

## Joshua Succeeds Moses as Leader

### Deuteronomy 31

**Deuteronomy 31:1-13** – *“Then Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel. <sup>2</sup> And he said to them: “I am one hundred and twenty years old today. I can no longer go out and come in. Also the Lord has said to me, ‘You shall not cross over this Jordan.’ <sup>3</sup> The Lord your God Himself crosses over before you; He will destroy these nations from before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua himself crosses over before you, just as the Lord has said. <sup>4</sup> And the Lord will do to them as He did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites and their land, when He destroyed them. <sup>5</sup> The Lord will give them over to you, that you may do to them according to every commandment which I have commanded you. <sup>6</sup> Be strong and of good courage, do not fear nor be afraid of them; for the Lord your God, He is the One who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.”*

*<sup>7</sup> Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel, “Be strong and of good courage, for you must go with this people to the land which the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them, and you shall cause them to inherit it. <sup>8</sup> And the Lord, He is the One who goes before you. He will be with you, He will not leave you nor forsake you; do not fear nor be dismayed.”*

*<sup>9</sup> So Moses wrote this law and delivered it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. <sup>10</sup> And Moses commanded them, saying: “At the end of every seven years, at the appointed time in the year of release, at the Feast of Tabernacles, <sup>11</sup> when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God in the place which He chooses, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing. <sup>12</sup> Gather the people together, men and women and little ones, and the stranger who is within your gates, that they may hear and that they may learn to fear the Lord your God and carefully observe all the words of this law, <sup>13</sup> 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 which you cross the Jordan to possess.”*

### Background Notes

Deuteronomy 30 concluded the sermons of Moses to the people of Israel on the plains of Moab, as they were about to cross the Jordan River into the Land of Promise. Chapter 31 is the account of the leadership transfer from Moses to Joshua. An outline of the life of Moses is easy to remember, because the 120 years of his life was divided into three periods of forty years each – forty years in Egypt, forty years in the land of Midian, and forty years leading Israel from Egypt to Canaan. So at this point Moses was 120 years old.

Moses that he knew his days on earth were drawing to a close. The Lord had told him that he would not enter the Promised Land (v2). Remember, this was part of God’s discipline when Moses **struck** the rock to obtain water in the wilderness, when God had told him to **speak** to the rock (Numbers 20). Although Moses prayed to the Lord that he might be allowed to cross the Jordan River, God said “No” (Deuteronomy 3:25).

So in Deuteronomy 31 Moses obediently followed these directions to transfer the leadership to Joshua, and to encourage him for the job ahead.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. Spiritual leadership must be passed on to the next generation.

The time had come for Moses to depart. Did that mean the work of the Lord on this earth would come to an end? No, of course not. The Lord's work with Israel would continue, but the spiritual leadership would be transferred from Moses to Joshua.

That's the way the Lord always works. His work on earth continues, but spiritual leadership must be passed on to the next generation. In fact, the work of the Lord should not suffer when the spiritual leadership is passed on to the next generation. If it does suffer, this may indicate that the ministry too much "man-centered," and not enough "God-centered," and that the older generation has not adequately prepared a new generation of spiritual leaders.

***Because spiritual leadership must be passed on to the next generation, the former generation of spiritual leaders should do all that it can to prepare the next generation of spiritual leaders.***

Notice four things that Moses did to prepare for the transition. All four are important principles for the passing-on process today:

- a. Moses made sure that the people understood that this transfer should not disrupt or diminish the work of the Lord in any way (v4-5).
- b. Moses encouraged both the people and Joshua, the next leader, to be strong and courageous, because they would not fail if they were faithful to the Lord (v6-8).
- c. Moses made sure that all Israel knew that Joshua was to be the next leader. Notice: "*Then Moses called Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel*" (v7). It was very important that **all** the people knew that Joshua would be their next leader, and that the Lord was with him.
- d. Moses ensured that the emphasis on the Word of God would continue. He directed the priests to publicly read the Law every seven years at the Feast of Tabernacles. Obviously this was well before the invention of the printing press, so only a very few copies of Scripture were available.

Clearly, all four of these areas of preparation are principles for leadership transfer today. Spiritual leadership must be passed on to the next generation.

## 2. The Lord prepares the spiritual leadership for the next generation.

**Deuteronomy 31:14-23** - *Then the Lord said to Moses, "Behold, the days approach when you must die; call Joshua, and present yourselves in the tabernacle of meeting, that I may inaugurate him." So Moses and Joshua went and presented themselves in the tabernacle of meeting. <sup>15</sup> Now the Lord appeared at the tabernacle in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood above the door of the tabernacle.*

*<sup>16</sup> And the Lord said to Moses: "Behold, you will rest with your fathers; and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. <sup>17</sup> Then My anger shall be aroused 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, 'Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?' <sup>18</sup> And I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil that they have done, in that they have turned to other gods.*

*<sup>19</sup> Now therefore, write down this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel. <sup>20</sup> When I have brought them to the land flowing with milk and honey, of which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and filled themselves and grown fat, then they will turn to other gods and serve them; and they will provoke Me and break My covenant. <sup>21</sup> Then it shall be, when many evils and troubles have come upon them, that this song will testify against them as a witness; for it will not be forgotten in the mouths of their descendants, for I know the inclination of their behavior today, even before I have brought them to the land of which I swore to give them." <sup>22</sup> Therefore Moses wrote this song the same day, and taught it to the children of Israel. <sup>23</sup> Then He inaugurated Joshua the son of Nun, and said, "Be strong and of good courage; for you shall bring the children of Israel into the land of which I swore to them, and I will be with you."*

In these verses the Lord officially commissioned Joshua as Moses' successor. The Lord had been preparing faithful Joshua for leadership for some time. Joshua first appeared on the scene in Exodus 17, when he proved to be an effective military leader in defeating the Amalekites. Joshua became Moses' right hand man. He was with Moses on Mount Sinai (Exodus 24), and Joshua was one of the faithful spies (Numbers 13). Think of all the leadership lessons Joshua would have learned from Moses over the years - all part of the Lord's preparation for the transfer of spiritual leadership from Moses to Joshua.

In Deuteronomy 31 the Lord continued to prepare Joshua by officially commissioning him and including him in His communication to Moses about the future rebellion and discipline of the children of Israel (v14-17). The Lord prepares His new spiritual leaders so that they are not blind-sided by the adverse behavior of people they lead!

Notice one more item in Joshua's preparation (v19). Joshua was to help Moses write the song recorded in Deuteronomy 32. The plural verb was used in verse 19, indicating that both Moses **and** Joshua were directed to write the song. This song was to help the people remember their God, both the Lord's gracious care of His people, and also their responsibilities to Him.

All of these things were part of Joshua's preparation to be a leader of God's people, and this is still true today. 1 Timothy 3:6 says that spiritual leaders should not be new converts. The Lord prepares the spiritual leadership for the next generation.

## Practical Application

**Don't be afraid to tell people about God's anger.**

**Deuteronomy 31:24-29** - *So it was, when Moses had completed writing the words of this law in a book, when they were finished, <sup>25</sup> that Moses commanded the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying: <sup>26</sup> "Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there as a witness against you; <sup>27</sup> for I know your rebellion and your stiff neck. If today, while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against the Lord, then how much more after my death? <sup>28</sup> Gather to me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their hearing and call heaven and earth to witness against them. <sup>29</sup> For I know that after my death you will become utterly corrupt, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you. And evil will befall you in the latter days, because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord, to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands."*

Moses charged the priests to preserve the written law, probably the entire book of Deuteronomy. It was to be kept beside the Ark of the Covenant. The stone tablets on which God inscribed the Ten Commandments were kept inside the Ark of the Covenant.

Moses didn't hesitate to remind the children of Israel of their sinful nature, and that God is angry with sin and with sinners. Psalm 7:11 says that God is angry with the wicked every day. Yes, we need to tell people that God loves them and has provided a way of salvation for them through Christ - but we shouldn't be afraid to tell people about God's anger. God is holy. He hates sin, and He must judge sinners. John 3:36 says that the "*wrath of God abides on unbelievers.*" People need to know this so that they will be motivated to respond to God's way of salvation. So tell people that God loves them, but don't be afraid to tell them about His anger. Many children become believers when they learn of hell.

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