

Moses' farewell

From Sinai to Canaan

Study 9

Warmup



If you knew that you were about to depart this earth, and had a minute to give a farewell speech to your family, or workplace, or church, what would you say? (No pressure!)

Introduction

The occasion for the Book of Deuteronomy is Israel's fortieth and final year before entering the Promised Land. Through the book, Moses recounts the journey from Mt Sinai, and highlights some of the events of significance, as well as reminding the Israelites of the covenant that God had made with them at Sinai. (The word 'Deuteronomy' literally means second law, not implying that a new law was given, but referring to a repeating of the law given to Moses at Sinai.)

Moses earnestly desired to lead the people into Canaan, but was denied the privilege because of his mistake earlier in the year, when he struck the rock in anger. And yet instead of sulking and giving way to resentment and bitterness, he faces his end bravely, and says all his goodbyes with faith, humility, and composure.

Read Deuteronomy 31:1-14

¹ Then Moses went out and spoke these words to all Israel: ² "I am now a hundred and twenty years old and I am no longer able to lead you. The Lord has said to me, 'You shall not cross the Jordan.' ³ The Lord your God himself will cross over ahead of you. He will destroy these nations before you, and you will take possession of their land. Joshua also will cross over ahead of you, as the Lord said. ⁴ And the Lord will do to them what he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, whom he destroyed along with their land. ⁵ The Lord will deliver them to you, and you must do to them all that I have commanded you. ⁶ Be strong and courageous. Do not be afraid or terrified because of them, for the Lord your God goes with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you."

⁷ Then Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the presence of all Israel, "Be strong and courageous, for you must go with this people into the land that the Lord swore to their forefathers to give them, and you must divide it among them as their inheritance.

⁸ The Lord himself goes before you and will be with you; he will never leave you nor forsake you. Do not be afraid; do not be discouraged."

⁹ So Moses wrote down this law and gave it to the priests, the sons of Levi, who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, and to all the elders of Israel. ¹⁰ Then Moses commanded them: "At the end of every seven years, in the year for cancelling debts, during the Feast of Tabernacles,¹¹ when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place he will choose, you shall read this law before them in their hearing.¹² Assemble the people - men, women and children, and the aliens living in your towns - so they can listen and learn to fear the Lord your God and follow carefully all the words of this law. ¹³ Their children, who do not know this law, must hear it and learn to fear the Lord your God as long as you live in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess."¹⁴

¹⁴ The Lord said to Moses, "Now the day of your death is near. Call Joshua and present yourselves at the Tent of Meeting, where I will commission him." So Moses and Joshua came and presented themselves at the Tent of Meeting.

First Impressions

Record some of your own first impressions about the passage you have just read.

Question 1

How do you picture Moses at the age of one hundred and twenty? (Look up Deuteronomy 34:7 to evaluate your answer.)

Question 2

Moses' leadership will come to an end, not because he is worn out, but because he 'broke faith' in the incident of the rock-striking. He respectfully asks God to change His mind, but to no avail (Deuteronomy 3:23-29). He is further informed that he will soon die, and is instructed to appoint Joshua to be his successor. Knowing something of the dynamics of disappointment, how do you think he handles the transition (v7,8)?

Question 3

Moses commands the Israelites to read the law, every seven years, in the context of a special assembly (v10-13). What might be the logic and thinking behind this timeframe? Is this one of those rules that discontinues with the arrival of the New Testament, or could there be some continuity that is required and relevant?

Question 4

In one of Moses' closing speeches, he makes the following earnest appeal to the Israel to take the Book seriously:

"Take to heart all the words I have solemnly declared to you this day, so that you may command your children to obey carefully all the words of this law. They are not just idle words for you they are your life. By them you will live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to possess." (Deuteronomy 32:46,47)

What does he mean by the expression, 'they are your life'?

Question 5

⁴⁸ On that same day the Lord told Moses, ⁴⁹ "Go up into the Abarim Range to Mount Nebo in Moab, across from Jericho, and view Canaan, the land I am giving the Israelites as their own possession. ⁵⁰ There on the mountain that you have climbed you will die and be gathered to your people, just as your brother Aaron died on Mount Hor and was gathered to his people. ⁵¹ This is because both of you broke faith with me in the presence of the Israelites at the waters of Meribah Kadesh in the Desert of Zin and because you did not uphold my holiness among the Israelites. ⁵² Therefore, you will see the land only from a distance; you will not enter the land I am giving to the people of Israel." (Deuteronomy 32:48-52)

¹ Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the Lord showed him the whole land—from Gilead to Dan, ² all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, ³ the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. ⁴ Then the Lord said to him, "This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it." ⁵ And Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said. ⁶ He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is. (Deuteronomy 34:1-6)



What is impressive here about Moses' obedience?

In the texts above, can you identify some examples of God's mercy, justice, and wisdom?

Mercy: _____

Justice: _____

Wisdom: _____

Conclusion

Deuteronomy has many famous chapters and verses, like the following:

Hear, O Israel: The Lord our God, the Lord is one. Love the Lord your God with all your heart and with all your soul and with all your strength. (6:4,5)

I will proclaim the name of the Lord. Oh, praise the greatness of our God! He is the Rock, his works are perfect, and all his ways are just. A faithful God who does no wrong, upright and just is he. (32:3,4)

For the Lord's portion is his people, Jacob his allotted inheritance. In a desert land he found him, in a barren and howling waste. He shielded him and cared for him; he guarded him as the apple of his eye, like an eagle that stirs up its nest and hovers over its young, that spreads its wings to catch them and carries them on its pinions. (32:9-11)

There is no one like the God of Jeshurun [Israel], who rides on the heavens to help you and on the clouds in his majesty. The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. (33:26,27)

Use the comforts and counsels in the verses above to compose a closing prayer: