

UNIT 1

**GRADE
10**

LESSON 3

Aim & Objectives:

1. Covenants are made by God
2. Man has the freedom to choose Life or Death
3. How we can love God and keep His commandments

The Choice of Life and Death

Theme:

Loving God and Freedom of Choice

Teacher's Preparation:

- Depending on one's perspective many biblical verses can be classified as covenants. The Palestinian covenant is chosen to illustrate the objectives of this lesson.
- Encourage students to reflect on loving their Lord
- Prepare for activities using practical situations of students

Proposed Reading/References Used:

Katharine D. Sakenfeld et. al, The New Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible: A-C, Abingdon Press, 2006 (see 'Covenant' definition)

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Deuteronomy 30:1-20 (NRSV)

God's Fidelity Assured

When all these things have happened to you, the blessings and the curses that I have set before you, if you call them to mind among all the nations where the LORD your God has driven you, ²and return to the LORD your God, and you and your children obey him with all your heart and with all your soul, just as I am commanding you today, ³then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you, gathering you again from all the peoples among whom the LORD your God has scattered you. ⁴Even if you are exiled to the ends of the world, from there the LORD your God will gather you, and from there he will bring you back. ⁵The LORD your God will bring you into the land that your ancestors possessed, and you will possess it; he will make you more prosperous and numerous than your ancestors.

⁶Moreover, the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your descendants, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, in order that you may live. ⁷The LORD your God will put all these curses on your enemies and on the adversaries who took advantage of you.

⁸Then you shall again obey the LORD, observing all his commandments that I am commanding you today, ⁹and the LORD your God will make you abundantly prosperous in all your undertakings, in the fruit of your body, in the fruit of your livestock, and in the fruit of your soil. For the LORD will again take delight in prospering you, just as he delighted in prospering your ancestors, ¹⁰when you obey the LORD your God by observing his commandments and decrees that are written in this book of the law, because you turn to the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul.

Exhortation to Choose Life

¹¹Surely, this commandment that I am commanding you today is not too hard for you, nor is it too far away. ¹²It is not in heaven,



that you should say, “Who will go up to heaven for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?”¹³ Neither is it beyond the sea, that you should say, “Who will cross to the other side of the sea for us, and get it for us so that we may hear it and observe it?”¹⁴ No, the word is very near to you; it is in your mouth and in your heart for you to observe.

¹⁵ See, I have set before you today life and prosperity, death and adversity. ¹⁶ If you obey the commandments of the LORD your God that I am commanding you today, by loving the LORD your God, walking in his ways, and observing his commandments, decrees, and ordinances, then you shall live and become numerous, and the LORD your God will bless you in the land that you are entering to possess. ¹⁷ But if your heart turns away and you do not hear, but are led astray to bow down to other gods and serve them, ¹⁸ I declare to you today that you shall perish; you shall not live long in the land that you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess.

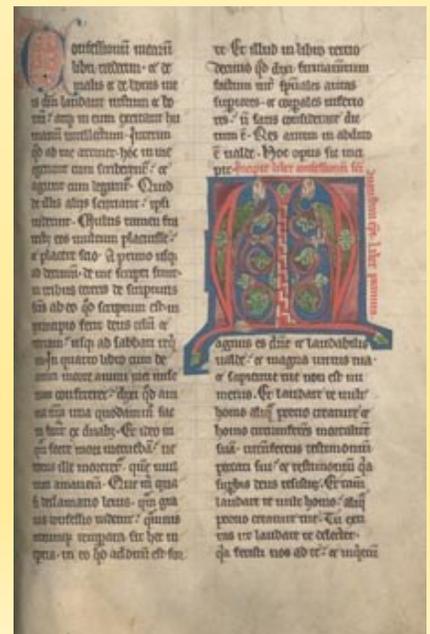
¹⁹ I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live, ²⁰ loving the LORD your God, obeying him, and holding fast to him; for that means life to you and length of days, so that you may live in the land that the LORD swore to give to your ancestors, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob.

Reference Deuteronomy 29

Student's Introduction to the Lesson:

St. Augustine (**Aurelius Augustine**) was born in Northern Africa (Present day Algeria) in 354 AD to a pagan father (Patricius) and a devout Christian mother (Monica). Augustine went to study in the city of Carthage at the age of sixteen. In Carthage he was drawn to pagan ideas, theatre, and various sins of impurity. From the age of seventeen Augustine maintained a relationship with a woman whom he never married. He had a son from this relationship. During this time, he was exposed to various schools of philosophical thought, particularly those associated with Greek thought. Subsequently, he was attracted to a philosophy called Manichean theology, later deemed to be heretical by the universal Christian church due to a number of positions it took that were clearly contrary to established Christian thought and Scripture. Among other things, Manichean theology included the rejection of God's omnipotence. None of these philosophical inquiries gave Augustine any peace of mind.

By the age of thirty, Augustine left Carthage for Rome and then went to Milan in Italy. Throughout these years his mother Monica continued to pray for his conversion to Christianity. He gave up his relationship with his mistress upon Monica's insistence. However, he then began a relationship with another woman. At Milan, Augustine became attracted to Bishop Aurelius Ambrose for the latter's oratorical skills. Gradually, Augustine became interested in the Christian message itself and began reading the epistles of St. Paul. Augustine soon became a believer and was baptized at the age of 32. Ten years later he became Bishop of Hippo (Hippo is the ancient name of a Roman city in Algeria, now known as Annaba). Augustine became a prolific writer and his treatises on subjects such as Grace, the Trinity, the Soul, Sacraments and various other concepts became authoritative works on Christian theology. “*The Confessions*”, is his autobiography and is the first known autobiography in history. It should also be noted that while Augustine was a highly respected early Christian theologian, considered



to one of the “Church Fathers,” a number of his teachings have been refuted by other schools of Christian thought.

Augustine realized that he was following the path of sin or death and chose life by becoming a follower of Christ. God blessed him abundantly by magnifying his talents of oration and writing. His autobiography and other works led people to truth and God. He was declared a saint of the Catholic and Anglican Churches and his teachings were extremely influential in formulating many doctrines of the Catholic Church.

Bible Exposition:

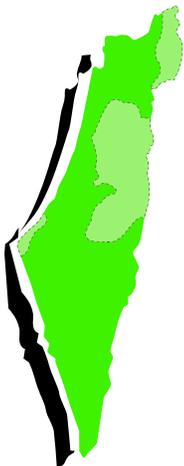
Covenants

The word *covenant* is repeatedly used in the Bible, especially in the Old Testament. It is an agreement between two or more persons to do and/or not do something specified. However, a covenant is different from a *contract*. A covenant in its purest form is a mutual commitment but not a conditional one i.e. it is not contingent upon one side while a contract is broken immediately if one side fails to live up the stipulated conditions. God did not break his covenant with Abraham even though Abraham’s descendants failed to uphold their side of the time and time again. Biblical covenants are always initiated by God. God in his mercy and love instructed or decreed His people or creation to honor these covenants in order to have life. God has warned that the rewards of disobedience of the covenants are curses or death.

Examples of biblical covenants

At various times in the biblical history of man, God assures his people of His blessings of protection, mercy, kindness and warns of His punishments. There are various covenants identified in the Bible:

- ✦ Noahic covenant (Genesis 9: 8-17)
- ✦ Abrahamic covenant: Genesis chapters 12-16 in junior classes.
- ✦ Mosaic Covenants (Genesis, chapters 17, Exodus chapters 19-24, 34:28 and Deut.5:6-22)
- ✦ Palestinian covenant (Deut: chapters 29 and 30)
- ✦ Davidic covenant (2 Samuel 7: 12-13)
- ✦ New Covenant (Jeremiah 31: 1-34)



Israel

Palestinian covenant –The Palestinian covenant is considered to be part of the Mosaic covenants and is also known as the “land covenant” because God gave these commandments through Moses to the Israelites just before the Israelites were to get possession of the Promised Land of Canaan. These covenants are described in Deuteronomy chapters 29 and 30. God made this covenant with Israel while they were in Moab waiting to go into the Promised Land. This covenant would serve the new generation of Israelites as a reminder of their special covenantal relationship with God.

Deuteronomy chapter 30:1-20 can be taken as a summary of the Palestinian

covenant. Moses reminds the Israelites of the following:

You can choose Life or Death (blessings or curses - Deut. 30:1,15)

These commandments are not too hard for you, nor is it far off, but the word is near you; it is in your heart, so that you can do it (Deut: 30: 11-14)

You can obey His commandments by loving the Lord your God (Deut. 30:2,16)

You will perish and will not live long if your heart turns away from the Lord and his commandments (Deut. 30:17-18)

The Palestinian Covenant presupposes that Israel will fail to keep the Mosaic Covenant. In the event of such a failure, God promises to do the following if they sincerely turn their hearts back to Him:

- Have compassion on Israel
- Free Israel from enslavement
- Re-gather Israel, from all parts of the earth, into their own land
- Circumcise Israel's heart, such that their love and obedience of God will be perfect

Blessings and curses

The history of the people of Israel is replete with cycles of blessing and punishment. We see that the nation of Israel prospered during the times of kings such as David and Solomon. During the time of King Jehoiakim, Nebuchadnezzar invaded Jerusalem and exiled most of the people to Babylon. When they turned their heart to God during the times of Ezra and Nehemiah, Israel was returned from captivity. Many a time, God judged Israel's enemies and destroyed them. Thus, we see a God who delights in blessing the people. We know that Israel as a nation rejected Jesus Christ as its Messiah and was once again cursed and cut off from the land when the Romans conquered Jerusalem in A.D. 70 after the Jewish rebellion.

Freedom of choice

In the Palestinian covenant, Moses reminds the people that they are free to choose life or death. This is similar to the freedom of choice Adam and Eve had and they chose death. They consequently lost their dominion and fellowship with God.

God's covenants teach us that we are choosing a blessing or curse whenever a choice is made between good and bad. Perhaps, these consequences are not visible immediately, as in the case of King Uzziah. However, these decisions will affect our inner state of mind and our well being. It is true that we get an inner satisfaction and sense of joy when we sincerely love or help another person, whereas we feel disgraced after a sinful thought or deed. Not only do we indulge in sinful deeds but we also pretend that nothing out of the ordinary has happened! When we do something good, the Holy Spirit will strengthen us to do greater things that are pleasing to our Lord.

Loving the Lord

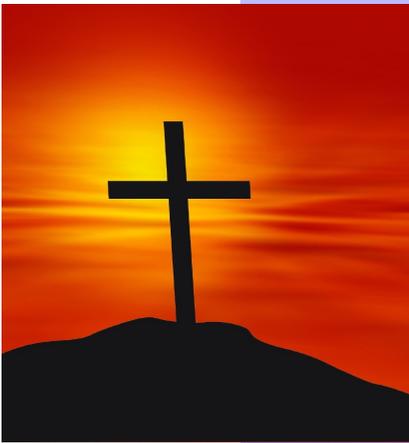
The Palestinian covenant demanded the Israelite nation's absolute devotion to God with all its heart and soul. God demands whole hearted love. That is a love shown through a sincere commitment from our heart, soul, mind, strength (Deut.



Star of David

30: 2, 16; Mark 12:30). Half hearted love is not love. The supreme example of love is that shown by Jesus Christ when he obeyed the Father on the cross.

Have you ever asked yourself the question: **Do I love my Lord?** Many of us have the following train of thought: God is love and He is my Father and therefore it is His responsibility to keep me safe and sound and grant fulfillment of my needs and even luxuries. If we do not get our needs or luxuries, we turn away from the Lord, become unhappy and start seeking other gods. In Mark 12: 28 -31 we read a conversation between a scribe and Jesus. Jesus taught him that the most important of the commandments is that “you shall love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul, and with all your mind and with all your strength”.



Loving the Lord with all your heart, soul, mind and strength is very burdensome. It involves great sacrifice. All dimensions of life have to bear this concept of sacrificial love as Jesus did. In the garden of Gethsemane, Jesus requested the Father to remove the agony of the cross but submitted by saying, “not my will but yours” and was empowered to say “it is finished” on the cross. This is the model of love and obedience that we should emulate. When we seek our Lord, we should seek Him with a pure mind, concentrating on him, praising him with all our heart and soul. We have to devote our best to the Lord and do the things that please Him with all our strength. Then, we realize that our responsibility in this world is for the glory of His name and we will begin to love others as ourselves. We will keep his commandments with a full heart and soul. (“If you love me, you will keep my commandments”, John 14:15).

The Difficult Relationship between “Freedom of Choice” and “Loving the Lord”

Freedom as a concept is central to the constitutions of many countries and human rights organizations. A nation with a diverse population such as the United States, which is composed of peoples of different backgrounds and religious affiliations (or no religious affiliation), has always exhibited an uneasy balance between embracing human freedom and loving God simply because individuals, families and wider communities have different views of these and all are granted equal rights to voice those views in order to live in harmony with each other.

As an example, the Declaration of Independence of the United States asserts the following:

We hold these truths to be self-evident, that all men are created equal, that they are endowed by their Creator with certain unalienable Rights, that among these are Life, Liberty and the pursuit of Happiness.-

The U.S. Constitution’s First Amendment grants freedom of religion to U.S. citizens but in practice, various arguments arise as to how best to exercise this freedom (ex: prayers in public schools). Politicians will often play by one set of rules to gain

votes and while in office, change tack in order to stay in office. Judges may issue opinions that are not consistent throughout their tenure. A Christian is called to navigate through these uncertain times by loving God. Often, this means making the best of a difficult situation and trusting that God will give one the strength to see it through.

Loving God may very well mean not accepting the general opinion of the public i.e. going against the flow. Persecution, including ostracism in the media or legal challenges in the courts, may result from loving God. It is extremely difficult to embrace loving God in these circumstances. Christians will be under pressure,

Group Discussion:

1. Discuss the freedom of choice – its meaning and implication in your life. Examples: Telling the truth or a lie; opportunity to steal or return a found item; opportunity to give comfort to a sick/elderly person in public transit by offering your seat; genuinely congratulating somebody on his/her achievement or harboring resentment or jealousy.
2. What does loving your Lord mean in your life? Discuss and provide examples.
3. Discuss the conflict between freedom of choice and loving God.

Values For Life

Let us love God fully, obey His commandments and choose life. All of us have the freedom to do good or bad in our daily lives. Every day we are presented with multiple choices in our life situations.

Some examples are: *watch appropriate movies or inappropriate ones; browse ethical versus unethical websites; be kind to a fellow student/neighbor or be hostile and cold; ignore a person or listen; attend a church service or stay home, and so forth.* Every day we make our choices without much consultation of the Lord and continue to live our lives. We do not think much about the consequences of our choices.

Through prayer, we can seek God's wisdom to make correct choices.



Life Response

The Father has sent His Son to this world. Are we accepting or rejecting Him?

UNIT 1

GRADE 10

LESSON 3

Memory Verse:

I call heaven and earth to witness against you today that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Choose life so that you and your descendants may live.”

Deuteronomy 30:19

Closing Prayer

Dear Lord, We love you with all our heart, soul and mind. Please help us to keep your covenants sacred and give us the wisdom to be able to make the right choices in our lives. AMEN.

Lesson Review:

Multiple Choice:

- The name of St. Augustine's autobiography is:
 - The *Works of Augustine of Hippo*
 - The *Confessions*
 - Life of a Sinner*
- The Palestinian covenant is also called the:
 - Land covenant
 - New covenant
 - Noahic covenant
- Jesus taught to love God with the following (choose the most accurate answer):
 - heart, soul, mind, strength
 - heart, soul
 - spirit, mind, strength

Short Answers

- Summarize the four points of the Palestinian Covenant.
- Give two examples of punishments that the people of Israel suffered due to their disobedience under the covenants
- Describe the difference between a covenantal commitment and a contractual commitment.

Essay

Many people in the Bible have encountered blessings and curses throughout their lives. Discuss specific ways in which the decisions made by the biblical characters led to blessings and curses in their lives. *The essay must include:*

- Introduction
- Identify and describe two such individuals who have received blessings as result of their obedience to God
- Identify and describe two individuals who have been cursed as a result of their disobedience to God
- Explain how freedom of choice played a role in the resulting consequences.
- Conclusion