

March 8

Deuteronomy 31 & 32

Hi, I'm Jack Arant, Director of International Student ministries, with you once again to look at our reading from Deuteronomy Chapters 31 & 32.

Moses is now handing over leadership of the nation of Israel to Joshua, his longtime assistant and leader of the army. Moses is now 120 years old, and while he is still in good physical condition, the Lord has made it clear to him that it is time for him to pass the torch of leadership to Joshua. More importantly, God made it clear that He Himself will be the conquering leader for the nation, going ahead of the people. God had promised the land way back to Abraham, and God himself will fulfill his promise!

This Joshua is that same bold scout, who along with Caleb, some 40 years earlier, had declared confidence that God would help them in the conquest of the Promised Land. Well, you know the rest of the story! All the other men of his generation have died in the wilderness because of their unbelief. Joshua and Caleb would now be the oldest men surviving of all of the hundreds of thousands of men in the whole nation of Israel.

You will notice that three times the words "be strong and courageous" are exclaimed in this installment of Joshua. The first "be strong and courageous" is spoken to Joshua with a reminder of previous victories over Sihon and Og. You might also remember that Joshua led the troops while Moses held up his hands to conquer the Amalikites. When we reflect on past victories, it gives us confidence that there's going to be victory ahead! That's why the psalmist said "I will remember the deeds of the Lord, yes, I will remember your miracles of long ago." In the same way, it's good for us to reflect back on the miracles of scripture as well as the times that God has delivered us personally.

The second time Moses says "be strong and courageous" to Joshua is in front of the whole nation. The people clearly hear what The Lord plans to accomplish with Joshua as their leader. Joshua can lead the people with confidence. They will be united with him in purpose.

The third time God speaks to Joshua the Lord speaks to him in person, while in his visible presence, in the sacred Tent. There he personally affirms Joshua and reaffirms his promise to give Israel the land.

Why is it that the Lord repeats this promise so many times? It's because when we face battles ahead, the Lord knows we need lots of encouragement! Another example are the words, "Fear not". It is repeated in the Bible 365 times! That's one for every day in the year! And the scripture is loaded with encouraging words! My favorite phrase from an old hymn, "How firm a foundation" is: "what more can he say than to you he has said..." And His promises are as solid as ever.

The next section of our reading reminds me of another line from an old hymn: "prone to wander, Lord I feel it. Prone to leave the God I love..."

God gave Moses a song to warn the people. He knew that soon their hearts would turn away to other gods. Soon they would possess the land and become prosperous and

satisfied. Sounds a lot like our current day. Ease and wealth seem to be a greater test of our faith than hardship and need. Throughout the stories we will read through Old Testament, we'll see this happen time and time again.

God gave the people this warning in the form of a song, which was to be learned and carefully preserved. Songs make messages so much easier to remember. I can still remember advertising jingles from my childhood, and the scripture verses I remember best are ones that have been set to music.

Moses begins this song with praise to the great God who is perfect, just, and faithful. He is both creator and Father. He found his people in a desert place and cared for them and rescued them, and then the Lord gave them the best of everything. No longer bowed down under the yoke of slavery, he nicknamed them Jeshurun, meaning "Upright one". But in his prosperity he abandoned the very one who had given him everything.

God, who is rightfully jealous for his people, is inflamed. The calamities of his justice are heaped upon his once blessed people. Instead of continued blessing, God promises famine, pestilence, plague, wild beasts, snakes, war and disaster.

In the middle of this song, the Lord expresses wonderment at the lack of discernment of his people. We would say "they just don't get it!" How could they be so unfaithful to the one who had rescued them and given them so much?

Yet, even in the midst of this stern warning there is a tender message of hope. When all else is gone, he is there, and he will bring his people back to life and take vengeance on their enemies. The Lord will make atonement for his land and people, and restore them. In wrath he remembers mercy!

On completion of this song, Moses reminds the people that God's words are not to trifle with. They are your life! By them you will live. Jesus says it once again for us when he says, "man shall not live on bread alone, but by every word that proceeds from the mouth of God."

There's an easy application here! Turning from our Father is incredibly foolish. What do we have that was not given to us by him anyway? Why would we not follow his perfect words of instruction that have been proven true? He's a jealous God, and rightfully so. Any path that leads away from him leads to misery.

It makes me pray, "Lord, take away my wayward heart, and give me a reasonable understanding to walk humbly in your ways, with your word as my vital food.

God bless you as you walk in his way and feed on his word today.