

# **God of Promise – God of Compassion**

**by**

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## **Introduction**

Many times in life when we succumb to our short-comings, i.e., we “blow it”, we stand before an all knowing God wondering what happens next. Sometimes the consequences of our actions are not as bad as confessing before our Heavenly Father saying, “Lord, I’m sorry. I messed up. It wasn’t a ‘mistake’; I just chose to do wrong.” Then your mind begins to wonder, “What kind of God is He? How will He respond to my sin and confession? I truly regret what I did and will strive to turn around, but what does God feel?”

This lesson focuses on the final instructions Moses provides the people of Israel right before they enter the Promised Land. And through his instructions, we can gain some insight into the character of God. This will give us a better understanding of our Father when we succumb to our weaknesses and then repent.

## **Scriptures Used In This Lesson**

Deuteronomy 28

Deuteronomy 30: 1 – 10

John 3:16 – 17

Romans 8:32

Exodus 34:6 – 7

## **Background**

The people of Israel were on the verge of entering into the Promised Land after wandering in the desert for 40 years. The book of Deuteronomy begins with Moses reminding the people of all the Lord had done for them while in the desert. In addition to reviewing their history, Moses also went over blessings and curses associated with following or not following the Lord's commands. Moses is speaking to a “new” generation, the children of the adults who left Egypt 40 years earlier. The adults died wandering in the wilderness because of their continued disbelief in and disrespect for God. Their children were the ones receiving the instructions from Moses. The year is about 1406 BC on the plains of Moab.

## **Tell It Like It Is**

In Deuteronomy 28 Moses spells out the blessings for obedience to God's commands and the curses for disobedience to the “new” generation of Israelites. The contrast between the two consequences is very straightforward and clear. First read the blessings for obedience. Read Deuteronomy 28:1 – 14.

These blessings covered every aspect of their lives – protection from enemies, their labor, their finances, even the “fruit of their bodies”, i.e., their children. God left nothing untouched. After reading the passage, it makes you want to get up and say, “Ok, I want to start being obedient today! This sounds too good to pass up!”

Now read Deuteronomy 28:15 – 48. These are the curses for disobedience. They actually continue through the end of the chapter. After reading the curses, you should think, “Disobedience is not worth it. There’s no way I would want to go through all that.” Unfortunately that’s exactly what the nation of Israel experienced repeatedly in their history.

Now you may be wondering, “How in the world could these people miss it? How could they sin knowing the consequences?” If we are honest, many times we behave the same way, i.e., we sin willfully, fully aware of the possible consequences. We either *hope* the consequences won’t be too bad, or we block them out of our minds as a possibility. Why do we do that? Why do we act like Israel? The diagrams below illustrate what goes on inside us.



Again, like Israel, we have two choices, obedience and disobedience. If we take a look at what’s underneath these choices, we see that there are two factors guiding our actions – the desire to do God’s will and the desire to do our will.



It's fairly simple. When we have it in our hearts to do God's will, obedience will come more naturally to us. We won't struggle as much to "do the right things"; it will flow because it's in our hearts. On the other hand, if it's not in our hearts to do God's will, then disobedience will *flow*. So the question is: What's in your heart? Do you even think about being obedient to God or are your thoughts always focused on the activities of the day?

*Do you struggle with being obedient to God's will? Are there habits you need to overcome that prevent you from being obedient? Is there an underlying fear to being obedient? How about the desire to please others? If so, have you sought help from the Lord or other godly people? If not, why not?*

*Here is a list of some obstacles to doing the will of God. With which one(s) do you struggle? Can you think of others? What can be done to overcome each of these obstacles?*

- *Fear*
- *Desire to please others*
- *Bad habit*
- *Desire to promote myself (pride)*
- *Anger or Bitterness*
- *Lack of knowledge about God or His ways*
- *No relationship with God*
- *Don't know the voice of God*
- *Inner hurts (as a result of the action of others)*

### **The Heart of God Revealed**

With the foundation of obedience and disobedience laid out before them, Moses begins Deuteronomy 30. Read verses 1 – 3. I've presented the passage below from the New International Version (NIV) to emphasize some key words and phrases.

When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come upon you and you take them to heart wherever the LORD your God disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the LORD your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you.

To begin with, Moses did not start the passage with, “*If* all these blessings and curses...”, but “*When*...”. He was letting them know that they would indeed disobey the Lord’s commands in the future. He also let them know that they would indeed be dispersed. Afterwards they would return to the Lord and obey Him with all their hearts and souls; He would “gather you again” from all the nations where they had been scattered. So Moses was letting them know what the future held for them.

It’s sad to think that they would experience “scattering”, but their disobedience would be in the form of idolatry, rejection and denial of God, heathenish living and even human sacrifices. The “scattering” was in the form of being conquered by other nations and taken captive. After intense suffering, Israel would eventually return to the Lord. Unfortunately for us, it sometimes takes a tragedy or some difficulty before we return to the Lord with “all our hearts”.

*Why does it take a tragedy or some difficult circumstance before we turn to the Lord with “all our hearts”? Does it have to be this way? What can we do to change it?*

Israel’s “scattering” shows that God is a just and righteous God; you don’t escape from the consequences of sin. God sometimes graciously gives you time to repent, but ultimately, we will all have to face our Judge.

**Key Point:** God is righteous and just.

**Key Point:** You don’t escape the consequences of sin.

### **Love, Glory, and Faithfulness**

Verse 2 provides hope. First, because of their suffering, Israel would, “...return to the LORD your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul...” Upon doing this, God would, “...*restore your fortunes* and have compassion on you...”

This says a lot about the heart of God. Like the children of Israel, God chose us to be “His people”; a people “called by His name”. As a result, He wants the best for us – His best. *If we return to Him with “all our heart and soul”, then He will have compassion on us and restore us.* That’s His heart for us. Now there will be consequences for our disobedience, just as in the case of Israel. But God’s ultimate desire is to restore us. Now one might ask, “Why would He restore us?” There are three main reasons; you may think of others:

- He loves us
- He receives glory
- He is faithful

Read John 3:16 – 17 and Romans 8:32. God loves us. He sacrificed a part of Himself (Jesus) so that we could have an intimate, personal relationship with Him and be saved from an eternity separated from Him.

God receives glory when He shows compassion (as well as justice) towards us. What is “glory”? One of the Hebrew words used in the Old Testament is “kabowb”; it means:

- Honor, splendor, riches, dignity, reputation, reverence

So when God is merciful towards us, it gives Him more honor and He is more revered by those who see what He has done.

Lastly, when God restores us, or shows us mercy, it demonstrates His faithfulness. He promises to never leave us nor forsake those “called by His name”, i.e., us. Restoring us and doing what we could not do ourselves shows the world that God keeps His promises.

### **More Hope**

Verse 4 provides more reason to hope in the Lord after we have fallen. Read verse 4. No matter how many countries and how far away the people would be scattered, God was able to bring them back to the Promised Land. *For us this says that no matter how bad we think we have sinned, God can restore us. We are never too far from the reach of an almighty God.*

Now, does this mean that when God restores us, it will be as if we never sinned? Maybe, maybe not. There are consequences for sin and sometimes the restoration takes time. So at the very least we may “lose” time. But God will accept us where we are and take us to where we need to be.

**Key Point:** We are never too far from the reach of an all loving, all powerful God.

The restoration of Israel will come at the hand of God, not by their own efforts.

Verse 5 shows three of aspects of God’s character:

- God is faithful. When He brings the people back to the Promised Land, it shows how God keeps His word, even when the promise was directly made to Abraham and not to the “scattered” Hebrews directly.
- God is compassionate. Moses said, “...He will do thee good...” God did not have to be good to the people who were scattered because they had disobeyed Him. He did not have to bring them

back to the Promised Land; He could have settled them anywhere. But He chose to keep His promise. God had a right to keep them scattered as punishment. But He chose not to.

- God is good. Not only would God multiply the people but "...multiply thee above their fathers..." God would bless the people above and beyond their ancestors.

*Has God ever blessed you "above and beyond"? Has He ever given you "extra"? Has He ever shown you compassion when you didn't deserve it? Has He been faithful to you? If so, you have experienced verse 5.*

Verse 6 says that God would "circumcise their heart". The word "heart" comes from the Hebrew word "lebab" which means:

- inner man, mind, will, heart, soul, understanding
- inclination, resolution, determination (of will)
- conscience
- heart (of moral character)
- as seat of appetites
- as seat of emotions and passions
- as seat of courage

God's actions would penetrate the very core of their being. God was not interested in superficial change, but a permanent change, a change of their "inner man", the "seat of their appetites, emotions, and courage", not only for them, but also for their children. They would love the Lord their God with all their heart. Their love would be demonstrated by keeping His commandments.

Again, remember what it would take to get them to that point – a "scattering". God sometimes uses "scatterings" to get our hearts right after we sin. He won't accept a superficial return to Him; it must be with "all" our hearts.

**Key Point:** God wants *all* of our hearts.

**Key Point:** Love for God is demonstrated by our obedience.

In verse 7 God would defend his people by putting the "curses" on their enemies. This shows how God wants to restore His people. If they had a turn of heart, He would be their shield again. What does this say to us? God will be our shield if we have a "change of heart".

**Key Point:** God will be our shield if we have a "change of heart".

Verse 9 again shows how God wants to restore His people. Their “punishment” would not last forever. He would make them “plenteous” in “every” work. The word “plenteous” comes from the word “yathar” which means:

- to have excess
- to have more than enough
- to have some left over
- to abound
- to be beyond measure
- to exceed bounds

This again shows the character of God. Not only does He want to restore His people, but to *abundantly* bless them. The blessing would be in every area of life, i.e., their children, livestock, and crops (vocation). God would also “rejoice” over them for good. Just like the parent of a little child, God would “rejoice” seeing His children prosper.

Verse 10 reveals the condition of the blessings outlined in verse 9 – obedience to His commands with all our hearts. God makes it very clear how to receive His blessings and how He will respond to us when we return to Him.

### Summary

The heart of God is displayed very clearly in this passage in Deuteronomy 30. We see that God is righteous and just, but He is also a God of compassion. Read Exodus 34:6 – 7. God tells Moses directly what He’s like. And since God does not change, we can have confidence that He will respond the same way towards us.

### Aspects of God’s Character Build on His Love



So when you sin, repent quickly with all your heart and know the character your heavenly Father Who longs to restore you.