DEUTERONOMY

Chapter 31

*Joshua to Succeed Moses*

**Then Moses went out and spoke these words to all Israel: 2 “I am now a hundred and twenty years old and I am no longer able to lead you. The Lord has said to me, ‘You shall not cross the Jordan.’ 3 The Lord your God himself will cross over ahead of you. He will destroy these nations before you, and you will take possession of their land. Joshua also will cross over ahead of you, as the Lord said. 4 And the Lord will do to them what he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, whom he destroyed along with their land. 5 The Lord will deliver them to you, and you must do to them all that I have commanded you. 6 Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you.” 7 Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, “Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to their forefathers to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance. 8 The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged.”**

For forty years Moses had led the children of Israel in the wilderness. They are now about to enter the Promised Land. When the Israelites crossed the Jordan River, they would not only gain a new homeland; they were also about to begin an entirely new way of life. In his parting words Moses repeated and adapted the Sinai laws for changed religious, political, and social life the next generations of Israel would live. (PBC)

The greatest change Israel would face would be a transfer of leadership. Moses would die soon, and his faithful assistant Joshua was about to become Israel’s new leader. But this change of human leaders would not disrupt the continuity with the past. The Lord’s covenant with still be in effect, but would need to be renewed for this change of leadership. Joshua would receive the same divine authorization Moses enjoyed. The Lord and Moses would take every step to assure the Lord’s people that Joshua was chosen to inherit Moses’ authority and responsibility. (PBC)

**31:1–2** Moses did not have God’s permission to lead the people any further. Cf 3:23–28; 32:51–52. (TLSB)

**31:2** *no longer able to lead.* Not a reference to physical disability (see 34:7). The Lord did not allow Moses to lead the people into Canaan because of his sin (see 1:37; 3:23–27; 4:21–22; 32:48–52; Nu 20:2–13). (CSB)

**31:3** Moses asserts that the Lord God Himself, the real leader of Israel, would not only enter the Promised Land with the Israelites but would go before them and destroy their enemies. (TLSB)

**31:4** *what he did to Sihon and Og.* See 2:26–3:11. (CSB)

**31:6** *Be strong and courageous.* The Lord’s exhortation, often through his servants, to the people of Israel (Jos 10:25), to Joshua (vv. 7, 23; Jos 1:6–7, 9, 18), to Solomon (1Ch 22:13; 28:20) and to Hezekiah’s military officers (2Ch 32:7). By trusting in the Lord and obeying him, his followers would be victorious in spite of great obstacles. (CSB)

Phrase forms thematic underpinnings of Joshua’s inauguration as Moses’ successor and indicates that when Israel crosses the Jordan, the people would face the certain prospect of numerous military campaigns (cf vv 7, 23). (TLSB)

*he will never leave you nor forsake you.* See v. 8; Jos 1:5; 1Ki 8:57; see also note on Ge 28:15. (CSB)

But Israel’s true leader would still be the Lord. As He led Isreal through Moses’ ministry, He would bring Israel into the Promised Land through the service of Joshua. Just as He won Israel’s battles against Sihon and Og (Numbers 21:21-31; Deuteronomy 2:24-3:11), He would conquer their enemies in the land. (PBC)

**31:8** *He will not leave you or forsake you*. Because of His covenant of grace He made with their forefathers. Cf Mt 28:19–20; Jn 14:18. (TLSB)

**31:1–8** Moses’ introduction of Joshua as his successor begins with acknowledging God’s judgment on his own disobedience, which disqualified him from entering the Promised Land. Yet, God in His mercy would go before His covenant people, destroy their enemies, and cause them to inherit the Promised Land. Because of the covenant of grace God made with His people, He would not leave them or forsake them. • Heavenly Father, when I feel alone and afraid, remind me that You will never leave me or forsake me. Revive me with the strength and courage that comes from Your Word. Amen. (TLSB)

*The Reading of the Law*

**9 So Moses wrote down 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. 10 Then Moses commanded them: “At the end of every seven years, in the year for canceling debts, during the Feast of Tabernacles, 11 when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing. 12 Assemble the people—men, women and children, and the aliens living in your towns—so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. 13 Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess.”**

**31:9** *wrote down this law and gave it to the priests.* Ancient treaties specified that a copy of the treaty was to be placed before the gods at the religious centers of the nations involved. For Israel, that meant to place it in the ark of the covenant (see 33:9; see also notes on Ex 16:34; 31:18). (CSB)

God directed priests to serve as custodians of the Law and to ensure that it was read at regular intervals. (TLSB)

**31:10** *every seven years.* See 15:4 and note; Ex 23:10–11; Lev 25:17; see also chart

on “OT Feasts and Other Sacred Days”. (CSB)

Lv 25:23–34 lists provisions for redemption of people, property, and possessions in observance of the Year of Jubilee, a year of liberty. The Lord directed His people to observe the seventh year—the sabbatical year—as a year of rest for the entire land (Lv 25:1–7). (TLSB)

*Feast of Booths*. Dwelling in booths for seven days commemorated how the Israelites dwelled in booths when the Lord delivered them out of the hands of the Egyptians (cf Lv 23:42–43). (TLSB

**31:11–13** The Lord established the frequency, time, and location for the public reading of the Law. Everyone traveling with Israel was to assemble for the reading. Cf Jsh 23–24. (TLSB)

**31:11** *place he will choose.* See note on 12:5. (CSB)

r*ead this law before them.* Reading the law to the Israelites (and teaching it to them) was one of the main duties of the priests (see 33:10; Mal 2:4–9). (CSB)

**31:13** *their children*. Provision to teach children the ways of the Lord constituted an indispensable element of the people’s response to God’s covenant of grace (cf 6:7). Luth: “It is the duty of every father of a family to question and examine his children and servants at least once a week and to ascertain what they know, or are learning from the catechism. And if they do not know the catechism, he should keep them learning it faithfully” (LC, Short Preface, 4). (TLSB)

**31:9–13** Israel could have no relationship with the Lord God apart from His Word. Israel’s very existence depended upon the Lord. In response to His grace, Israel was to engage in regularly reading the Law and instructing future generations about the one true God, who led them through the wilderness to the Promised Land. • Let Your Holy Spirit dwell mightily within my heart that I do not forsake the path of faith and thereby be disqualified from entering the eternal promised land. Amen. (TLSB)

*Israel’s Rebellion Predicted*

**14 The Lord said to Moses, “Now the day of your death is near. Call Joshua and present yourselves at the Tent of Meeting, where I will commission him.” So Moses and Joshua came and presented themselves at the Tent of Meeting. 15 Then the Lord appeared at the Tent in a pillar of cloud, and the cloud stood over the entrance to the Tent. 16 And the Lord said to Moses: “You are going to rest with your fathers, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them. 17 On that day I will become angry with them and forsake them; I will hide my face from them, and they will be destroyed. Many disasters and difficulties will come upon them, and on that day they will ask, ‘Have not these disasters come upon us because our God is not with us?’ 18 And I will certainly hide my face on that day because of all their wickedness in turning to other gods. 19 “Now write down for yourselves this song and teach it to the Israelites and have them sing it, so that it may be a witness for me against them. 20 When I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, the land I promised on oath to their forefathers, and when they eat their fill and thrive, they will turn to other gods and worship them, rejecting me and breaking my covenant. 21 And when many disasters and difficulties come upon them, this song will testify against them, because it will not be forgotten by their descendants. I know what they are disposed to do, even before I bring them into the land I promised them on oath.” 22 So Moses wrote down this song that day and taught it to the Israelites.23 The Lord gave this command to Joshua son of Nun: “Be strong and courageous, for you will bring the Israelites into the land I promised them on oath, and I myself will be with you.” 24 After Moses finished writing in a book the words of this law from beginning to end, 25 he gave this command to the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord: 26 “Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God. There it will remain as a witness against you. 27 For I know how rebellious and stiff-necked you are. If you have been rebellious against the Lord while I am still alive and with you, how much more will you rebel after I die! 28 Assemble before me all the elders of your tribes and all your officials, so that I can speak these words in their hearing and call heaven and earth to testify against them. 29 For I know that after my death you are sure to become utterly corrupt and to turn from the way I have commanded you. In days to come, disaster will fall upon you because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord and provoke him to anger by what your hands have made.”**

**31:14** *I will commission him.* See v. 23; cf. Nu 27:18–23. (CSB)

God’s direction signaled the transfer of authority from Moses to Joshua. (TLSB)

**31:16** *whore after the foreign gods*. In Hos 1:2; 2:1–23, God illustrated Israel’s spiritual condition of chronic infidelity by commanding the prophet Hosea to marry a prostitute to symbolize how Israel committed spiritual adultery through their idolatry. (TLSB)

**31:17** *I will forsake them*. When God’s people forsake Him, He will forsake them. The full force of the Father’s fury that sinful human beings deserved fell upon His own Son at the cross (cf Mk 15:34). (TLSB)

**31:19** *write down … this song and teach it.* See v. 22; 31:30–32:43. (CSB)

*song may be a witness for Me*. Another witness against the people if they should break the covenant. (TLSB)

**31:20** *grown fat, they will turn*. Israel would forget that God is the source of their fatness, i.e., their abundance (cf Is 1:4). Rather than glorifying the one true God for opening up the windows of heaven and showering blessings upon them (Mal 3:6–12), they would turn to other gods. (TLSB)

**31:21** *unforgotten in* … *their offspring*. Ironically, children would remember this indicting song and convict Israel. Similarly, it is mere children, with their song of “Hosanna to the Son of David,” that both incites and indicts the chief priests and scribes during Jesus’ triumphal entry into Jerusalem (Mt 21:15–16). (TLSB)

**31:22** *same day.* Urgency underscores the song’s gravity. (TLSB)

**31:23** *commissioned*. Unlike Moses, Joshua expressed no reluctance in accepting this commission (cf Ex 3). Cf 2Ki 2 for the transfer of the mantle from Elijah to Elisha, Is 6 for Isaiah’s call from the Lord, Jer 1 for Jeremiah’s call from the Lord, Ezk 2–3 for Ezekiel’s call, and Am 7:14–15 for Amos’s description of his call. (TLSB)

*Be strong and courageous.* See note on v. 6. (CSB)

**31:24–29** Records the stinging message Moses delivered, along with the presentation of the written Law (vv 9–13). Reinforces 30:14. (TLSB)

**31:24** *words of this law from beginning to end.* The book of Deuteronomy up to this place (see note on v. 9). (CSB)

Identifies the author and that the written Law would be completed in its entirety. (TLSB)

**31:25** *Levites*. Descendants of Levi, the Levites were substituted for the firstborn among the people of Israel and performed duties pertaining to the worship of the one true God (cf Ex 6:16–25; Lv 10:11; 25:32; Nu 3:11–13; 35:2–8; Dt 10:8; 17:18). (TLSB)

**31:26** *place it beside the ark.* See note on v. 9. (CSB)

Ex 25:22 identifies the ark of the covenant as the place where God would instruct Moses regarding the message he was to deliver orally to Israel. The placement of the written Word by the side of the ark indicates to those assembled that the written Word will be just as authoritative as if it were delivered orally by Moses and then orally passed within each household (cf Dt 5:23–33; 6:6–9; 11:18–20). God’s oral Word, heretofore communicated through Moses, is now God’s written Word. (TLSB)

**31:27** *stiff-necked.* See 9:6, 13; 10:16; see also note on Ex 32:9. (CSB)

Suggests that Moses, even in the face of impending death, enjoyed no respite from Israel’s rebellious behavior and was judging breaches against the Ten Commandments. (TLSB)

**31:28** *elders*. Leaders who themselves fomented rebellion (e.g., Nu 12–14; 16). (TLSB)

*heaven and earth to testify.* See note on 30:19. (CSB)

**31:29** *what your hands have made.* A reference to idols (see 4:28; 27:15 and note). (CSB)

**31:14–29** As Moses focuses on his impending death, he identifies Joshua as his successor and God’s Word as a lasting authority. Moses puts the Israelites on notice that the words he has just finished writing, i.e., the Book of the Law, is just as authoritative as the words he had spoken to them in the past because God was the author of both the oral and the written Word. Employing the Law, Moses prophesies that Israel will be unfaithful. Yet, he also encourages Joshua to be strong and repeats God’s promise that He will bring them into the Promised Land (31:23). • Lord God, heavenly Father, let Your Holy Spirit so work in my heart through faith in Christ that I never disregard Your Word but hold it sacred and gladly hear and learn it. Amen. (TLSB)

*The Song of Moses*

**30 And Moses recited the words of this song from beginning to end in the hearing of the whole assembly of Israel:**

**31:30–32:43** The song of Moses (see notes on Ex 15:1–18; Rev 15:3). (CSB)

**31:30** *spoke* … *this song*. Hbr expression likely refers to singing. (TLSB)