



Study Guide: Deuteronomy – Chapter 31

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This study guide provides an educational overview of Deuteronomy Chapter 31 using a verse-by-verse structure, theological context, and application-oriented insights grounded in Scripture.

Introduction

Deuteronomy 31 marks a pivotal moment in the Pentateuch where Moses prepares Israel for his departure and the transition of leadership to Joshua. This chapter contributes significantly to the book's flow by emphasizing the continuity of God's covenant and the importance of obedience as Israel stands on the threshold of the Promised Land. Readers should watch for the themes of divine faithfulness, human responsibility, and the preservation of the law through future generations.

Context

Deuteronomy 31 is situated at the conclusion of Moses' farewell speeches to the Israelites. It follows the detailed restatement of the law and precedes the song of Moses and his final blessings. The chapter occurs within the covenantal framework established at Sinai, where God's laws were given as a guide for Israel's life in the land. The key speakers are Moses, who is preparing to die, Joshua, who is being commissioned to lead, and God, who reassures the people of His presence. The setting is the plains of Moab, east of the Jordan River, just before Israel's entry into Canaan.

Outline

The chapter begins with Moses addressing the people and encouraging them to be strong and courageous as he prepares to hand over leadership (verses 1–8). This is followed by the formal commissioning of Joshua as the new leader (verses 9–15). Next, Moses commands the reading of the law every seven years to ensure the covenant remains alive among the people (verses 16–21). The chapter concludes with God's assurance to Moses that Israel will eventually turn away but that His presence will not abandon them, and Moses is instructed to write a song that will serve as a witness against Israel's future unfaithfulness (verses 22–30).



Verse-by-Verse Study

Verses 1-3: Moses begins by declaring that he is old and will not cross the Jordan, urging the Israelites to be strong and courageous as they prepare to enter the land God promised. This sets the tone of transition and reliance on God's promise.

Verses 4-6: God reassures Moses that He will go before Israel and will not fail them, emphasizing divine faithfulness and the necessity of courage in leadership and obedience.

Verses 7-8: Moses publicly commissions Joshua, charging him to be strong and courageous, promising that God will be with him as He was with Moses, underscoring continuity in leadership and divine presence.

Verses 9-13: Moses commands the Levites to place the Book of the Law beside the Ark of the Covenant and instructs the people to read the law publicly every seven years during the Festival of Tabernacles, ensuring the law's ongoing centrality in Israel's life.

Verses 14-15: The Lord commands Moses to ascend Mount Nebo to view the Promised Land before his death, and God declares that the people will soon break the covenant and turn to other gods, highlighting human frailty despite divine faithfulness.

Verses 16-21: God instructs Moses to write a song that will serve as a witness against Israel's future rebellion, emphasizing accountability and the power of God's word to convict and remind the people of their covenant obligations.

Verses 22-30: Moses writes the song and teaches it to the Israelites, and the chapter closes with a reminder that the law and this song will be a lasting testimony, preserving God's covenant through generations.

Key Themes

One key theme is the transition of leadership and the importance of courage grounded in God's presence. Another is the faithfulness of God contrasted with the anticipated unfaithfulness of Israel, highlighting the tension between divine promise and human responsibility. The preservation of the covenant through the law and public reading underscores the necessity of continual remembrance and obedience. Finally, the use of the song as a witness introduces the theme of accountability and the enduring power of God's word to guide and convict.



Cross-References

Joshua 1 parallels Deuteronomy 31 by continuing the theme of courage and God's presence with the new leader. Psalm 78 reflects on the importance of teaching God's laws to each generation, echoing the command for periodic public reading. Isaiah 30:15 highlights the call to trust and be calm, resonating with the encouragement to be strong and courageous. Hebrews 3:1–6 contrasts Moses and Jesus, providing a New Testament perspective on leadership and faithfulness. Lastly, Revelation 15:3 references the song of Moses, showing its lasting significance in worship and testimony.

Application

Modern disciples can draw encouragement from the call to be strong and courageous, trusting in God's presence amid transitions and challenges. The chapter reminds believers of the importance of grounding their lives in Scripture, regularly engaging with God's word to maintain faithfulness. It also challenges the church to hold leaders accountable while supporting them with prayer and encouragement. The concept of a "witness" through song or testimony invites Christians to consider how their lives and words serve as reminders of God's covenant and grace to others. Finally, the chapter calls for humility, recognizing human tendencies toward unfaithfulness and the need for continual repentance and renewal.

Summary

Deuteronomy 31 serves as a crucial transition chapter where Moses prepares Israel for new leadership and life in the Promised Land. It emphasizes the enduring presence of God, the necessity of courage, the importance of covenantal faithfulness, and the role of Scripture as a living witness. Through commissioning Joshua, commanding the public reading of the law, and introducing the song of Moses, the chapter underscores the continuity of God's plan and the responsibility of Israel to remain obedient. This passage challenges believers to trust God's promises, uphold His word, and remain faithful amid change and uncertainty.