

June 9: Deuteronomy 31:1-30

- I. Verses 1-8: succession of Joshua
- II. Verses 9-13: Reading of the law
- III. Verses 14-18: Israel will fall away
- IV. Verses 19-22: the song
- V. Verse 23: Joshua commissioned
- VI. Verses 24-30: anticipation of disobedience

- I. Verses 1-8: succession of Joshua

*So Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel. <sup>2</sup> And he said to them, “I am a hundred and twenty years old today; I am no longer able to come and go, and the Lord has said to me, ‘You shall not cross this Jordan.’ <sup>3</sup> It is the Lord your God who will cross ahead of you; He will destroy these nations before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua is the one who will cross ahead of you, just as the Lord has spoken. <sup>4</sup> The Lord will do to them just as He did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when He destroyed them. <sup>5</sup> The Lord will deliver them up before you, and you shall do to them according to all the commandments which I have commanded you. <sup>6</sup> Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or tremble at them, for the Lord your God is the one who goes with you. He will not fail you or forsake you.” <sup>7</sup> Then Moses called to Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, “Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land which the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall give it to them as an inheritance. <sup>8</sup> The Lord is the one who goes ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not fail you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”*

- a. We may now be beginning Moses’ fourth speech. Though verse 1 says in the NASB “Moses went out and spoke these words...” In the ESV it says, “Moses continued...”
- b. So, I could see this as either a new speech or continuing speech.

Three Stages of Moses’ Life<sup>1</sup>

Location	Age	Reference
Egypt	0–40	<a href="#">Ex. 2:11</a> ; <a href="#">Acts 7:23</a>
Midian	41–80	<a href="#">Ex. 2:15</a> ; <a href="#">7:7</a> ; <a href="#">Acts 7:29–30</a>
The wilderness	81–120	<a href="#">Deut. 31:2</a> ; <a href="#">34:7</a> ; cf. <a href="#">Num. 14:33–34</a> ; <a href="#">Deut. 29:5</a>

- c. As the ESV Study Bible shares, Chapters 31-34 are about the succession of leadership and writing down the law for the future. Further, it has been clear throughout Deuteronomy that Moses will not live to see the promised land.
- d. In verse 2, Moses shares with them that he is 120 years old. The NASB says, “Today.” It is most likely that is not his birthday. Who knows if he knew when his birthday was? What is true is that he is 120 years old at the time of this speech.

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.esv.org/Deuteronomy+31/>

- e. If interested the IVP Bible Backgrounds Commentary of the Old Testament shares about life expectancy: *In Egypt the ideal length of life was 110 years; in a wisdom text from Emar in Syria it was 120. Examination of mummies has demonstrated that the average life expectancy in Egypt in this general period was between 40 and 50, though texts speak of some reaching 70 and 80. Mesopotamian texts of several different periods mention individuals who lived into their seventies and eighties, and the mother of the Babylonian king Nabonidus was reported to have lived 104 years.*<sup>2</sup>
- f. He says he is no longer able to come and go. He is just referring to his old age. Deut 34:7 shows that his health as still good: Moses was 120 years old when he died, but his eye was not dull nor had his vitality departed.<sup>3</sup>
- g. Moses' exclusion from the Promised Land was due to his sin ([1:37](#); [3:27](#); [4:21–22](#); [32:51–52](#); [Num. 20:2–12](#)).<sup>4</sup>
- h. Verse 3 must be very encouraging. “It is the Lord your God who will cross ahead of you; **HE** will destroy these nations ahead of you...”
- i. See Deut. 9:3: <sup>3</sup> *Understand today that the LORD your God who goes before you is a devouring fire; he will defeat and subdue them before you. You will dispossess and destroy them quickly just as he has told you.*<sup>5</sup>
- j. Verse 3 shows that it is Joshua who will lead them. Also stated in: Num 27:18
- k. Verse 4 shows that just as they had conquered they will conquer when they go over the Jordan. See Deut. 2:24-3:11
- l. Verse 5: The Lord delivers them...
- m. Verse 6 is the first of many time “be strong and courageous is listed.”
- n. Later This command to all Israel is also made directly to Joshua ([vv. 7, 23](#); [Josh. 1:6, 7, 9](#)).<sup>6</sup>
- o. Moses tells them the Lord “will not fail you or forsake you.”
- p. I find this verse very encouraging. The promise is made first to Joshua, but it is true of us as well. In Matthew 28:20 Jesus tells the disciples He is with them (and us) always to the end of the age.
- q. Verse 7: Moses repeats this to Joshua in front of all the people. Moses gives him a public endorsement.
- r. I love this because imagine Joshua taking over for Moses. Who would want to follow Moses? Moses charges Joshua.
- s. Verse 8 shows why Joshua has nothing to be concerned about. The Lord goes ahead of them. The Lord will not fail... The Lord will be with him...
- t. The ESV Study Bible points out: *Here Moses commissions Joshua, which God himself then does in [v. 23](#).*<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament](#), electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 31:2.

<sup>3</sup> Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2005), Dt 34:7.

<sup>4</sup> <https://www.esv.org/Deuteronomy+31/>

<sup>5</sup> Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2005), Dt 9:3.

<sup>6</sup> <https://www.esv.org/Deuteronomy+31/>

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.esv.org/Deuteronomy+31/>

## II. Verses 9-13: Reading of the law

<sup>9</sup> So Moses wrote this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. <sup>10</sup> Then Moses commanded them, saying, "At the end of every seven years, at the time of the year of remission of debts, at the Feast of Booths, <sup>11</sup> when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this law in front of all Israel in their hearing. <sup>12</sup> Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the Lord your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law. <sup>13</sup> Their children, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as you live on the land which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess."

- a. Moses writes the law and gives it to the priests and elders.
- b. The Moody Bible Commentary shares: *This law (v. 9) refers either to the entire book of Deuteronomy or to the body of laws in chaps. 6–28. And: reading of Deuteronomy was not just for the men but also for the women and children, as well as any foreigners in their midst (v. 12). All people were to have access to this law so that they might not only hear it but also learn through it to fear the Lord and carefully observe God's law.*<sup>8</sup>
- c. Verse 10 informs us that they are to read the law every 7 years.
- d. This is the "Feast of Booths," Or "Feast of Tabernacles": The IVP BBC OT: *The Feast of Tabernacles is the fall harvest feast that commemorates the wandering in the wilderness.*<sup>9</sup>
- e. Verse 11: all Israel appears before the Lord at the place He chooses. This starts with Shiloh and ends up as Jerusalem. Then there is the public reading.
- f. About verse 12 the ESV Study Bible informs us: *According to [16:16](#), only the men were required to make the pilgrimage for the feast each year. Here, that obligation is extended to everyone in the seventh year, when the law is read.*<sup>10</sup>
- g. Verse 13 is about teaching children: children who have not known will hear and learn...

## III. Verses 14-18: Israel will fall away

<sup>14</sup> Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, the time for you to die is near; call Joshua, and present yourselves at the tent of meeting, that I may commission him." So Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves at the tent of meeting. <sup>15</sup> The Lord appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood at the doorway of the tent. <sup>16</sup> The Lord said to Moses, "Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers; and this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. <sup>17</sup> Then My anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide My face from them, and they will be consumed, and many evils and troubles will come upon them; so that they will say in that day, 'Is it not because our God is not among us that these evils have come upon us?' <sup>18</sup> But I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they will do, for they will turn to other gods.

- a. The Lord is speaking and speaking to Moses, take note of that.

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<sup>8</sup> The Moody Bible Commentary (Kindle Locations 11892-11893). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

<sup>9</sup> Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament](#), electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 31:10.

<sup>10</sup> <https://www.esv.org/Deuteronomy+31/>

- b. The Moody Bible Commentary shares: ***This is the only mention of the tent of meeting in the entire book of Deuteronomy.*** *The Lord's presence was signaled by the appearance of the pillar of cloud ... at the doorway of the tent (v. 15). Moses had earlier anticipated the nation's future apostasy (30:1), but now God told him directly that the Israelites will arise and play the harlot (v. 16) with strange gods, thereby forsaking the Lord and His covenant.*<sup>11</sup>
- c. The Lord will commission Joshua. Moses had commissioned him, but now the Lord commissions him.
- d. Joshua and Moses go to the tent of meeting.
- e. Again, Moses will die soon.
- f. Joshua is to be called.
- g. Ex 33:9–11 mentions Joshua alongside Moses.
- h. Verse 15 gives us an insightful description: *The Lord appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood at the doorway of the tent.*
- i. Can you imagine this? Imagine being there and seeing this. This is a Theophany, an appearance of the Lord.
- j. Exodus 33:9: *And whenever Moses entered the tent, the pillar of cloud would descend and stand at the entrance of the tent, and the LORD would speak with Moses.*<sup>12</sup>
- k. Dr. Constable shares: *The bulk of this section concerns God's revelation to Moses concerning Israel's future apostasy (vv. 16–22). Hiding the Lord's face (vv. 17–18; 32:20) is the opposite of making His face shine on His people and turning His face toward them in blessing (cf. Num. 6:25–26). To discourage this departure God gave Moses a song that he was to write down and teach the people to remind them of God's faithfulness. As a song the people would have repeated these words frequently and remembered them easily. The singing of it would haunt them with how much they had lost for disobeying Yahweh.*<sup>13</sup>
- l. Verses 16-18 the Lord speaks. The Lord is now talking about the future disobedience of the people. This is no longer Moses talking about this, this is the Lord directly talking about this. Remember the Lord spoke with Moses face-to-face (Ex. 33:11). This is anthropomorphic language, ascribing to God human attributes, but the point is that the Lord spoke to Moses as if face-to-face.
- m. The Lord tells Moses how the people will rebel and become the object of God's wrath. We have seen this repeatedly in the Old Testament.
- n. Verse 18 describes the Lord hiding His face from them **because** of their evils.
- o. We especially see this in Judges.

#### IV. Verses 19-22: the song

<sup>19</sup> *“Now therefore, write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the sons of Israel; put it on their lips, so that this song may be a witness for Me against the sons of Israel. <sup>20</sup> For when I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to their fathers, and they have*

<sup>11</sup> The Moody Bible Commentary (Kindle Location 11901). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

<sup>12</sup> Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition; Bible. English. NET Bible.; The NET Bible](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2005), Ex 33:9.

<sup>13</sup> Tom Constable, [Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), Dt 31:14.

*eaten and are satisfied and become prosperous, then they will turn to other gods and serve them, and spurn Me and break My covenant.* <sup>21</sup> *Then it shall come about, when many evils and troubles have come upon them, that this song will testify before them as a witness (for it shall not be forgotten from the lips of their descendants); for I know their intent which they are developing today, before I have brought them into the land which I swore.”* <sup>22</sup> *So Moses wrote this song the same day, and taught it to the sons of Israel.*

- a. God is going to give Moses a song in the next chapter.
- b. A song will be memorable for the people of Israel about God’s faithfulness. The ESV Study Bible shares: *The anticipation is that Israel will disobey and that the song will therefore be a witness to Israel’s disobedience (31:21).*<sup>14</sup>
- c. The Lord continues to talk about how the people will reject Him.
- d. Verse 21: after the evils and troubles... this song will testify before them as a witness. Verse 21 says that it will not be forgotten.
- e. The ESV Study Bible shares again: *As Deuteronomy often suggests, Israel’s heart was inclined to faithless disobedience, not faithful obedience.*<sup>15</sup>
- f. Notice the cross references about the Lord knowing our hearts and minds and so does Jesus: 1 Chr 28:9; John 2:24, 25
- g. Moses writes the song the same day and taught it to the people.
- h. The IVP BBC OT shares: *Songs of all sorts are known throughout the ancient Near East from the first half of the third millennium. One Assyrian list of songs about a century before David includes titles of about 360 songs in dozens of different categories. Songs concerning the covenant are also present in the book of Psalms (e.g., Ps 89).*<sup>16</sup>

V. Verse 23: Joshua commissioned

<sup>23</sup> *Then He commissioned Joshua the son of Nun, and said, “Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the sons of Israel into the land which I swore to them, and I will be with you.”*

- a. Now the Lord, specifically, commissioned Joshua.
- b. “be strong and courageous” see Joshua 1:6
- c. Cross reference: Num 27:23; Deut 31:7
- d. In Ex 3:12 the Lord told Moses that He, the Lord, would be with Him.

VI. Verses 24-30: anticipation of disobedience

<sup>24</sup> *It came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete,* <sup>25</sup> *that Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying,* <sup>26</sup> *“Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you.* <sup>27</sup> *For I know your rebellion and your stubbornness; behold, while I am still alive with you today, you have been rebellious against the Lord; how much more, then,*

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<sup>14</sup> <https://www.esv.org/Deuteronomy+31/>

<sup>15</sup> <https://www.esv.org/Deuteronomy+31/>

<sup>16</sup> Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, [\*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament\*](#), electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 31:22.

after my death?<sup>28</sup> Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their hearing and call the heavens and the earth to witness against them.<sup>29</sup> For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands.”

<sup>30</sup> Then Moses spoke in the hearing of all the assembly of Israel the words of this song, until they were complete:

- a. Moses finishes writing the words of the law in a book... this is more of a scroll.
- b. Verse 25: Moses commands the Levites. It specifies the Levites as the ones carrying the Ark of the Lord.
- c. Verse 9 of this same chapter also says that he gives it to all the Elders too.
- d. Verses 26 and following begin Moses’ instructions to the Levites.
- e. They are to put this law next to the Ark of the Covenant of the Lord their God. The IVP BBC OT shares about holy documents: *The only objects placed inside the ark were the tablets with the law on them (10:2, 5). In Egypt it was common for important documents that were confirmed by oath (e.g., international treaties) to be deposited beneath the feet of the deity. The Book of the Dead even speaks of a formula written on a metal brick by the hand of the god being deposited beneath the feet of the god. There were a number of objects placed before the ark, including a jar of manna (Ex 16:33–34) and Aaron’s rod that budded (Num 17:10). Here the book of the law is added to them.*<sup>17</sup>
- f. Dr Constable shares: *Moses charged the priests with the care and keeping of the law he had written (vv. 25–26), perhaps the whole Book of Deuteronomy.*<sup>333</sup> *It was normal for priests to bear this responsibility in the ancient Near East.*<sup>334</sup> *They kept this document beside, not in, the ark (v. 26; cf. 2 Kings 22:8). **Only the Ten Commandments were in the ark (Exod. 25:16; cf. Exod. 16:33–34; Num. 17:10–11).** The Levites who carried the ark were Kohathites. The song (vv. 15–16) and the scroll were two witnesses to the people’s obedience and disobedience. Moses also warned the priests of Israel’s future*

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<sup>17</sup> Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, [\*The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament\*](#), electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 31:26.

<sup>333</sup> 333. Deere, p. 317.

<sup>334</sup> 334. Thompson, pp. 290–91.

*apostasy as God had revealed this to him (vv. 27–29). It was important that these spiritual leaders be ready for what was coming.*<sup>18</sup>

- g. The words of the law are a witness, **against** them.
- h. I notice the word, “against” and think of how this Law tells how they are to live and when they are wrong. It also prophesies of their wrong doing.
- i. In verse 27 now Moses is talking about their rebellion.
- j. They have rebelled in his life, so how about after his death. The Hebrew brings this out as sarcastic.
- k. Deut 9:7-24 was a history of their rebellion.
- l. In verse 28 Moses wants to talk to all the elders and officers. It seems that he wants to go over the words of the Law with them.
- m. Verse 29: Moses knows after his death they will act corruptly. They will provoke the Lord to anger. It is almost as if he is sharing with them what the Lord shared with him in the previous section. The NET Bible shares: *The Hebrew text uses the infinitive absolute for emphasis, which the translation indicates with “totally.”*<sup>19</sup>
- n. Verse 30: Moses shares the song which is in the next chapter.

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<sup>18</sup> Tom Constable, [\*Tom Constable's Expository Notes on the Bible\*](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), Dt 31:24.

<sup>19</sup> Biblical Studies Press, [\*The NET Bible First Edition Notes\*](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Dt 31:28–29.