

## You and Free Will

### Commentary for August 1, 2011 — Choices Are Not Necessarily Free

This month's presentation asks the question, "Does Man Have a Free Will?" It is a 1983 presentation by Dr. Ernest L. Martin. Read the "[August 2011 Newsletter](#)" first. Some scholars and theologians bring up the instance of Israel's acceptance or rejection of the Covenant at Mount Sinai (Exodus 24: 3–8). Were the people of Israel truly "free" to make an informed choice? Look at the circumstances.

### *Israel's Choice at Sinai*

God caused Israel's ancestors to go to Egypt 400 years before. He allowed (He arranged circumstances) for them to come under bondage to the Egyptians. Then through wondrous miracles God caused the plagues upon Egypt, He rescued them from Egypt, had them cross the Red Sea, and then God destroyed Pharaoh's army. Then at Sinai God put on a tremendous visual, audible, and sensate display of power:

**"And Mount Sinai was wrapped in smoke, because YHWH descended upon it in fire; and the smoke of it went up like the smoke of a kiln, and the whole mountain quaked greatly. And as the sound of the trumpet grew louder and louder, Moses spoke, and God answered him in thunder."**

• *Exodus 19:18–19, Revised Standard Version*

**"And all the people saw the thunderings, and the lightnings, and the noise of the trumpet, and the mountain smoking: and when the people saw it, they removed, and stood afar off. And they said unto Moses, 'Speak you with us, and we will hear: but let not God speak with us, lest we die.'"**

• *Exodus 20:18–19, KJV*

Smoke, fire, earthquake, trumpet noise, thunder, lightning — is it any wonder the people of Israel agreed to what God proposed to them? He totally overawed their bodies and minds. This was after they were made to feel special by God's salvific acts and after He told them they were chosen for a mission that God would fulfill through them, His special chosen people. After this display of power, after being told by the Creator of the universe that you are especially chosen by birth, would you agree to God's offer to have a special covenant relationship with you?

The answer to the question is, of course you would. Given the circumstances you would have no other choice except to agree to God's covenant. I would too. In Exodus the decision of the people of Israel to accept God's offer of Covenant was not put in the form of a "choice." There was no discussion of Israel's "free will" to accept or reject God's offer.

### *Israel's Choice Later*

The agreement of Israel's covenant with God was reiterated again some 40 years later in Deuteronomy chapter 30 after God again told the tribes of Israel that they were His chosen

people. **“See, I have set before you this day life and good, and death and evil”** (Deuteronomy 30:15). YHWH goes on to tell Israel about blessings for obedience and punishments for disobedience. Then He tells them they have a choice:

**“I call heaven and earth to record this day against you, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life, that both you and your seed may live.”**

• **Deuteronomy 30:19**

Only after 40 years in the wilderness, and just before they were about to enter into the land that God promised to their descendants 40 years before, NOW God tells them that they have a choice, and that choice is between life and death, obedience or rejection. They have a choice after their parents and grandparents 40 years before made a covenant with YHWH. Israel was free to choose life or death. That was the extent of their freedom of will as they were in the wilderness about to enter the promised land that YHWH gave to them.

To be sure God promised blessings for obedience, tremendous blessings and happiness, and even long life (Deuteronomy 30:20). Yet God made these promises knowing that generally the people of Israel would fail, and that obedience and the resulting blessing would not occur often.

### **Israel's Choice in Joshua's Time**

In the last chapter of the book of Joshua:

**“And if it seem evil unto you to serve YHWH, choose you this day whom you will serve; whether the gods which your fathers served that were on the other side of the flood, or the gods of the Amorites, in whose land you dwell: but as for me and my house, we will serve YHWH.**

**And the people answered and said, ‘God forbid that we should forsake YHWH, to serve other gods; For YHWH our God, he it is that brought us up and our fathers out of the land of Egypt, from the house of bondage, and which did those great signs in our sight, and preserved us in all the way wherein we went, and among all the people through whom we passed: And YHWH drove out from before us all the people, even the Amorites which dwelt in the land: therefore will we also serve YHWH; for he is our God.’**

**And Joshua said unto the people, ‘You cannot serve YHWH: for he is an holy God; he is a jealous God; he will not forgive your transgressions nor your sins. If you forsake YHWH, and serve strange gods, then he will turn and do you hurt, and consume you, after that he has done you good.’**

**And the people said unto Joshua, ‘Nay; but we will serve YHWH.’ And Joshua said unto the people, ‘You are witnesses against yourselves that you have chosen you YHWH, to serve him.’ And they said, ‘We are witnesses.’**

**‘Now therefore put away,’ said he, ‘the strange gods which are among you, and incline your heart unto YHWH God of Israel.’ And the people said unto Joshua, ‘YHWH our God will we serve, and his voice will we obey.’”**

• **Joshua 24:15–24**

This exchange is interesting. Joshua told the people to choose again to serve YHWH, and then he told them **“You cannot serve YHWH.”** Joshua was telling them they were incapable of obeying YHWH. Yet they chose to do so ... again, just as they had at Sinai, just before enter-

ing the land, and again just before Joshua's death. Joshua warned them. They did not listen, and they chose to attempt to do that which they were incapable of doing. The people of Israel were free to choose, but they were not free to fulfill the choices they made. To fear YHWH has always been an available choice for the people of Israel (Proverbs 1:29).

### **Choice in Your Life**

Look at your life. Look at everyone else's life. We always have choices in life. Most often those choices are limited. They usually are not cosmic choices, yet at times they are life and death choices. We did not choose our time or place of our birth, nor did we choose the circumstances of our growing up, and as adults your choices are limited by age, finances, family, health, you name it.

Before we believed in Christ's resurrection, you, I, and every other human being — each of us were limited in our life's choices by a spirit of bondage:

**"For you have not received the spirit of bondage** [slavery, a spirit that you had in the past] **again to fear; but you have received the Spirit of adoption, whereby we cry, 'Abba, Father.'** **The Spirit itself bears witness with our spirit,** [and what does it witness to?] **that we are the children of God."**

• **Romans 8:15–16**

**"Spirit of bondage"** is better translated **"spirit of slavery."** We are God's children. The opposite of bondage is liberty. You have God's Holy Spirit which gives you liberty as children of God. Liberty to do what? To do righteousness — finally. The rewards for doing acts that come from righteousness are much greater than anything you can imagine.

**"Therefore, brethren, we are debtors, not to the flesh, to live after the flesh. For if you live after the flesh, you shall die: but if you through the Spirit do mortify the deeds of the body, you shall live. For as many as are led by the Spirit of God, they are the sons of God."**

• **Romans 8:12–14**

The circumstances of our lives, however bad they may be, are temporary. It is difficult to comprehend, but trust God on that point. Back to Paul in Romans chapter 8:

**"And if children, then heirs; heirs of God, and joint-heirs with Christ; if so be that we suffer with him, that we may be also glorified together. For I reckon that the sufferings of this present time are not worthy to be compared with the glory which shall be revealed in us."**

• **Romans 8:17–18**

Ask God for trust. Ask God for patience. Ask God for His peace. Read all of Philipians 4:4–8, but note especially these references to God's peace for you:

**"Let your moderation be known unto all men. The Lord is at hand. Be careful for nothing; but in every thing by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known unto God. And the peace of God, which passes all understanding, shall keep your hearts and minds through Christ Jesus. ...**

**Those things, which you have both learned, and received, and heard, and seen in me, do: and the God of peace shall be with you."**

• **Philippians 4:5–7, 9**

God's peace comes through His Holy Spirit (John 14:26–27). This does not guarantee peace. That was not what Christ was saying. He was saying that God's Spirit will bring you peace even in troubled and difficult times in your life.

For those with God's Holy Spirit, what the Psalmist writes is more than a possibility. It is a reality: **"I have chosen the way of truth [faithfulness]: your judgments have I laid before me"** (Psalm 119:30). We can now choose **"the way of faithfulness"** because God's Holy Spirit gives us the will to do so (Philippians 2:13; Hebrews 13:21). **"Let your hand help me; for I have chosen your precepts"** (Psalm 119:173).

God will help you in this. It is His will for you to obey His will. He says He will. He wants you to do so (Luke 11:9–13). He has given you His Holy Spirit to help you, little by little, bit by bit, day by day, until you die and then you immediately experience your resurrection from the dead when you rise at Christ's return.<sup>1</sup>

### **Free Will?**

The degree of freedom you have in life depends on the variety and number of choices available to you. Free will does not really exist except philosophically. "Free will" is not a biblical phrase or combination of words. The only being with free will is YHWH, God the Father. We have freedom only within a range of limited choices. Even Christ does the will of His Father<sup>2</sup>:

**"For I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me."**

• **John 6:38**

**"Marvel not at this: for the hour is coming, in the which all that are in the graves shall hear his voice, And shall come forth; they that have done good, unto the resurrection of life; and they that have done evil, unto the resurrection of damnation [judgment]."**

**I can of mine own self do nothing: as I hear, I judge: and my judgment is just; because I seek not mine own will, but the will of the Father which has sent me."**

• **John 5:28–30**

**"For whosoever shall do the will of my Father which is in heaven, the same is my brother, and sister, and mother."**

• **Matthew 12:50**

We are, and we shall remain, God's beloved children.

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<sup>1</sup> You will remain dead (without consciousness) until that moment.

<sup>2</sup> Christ's final submission of His will to the His Father's will shall be at the consummation when He gives back all power His Father, 1 Corinthians 15:24–25, 28:

**"Then comes the end, when he shall have delivered up the kingdom to God, even the Father; when he shall have put down all rule and all authority and power. For he must reign, till he has put all enemies under his feet. ..."**

**And when all things shall be subdued unto him, then shall the Son also himself be subject unto him that put all things under him, that God may be all in all."**