

CHOOSING (Deuteronomy 30, 19 – 20)

“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 thou and thy seed may live: That thou mayest love the LORD thy GOD, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him: for he is thy life, and the length of thy days: that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them”. (King James’s Version, further KJV)

“I call heaven and earth to witness against you today: I set before you life or death, blessing or curse. Choose life then, so that you and your descendants may live, in the love of Yahweh your God, obeying his voice, clinging to him; for in this life consists, and on this depends your long stay in the land which Yahweh swore to your fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob he would give them”. (The Jerusalem Bible, further JB)

It is interesting to compare these two translations, an old one, more than three hundred years old, and a modern one. Are there differences in the meaning? Are there differences in the impressions they give, the feelings we get, when we are reading them? Do we like one of them better than the other one? And can we find out what we like better?

1 The situation

After a travel of forty years through the desert, with many many ups and downs, most of which they were themselves responsible for, the Hebrews are standing before the promised land, before a new life. In this situation Moses talks to the people. He tells them what will happen to them in this new and, when they either follow God, listen to His word, or don't do so.

In fact it is wisdom at hindsight. The book Deuteronomy is written when the people lived already for ages in this promised land and had made its nasty experiences with itself and so with life. They knew: This was what Moses could have said, what was true, now and then.

How could we tell each other about Northern Ireland? Can we find that there is a relationship between our not listening to God and the situation we are in? Could there be something like a fatality in our living together, and our destroying each other, in the country, in our families, because of our not-listening?

Moses says all these words just before his death. It is something like a valedictory address. He is giving the baton to the next generation. This situation is a very important one in all cultures: The dying woman, man, giving acquired wisdom, good advice, life, peace, to those who stay “behind” in life, so giving them the possibility to go on. And very often part of these words: Do this so, and not so! Stop doing things in that manner, there is a better one.

Maybe we can find examples from our own life. From what happened in our own family or with friends. From stories we read. It is clear: the whole situation is about making a choice. Choosing means that we are taking decision about our future, about our very lives. There is something solemn around choosing. We are listening to somebody, talking to us. To the voices which are in us, and which in fact too are voices of others we once heard. Then we are silent. And we choose, to go to the right or to the left, to give our life form, character, in this manner or in that manner.

Moses taking leave of his people, which he led so many through the desert (as our parents lead us so many years through the early years of our life), makes it a solemn occasion (as when our parents die and take leave of us). So it is an occasion for a choice. Moses makes that very clear.

Situations are not only solemn when somebody who is near to us, is dying. Any time we take a decision about our life, it is a solemn occasion. Can we find that back, in our own life? Did we experience this with others?

How can we compare our youth with our parents with the journey of the Hebrews through the desert? Was there a clear guidance in our life? How did we stray away? What can we tell about the oasis in our life? Which was the land of adulthood we were looking forward to?

Furthermore it is clear: Choices have their "hours". We can postpone to make choices time and again, and then it may become clear to us that we lost the opportunity, that life always will stay as it was, without real hope and without a real future, because we did not see, we did not get the opportunity, the possibility, or because we were too afraid to make a choice.

And again: Maybe we can tell each other about situations in which we choose. And other ones in which we, at hindsight, lost real possibilities because we did not choose.

2. Somebody speaks. And people listen

Very fundamental for the whole situation is, that somebody speaks, somebody who is important for the people, standing around, and that these people is listening. It is worthwhile to think a little bit about that. We are totally overwhelmed by voices and by noise. Voices all around. From TV and radio. From the gramophone and CD. From people talking to us, when we are reading. We are hardly listening any more. There are too many voices. We only listen when we are interested and then very often even then casually, and when we have interest. Hopefully when somebody says to us "I love you".

Our possibilities to listen are too weakened because we are living, because of the media and because our life becomes more and more complicated, in so many different worlds in the same time. In other words, we are endlessly distracted.

The Hebrews had nothing of this. They lived in a very known landscape which did not change. They only heard natural noises and probably very few, and the voices of people they knew, in a very ordered and regular life in which, in our sense, very little happened. They could listen, much better than we can. In fact, we have again to learn to listen.

We can try to learn it a little bit together. We are silent for 5 minutes, carefully listening to everything which reaches our ears, noises from outside or from inside of the place we are, voices. After the 5 minutes of listening we tell each other what we heard.

We can tell each other one or two sentences, and then we tell back what we heard, to look if we really exactly understood what was meant. One says another sentence, the other saying what she or he understood, the whole group listening, every member of the group again telling what she, he understood. Every member of the group having his, her turn.

It is important to be careful at home: Do we really listen to each other? Or are we just giving answers or not even that?

When we are listening, the other comes into us with the waves, the vibrations, of her, his voice. The voice, the words said, become part of our very body. Much more so than with the eyes. The eyes can perceive millions of things in the same moment. The ear can hear only one voice or noise clearly. When we let the voice into our body, it becomes part of it. There is no possibility to deny that the voice is there. I can say “no” to the voice, but even when we say no, the words, coming to us, are part of our life. Hearing the voice always means taking a decision.

Maybe we can tell each other about situations, in which we heard the voice of somebody, which we never forgot, which clearly has been very important for us. Are they good memories or bad memories?

Of course we can fight against people and so we can fight against their voices. We don't wish to listen. We don't wish a relationship. We don't wish to take decisions about our life, listening. It might be right, justly defending ourselves. It might be wrong, because we are choosing only for ourselves.

Anyway, not listening, choosing for ourselves, means that nothing ever happens in our lives. In the end life must become extremely dull. The French say: The more things change, the more they stay the same. This is certainly true, when we don't listen. It looks like enormous changes in our lives, but as long as we are not listening, in fact nothing every changes.

Voices of people “from over the boundaries” of people we don't know too well, or voices of people who really have something to tell, who have a message, which is important for us, if we know it in advance or not, they change, if we let them come into us, our lives. To change our life, to keep life interesting, exciting, to have the possibility to choose, we have to listen. Not listening means never to take decisions. Not listening to voices, letting them penetrate our lives, makes life a nuisance.

Paul writes in the letter to the Romans: “So faith comes from what is preached, and what is preached comes from the word of Christ”. (10, 17) (JB). The KJV translates: “So when faith cometh by hearing, and hearing by the word of God”. The last translation is much more in accordance with the original Greek text: “So the faith comes from the hearing, and the hearing by the word of Christ”. (God instead of Christ in the KJV, because in the 17th century scholars thought that in the original Greek text there stood God. As they think now, that it has to be Christ).

The original Greek text and the KJV reflect the biblical tradition about hearing. Is that clear?

3. “I call heaven and earth to witness against you” (Jerusalem Bible)

Real choices in our lives (and Moses is certainly asking for a real choice) decide about our very life: how it will be. They are choices, not only for “the now” but for the rest of our life. The decision now taken gives form, gives substance (to the rest of our life).

Choices in this sense too are disappearing more and more out of our lives. Less and less people choose a profession for their whole life, choose a husband, a wife for the whole of their life. Do we also do so with the decision to have children or do we get into the habit to put them out of our lives, before or after their birth, too? Is there still any decision about our life?

Anyway, if we take a real decision, heaven and earth, everything, the total reality in which we live, is around us. In that moment we are the centre of everything that exists, because it is a decision about our relationship with everything that exists. Choosing, changing, means that all our relationships change. The universe is looking at us, when we choose, or refuse to do so, listening to us.

In the translation, both the KJV and JB, it is a witnessing against us. The Hebrew word, thus translated, in fact only a letter, 'b', has many meanings. Heaven and earth are with us. They become against us, when we take the wrong decision or do not wish to decide at all. In both cases nothing changes. We stay the old people we were, without any possibilities for a new life with a real future. Heaven witnesses against us by becoming closed, earth by becoming arid.

Heaven and earth being witnesses too means, that our choosing is something objective. Witnesses always are called to testify that something really happened by somebody. Choosing makes life objectively, recognisable for others, another life. There is a before and an after the choice.

In Deuteronomy 4, 26; 31, 28 we find these same words, when it is about life-encompassing choices. Do we recognise all this? Can we tell about choices in our life, which changed life, even if only a little bit? Can we feel the centre of our life when we think about such choosing?

4. "I see before you life or death, blessing or curse". (JB)

The KJV: life and death, blessing and curse. As in the Hebrew text the two possibilities are simply put beside each other.

Is there a difference between the two possibilities for us? Which is clearer, if there is any, life or death, life and death?

Life and death, blessing or curse. It is very common in Hebrew texts to say the same thing in different manners. When it is important enough, what it is about is repeated. Life is the same as blessing, death the same as curse.

Of course we do the same: "I like you so, I love you". "You are scoundrel, I hate you". "O is this beautiful, look how beautiful it is". Maybe we can find more examples.

Blessing means: The ways of life are open. Life is opened up before us. It looked like closed, hopeless, the eternal repeating of things not really worthwhile or even bad, hopeless. And now it looks like a wall is taken away, that the prison in which we were closed up is opened. It is a gift. We did nothing for it. And we are saved, delivered out of a situation in which life was dull, just normal or worse.

Curse means exactly the reverse: the ways into the future are closed. We will stay amidst of the violence, of our own and of others. There is no newness in our life, no real love. Routine, boredom, characterless, mutual exploitation, the eternal fight to win with in the end

always the losing. Curse means the adventure of life, with all its gifts, has ended. Only the struggle for survival stays.

If we look at Deuteronomy 30, 15, we see that life is the same as good, death is the same as evil. Life, blessing, good are the same, as death, curse, evil.

Can we understand in which manner, how this is true in our own life? Do we have experiences of that?

Good and evil are the (literal) translations of the KJV. The JB translates: prosperity and disaster. What do we like more? What seems better to us?

5. "Choosing then". (JB)

These are in fact the deciding words. There is no newness of life, there is no progression, there are no real changes, without choosing. Choosing means to leave the known behind you, to leave the known patterns of life, to go into something new, a new reality, with new possibilities, new difficulties, new tasks.

Without choosing we stay in the "normal" and we are prisoners of this normal. Even if we are happy, feel happy, if we are those happy people who never had to take risks, never had to choose, who drifted along and life was always good, if we came there without choosing, we are prisoners within the end maybe an easy, but in any case a dull life. And, in fact we never can do what we really wish.

How do we make this concrete, an experiential reality? In fact only by choosing. Maybe we can tell each other situations in which we choose. And maybe we can tell each other where life became dull because we did not dare to choose or did not know how to.

We can see it around us, in the lives of people in which anything never happens. No deep joys and no deep suffering. Life is just death, as our life will stay and be as we don't choose.

So there is only one way out into life: by choosing. And it is very clear that it is not done automatically, sort of matter of fact. We have to choose for what was not expected, neither by others, nor by ourselves. It is a choosing for life we never would have fantasised that we would choose.

Can we tell each other about choosing we did, in fact changing our life, overcoming and the reluctance, the fears, for the people around us, for the future? And, could we tell each other about possibilities of, and for, our lives we would like to choose for, what we strictly speaking would like to do, but where we did not or do not have the courage?

To choose is difficult. We need the other who calls us, by his or her voice, by her or his being with, to get the freedom to choose. It is the voice, the being out of another world, which calls us to choose. Nearly, never (it) are they the voices of our family. We know each other too well. These are not voices from another world. Only when our relatives, our friends have the voice of again another one, as Moses had the voice of God, then we can hear. The voice is always the voice of a stranger. A human stranger, or the all encompassing stranger of our life, God.

Friends and relatives, parents, brothers, sisters, can give us good advice and we hardly can live without them and without that. And the voice which calls us to choose can hardly be theirs. Do we understand the difference?

In the last paragraph are the words “to get the freedom to choose”. There is a very curious relationship between freedom and choosing. In the daily routine of life we can feel very well, but we never are free, just because it is routine. In all of us, sometimes or often, there is a deep longing for freedom. We very often fight to get free, making ourselves enslaved to the fight and becoming more unfree. Every freedom fighter (and we all are more or less) is a good example. Only by really choosing we leave the past behind us and are free. We show to be free by choosing and the choosing makes us free.

Of course, again, there is much to talk about. It is one of the exciting aspects of our life, filling us with a deep happiness when we know about this freedom because we choose. Maybe we can try to help each other to understand.

Real choosing is always between “yes” and “no”. In our case between life and death, blessing and curse. I do this or I don’t. I take the decision to do this or I don’t. I ask her to marry me or I don’t. I decide to take this profession or I don’t. I decide to become a terrorist or I don’t. Very often it is difficult to find the clearness in which we can, and in the same time have to, choose. Here, friends, parents, people who have a little bit of wisdom of life, maybe can help us. Life is, of course, often very complicated. Moses is in fact a very big prophet, because he makes the choice out of the experiences of the Hebrews in the past, so clear.

We only can choose when we are not made unfree by the people, talking to us. If they are not moralising us and if we are not moralising ourselves, telling ourselves that we would like to do this, but that we should do that.

Moses says matter of fact: These are the two possibilities, each of them with their consequences. Make your choice! He does not put himself between the people who have to choose and what they have to choose, in this case between them and God.

This is again a reason why people who are near to us and who love us are hardly in the position to give us the freedom to choose. They have, very understandable, too much interest and try to persuade, to convince us, because, as they are sure, of our own interest. But in fact in that case we are not any longer thinking about our choice. We are busy with our relationship with them, agreeing or fighting, but anyway, losing the possibility to make a free choice.

6. “That you and your descendants may live”. (JB)

When we choose and we say YES, we never choose alone for ourselves. By saying YES, we change. Not only our outlook on the world and on life changes. Our very being changes, till and with the cells of our body. Saying YES, choosing about our very existence, changes the whole of our existence.

We are never alone in our choosing. There are people around us. We are always influencing each other, mostly even without acknowledging it, but just because we don’t acknowledge it, we influence each other so deeply. The other is doing what I am doing, is going with my choice, in some manner. Everything influences and depends on everything, everybody influences and depends on everybody.

People who come into mimesis with us, are, in some manner doing what we are doing, without even knowing it, when we live our choice, when we don’t speak about it, defend it, apologise for it. Only if and when necessary, telling the fact. Changing by choosing we change people by just being and living our choice.

Only when we try to defend our choice, try to show that it is a good one, if we try to bring others to the same choice, then everything becomes conscious and we begin to fight with each other. The freedom of the choosing is lost, as is the freedom of others to do the same we did or even to respect us.

Here is the tragedy of so many well meaning people, who tried to convince others of their choice, only reaping negative reactions and despise. Trying to convince always is a power game. And then always those who say no win.

The same is true when we say NO. Other people around us who said already NO, again, even when we don't speak about it, are more than very convinced that it is right to say NO, which in fact means that it is right not to take any decision, which really has to do with our future, at all. Here, as ever, the positive, the YES, and the negative, the NO, are mirroring each other. The good sides of the YES are the bad sides of the NO.

Can we find examples where we were influenced by the NO of others, so choosing the NO we ourselves too? And the reverse? Can we find influences of the choices we did?

All choices have their influences. The choosing of life, of blessing of the God who saves, makes free, is like the fragrance of a flower. We never know who picks it up. The world always changed in the long run, because small people made big choices about their lives.

So, every choice we make, in which we say YES, carries a promise with it: "that you and your descendants may live". The Hebrews lived very much with the generations together, within the extended family. There was a deep tradition, which kept them together during their lives, with responsibilities for each other's well being which could not be evaded.

NB. A promise always has to do with the future. For the Hebrew the future was in and for his children.

We lost very much of all this and are very often far from our relatives and without a shared tradition which binds us together. Our home is not the extended family. Our home more and more is the world. In this world our choices work, nearly always in manners we don't know or understand, but in the same time with a force which cannot be taken away.

7. The choice to live and the choice to die

Mostly when we have to choose and don't say "YES", we in fact don't say "NO" either. We decide as far as we are deciding, to stay where we are. We don't move. Life is too beautiful, too cosy, too easy. The consequences of saying "YES", although there are so many possibilities when we do, are so risky, that we refrain from doing anything at all.

In another text, which is very much the same as ours, Joshua 24, 14 – 15, this is made very clear: "So now, fear Yahweh and serve him perfectly and sincerely; put away the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River and in Egypt, and serve Yahweh. But if you will not serve Yahweh, choose today whom you wish to serve, whether the gods that your ancestors served beyond the River, or the gods of the Amorites in whose land you are now living. As for me and my House, we will serve Yahweh (JB)".

The real choice is to say yes or no to Yahweh, to God. If you say no, it does not matter what you choose. Then you can do either this or that.

Whatever you choose, you stay in your old, known life, in the past. There is no change, there is no hope. In fact, Joshua is mocking, saying: When you say no, thou choose.

There is a possibility, which shows up again and again, and especially too in Northern Ireland, that we say YES, which means in fact NO. If we say YES to the gods of violence and wish to destroy, we say in fact NO to the question Moses puts to us. Saying YES to the gods of violence can mean that we are so desperate that our only wish is to destroy or it can mean that we hope that by destroying we are working for a new future. The difference between the two is only gradual. A man who kills his own family out of sheer desperation and a member of a terrorist group kills an opponent at random, being convinced that so a new world is built or an old, good world is defended, both hope, although they might not be conscious of it, that out of chaos comes peace. Saying YES to the gods of violence is deeply religious. All the heathens always believed that violence, chaos, is needed to have peace. All ritual (and out of that reason terrorism is deeply ritualistic) goes the way via violence to peace.

I hope we can find in our own hearts, our own life, this violence, this wish to destroy everything, hoping, eventually without knowing, that so at last there came new possibilities. We all are deeply religious, believing in violence to find solutions.

We are mostly very keen to scapegoat violent people. In the same time we always find good words for some violence, because we agree that if ever, in that case violence was necessary or at least “worked”. We can be sure, as long as we are condemning, scapegoating violent people, we hope, in this manner, to get rid of our own violence, hoping to forget it and hoping that other people forget too. As children say: what you say about me, you are yourself!

Staying in our old life, refusing to choose, refusing to say YES on Moses’ question, means in fact that we choose NO, staying in the world of violence. Even if we never take part in it and say to abhor it, we are part of it as long as we did not leave it. In the end, essentially, Moses asks us to choose to stay in the world of violence, of terrorism, to have all the niceties of that, or to say YES I belong to God who saves, exactly out of this world of violence, bringing into a peace which is above all understanding, just because no violence is needed. God just gives. With the risks.

Which are the risks? Do we see risks, when we say YES? The risk to be a softy? To suffer? Not to know what to do?

8. “That thou mayest love the LORD, thy GOD, and that thou mayest obey his voice, and that thou mayest cleave unto him”. (KJV)

“In the love of Yahweh your God, obeying his voice, clinging to him”. (JB)

Here comes the answer on the question how we in fact do choose. By loving God, by obeying his voice. By cleaving to him. The two translations are again strikingly different and the old one is by far the best. It is about our loving God, obeying his voice, cleaving to him. And again the same is said three times with different words. So the repeating: That thou mayest, is much better than the conjunction “and”, which would mean that they are three different realities, put together. We translate best by: by loving, by obeying, by cleaving. These three words are too something like a fixed phrase. They are too together in Deut. 11, 22, so they are very important.

The choice Moses puts before the Hebrews, before us, thinking together about the text is: To love God or not to love him. Who is God, this God? What does the word love mean?

Who is this God? It certainly is not about our fantasies about God. It is about the God, Moses is speaking about. So we have to look back, to his words before he puts the choice before us in this chapter, vs. 11 – 20. When we read carefully, we see: It is the God who gives a future (comp. Vs 16). He gives space to live, in peace and abundance, which is

indicated with the milk and honey. And it is the God who gives it out of the blue. He saves out of the slavery (of Egypt, of daily life, with all its violence, boredom and excitement) and gives space. As the Hebrews said: Shalom.

The love begins as soon as we become interested in all this. When we begin to ask ourselves if that really is a possibility amidst of all possibilities of this world and our lives. Love, here is nothing emotional. It has nothing to do with enthusiasm. Love is first of all giving a chance, giving space in our heart, not fighting against what Moses is saying because we think we know who God is, either in a positive or in a negative way. Only giving space in our hearts to what Moses is saying, his and the peoples experience about God. By letting the words be, trying to think about their meaning, how incredible ever, in our own life, the words, the reality Moses is talking about, gets a chance. And love is becoming a reality.

This, of course, is another love, than the love between a girl and a boy, a man and a woman, or the love for our fatherland. It is very worthwhile to think about all these possibilities of love. To tell each other about the differences we experience and to find if we can recognise the love of God, as it is described here.

So it goes together. We begin to understand a little bit of what Moses is telling about his and the Hebrews experiences of God, because we let space for these words, we did not close our hearts in advance. And in the same time our love is already there. The knowledge: however hesitating I give God something like a place in my heart and then it becomes clear to me that I have something like love for Him, I love Him.

Because, and that is in a sense both totally natural and on the other hand very astonishing, as soon as we give some space in our heart to have the possibility to listen, then in fact his voice is there. Moses says that very explicitly in this chapter, vs. 11 – 14, especially 14.

As soon as you love, as soon as you give this God a place in your heart, we do what we always do when we love somebody: we wish to be as he is. He is the God who gives space, peace. He gives it to all the Hebrews, to all of us, although we certainly are not all that good. Obeying him means to follow him, giving space and peace to everybody we meet, loving everybody we meet, forgetting at last everything we think to know about others.

To say it in still another manner: The voice comes into us. The vibrations which make the sound are outside us and, through our ears, are in us. In the space we have for God, because we let Him be, without arguing with him, the voice is in that space in us. It becomes part of us. We ourselves.

Obeying means in the end: to live in the space we give God in our life and so living in his freedom. Obeying is not that you have to fulfil all the commandments. Obeying is: staying with him, letting him his place in our life.

Love means to follow. To do with the whole of our heart which we know the other is happy with. As long as we really are in love, there are no laws, because we don't need them. Maybe we can tell examples about that from our own life.

Love means to follow. To do with the whole of our heart which we know the other is happy with. As long as we really are in love, there are no laws, because we don't need them. Maybe we can tell examples about that from our own life.

We see an illustration of this in the Ten Commandments. They don't say 'You have to do this and that'. They say: 'As long as you belong to me, the God who made you free, you will not do this and that. Doing this and that, all the things in the Commandments, would mean: You are not any longer belonging to me. You choose not to'.

It is about exactly the same when Jesus says (Mark 10, 15) "I tell you solemnly, anyone who does not welcome the kingdom of God like a little child will never enter it". (JB). "Verily I say unto you, Whosoever shall not receive the kingdom of God as a little child, he shall not enter therein". (KJV).

Children say YES and they belong. They trust and follow. They don't ask questions and don't strive. They give themselves so that they have a real human life.

Verily (KJV), solemnly (B) does not mean anything pathetic. It means "Take care, this is extremely important for you". Further the KJV is again much clearer. We are not welcoming the kingdom, leaving it outside of us. It becomes part of our life, and we part of the kingdom. And in the receiving we become God's child, not like, as if we were a child.

"That thou mayest cleave unto him" (KJV). Clinging to him (JB). Here again the older translation is a much better one. The same reality of belonging to God is again described. It is not addictive. And how is this reality?

In the Hebrew text, the same word for cleave is used as in Genesis 2, 24. Both times the KJV translates: to cleave. Both times it is about a relationship, which encompasses our total being, a relationship, the air of which we breathe, which is our daily possibility to live. The JB translates Gen. 2, 24: to join himself to. Here: clinging. To cleave, with all the rich meanings of the word, makes immediately clear: it is about my life itself. And: if you can compare it with any other reality, it is the relationship of a man and a woman.

Maybe we can talk a little bit about the meaning for us of the word to cleave. It is old fashioned. Maybe we run the risk of not only losing the word, but too the reality the word indicates. To cleave is not something you are doing constantly, like to cling. It indicates the reality in which we live because we choose to. Love, obey, cleave, they are three doors into the same reality.

It becomes again clear: choosing means a transition, from one life to another life. As from unmarried to married, it is the transition from the old, known world to the new, in fact unknown world. There again, of course, difficulties will rise. We ourselves are time and again, unfaithful. People won't understand us. But certainly it are new difficulties, not the old ones which are extremely boring because we know them too well.

9. "For in this your life consists" (JB) "for he is thy life" (KJV)

Here again the same is said in another manner. And it goes two ways round: Because he is our life, we choose him. And when we choose him we know, he is our life.

He is in fact our life, as soon as we choose. As the woman, the man I love is my life. My life does not consist in this love. She, he is my life. As the poet Rilke said to a woman he loved: Only where you are there is a room to live, a space in which I can be. You are my life.

In the same manner, when we choose YES, we know, it happens to us: He is my life. I have space, room in my life and so freedom to move.

"And the length of thy days" (KJV) and "on this depends your long stay" (JB).

Again the KJV is much nearer to the original text and much more direct. God is, as soon as we say YES, the length of our days. In the YES he simply is it. It does not depend on the choice.

The length of our days is again a very rich reality. There are many aspects:

- (a) Living in a space, without being threatened by everybody and everything around us, everyday has more possibilities. Every day is in the good sense longer.
- (b) Living in this space, there are more days in which we really live, in which we are not only hunted by everything, so losing our day, our life.
- (c) There might in fact be more days. Although we have so many drugs, people fall more and more ill, because of all the stress they live in. Out of our stress we constantly take risks, which endanger our life.
- (d) And, of course, our life can be shortened just because we say YES. There can be persecutions. We can, in a society like Northern Ireland be killed, just because we refuse to partake in violence, although the experience is that will not be the case. And again, dying with Jesus would mean living in eternity, and length of days.

We all know that clock-time is not real time. Real time has everything to do with our being, how we feel and how life goes. We can tell each other a little bit about that. To partake, in the space, the room we had or have in our life, by telling each other is exciting.

10. “that thou mayest dwell in the land which the LORD sware unto thy fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac and to Jacob, to give them” (KJV) “(your long stay) in the land which Yahweh swore to your fathers Abraham, Isaac and Jacob he would give them” (JB)

In the KJV exactly as in the Hebrew text, first it is said to us: ‘He is the length of our days’. Then, in the next part of the sentence: ‘and this will happen, it will be given to you, in this promised land’, as it will be given to us in Northern Ireland, in which God brought us, thousands of years ago or hundreds of years ago.

The space God gives is not only a spiritual space. Because the space has to do with our total existence, with our body as well as with our spirit, our “soul”, the space is really too a space in space, a geographical one.

There is something very curious about this space. It is a space to dwell (not only a stay) a place in which you can move and are happy. Dwelling is a beautiful word to indicate the moving around the freedom.

In the same time: in the moment the Hebrews are asked to choose, they still are having nothing at all of the country. They have to conquer it. They have it, being with God they have the space. And in a sense they still have nothing.

But that again is not wholly true. The land was promised, three times (hence the repetition in the KJV) to three different ancestors. Three times, that is fulfilment, it is total. So they have, in the promise, although they don’t.

This is again something to talk about. In the promise which we trust we have, although we don't (yet) have. It gives a deep feeling of peace to trust the promise. By so trusting we get what was promised, be it eventually in a totally other manner than we expected. Just by trusting the promise we stop fighting. What always evaded us as long as we fought, comes to us when we stop the fighting. Some of us must have such experiences.

In the end of the text we are again in the tradition. We are not individuals. Our life and the possibilities to live have to do with our parents, our ancestors, as the life of our children and their children will have to do with ours. What our ancestors knew and hoped for, what was promised to them, is still real for us. Not to fight for. A gift we fight for is destroyed. To receive.

11. The text is about choosing, about freedom, about space, about a future for all of us.

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Roel Kaptein