאָדָם) 'and by this thing you shall prolong days upon the land') connects obedience to divine Word with longevity in the promised land. The phrase *asher attem ovrim et-haYarden* (אֲשֶׁר אַתֶּם עַבְרִים אֶת־הַיַּרְדֵּן) 'which you are crossing the Jordan') emphasizes immediacy—they stand at the threshold of inheritance, and covenant faithfulness determines whether they retain it. Theologically, this verse reveals that true life flows from relationship with God mediated through His revealed Word.

Historical Context

This statement comes at the conclusion of the Song of Moses (Deuteronomy 32), just before Moses' final blessing on the tribes (chapter 33) and his death (chapter 34). Moses had finished reciting the entire song to Israel, and now (circa 1406 BC) he urges them to take these words seriously and teach them to their children (32:46). The context is crucial: Israel has heard the law repeatedly over forty years, witnessed God's faithfulness, and now faces the challenge of maintaining covenant faithfulness in Canaan.

Moses' assertion that God's Word is 'not a vain thing' anticipates Israel's future tendency toward casual disregard for Torah. Later history validated this concern—repeated apostasy during the judges period, idolatry under various kings, and eventual exile resulted from treating God's Word as optional. The prophets continually called Israel back to Torah (Isaiah 8:20; Jeremiah 8:8-9; Malachi 4:4). Jesus rebuked those who nullified God's Word through tradition (Mark 7:13), while Paul emphasized Scripture's inspiration and profit for life and godliness (2 Timothy 3:16-17).

This verse establishes a principle: covenant communities live or die by their relationship to God's revealed Word. When Scripture is treasured and obeyed, life flourishes; when ignored or distorted, death follows. The Reformation's emphasis on *sola Scriptura* recovered this biblical priority.

Related Passages

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

James 2:17 — Faith and works

Study Questions

1. How does Scripture function as 'life' itself, not merely a guide to living?
2. In what ways might we treat God's Word as 'vain' or empty through neglect, casual reading, or disobedience?

3. How does the connection between God's Word and 'prolonged days' apply to believers under the New Covenant?
4. What practices help us treasure Scripture as essential life rather than optional religious reading?
5. How does this verse challenge cultural Christianity that honors Scripture theoretically but ignores it practically?

Interlinear Text

לֹא	בְּזַבְּדָה	כִּי	מִקְרָא
H3588	H3808	H1697	H7386
and	through this thing	For it is not a vain	the Word
הַ זְּמָן	בְּזַבְּדָה	כִּי	תִּאֲרִיךְ יְמֵינוּ
H1931	H2416	H1697	H2088
for you because it is your life	and through this thing		ye shall prolong
יְמִינֵיכֶם	בְּזַבְּדָה	עֲבֹר יָמֵן	אַתֶּם
H3117	H127	H5674	H853
your days	in the land	whither ye go over	
וְרַשְׁתָּתֶךָ:	שֵׁמֶה	לְרַשְׁתָּתֶךָ:	בְּרִיאָה
Jordan	H8033	to possess	H3423
H3383			

Additional Cross-References

Proverbs 4:22 (Parallel theme): For they are life unto those that find them, and health to all their flesh.

Leviticus 18:5 (Parallel theme): Ye shall therefore keep my statutes, and my judgments: which if a man do, he shall live in them: I am the LORD.

2 Peter 1:16 (Parallel theme): For we have not followed cunningly devised fables, when we made known unto you the power and coming of our Lord Jesus Christ, but were eyewitnesses of his majesty.

Proverbs 3:22 (Parallel theme): So shall they be life unto thy soul, and grace to thy neck.

Proverbs 3:18 (Parallel theme): She is a tree of life to them that lay hold upon her: and happy is every one that retaineth her.

2 Peter 1:3 (Parallel theme): According as his divine power hath given unto us all things that pertain unto life and godliness, through the knowledge of him that hath called us to glory and virtue:

Isaiah 45:19 (Parallel theme): I have not spoken in secret, in a dark place of the earth: I said not unto the seed of Jacob, Seek ye me in vain: I the LORD speak righteousness, I declare things that are right.

Matthew 6:33 (Parallel theme): But seek ye first the kingdom of God, and his righteousness; and all these things shall be added unto you.

Revelation 22:14 (Parallel theme): Blessed are they that do his commandments, that they may have right to the tree of life, and may enter in through the gates into the city.

1 Timothy 4:8 (Parallel theme): For bodily exercise profiteth little: but godliness is profitable unto all things, having promise of the life that now is, and of that which is to come.