

Deuteronomy 31 - Passing the Baton

III. Third sermon: What God will do for Israel (Deut 27:1—34:12)

(3) Transition toward New Covenant leadership (Deut 31:1—34:12)

(A) Transition from Moses to Joshua (31:1-29)

(a) Joshua to lead Israel (31:1-8)

(b) Instructions regarding the covenant renewal ceremony to take place every seven years (31:9-13)

(c) Israel's future apostasy (31:14-22)

(d) Joshua commissioned (31:23)

(e) Covenant placed in Ark (31:24-29)

(3) Transition toward New Covenant leadership (Deut 31:1—34:12)

This is the last section of the Book of Deuteronomy. It is a requiem to Moses and encompasses Deut 31-34. It begins with the fifth oration, which Moses gave to the children of Israel and is recorded in this book. We are coming to the end of the life of Moses. The entire Bible up to this point has been written by him and a great deal of it has been about him. He has been a key person ever since they came out of the land of Egypt. He has been concerned with Israel for forty years, and he has left us a record of the 120 years of his life. Yet, even he was not indispensable to the fulfillment of God's purpose. Now he is getting ready to die. Moses had finished his work as the legislator and ruler and leader of Israel. He now had to establish his successor to the leadership: committing the keeping of the Law to the priests; admonishing the people to obedience; encouraging them to go forward in the conquest of Canaan; assuring them of the Divine favor and blessing; and, pronouncing on them his parting benediction.

Deuteronomy 31

(A) Transition from Moses to Joshua (31:1-29)

(a) Joshua to lead Israel (31:1-8)

1 So Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel.

1 So Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel.

1 Moses went and explained these things to everyone in Israel.

1 And Moses went and spake these words unto 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, and the LORD has told me, 'You shall not cross this Jordan.'

2 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.'

2 Then he concluded, "I'm now 120 years old. I'm not able to get around anymore,

2 And he said unto them, I am an hundred and twenty years old this day; I can no more go out and come in: also the LORD hath said unto me, Thou shalt not go over this Jordan.

3 It is the LORD your God who is going to cross ahead of you; He Himself will destroy these nations before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua is the one who is going to cross ahead of you, just as the LORD has spoken.

3 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.

3 and the LORD told me, 'You won't be crossing the Jordan River.' But the LORD your God is crossing over before you. He will destroy these nations in front of you and you will dispossess them. As for Joshua, he will cross over before you, just as the LORD promised.

3 The LORD thy God, he will go over before thee, and he will destroy these nations from before thee, and thou shalt possess them: and Joshua, he shall go over before thee, as the LORD hath said.

- When Moses stood before Pharaoh he was eighty years old (Ex 7:7); since then forty years had elapsed during the wanderings in the wilderness

- Moses did not choose Joshua; God selected him to be the leader to succeed Moses

— I doubt whether Moses would have chosen Joshua if the choice had been left to him

— Actually, Caleb seems more impressive than Joshua, and it would seem more natural for him to be the new leader

4 And 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.

4 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.

4 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.

4 And the LORD shall do unto them as he did to Sihon and to Og, kings of the Amorites, and unto the land of them, whom he destroyed.

5 The LORD will turn them over to you, and you will do to them in accordance with all the commandments which I have commanded you.

5 The LORD will deliver them up before you, and you shall do to them according to all the commandments which I have commanded you.

5 The LORD will hand them over to you, so you can do to them what I've instructed you to do.

5 And the LORD shall give them up before your face, that ye may do unto them according unto all the commandments which I have commanded you.

- Though Moses was no longer to be their leader, he assures them that the Lord would fulfill his engagement to conduct them to the possession of Canaan, even as he had already given them the territory of the kings of the Amorites; and he therefore exhorts them to be of good courage and fearlessly go forward to the conquest of the land (Cf. Deut 1:21; 10:3)

6 Be strong and courageous, do not be afraid or in dread of them, for the LORD your God is the One who is going with you. He will not desert you or abandon you."

6 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."

6 Be strong and courageous. Don't fear or tremble before them, because the LORD your God will be the one who keeps on walking with you—he won't leave you or abandon you."

6 Be strong and of a good courage, fear not, nor be afraid of them: for the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee; he will not fail thee, nor forsake thee.

7 Then Moses called to Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, "Be strong and courageous, for you will go with this people into the land which the LORD has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you will give it to them as an inheritance.

7 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.

7 Then Moses called on Joshua and told him in the presence of everyone in Israel, "Be strong and courageous, because you'll bring this people to the land that the LORD your God had promised to give your ancestors. You will be the one who causes them to possess it.

7 And Moses called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the LORD hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it.

- Moses is encouraging these people not to fear the enemy tribes that are in the land
— He encourages this generation over and over, telling them to cross over into the land
— He had lived through the experience of Kadesh-Barnea; he had seen the older generation turn yellow and run back into the wilderness

8 And the LORD is the one who is going ahead of you; He will be with you. He will not desert you or abandon you. Do not fear and do not be dismayed."

8 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."

8 Indeed, the LORD is the one who will keep on walking in front of you. He'll be with you and won't leave you or abandon you, so never be afraid and never be dismayed."

8 And the LORD, he it is that doth go before thee; he will be with thee, he will not fail thee, neither forsake thee: fear not, neither be dismayed.

(b) Instructions regarding the covenant renewal ceremony to take place every seven years (31:9-13)

9 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.

9 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.

9 Then Moses wrote down this Law and gave it to the Levitical priests who carry the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD and to all of Israel's leaders.

9 And Moses wrote this law, and delivered it unto the priests the sons of Levi, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, and unto all the elders of Israel.

This was the same lesson that Isaiah had to learn. Is 6 starts, "In the year that king Uzziah died I saw also the Lord sitting upon a throne..." Poor Isaiah! Uzziah had been a good king, and now that he was dead, Isaiah thought things were really going to be bad, but he found that God was still on the throne, that the real King of Israel and of Judah was still on the throne. He wasn't dead. He wasn't even sick. Isaiah learned that although Uzziah had died, God was still very much alive

Deuteronomy began, "These are the words which Moses spoke." There are about eight orations of Moses in the book—given orally, then written down. Moses wrote this Law. (Seventy elders assisted him; scribes also likely. They probably were the ones who wrote Deut 34.)

The Graf-Wellhausen theory rejects the Mosaic authorship, considering the Pentateuch as historical documents compiled shortly before 400 BC. The original argument for this theory was that writing was not in existence at the time of Moses. Of course archaeologists have found that writing was in existence long before Moses' day, but the Graf-Wellhausen theory is still held by the liberal wing of the church for the obvious reason that the prediction of Israel's declension after entering the land is so accurate that the unbeliever would like to think it was written as history rather than prophecy. Furthermore, Jesus attributes each of the books of the Torah to Moses. That's enough for me.

10 Then Moses commanded them, saying, "At the end of every seven years, at the time of the year of the release of debts, at the Feast of Booths,

10 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,

10 Then he gave these orders: "At the end of seven years, the year designated for release, during the Festival of Tents,

10 And Moses commanded them, saying, At the end of every seven years, in the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles,

11 when all Israel comes to appear before the LORD your God at the place which He will choose, you shall read this Law before all Israel so that they hear *it*.

11 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.

11 when all of Israel comes to appear in the presence of the LORD your God at the place that he'll choose, read this Law aloud to them.

11 When all Israel is come to appear before the LORD thy God in the place which he shall choose, thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing.

- The septennial reading of the Law to Israel (v10) at the Feast of Tabernacles (Cf. 16:13ff.) in the year of release (Cf. 15:1ff.) was intended not as the sole means of teaching the people of Israel their covenantal obligations but as an especially impressive reminder, at this time of sabbatical renewal and consummation, of the need for an ever-fresh self consecration by the servants of the Lord if they would enjoy full covenant.

— If they had faithful to so this after Joshua's day, the history in the Book of Judges would have been different, indeed!

12 Assemble the people, the men, the women, the children, and the stranger who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the LORD your God, and be careful to follow all the words of this Law.

12 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.

12 Gather the people—the men, women, children, and the foreigners that live in your cities—so they may hear and fear the LORD your God, and so they may be careful to obey the words contained in this Law.

12 Gather the people together, men, and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law:

13 And 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."

13 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."

13 Their children who don't know will hear and learn to fear the LORD your God as long as you live in the land that you are crossing the Jordan River to possess."

13 And that their children, which have not known any thing, may hear, and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it.

(c) Israel's future apostasy (31:14-22)

14 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, and I will commission him." So Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves at the tent of meeting.

14 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.

14 Then the LORD told Moses: "Look! Because your time to die is approaching, call Joshua, present yourselves at the Tent of Meeting, and then I will commission him." Moses and Joshua complied and presented themselves at the Tent of Meeting.

14 And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thy days approach that thou must die: call Joshua, and present yourselves in the tabernacle of the congregation, that I may give him a charge. And Moses and Joshua went, and presented themselves in the tabernacle of the congregation.

15 And the LORD appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood at the entrance of the tent.

15 The LORD appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood at the doorway of the tent.

15 So the LORD appeared at the tent in a pillar of cloud that stood above the entrance.

15 And the LORD appeared in the tabernacle in a pillar of a cloud: and the pillar of the cloud stood over the door of the tabernacle.

- After nominating Joshua as his successor, and assigning the keeping of the Law to the priesthood and body of elders, Moses was summoned by the Lord to appear with Joshua in the tabernacle, that Joshua might receive a charge and appointment to his office. Joshua, like Moses (Cf. Ex 3:1—4:17), was personally commissioned by the Lord himself.

At the same time, God announced to Moses that after his death the people would go astray, turn to idolatry, and violate the covenant so that God's anger should be kindled against them, and he would leave them to suffer the consequences of their folly and sin. In view of this, Moses was directed to write a song and teach it to the people, that it might abide with them as a witness against them, rising up, as songs will do, in the memory of the nation, even after they had apostatized from the path in which the author of the song had led them.

16 The LORD said to Moses, "**Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers;** and this people will arise and play the prostitute with the foreign gods of the land into the midst of which they are going, and they will abandon Me and break My covenant which I have made with them.

16 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.

16 Then the LORD told Moses, "Look! You are about to join your ancestors. Afterwards, this people will rebel and commit prostitution with the foreign gods of the land that they are about to enter to possess. They will abandon me and break my covenant that I made with them.

16 And the LORD said unto Moses, Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers; and this people will rise up, and go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them.

- "...Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers" - Cf. 2 Sam 7:12; Ps 13:3; 76:5; Dan 12:2; Matt 27:52; John 11:11; 1 Thess 4:14

The death of men, both good and bad, is often called a sleep, because they shall certainly awake out of it by resurrection. — Peele

17 Then My anger will be kindled against them on that day, and I will abandon them and hide My face from them, and they will be consumed, and many evils and troubles will find them; so they will say on that day, 'Is it not because our God is not among us that these evils have found us?'

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 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?'

17 When that happens, my anger will burn against them, because they will have abandoned me. I'll hide my face from them, they will be consumed, and many evils and distresses will find them. When this happens, they will say, 'These troubles have happened to us because God isn't among us.'

17 Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall befall them; so that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not among us?

18 But I will assuredly hide My face on that day because of all the evil that they will have done, for they will have turned away to other gods.

18 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.

18 I'll surely hide my face in that day on account of the evil that they will have done for they turned to other gods."

18 And I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evils which they shall have wrought, in that they are turned unto other gods.

- There are people who say today, "We are different today. We'll not turn away from God."

- Do you know that Jesus said the same thing about the church?

— In Luke 18:8 He said, "Nevertheless when the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth."

— "Faith" is the faith, the whole body of revealed truth. The answer to that is no, He won't.

— In fact, the way the question is couched in the Greek demands a negative answer.

— In the NT there is predicted the apostasy of the church, just as it was predicted of Israel, and you and I are living in it today.

19 "Now then, 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.

19 "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.

19 "Now write this song and teach it to the Israelis. Put this song in their very mouths, so that it will be a witness for me against the Israelis,

19 Now therefore write ye this song for you, and teach it the children of Israel: put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel.

20 For when I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to their fathers, and they eat and are satisfied and become prosperous, then they will turn to other gods and serve them, and spurn Me and break My covenant.

20 For when I bring them into the land flowing with milk and honey, which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and are satisfied and become prosperous, then they will turn to other gods and serve them, and spurn Me and break My covenant.

20 because after I've brought them to the land flowing with milk and honey that I promised to their ancestors by an oath, they'll eat, grow fat, and then they'll turn to other gods and serve them, while despising me and breaking my covenant.

20 For when I shall have brought them into the land which I swore unto their fathers, that floweth with milk and honey; and they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat; then will they turn unto other gods, and serve them, and provoke me, and break my covenant.

- The Song which Moses and Joshua wrote together is in Deut 32

21 Then it will come about, when many evils and troubles find them, that this song will testify before them as a witness (for it shall not be forgotten from the mouth of their descendants); for I know their inclination which they are developing today, before I bring them into the land which I swore."

21 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."

21 Then, when many evils and troubles will have come upon them, this song will serve as a witness against them, since their descendants won't fail to sing it. I know the plan that they are devising even before I bring them into the land that I promised them by an oath."

21 And it shall come to pass, when many evils and troubles are befallen them, that this song shall testify against them as a witness; for it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed: for I know their imagination which they go about, even now, before I have brought them into the land which I swore.

22 So Moses wrote down this song on the same day, and taught it to the sons of Israel.

22 So Moses wrote this song the same day, and taught it to the sons of Israel.

22 So Moses wrote the song that very day and taught it to the Israelis.

22 Moses therefore wrote this song the same day, and taught it the children of Israel.

(d) Joshua commissioned (31:23)

23 Then He commissioned Joshua the son of Nun, and said, "Be strong and courageous, for you will bring the sons of Israel into the land which I swore to them, and I will be with you."

23 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."

23 Then the LORD charged Nun's son Joshua, "Be strong and courageous, because you'll bring the Israelis to the land that I promised to them by an oath. I'll be with you."

23 And he gave Joshua the son of Nun a charge, and said, Be strong and of a good courage: for thou shalt bring the children of Israel into the land which I swore unto them: and I will be with thee.

(e) Covenant placed in Ark (31:24-29)

24 It came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this Law in a book until they were complete,

24 It came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete,

24 When Moses had finished writing the words of this Law in a book,

24 And it came to pass, when Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished,

25 that Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying,

25 that Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying,

25 he gave this charge to the descendants of Levi who carried the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD:

25 That Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying,

26 "Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, so that it may remain there as a witness against you.

26 "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.

26 "Take the book of this Law and set it beside the Ark of the Covenant of the LORD your God. Let it remain there with you as witness against you,

26 Take this book of the law, and put it **in the side of the ark** of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against thee.

- "...in the side of the ark" - at or by the side of the ark

— According to the Targum of Jonathan, it was in a coffer by the right side of the ark that the book was placed; but the Talmudists say it was put within the ark, along with the two

tables of the Decalogue ('*Baba Bathra*,' 14); [but 1 Kings 8:9 indicates that only the Decalogue was in the Ark then]

27 For I know your rebellion and your stubbornness; behold, as long as I have been alive with you *until* today, you have been rebellious against the LORD; how much more, then, after my death?

27 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, after my death?

27 because indeed I know your rebellion and stubbornness. Note that even while I'm still alive, you've been rebelling against the LORD—how much more so after my death!

27 For I know thy rebellion, and thy stiff neck: behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, ye have been rebellious against the LORD; and 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 hearing and call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against them.

28 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.

28 Gather together the leaders of your tribes and your foremen so I can speak these words in their hearing and call heaven and the earth as witnesses against them,

28 Gather unto 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 record against them.

- He calls the tribes around him just as old Jacob had called the twelve sons around him (Gen 34)

- The twelve sons have now become the twelve tribes, and they are a great nation. Moses calls them to him.

29 For I know that after my death you will behave very corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will confront you in the latter days, because you will do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands."

29 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."

29 because I know that after my death, you'll surely act wickedly and turn from the road that I've instructed you. As a result, evil will fall on you in days to come, because you'll act wickedly in the sight of the LORD, causing him to become angry due to your behavior."

29 For I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days; because ye

will do evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands.

- This statement is still true. It has been fulfilled quite literally. It is also true of the entire human family, for God has said that mankind apart from God will utterly corrupt itself. All we need to do is look around us today and we can see that this is true.

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

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

30 So Moses spoke the words of this song—to the very end—in front of the entire assembly of Israel.

30 And Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song, until they were ended.

- The song is rather different from the preaching style found in most of the rest of the book — It is, in contrast, poetic, and in both substance and style it anticipates passages in the Psalms and the prophetic Scriptures