
DEUTERONOMY 31:1 Moses went and spoke these words to all Israel.

Moses, being one hundred and twenty years old and about to die, calls the people together, and exhorts them to courage and obedience, Deu 31:1-6. Delivers a charge to Joshua, Deu 31:7, Deu 31:8. Delivers the law which he had written to the priests, with a solemn charge that they should read it every seventh year, publicly to all the people, Deu 31:9-13. The Lord calls Moses and Joshua to the tabernacle, Deu 31:14. He appears to them, informs Moses of his approaching death, and delivers to him a prophetic and historical song, or poem, which he is to leave with Israel, for their instruction and reproof, Deu 31:15-21. Moses writes the song the same day, and teaches it to the Israelites, Deu 31:22; gives Joshua a charge, Deu 31:23; finishes writing the book of the law, Deu 31:24. Commands the Levites to lay it up in the side of the ark, Deu 31:25, Deu 31:26. Predicts their rebellions, Deu 31:27. Orders the elders to be gathered together, and shows them what evils would befall the people in the latter days, Deu 31:28, Deu 31:29, and repeats the song to them, Deu 31:30.

DEUTERONOMY 31:2 He said to them, "I am one hundred twenty years old this day. I can no more go out and come in. the LORD has said to me, 'You shall not go over this Jordan.'

Verse 2

I am a hundred and twenty years old - The life of Moses, the great prophet of God and lawgiver of the Jews, was exactly the same in length as the time Noah employed in preaching righteousness to the antediluvian world. These one hundred and twenty years were divided into three remarkable periods: forty years he lived in Egypt, in Pharaoh's court, acquiring all the learning and wisdom of the Egyptians; (see Act 7:20, Act 7:23); forty years he sojourned in the land of Midian in a state of preparation for his great and important mission; (Act 7:29, Act 7:30); and forty years he guided, led, and governed the Israelites under the express direction and authority of God: in all, one hundred and twenty years.

DEUTERONOMY 31:3 The LORD your God himself will go over before you. He will destroy these nations from before you, and you shall dispossess them. Joshua will go over before you, as the LORD has spoken.

Verse 3

Joshua, he shall go over before thee - See on Num 27:17 (note), etc.

DEUTERONOMY 31:4 The LORD will do to them as he did to Sihon and to Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land; whom he destroyed.

DEUTERONOMY 31:5 The LORD will deliver them up before you, and you shall do to them according to all the commandment which I have commanded you.

of it, that each of the contracting parties might have one: therefore one was laid up beside the ark, this was the Lord's copy; another was given to the priests and Levites, this was the people's copy.

DEUTERONOMY 31:10 Moses commanded them, saying, "At the end of every seven years, in the set time of the year of release, in the feast of tents,

Verse 10

At the end of every seven years - thou shalt read this law - Every seventh year was a year of release, Deu 15:1, at which time the people's minds, being under a peculiar degree of solemnity, were better disposed to hear and profit by the words of God. I suppose on this ground also that the whole book of Deuteronomy is meant, as it alone contains an epitome of the whole Pentateuch. And in this way some of the chief Jewish rabbins understand this place.

It is strange that this commandment, relative to a public reading of the law every seven years, should have been rarely attended to. It does not appear that from the time mentioned Jos 8:30, at which time this public reading first took place, till the reign of Jehoshaphat 2Chr 17:7, there was any public seventh year reading - a period of 530 years. The next seventh year reading was not till the eighteenth year of the reign of Josiah, 2Chr 34:30, a space of two hundred and eighty-two years. Nor do we find any other publicly mentioned from this time till the return from the Babylonish captivity, Neh 8:2. Nor is there any other on record from that time to the destruction of Jerusalem. See Dodd.

DEUTERONOMY 31:11 when all Israel has come to appear before the LORD your God in the place which he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing.

DEUTERONOMY 31:12 Assemble the people, the men and the women and the little ones, and the foreigners who are within your gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn, and fear the LORD your God, and observe to do all the words of this law;

DEUTERONOMY 31:13 and that their children, who have not known, may hear, and learn to fear the LORD your God, as long as you live in the land where you go over the Jordan to possess it."

DEUTERONOMY 31:14 The LORD said to Moses, "Behold, your days approach that you must die. Call Joshua, and present yourselves in the Tent of Meeting, that I may commission him."

Moses and Joshua went, and presented themselves in the Tent of Meeting.

DEUTERONOMY 31:15 The LORD appeared in the Tent in a pillar of cloud, and the pillar of cloud stood over the Tent's door.

DEUTERONOMY 31:16 The LORD said to Moses, "Behold, you shall sleep with your fathers. This people will rise up, and play the prostitute after the strange gods of the land, where they go to be among them, and will forsake me, and break my covenant which I have made with them.

Verse 16

Behold, thou shalt sleep with thy fathers - שוכב shocheb, thou shalt lie down; it signifies to rest, take rest in sleep, and, metaphorically, to die. Much stress cannot be safely laid on this expression to prove the immortality of the soul, or that the people in the time of Moses had a distinct notion of its separate existence. It was, however, understood in this sense by Jonathan ben Uzziel, who in his Targum paraphrases the word thus: "Thou shalt lie down in the dust with thy fathers; and thy soul (נשמתך nishmethach) shall be laid up in the treasury of the life to come with thy fathers."

DEUTERONOMY 31:17 Then my anger shall be kindled against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide my face from them, and they shall be devoured, and many evils and troubles shall come on them; so that they will say in that day, 'Haven't these evils come on us because our God is not among us?'

DEUTERONOMY 31:18 I will surely hide my face in that day for all the evil which they have done, in that they have turned to other gods.

Verse 18

I will surely hide my face - Withdraw my approbation and my protection. This is a general meaning of the word in Scripture.

DEUTERONOMY 31:19 "Now therefore write this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel. Put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for me against the children of Israel.

Verse 19

Write ye this song - The song which follows in the next chapter. Things which were of great importance and of common concern were, among the ancients, put into verse, as this was found the best method of keeping them in remembrance, especially in those times when writing was little practiced. Even prose was sometimes sung. The history of Herodotus was divided into Nine books, and each inscribed with the name of one of the Nine Muses, because these books were anciently sung. Homer is reported to have sung his poems through different Greek cities. Aristotle observes that anciently the people sung their laws. And Cicero observes that it was a custom among the ancient Romans to sing the praises of their heroes at the public festivals. This was the case among the northern inhabitants of Europe, particularly in Ireland and Scotland; hence the Gaelic poetry of Ossian and others. See Dodd; and see the note on Exo 15:1, where the subject is largely treated.

DEUTERONOMY 31:20 For when I have brought them into the land which I swore to their fathers, flowing with milk and honey, and they have eaten and filled themselves, and grown fat; then they will turn to other gods, and serve them, and despise me, and break my covenant.

DEUTERONOMY 31:21 It will happen, when many evils and troubles have come on them, that this song will testify before them as a witness; for it will not be forgotten out of the mouths of their descendants; for I know their ways and what they are doing this day, before I have brought them into the land which I swore."

Verse 21

This song shall testify against them - Because in it their general defection is predicted, but in such a way as to show them how to avoid the evil; and if they did not avoid the evil, and the threatened punishment should come upon them, then the song should testify against them, by showing that they had been sufficiently warned, and might have lived to God, and so escaped those disasters.

DEUTERONOMY 31:22 So Moses wrote this song the same day, and taught it the children of Israel.

DEUTERONOMY 31:23 He commissioned Joshua the son of Nun, and said, "Be strong and courageous; for you shall bring the children of Israel into the land which I swore to them. I will be with you."

DEUTERONOMY 31:24 When Moses had made an end of writing the words of this law in a book, until they were finished,

DEUTERONOMY 31:25 Moses commanded the Levites, who bore the ark of the covenant of the LORD, saying,

DEUTERONOMY 31:26 "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."

Verse 26

Take this book of the law - The standard copy to which all transcripts must ultimately refer: another copy was put into the bands of the priests. See the note on Deu 31:9.

DEUTERONOMY 31:27 For I know your rebellion, and your stiff neck. Behold, while I am yet alive with you this day, you have been rebellious against the LORD. How much more after my death?

Verse 27

While I am yet alive - ye have been rebellious - Such was the disposition of this people to act contrary to moral goodness that Moses felt himself justified in inferring what would take place from what had already happened.

1. Never was a people more fully and faithfully warned, and from this very circumstance we may see that they were under no fatal constraining necessity to commit sin against God; they might have avoided it, but they would not. God was present to help them, till by their repeated provocations they forced him to depart: wrath therefore came upon them to the uttermost because they sinned when they might have lived to the glory of God. Those who abuse God's grace shall not only have that grace taken away from them, but shall be punished for the abuse of it, as well as for the transgression. Every sin is double, and must have a twofold punishment; for 1. Grace is resisted; 2. Transgression is committed; and God will visit for both.

2. How astonishing it is that, with such examples of God's justice before their eyes, the Jews should be so little affected; and that the Gentiles, who have received the Gospel of God, should act as if God would no more punish transgression, or that he must be so partial to them as to pass by iniquities for which the hand of his justice still continues heavy upon the descendants of Jacob! Let them take heed, for if God spared not the natural branches, he will not spare them. If they sin after the manner of the Jews, they may expect to be partakers with them in their punishments. What God does to nations he will do to individuals who reject his mercy, or trample under foot his grace; the soul that sinneth, and returns not to God by repentance and faith, shall die. This is a decree of God that shall never be reversed, and every day bears witness how strictly he keeps it in view.

3. The ode composed by Moses for this occasion was probably set to some lively and affecting air, and sung by the people. It would be much easier to keep such a song in remembrance, than an equal quantity of prose. The whole would have the additional circumstances of cadence and tune to cause it to be often repeated; and thus insure its being kept in memory. Poetry, though often, nay, generally abused, is nevertheless a gift from God, and may be employed with the best effect in his service. A very considerable part of the Old Testament is written in poetry; particularly the whole book of Psalms, great part of the prophet Isaiah, the Lamentations, and much of the minor prophets. Those who speak against poetic compositions in the service of God, speak against what they do not understand. All that a man hath should be consecrated to his Maker, and employed in his service; not only the energy of his heart and mind, the physical force of his body, but also the musical tones and modulations of his voice.

DEUTERONOMY 31:28 Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes, and your officers, that I may speak these words in their ears, and call heaven and earth to witness against them.

DEUTERONOMY 31:29 For I know that after my death you will utterly corrupt yourselves, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will happen to you in the latter days; because you will do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD, to provoke him to anger through the work of your hands."

DEUTERONOMY 31:30 Moses spoke in the ears of all the assembly of Israel the words of this song, until they were finished.
