

# AM Deuteronomy 31:1-13 The Lord will go with you

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[ 0 : 00 ] Well, let's turn now to the Word of God and Deuteronomy chapter 31. Continuing my series on passages from the book of Deuteronomy, I'm going to look today at chapter 31 verses 1 to 13.

So Moses continued to speak these words to all Israel.

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. 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 as the Lord has spoken. And the Lord will do to them as he did to Sihon and Og, the kings of the Amorites, and to their land, when he destroyed them.

[ 1 : 28 ] And the Lord will give them over to you. And you shall do to them according to the whole commandment that I have commanded you. 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, nor forsake you. Then Moses summoned Joshua, and said to him in the sight of all Israel, Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land that the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them.

And you shall put them in possession of it. It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you. He will not leave you, or forsake you.

Do not fear, or be dismayed. Then Moses wrote 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.

And Moses commanded them, At the end of every seven years, at the set time in the year of release, at the feast of booths, when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God, at the place that he will choose, you shall read this law before all Israel in their hearing.

[ 3 : 07 ] Assemble the people, men, women, and little ones, and the sojourner within your towns, that they may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, and be careful to do all the works of this law, and that their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess.

Well, may God speak to us through his holy word. Well, let me ask you to turn now, please, to Deuteronomy 31.

We've been looking together on and off throughout this year, at the book of Deuteronomy, and we're now coming towards the end.

Moses has gathered the Israelites on the plains of Moab, and they're ready now to enter the promised land.

But now comes a bombshell. He tells them, he will not be going with them. Moses is about to die.

[ 4 : 47 ] And he is handing over the leadership to Joshua. He leaves them, however, with this promise. One of the most precious promises in the Bible.

It's repeated twice, verse 6 and verse 8, reading it from verse 6. Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be in dread of them.

The Canaanites, that is. For it is the Lord your God who goes with you. He will not leave you nor forsake you.

Moses will no longer be with them, but God will. What a promise. Now it seems to me that there is a message here, particularly for these troubled times in which we live.

We've seen several changes of leadership over the past few months, haven't we? Queen Elizabeth II is gone.

[ 5 : 55 ] Charles III has taken her place. Boris Johnson is gone. Liz Truss is gone. And there have, of course, been many other changes around the world.

And maybe changes in your own life as well. But the message is, in a changing world, trust in the unchanging God.

He alone can give us stability and hope. And that promise, He will go with you, is a promise that we can apply to ourselves today.

Now this passage can be divided into three parts. There's the promise to the people in verses 1 to 6. The promise to Joshua in verses 7 and 8.

And then the command to the priests in verses 9 to 13. And we'll look at each of these and see how these ancient scriptures speak to us today.

[ 7 : 20 ] So first, the promise to the people in verses 1 to 6. Moses makes here a very important announcement.

He is not going with them into the promised land. The reason is given first as old age.

I'm 120 years old today. I am no longer able to go out and come in. Well, 120 years is quite an age.

Moses himself, who says in Psalm 90, that the years of our life are 70 years. And if by reason of strength they are 80, yet is there strength, labor, and sorrow.

Some of us here know that only too well. Moses was already 80 when God sent him to Egypt to say to Pharaoh, let my people go.

[ 8 : 26 ] And for the past 40 years, he had been leading Israel through the wilderness. Now I'm only in my 70s, and an afternoon stroll by the riverside is enough for me.

I can't imagine walking through the wilderness for 40 years and leading a rebellious people.

Just imagine all the weariness, all the stress and strain that Moses had been under. But he'd managed it.

And he was actually still in good health. It says in Deuteronomy 34 and verse 7, Moses was 120 years old when he died.

His eye was undimmed and his vigor unabated. But he had his limits. And he knew it.

[ 9 : 31 ] I am no longer able to go out and come in. He no longer had the strength to lead Israel.

And he certainly didn't have the strength to lead them in battle. But there was another reason. God had forbidden him to go into the promised land.

The Lord has said to me, you shall not go over this Jordan. The story is told in Numbers chapter 20. The Israelites there had once again demanded water. And God had told Moses to speak to the rock and it would yield water for them.

But he lost his temper and he struck the rock. And the Lord said to him, because you did not believe in me to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring the assembly into the land that I have given them.

[ 10 : 45 ] Seems harsh, doesn't it? one moment relapse and he's excluded from the land of Canaan. But God won't allow even Moses to get away with that.

He was misrepresenting God to the people. Presenting God as if he were angry when actually he was being gracious and kind to them. And therefore he had been forbidden to enter the land.

And maybe it was best that Moses the lawgiver didn't lead them into the promised land so that they might understand that it was not through the law but by grace that they were saved.

Moses instead would be going over his own private Jordan. He would be going over the river of death and he would be entering into a much better land.

Must have been an emotional moment mustn't it making this announcement. And it must have been an emotional moment hearing it. How could they cope without Moses?

[ 12 : 07 ] A whole generation had passed away since they left Egypt. And this younger generation they'd never known any other leader. This was bad news that Moses would not go with them.

But then comes the good news. Someone far greater than Moses will go with them and I don't mean Joshua. The Lord your God himself will go over before you.

Now this was nothing new that God would be with them and lead them. The Lord had been leading them all along. He was their true leader.

He'd led them by the pillar of cloud and fire through the wilderness. He'd been with them symbolically in the Ark of the Covenant. The promise is that he will continue to be with you.

Moses' departure will make no difference to that. God will still be with you. True the pillar of cloud and fire would vanish but the Ark would remain as the visible symbol that God was with them.

[ 13 : 34 ] and he would continue to give them victories. As he had destroyed Sion and Og so he would destroy the Canaanites also.

Joshua would lead them and they would inherit the land. Therefore he says be courageous and fear not for it is the Lord your God who goes before you he will not leave you nor forsake you. In the Hebrew that is very emphatic. He will never ever forsake you. The authorised version translates it he will not fail you.

How could he? He is the covenant God 100% committed to his people. He is the eternal God unlike Moses he will never die.

he is the faithful God he never goes back on his word. Great promise for the Israelites what about us?

[ 14 : 45 ] Well this is a promise that reverberates all the way through the scriptures as a promise to God's people in every generation. Psalm 46 for example the Lord of hosts is with us.

The God of Jacob is our refuge. Isaiah 43 when you pass through the waters I will be with you. And through the rivers they shall not overflow you.

How many Christians have taken comfort in that when passing through various trials and tribulations. God is with us. What more could we wish for?

And nowhere is that more clearly seen than in the coming of Christ into this world. One of his names is Emmanuel which means God with us.

Remember how Matthew sees his birth as the fulfillment of Isaiah 7. Behold the virgin shall conceive and bear a son and they shall call his name Emmanuel which means God with us.

[ 15 : 59 ] our Lord Jesus Christ was literally God with us. And he remains with us forever.

He said so in Matthew 28 verse 20 Behold I am with you always even to the end of the age. There is actually a striking similarity between Matthew 28 and Deuteronomy 31.

Just as Moses was about to leave them and they were to go courageously into Canaan and conquer it trusting in the Lord.

So Jesus was about to leave his disciples ascending up into heaven but they were to go courageously out into the world preaching the gospel trusting in the Lord.

But whereas Moses could only say he will be with you Jesus could say I am with you.

[ 17 : 15 ] We find the promise again in Hebrews 13 and verse 8 where he actually quotes from Joshua 1 where this promise is repeated. Be content with what you have for he has said I will never leave you nor forsake you.

If you have the Lord why worry about the things of this world? They're so small in comparison. And the grand climax of the Bible in Revelation 21 is precisely this God himself will be with them.

All the blessings of heaven are summed up in that God will be with us. So this then is the promise to the people a wonderful promise.

And if you belong to the people of God as you do if you are trusting in Christ then you can claim this promise for yourself.

But then secondly we have the promise to Joshua in verses 7 and 8. Moses now commissions Joshua as the new leader.

[ 18 : 32 ] Moses summoned Joshua and said to him in the sight of all Israel be strong and courageous for you shall go with this people into the land that the Lord has sworn to their fathers to give them and you shall put them in possession of it and he adds this promise it is the Lord who goes before you he will be with you he will not leave you nor forsake you do not fear or be dismayed now you may say that's the same promise what more is there to say but the point is that this time it is personal this is more than just a general promise to the people of God as a whole this is a specific promise to Joshua as the leader of Israel and we do all need that personal reassurance don't we that the

Lord is with us in our own circumstances and in our own work leaders especially need this some of you may know that I had several years in the church of England and I remember how in the prayer book the minister would say to the congregation the Lord be with you and the congregation would reply and also with you the point is that both the congregation and the minister particularly needed God's presence and that's what Moses is saying here having said to the congregation the Lord will be with you he is now turning to Joshua and saying and also with you as a congregation here in Dumfries we need

God's promise that he will be with us except the Lord build the house they labor in vain that build it anything we seek to do as a church it will fail unless the Lord is with us should be our constant prayer as individuals within the congregation we need that the Lord will be with us as we go about

our daily work our daily lives we need that the Lord will be with us in our individual homes but especially we should pray for the leaders of the church for the elders and for those who come here to preach that the Lord will be with them and give them wisdom and give them courage in their work it's very striking that this promise is repeated personally to

Joshua twice in Joshua chapter one after the death of Moses God says to Joshua there in verse five just as I was with Moses so I will be with you I will not leave you nor forsake you then he says few moments later in verse nine be strong and courageous do not be frightened do not be dismayed for the Lord your God is with you wherever you go why does he keep repeating it isn't Joshua going to turn around and say yes Lord you told me that you don't need to tell me again yes he does need to tell you again because we forget so easily we turn our eyes away from the Lord so easily we get discouraged so easily we need constant reassurance Joshua needed that constant reassurance and all the more so now that Moses had gone and now that the time of action was drawing near and we need that constant reassurance as well

I can assure you as a retired minister that it never got any easier as the years went by I can assure you as an occasional preacher now that it doesn't get any easier even in my seventies I've been preaching now for nearly fifty years and I still have moments when I'm afraid that my sermon is going to be a total disaster and if the Lord were not with me it would be I need that promise constantly the Lord will be with you and so does every servant of God in any kind of Christian work finally we have the command to the priests verses nine to thirteen Moses now commands the priests to read out the entire law once every seven years verse nine

[ 24 : 01 ] Moses wrote this law 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 and Moses commanded them at the end of every seven years at the set time in the year of release at the feast of booths when all Israel comes to appear before the Lord your God at the place that he will choose you shall read the law before all Israel in their hearing he's very specific that it must be all Israel every one of them and that all the law is to be read verse 12 assemble the people men women and little ones and the sojourner within your towns no one is left out that they may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God and be careful to do all the words of this law all of it every word he's especially concerned for future generations verse 13 that their children who have not known it may hear and learn to fear the

Lord your God as long as you live in the land that you are going over the Jordan to possess not that there was to be nothing going on in between those seven yearly readings it was the priest's duty to teach the law all the time and godly Israelites like David would meditate on the law every day but this once in seven years command was to make sure that the law was not forgotten took place notice at the feast of booths or tabernacles when they dwelt in tents to remember the wilderness where the law was given and it took place in the year of release the sabbatical year that the Lord had commanded in exodus 23 when the land itself had rest and they would have time to give attention to this now we know of course from the subsequent history that the law was forgotten and this law was neglected but in times of revival it was restored in

Nehemiah chapter 8 Ezra gathered all Israel and read from early morning until midday and gave the meaning so that they might understand they actually rediscovered the feast of booths at that time now the point of all this is that there was a covenant between God and his people and a covenant has two sides to it yes God took the initiative he had chosen them to be his people he had given them the land he would be with them but he expected in return that they would obey his law and likewise for us today God in his grace has saved us he has sent his own son to die for us he has given us his spirit he has given us eternal life through faith in

Christ but he expects that we will walk in the ways of Christ Paul says in Titus 2 14 Christ gave himself for us to redeem us from all lawlessness and purify for himself a people for his own possession who are zealous for good works and the reading of God's word is a good start today as Christians we read God's word publicly not once every seven years but every seventh day on the Sabbath and it's good that the whole congregation gathers together including the children because God's word is forever for everyone the eternal God wants people who will obey him and we can only obey him if we know what he has commanded therefore we're to give attention to the word of God so how does all this apply to you well firstly do you belong to the people of God these promises were made to God's people and to no one else they weren't made to the Moabites or the Ammonites no Canaanite could say the Lord is with us because he wasn't because of their sins God was about to judge the Canaanites so today you could only claim these promises if you are a

Christian if you are trusting in Christ as your Lord and Savior if you are a Christian then everything is yours God will be with you forever and he will give you not just the land of [ 30 : 02 ] Canaan but heaven itself but if you're not there is nothing you need to become a Christian and you can even in Old Testament times it was possible for people to join the people of God imagine a Moabite thinking to himself these are impressive promises I want to be part of that well actually he could because that is exactly what happened with a young Moabite girl called Ruth your people shall be my people she said and your God shall be my God and she was accepted certainly today whoever calls on the name of the Lord shall be saved whoever

Peter says the promises to you and to your children and to all who are far off whoever the Lord shall call but if you are a Christian rejoice in these promises and live in the light of them go courageously into your daily life and into the Lord's work knowing that the Lord is with you it takes courage doesn't it to live for Christ in a hostile world so much easier when you know that God is with you think of this promise every day think to yourself I am not alone the Lord is with me we value human help don't we two are better than one so much easier with someone helping you much more so with divine help and that divine help is available if you are a

Christian even if you're alone you're not alone God is with you and that is better than any human help but remember you are a covenant people and God expects you to walk in his ways remember what it says in the great commission go and make disciples of all nations baptizing them and teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you there's a parallel again isn't there between Matthew 28 and Deuteronomy 31 the priests had their great commission to teach the people the law of God to teach people what God had commanded them and we have our great commission to go into all the world and teach the world what God has commanded first and foremost of course we ourselves must obey what

God has commanded no point in teaching others unless we follow that teaching ourselves make disciples of all nations yes first be a disciple yourself urge people to come to Christ to trust in Christ yes but first trust in Christ yourself and then go out and teach the world may the Lord help us all to be faithful disciples of a faithful God Amen