

**May 17, 2020 - Deut. 31:1-30 - Moses and Joshua**  
**Torah Reading: Deuteronomy 31:1-30 - Moses and Joshua**  
**Psalm 145 (repeat)**  
**Haftarah: 1 Kings 2:1**

### **Moses' Last Speech**

**Deuteronomy 31:1** - "And Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel."

"And Moses went;" i.e. he disposed or set himself to speak. He didn't *go* anywhere. Possibly it means Moses "went on to speak" or continued to speak.

There is some confusion about whether Moses ended his speech and then started another, or continued. The Septuagint has "And Moses made an end of speaking these words" as if the Hebrew was *vay'cal* instead of *vay-yelek*. A transposition of two letters would make all the difference.

**Deuteronomy 31:2** - "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."

Moses was 80 years old when he "spake unto Pharaoh" (**Exodus 7:7**) and 40 years had passed since then.

God's prohibition on Moses crossing into the Promised Land is recorded in **Deuteronomy 1:37-38** - "Also the LORD was angry with me for your sakes, saying, Thou also shalt not go in thither. But Joshua the son of Nun, which standeth before thee, he shall go in thither: encourage him: for he shall cause Israel to inherit it."

Also in **Deuteronomy 3:27** - "Get thee up into the top of Pisgah, and lift up thine eyes westward, and northward, and southward, and eastward, and behold it with thine eyes: for thou shalt not go over this Jordan."

And expanded on here:

- **Numbers 27:12-13** - "And the LORD said unto Moses, Get thee up into this mount Abarim, and see the land which I have given unto the children of Israel. And when thou hast seen it, thou also shalt be gathered unto thy people, as Aaron thy brother was gathered."

### **Why did God prevent Moses from entering the Land?**

Because God asked him to "speak to the rock" to produce water, and instead he struck the rock twice (**Numbers 20:11**).

The rock was Christ (**1 Corinthians 10:3-4**). Moses striking the rock earlier in **Exodus 17** "pre-enacted" Christ's crucifixion, a pre-requisite for the living water. Simply speaking

to the rock as the pre-incarnate Christ would produce again the rivers of living water, available because of that sacrifice.

However, Christ died "once for all." Striking it again (*twice!*) implied that Christ's sacrifice would not be enough, but would have to be repeated.

[For all the possible reasons the rabbis have offered for Moses' ban, see [https://www.chabad.org/library/article\\_cdo/aid/3839434/jewish/Moses-Strikes-the-Rock-The-Full-Story.htm](https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/3839434/jewish/Moses-Strikes-the-Rock-The-Full-Story.htm)]

Rashi - "I can no more go out and come in": One might think [this means] that Moses' strength had ebbed [and that is why he could no longer go or come]. Scripture [however] states [regarding Moses], "His eye had not dimmed, nor had he lost his [natural] moisture" (Deut. 34:7) [which teaches us that his powers were intact even on the day of his passing]. So what then is [the meaning of] "I can no longer"? [Here it means:] "I am not permitted," because authority was taken from him and granted to Joshua.

Another interpretation of "[I can no longer] go or come" is: [I can no longer figuratively go and come, i.e., I can no longer negotiate] in matters of Torah. This teaches us that the channels of transmission and the well-springs of wisdom were closed up from him [i.e., from Moses on that day]. — [Sotah 13b] i.e. and transferred to Joshua, a type of Christ.

This is analogous to that incident in the New testament where John the Baptist says to Jesus/Joshua, "He must increase, but I must decrease." (**John 3:3**) "For all the Prophets and the Law prophesied until John." (**Matthew 11:13**) Moses would decrease, and Joshua would increase.

But the practical reason was that God had told Moses he was to die.

## Encouragement

**Deuteronomy 31:3-4** - "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. And the LORD shall do to them as he did to Sihon and to Og, kings of the Amorites, and to the land of them, whom he destroyed."

## Joshua = Yahweh = Christ

Can it be accidental that Yahweh and Joshua are spoken of in exactly the same language, and that there is no distinguishing conjunction between them, the "and" of the English version being supplied? "Yahweh, He is going over; Joshua, he is going over." Verbally, the two are as much identified as "The God who fed me all my life long unto this day, the Angel that redeemed me from all evil" (**Genesis 48:15-16**). The prophetic truth of this identification is too remarkable to be missed. - *Ellicott's Commentary*

**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."

That is, utterly destroy them, make no covenant with them, enter into no alliances nor contract any marriages with them; but demolish their altars, cut down their groves, and break their images in pieces.

Spiritually this is also what it means for us to enter into the Promised Land of Rest. The whole book of Deuteronomy has been about this one thing.

### **Strength and Courage with God's Presence**

**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."

Rashi - The word for "fail" stems from the root רפה, meaning "weak." Thus, the expression here means:] God will not give you [cause for] weakness [resulting] from your being forsaken by Him.

This is a theme repeated throughout the scriptures.

- **Psalms 31:24** - "Be strong and courageous, all you who hope in the LORD."

David repeated this to his son Solomon:

- **1 Chronicles 28:20** - "And David said to his son Solomon, 'Be strong and of good courage, and do it; do not fear nor be dismayed, for the LORD God — my God — will be with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you, until you have finished all the work for the service of the house of the LORD.'"

The prophets took it up:

- **Isaiah 41:10** - "Fear thou not; for I am with thee: be not dismayed; for I am thy God: I will strengthen thee; yea, I will help thee; yea, I will uphold thee with the right hand of my righteousness."

The New Testament interprets "them" - the Canaanite enemy tribes - as representing internal threats - self seeking, covetousness and worry, any inward opposition to God - and applies this promise to all believers:

- **Hebrews 13:5** - "Keep your lives free from the love of money and be content with what you have, for God has said: "Never will I leave you, never will I forsake you." (Quoting from Deut. 31:6)

- **Matthew 28:20** - Jesus says "And lo, I am with you always, even unto the end of the

world"

The Greek for "always" indicates "the whole of every day" or "each day."

He promises we will never be without His comfort, direction, presence, power and peace.

- **James 4:7** - "Submit yourselves therefore to God. Resist the devil, and he will flee from you."

It takes courage to resist.

The Septuagint version of **verse 6** is, "play the man, and be strong," which is quoted by Paul:

- **1 Corinthians 16:13** - "Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, quit you like men, be strong."

### The Same Charge to Joshua

**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."

The Targum of Jonathan adds, "And Moses called unto Joshua out of the midst of the people:"

Rashi - Moses' statement of leadership role to Joshua can be understood as follows]: Moses said to Joshua, "The elders of the generation will be with you, [for] everything should be done according to their opinion and counsel." In contrast, however, the Holy One, Blessed is He, said to Joshua, "For you shall bring (אֲבִיךָ) the children of Israel to the land which I have sworn to them" (verse 23). [God's statement of leadership role to Joshua here means:] "You shall bring them [even if it is] against their will! Everything depends [only] upon you; [if necessary,] you must take a rod and beat them over their heads! There can be [only] one leader for a generation, not two leaders for a generation."- [Sanh. . 8a] i.e. Joshua would "cause them to inherit it."

We must be "strong and of good courage" because it is fear that keeps us in bondage to our own idolatry, self-seeking and unbelief. Jesus/Joshua will lead us out and into the Promised Land of Rest.

- **1 John 4:18** - "...perfect love casteth out fear: because fear hath torment." (And it has to do with punishment and guilt).

- **Isaiah 35:4** - "Say to them that are of a fearful heart, Be strong, fear not: behold, your God will come with vengeance, even God with a recompence; he will come and save you.

**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."

Targum: The Word of the Lord, his Shechinah...

This is the same charge and assurance given to the people as a whole, now given to Joshua as the person who would be responsible to God for the people.

- **Romans 8:31** - "What shall we then say to these things? If God be for us, who can be against us?"

Moses repeats this promise to Joshua again in **Deuteronomy 31:23** below. Then God later repeats this promise directly to Joshua in **Joshua 1:5-9**.

### Finishing the Book of the 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."

"this Law" - either the Book of Deuteronomy or the whole Torah, the five scrolls.

Given to the priests and Levites, because they were charged with teaching it to the people.

- **Malachi 2:7** - "For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts."

...And given to the elders, because they would use it as civil magistrates to judge among the people.

The Jews say Moses wrote thirteen copies of the law, twelve for each of the twelve tribes, and one to be put into the ark, to convict of fraud or corruption, should any be made. (Debarim Rabba, sect. 9. fol. 244. 2.) A tradition says Moses blessed each tribe when he delivered the scroll to them, tribe by tribe, although the blessings are all recorded together later, in **Deuteronomy 33**.

### Torah to be Read Every Seven Years at Tabernacles

**Deuteronomy 31:10-11** - "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, 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."

This was to be at the end of the seventh year and the beginning of the eighth, according

to the Mishnah. (The month Tishri was originally the beginning of the year until the Exodus, when Nisan replaced it, but was considered the beginning of the year still for many things). With the harvest in, and hearts filled with joy, no tillage of the land required, being the seventh year, and all debts released, freed from all cares and troubles, it was the perfect time to devote to hearing the Torah.

**Deuteronomy 31:12-13** - "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: 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."

Not just the men, who were required to gather at the pilgrimage feasts, but women, and children, who "have not known any thing" - Parents were instructed to teach the Law in the home, and it was later read every Sabbath in the synagogues. But this public, national recitation would impress upon children they were part of something bigger - Israel.

...And the stranger - as the Targum of Jonathan expresses it, "that they might see the honor and glory of the law, 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."

Josephus (Antiqu. l. 4. c. 8. sect. 12.) ascribes this service to the high priest; he says, standing in an high pulpit (or on a high bench), "from whence he may be heard, he must read the laws to all" but the Jewish writers commonly allot this work to the king, or supreme governor, who at least was to read some parts of it; so Rashi says, the king at first read Deuteronomy, as it is said in the Mishnah (Sotah, ut supra. c. 7. sect. 8.); "he read from the beginning of Deuteronomy to Deuteronomy 6:4; hear, O Israel, &c. and then added Deuteronomy 11:13; then Deuteronomy 14:22; after that Deuteronomy 26:12; then the section of the king, Deuteronomy 17:14; next the blessings and the curses, Deuteronomy 27:15, with which he finished the whole section;" and so we find that Joshua, the governor of the people after Moses, read all his laws, **Joshua 8:35**; and so did King Josiah at the finding of the book of the law, **2 Kings 23:2**, and Ezra, **Nehemiah 8:3**. The king received the book from the high priest standing, and read it sitting; but King Agrippa stood and read, for which he was praised.

### The Approaching Death of 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."

Aben Ezra says Moses went from the camp of Israel where he was, to the camp of the Shechinah; Moses, they say (Debarim Rabba, sect. 9. fol. 244. 2.), went on the left hand of Joshua; and they went to the tabernacle, and the pillar of cloud descended and

separated between them.

The Pillar of Cloud seems to have appeared first in the Tabernacle, and then it came out of it, and stood over the door of it, near to where Moses and Joshua were: the Targum of Jonathan adds, "Moses and Joshua stood without."

### A Dire Prophecy

**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."

It was not until after Joshua's death, and the death of the elders of Israel, that Israel rebelled and fell into idolatry (**Joshua 24:31**).

Breaking the covenant would have the nature of breaking a matrimonial contract (**Jeremiah 31:32**).

**Deuteronomy 31:17-18** - "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?' 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."

The purpose of God's "hiding His face" from them and the ensuing calamities was intended to bring them back, to cause them to repent, and then to eventually restore them, to "make His face to shine upon you" as in the priestly blessing:

- **Numbers 6:24-26** - "The Lord bless thee, and keep thee: The Lord make his face shine upon thee, and be gracious unto thee: The Lord lift up his countenance upon thee, and give thee peace."

This recalls Cain's cry when being cursed by God in **Genesis 4:14** "I will be hidden [*essater*, unpointed version of '*str*'] from your face/presence."

### Esther - '*str* - Hidden

The Rabbis thought that **Deuteronomy 31:18** included a hidden reference to Esther and is the reason that God's name is absent from the book read on Purim.

Talmud Hullin 139b asks, "Where is Esther indicated in the Torah?" The answer is a quotation from Deuteronomy 31:18, where God declares, "And I will surely hide [*hstr* - '*str* without the vowel points] my face (or 'presence') from them." Another explanation of Esther's name is in Talmud Megilla 13a was because "she hid facts about herself" i.e. she "did not reveal her people" to the king initially.

Also, the "many evils and troubles" that would befall Israel when they would forsake the Lord are two words - *ra'ot* (evils) and *sarot* (troubles, enemies) both of which are used in Esther to describe Haman.

Ultimately, however, the example of Esther shows that even when God hides his face, He is actively guiding the providence of Israel. How He does that exactly is hidden, too. Perhaps this is another of those "secret things" that belong to the Lord (**Deuteronomy 29:29**).

But this question also points to Christ on the cross, where Jesus cried out "Why hast Thou forsaken me?" as He took on the sin of the world. Although God had to turn away from the sin, His will was still being performed, and His care for His Son never wavered.

The mandate on Purim is to drink "until one cannot tell the difference between 'arur Haman' (cursed be Haman) and 'barukh Mordekhai' (blessed be Mordecai)" (Babylonian Talmud, Megillah 7b) This can also mean "until one cannot know." And that leaves us once again in humility.

### **Moses Instructed to Write a Song**

**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."

The Song of Moses is recorded in **Deuteronomy 32:1-43**.

The Song would be one more witness against Israel, in addition to the stones set up in the Jordan, at Gilgal and on Mount Ebal, as well as the tablets of the Ten Commandments placed inside the Ark and the Torah now placed at the side of the Ark.

### **The Dangers of Complacency**

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

**Deuteronomy 31:21-22** - "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. Moses therefore wrote this song the same day, and taught it the children of Israel."

"imagination" = *yetzer* - inclination. This is the source of the Jewish belief in the "*yetzer haRa*" the evil inclination, latent in everyone, the natural self-seeking of Adam, inborn since the Fall in the Garden.

## Joshua Again Encouraged

**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."

## Placing of the Torah in the Side of the Ark

**Deuteronomy 31:24-26** - "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, That Moses commanded the Levites, which bare the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying, 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."

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

## Moses Again Predicts the People's Rebellion

**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?"

Murmuring at God's providences, **Exodus 16:8**, speaking against his ministers, **Exodus 16:2**; breaking his laws, particularly being guilty of idolatry, in making and worshipping the golden calf, **Exodus 32:8**; and even now, as in **Deuteronomy 31:21**, were imagining, forming, and framing in their minds something of the same kind, from the time of their coming out of Egypt unto this time they were now on the borders of Canaan; this had all along been their character; see **Deuteronomy 9:7**.

## A Captive Audience

**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."

i.e. gather to hear the Song Moses

**Deuteronomy 31:29-30** - "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. And Moses spake in the ears of all the congregation of Israel the words of this song, until they were ended."

The Song follows in the next chapter

## The Tradition of Moses' Last Request

Before his death, Moses asked for one final miracle, granting his people a true perception of the exclusive omnipotence and omniscience of Divine existence: That all the gates of Heaven and the deep be opened for them to see that there is none beside Thee, as it is said: "Know therefore this day, and lay it to thine heart, that the Lord He is God in Heaven above and upon the earth beneath; there is none else" (**Deuteronomy 4:39, Isaiah 45:5**)

What is the implication of the Divine reply, the apparent play on the word *'od*: "You declare there is none else (*'od*). I too say 'And no one else (*'od*) hath arisen in Israel like unto Moses.'" God answers that Moses' request has already been acceded to, as far as possible, without infringing on man's free will. There is no more clearer revelation of God than the contents of the Torah itself.

What Moses had requested had already been granted. All the gates of Heaven and the deep had been opened and "unto thee it was shown for thee to know that the Lord He is God; there is none else beside Him" (**Deuteronomy 4:35**).

- **Psalms 19:8-9** - "The Law (Torah) of the Lord is perfect, restoring the soul, The commandment of the Lord is pure, enlightening the eye."

### "None Else" and the Uniqueness of Christ

If Moses was unique, or *'od* - "none else like him" as the tradition said, then the promised prophet would be "like unto" Moses in uniqueness (Although that is almost a contradiction in terms).

- **Deuteronomy 18:18-19** - "I will raise them up a Prophet from among their brethren, like unto thee, and will put my words in his mouth; and he shall speak unto them all that I shall command him. And it shall come to pass, that whosoever will not hearken unto my words which he shall speak in my name, I will require it of him."

To "break the mold" means basically creating or casting an excellent and beautiful work that is made unique and unrepeatable when the mold is broken. An example is casting a statue by creating a hollow mold and pouring molten metal into it. If the mold is broken, it can't be duplicated.

This kind of uniqueness is attributed in the Bible to God, but also to Moses and the Torah in rabbinical literature, but especially to Jesus in the New Testament.

The uniqueness of the Son exceeds that of Moses and the Torah. In fact, He fulfilled the Torah and it is part of His being, and He is the Word of God. And as Moses delivered the Law to Israel, Jesus presented the Gospel through His incarnation, life and death and resurrection - providing the Way into the New Covenant spoken of by the prophets in which the Law is inscribed on our hearts.

Jesus declared, "I and the Father are one" (**John 10:30**). But He is also the fulfillment of the Law, and is the Prophet "like unto" Moses.

- **John 5:45-47** - "Do not think that I will accuse you to the Father: there is one that accuseth you, even Moses, in whom ye trust. For had ye believed Moses, ye would have believed me: for he wrote of me. But if ye believe not his writings, how shall ye believe my words?"

This is Jesus' self-identification as the promised "Prophet... like unto thee."

This is why Moses and Elijah appeared speaking to Jesus at the Transfiguration. Then God Himself also affirms that Jesus is the promised prophet:

- **Matthew 17:5** - "...This is my beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased; hear ye him."