

The Book of Deuteronomy, Teacher's Guide

Lesson 18: The Song of Moses, His Blessing, and His Death

Deuteronomy 31:1–34:12

Teaching Aim (Teacher Orientation)

Doctrinally this capstone lesson must show that even Moses, the greatest prophet of the old covenant, the one whom the Lord knew face to face, points beyond himself to Christ. Moses foretold a Prophet like him (18:15–18), and the New Testament identifies that Prophet as Jesus (Acts 3:22–23), who is greater than Moses as a son is greater than a servant (Hebrews 3:1–6). The teacher must help students see Moses rightly: genuinely great, yet not the final word, a signpost to the One who would lead God's people all the way home.

The lesson must also guard the longing for the land against a future-earthly-Israel reading. Moses died outside the land and Israel entered it under Joshua, yet Hebrews teaches that the rest Israel sought was never finally a plot of ground; the true rest remains and is entered through faith in Christ (Hebrews 4:1–11), and the faithful of old sought a better, heavenly country (Hebrews 11:13–16). The promised land is a shadow whose substance is the inheritance Christ secures, not a future political restoration of national Israel.

Beyond the doctrine, this lesson aims to gather up the whole study into the formation of the student. Moses' faithful, unfinished, mortal life, poured out for God and pointing past himself, is a model and a summons. The God who was Israel's Rock and whose everlasting arms held them is our Rock too, and the teacher should help students leave Deuteronomy resolved to love this God wholeheartedly, hold fast to Christ the greater Prophet, and run their own course with faithful endurance toward the better country.

Question 1

Student Question:

Moses commissions Joshua publicly, telling him “be strong and courageous” because “it is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you nor forsake you” (31:7–8). What does this transfer of leadership teach us about how God's work continues beyond any one servant?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Moses had been Israel's leader for forty years, and now, knowing he will not cross the Jordan, he publicly commissions Joshua: “Be strong and courageous, for you shall go with this people into the land” (31:7). The transfer is orderly, public, and confident, because Moses knows the work was never finally his. It belongs to God.

The ground of Joshua's courage is not his own ability but God's presence: "It is the Lord who goes before you. He will be with you; he will not leave you nor forsake you" (31:8). The same God who walked with Moses will walk with Joshua. Leaders change; the Lord who goes before His people does not.

This teaches us something steadying about how God's work continues. No servant is indispensable, and no servant is the foundation. When a beloved leader's season ends, the people are not orphaned, because their hope was never in the leader but in the God who raised him up and now raises up another. The work outlives the worker.

It also models humility and faith in those who lead. Moses does not cling to his position or despair that the task is unfinished. He hands it on, blesses his successor, and trusts the Lord to bring the people home. Every faithful servant eventually does the same, laboring hard and then entrusting the harvest to the God who gives the increase (1 Corinthians 3:6-7).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God's work continues beyond any single leader
- Courage rests on God's presence, not human ability
- No servant is indispensable; the Lord is the foundation
- Faithful leaders hand on the work without clinging
- We labor hard, then entrust the increase to God

Discussion Prompts

- Why is it healthy to remember that God's work does not depend on any one person?
- Where do you place your hope, in leaders or in the Lord who raises them up?
- How does Moses model finishing well and handing on the work?

Question 2

Student Question:

Moses writes the law and commands that it be read to all Israel every seven years so that they and their children "may learn to fear the Lord" (31:9-13). How faithfully are you keeping God's word before your own heart and the next generation?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Moses writes the law down and gives it to the priests, commanding that it be read aloud to all Israel, men, women, children, and sojourners, every seventh year at the Feast of Booths (31:9-13). The purpose is explicit: "that they may hear and learn to fear the Lord your God", and that "their children, who have not known it, may hear and learn".

God knows how quickly a people forgets. A generation that personally saw His works gives way to a generation that has only heard of them, and that generation gives way to one that has not

even heard. So God builds rehearsal into the rhythm of national life. The word must be kept before the people on purpose, or it will quietly slip away.

This presses a searching question on us. How faithfully do we keep God's word before our own hearts and before the next generation? It does not happen by accident. The children who do not know it will not learn it unless someone deliberately reads, teaches, and rehearses it in their hearing, at home and in the assembly of God's people.

The principle abides even though the old feast does not bind us. God's revealed word is given to be heard, learned, and passed on (2 Timothy 2:2; Ephesians 6:4). A home and a congregation that keep Scripture central are doing exactly what Moses commanded; a home that neglects it is, however unintentionally, raising a generation that will not know the Lord.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Keeping God's word before the heart takes deliberate effort
- Each generation must be taught; faith is not inherited automatically
- Reading and rehearsing Scripture in the assembly and the home
- Passing the word to children is a commanded responsibility
- The principle abides though the old feast does not bind Christians

Discussion Prompts

- How deliberately are you keeping God's word before your own heart?
- What are you doing to pass the faith to the next generation?
- Why does a generation forget God so quickly without intentional teaching?

Question 3

Student Question:

God tells Moses plainly that after his death the people "will turn to other gods" and break the covenant (31:16–21), and He gives the song as a witness against them. What does it reveal about God that He provides for Israel's future failure even before it happens?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

God speaks with sobering candor: after Moses dies the people "will rise and whore after the foreign gods", forsake Him, and break the covenant (31:16). He does not pretend the future is bright. He tells Moses plainly that Israel will fail, and He prepares a witness, the song, against the day it happens (31:19–21).

It is striking that God provides for the failure before it occurs. He is not caught off guard by sin, and He does not abandon a people simply because He foresees their unfaithfulness. Even as He names the coming rebellion, He is already making provision, giving a song that will testify and, in its closing verses, even speak of atonement and hope.

This reveals the patient realism of God's love. He sees us as we are, knows the failures ahead, and still binds Himself to His people and makes a way back. He is not the disillusioned friend who walks away the moment He learns the truth about us; He knew the truth all along and loved us still.

For us this is deep comfort without being license. God's foreknowledge of failure is never permission to fail; the song is a witness against sin, not an excuse for it. But the same God who foresaw Israel's wandering and provided a way home foresaw ours and provided a Savior. "While we were still sinners, Christ died for us" (Romans 5:8). He makes provision for the very failure He grieves.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God is not caught off guard by His people's sin
- He provides for future failure even before it happens
- His love is realistic, seeing us as we are and staying
- Foreknowledge of failure is no license to sin
- The pattern points to Christ, who died for us while we were sinners

Discussion Prompts

- What does it reveal about God that He provides for failure He already foresees?
- How is God's patient realism different from indulgence of sin?
- How does this point forward to the provision of a Savior?

Question 4

Student Question:

The Song of Moses opens by calling God "the Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice" (32:4). When life feels unstable, what difference does it make to you to know that God is an unchanging Rock?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The Song of Moses opens with a name for God that echoes through the whole song: "The Rock, his work is perfect, for all his ways are justice. A God of faithfulness and without iniquity, just and upright is he" (32:4). Against a people who change like the weather, God is the Rock, solid, dependable, unmoved.

A rock does not shift with our moods or circumstances. When everything else in life feels unstable, the ground heaving under our feet, plans collapsing, relationships shaking, a rock is the thing you can stand on. Moses gives Israel, and us, this picture of God precisely as a refuge for unstable times.

Notice what makes God a Rock: His work is perfect, His ways are justice, He is faithful and without iniquity. He is not a Rock merely because He is powerful but because He is utterly trustworthy. There is no flaw in Him to give way under pressure, no inconsistency to betray those who lean on Him. He is exactly as good tomorrow as He was yesterday.

This is why the saints in every age have run to this image. “The Lord is my rock and my fortress” (Psalm 18:2). To know God as the Rock is to have a place to stand when the floods come. And the New Testament tells us this Rock is no mere metaphor left in the past; Christ Himself is the Rock on whom the wise build, the unshakeable foundation for a shaking life (Matthew 7:24–25; 1 Corinthians 10:4).

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- God is the Rock, stable and unchanging amid instability
- His dependability rests on His perfect, just, faithful character
- A Rock gives a place to stand when everything else shakes
- The saints in every age run to this image
- Christ is the Rock and unshakeable foundation for our lives

Discussion Prompts

- What in your life feels unstable right now, and how does God as the Rock speak to it?
- Why is God dependable, not merely powerful?
- What does it look like to actually build your life on the Rock?

Question 5

Student Question:

The song laments that Israel “scoffed at the Rock of his salvation” and “forgot the God who gave you birth” (32:15–18). What does the song teach us about how comfort and prosperity can lead God’s people to forget Him?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The song traces a tragic turn. “Jeshurun grew fat, and kicked”; the well-fed, prosperous people “forsook God who made him and scoffed at the Rock of his salvation” and “forgot the God who gave you birth” (32:15–18). It was not poverty that ruined Israel but plenty. Comfort made them careless, and careless they forgot their God.

This is a danger we rarely take seriously. We pray for ease and abundance, and rightly thank God for His gifts, but the song warns that prosperity has a way of quietly loosening our grip on the Giver. When the barns are full and the road is smooth, we feel less need, and felt need is so often what keeps us close to God.

Forgetting God is seldom a dramatic decision. Israel did not announce one morning that they were abandoning the Lord. They simply grew comfortable, grew distracted, grew full, and somewhere along the way the God who had been everything became an afterthought. Forgetting is the slow erosion of gratitude and attention.

The remedy is deliberate remembrance, the very thing Deuteronomy keeps commanding. We must thank God in our plenty as earnestly as we cried to Him in our need, hold His word before us when life is easy, and watch our hearts most carefully not in famine but in feast. The Christian in comfortable times must take special care, lest, like Jeshurun, we grow fat and forget the Rock of our salvation.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Prosperity and comfort can lead God's people to forget Him
- Felt need keeps us close; ease can loosen our grip
- Forgetting God is a slow erosion, not a sudden decision
- Deliberate remembrance and gratitude are the remedy
- We must guard our hearts most carefully in times of plenty

Discussion Prompts

- How has comfort or success ever loosened your grip on God?
- Why is forgetting God usually slow rather than sudden?
- What deliberate habits keep you close to God in easy seasons?

Question 6

Student Question:

The song warns of a people who "are a nation void of counsel, and there is no understanding in them" and pleads, "Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would discern their latter end" (32:28–29). Where do you need to grow wiser about where your present choices are leading?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The song mourns a people with no insight: "they are a nation void of counsel, and there is no understanding in them", and then comes the aching wish, "Oh that they were wise, that they understood this, that they would discern their latter end" (32:28–29). Their problem was not lack of information but lack of wisdom; they would not think about where their road was leading.

To "discern your latter end" is to look down the road of your present choices and ask honestly where they go. The foolish live only in the moment, refusing to connect today's small

compromises with tomorrow's harvest. The wise lift their eyes and reckon with consequences before they arrive.

Most of us know more than we live by. We do not chiefly need new facts; we need the wisdom to act on what we already know, to trace the line from this choice to its end and to choose accordingly. Sin always asks us to stop thinking about the latter end, to enjoy the moment and ignore the destination.

God longs for His people to be wise, and that longing is gracious. He is not setting a trap; He is pleading with us to think, to discern, to see where things are heading while there is still time to change course. The book of Deuteronomy as a whole is one long call to this kind of wisdom, and the Spirit gives it to those who ask (James 1:5). The wise person regularly asks, of every habit and choice, "where is this taking me?"

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Wisdom is discerning where present choices lead
- Foolishness lives in the moment and ignores consequences
- Most of us need to live by what we know, not just know more
- Sin asks us to stop thinking about the latter end
- God graciously longs for and gives wisdom to His people

Discussion Prompts

- Where do you most need to ask "where is this taking me?"
- Why do we so often refuse to discern our latter end?
- What is the difference between having knowledge and living wisely?

Question 7

Student Question:

Even in judgment the song turns to hope, declaring "I kill and I make alive" and "vengeance is mine, and recompense", and finally that God "atones for his land and his people" (32:39-43). What does this blend of judgment and mercy reveal about God's ultimate purposes?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The song does not end in judgment; it bends toward mercy. God declares, "I kill and I make alive; I wound and I heal" (32:39), and though He says "vengeance is mine, and recompense", the song closes with God who "atones for his land and his people" (32:43). Judgment is real, but it is not God's final word over His people.

This blend of judgment and mercy runs through the whole Bible. God is too holy to wink at sin, so judgment is real and severe. Yet He is too gracious to abandon His people to it, so mercy has

the last word. The same hand that wounds also heals; the same God who kills also makes alive. These are not contradictions but the two sides of His covenant love.

We must hold both. A God of mercy without judgment would be sentimental and unjust, unmoved by the evil that destroys His world. A God of judgment without mercy would leave us all without hope. The God of the song is both, and only such a God can be both perfectly just and the justifier of His people.

The cross is where “I kill and I make alive” reaches its deepest meaning. There God’s judgment against sin fell and His mercy flowed at once, as Christ was wounded for our healing and put to death that we might be made alive (Isaiah 53:5; Romans 4:25). The song’s closing note of atonement for God’s people finds its fulfillment in the One who atones once for all, so that judgment is not the last word for those who are His.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Judgment is real but not God’s final word over His people
- God blends justice and mercy without contradiction
- Mercy without judgment is sentimental; judgment without mercy is hopeless
- Only such a God can be just and the justifier of His people
- The cross fulfills “I kill and I make alive” in Christ

Discussion Prompts

- Why do we need a God who is both just and merciful?
- How does the song keep judgment and mercy together?
- How does the cross fulfill the song’s note of atonement?

Question 8

Student Question:

Moses blesses the tribes like a father, beginning “there is none like God” who “is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (33:26–27). How have you known the everlasting arms underneath you in a hard season?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

Like a father gathering his children for a final word, Moses blesses the tribes one by one, and he frames it all with a declaration of God’s incomparable greatness: “There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help” (33:26). The God who is high above all is the very God who stoops to help His people.

Then comes one of the most beloved promises in all of Scripture: “The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms” (33:27). However far His people fall,

they do not fall out of His grip. Beneath them, always, are arms that do not tire and do not fail, arms that have held God's people in every generation.

Many of us know this from the inside. In the hard season, the grief, the fear, the long night, when we felt we were falling, something held us. We could not always name it at the time, but looking back we see it: the everlasting arms were underneath, carrying us when we could not carry ourselves. This is not poetry only; it is the testimony of countless saints.

Notice that these arms are everlasting. Human arms grow weary and eventually let go; even the strongest fail at last. But the arms underneath God's people never give out. The God who held Israel through the wilderness holds His people still, and in Christ we are assured that nothing can pluck us from the Father's hand (John 10:28-29). When we cannot hold on to Him, He is holding on to us.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- The God high above all stoops to help His people
- God Himself is our dwelling place and refuge
- The everlasting arms hold us when we cannot hold ourselves
- Many saints testify to being carried through hard seasons
- These arms never fail; in Christ we are held in the Father's hand

Discussion Prompts

- When have you sensed the everlasting arms underneath you?
- What is the difference between human arms that tire and arms that are everlasting?
- How does it steady you to know God holds you when you cannot hold Him?

Question 9

Student Question:

Moses climbs Nebo, sees the promised land he may not enter, and dies, and Scripture says "there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (34:10). Yet Moses himself foretold a Prophet like him to come (18:15-18), fulfilled in Jesus (Acts 3:22-23), and Hebrews shows Jesus as greater than Moses (Hebrews 3:1-6). How does the unequaled Moses point us beyond himself to Christ, and how should we read the promised land and the rest he longed for in light of the gospel?

Commentary and Teaching Notes

The book ends on Mount Nebo. Moses climbs, God shows him the whole land, and then says, "I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there" (34:4). He dies at the Lord's word, God Himself buries him, and no one knows the place. Then comes the great tribute:

“There has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” (34:10). Moses is, by Scripture’s own testimony, the unequaled prophet of the old covenant.

And yet, and this is the heart of the matter, even the unequaled Moses points beyond himself. Earlier in this very book he had promised, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among you, from your brothers. It is to him you shall listen” (18:15). Moses himself directed Israel’s eyes forward to One who would come. He knew he was great, but he knew he was not the end of the story.

The New Testament tells us plainly who that Prophet is. Peter, standing in Solomon’s portico, declares that Moses spoke of Jesus: “The Lord God will raise up for you a prophet like me from your brothers. You shall listen to him in whatever he tells you” (Acts 3:22–23). Jesus is the Prophet like Moses, and more. Hebrews makes the comparison explicit: Moses was faithful in God’s house as a servant, but Christ is faithful over God’s house as a son, and the son is greater than the servant (Hebrews 3:1–6).

Consider how Christ surpasses Moses at the very points where Moses fell short. Moses could only see the land from a distance and could not bring even himself across the Jordan; Jesus, the greater Joshua, leads His whole people all the way home. Moses gave a law that exposed sin but could not finally take it away; Christ gives grace and truth and atones for the sin the law revealed (John 1:17). Moses died and was buried by God; Christ died and rose, the firstborn from the dead, conquering the grave that holds even the greatest of mere men.

This also reshapes how we read the land Moses longed for and could not enter. The land was real, and Israel entered it under Joshua, yet Scripture teaches that it was never the final goal. Hebrews says the rest Israel sought was not finally a plot of ground but a rest that remains for the people of God, entered by faith in Christ (Hebrews 4:1–11), and that the faithful of old were looking past the land to “a better country, that is, a heavenly one” (Hebrews 11:13–16). So we do not read these chapters as a promise of a future earthly political restoration of national Israel. The land was a shadow; the substance is the inheritance Christ secures, the better country toward which all the faithful, Moses among them, were truly journeying. Moses on Nebo, gazing at a land he would not enter, becomes a picture of every saint who dies in faith looking toward the promise, and of the truth that the real homeland is found in Christ alone.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Moses is the unequaled prophet of the old covenant (34:10)
- Yet Moses himself foretold a greater Prophet to come (18:15)
- Jesus is that Prophet, identified in Acts 3:22–23
- Christ is greater than Moses as a son over the house (Hebrews 3:1–6)
- Christ leads His people all the way home, unlike Moses at the Jordan
- The land was a shadow; the true rest is in Christ (Hebrews 4)
- Guard against a future-earthly-Israel reading; the inheritance is heavenly (Hebrews 11:13–16)

Discussion Prompts

- How does the unequalled Moses point us beyond himself to Christ?
- In what specific ways does Jesus surpass Moses?
- How should we read the promised land and Israel's rest in light of Hebrews?

Question 10

Student Question:

Looking back now across the whole book of Deuteronomy, the wilderness retold, the great commandment to love God, the warnings and blessings, the call to choose life, and now the song, the blessing, and the death of Moses, name one specific way the Lord Jesus has been forming you through this entire study, and one thing you will carry forward.

Commentary and Teaching Notes

We have come to the end, not only of this lesson but of the whole book of Deuteronomy. We began in the wilderness, with Moses retelling the journey so a new generation would not forget. We heard the great commandment to love the Lord with all the heart, walked through the laws that shaped a holy people, stood between the mountains of blessing and curse, heard the ringing call to choose life, and now we stand on Nebo as the greatest of the prophets dies looking toward the promise. It has been a long and rich road.

Deuteronomy is, from first to last, a book about love and loyalty to the God who redeems. It calls us to remember His works, to keep His word before our hearts and our children, to refuse the idols that compete for our devotion, to choose life, and to hold fast to the One who is our life. And it ends by lifting our eyes past even Moses to the greater Prophet, Jesus, who leads His people into the rest the land could only foreshadow.

So make this personal as we close. Look back across the whole study and name the work God has done. Perhaps you have learned to love Him more wholeheartedly, or to take sin more seriously, or to rest on Him as the Rock, or to hear the everlasting arms underneath you, or to choose life where you had been drifting toward death. Name one specific way the Lord Jesus has been forming you through Deuteronomy, and one thing you will carry forward, and then go and hold fast to Him, for He is your life and the length of your days.

Doctrinal / Christian Living Issues

- Gathering up the whole book into personal application
- Deuteronomy as a sustained call to love and loyalty to God
- Remembering, choosing life, and holding fast to Christ
- Naming the specific formation God has worked through the study
- Carrying one concrete thing forward into life

Discussion Prompts

- What is the single most important thing Deuteronomy has worked in you?
- How has this study deepened your love and loyalty to God?
- What one thing will you carry forward and put into practice?