

# The Lord Goes Before You and Will Be With You

Week 10

**Scripture:** Deut. 29-31

**Sermon Series:** *Deuteronomy: The Final Words of Moses*

**Topic:** Moses, Covenant, Joshua

## I. Introduction

Chapters 29-31 contain the third and final speech of Moses. In chapter 31, we find God telling Moses that he will soon die and the leadership of the nation would pass to Joshua.

The truth that all Israel (and us) most needs to hear is, "*The Lord goes before you and will be with you.*" Moses says this three times<sup>1</sup> and God himself says it once.<sup>2</sup>

In chapter 29 Moses calls them to believe in the LORD because of all the incredible things they have seen, but he acknowledges that they cannot do this without a new heart and they heart they have will bring upon them the curses of the covenant. Despite this, he makes clear to them that God still loves them and is renewing his covenant with them.

In chapter 30 Moses reveals that in the future they will be faithless and break their covenant with the LORD. Then the LORD will bring on them the curses included in the covenant (which we considered last week—see chapter 28), and because of their rebellion God will exile them out of their land and scatter them among the nations. Later they will come to their senses and repent and return to the LORD and he will forgive them, gather them back to their land, and give them new hearts, which will love and obey the LORD. Moses then states their situation in simple terms of choosing either life or death. It's obvious what the right choice is.



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<sup>1</sup> Deuteronomy 31:3, 6, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Deuteronomy 31:23.

In chapter 31 Moses tells the people that he is about to die and that Joshua will succeed him in leading the nation. Joshua will lead them across the Jordan river and into the land promised to them by the LORD. God commands Moses to write a song as a reminder of his power and faithfulness. Moses ends chapter 31 by writing this law completely and by predicting their rebellion and rejection of the LORD. Moses charges the Levites with the responsibility of regularly reminding Israel of this law, its expectations, terms, blessings, and curses.

## II. The LORD Goes Before You and Will Be With You

Moses is in the final days of his life. He sees before him a nation of people who belong to the Lord, but who have not yet whole-heartedly surrendered to this great God who has chosen them. They have seen God's wondrous miracles manifested before them on a daily basis, but they still do not fully grasp the glory of the person—the God—to whom these miracles point. This great God has fulfilled his promised to Israel to give them this land before them. They stand at the border and about to go in. Moses, because of his own sin, will not be allowed to join them, but he can see this great land and this great God who has led them to this point. Joshua will lead them in. This generation will realize the promise of God. But first Moses must renew the covenant between the people and their God. Then Moses will encourage them with a sweet promise. And at last he will remind them that, "*The LORD your God will go into the land before you. He will be with you.*"

### A. Seeing Is Not Believing (29)

This chapter is marked by four key words; *seeing, standing, warning, and secret*.

**Seeing.** Moses begins this third and final speech by reminding Israel of all the miraculous things they have seen God do.

<sup>2</sup> And Moses summoned all Israel and said to them: "You have seen all that the LORD did before your eyes in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, <sup>3</sup> the great trials that your eyes saw, the signs, and those great wonders. <sup>4</sup> But to this day the LORD has not given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear. Deuteronomy 29:2-4 (ESV)

*They have seen, but they yet do not see.* What have they seen? The ten plagues would come to mind. God's power over the water of the Nile, over all animals and insects of the land, over the wind and weather, over light and darkness, and even over life and death. God split the Red Sea and safely delivered Israel through it and then by that same means destroyed the entire Egyptian army. He fed them every day for 40 years. He caused water to rise up from the sand and spring forth out of rocks. He prevented their clothes and shoes from wearing out for 40 years! He defeated two foreign kings and their armies and delivered their land into the possession of 2 and a half of their tribes.

Yet, in spite of all these miracles and wonders, they *still did not fully understand* or see *rightly* who God truly was. They saw the power of God, but they still did not fully comprehend the person of God. They saw mighty miracles, but they missed the deeper meaning to which they pointed. They saw God's great glory, but they still were not fully convinced of his goodness. They had more than enough evidence of to be whole-hearted believers, but something was still preventing them. **Seeing is not believing.** Evidence alone is not enough to transform a heart. Why had they missed the point? Moses' answer is *because God had not yet given them an understanding heart or discerning eyes.*

Their *hearts were so hard that they could not by themselves overcome their own unbelief.* They needed God's help. Human effort alone would not deliver them to true belief. They were in need of God's divine work on their hearts if they were see and understand and love and obey God from heart. Without God giving them the heart they needed, they would never experience true and deep transformation. Moses points them to their God and Savior.

**Standing.** They lacked the heart they needed, and yet that fact did not keep God from loving them and entering into a covenant with them.

<sup>10</sup> "You are standing today, all of you, before the LORD your God... <sup>12</sup> so that you may enter into the sworn covenant of the LORD your God, which the LORD your God is making with you today, <sup>13</sup> that he may establish you today as his people, and that he may be your God, as he promised you, and as he swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Deuteronomy 29:10, 12-13 (ESV)

These people were not who they ought to have been, and yet this did not keep God from his intention to enter into a new covenant with them<sup>3</sup> and through them to renew his covenant with their parents.<sup>4</sup> They were all standing there that day because God had brought them there. They were all alive because of the grace and mercy of God. He had brought them to this day. God had chosen to be gracious to them and "**enter into a sworn covenant**" with them. He loved them and chose to "**establish them as his people and he would be their God.**" This is the language of covenant love. God on this day was reaffirming his love for his people. He is lovingly reminding them that he was keeping his promise, which he long ago made with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. They were standing there that day because God loved them!

**Warning.** They needed a new heart and yet God loved them. Therefore, Moses warns them against allowing unbelief and idolatry to creep into their hearts and lives.

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<sup>3</sup> This covenant is know as the Moab Covenant (Dt.29:1).

<sup>4</sup> This refers to the covenant made at Mt. Sinai, also knows as Mt. Horeb (Dt 29:1).

<sup>18</sup> Beware lest there be among you a man or woman or clan or tribe whose heart is turning away today from the LORD our God to go and serve the gods of those nations. Beware lest there be among you a root bearing poisonous and bitter fruit, <sup>19</sup> one who, when he hears the words of this sworn covenant, blesses himself in his heart, saying, 'I shall be safe, though I walk in the stubbornness of my heart.' This will lead to the sweeping away of moist and dry alike.  
Deuteronomy 29:18-19 (ESV)

A wandering heart was a serious problem in the eyes of Moses. Twice he tells them, "**Beware.**" A heart that turns away from God to worship idols will lead to the destruction of that person. He will be "**swept away.**" Where one heart wanders, others will follow and thus many will be swept away by God's wrath and the curses of the covenant. The author of Hebrews quotes this verse as a warning to the whole community (Heb 12:15). If Israel were to tolerate even a single person who thinks he can get away with secretly embracing idolatry, it would be like giving ground to a "**root**" that would soon yield "**poisonous and bitter fruit.**" The person who stubbornly persists in idolatry or habitual turning away from God to worship other idols, will be the one upon whom the curses of the covenant will fall. Moses warns them not to think that idolatry of the heart will go unseen by the LORD God who created the heart to be his home.

**Secret things** (v.29). What a minute? We can be justly condemned for not having a fully faithful heart and yet the reason we don't have such a heart is because God has not yet given such a heart? How can this be? Moses, did we hear that right? The curses of the covenant will come upon us because we do not have the right heart, and yet God is the only one who can give an understanding heart and discerning eyes? Yes. What? How can these things be? Answer: God has not revealed to us everything in his mind. There are some things we don't understand and God has not chosen to reveal them to us. But, everything that he has revealed to us has been revealed to us so that we and our children can obey God's word. What is plain in God's word, we must obey. What has been revealed is what we need to focus on and pay primary attention to. In all other things, we must trust in our LORD.

### **Summary**

The people of Israel have seen many miracles which clearly demonstrate God's greater glory over all the false gods of the nations. God is infinitely greater than all the gods of Egypt. They have seen this. God is greater than the gods of the two kings of the Amorites who were powerless against the one true God. Israel has seen God's power and might and yet still their heart is unable to fully comprehend God's greatness and goodness. The people must beware of their hearts. They cannot stubbornly cling to idolatry or else this will lead to the ruin of the whole nation.

## B. You Will Break the Covenant (30)

Chapter 30 is marked by three key words; *breaking, regenerating, and choosing*.

**Breaking.** This chapter opens with Moses stating that all the blessings and the curses of the covenant will eventually come upon the people. The blessings will come first, but then he plainly predicts that they will break the covenant and be sent into exile “*among all the nations where the LORD has driven you*” (Dt 30:1). Israel will be unfaithful and God will *scatter* them as *outcasts* in the *uttermost parts* of the earth (Dt 30:3-4). Moses can foresee that their unbelieving hearts will eventually result in their deportation from the land they are about to enter. Their future failure has been foretold with certainty. And as we know the history of Israel, this indeed does occur. This may appear to be quite discouraging, but Moses is not finished.

**Regeneration.** While it is true that Israel will eventually be exiled because of their stubborn and rebellious hearts, Moses says that God will not be prevented by this from keeping his promises. God will one day come and give them a new heart. Moses explains that while in exile in a foreign land the people will come to their senses. They will repent and *return*<sup>5</sup> to the Lord and seek to obey his voice. The LORD their God will respond to their repentance and *restore*<sup>6</sup> them to their land, but best of all, he will give them the one thing they need most, a new heart.

And the LORD your God will circumcise your heart and the heart of your offspring, so that you will love the LORD your God with all your heart and with all your soul, that you may live. Deuteronomy 30:6 (ESV)

*Having a heart totally in love and completely devoted to the LORD is something only God can give.* As we have seen, evidence alone is not enough to result in total transformation of heart. If a person is to “love the LORD God with all heart and soul,” then that requires the gracious and divine work of God himself. And the happy news that Moses here shares is that God will do just that.

At some point, after the time of exile, *the people must be completely broken and totally defeated and wholly bereft of all pride and self-sufficiency.* They must come to the absolute end of themselves, before they will completely repent. Only then will they repent of their stubbornness, selfish idolatry, failure to listen, their disobedience, and rebellion and then return to LORD *who will forgive them and give them new hearts!* And not only them, but he will also give new hearts to their children such that they will all “*love the LORD your God with all your heart and all your soul, so that you may live!*” The repentance of the parents bears fruit in the form of transformed hearts, not only of themselves, but also of their children. Thus, the *regeneration* (i.e. transformation of heart)

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<sup>5</sup> Deuteronomy 30:2-5.

<sup>6</sup> Deuteronomy 30:3.

required for whole-hearted devotion to God, will be graciously given by God to those who know for certain that they cannot save themselves and thus repent and return to him.

**Choosing.** Moses concludes with a call to choose. He explains that this choice is neither too hard to too far off. Choosing to trust in the goodness of God and believe that he is better than all gods, and that his ways are better, is not a hard choice.

<sup>19</sup> "I call heaven and earth to witness against you today, that I have set before you life and death, blessing and curse. Therefore choose life, that you and your offspring may live, <sup>20</sup> loving the LORD your God, obeying his voice and holding fast to him, for he is your life and length of days, that you may dwell in the land that the LORD swore to your fathers, to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, to give them."  
Deuteronomy 30:19-20 (ESV)

Moses invokes heaven and earth<sup>7</sup> as two witnesses to this covenant. However, the terms of the covenant are simple. To keep the covenant is life, but to break it is death. To obey the voice of the LORD brings blessing, while to disobey brings a curse. It is not a hard decision between the two. Either one loves the LORD and clings to him which leads to life, or one hates him and turns away from him which leads to death. The obvious answer is simple and Moses commands it. "**Choose life, that you and your offspring may live!**" (Dt 30:19). Love the LORD and be filled with life. Or leave the LORD and suffer death. This is not a hard decision.

### Summary

This chapter begins with the assumption that Israel will fail to fully keep the terms of the covenant. The point is that no one enters eternal life by their own effort. Their hearts lacked the deep devotion required to fully obey the LORD and thus they will eventually endure the full measure of the curses of the covenant. However, after being exiled from the land by God and scattered among the nations, God will allow them to understand that they cannot save themselves and will grant them the repentance required to return to the Lord. The LORD will graciously respond with forgiveness and will then himself circumcise their hearts so that they will love him with all heart and soul, which results in life! Despite Israel's failure, God's lovingkindness will prevail! God, not Israel, will save Israel.

### C. A New Leader (31)

In chapter 31, Moses speaks encouraging words to both the people of Israel, but also to Joshua, who will succeed him in leading Israel. The three key words of this chapter are, *dying, transferring, and trusting.*

**Dying.** In this section Moses announces his impending death.

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<sup>7</sup> See also Deuteronomy 31:28.

<sup>1</sup> So Moses continued to speak these words to all Israel. <sup>2</sup> And he said to them, "I am 120 years old today. I am no longer able to go out and come in. The LORD has said to me, You shall not go over this Jordan." <sup>3</sup> The LORD your God himself will go over before you. He will destroy these nations before you, so that you shall dispossess them, and Joshua will go over at your head... <sup>6</sup> Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them, for it is the LORD your God who goes with you. He will not leave you or forsake you." Deuteronomy 31:1-3, 6 (ESV)

Moses is still speaking "*to all Israel*" and he tells them that he is "*120 years old*" and "*no longer able to go out and come in.*" This phrase does not mean that he is weak and feeble, for we are told in the final chapter that when he died "*his eyes were undimmed and his vigor unabated*" (Dt 24:7). This same phrase, "going out and coming in," is used by the 30 year old Solomon as the basis for his request for wisdom to lead the people.<sup>8</sup> Solomon was certainly not physically weak or feeble. Moses is not physically unable to lead, but rather God has chosen a new leader. Moses means he will not lead the people into the Promised Land, but rather Joshua will. The LORD said to Moses, "*Behold, the days approach when you must die*" (31:14) and "*You are about to lie down with your fathers*" (31:16). Moses must face the fact that his time is drawing to an end and he must confront his own death.

In the final words of this speech, Moses speaks encouraging words to all the people, telling them to "*be strong and courageous,*" not to fear the nations, but to trust in the Lord "*who goes with you.*" Moses points to people to trust in the Lord who will be with them. He will not leave them alone and he will not forsake them in this new land or in the face of their enemies.

**Transferring.** Before Moses' leadership is concluded, he must transfer this responsibility to Joshua. Moses will do this in very public way. Moses called Joshua to him and they both stood "*in the sight of all Israel*" (31:7). Moses now says to Joshua what he had just said to all the people, "*Be strong and courageous*" (31:7). As Moses is stepping down from leadership, he pours courage into the young man stepping up behind him. Moses speaks with authority and certainty saying, "*You shall go with this people into the land... and you shall put them in possession of it. It is the LORD who goes with you. He will be with you; he will not leave you or forsake you. Do not fear or be dismayed*" (31:7-8). Moses has no doubt that Joshua will be successful, not because of Joshua's ability, but rather because the LORD will be with him. If God is with him, then who can be against them? No one! As Moses transfers leadership, but again points the new leader's trust to be grounded in the LORD.

**Trusting.** The issue of trust is crucial. Not only does Moses want Joshua trusting in the LORD, so does God himself. Therefore, God called out both Moses and Joshua to go and

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<sup>8</sup> 1 Kings 3:7.

meet him at “*the tent of meeting*” for a personal consultation between the three of them (31:14). Whereas previously only Moses experienced the LORD’s presence in the tabernacle, here the LORD also now invites Joshua. The LORD appeared to them in a pillar of cloud and spoke to them (31:15). Moses had just told Joshua that the LORD would be with him and here the LORD immediately demonstrates this to be true.

As the Lord spoke, He reminded Moses that he was about to die, but God also revealed to them both that after the death of Moses the people would forsake the LORD by whoring after false gods and break his covenant (31:16). The people would turn away from the LORD and so He said that he would “*hide my face*” from them.

In light of this spiritual defection, the LORD commands Moses and Joshua to write a song together (31:19). “The imperative *write* for yourselves is plural in form, implying that both Moses and Joshua will write the song.”<sup>9</sup> The song is intended to be “*witness against the people.*” The song is to serve as a perpetual reminder of the goodness, faithfulness, and power of God and a call to fidelity from the people. The song will include the blessings of obedience and the curses of disobedience. We will consider the content of the song next week. After giving the command regarding the song, the LORD now speaks directly with Joshua.

And the LORD commissioned Joshua the son of Nun and said, “Be strong and courageous, for you shall bring the people of Israel into the land that I swore to give them. I will be with you.” Deuteronomy 31:23 (ESV)

Joshua had heard these words from Moses, but now he hears them directly from the LORD himself. Joshua has been publicly commissioned as Israel’s new leader and now he is so privately as well. Moses had commissioned Joshua and now so does the LORD. God pours courage into Joshua and promises to be with him.

The concluding scene of chapter 31 involves Moses and the Levites.

<sup>24</sup> When Moses had finished writing the words of this law in a book to the very end,<sup>25</sup> Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD,<sup>26</sup> “Take this Book of the Law and put it by the side of the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God, that it may be there for a witness against you.<sup>27</sup> For I know how rebellious and stubborn you are. Behold, even today while I am yet alive with you, you have been rebellious against the LORD. How much more after my death! Deuteronomy 31:24-27 (ESV)

After speaking all these words to the people, Moses then wrote all these words “in a book to the very end.” Moses entrusted this book to the the Levites and commanded them to read it to the people every seven years (31:9-10). But what is most striking is that Moses is well aware of

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<sup>9</sup> Edward J. Woods, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary*, ed. David G. Firth, vol. 5, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries (Nottingham, England: Inter-Varsity Press, 2011), 304.

the sinful tendency within the hearts of, not merely all of Israel, but even in those who are priests and Levites, those who are closest to God.

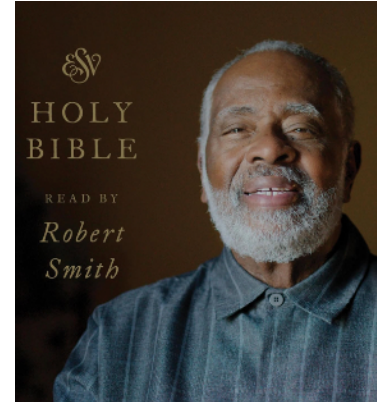
### III. Conclusion

Let's conclude with four observations.

1. **Seeing is not believing.** The piling up of abundant evidence is not in itself enough to cause someone to wholeheartedly believe in and surrender to the Lord. There was more than enough miracles shown to Israel to cause them to believe in and trust the Lord. But that was not enough. The hardness of the hearts of the people of Israel and their persistent stubbornness to continue in sin are reflective of the hearts of every human being. Simply giving people evidence that God is real, exists, and is good is not enough to overcome the spiritual deadness present within our hearts. We need something more than mere evidence or proof. Witnessing a miracle will not in itself cause someone to fall in love with Jesus.
2. **Salvation is supernatural.** What the people of Israel needed was a new heart. They could not save themselves or will themselves to believe, even though they had abundant evidence to the reality and power of God. Moses rightly said, *"to this day the LORD has not given you have not been given a heart to understand..."* (Dt 29:4). But Moses promised them that one day *"God will circumcise your heart... so that you will love the LORD your God"* (Dt 20:6). This inner work on the heart is the regenerating work of the Holy Spirit, for the apostle Paul explains, *"A Jew is one inwardly, and circumcision is a matter of the heart, by the Spirit..."* (Rom 2:29). The prophet Ezekiel repeated almost the same words, *"I will give you a new heart, and a new spirit I will put within you... and cause you to walk in my statutes and be careful to obey my rules"* (Ez 36:26-27). Israel needed a new heart and God promised to give one. Jesus then came to keep that promise and so on the night he was betrayed he held up the cup and said, *"This is the new covenant in my blood..."* (??). Then after he ascended to the right hand of God the Father and *"...having received from the Father the promise of the Holy Spirit, he has poured him out..."* (Acts 2:33) upon all who go to God through him! Having a new heart comes only through receiving the Holy Spirit whom Jesus alone can give. Salvation is not natural, but rather supernatural. We cannot save ourselves. Only Jesus can save and he saves only the penitent—those who know their sin and that they cannot save themselves!
3. **God saves the penitent, not the perfect.** God knew in advance that the people of Israel, after entering the land and enjoying his blessings, would turn away from him, be unfaithful to him, and commit repugnant idolatry. And yet despite this fact, he still loved them enough to make his covenant with him. God said to Israel, I know that after I bless you, then you will abandon me, but yet I promise to give you a new heart. God knows all things and he knows you will sin after you become a Christian and yet he says, *"Come to me and I*

*will give you rest.*<sup>10</sup> *And whoever comes to me I will never cast out.*<sup>11</sup> Do you think when Jesus invites us to come to him that he is unaware of our future sins? No, of course not. And yet he invites us to humbly come to him. Because Jesus saves the penitent, not the perfect.

4. **God uses old people.** "Old" is a fairly relative term, but I think we'd all agree 120 years qualifies as "old." God allowed Moses to participate in his redemptive plan until the last day of his life. There are many examples. God used Billy Graham for 99 years. After age 70 he preached in four countries on three continents and wrote 4 books! George Müller (1805-1898) retired from parish ministry at age 70 then went on nearly a worldwide preaching circuit and wrote 10 books before 92. He oversaw 5 orphanages, 10,000 orphans, and recorded in his journal over 50,000 answers to prayer. God used Corrie ten Boom (1892-1983) until she was 91. And He's still using Dr. Robert Smith in many ways. He served as Professor of Christian Preaching 25 years at Beeson Divinity (Samford University). He is my favorite voice in ESV Bible reading app. At age 77 he is still going strong.



Israel needed to hear Moses say to them, "**The LORD goes before you and will be with you.**" Joshua needed to hear this and so do we. No one can save himself. God saves only those who know they need saving and are willing to humbly ask for salvation through Jesus. Jesus alone can give the heart that is truly repentant and lovingly obedient.

## Discussion Questions

1. What does Moses mean by saying "the LORD has not yet given you a heart to understand or eyes to see or ears to hear?" (29:4). Why does he say this immediately after having said, "You have seen all the LORD did before your eyes in Egypt?" (29:2)
2. Whom has Moses in mind when he says that he is making a covenant with "whoever is standing here... and with whoever is not here with us?" (29:15)
3. Why are the "secret things" where they are? Why did Moses say this?

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<sup>10</sup> Matthew 11:28.

<sup>11</sup> John 6:37.

4. What is revealed about the character of God when Moses reveals that God knows Israel will break the covenant, but yet He is still willing to enter into a covenant with the people?
5. What do these chapters reveal about the human heart?
6. What do these chapters reveal about Moses? About Joshua?
7. What do these chapters reveal about yourself?
8. What, if anything, did you learn from these chapters?