

Deuteronomy Chapter 31 – John Karmelich

1. My title for this lesson is "Who leads us into the Promised Land". In Chapter 31, we get a formal transfer of the leadership role from Moses to his assistant named Joshua. He'll actually lead the Israelites into the Promised Land. The point for us Christians is that the Hebrew name "Joshua" and the Greek word "Jesus" is actually the same name. Just as Joshua will lead the Israelites into the Promised Land, so Jesus leads us Christians through God's power to live as He desires. As I love to state, the idea of the Promised Land for Christians is about living as God desires we live. There's a lot to learn about this leadership transfer more than the fact it represents what Jesus is doing for us as Christians. The central theme for us is to encourage us to live as God desires and when we do mess up, God still wants to have a relationship with us and turn back to Him. With that said, the rest is the details, which of course I want to summarize for you here and now.
2. The first thing Moses talks about is his age. He's 120 years old. I'll never forget the day when my brothers and I told my father he couldn't drive anymore, as his reactions weren't what they used to be. My point is it is hard for me to imagine someone 120 years old still being allowed to lead others. However, the issue isn't physical strength. Coming up in a few chapters, Moses will walk up on a mountain to die. The issue is that God told Moses it's time to transfer his leadership to someone else and now's that time. The point is like dealing with my aging father, we eventually come to a time in our lives when we realize its time to transfer leadership to the next generation.
3. The good news is the transfer is not that direct. From here Moses reminds all the Israelites how God's given them victories over two nations that lived outside of Israel. If you think, that's no big deal, let me remind you of a statistic. Based on the number of Israelites stated in Numbers, there were roughly 2,000,000 Israelites at that time. If two and one half tribes settled in this area, which means the land they already conquered was big enough for over 400,000 of them. This just shows that God's been leading us "this far" in our lives and we should trust Him for every aspect of our lives as that's what the idea of the "Promised Land" is all about.
4. From here we get a few words by Moses directly to Joshua. This is Moses encouraging him to do what God's called him (Joshua) to do: Be strong and courageous. I'm reminded of the story of a famous baseball player from my area that was given the nickname "Bulldog" by his coach. At the time he got that nickname, he was a scared young kid. The coach gave him a tough nickname to live up to so he could make a difference for that team. I believe Moses is doing something similar here with Joshua. I have no idea how brave Joshua is, but having to follow Moses as the leader of 2,000,000 people had to be a scary thing. Therefore we read of Moses encouraging Joshua as he is about to accept that leadership. The point for us of course, is that God wants to encourage us to make a difference for Him just as He's doing for Joshua at this moment in time.
5. Then Moses tells the Israelites that there's to be a public reading of the law (most of Deuteronomy this book) every seven years at a Jewish holiday called the feast of booths (also called tabernacles depending upon your bible translation). This holiday was held every fall to remind the Israelites that they were once slaves in Egypt. The idea is for the Israelites to live in temporary shelters, as in tents so they could recall what it was like for all of their ancestors to live that way for 40 years. The point is that once every seven years that ritual was to include the reading of Deuteronomy. Why every seven years? It's often enough so people would remember it, but not so often that it's a ritual. The point for us is we as Christians should occasionally read and study God's laws as to remind ourselves how it is that God wants us to live as His followers. In other words, behavior matters even to the saved Christian.
 - a) From here, we also get a few words about how the priests, one of the 12 tribes of Israel were to be in charge of this ritual and the elders (senior leaders) were to read them. The point for us is we who know God's laws are called to explain them to others around us.

6. At this point, we have a private meeting with just Moses, Joshua and God. This ceremony is the formal transfer of power. Note how this meeting takes place outside of the camp of Israel. We read of Moses, ending his public address to probably millions of people so he can have a private talk with Joshua. Here God warns both of them that despite all of the warnings given in the last few chapters, (that is, "the bad news, the good news and the very bad news" of Chapters 28-29), God's effectively saying that He knows all human history before it occurs and He knows that the Israelites will blow it despite all those warnings. The reason God's telling them this in a private meeting, is so Moses and Joshua can still encourage them to do what's right despite their future failures. It's like saying we have no one to blame but ourselves, as we should have known better. It's kind of like realizing stealing is wrong as we instinctively know that to be true. God is called that nation and us Christians today to live, as He desires. God's well aware of our failures to live up to His desires. However, we should never let that be a reason to not go forward as we learn from our mistakes and continue to live for God with our lives.
 - a) That leads to the next section, which is a preview of Chapter 32. The short version is that in that chapter, Moses will teach a song for the Israelites to learn. Our minds remember a song much more than written text. While we don't have the tune today, we still have all the words as written in that chapter. The point is this song isn't good news. It's another reminder of how the Israelites will mess up in their future. It's a way to remind them that God requires them to stick close to Him despite their failures. The reason that song gets a preview in this chapter is here is where God gives Moses that song. It is written down in the next chapter.
 - b) As to the song itself, I'll cover it in the next lesson as it's too long to combine with the issue of the transfer of leadership issues as taught in this chapter.
7. From this point we get another encouragement by Moses to Joshua to be strong and courageous. As anyone who teaches or coaches on a regular basis realizes, one has to keep encouraging others in order for that idea to stick. It's like my baseball player story of being called "bulldog" over and over again until it stuck that the coach believes the player can and will succeed. Thus we read of Moses repeating his encouraging words to Joshua, just as we should keep on encouraging each other with God's words and His love for all of us, faults and all.
8. At this point, we get the "end" of Deuteronomy as written by Moses. The last 3 chapters state the words of the negative song just mentioned and the story of Moses death. Some argue that Joshua or someone else wrote the last few chapters and others say Moses knew of the events of his death so well, he could write those chapters in advance. Either way, they're here. It is for us to realize Moses wanted to state how basically he's finished with the book. He then tells the Levites to read it to the Israelites so they'd always realize what it is God expects of them as well as to realize their (and our) shortcomings before God. By regularly reading this book, it reminds the Israelites what God does require of them and how He wants them and us to live as a witness for Him.
 - a) The rest as they say, is the details. Speaking of details, time to get started on the verse-by-verse commentary on this book.
9. Chapter 31, Verse 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.
 - a) It always helps to start to remember where we left off. At the end of Chapter 30, we had Moses speaking to all the Israelites. I picture a large natural amphitheater type of setting where all could hear Moses. Some think these verses are a "wrap up" of what was said in the last chapter. Others see it as the beginning of Moses finishing this series of speeches which collectively is the book of Deuteronomy. Either way, Moses is saying in effect, I've been talking through a whole book now, I'm about to die soon as I'm 120 years old today, and as your leader for the last 40 years. I can't lead you any further, so let me finish what I have to say to you, by reminding you who'll specifically lead you into the Promised Land.
 - b) Bottom line is this is Moses wrapping up his speech to the Israelites in this chapter.

- c) I'm trying to visualize someone who is celebrating their 120th birthday. The oldest man I ever knew was someone who lived to 101. It's hard for me to picture a 120 year old man who can do anything. As I said in the introduction, I remember when my brothers and I had to take away my father's car keys, as he couldn't safely drive anymore. My point is simply it's hard for me to picture a man 120 who's still be very active. Realize in Moses case, he was still very active as God was still guiding his life for His glory. I'm not saying we can live to 120 if we perfectly do God's will. I'm just saying it was His will for Moses to live that long.
- d) The next phrase to discuss is "I'm no longer able to lead you". This is not about physical strength, but about accepting God's will. In the last chapter, we'll read of Moses traveling up a mountain to die. My point is he's not transferring leadership due to a lack of strength but simply as he's accepting God's will. I hope I have that good of an attitude when it's my turn to "turn over the car keys" to the next generation (my children).
- e) Then we get to my favorite part of these verses. The text doesn't say Joshua will lead you to fight the battles. It said, "The Lord will lead you". Yes it's a hint that Joshua's name is the same as Jesus. However, the more important point is that the Israelites will win their battles not because of great leadership or great fighting ability, but just because it's God's will for them to win those battles in the Promised Land.
 - i) That leads me back to my definition of the Promised Land: It's about trusting God with every aspect of our lives. I never thought of the "Promised Land" as heaven as I don't think there are battles to be won in heaven. That's why I've been stating all through my lessons on this book that the Promised Land is about experiencing the joy of trusting God to guide us through every aspect of our lives. Just as God lead the Israelites to victory in conquering that piece of real estate, so God wants to lead us to do His will as we make a difference for Him in the world around us.

10. Verse 3b: 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."

- a) From here we get more details of what will happen once the Israelites actually enter the land of Israel. Again we have the emphasis on God leading them, not Joshua. In fact the last part of Verse 3 mentions how Joshua "also will cross over ahead of you", as if to say, oh yes, God will lead you, but Joshua will be lead by God to do His will.
- b) By the way, Joshua was no "spring chicken" himself at this time as he was about 80 years old. (That's based on a comment made by Joshua in Joshua 14:7). Joshua was not picked because of his age, but because he learned under Moses leadership how he is to trust with his life and let God lead Joshua to those literally victories.
- c) At this point, we get an encouragement speech by Moses to the Israelites. To paraphrase, "God's gotten you this far. You've already conquered enough land for 400,000 people and their animals to settle there. You have no reason to fear, if God's gotten you this far, what makes you think he is going to stop leading you the rest of the way?"
 - i) I have to admit, comments like that help me to get through my own periods of fear of what could happen to me in the future. I'm convinced that the opposite of faith is not a lack of faith, but fear: Fear of what could happen in the future. Here we're reading of Moses trying to encourage the Israelites to not be afraid, just as God is encouraging us to not be afraid to fight whatever it is we fear in our own lives.
 - ii) As to the text itself, we get the specific's of who was conquered by the same group of people that Moses is addressing at this moment. Then the text reminds us that God won't ever forsake those who are trusting Him to guide their lives.

11. Verse 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."
- a) Here we get the public ceremony of Moses transferring his leadership to Joshua. Moses says in front of the huge crowd, the quote of Verse 7. The transfer starts with a reminder to be strong and courageous. This is giving Joshua a reputation to live up to. It's more than just leading the Israelites to victories over the inhabitants of the land of Israel. It's about getting them to trust God as they do what it is He desires of them. Then Joshua is to divide the land up by tribes. We tend to forget that as the Israelites were camped out in the wilderness, they were camped by their tribes. That way if Moses wanted to pass word to all the Israelites, he would have tribal leaders pass on those commands.
 - b) Then we get another reference to the most holy name of God, written as "LORD" here. It's what we call Jehovah or as it's also called, the unpronounceable name of God. That word essentially means, "I am that I am" implying God wasn't a created being. He always did exist and always will exist and all things were created through Him.
 - c) I'm getting into that basic theology, as I want to discuss a key verse in this lesson, Verse 8: I happen to love the expression, "He will never leave you nor forsake you." Back when we had all those horrible curses a few chapters back the text stated effectively that it'll please God to punish the Israelites if they continue to forsake Him. So how does one reconcile that concept with the idea that God will never leave us or forsake us?
 - i) The first question is in effect, "can we sin enough to lose our salvation?" I don't believe that's possible. If it was, I probably blew it a long time ago. If we believe God is perfect by definition, we have to be perfectly forgiven to be with Him in heaven forever. That's why God Himself paying for our sins was a necessity in order for us to be saved in the first place.
 - ii) What about those who say have gone to church for years, and then walked away from their faith? I'll let God judge those types of cases. Our job as Christians is to judge behavior, not salvation. God lets us decide who can and cannot be within our Christian churches based on behavior. My sole point here is behavior matters.
 - iii) This gets me back to the discussion of whether or not God can and will forsake us if we turn from Him: Yes, we suffer the consequences of our sins as most of us are painfully aware of. However, as long as we're only trusting in Jesus for payment of our sins, I am convinced it's not possible to lose our salvation.
 - iv) The issue isn't salvation, but being a good witness for God. Does God expect us to be perfect? Of course not. Does He expect us to try? Of course He does. We just got a lecture by Moses on being brave enough to trust God as we go forward in life to make a difference for Him. The same way Moses is trying to encourage all these Israelites to trust Him as they enter the Promised Land, so God's saying to us, that He'll never forsake us (not in a salvation sense, but as a witness for Him) as we do use our lives to make a difference for Him.
 - v) I'm not saying that making a difference for God is depends upon our willpower or having to be "psyched up" to go forward. Remember the text said earlier that God Himself will lead the Israelites to victory. The point for you and me as Christians is we have the gift of the Holy Spirit, which is God working within us to do what it is He desires to do, which is to lead us closer to Him and help lead others closer to Him as we go through our lives.
 - d) Let me wrap up these verses by saying the key to understanding them is to realize that He can't "un-love" what He's committed to love in the first place. God can forsake us in order to draw us back to Him, but He can never stop loving what He's committed to loving.

12. Verse 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.
- a) I mentioned in the introduction that some think Moses only wrote to this chapter. Others will argue he wrote it until the end of the book and wrote his own death in it as he knew exactly how it would occur. Putting that debate aside for the moment, what I'd like you to notice is the phrase, "Moses wrote down this law", for the moment:
 - b) There is a lot of bad theology that came out of Germany a few centuries back that argued that Moses didn't write the first five books of the bible himself. There is a popular theory among some scholars that there are separate authors for these books. They base that idea on the accuracy of the predictions about the demise of Israel as a nation and say it must be late dated in order to justify their arguments. What amazes me is they ignore the text that literally says, "Moses wrote down this law" as they refuse to accept his authorship.
 - i) I always like to add the point that Jesus Himself attributed this book to Moses. So if you don't believe Jesus is God, you have a much bigger problem than who wrote this book. My point is simply that I take Jesus word as authority so I don't believe any of the modern theories about who was "really" the author of this book.
 - c) Meanwhile, back to the text itself. Moses had handwritten the original copy of this book and gave it the priests to be in charge of that book. The book wasn't kept in the Ark of the Covenant (the most holy object the priests were in charge of), but it was the priest's job to keep the book itself. The point for you and me is that if we're a witness for Jesus, whether we realize it or not we're all priests in that we're all called to be a witness for Him. What I am getting it is as Christians, we're to study and learn God's commandments, not to obey them to prove our worth to God, but to be learn them as a guideline of how God wants us to live to be a witness for Him. Now that we know the priests are in charge of God's laws, we read how they are to teach others of them:
13. Verse 10: Then Moses commanded them: "At the end of every seven years, in the year for canceling 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."
- a) The short version here is that once every seven years, the priests are to read out loud all the words of these laws (that is, most of the book of Deuteronomy). Moses called on the Israelites to do this once every seven years at the Feast of Tabernacles.
 - b) The idea of once every seven years is "often enough" where people realize it will come up every so often but not often enough where it is a routine. This implies that the Israelites had to keep track of time. Let's face it, Moses knew he was 120 years old. Now we know the Israelites had to count every seven years on this particular holiday to know when it was time to read this book. That day ever seven years was also a time when all debts are to be cancelled. (See Deuteronomy 15:1 on that point.)
 - c) I don't know how obedient the Israelites were to reading it. I get the impression it wasn't followed as closely as Moses desired. There are only two recorded instances stated in the bible after Joshua's time where this book was read. (See 2nd Chronicles 17:7, 34:30). It may have been read more often than that, but I get the impression this command was ignored for most of Israelites history.
 - d) OK, so the Israelites probably blew this law for hundreds of years. Why should we care? Again, the real issue isn't them, but "us". I'm not saying we as Christians are in trouble if we don't read this book say once every seven years. I'm saying that we're accountable for the knowledge we have of God's laws. He expects us to be obedient to live as He desires we live, which essentially comes down to loving God and loving others.

- e) Another responsibility of understanding God's laws is so we can teach them to the next generation. That's what Moses is commanding everyone listening to him do at this point. A point to get across is we Christians are not responsible for how many people get saved. However both collectively and individually, God holds us accountable for how we have used our time. The one question I believe we as Christians will be judged on is how we've used the time God's given us. If we've only used it to take care of ourselves, we've wasted the greatest asset God's given us. If we use it to make a difference for God in the world, which includes teaching others about God's existence and what He requires us to do, then we'll be rewarded in heaven for not wasting our time. It's not a matter of any punishment for eternally. Revelation 22:12 states Christians have rewards when Jesus returns.
 - i) You may think I've wandered from the text, but that's what Moses is trying to get across to this large crowd listening to him speak. He's saying in effect, "It's not just about all of you. It's about anyone and everyone who wants to use their lives for a greater purpose than themselves. God's laws should be read publicly every now and then so we can remind ourselves what they say and others can learn what it is God expects of us and how He desires we live our lives".
 - ii) Bottom line time: You believe Jesus is God? Great, so do the demons. However, God's more interested in what we've done with that information than just saying we believe it. Therefore, Deuteronomy is a good summary of what God expects us to do with our lives. Jesus quotes from this book more than any other bible book. The point essentially is, "behavior matters", and I'm saying that as a born-again, Christians that one cannot lose one's salvation if one is trusting that Jesus paid the full price for our sins. Therefore, in order to know what it is we're supposed to do as far as how we behave, we're to study God's laws to see how they apply to our lives. The key for the Christian is to see them from a New Testament perspective, which is what I've been trying to emphasize all through these studies.
 - iii) OK, now that I've beaten that point to death, we can move on to the next verse.
- 14. Verse 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.
 - a) Remember in the last set of verses, Moses is speaking to all the Israelites. Now God tells Moses, it's time for a private ceremony. Therefore, it's time for a private meeting with just God, Joshua and Moses.
 - b) The Tent of Meeting may or may not be the same place as the Tabernacle. It's one of those things scholars debate and personally, I don't care. What's important is we read of both of these men being faithful in their lives until their death.
 - c) Stop and think what would you do if God spoke to you audibly to say, "The time of your death is near" as Verse 14 says. Would you ask for more time? Would you want to go to a specific place or say good byes to people? What if you've already lived a long time like Moses and get that same message? Would you say to God, "About time, or how about a few more years?" The key here is to notice Moses obedience. He didn't ask questions, he just did as God instructed him to do and held a private ceremony with God.
 - i) OK John, but God doesn't speak to you and me that way. Of course none of us are aware of how much time we have. All we know is it's short. Ask people who are on their deathbed how fast it went by and they'll say something to the effect that it was like the blink of an eye. That's why I'm constantly emphasizing the fact that the most valuable thing we own is our time and doing what God commands is the key for Christian living.
 - ii) That leads back to the question of whether or not God "speaks to us that way". He does, but we take it for grant it. God's effectively saying to us, "Here is my Word, study it as it applies to us as much as it did to Moses".

15. Verse 15: Then the LORD appeared at the Tent in a pillar of cloud, and the cloud stood over the entrance to the Tent. ¹⁶ And the LORD said to Moses: "You are going to rest with your fathers, and these people will soon prostitute themselves to the foreign gods of the land they are entering. They will forsake me and break the covenant I made with them. ¹⁷ On that day I will become angry with them and forsake them; I will hide my face from them, and they will be destroyed. Many disasters and difficulties will come upon them, and on that day they will ask, 'Have not these disasters come upon us because our God is not with us?' ¹⁸ And I will certainly hide my face on that day because of all their wickedness in turning to other gods.
- a) In these verses it says God appeared to Moses and Joshua in a "pillar of a cloud". I'm not exactly sure what that looked like, but I'm positive it was a strange enough site, that those around there realized this is no ordinary cloud or fog bank. If you read through the bible, whenever God the Father appears, clouds are always mentioned, why is that? It's so we grasp the idea that we can never fully comprehend God. If you've ever walked or driven through fog, you know it's hard to see. That's the idea here.
 - b) So does that mean God can only speak to us in a fog? Of course not. I figured that if "God is God", He will do what He wants when He wants. We don't have to strain to try to hear His voice. If God wants to make something known to us, He'll make it obvious and He'll do it on His timing not ours. The clouds just show us that we can never fully comprehend Him even if and when He is speaking to us. What we do know is that God communicates with people in the bible and it's recorded for us to learn. Therefore, back to the text itself:
 - c) The first thing God says is effectively, "Moses you're about to die". I suspect Moses knows that at this point, but the context is, "Moses, despite all the warnings you've given to them over the last few chapters about the bad stuff that will happen if someone turns from Me, they'll blow it anyway". Moses has been leading this group for the last 40 years. It had to be hard for him to hear that despite all his warnings and all the miracles the Israelites saw, they will still blow it badly after they've entered the Promised Land.
 - i) If all that's true, and it was true historically, why did God bother? If God knew in advance the Israelites would blow it why bother with the Exodus in the first place? Part of the reason is to show the world through the copying of the bible that God's willing to forgive us after they (and us) have messed up. Part of it is to show that despite all the mistakes we've made as humans and our failure to trust God, we're still called to serve Him, faults and all.
 - ii) Another obvious point is God wanted the Jewish nation to exist at the time Jesus would enter the world so He could fulfill His mission through them. I also believe that the nation of Israel has to exist at the time of Jesus return so there is an Israel to "rule from". Is that the same Israel that exists today? Short answer is I hope so.
 - d) Meanwhile, let's ignore the scope of history for the moment, to return back to Moses' time. The point to get across here is Moses is being told that despite the fact he's about to die, he has to accept the idea that the nation of Israel will blow it. It doesn't excuse any sin by the fact God knows all of history in advance. We're still accountable for our sins to God and be grateful Jesus died for every one of those sins, past, present and future. However, even as believing Christians, God expects us to "do something about it" which is to be a witness for Him. That gets me back to the idea that Jesus said when He returns, "My rewards are with me" as I stated is Revelation 22:12. Whatever those rewards are, we get them for all of eternity, so there's a good motivation right there to work hard for Jesus in this lifetime.
 - i) In effect, what God's telling Moses is also what He's telling us. That is, our time on earth is limited. Despite whatever effort we make to make a difference for God we have to accept the idea that most people are far more concerned with what occurs to them in this life than the next one. They mistakenly think they'll get rewarded as their good deeds outweigh their bad deeds, which is not what the bible teaches.

- e) There is a final and scary part of this little speech by God to Moses and Joshua. It is that there's a moment when it is "too late". Notice the last part of Verse 18 says that when they realize they've blown it because "God's not with them", then God will hide His face from them at that point. The good news for Christians is this is not a loss of salvation issue. It is a "loss of reward" issue if we fail to use our lives to make a difference for Him. It's also for nonbelievers to realize that there is a point in life where it's too late to turn around.
 - i) That leads to the logical question, when does that time come? The true answer is we don't know. I remember one pastor using the expression, "Don't go down that road is it's greased": What he meant was if we choose to ignore God and go down the wrong path in life, there can be a point in time when it's too late to turn back. I never ever make that assumption about anyone. I've met Christians who've come from a lifestyle I wouldn't wish on anyone and they've turned their lives around. None of us know who's saved and who isn't saved. We just have to realize God has a line that can't be crossed and personally I never want to get near that line.
 - ii) Let me also address this idea from the prospect of the Nation of Israel. Is it too late for them to collectively accept Jesus? The way I see it is God's willing to work with anyone willing to use his or her lives for His glory. There are many Christians that came from Jewish backgrounds who are saved. Israel as a nation still has a destiny to fulfill as Jesus needs an Israel nation to exist that believes in Him when He does return. That's what Romans Chapter 11 is all about. The best way to describe this is to grasp the idea that heaven does not have an infinite number of people. There is an unknown fixed number of people that will be in heaven. When the last non-Jewish person gets saved, that is when God the Father will effectively say, OK, it's time for Jesus to return and there will a large percentage of Jewish people living in the land of Israel that will accept His rule and judgment over them at that time.
 - f) Want a bottom line of all this text? Don't mess with God. It's best to use our lives to make a difference for Him, and we'll suffer collectively and individually if we choose to use our lives for any purpose other than to glorify Him with our lives.
 - i) Meanwhile, it's time for us to get back to God lecturing Moses and Joshua here:
16. Verse 19: "Now write down for yourselves this song and teach it to the Israelites and have them sing it, so that it may be a witness for me against them."²⁰ When I have brought them into the land flowing with milk and honey, the land I promised on oath to their forefathers, and when they eat their fill and thrive, they will turn to other gods and worship them, rejecting me and breaking my covenant.²¹ And when many disasters and difficulties come upon them, this song will testify against them, because it will not be forgotten by their descendants. I know what they are disposed to do, even before I bring them into the land I promised them on oath."²² So Moses wrote down this song that day and taught it to the Israelites.
- a) It's time for a preview of the next lesson. Chapter 32 is mostly one very long song. As the text states here, it's not a positive song, but more of a dirge. It's designed to remind all of the Israelites of the price they'll pay and did pay when they turn from God. The point is this song that we'll see line-by-line in the next chapter (next lesson) was dictated by God here in this tent to Moses, which he wrote down for us.
 - b) So why a song? Our minds remember songs better than most things. I joke that I struggle to remember the name of a person I met yesterday, but I can recall by verbatim songs that I have learned as a child. Of course we don't have the melody to this song, just the words. It is here for us to remind ourselves what's the penalty for turning from God.
 - c) Before I get into the specifics about this song, here's a question to ponder: If we are saved Christians, why would God want us to know this song? If we can't lose our salvation, but only our rewards for failing to be a witness for Him, why learn these words? What's in it for us? The problem is we easily wander from what He calls us to do. We way too easily focus on our problems and forget why God created us in the first place.

- d) That leads me back to the song itself. Notice the text of these verses describe disasters the Israelites will suffer and this song will be a "testament against them". So if they're going to suffer so badly, why have this song here? Hopefully for them (and us) to learn from the mistakes of history as well as our own mistakes. What all this means is despite the mistakes we've made or our ancestors have made before us, it's never too late to change as God can't "un-love" what He loves. But John, didn't you just lecture us on realizing there is a point where it is too late? The difference is between believers and non-believers. The other difference is about what time we have left to live this life. To state the obvious, we can't change our past only learn from it. That's what God's teaching here and that's the key point of the next lesson: Learn from our past, both history and how we've lived up to now. None of us can change our past, but the wise people learn from their mistakes and realize, ok, I've only got a limited but unknown time to live, the best thing I can do with what time I have remaining time, is to use it for God's glory.
 - e) I know I sound like a broken record at this point, but we way too easily get our minds on our problems of the moment, and forget the big picture of why we're created and living in the first place: To glorify God. In the last lesson, I talked about hardships I've had to deal with as of late. What hit me yesterday was the reminder of having joy in my life despite whatever I'm dealing with. To steal an old movie line, "What if this is as good as it gets?" (Jack Nicholson) We only get one shot at life here. We can always choose to be full of joy or we can choose to be miserable. We can't always control our circumstances, but we can always choose our attitude about whatever we're dealing with at any time.
 - i) That bit of common sense advice is key to understanding the text. Moses is being told to write a negative song not so the Israelites can feel sorry for themselves, but so they can learn from history and get back to what God's called all of us to do, use our lives to make a difference for Him.
 - ii) Let me address the specifics for a moment: OK, we should use our lives to glorify God, what do we specifically do? The short answer is "something". Sometimes it requires prayer. Other times it's to do what's logical. The best answer is to learn to do what one enjoys doing anyway, and find a way to combine that love with a way that makes a difference for God. I write because I love to write and I can use it to make a difference that way. I've met people who've started ministries based on what they enjoy doing anyway. There are millions of ways to make a difference for God. It may mean volunteering where needs exist. If one takes the time to go look for opportunities to serve, one will find them.
 - f) Enough of all of that, time to get back to Moses and Joshua:
17. Verse 23: The LORD gave this command to Joshua son of Nun: "Be strong and courageous, for you will bring the Israelites into the land I promised them on oath, and I myself will be with you."
- a) I was trying to picture what it would be like for Joshua to see all of this. He was no young man himself, and was probably around 80 years old as I stated earlier in this lesson. One of the hardest things for anyone to do in life is to follow a great leader. One of the things I've struggled with in my life is trying to follow in my father's footsteps. I've had to learn the hard way that God didn't call me to be "just like my father" as the path for each of us as individuals is different. I state that obvious point, as I'm sure Joshua was nervous here as he had the difficult job of having to follow Moses, who was the great Israelite leader for the last 40 years of their history.
 - b) Remember that Joshua also heard this little lecture about the Israelites failure in the future to obey God. He too, realized they would blow it. God's saying to him in effect, despite all of that, "be strong and courageous" and do what I've called you to do. In other words, it's like saying, I (God) know history before it's written, but none of you know it. That's why we have to be courageous to do what God calls us to do and not worry about that.

- c) The point is just as God's called Joshua to be courageous, so God's called you and me to be "strong and courageous". Yes, we're going to make mistakes. Yes we're going to have to deal with problems in our lifetime. Despite all of that, we can have joy, knowing we're saved through all of that. However in this lifetime, we can still use it for God's glory if we are willing to commit our lives to serving Him. That's what I've had to remind myself as of late, and hopefully we each learn that God's always with us through the good and bad moments of our lives and still wants to guide us for His glory. It's like God's saying to us that "I know what you're going to face in the future. You don't know, but I do. I promise to guide you (us) through it, but you have to trust Me that I'm still guiding you in spite of whatever difficulties you are facing at the moment."

18. Verse 24: After Moses finished writing in a book the words of this law from beginning to end,²⁵ he gave this command to the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD:²⁶ "Take this Book of the Law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the LORD your God. There it will remain as a witness against you."²⁷ For I know how rebellious and stiff-necked you are. If you have been rebellious against the LORD while I am still alive and with you, how much more will you rebel after I die!²⁸ Assemble before me all the elders of your tribes and all your officials, so that I can speak these words in their hearing and call heaven and earth to testify against them.²⁹ For I know that after my death you are sure to become utterly corrupt and to turn from the way I have commanded you. In days to come, disaster will fall upon you because you will do evil in the sight of the LORD and provoke him to anger by what your hands have made."

- a) Moses says in Verse 25 he's written Deuteronomy even though there are still 3 chapters left to go including the song of the next chapter, which Moses probably wrote here. As I've stated scholar's debate whether Moses wrote the last two chapters or maybe Joshua or someone else recorded those events. My standard answer of course, who cares? The last few chapters are there for us to study and we'll get there soon enough.
- b) Moses wanted this original copy of Deuteronomy to be placed in the Tabernacle right next to the "ark of the covenant". I won't get into a whole lecture here about what that is, as it's discussed in detail the book of Exodus. (See Chapter 25). My point here is simply that the 10 Commandments were in the ark, and the whole book of Deuteronomy was to be kept next to the ark. Moses wanted all the Israelites to hear that book every seven years as I've discussed earlier in the lesson. This book has been preserved for us over the millenniums as God intended it to be part of the bible for us to study.
- c) Let me ask for the moment, how do we know the book is accurate? For starters, the way it was copied was on each page, the writer would add up the numerical value of each letter. If the copy matched the original, it would be replaced. If it didn't match up the scribe had to start all over again. About one hundred years ago, copies of almost every book of the Old Testament was found in caves (the Dead Sea Scrolls). They were about a 1,000 years older than the oldest copy we had at that time. My point is the accuracy was almost the exact same and it gives good support that this book was copied accurately over that time.
- d) After God says where to keep the book, the next thing God states is this book will be kept as a witness against the Israelites for their failure to keep His laws. If you study the books of 1st and 2nd Kings, you will read of the Israelites failure to keep God's laws. There is a great story in those books about finding a copy of this book there in God's Temple many years after it was ignored. (2nd Kings 22:8). My point is God's word came exactly true as stated here in Deuteronomy as a copy of this book was literally used as a witness against them for their failure over the centuries after it was written for them to keep it.
- e) All right John, we can tell it's time for another of your "Why should we care" lectures? Hit us: The issue for Christians is not about being saved, it's about living as a witness for God in all that we do. The laws in this book tell us that behavior matters and I'm saying that as a "born-again, can't lose my salvation" Christian. All I'm saying is that it's important for us Christians to study and obey God's laws in light of New Testament beliefs.

- f) What the rest of the text says in effect is that Moses calls one last meeting of all the elders of Israel so he can read these words to them one more time before he dies. That reading is not recording in this book, but I suspect that since that was Moses intent here, it was done before he died. Moses understood all that God said about how the Israelites were going to "blow it", and since Moses didn't want to be part of that guilty group, he decided that the whole book needed to be read to the leaders of Israel one more time before they went into that land, hopefully to remind them to do the right thing even if was for only for say one generation or so.
- i) In fact, one of the great lines from the end of the book of Joshua is "Israel served the LORD throughout the lifetime of Joshua and of the elders who outlived him and who had experienced everything the LORD had done for Israel." (24:31). My point is the reading of God's law here helped during the reign of Joshua and did keep those Israelites on the "right course" at least for one more generation.
 - ii) OK, good for them I suppose. What's the point? This leads me to my title for this chapter that I stated in the introduction: "Who leads us into the Promised Land". In other words, to live as God desires, does require us to stick close to Him. We do that by regularly reading His word, to remind us how it is God desires we live. In effect, it's the answer to my favorite question of "I believe in Jesus, now what?"
 - a) The now what is to regularly remind ourselves of what it is God requires of our lives so we can live as He desires so we can make a difference for Him in the world around us. You get that, you not only get what Deuteronomy is all about but the bible as whole.
 - b) To state this another way, the way God wants us to live the Christian life, is first of all regularly remind ourselves of how He wants us to live, which we do by daily spending time in His word and then making the best decisions possible based on the guidelines the whole bible teaches us.
 - g) You may think I've wandered away from the text, but I haven't. The rest of the text states how Moses wanted to assemble all the Israelites so they could hear what's written in this book. That's what I'm asking both you and me to do with our lives. Make the whole bible part of our daily life. The reason we study the Old Testament as well as the New is for us to grasp how God wants us to live. As we read it, the Holy Spirit guides us as He teaches the book to us by example, by direct commands, by predictions and by "poetry" (songs). That's the basic type of writings one finds in the bible.
 - h) The good news is I'm basically done teaching God's laws through this book. As we know by now, the next lesson is on biblical poetry (a song) and in the final two chapters Moses gives a closing blessing to the Israelites and then the book ends with the story of Moses' death. We'll discuss all of that when we get there. First, one last verse here:
19. Verse 30: And Moses recited the words of this song from beginning to end in the hearing of the whole assembly of Israel:
- a) The last part of the text talked about the reading of the whole book of Deuteronomy to the elders of Israel. Before we get there Verse 30 is a one-line introduction to the next chapter. The simple point of this verse is that the next 43 verses of this book is that song. I'm going to need the next lesson to explain that song, so we'll get to it then.
20. Let me end this lesson with a reminder that it is about the leadership transfer from Moses to his assistant Joshua. It involved Moses publicly and privately anointing Joshua as the next leader. As part of his final public act, Moses not only tells the Israelites that Joshua is now in charge, he also ends his leadership ministry by telling the Israelites in effect, "You're going to blow it and do it badly. Expect it to occur. Despite that fact, God still loves and cares for you. If and when any individual Israelite decides to return to worshipping God the way He desires by His standards, then know that God loves you and desires to guide you the rest of your lives." That applies to us as well as them and that's the key point of this lesson. OK time for my closing prayer.

21. Father, this lesson had its tough moments as we realize that we too are not always pleasing in Your sight. That is why we should never fail to be grateful that we can't earn Your love based on how we live our lives. Therefore, we live as You desire not to earn Your love, but simply because it's the best way to live out the time we have on earth. May the Holy Spirit guide us, as we learn more of Your truth day by day. That way we can be full of joy no matter the circumstances, as to use our lives to make a difference for You. Help us to make that difference. We ask this in Jesus name, Amen.