

Deuteronomy Chapter 31

Verses 31:1 – 34:12

Two themes dominate the last 4 chapters of Deuteronomy:

- (1) The death of Moses (31:1-2, 14, 16, 26-29; 32:48-52; 33:1; 34:1-8, 10-12); and
- (2) The succession of Joshua (31:1-8, 14, 23; 32:44; 34:9).

These final chapters are centered around two more speeches by Moses:

- (1) The Song of Moses (32:1-43); and
- (2) The Blessings of Moses (33:1-29).

These chapters recorded the last acts of Moses and his death.

There are more features of the suzerainty treaty pattern here, such as an instruction to deposit the covenant document in the ark (31:24-29), a reference to the appointment of Joshua as the visible head of the covenant community (31:1-8; 14-23), and a promise of the blessing to be enjoyed by the tribes (chapter 33).

(Chapter 32), is very much like the standard indictment document issued to a wayward vassal.

(Chapter 34), concludes with the account of Moses' death.

Verses 1-8

Moses assures Israel of the constant presence of God with them.

This is applied by the apostle to all God's spiritual Israel, to encourage their faith and hope.

Unto us is this gospel preached, as well as unto them; he will never fail thee, nor forsake thee (Heb. 13:5).

Moses commends Joshua to them for a leader.

One whose wisdom, and courage, and affection they had long known.

One whom God had appointed to be their leader; and therefore, would own and bless.

Joshua is well pleased to be admonished by Moses to be strong and of good courage.

Those shall speed well, who have God with them.

Therefore, they ought to be of good courage.

Through God let us do valiantly, for through him we shall do victoriously.

If we resist the devil, he will flee from us.

Moses gives a series of charges to the people (in verses 1-6), and to Joshua (in verses 7-8).

God had forbidden Moses to cross over the Jordan (3:23-29; 32:50-52; Num. 20:11-12).

But the LORD would “go over before thee, and destroy these nations”.

Thus, the LORD Himself would continue to lead them through Joshua who had already been designated by Moses in the presence of Eleazar and the congregation to assume the leadership after his death (1:38; Num. 27:18-23).

Deuteronomy 31:1 "And Moses went and spake these words unto all Israel."

“Moses went and spake”:

Though some interpreters view this verse as the conclusion to the foregoing address in (chapters 29-30), it is better to see these words as an introduction to the words of Moses which follow, based upon the general pattern of Deuteronomy.

(Verses 2-6), are addressed to every Israelite.

It really is not important where this message was spoken.

It is just important, that Moses spoke it to all the people.

Deuteronomy 31:2 "And he said unto them, I [am] a 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."

“A hundred and twenty years old”:

This was the age of Moses at his death.

According to Acts 7:30, Moses spent 40 years in Midian tending sheep.

Thus, the life of Moses is broken down into three 40 year periods.

His first 40 years were spent in Egypt (Exodus 2:1-15).

The second 40 years were spent in Midian (Exodus 2:15 – 4:19).

His final 40 years were spent leading Israel out of Egypt and through the wilderness to the Promised Land.

The life and ministry of Moses were completed, but God's work would go on (verse 3a).

“Go out and come in”:

Here is an idiom for engaging in a normal day's work and activity.

Though still strong for his age (compare 34:7), Moses admitted that he no longer could provide the daily leadership necessary for Israel.

Furthermore, God would not allow him to enter the Land over the Jordan because of his sin at the waters of Meribah (see 32:51).

Moses was 40 years old, when he fled Egypt the first time.

He was 80 years old, when the wilderness journey began, and now after the wilderness wanderings, he is 120 years old.

He has lived a very full life.

It is time for him to go to heaven and receive his reward.

In his own sight, Moses is too old to lead them anymore.

The LORD had told him he would not go over into the Promised Land, because of his disobedience, when he struck the Rock the second time to get water.

The people had angered Moses so much, that he struck the Rock instead of speaking to it.

The Rock symbolized the Lord Jesus.

Moses would see the Promised Land from the top of the mountain, and then be buried in the mountain.

Deuteronomy 31:3 "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."

“God ... go over ... Joshua ... go over”:

Though Joshua was to be the new human leader over Israel (see 31:3-7, 23), it was the LORD Himself who was the real leader and power.

He would cross over ahead of them to enable them to destroy the nations.

Moses is reminding them again, that God had anointed Joshua to lead them into the Promised Land.

The LORD will be with them, and go before them.

They have nothing to fear.

God will destroy the strong nations that lie before them in the way.

They shall go in and possess the land of promise.

Deuteronomy 31:4 "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."

“Sihon and Og”:

Israel was assured that the nations of the Land would be destroyed by the LORD in the same way that He had recently defeated the Amorite kings, Sihon and Og, on the east side of the Jordan River (see 2:26 – 3:11).

That was a preview of what was to come (verse 5).

This is God's battle.

He will destroy the nations occupying the land and give the land to Israel.

He had already shown them an example of what He would do, when He destroyed Og.

Deuteronomy 31:5 "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."

To ruin and destruction.

The Targum of Jonathan is, "the Word of the Lord shall deliver them up".

"That ye may do unto them according to all the commandments which I have commanded you":

That is, utterly destroy them, making no covenant with them, or enter into any alliances or contract any marriages with them.

But demolish their altars, cut down their groves, and break their images in pieces.

Of which Aben Ezra interprets the words; but they are not to be restrained to that single instance (see Deut. 7:1).

In the earlier chapters, Moses went into great detail about what they were to do with the people before them.

They must just carry out those commands now.

The LORD will do the same thing with Joshua as leader, that He would have done with Moses as leader.

Verses 6-8

“Be strong and of a good courage”:

The strength and courage of the warriors of Israel would come from their confidence that their God was with them and would not forsake them.

In (verses 7-8), Moses repeated the substance of his exhortation, this time addressing it specifically to Joshua in the presence of the people to encourage him and to remind the people that Joshua’s leadership was being assumed with the full approval of God.

This principle for faith and confidence is repeated in (31:23; Joshua 1:5-7; 2 Sam. 10:12; 2 Kings 2:2; 1 Chron. 22:11-13; 2 Chron. 32:1-8; Psalm 27:14).

The writer of Hebrews quotes (verses 6 and 8 in 13:5).

Deuteronomy 31:6 "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."

The Septuagint version is, "play the men, and be strong".

Be strong in the LORD, and in the power of his might, trusting and relying on him that goes before you.

And so take heart, and be of good courage, and act the manly part.

The apostle seems to refer to this passage (1 Cor. 16:13).

"Fear not, nor be afraid of them":

Their enemies, though so numerous, so mighty, and some of them of a gigantic stature, and their cities strong and well fenced.

"For the LORD thy God, he it is that doth go with thee":

In comparison of whom, numbers of men, their strength of body, and fortified places, signify nothing.

"He will not fail thee, nor forsake thee":

Not fail to fulfil his promises to them.

Not leave them till he had given them complete victory over their enemies, put them into the possession of their land, then settled them in it.

This promise, though made to literal Israel, belongs to the spiritual Israel of God, and is made good to every true believer in the Lord (see Heb. 13:5).

They should realize by now, that it is not their strong arm that has gotten them this far.

The strength they have is in their God.

He will continue to be with them, and they have nothing to fear.

He will not forsake them.

Verses 7-8:

Moses had already reminded the people that he would be replaced by Joshua (1:38).

Repeating it here, "in the sight of all Israel", affirmed that Joshua was approved by both God and him and provided for a smooth transition.

Deuteronomy 31:7 "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."

Who might be at some distance from him, with the tribe to which he belonged.

The Targum of Jonathan adds, "out of the midst of the people".

"And said unto him in the sight of all Israel":

Now assembled together, and what follows was said in their hearing, to make him the more respectable to them.

"Be strong and of a good courage":

The same that is said to the people in (Deut. 31:6).

And which was still more necessary in him, who was to be their general, and to go at the head of them, and lead them on to battle.

And though Joshua was a man of courage and valor, as well as had military skill, as appears by his fight with Amalek (Exodus 17:9).

Yet such an exhortation was not needless, seeing he had so much work to do, and so many enemies to contend with.

"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":

The Targum of Jonathan is, "which the Word of the LORD hath sworn to give;" the land of Canaan, there he must go with them.

This was the will and determination of God, and he must go alone without Moses, which would be a trial of his courage.

Moses is reminding Joshua, that it will be his responsibility to bring the people into the Promised Land.

It takes a person of very strong character to lead these people.

He must not shrink back, but must be brave enough to lead them in.

He must never weaken or doubt.

Deuteronomy 31:8 "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."

The Word of the LORD, his Shekinah, according to the above Targum.

And so in the next clause; the same that brought Israel out of Egypt, had gone before them in the wilderness, and now would go before Joshua and them into the land of Canaan.

"He will be with thee":

To guide and direct, to assist and strengthen.

And to protect and defend, giving success to his arms, and victory over his enemies.

"He will not fail thee, neither forsake thee":

Not fail to give him counsel and direction.

To afford him strength, and to fill him with courage, and to deliver his enemies into his hands.

Nor forsake him till he had finished the work he was to do.

And had made a complete conquest of the Canaanites, and settled the people of Israel in their land.

"Fear not, neither be dismayed":

At the number and strength of the enemy.

Nor at any difficulties that might lie in the way of finishing so great an undertaking.

Since the Lord would be with him (see Rom. 8:31).

Joshua was one of the two spies, who thought they should have taken the Promised Land before.

He and Caleb were the only two of the twelve spies who had searched the Promised Land, who thought they could take it.

He will not fail, because he places his trust in God, and not his own strength.

God will be with them; Joshua will not fail.

Verses 9-13

Though we read the word in private, we must not think it needless to hear it read in public.

This solemn reading of the law must be done in the year of release.

The year of release was typical of gospel grace, which is called the acceptable year of the Lord; for our pardon and liberty by Christ and engage us to keep his commandments.

It must be read to all Israel, men, women, children, and to the strangers.

It is the will of God that all people should acquaint themselves with his word.

It is a rule to all, therefore should be read to all.

Whoever has read of the pains taken by many persons to get scraps of the Scriptures, when a whole copy could not be obtained, or safely possessed, will see how thankful we should be for the thousands of copies amongst us.

They will also understand the very different situation in which the Israelites were placed for many ages.

But the heart of man is so careless, that all will be found too little, to keep up a knowledge of the truths, precepts, and worship of God.

Moses gives a charge to the priests in this section.

The deposit of a written copy with the “priests” (verse 9, symbolizing the transfer of responsibility for the enforcement to the priests), and the regulation for reading the covenant periodically (verse 10, at the “feast of tabernacles”), were the typical conditions of royal treaties of this time.

The purpose was for all the people to “hear ... learn ... fear ... and observe to do all the words of this law”.

Deuteronomy 31:9 "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."

“Moses wrote this law”:

At the least, Moses, perhaps with the aid of some scribes or elders who assisted him in leading Israel, wrote down the law that he had explained in the first 32 chapters of Deuteronomy (compare verse 24).

However, since the law explained in Deuteronomy had been given in portions of Exodus through Numbers, it seems best to view this written law as all that is presently found in Scripture for (Gen. 1 through Deut. 32:47).

After Moses’ death (Deut. 32:48 – 34:12), were added to complete the canonical Torah, perhaps by one of the elders who had served with Moses, even Joshua.

Moses wrote the law down, and sent it to the priests and elders for safe keeping.

Deuteronomy 31:10 "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,"

The priests and the elders, to whom the law was delivered.

Saying as follows: "At the end of every seven years":

Every seventh year was a year of rest to the land, and of remission of debts to poor debtors.

At the close of this year or going out of it, according to the Mishnah.

Even on the eighth year coming in, the following was to be done.

Namely, the reading of the law.

And so Jarchi interprets it of the first year of release, the eighth.

That is, the first year after the year of release.

But Aben Ezra better interprets it of the beginning of the seventh year.

For as he elsewhere observes in (Deut. 15:1).

The word signifies the extremity of the year, and there are two extremities of it, the beginning and the end, and the first extremity is meant.

Which is more likely than that the reading of the law should be put off to the end of the year, and which seems to be confirmed by what follows.

"In the solemnity of the year of release, in the feast of tabernacles":

Or "in the appointed time"; of the year of release.

Of the release of debtors from their debts (Deut. 15:1).

When the time or season appointed and fixed was come.

Moreover, what is here directed to being done at the feast of tabernacles, shows it to be at the beginning of the year, since that feast was in the month Tishri.

Which was originally the beginning of the year, before the coming of the children of Israel out of Egypt.

And still continued so for many things, and particularly for the years of release.

And this was a very proper time for the reading of the law, when all the increase of the earth and fruits thereof were gathered in.

And so their hearts were filled, or at least should be, with gladness and gratitude.

And when there was no tillage of the land, being the seventh year, and so were at leisure for such service.

And when all poor debtors were released from their debts, and so were freed from all cares and troubles, and could better attend unto it.

Deuteronomy 31:11 "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."

“Thou shalt read this law before all Israel”:

The law that Moses wrote down was given to the priests who were required to be its custodians and protectors and to read it in the hearing of all Israel at the Feast of Tabernacles during each sabbatical year.

This reading of the law every 7 years was to remind the people to live in submission to their awe-inspiring God.

They are to read the law aloud to the people every seven years to remind them.

This is to be done at the Feast of Tabernacles.

The seventh year was when they freed their Hebrew brothers.

This reading of the law was a reminder to them of the importance of keeping the law of God.

The priests and elders were to keep the law safe, until time to read it.

They were also, to see that the people kept the law between the seven years.

This was not just the Ten Commandments, but the law that covered secular life, as well as religious life.

Deuteronomy 31:12 "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:"

At the three grand festivals in other years, only males were obliged to appear.

Women might if they would, but they were not bound to it.

But at this time all of every age and sex were to be summoned and assembled together.

And it is said, when the king read in the book of the law, all the people were obliged to come and bring their families, as it is said (Deut. 31:12).

"Gather the people", etc. and as it could not be done when it happened on the Sabbath day, the reading of the section was put off to the day following.

"And thy stranger that is within thy gates":

Not only the proselyte of righteousness, but the proselyte of the gate that renounced idolatry.

For his further conviction and thorough conversion to the religion of the true God.

Or, as the Targum of Jonathan expresses it, that they might see the honor and glory of the law.

The end is more fully expressed as follows.

"That they may hear":

All the laws which God had given.

"And that they may learn":

And attain unto the true knowledge and right understanding of them.

"And fear the LORD your God":

Serve and worship him internally and externally, according to these laws.

"And observe to do all the words of this law":

So take notice of them as to put them in practice.

And reading them in such a solemn and reverent manner made them the more servable, and raised the greater attention to them, to the importance of them.

Otherwise they were read in their families, and on Sabbath days in their synagogues (see Deut. 6:7; Acts 13:15).

Not even strangers or small children were to be unaware of the law.

Everyone, women, children, and the men were all to hear the law.

It was the obligation of each person to know and keep the law.

Deuteronomy 31:13 "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."

Of God and of his law and of their duty to God.

To their parents, and the rest of their fellow creatures.

"May hear, and learn to fear the LORD your God":

Hear the law of God, learn the meaning of it, and so be brought up in the fear, nurture, and admonition of the LORD.

And serve him their Creator in the days of their youth.

"As long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it":

This being a means to continue the fear, service, and worship of God in their posterity.

And so of their long continuance in the land of Canaan.

The children would soon grow up, so they needed to hear the law, so they would live by it too.

The law, spoken of here, is the law in its entirety.

Perhaps it was the one from Leviticus with the additions here.

Some believe they read the entire Pentateuch at that time.

It was just every seven years, so that is possible.

The reason for it was to remind them of their obligations toward God and man.

Verses 14-23

Moses and Joshua attended the Divine Majesty at the door of the tabernacle.

Moses is told again that he must shortly die; even those who are most ready and willing to die, need to be often reminded of its coming.

The LORD tells Moses, that, after his death, the covenant he had taken so much pains to make between Israel and their God, would certainly be broken.

Israel would forsake Him; then God would forsake Israel.

Justly does he cast those off who so unjustly cast him off.

Moses is directed to deliver them a song, which should remain a standing testimony for God.

As faithful to them in giving them warning, and against them, as persons false to themselves in not taking the warning.

The word of God is a discernor of the thoughts and intents of men's hearts, and meets them by reproofs and correction.

Ministers who preach the word, know not the imaginations of men. But God, whose word it is, knows perfectly.

This portion contains two themes: the formal commissioning of Joshua by God at the tent of meeting (verses 14-15, 23) and an introduction to the song of Moses which is given in the next chapter.

(In verse 19), Moses and Joshua are commissioned to “write” a “song” that would help the people remember the demands of the covenant.

Joshua’s formal commission at the end of this passage is the setting in which the Song of Moses is introduced to the people (31:30 – 32:43).

In Joshua’s private commissioning, which opens this passage, only “Moses and Joshua” meet in the “Tabernacle” before the LORD.

This is where God foretells Israel’s rebellion and introduces the accompanying “song” to Moses.

Deuteronomy 31:14 "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."

“In the tabernacle”:

The LORD told Moses to summon Joshua to the tent where He met Israel, and the presence of the LORD appeared in the pillar of cloud standing at the door of the Holy Place (verse 15).

This signaled God’s confirmation of Joshua, the former military captain (see Exodus 17:9-14) and spy (see Num. 13:16), as Israel’s new leader.

God’s message to Joshua is summed up in (verses 16-22).

After Moses had spoken to the people of the law, and then gave the law for safe keeping to the elders and priests, it was time to meet and turn his anointing over to Joshua.

God told Moses to come to the tabernacle with Joshua.

God will charge Joshua with the caring for the people.

The burden of these people will be removed from Moses.

They went to the tabernacle, as God had commanded them.

Deuteronomy 31:15 "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."

As he was accustomed to do (see Exodus 33:9).

In which cloud there was a luster, a brightness, a glory visible, which showed that he was there.

"And the pillar of the cloud stood over the door of the tabernacle":

It seems to have appeared first in the tabernacle, and then came out of it, and stood over the door of it.

Near to which Moses and Joshua were: The Targum of Jonathan adds, "Moses and Joshua stood without".

"Though the former clause, according to Noldius, should be "over the tabernacle".

Or above where the cloud was accustomed to being.

This is the same pillar of cloud that had travelled across the wilderness with them.

God did not show himself in the body of a man.

He always was hidden by the smoke that surrounded Him.

Verses 16-21

"They ... will forsake me, and break my covenant":

After Moses' death, the LORD Himself predicts that in spite of what He has commanded (30:11, 20), the Israelites would forsake Him by turning to worship other gods and thereby break the Sinaitic Covenant.

Having forsaken God, the people would then be forsaken by God with the inevitable result that disaster would fall upon them at every turn.

This is one of the saddest texts in the Old Testament.

After all God had done, He knew they would forsake Him.

Deuteronomy 31:16 "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."

Out of the pillar of cloud.

"Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers":

A phrase expressive of death, frequently used both of good and bad men.

Which serves to render death easy and familiar, and less formidable.

And to assure and lead into an expectation of an awaking out of it, or a resurrection from it.

"And this people will rise up":

In their posterity.

For not till after Joshua's death, and the death of the elders of Israel, did they revolt to idolatry (Joshua 24:31).

"And go a whoring after the gods of the strangers of the land, whither they go to be among them":

That is, after the gods of the Canaanites, who though at this time the inhabitants of the land, yet when the children of Israel became possessors of it, they were the strangers of it.

And being suffered to continue contrary to the directions God had given to destroy them, would be a means of drawing them into the worship of their idols.

Expressed here by going a whoring after them, or committing whoredom with them.

Idolatry in Scripture is frequently signified by fornication and adultery.

And, as foretold, this was the case (see Psalm 106:35).

"And will forsake me":

Their husband, departing from his worship and service.

"And break my covenant which I have made with them":

And now again in the plains of Moab, and which had the nature of a matrimonial contract (see Jer. 31:32).

The act of death is many times spoken of as sleep.

This just means that Moses' days upon the earth are at an end.

These people have been rebellious from the beginning.

They will soon forget God's warning, and will begin to worship false gods (go a whoring after the gods of the strangers).

The worship of false gods is spiritual adultery.

Deuteronomy 31:17 "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?"

As the anger of a man is against his wife who has treacherously departed from him.

And jealousy, which is the rage of such a man, is very cruel.

And much more the wrath and anger of a jealous God, who is a consuming fire.

"And I will forsake them":

Withdraw his favors from them, and his protection of them.

"And I will hide my face from them":

Take no notice of them in a providential way for good, nor hear their cries, to deliver them from evil.

"And they shall be devoured":

By their enemies, or by the sore judgments of God, by famine, sword, pestilence, and evil beasts, they and their substance.

"And many evils and troubles shall befall them":

Both in their own land, and in other countries, where they would be, and have been carried captive.

"So that they will say in that day, Are not these evils come upon us, because our God is not amongst us?":

Of which they would be sensible by their being exposed to their enemies for want of his protection.

And by the evils upon them through his displeasure.

And by their being deprived of the good things that came from him.

But no intimation is given of their being sensible of their sins as the cause of all this.

Just as God had said, He will not stay with those who worship false gods.

God leaves them, when they worship false gods, and their enemies devour them.

God leaves them to this terrible fate, so they will repent and turn back to Him.

Deuteronomy 31:18 "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."

Which is repeated for the certainty of it, and that it might be taken notice of.

That he was the spring and source of all their good things.

Their sun and their shield, who being withdrawn from them.

They would be deprived of everything that was good, and be liable to all evil.

And this he would do.

"For all the evils which they shall have wrought":

For all the immoralities they should be guilty of, every transgression of his law.

Whether of the first or second table, and especially idolatry.

"In that they are turned unto other gods":

To the worship and service of them, which of all evils would be the most provoking to God.

And the way of speaking suggests as if all evils were included in idolatry, and sprang from it, or were committed with it.

God will not immediately turn to them, and answer their cries.

They have committed a very serious sin, and God has hidden His face from them.

They will have to repent and have a complete change of heart, before God will listen to their prayer.

Verses 19 and 22

"Write ye this song":

The song that the LORD gave Moses to teach the Israelites would be a constant reminder of their disobedience to the LORD and the results of that disobedience.

The song was written that same day and is recorded (in 32:1-43).

Deuteronomy 31:19 "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."

Which was now dictated by the LORD, and given to Moses and Joshua to write.

Which is recorded in (Deut. 32:1).

"And teach it the children of Israel":

Teach them by it, instructing them in the meaning of it.

Thus, it was usual in ancient times to write things in verses, that they might be the more pleasingly attended to and regarded, and be longer retained in memory.

And especially this practice was used with children, and still is.

"Put it in their mouths":

Oblige them to get it by heart, or lay it up in their memories, and repeat it frequently. That it may be familiar to them, and not be forgotten by them.

"That this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel":

When in times to come, they shall call to mind how in this song they were cautioned against such and such sins.

And what they were threatened with should befall them on account of them.

And how all things have come to pass exactly as foretold in it.

Which would be a testimony for God of his goodness to them, of his tender care of them, and concern for them.

In the previous cautions he gave them.

And of his foreknowledge of future events; and a testimony against them for their ingratitude and other sins.

Moses and Joshua together write this song, that is in the next chapter.

It is to remind them of their sins, and the only way to get help.

Moses had tried to keep the people true to God for 40 years, now it will be the job of Joshua.

Deuteronomy 31:20 "For when I shall have brought them into the land which I sware 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."

To give it to them, and put them into the possession of it. Even the land of Canaan, often thus described, and as it is by the following character.

"That floweth with milk and honey":

Aboundeth with all good things (see Exodus 3:8).

"And they shall have eaten and filled themselves, and waxen fat":

That is, after they have for a considerable time enjoyed the good things of the land.

And they abound with them, and increase in them, and have great fullness of them.

"Then when will they turn unto other gods":

Turn from the LORD who has brought them into all this plenty, from the fear, worship, and service of him, and turn to the worship of idols.

"And serve them":

The works of men's hands, and at most but creatures, and not the Creator.

Than which nothing can be more absurd and stupid, as well as wicked and ungrateful.

"And provoke me":

Nothing being more provoking to the LORD than idolatry.

It striking at his very nature, being, and glory.

"And break my covenant":

Now made with them; this being foretold by the LORD, which exactly came to pass in numerous instances.

Proves his precise foreknowledge of future events, even such as depend on the inclinations, dispositions, and wills of men.

This falling away from the One True God happens, after they are in the Promised Land and have been blessed of God to overflowing.

Their prosperity is a downfall to them.

When they have time on their hands that they do not need to make a living, then they go running after false gods.

God does not break covenant with Israel.

They break covenant with Him with the false gods.

God had warned them what would happen if they did this, and they did it anyway.

Deuteronomy 31:21 "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 swear."

As did in the times of the judges, in the Babylonish captivity.

And do now in their present exile.

"That this song shall testify against them as a witness":

Which so clearly points at their sins, with all their aggravated circumstances.

And describes so fully their calamities, distresses, and punishment for them.

"For it shall not be forgotten out of the mouths of their seed":

Which shows that it respects time to come, their later posterity.

Whose memory of this song would be conjured up by the evils that should come upon them for their sins.

Nor is it forgotten by them to this day, who acknowledge there are some things in it now fulfilled or fulfilling in them.

"For I know their imagination which they go about even now":

Or are "making"; forming and framing within themselves.

There being a secret inclination in their minds to idolatry, which were working and contriving schemes to bring it about, and set it up.

And this, God, the searcher of hearts, knew full well.

And that in process of time this evil imagination would break forth into action, in an open and flagrant manner.

"Before I have brought them into the land which I swear":

To their fathers, to give it to them for an inheritance, as is suggested in (Deut. 31:20).

God is speaking all of this as if it had already happened, because he knows their evil hearts.

He knows they are rebellious.

This song will testify to them, after they have sinned.

God knows exactly what they will do, when they get into the land.

He sees into the future.

Deuteronomy 31:22 "Moses therefore wrote this song the same day, and taught it the children of Israel."

The same day it was dictated to him by divine inspiration.

He wrote it, as Josephus says, "in hexameter verse, which he left in the holy Bible or book (the Pentateuch).

Containing (as he adds), a prophecy of things future.

According to which all things have been done, and are done.

And in nothing of it has he erred from the truth.

Which is a very just account of it, and worthy of observation.

"And taught it the children of Israel":

Instructed them in the meaning of it, and directed them to repeat it frequently.

And to lay it up in their memories, and often meditate upon it.

As being a divine composition, and of great importance, as the consideration of it will make appear.

It appears that Moses composed the song, and Joshua wrote it down.

Israel was to memorize this song, as a reminder to them.

Verses 23-30

The solemn delivery of the book of the law to the Levites, to be deposited in, or rather by the side, of the ark, is again related.

The song which follows in the next chapter is delivered to Moses, and by him to the people.

He wrote it first, as the Holy Spirit taught him; and then spake it in the hearing of all the people.

Moses tells them plainly; I know that after my death ye will utterly corrupt yourselves.

Many a sad thought, no doubt, it occasioned to this good man.

But his comfort was, that he had done his duty, and that God would be glorified in their dispersion, if not in their settlement, for the foundation of God stands sure.

Deuteronomy 31:23 "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 sware unto them: and I will be with thee."

“I will be with thee”:

Joshua was to assume his lonely role of leadership over Israel with an assurance of the companionship and strength of the LORD.

God’s presence with him was sufficient to enable him to meet boldly every obstacle that the future could bring (see Joshua 1:5; 3:7).

This charge is in the form of encouragement.

God had sworn to give this land to Abraham's descendants.

Verses 24-29

“This law in a book” (Deuteronomy) was to be placed at the “side of the ark of the covenant”, not in it.

The scroll was regarded as a witness against the people if they wandered from faithfulness to the LORD.

The duplicate copies of the Ten Commandments were placed inside the ark (Exodus 25:16; 31:18; 1 Kings chapters 8 and 9).

Deuteronomy 31:24 "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,"

“In a book”:

The words that Moses had spoken were written down in a book that was placed beside the ark of the covenant (verse 26).

Only the Ten Commandments were placed in the ark itself (Exodus 25:16; 31:18).

The “book of the law” (verse 26), was one of the titles for the Pentateuch in the rest of Scripture (Joshua 1:8; 8:34).

Deuteronomy 31:25 "That Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying,"

These were not the common Levites, but the priests who were also Levites, to whom the law was given (Deut. 31:9).

And none but they might touch the ark, or go so near it as, they are bid to do.

To put the law on the side of it; so Aben Ezra.

It follows:

"Which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD":

As the priests are said to do (see notes on Deut. 31:9).

For though in journeying the Kohathites carried it, yet not until it was covered by the priests, for they must not touch it.

As these must do when they put the law on the side of it, as they are ordered in (Deut. 31:26).

Verses 26-29

Moses angry words regarding the people’s future apostasy reflect both his frustration and his disappointment in them.

Deuteronomy 31:26 "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."

Not Deuteronomy only, but the whole Pentateuch.

"And put it in the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God.

Not in the ark, for there were nothing there but the two tables of stone with the ten commandments on them (1 Kings 8:9).

But on one side of it; the Targum of Jonathan says, it was "put in a chest (or box), on the right side of the ark of the covenant".

Which is very probable.

"That it may be there for a witness against thee":

When they fall into idolatry or any other sin, a transgression of any of the laws therein contained.

It appears that Moses gave these writings to the Levites who were in charge of the ark.

They were not to put it inside the ark, but at the side of the ark.

It would be moved, when the ark was moved.

It was to be kept in safe keeping to remind them.

There was no safer place for it, than near the ark.

Deuteronomy 31:27 "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?"

"Thy rebellion, and thy stiff neck" (see 9:6, 13; 10:16).

Moses was well acquainted with Israel's obstinate ways even in the most gracious of divine provision.

This is Moses speaking, and he does know them well after leading them for 40 years.

Moses had kept their rebellion at a minimum while he was alive.

After his death, they will rebel worse.

Deuteronomy 31:28 "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."

The heads of the tribes, the princes, and all other inferior magistrates.

"That I may speak these words in their ears":

Not the words of the law, but of the song which he was ordered to write, and is recorded in the following chapter.

"And call heaven and earth to record against them":

To bear witness of what he delivered to them, and to bear witness against them should they transgress the laws he gave them.

And to bear witness that they had been faithfully cautioned against transgressing.

And had been severely threatened, and the punishment plainly pointed out that should be inflicted on them in case of disobedience.

So that they were left entirely without excuse.

It was the business of the officers to teach those under them, the song Moses has given them.

Moses will speak the last minute instructions aloud to the leaders, and they will be without excuse.

They cannot say, they did not know.

Deuteronomy 31:29 "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."

"Ye will utterly corrupt yourselves":

Dominated by the practice of idolatry (see 4:16, 25; 9:12), the people would become wicked.

"Evil will befall you in the latter days":

"The latter days" (literally "at the end of the days"), referred to the far distant future.

This was the time when the king would come from Judah (Gen. 49:8-12) to defeat Israel's enemies (Num. 24:17-19).

Here it is revealed that it would also be a time when disaster would fall upon Israel because of evil done, thus bringing the LORD's wrath.

The description of God's judgment on Israel and the nations in this song can't be limited to the immediate future of the people as they entered the Land, but extends to issues which are eschatological in time and global in extent, as the song indicates (32:1-43).

Verses 31:30 – 32:47

This is the song Moses and Joshua wrote:

This prophetic, poetic song has as its central theme Israel's apostasy, which brings God's certain judgment.

The song begins with a short introduction emphasizing the steadfast God and the fickle nation (verses 1-6).

The song describes God's election of Israel (verses 8-9), and His care for them from the time of the wilderness wanderings (verses 10-12), to their possession and initial enjoyment of the blessings in the Land (verse 13 and 14).

However, Israel's neglect of God's goodness and her apostasy (verses 15-18), would bring God's future outpouring of wrath on His people (verse 19-27), and Israel's continuing blindness in the face of God's wrath (verses 28-33).

Ultimately, God's vengeance would strip Israel of all power and turn the nation from idolatry (verses 34-38).

Then, God would bring His judgment upon the nations, both His enemies and Israel's (verses 39-42).

The song ends with a call to the nations to rejoice with Israel because God would punish His enemies and spiritually heal both Israel and her Land (verse 43).

Ezek. chapter 16), should be studied as a comparison to this chapter.

It recites similar matters in graphic and picturesque language.

Deuteronomy 31:30 And Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song, until they were ended.

Not in the hearing of the whole body of the people, and every individual thereof.

No man could be able to speak to such a numerous congregation, as that they should hear him.

But in the hearing of their heads and representatives, the elders of their tribes and officers, ordered to be gathered together for this purpose (Deut. 31:28).

"The words of this song, until they were ended":

Which song is recorded in the following chapter (Deut. 32:1).

"The work of their hands" is speaking of idols.

Moses knows they will rebel, because they have been rebelling all the way from Egypt.

The latter days could be speaking of the time of Christ.

You could pick out most any age, and find it has not gone well with the Hebrew people.

The reason being, they have not remained faithful to God.

The song is to remind them of their failure toward God.

Deuteronomy Chapter 31 Questions

1. Who did Moses speak to in verse 1?
2. How old was Moses, when he spoke these words?
3. He had gotten _____.
4. How old was Moses, when he fled Egypt the first time?
5. How old was Moses, when the wilderness journey began?
6. Why would he not go into the Promised Land?
7. Who did the Rock symbolize?
8. Who will go before them into the Promised Land?
9. Whose battle is this?
10. What instructions were given to them in verse 6?
11. What was Joshua to cause these Israelites to do?
12. What kind of person will it take to lead them into the Promised Land?
13. Who, besides Joshua, had thought they could take the land the first time they spied it out?
14. How many of the spies did not believe they could take it?
15. Who did Moses deliver the law to?
16. When were they to read it aloud to the people?
17. Why were they to read the law aloud?
18. Who kept it safe between the times they read it?

19. Who was brought together to hear the law?
20. Why was it important for the children to hear it?
21. Who did the LORD tell Moses to meet with Him?
22. Where did they meet?
23. What was the appearance of God as?
24. When Moses dies, what will the people do?
25. What will God do, when they go a whoring after false gods?
26. What does God tell Moses to write?
27. What is this for?
28. When will they fall away from God?
29. Why is God speaking, as if this has already happened?
30. Where were the Levites to keep the law?
31. The work of their hands is speaking of _____.