

Deuteronomy 31:24-29

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After writing down the LORD's covenant law, Moses commands the Levites to place the scrolls of the law next to the ark of the covenant so that it may serve as a witness against Israel in the LORD's presence when they fall into idolatry.

The text now switches to what needed to be done with the scrolls containing the covenant law that Moses had written down. This took place after he *finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete* (v. 24). As stated earlier, the term *law* here likely refers to the entire book of Deuteronomy, and possibly the first five books of the Bible. The word *book* probably refers to a type of scroll often made of sheets of animal skin or papyrus.

It is not likely that the Hebrews were educated to write while living in Egypt as slaves. Now it seems apparent that at least the priests are literate. It seems reasonable to presume that this transition took place as a result of Moses. Moses was raised in the household of an Egyptian noble, so likely was educated to read and write ([Exodus 2:5-10](#)). It could be that while wandering in the wilderness, Israel become literate.

Moses' commands were given to the *Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the LORD* (v. 25). The ark was a box which contained the two tablets of the covenant on which the Ten Commandments were written ([Deuteronomy 4:13](#); [10:8](#)). The *Levites* (the priestly tribe)—specifically the family of Kohath ([Numbers 4:4](#), [15](#); [7:9](#))—were the ones assigned to maintain it and carry the *ark* whenever the Israelites traveled, or for some other purpose ([Deuteronomy 10:8](#); [Numbers 1:50ff](#); [Joshua 3:13](#)).

Therefore, Moses commanded them to *take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God* (v. 26). The *book* was not placed *in* the ark because the two tablets containing the Ten Commandments were in it ([Exodus 25:16](#)). So, it was placed beside it where it would reside with the ark in the Holy of Holies, where the LORD dwelt among His people ([Exodus 25:8ff](#)).

Moses told the people that the *book* was to be placed in the LORD's presence *that it may remain there as a witness against you*. Israel had agreed to follow the provisions of God's covenant with them in order to receive the blessing ([Exodus 19:7-8](#)). In v. 19, the song of Moses was going to be witness against the Israelites when they fell away from their faith in their LORD. Here, a second witness was provided in the form of a scroll containing the words of the covenant ([Numbers 35:30](#); [Deuteronomy 17:6](#); [19:15](#)). God is setting in place reminders, that the choice of Israel would be deliberate, whether to obey and follow God's ways, are to abandon them for the pagan ways of their neighbors.

Moses was well aware of the people's tendency toward disobedience (see [Exodus 32 – 33](#)) and told them that he knew their *rebellion* and their *stubbornness* (v. 27). Humans are prone to self-seeking, rather than loving others. Humans are also prone to follow their own ways, rather than submit to someone telling them something they don't want to hear.

The two words *rebellion* and *stubbornness* could be a hendiadys (using two words to convey one concept) meaning "stubborn rebelliousness". The term *rebellion* (Heb. "meri") emphasizes Israel's open disobedience to Moses' authority. They refused to submit to the order that the LORD established through Moses. This order, which may be summarized by the command to love their neighbor as themselves, was given for their best interest. A community that loves one another will be productive, enjoyable, and supportive. But it requires each person to accept responsibility for others. The term *stubbornness* (Heb. "ōrep ha qāsheh") literally means "stiff-necked" or "hardness of neck." It describes a state of mind that refuses to accept correction and discipline. It indicates someone determined to have their own way, which typically will result in exploitative behavior.

Like oxen who do not go the way their owner wishes, it describes someone who goes their own way instead of the LORD's. It suggests Israel's unwillingness to obey their Suzerain (Ruler) God. The word *stubbornness* is first used in the Old Testament to describe Israel within the context of the golden calf episode where they asked Aaron to fashion a new god for them while Moses was on the mountain to receive the Ten Commandments from the true God ([Exodus 32:9](#); [33:3](#), [5](#); [34:9](#)). Such rebellious and stubborn behavior would have led to Israel's complete destruction had Moses not entreated God on their behalf ([Exodus 32:11-14](#)).

Moses pointed out that *behold, while I am still alive with you today, you have been rebellious against the LORD*. Was then Moses not sure that they would continue *much more, then, after his death*?

For this reason, before Moses died, he commanded the *Levites to assemble to him all the elders of the tribes and the officers* (v. 28), that he might *speak these words in their hearing and call the heavens and the earth to witness against them*. Since the *elders of the tribes and the officers* were leaders working alongside Moses ([Deuteronomy 1](#)), it was necessary for them to hear the *words of the law* to learn it.

So, Moses called on these leaders to listen to the covenant document to make sure they understood all the stipulations therein. By doing so, Moses gave Israel a full education on what was in their best interest, and left no room for confusion. God's people could not say that they did not know His law when they disobeyed it. Therefore, if they followed their own ways, chasing their appetites rather than serving others, God's judgment would be justified, and the *heavens and the earth* would testify *against them*.

Like the Suzerain (Ruler) God (v. 16), Moses knew that *after my death*, the Israelites would continue to *act corruptly and turn from the way which he had commanded them* (v. 29). Moses also knew that the LORD would not leave His covenant people undisciplined. God disciplines those whom He loves ([Hebrews 12:6](#): [Revelation 3:19](#)).

When they broke His covenant, he told them that *evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the LORD*, and this will result in *provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands*. The people's acts of disobedience would cause the LORD to be angry and punish them for the *evil* they had done. This is stipulated in the covenant, that God will turn Israel over to oppressors when they themselves become oppressive ([Deuteronomy 28:25-35](#)).

The Israelites had now been given fair warning—if they violated God's covenant in the future, they would suffer the consequences because God is fair and just. They will next be given a song to remind them of this reality, that their blessing will depend upon their choices. When they enter the land, they will be given a ceremony on two mountains to further emphasize the point ([Deuteronomy 27:11-12](#)). They have the law, which they are to learn, and speak of all day every day ([Deuteronomy 6:4-9](#)) which will be read in

community every seven years ([Deuteronomy 31:10](#)). God uses repetition in multiple mediums in order to get the point to sink in: “Your choice of behavior will have consequences.”

God had given His law to His chosen people and had asked them to choose the ways that lead to life ([Deuteronomy 30:19](#)). If they chose to live in obedience, they would be blessed. If they chose to live in rebellion, they would be cursed and would suffer great and devastating consequences. In either case, they will be His people, and dwell in His love. This is the pattern by which God always operates throughout Scripture. God accepts people into covenant with Him by His love, which is received through faith ([John 3:14-16](#)). Then God provides clear directives that lead to our best self-interest, along with the provision to walk in the ways of life. In the New Testament, believers are given the Spirit to direct them in the ways of life ([Galatians 5:16](#)).

Biblical Text:

²⁴ It came about, when Moses finished writing the words of this law in a book until they were complete, ²⁵ that Moses commanded the Levites who carried the ark of the covenant of the Lord, saying, ²⁶ “Take this book of the law and place it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may remain there as a witness against you. ²⁷ For I know your rebellion and your stubbornness; behold, while I am still alive with you today, you have been rebellious against the Lord; how much more, then, after my death? ²⁸ Assemble to me all the elders of your tribes and your officers, that I may speak these words in their hearing and call the heavens and the earth to witness against them. ²⁹ For I know that after my death you will act corruptly and turn from the way which I have commanded you; and evil will befall you in the latter days, for you will do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord, provoking Him to anger with the work of your hands.”