Turn with me to Deuteronomy Chapter 4. Moses has given a summary of the history of Israel since Mount Sinai. We have seen Israel’s unfaithfulness to the God who saved them from slavery. God has done mighty things and Israel has grumbled and rebelled. Now Moses places a challenge before Israel as they are gathered at the Jordan. Will they choose life, or will they perish? Read with me Deuteronomy 4:1-40

*"And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live, and go in and take possession of the land that the LORD, the God of your fathers, is giving you.*

*2 You shall not add to the word that I command you, nor take from it, that you may keep the commandments of the LORD your God that I command you.*

*3 Your eyes have seen what the LORD did at Baal-peor, for the LORD your God destroyed from among you all the men who followed the Baal of Peor.*

*4 But you who held fast to the LORD your God are all alive today.*

*5 See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it.*

*6 Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.'*

*7 For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him?*

*8 And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?*

*9 "Only take care, and keep your soul diligently, lest you forget the things that your eyes have seen, and lest they depart from your heart all the days of your life. Make them known to your children and your children's children--*

*10 how on the day that you stood before the LORD your God at Horeb, the LORD said to me, 'Gather the people to me, that I may let them hear my words, so that they may learn to fear me all the days that they live on the earth, and that they may teach their children so.'*

*11 And you came near and stood at the foot of the mountain, while the mountain burned with fire to the heart of heaven, wrapped in darkness, cloud, and gloom.*

*12 Then the LORD spoke to you out of the midst of the fire. You heard the sound of words, but saw no form; there was only a voice.*

*13 And he declared to you his covenant, which he commanded you to perform, that is, the Ten Commandments, and he wrote them on two tablets of stone.*

*14 And the LORD commanded me at that time to teach you statutes and rules, that you might do them in the land that you are going over to possess.*

*15 "Therefore watch yourselves very carefully. Since you saw no form on the day that the LORD spoke to you at Horeb out of the midst of the fire,*

*16 beware lest you act corruptly by making a carved image for yourselves, in the form of any figure, the likeness of male or female,*

*17 the likeness of any animal that is on the earth, the likeness of any winged bird that flies in the air,*

*18 the likeness of anything that creeps on the ground, the likeness of any fish that is in the water under the earth.*

*19 And beware lest you raise your eyes to heaven, and when you see the sun and the moon and the stars, all the host of heaven, you be drawn away and bow down to them and serve them, things that the LORD your God has allotted to all the peoples under the whole heaven.*

*20 But the LORD has taken you and brought you out of the iron furnace, out of Egypt, to be a people of his own inheritance, as you are this day.*

*21 Furthermore, the LORD was angry with me because of you, and he swore that I should not cross the Jordan, and that I should not enter the good land that the LORD your God is giving you for an inheritance.*

*22 For I must die in this land; I must not go over the Jordan. But you shall go over and take possession of that good land.*

*23 Take care, lest you forget the covenant of the LORD your God, which he made with you, and make a carved image, the form of anything that the LORD your God has forbidden you.*

*24 For the LORD your God is a consuming fire, a jealous God.*

*25 "When you father children and children's children, and have grown old in the land, if you act corruptly by making a carved image in the form of anything, and by doing what is evil in the sight of the LORD your God, so as to provoke him to anger,*

*26 I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that you will soon utterly perish from the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess. You will not live long in it, but will be utterly destroyed.*

*27 And the LORD will scatter you among the peoples, and you will be left few in number among the nations where the LORD will drive you.*

*28 And there you will serve gods of wood and stone, the work of human hands, that neither see, nor hear, nor eat, nor smell.*

*29 But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.*

*30 When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice.*

*31 For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.*

*32 "For ask now of the days that are past, which were before you, since the day that God created man on the earth, and ask from one end of heaven to the other, whether such a great thing as this has ever happened or was ever heard of.*

*33 Did any people ever hear the voice of a god speaking out of the midst of the fire, as you have heard, and still live?*

*34 Or has any god ever attempted to go and take a nation for himself from the midst of another nation, by trials, by signs, by wonders, and by war, by a mighty hand and an outstretched arm, and by great deeds of terror, all of which the LORD your God did for you in Egypt before your eyes?*

*35 To you it was shown, that you might know that the LORD is God; there is no other besides him.*

*36 Out of heaven he let you hear his voice, that he might discipline you. And on earth he let you see his great fire, and you heard his words out of the midst of the fire.*

*37 And because he loved your fathers and chose their offspring after them and brought you out of Egypt with his own presence, by his great power,*

*38 driving out before you nations greater and mightier than you, to bring you in, to give you their land for an inheritance, as it is this day,*

*39 know therefore today, and lay it to your heart, that the LORD is God in heaven above and on the earth beneath; there is no other.*

*40 Therefore you shall keep his statutes and his commandments, which I command you today, that it may go well with you and with your children after you, and that you may prolong your days in the land that the LORD your God is giving you for all time."*

*(Deu 4:1-40 ESV)*

It seems so simple doesn’t it? If someone stood before you and declared, “Choose life or death,” the answer ‘Life’ would be obvious to most. Usually at that time our minds begin to play tricks with us. It cannot be that simple. What are the strings? What kind of life? Will I get to do what I want? Will it be a satisfactory life? Moses stands before Israel and declares, “Choose life, or perish.” Then he reveals that life. This morning I want us to also stand before God to hear His word, hear His challenge, and ask ourselves which we choose: the hope of life, or the warning of death. Let us begin with the hope of life.

The first thing I want you to notice is how Moses presents life. Moses presents a biased view. He tilts the scales towards life. Moses desires both Israel and all who read this to pick the right one. Notice how he words it in verse 1 “And now, O Israel, listen to the statutes and the rules that I am teaching you, and do them, that you may live.” Moses wants Israel to choose life. It is not a dull life, either. It is a life of gain. They are wandering nomads with no home and Moses says choose life so you may possess the land God is giving you. Moses is asking them to choose a life that leads to a gift. In verse 5 they are to enter this land and take possession of it. This life not only leads to a gift but leads to a purpose: possession of the land.

This life will also be desirable to all who see it. Notice verses 6-8. The nations will think this life is one of wisdom. The nations will notice this life that is offered to Israel and they will be amazed. Moses is not offering Israel a dreary life. It is a life full of reward, purpose, and wisdom. The nations will be amazed at the life Israel leads. It sounds glorious does it not? Who would not want to live a life full of purpose? Who would not want to live a life that makes others notice and be amazed? Who would not want to live a life that leads to rewards?

There is one caveat. It is a life based on the commandments of the Lord. To choose life means they will bind themselves to live as God’s people under His rule. As verse 2 states, they will not take away or add to God’s commandments. What God allows, they allow. What God forbids, they forbid. Here is the life that is offered: a life that other nations will admire, under the rule of God. It seems so simple; yet do not our hearts rebel the moment we hear of God’s rule? Our sinful nature stirs up and will not believe that God is promising good. We hear of His commandments and immediately want to object. Our sinful nature does not want life if it is under the rule of God, even when he promises such an amazing life.

So Moses lays out not only the hope of life, but the warning of death.

Moses warns of perishing if they reject life under God’s rule. He lays out the way to death in verses 9-28. It begins with forgetting what God has done. This is expressed in two ways. Forgetting what they have seen, or the experience of all they have been through, and forgetting what they have heard, which is the voice of God. Did you notice how Moses specifically focuses on the 10 commandments? Remember, this is the second generation. Many were merely babes or toddlers on the day when God spoke. The emphasis here is that God spoke to one generation and each generation is held accountable for what was heard. God’s covenant is generational; therefore, what was heard was to be passed down one generation to the next. We see here an emphasis on teaching. What was spoken to one generation was the rule for all. To perish means we fail to teach our children the greatness of God as recorded through His revealed Word. We need to notice that teaching is directly linked to daily life and worship. Jesus linked the two great commandments together and Deuteronomy 4 reveals why. Our ethics, our behavior, our obedience is always to be linked to our worship of God.

God’s people perish not only when they forget God’s actions, but also when they turn to false worship. We see this in verse 15-18. They heard God’s voice but saw no form. They are to worship God as a Spirit without a physical body. No idol is to be made. No representation is to be carved or painted or sculpted because humanity cannot capture the vastness of God. They are moving into a land where idols abound and they are to guard themselves from being swayed into false worship. The issue was not merely worshipping other gods, but also that Israel would not assign a bodily form to God. Verse 35 declares there are no other gods there is only the Lord; therefore He is to be worshipped as he declares, not as we desire. To perish is to live in disobedience of this great God. To perish means we harden our hearts to his commands. We follow our desires and whims in worship. We abandon God’s commandments and focus on what pleases us, what brings us pleasure, what satisfies our desires. Romans 1 describes it this way:

*For although they knew God, they did not honor him as God or give thanks to him, but they became futile in their thinking, and their foolish hearts were darkened.*

*22 Claiming to be wise, they became fools,*

*23 and exchanged the glory of the immortal God for images resembling mortal man and birds and animals and creeping things.*

*24 Therefore God gave them up in the lusts of their hearts to impurity, to the dishonoring of their bodies among themselves,*

*25 because they exchanged the truth about God for a lie and worshiped and served the creature rather than the Creator, who is blessed forever! Amen. (Rom 1:21-25 ESV)*

To perish means we choose a lie over God. Here is the great struggle we all experience. Our minds and our hearts recoil at the idea of life under the rule of God because we would rather listen to lies than have life. Moses lays out the result of this. They will be sent into strange lands and serve other nations. The idols they worship will become their masters and they will perish. It is such a dreadful thing, for we know this is what happens. What is even more dreadful is that generation after generation hears what occurred and we still would rather listen to the lies of our hearts. As Jeremiah declares:

*The heart is deceitful above all things, and desperately sick; who can understand it? (Jer 17:9 ESV)*

And yet our culture calls upon us to follow our hearts. Here is the dreadful state in which we find ourselves. Moses begs Israel and us to choose life, but we do not want it. We would rather perish in a lie than worship and obey the living God.

What hope is there? Did you notice the great hope in this passage? It is not that Israel will choose life. They will not. They do not want to, just like you and I. We are incapable of doing so. We are unable to rise above the lie that generation after generation have listened to and perished clutching. The hope is not in choosing life. The hope is found in verses 29-31:

*29 But from there you will seek the LORD your God and you will find him, if you search after him with all your heart and with all your soul.*

*30 When you are in tribulation, and all these things come upon you in the latter days, you will return to the LORD your God and obey his voice.*

*31 For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them. (Deu 4:29-31 ESV)*

How will those who abandon God ever seek Him? Have you ever pondered that? How can those choosing to perish under a lie ever reject that lie? How can one go from disobedience to obedience? How can one who is unfaithful become faithful? These verses confront you with this great dilemma. Moses says “Choose life,” then he says ‘But you will perish.” How can those who perish ever hope to live again? The answer is found in verse 31:

*For the LORD your God is a merciful God. He will not leave you or destroy you or forget the covenant with your fathers that he swore to them.*

Life comes to God’s people because God is merciful. You who believe are not gathered here today because you are great. You are here because God is merciful. God’s people worship him because God does not forget His covenant. God does not forget His promise that he made in the garden, and repeated to Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and now Moses. God will have people who will worship Him and it will be because God has mercy on them to save them from perishing. God chooses a people and in response His people will choose life.

Here is hope. God will redeem His people. God will intervene and do what humanity cannot. God will save His people from their sins. God will bring forth a redeemer who will save His people from the lies they love. God will save a people obsessed with themselves. God will take on the form of a man and live in the midst of our sin and misery in perfect obedience to the law, then sacrifice Himself as an atonement for the sins of His people. Here is why we need Jesus. Moses tells us choose life and we would rather choose death. So Jesus comes and declares:

*"I am the way, and the truth, and the life. No one comes to the Father except through me. (Joh 14:6 ESV)*

The law that we ignore points to the only source of life: God’s redeemer Jesus Christ. So Jesus declares:

*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy. I came that they may have life and have it abundantly. (Joh 10:10 ESV)*

What is that abundant life? It is the life Moses declared to God’s people. It is life under the rule of God. It is a life of obedient worship to the God who saved us in His mercy. It is life with purpose. Life that leads to great reward. Life that makes the nations marvel at our great God.

Is this your life? It is a life only attainable through the person and work of Christ. It is a life that reflects God glory, and delights in God’s commands because it is aware of the mercy given by God. Today, Moses words inspired by the Holy Spirit call out to each one of us. ‘Choose life’. It is a call for every generation, but only heeded by those who have met Christ, heard His words and seen His mighty works. Today will you choose life? Will you humble yourselves in obedience to God and cling to Christ? It is always the work of a merciful God. May we be a people whose obedient lives reflect God’s great work of mercy through Christ.