

GOD WITH US
Part 1: The Great Blessing
Genesis – Deuteronomy

Message 13 – Moses' Final Charge
Deuteronomy 27-34

Introduction

The final chapters of Deuteronomy record Moses' words to the nation of Israel as they prepared to enter the Promised Land while he prepared to die. This is his farewell speech to the people he has loved and led for so long. He encouraged them to recommit to the terms of the Covenant they made with Yahweh at Mt. Sinai. The primary basis for this Covenant renewal was that the blessings of life and remaining in the land were contingent upon obedience to the Law. On the other hand, if they failed to obey God's Law, a series of judgments would befall them until, ultimately, they would be expelled from the very land they were about to be given.

Renewal of the Covenant: 27:1-30:20

Forty years earlier, at Mount Sinai, Yahweh had entered into a formal Covenant relationship with the Israel. He had called them to be His "nation of priests, a holy people," to represent Him to the world. His Laws would guide their behavior and shape their witness as to the nature of the one true God. At that time, the 1st generation of Israelites made a commitment to accept the terms of the Covenant. *Then he took the book of the covenant and read it in the hearing of the people; and they said, "All that the Lord has spoken we will do, and we will be obedient!" (Exodus 24:7)*

Now, Moses addresses the 2nd generation as they are camped in Moab just east of the Promised Land. Moses will ask this new generation to ratify their commitment to the Covenant, and he will instruct them on how to conduct a Covenant renewal ceremony once they have crossed over into the Promised Land. Their entire future would be determined by the strength of their commitment to walk with their God. The stakes of obedience were high!

Blessings and Curses: 27:1-28:68

Once in the Promised Land, the nation was to gather between two mountain peaks – Mount Gerizim and Mount Ebal. The priests were to recite the entire Law to the people, who were divided: 6

tribes on Mount Gerizim and 6 tribes on Mount Ebal. After the Law was read to the people, the 6 tribes on Mount Gerizim were to recite *the blessings* that would flow if they *obeyed* God's decrees. Then, the 6 tribes on Mount Ebal were to recite *the judgments* that would ensue if they *disobeyed* God's decrees. Both the blessings and the judgments were listed here in great detail. Moses was making sure that the people renewed their commitment to the Covenant once they were in the land, for only in this way would God fight for them as He had promised, and secure for them a blessed future. Otherwise, God would cause Israel to fall before their enemies and, eventually, He would eject Israel from the Promised Land, just as He was doing with the Canaanites!

Moses' final appeal: 29:1-30:20

- **The call to commitment:** As Moses concluded his Covenant renewal speech, he drew the entire nation to the moment of commitment where they swore on oath to love and serve God.

“Carefully follow the terms of this covenant, so that you may prosper in everything you do. All of you are standing today in the presence of the Lord your God - your leaders and chief men, your elders and officials, and all the other men of Israel, together with your children and your wives, and the foreigners living in your camps who chop your wood and carry your water. You are standing here in order to enter into a covenant with the Lord your God, a covenant the Lord is making with you this day and sealing with an oath, to confirm you this day as his people, that he may be your God as he promised you and as he swore to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. I am making this covenant, with its oath, not only with you who are standing here with us today in the presence of the Lord our God but also with those who are not here today” (29:9-15).

- **A final warning about unfaithfulness:** Moses issued a final warning as to the implications of disregarding the Covenant: God would certainly bring disaster upon the nation of Israel. The other nations would then ask: *Why is all of this happening to them?*

And the answer will be: “It is because this people abandoned the covenant of the Lord, the God of their ancestors, the covenant he made with them when he brought them out of Egypt. They went off and worshiped other gods and bowed down to them, gods they did not know, gods he had not given them. Therefore the Lord's anger burned against this land, so that he brought on it all the

curses written in this book. In furious anger and in great wrath the Lord uprooted them from their land and thrust them into another land, as it is now. The secret things belong to the Lord our God, but the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.” (29:25-29).

“The secret things belong to the Lord our God . . .” Isn’t it interesting how we love to try to figure out many of the ‘mysteries’ concerning God and His ways, things He has chosen NOT to reveal to us? God has made it clear that there are many things concerning Himself and His ways that are simply beyond our ability to comprehend (Romans 11:33,34). Yet, “the things revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may follow all the words of this law.” God has made many things very clear, through His revealed Word, and it is these revealed truths that we will ultimately be held accountable for. Let the mysteries of God remain as His secrets, to be revealed, perhaps, only in eternity. Let the revealed things be the focus of our study and devotion . . . for these revealed truths are God’s gift of LIFE to us!

- **Provisions for future repentance:** Yet, even after they have disobeyed and been cast out of their land, there would always remain the opportunity for renewal after repentance (30:1-10).

“When all these blessings and curses I have set before you come on you and you take them to heart wherever the Lord your God disperses you among the nations, and when you and your children return to the Lord your God and obey him with all your heart and with all your soul according to everything I command you today, then the Lord your God will restore your fortunes and have compassion on you and gather you again from all the nations where he scattered you” (30:1-3).

God went so far as to promise that, after their return to Him, He would prosper them *more than* their forefathers (30:5)!

There is repeated emphasis in Deuteronomy on “loving God with all your heart and all your soul” (30:2,6,10). God is not interested in lukewarm love (Revelation 3:15,16). He searches the earth for hearts that are “fully His” (2Chronicles 16:9). Yet, apart from the enablement of God’s Spirit, producing in us a renewed heart, we will always find ourselves falling short of loving God fully. Thus, God promises to perform that work within those who turn to Him, recognizing their need for His grace: “The Lord your God will circumcise your hearts and the hearts of your descendants, so that you may love him with all your heart and with all your soul, and live” (Deut. 30:6). Oh how desperate we are for His work within us, giving us the ability to love Him fully, as we should!

- **The offer of “life” or “death:”** As the Covenant renewal ceremony came to an end, Moses called heaven and earth to witness the oaths Israel had sworn to Yahweh. He also simplified what was *really* at stake for the people: LIFE and DEATH.

“See, I set before you today life and prosperity, death and destruction. For I command you today to love the Lord your God, to walk in obedience to him, and to keep his commands, decrees and laws; then you will live and increase, and the Lord your God will bless you in the land you are entering to possess. But if your heart turns away and you are not obedient, and if you are drawn away to bow down to other gods and worship them, I declare to you this day that you will certainly be destroyed. You will not live long in the land you are crossing the Jordan to enter and possess. This day I call the heavens and the earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live and that you may love the Lord your God, listen to his voice, and hold fast to him. For the Lord is your life, and he will give you many years in the land he swore to give to your fathers, Abraham, Isaac and Jacob” (30:15-20).

Obedience to God is never just a matter of conforming ourselves to His will. It is always a matter of “life” or “death” for us. God our Father, who loves us, wants us to LIVE, not DIE. When God told Adam not to eat from that one tree in the Garden, He said that it was a matter of life and death: “. . . for in the day that you eat from it you will surely DIE” (Genesis 2:17). God always gives us His word (instructions for living) to lead us to real LIFE. Sin, on the other hand, always results in DEATH. So, when Moses pleaded with Israel to choose ‘obedience,’ he was really asking them to choose ‘life.’ **“Now choose LIFE, so that you and your children may LIVE . . . for this is your LIFE and the length of your days, that you may LIVE . . . (30:19,20).**

The Lord and Joshua to lead Israel in: 31:1-8

Moses assured Israel that although he could not personally lead them into the Promised Land, they were in good hands. The Lord would be their divine Leader, providing guidance through their new human leader, Joshua:

“It is the Lord your God who will cross ahead of you; He will destroy these nations before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua is the one who will cross ahead of you, just as the Lord has spoken” (31:3).

Three times we hear the phrase: “The Lord your God is the One who goes before you” (31:3,6,8). This truth was to give the people (and Joshua in particular) strength and courage for the difficult journey ahead. This is why it is so important to pray much before embarking on a major ‘journey’ in life. We need to move forward with the firm assurance that God is going ahead of us, preparing the way for us. When we have earnestly sought God, and received His marching orders, then we can move forward with this confidence, no matter what lies before us. On the other hand, when we fail to seek God in the major decisions of life, we will find ourselves treading down paths of our own choosing, depending on our own strength, and living out our own wills.

Repetition of the ceremony every 7th year: 31:9-13

Moses deposited with the Levitical priests a written documentation of the Covenant renewal ceremony (31:9). He then instructed them that this same kind of ceremony should be re-enacted every 7th year at the annual Feast of Booths. In this way, Israel would be repeatedly called back to Covenant loyalty. In particular, *the children* would be introduced to the privileges and responsibilities of the Covenant relationship to Yahweh.

“Assemble the people, the men and the women and children and the alien who is in your town, so that they may hear and learn and fear the Lord your God, and be careful to observe all the words of this law. Their children, who have not known, will hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as you live on the land which you are about to cross the Jordan to possess” (31:12,13).

The Lord tells Moses that Israel will fall away: 31:15-30

After the Covenant renewal ceremony, God called Moses and

Joshua into the Tabernacle for a special meeting. In a shockingly sad moment, God told both Moses and Joshua that Israel would certainly turn away from Him and, as a result, would be consumed by innumerable evils. This must have been a devastating message for Moses to hear, having invested his entire life in leading the nation to this point. It must have been even more shocking to Joshua, the one appointed to lead them into this kind of future.

The Lord appeared in the tent in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood at the doorway of the tent. The Lord said to Moses, "Behold, you are about to lie down with your fathers; and this people will arise and play the harlot with the strange gods of the land, into the midst of which they are going, and will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. Then My anger will be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them and hide My face from them, and they will be consumed, and many evils and troubles will come upon them; so that they will say in that day, 'Is it not because our God is not among us that these evils have come upon us?' But I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they will do, for they will turn to other gods" (31:15-18).

The sad song of Israel's future: 32:1-47

God then gave to Moses a song to teach to the people of Israel, a song that, sadly, enshrined the fact that Israel would be unfaithful to Yahweh in the future, and would pay a heavy cost. Yet, in the end, Yahweh would restore His disobedient people, causing their hearts to return to Him.

Moses commanded to ascend Mount Nebo: 32:48-52

As his life drew to an end, God called Moses to climb to the top of Mount Nebo, from which he could gain a glimpse of the Promised Land. He would, however, not be permitted to enter the Land, since he had dishonored God at the waters of Meribah.

Moses' final blessings over the 12 tribes: 33:1-29

As was customary in ancient Israel, the patriarch would utter words of blessing/prophesy over his descendants before his death. Moses, acting as the spiritual patriarch for the entire nation of Israel, recited words of blessing over each of the 12 tribes of Israel.

Moses' death and burial: 34:1-8

In one final display of intimacy, God invited Moses to go to the top of Mount Nebo in order to see the Promised Land from a distance.

Now Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan, and all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, and the Negev and the plain in the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. Then the Lord said to him, "This is the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there" (34:1-4).

The final scene contains an unparalleled display of God's love for a man. God Himself buried Moses in a spot only known to Him!

"So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor; but no man knows his burial place to this day. Although Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died, his eye was not dim, nor his vigor abated. So the sons of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the days of weeping and mourning for Moses came to an end" (34:5-8).

Why did God bury Moses in a secret location? Perhaps because He knew that Israel would, in the future, be tempted to worship the man, Moses. It is common for the religious mind to enshrine the memory of a human leader, and even come to the place of treating that person as some sort of a mini-god. I recall visiting a certain site where there was a marble statue of the apostle Peter. The tour guide assured a very long line of visitors that if they kissed the toes of Peter's marble feet, their journey toward heaven would be made much shorter. When I got close enough, I was shocked to see that Peter's marble toes had all but worn away from so many millions kissing and touching them. Perhaps God buried Moses in a secret place so that future generations would not be tempted to idolize the very man who so strongly tried to wean Israel away from idolatry!

Jesus taught us to pray: "Father . . . Thy will be done, on earth as it is in heaven." Yet, due to the devastating impact of sin, quite often God's servants must wait to see His perfect will fulfilled not on earth, but in heaven. Moses, because of his own sin, lost the privilege of setting foot in the Promised Land. It was a terrible loss to this great man of God. He asked God to restore that privilege; but it was not to be. How special, then, is the story of Jesus' transfiguration on a mountain in Galilee, in the weeks prior to His final journey to Jerusalem (Matthew 17). When Peter, James and John looked upon the glorified Jesus, who did they see standing there with Him? Moses and Elijah! Moses did, after all, get to set his feet in the Promised Land . . . and in the company of the Lord Jesus Himself! We can be quite sure that his heavenly reward far out-shadowed the dim memory of his earthly loss. Perhaps we put too much emphasis on our earthly rewards???

Epilogue concerning Moses: 34:9-12

"Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the Lord had commanded Moses. Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, for all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land, and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel" (34:9-12).

God with us - The Pentateuch in Review

With the final lines of Deuteronomy 34, the Pentateuch (5 scrolls) comes to a conclusion. In these sacred scrolls we have seen the first installment of God's plan to rescue the world from the tragedy of sin. Starting with Abraham, He began to build for Himself a nation of priests who would represent Him to the entire world. He sent them down into Egypt to grow into a nation. He then called them out of Egypt with a mighty hand, under the leadership of Moses. He entered into a Covenant relationship with them at Mount Sinai, giving them His sacred laws. He made His dwelling among them and showed them how unholy people should approach a holy God through sacrifices and offerings. He brought them to the edge of the Promised Land. Though the 1st generation forfeited the privilege of entering the land, because of their lack of faith . . . God remained faithful to His promises. The second generation is now poised on the edge of the Promised Land, ready to receive the land-portion of the promises made to Abraham (Gen.12:1-3). The next two books of the Old Testament, Joshua and Judges, will be a tale of triumph (Joshua) and tragedy (Judges).