

Be Valiant and Strong

Deuteronomy 31:1-8

Expository Lessons from the Book of Deuteronomy

I. Introduction and Background

- a. The **Book of Deuteronomy** consists of three speeches that Moses gave to the Israelites near the end of their 40 years of wandering in the Wilderness. The three speeches are as follows:
 - i. **Speech No. 1: Deuteronomy 1-4** (first four chapters)
 - ii. **Speech No. 2: Deuteronomy 5-26** (twenty-two chapters; about 25 lessons for us)
 1. This section covers the specific laws and regulations.
 - iii. **Speech No. 3: Deuteronomy 27-34** (last eight chapters of the book)
 1. Final wrap-up, including warnings and blessings, depending on whether the Israelites obey or disobey what has just been handed down.
 2. The death of Moses and the handoff of leadership to Joshua.
- b. Today, in **Deuteronomy 31:1-8**, we will see Moses addressing the following:
 - i. He explains to the people that he will soon die.
 - ii. After Moses dies, Joshua will be the one to lead them into the Promised Land.
 - iii. Moses charges Joshua and all the people to be “valiant and courageous” in the face of the challenges they will encounter as they enter Canaan.

II. Near the End, for Moses

- a. Read **Deuteronomy 31:1-2**.
 - i. Moses is now 120 years old.
 1. Stephen, in his speech to the Sanhedrin in **Acts 7**, breaks down Moses’ life into three 40-year periods.

- a. The first 40 years: as a prince in Egypt
 - i. “Now *when he was forty years old*, it came into his heart to visit his brethren, the children of Israel. And seeing one of them suffer wrong, he defended and avenged him who was oppressed, and struck down the Egyptian.” (**Acts 7:23–24**, NKJV)
 - b. The second 40 years (to age 80) in self-exile from Egypt, in the wilderness, tending the sheep of his father-in-law, Jethro.
 - i. “And when forty years had passed, an Angel of the Lord appeared to him in a flame of fire in a bush, in the wilderness of Mount Sinai.” (**Acts 7:30**, NKJV)
 - c. His third 40 years (age 80 to 120), leading the Israelites from Egypt to the edge of Canaan, where he will die.
 - i. “He brought them out, after he had shown wonders and signs in the land of Egypt, and in the Red Sea, and in the wilderness forty years.” (**Acts 7:36**, NKJV)
 - ii. Moses reminds the people that the Lord had told him he would not cross over the Jordan and enter Canaan with the rest of the Israelites.
- b. Read **Deuteronomy 31:3-8**.
- i. Moses explains that it will be his assistant, Joshua, who will bring them the rest of the way on their journey into the Promised Land.
 1. Recall that Joshua’s original name was *Hoshea*, the son of Nun. In **Numbers 13:16**, Moses changed his name to Joshua (in the Greek LXX, same name as “Jesus”).
 2. Moses was told that he would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land because of his sin in striking the rock the second time (**Numbers 20:7-12**). However, there may have been another reason as well.
 - a. I believe God was showing the Israelites that Moses could only take them part of the way. It would be a man who was given the special name “Jesus” who would finish the mission begun by Moses. He would take them

on the final leg of their journey, to their ultimate destination, the Promised Land.

- b. For examples of early Christians seeing the significance of the name of Joshua (foreshadowing the name of the Savior Jesus of Nazareth), see:
 - i. Justin Martyr, *Dialogue with Trypho*, chapters 113, 132; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, pp. 255 and 265-266.
 - ii. Irenaeus, *Fragments*, chapters 19-20; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 1, pp. 571-572.
 - iii. Tertullian, *Against Marcion*, book 3, chapter 16; found in Ante-Nicene Fathers vol. 3, pp. 334-335.
- ii. Moses reassures the people that the Lord will go before them into Canaan and give them victory over the nations that live there.
 1. Recall that these nations they would soon encounter in Canaan were the same ones who intimidated ten of the twelve spies Moses had sent out on an exploratory mission, about 38 years before (as discussed in **Numbers 13-14**).
 2. Moses says that the Lord will lead them to defeat these nations, just as He had helped them defeat kings Sihon and Og, on the east side of the Jordan (resulting in the inheritance of land for the tribes of Reuben and Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh).
- iii. Moses urges all the people (**Deuteronomy 31:6**) and then to Joshua in the hearing of all the people (**Deuteronomy 31:7**) to “be valiant and strong” in the face of the challenges ahead. Moses says that the Lord will be with them and among them. He will not leave or forsake them.
- iv. The Greek word rendered “valiant” in the OSB (**Deuteronomy 31:6** and **31:7**) literally means “to be manly.” Consider some other translations of these verses, also based on the LXX.
 1. “*Act like a man* and be strong; do not fear or be afraid or be terrified before them, for the Lord your God, the one going with you even among you, neither will he leave you or forsake you.” (**Deuteronomy 31:6**, LES)
 2. “*Be manly* and strong; have no fear, nor be frightened nor be terrified before them, because the Lord your God, He who goes

with you among you, will not forsake you or abandon you.”
(Deuteronomy 31:6, NETS)

- v. The same phrase is used by Paul in exhorting the Corinthians. For the most literal translations of the Greek word used here, some examples:
 1. “Watch ye, stand fast in the faith, *quit you like men*, be strong.” (**1 Corinthians 16:13**, KJV 1900)
 2. “Be watchful, stand firm in the faith, *act like men*, be strong.” (**1 Corinthians 16:13**, ESV)
- vi. I believe the translations cited here are all correct. The phrase “act like men,” or “be manly” (literally) means “to be courageous” (figuratively). While some women in Scripture did possess this characteristic, it is especially associated with men. It is the distinctive male characteristic in Scripture.

III. Implications of This Concept for Us

- a. In the Scriptures, the most distinctive characteristic of being a man of God (male, in contrast with female) is exhibiting the characteristic of COURAGE.
 - i. While Moses issued the challenge to “be men / be valiant and be strong” to Joshua and to the Israelites as they prepared for the battles with the Canaanites, Paul uses the same language to exhort the Christians! So this challenge applies to us as well.
 - ii. We live in a generation where there is a lot of confusion regarding distinctions between men and women. This has had a very disorienting impact on society in general, as well as on most churches in our country.
 - iii. Some here might be tempted to “pat ourselves on the back” that we are not like those other churches. After all, we hold to the distinction between men and women in several Biblically-based areas that have become counter-cultural (especially here in Massachusetts), such as:
 1. Male spiritual headship in the church and family.
 2. Men (only) preaching and teaching the mixed group.
 3. Men dress distinctly different from women, and vice versa.
 4. No transgender confusion. Gender assigned by God at birth.
 - iv. However, these things (while important) are the *outward manifestations*. Perhaps an even more important thing we need to restore is the character of Biblical manliness.

1. “Being manly” is not playing about violent sports, making lots of money, having a career that impresses the world, driving fast cars, lifting weights, building muscle mass, going hunting, drinking beer, joining the military, or doing other things that you might have associated with being a man.
 2. It certainly is not related to sexual encounters with women, or even whether we have a multitude of physical offspring.
 3. It is not being an “alpha male” with an aggressive personality and a high level of male hormones in your system.
 4. I believe it IS about having a courageous character. Which means no one has an advantage based on personality type or biological factors. ALL MEN, and I am speaking particularly of Christian males here, are called to be courageous.
 - a. Unfortunately, one of the casualties of the gender confusion in our culture is that being a man, being courageous, is “scrubbed out” of most men.
 - b. The church needs to be a place where we help men to be what they were intended to be, not to emasculate them and teach them that being a good Christian means shutting up, doing what you are told, and avoiding conflict.
 5. This is not about stifling women or limiting career opportunities for them. It is about *encouraging men to be what God intended us to be*.
 6. I believe women were (for the most part) created to be nurturing, and men to be warriors (the charge here in **Deuteronomy 31** was given in advance of battles against intimidating enemies).
 7. Other characteristics are essential for men as well (hard working, resisting the flesh, controlling our spirits, shepherds who look out for others, love, humility, etc.) However, I believe that courage is *the distinctive characteristic* that men (rather than women) are called to excel in.
- b. **Question:** How does a man become more courageous?
- i. Meditate on the lives of men in Scripture who demonstrated courage. Collect a small army of personal heroes in this area. Imitate what you see in them.

1. Examples of men in Scripture who demonstrated courage include:
 - a. Joshua,
 - b. David (vs. Goliath),
 - c. Elijah (vs. Ahab and Jezebel, and at Mount Carmel)
 - d. Elisha (surrounded by his enemies),
 - e. Phinehas (boldly addressing the sin of sexual immorality in the nation),
 - f. The apostles (who prayed for boldness and preached boldly), and
 - g. Gideon (who started out timid, but became a mighty warrior).

Read **Judges 6:11-17**.

- ii. Remember that God has promised that He will be with us.
 1. Gideon took courage (as in all the other examples cited above) when he became confident that *the Lord was with him*.
 2. Moses told that to Joshua; likewise, Jesus encouraged the apostles in the same way, in **Matthew 28:18-20**.
 3. The key to courage is not being overcome by the fear we have, based on recognizing that *God is with us*. We are not fighting our battles alone.
- iii. Fear of God (a spiritually healthy fear, which keeps us from sin) is the best counter to fear of men.
 1. Jesus sending out the apostles.
 - a. “Therefore do not fear them. For there is nothing covered that will not be revealed, and hidden that will not be known. “Whatever I tell you in the dark, speak in the light; and what you hear in the ear, preach on the housetops. And do not fear those who kill the body but cannot kill the soul. But rather fear Him who is able to destroy both soul and body in hell.” (**Matthew 10:26-28**, NKJV)
 2. Read **Wisdom of Sirach 34:13-17**.

a. “Those who fear the Lord will fear nothing.”

3. Read **Hebrews 13:5-6**.

a. “Let your conduct be without covetousness; be content with such things as you have. For He Himself has said, ‘I will never leave you nor forsake you.’ So we may boldly say: ‘*The LORD is my helper; I will not fear. What can man do to me?*’” (**Hebrews 13:5-6**, NKJV; quoting from **Psalms 117/118:6**)

b. If we know that the Lord is with us (as He promised), we won’t worry about things we don’t have, and we won’t be intimidated by people.

IV. Practical Applications – Testing and Strengthening Our Courage

a. We need men of courage who will address sin in one another.

i. **Follow what it says in Matthew 18:15-17.**

1. First step: go straight to the person involved, as Jesus directed us in **Matthew 18:15**.

a. Don’t give in to laziness or cowardice, which tend to produce conflict avoiders and gossips.

2. If the brother or sister in sin does not listen to you when you approach them 1-on-1, proceed to the second step. If that also fails to produce repentance, proceed to the third step. (See **Matthew 18:16-17**.)

ii. If the person involved in sin is older, exhort him respectfully, as you would treat a father. (**1 Timothy 5:1**)

iii. If the person involved with sin is a church leader (elder), there must be two or more witnesses. Those in sin need to be rebuked in the presence of all, so all may fear. (**1 Timothy 5:19-20**)

b. We need men of courage to be *true peacekeepers*.

i. Don’t confuse being a *peacekeeper* (a/k/a conflict avoider) with being a true *peacemaker*! Consider how the term “peacemaker” is defined in the Bible, and what the term would have meant to Jesus and His apostles.

1. In the beatitudes, found in the Sermon on the Mount, Jesus said: “Blessed are the *peacemakers*, For they shall be called sons of God.” (**Matthew 5:9**, NKJV)

2. **Questions:** What did that term “*peacemaker*” mean, as used in the Scriptures?
 3. That same Greek word here translated “*peacemaker*” (root: *eirenopoios* / *ἑιρήνοποιος*) is found in one other place in Scripture, in the LXX.
 - a. ‘*He who reproveth boldly is a peacemaker.*’ (**Proverbs 10:11**, LXX)
 - b. Think about the implications of that statement!
 4. According to this passage, a *peacemaker* is someone who ‘goes there’ by addressing sin boldly. He does not avoid conflict to try to “keep the peace.” Instead, he strives for *true* peace between God and men. That only comes by bringing things into the light.
 - a. This may bring conflict in the short term, and it takes courage to do this consistently.
- ii. **Question:** With that understanding of the meaning of “*peacemaker*,” which Biblical characters come to mind as having earned a place in the ‘Peacemaker Hall of Fame,’ based on what they did?
1. Some who come to mind include:
 - a. John the Baptist – who spoke the truth in confronting Herod’s sin, and lost his head for doing so. (**Matthew 14:1-12**)
 - b. Jonah - in preaching the impending judgment of God to the Ninevites. (**Jonah 3**)
 - c. Nathan - addressing David’s sin with Bathsheba. (**2 Samuel / 2 Kingdoms 11-12**)
 - d. Ezra – in forcefully confronting the sins of intermarriage with foreign wives. (**Ezra 9-10**)
 - e. Phinehas – who confronted sexual immorality in the community, and for his bold action was given “the covenant of peace” and the priesthood for his descendants. (Read **Numbers 25:1-13**).
 - f. Paul – in boldly confronting sin throughout his ministry and in his letters, for example, in **1 Corinthians 5**.

- g. Jesus – who was the greatest preacher of sin and repentance of all time, as seen in all four gospels as well as in **Revelation 2-3**.
- iii. There are so many tragic examples most of us can point to, showing what happens when churches lack courageous men who are true peacemakers, willing to confront sin they see in the church.
 - 1. I have seen problems like this in Catholic, Protestant, Restoration Movement, conservative Anabaptist, as well as independent nondenominational churches.
 - 2. The reasons for not dealing with sin are the same across the religious spectrum.
 - a. Those who know what is going on are afraid of the pushback, marginalization, personal attacks, and loss of financial support that they know they would receive by exposing and confronting the sin in leaders.
 - b. So they avoid conflict, and strive to stay ‘out of trouble.’ They look the other way, unwilling to lay down their lives to protect the sheep.
 - 3. Having a few courageous men in a church, sometimes even just one, can make all the difference.
- c. We need men of courage to evangelize the lost, taking the gospel to others.
 - i. The number one obstacle to effective evangelism in most churches: *fear of men* (fear of the negative reactions of others, in rejection or persecution).
 - 1. Our job is to plant the seed spiritually. Even though most will reject it, there are a few who will not. The challenge is to persevere through many rejections to find those few who are truth seekers.
 - 2. Other obstacles to evangelizing those around us include desire for personal comfort, laziness, worldliness, and lack of knowing what to do or say.
 - ii. Let us remember that in the face of resistance, the apostles prayed for *boldness* (rather than for open people) in **Acts 4:23-31**.
 - iii. This is a major challenge before our church!

V. Conclusion and Takeaways

- a. Joshua prepared the Israelites for their enemies and battles ahead by calling them to be “manly/valiant and strong”.
- b. Paul applied similar language (and challenges) to Christians.
- c. The distinctive characteristic that men (compared to women) are called to have is COURAGE.
- d. We live in an age where there is confusion about distinctions between men and women in our culture, impacting even the church. The challenge is to adhere to the high Biblical standard, be lights in a dark age, and be willing to stand firm against the pressures of our culture.
- e. We can grow in our courage by:
 - i. Following the great examples in Scripture.
 - ii. Fearing God rather than men.
 - iii. Striving to be true peacemakers (rather than simply being conflict-avoiding ‘peacekeepers’).
 - iv. Praying for boldness and sharing our faith with the lost.
- f. Never forget that we are not alone. God has promised us repeatedly that *He will be with us* in our spiritual battles.