

# DEUTERONOMY

## Chapter 31

*Joshua to Succeed Moses*

**So Moses continued to speak these words to all Israel. 2 And he said to them, “I am 120 years old today. I am no longer able to go out and come in. The LORD has said to me, ‘You shall not go over this Jordan.’ 3 The LORD your God himself will go over before you. He will destroy these nations before you, so that you shall dispossess them, and Joshua will go over at your head, as the LORD has spoken. 4 And the LORD will do to them as he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when he destroyed them. 5 And the LORD will give them over to you, and you shall do to them according to the whole commandment that I have commanded you. 6 Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you.” 7 Then Moses summoned 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 that the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall put them in possession of it. 8 It is the LORD who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed.”**

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 go out.* 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)

**31:6** *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 not leave you nor forsake you.* But Israel's true leader would still be the Lord. As He led Israel 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 Then 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. 10 And Moses commanded them, "At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the Feast of Booths, 11 when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. 12 Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, and be careful to do all the words of this law, 13 and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over 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). (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.* 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** *read 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)

#### *Joshua Commissioned to Lead Israel*

**14** And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, the days approach when you must die. Call Joshua and present yourselves in the tent of meeting, that I may commission him." And Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves in the tent of meeting. **15** And the LORD appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud. And the pillar of cloud stood over the entrance of the tent. **16** And the LORD said to Moses, "Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers. Then this people will rise and whore after the foreign gods among them in the land that they are entering, and they will forsake me and break my covenant that I have made with them. **17** 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 devoured. And many evils and troubles will come upon them, so that they will say in that day, 'Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?' **18** And I will surely hide my face in that day because of all the evil that they have done, because they have turned to other gods. **19** "Now therefore write this song and teach it to the people of Israel. Put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the people of Israel. **20** For when I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to give to their fathers, and they have eaten and are full and grown fat, they will turn to other gods and serve them, and despise me and break my covenant. **21** And when many evils and troubles have come upon them, this song shall confront them as a witness (for it will live unforgotten in the mouths of their offspring). For I know what they are inclined to do even today, before I have brought them into the land that I swore to give." **22** So Moses wrote this song the same day and taught it to the people of Israel. **23** And the LORD[a] commissioned Joshua the son of Nun and said, "Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the people of Israel into the land that I swore to give them. I will be with you." **24** When Moses had finished writing the words of this law in a book to the very end, **25** Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, **26** "Take this Book of the Law and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against you. **27** For I know how rebellious and stubborn you are. Behold, even today while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against the LORD. How much more after my death! **28** Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears and call heaven and earth to witness against them. **29** For I know that after my death you will surely act corruptly and turn aside from the way that I have commanded you. And in the days to come evil will befall you, because you will do what is evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking him to anger through the work of your hands."

**31:14** *I will commission him*. 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** *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)

**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. (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 the ide the ark.* 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)

**31:29** *what your hands have made.* A reference to idols. (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 Then Moses spoke the words of this song until they were finished, in the ears of all the assembly of Israel:**

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