

Living the Story

A Study through Scripture

Introduction:

The book of Deuteronomy records the final words of Moses over three different speeches. The book is laid out so that we see all three speeches given in the same location at the same time. These words serve not only as Moses' farewell, but also as a charge to the people to make a choice: Choose God.

What is interesting about the book of Deuteronomy is there are recurring ideas throughout the book, especially the idea of making the right choice between blessings (from following God) and curses (turning your back on God). The idea of this choice culminates in chapter 28, which some scholars claim serves as a lens through which to understand the entire history of God's people as found in Joshua through the book of 2 Kings. (The entire argument is beyond the scope of this lesson, but it *is* apparent that when Israel followed God, good things happened. When they did not, Israel fell as a nation.)

We are going to look at two aspects of this idea of choice. The first is simply making the right choice to begin with. The second is Moses' instruction to the people that the choice must be laid out in front of the people on a regular basis so that they continue to make the right choice. Included in this is the reminder that our children need to be taught to make the right choice as well.

Summary of the Text:

Although it is not a part of the texts of *The Story*, I think the exclusion of Deuteronomy 28 is an oversight. Too much of what we see in the history of the nation of Israel is shaped by following (or not following) God and the resultant blessings and curses. So to begin with, I want us to read Deuteronomy 28.1-29. The contrasts between the blessings and the curses are sharp enough that we should not have a problem deciding which direction is the best way to go.

By the way, Deuteronomy (the latter portion in particular) is organized in such a way that mirrors some of the extra-biblical covenant treaties that have been found in the Ancient Near East. Included in those treaties are a listing of blessings and curses that will be the resultant course of action for the one making the covenant if the other party does or does not follow the covenant. It may seem odd to us today, but realize it was not uncommon in the ANE.

The covenant God has made is renewed in chapter 29. Then we hear Moses telling the people that they have a choice: life or death (30.11-20). This is repeating or a summary of the blessings and curses of chapter 28. There is also a word of encouragement from Moses: "You can do this! It is not too hard for you to accomplish!" Remember that Moses was not allowed to go into the Promised Land. He could only look into it. As Moses watches the people of Israel stand at the precipice of fulfilling the promise made all the way back in Abraham's day, you have to wonder if Moses does not feel a great sense of vested interest in what happens next. Moses wants to see these people succeed, all the while, he is fully aware of their—and his—shortcomings and tendency to make the wrong choice.

In Deuteronomy 31.9, Moses has concluded his speech and "this law" is written down for the priests who carry the ark to keep. Moses then goes on to tell the people that every seven years, they are to gather and read "this law" before the "men, women and children, and the foreigners residing in your towns" (Deuteronomy 31.10-13).

We are not told specifically what commands or instructions are written in "the law." We know that the ark contained the stones tablets on which were written the Ten Commandments. It is possible this is what Moses refers to when he

LESSON #6

Date: 10/14/2012

Text: Deuteronomy 28; 30.11-20;
31.9-13

The Big Picture: We all know that spending time reading the Word of God is important, but do we actually spend time doing it? How can our reading of scripture help us make the right choices, rather than turning from God?

Materials Needed: none

says this, or, he could be giving further instruction, expounding on those commandments. If we look ahead to Joshua 8.30-35, we read that “all the words of the law—the blessings and the curses—just as is written in the Book of the Law” is spoken to the people in a ceremony that sounds like what is described in Deuteronomy 31.9-13.

If we continue to read Deuteronomy 31, we discover that this ceremony serves to teach the people so they can “learn to fear the Lord [their] God and follow carefully all the words of this law” (31.12), including the children who do not yet know the law.

So what is significant about these passages for us? First, we too have a choice, I believe. We can choose God and his blessings, or we can ignore God ... and ignore his blessings. In this, I think we need to recognize the blessings and curses of following God in our lives. The second important point is we need to consistently be reading the word of God, including—or perhaps especially—to people who do not know it. We know this, but in the same way that the Israelites were told to repeat this every seven years, we too need to be reminded.

Preparing for the Group Time:

I hope that at this point in your group life cycle, your group loves to take part in the study of God’s word. It is easy for us to enjoy eating, or watching football together, but we must also draw each other into a fellowship through reading and studying God’s word.

The biggest way this happens, I think, is doing it. There is at times awkwardness about stopping and reading scripture, but the only way for it to become natural and even cherished is if we do it.

Today we will read a slightly longer text than usual. You can go about this in several ways. One way is to have someone who is good at reading do so. You may want to divide the text so that everyone reads a part. You may choose a translation that is easier to read, so everyone feels more comfortable doing so. You can have everyone stand for the reading of God’s word. (This would have been how the Israelites heard the reading of the law—they stood in reverence to the word of God.) I would encourage you to read aloud, not just pass out the text and ask everyone to read silently. There is something powerful about hear God’s word audibly, not just seeing the words on a page. (I often choose to not follow along in my Bible, but rather just listen to a reading during worship for this very reason.)

Whatever way you go about it, be sure to make a time in God’s word a part of your group time together.

Living the Story

Lesson #6

Text: Deuteronomy 30.11-20; 31.9-13

Lesson Outline:

If you asked your group to participate in a time of Sabbath rest this past week, spend a few minutes allowing everyone to share their experiences. What worked well? What struggles did you have? How did you see God better through this process?

Read aloud Deuteronomy 28.1-29.

Ask the first two discussion questions.

Have your group read Deuteronomy 31.11-20 and 31.9-13.

Complete the remaining discussion questions.

Be sure to spend time encouraging one another to read this week, letting the people who do have a regular pattern of reading encourage those who may be struggling to do so.

Close with a time of praying the scripture, as described below.

Discussion Questions:

Describe a time when you were faced with a choice that was unmistakably black or white. Now, describe a time when you had a choice that was impossible to distinguish which was the best choice. Which would you prefer to have: a black and white choice or a good/good choice? Why is that the case?

Have you ever had a choice between good and bad ... and still made the wrong choice? Why do people—including the people of Israel—do that?

Deuteronomy 31.11-20 lays out the choice between life and death, and Moses repeatedly calls on the Israelites to choose life, that is, to make the right choice. Who in your life helps you make good choices? How can you help others do the same?

Why is it so important to be regularly reminded of the importance of choosing God's blessings over turning away from God?

In what ways do you regularly proclaim the laws of God to your spouse, your children, your group members, and other people with whom you have a relationship?

For the Children:

Given that Moses instructs the people of Israel to read the laws before all of the people, including the children, I think it is important for them to hear Deuteronomy 28 read aloud. I think it may also be beneficial for them to hear us wrestle with ways to proclaim to them God's laws better and more often, as well as, perhaps, repent that we have not done that more than we have.

For this reason, I would encourage you to include your children in the discussion if they are old enough to be able to follow the conversation.

If they are not old enough, I would be sure to have a time where they are focused on hearing the word of God. Perhaps you read this section for the preschool version of *The Story* prior to dismissing the children. Whatever you do, be sure they hear the word read during some point of your group time.

Living the Story:

Just as the nation of Israel had a specific time to gather and read the laws of God, we as followers of God need to have a time we do that as well. Our last discussion question asked in what ways you do that for one another. In order to live out the story this week, we need to all be doing this somehow.

If you do not have a regular time of reading God's word, what specific thing can you do this week to ensure that will happen?

If you do so, what advice can you give others in the group to help them follow through with reading this week?

Prayer Time:

Another way to read God's word is to actually pray it. Rather than each person praying their own words, have them prayer a verse or two from their favorite Psalm, or perhaps one of the intercessory prayers of Paul, as listed below.

Ephesians 1.15-23
Ephesians 3.14-21
Philippians 1.9-11
Colossians 1.9-14
2 Thessalonians 1.11-12

What's Next:

The congregational reading for this upcoming week (October 21) is the book of Joshua. This is covered in *The Story* chapter 7.