



Deuteronomy - Chapter Thirty Four

VI Deuteronomy 31:1-34:12 Succession of Leadership (continues/concludes)

Summary of Chapter Thirty Four

Moses dies and is buried on Mount Nebo, overlooking the Promised Land.

VI.d Deuteronomy 34:1-12 - Moses Dies and Is Buried in the Land of Moab

Refer to the chapter summary above.

¹ Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho, and the Lord showed him the whole land: Gilead as far as Dan, ² all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, ³ the Negeb, and the Plain – that is, the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees – as far as Zoar.

Deuteronomy 34:1-3

Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah. As Israel camped on the plains of Moab, Moses climbed the heights of Mount Nebo from which he could see all of the Promised Land. Many believe this to be the same location that the Devil undertook the temptation of Jesus to show him <<*all the kingdoms of the world*>> (Luke 4:5). As with that occasion, there may be something supernatural in being able to see so much of the land from one relatively low location. This was God's sweet grace to Moses. Although he could not set foot in the Promised Land, God allowed him to see it. Standing on the peak of Nebo in the range of mountains known as Pisgah, Moses stood in what is the modern nation of Jordan, looking towards the Promised Land of Canaan.

Gilead as far as Dan. **Gilead** is the name given generally to the Transjordanian territory. The tribe of **Dan** originally was allotted land in the southern part of Israel, but migrated to the north hundreds of years after this; refer to Judges Chapter 18.

The Western Sea is a reference to the Mediterranean Sea.

The Negeb is the arid land across the south, which is mostly desert but was populated by mostly nomadic tribes.

The valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees. Jericho would be the first city that Israel would conquer in its quest for the Promised Land.

As far as Zoar. Zoar was in a fertile valley and was part of the land in which Lot settled prior to the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

⁴ The Lord said to him, ‘This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, saying, “I will give it to your descendants”; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.’

Deuteronomy 34:4

This is the land of which I swore to Abraham. Deuteronomy begins and ends with the theme of the land promised by God; refer also to Deuteronomy 1:7-8. These words, being in the present tense, were spoken to Moses at the summit of Mount Nebo as he looked westward and saw the Promised Land. The list of places here follows a large anticlockwise circle from the north to the south. In this sweeping panorama, Moses saw the scope of the entire Promised Land.

I will give it to your descendants. God **swore** to give the land to the descendants of **Abraham**, **Isaac**, and **Jacob**, and now the promise was going to be fulfilled. Moses was allowed to take the descendants of these patriarchs up to the threshold of the Promised Land, but no further.

I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there. What a bitter-sweet moment! Moses saw this, and his heart was thrilled at being able to see the Promised Land as never before. Yet, there was, no doubt, a sadness in his heart, knowing that it was his own sin, his own misrepresentation of God, which led to his not being able to set foot in the Promised Land himself; refer to Numbers 20:7-12. Here he stood so close, yet so far away.

Looking out over the vast panorama, on what must have been a crystal clear day or part of a supernatural apparition, Moses saw the end result of his life’s work, leading the children of Israel to the borders of the Promised Land, where he heard God say, as clearly as he had ever heard God speak, “this is the land.”

⁵ Then Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, at the Lord's command.

Deuteronomy 34:5

The servant of the Lord. This title is reserved for special leaders or others in the service of God, e.g. Abraham (Genesis 26:24), Joshua (Joshua 24:29), King David (2 Samuel 3:18), Israel (Isaiah 41:8-9), and the foreign king Nebuchadnezzar (Jeremiah 25:9).

Moses had no headstone but he does have a great epitaph. It was not:

- Moses, Prince of Egypt.
- Moses, Murderer of an Egyptian.
- Moses, Shepherd in the Wilderness.
- Moses, Spokesman for a Nation.
- Moses, Great Leader.
- Moses, Miracle Worker.
- Moses, True Prophet.
- Moses, the Man Who Saw a Piece of God's Glory.
- Moses, Who Never Entered the Promised Land.

At the end of it all, the title was simple: Moses, the servant of the Lord.

Many of the NT authors introduced themselves as a servant. If one is truly a servant of the Lord, it can be demonstrated by a simple test: by how they react when someone treats them as a servant. Many are pleased to be servants for people or in circumstances of their own choosing. However, that is not really being the servant of the Lord.

Moses died just as God promised. The promises of God are sure, including his more severe promises. It all happened at the Lord's command.

Literally, the phrase at the Lord's command means upon the mouth of the Lord. From this, ancient Jewish traditions say that Moses died as God took away his soul with a kiss. The medieval Jewish rabbi Maimonides wrote that of the 903 different ways to die, this was the best.

According to ancient Jewish legends - which should be regarded only as legends - the death of Moses was tender and full of God's compassion. "In the meanwhile, Moses' time was at an end. A voice from heaven resounded, saying: 'Why, Moses, dost thou strive in vain? Thy last second is at hand.' Moses instantly stood up for prayer, and said: 'Lord of the world! Be mindful of the day on which Thou didst reveal Thyself to me in the bush of thorns, and be mindful also of the day when I ascended into heaven and during forty days partook of neither food nor drink. Thou, Gracious and Merciful, deliver me not

into the hand of [Satan].’ God replied: ‘I have heard thy prayer. I Myself shall attend to thee and bury thee.’ Moses now sanctified himself as do the Seraphim that surround the Divine Majesty, whereupon God from the highest heavens revealed himself to receive Moses’ soul. When Moses beheld the Holy One, blessed be His Name, he fell upon his face and said: ‘Lord of the world! In love didst Thou create the world, and in love Thou guidest it. Treat me also with love, and deliver me not into the hands of the Angel of Death.’ A heavenly voice sounded and said: ‘Moses, be not afraid. “Thy righteousness shall go before thee; the glory of the Lord shall be thy rearward.”’” It also states, “With God descended from heaven three angels, Michael, Gabriel, and Zagzagel. Gabriel arranged Moses’ couch, Michael spread upon it a purple garment, and Zagzagel laid down a woolen pillow. God stationed Himself over Moses’ head, Michael to his right, Gabriel to his left, and Zagzagel at his feet, whereupon God addressed Moses: ‘Cross thy feet,’ and Moses did so. He then said, ‘Fold thy hands and lay them upon thy breast,’ and Moses did so. Then God said, ‘Close thine eyes,’ and Moses did so. Then God spake to Moses’ soul: ‘My daughter, one hundred and twenty years had I decreed that thou shouldst dwell in this righteous man’s body, but hesitate not now to leave it, for thy time has run....I Myself shall take thee to the highest heavens and let thee dwell under the Throne of My Glory’...When Moses heard these words, he permitted his soul to leave him, saying to her: ‘Return to thy rest, O my soul, for the Lord hath dealt bountifully with thee.’ God thereupon took Moses’ soul by kissing him on the mouth.” (Ginzberg, Legends of the Jews).

⁶ He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor, but no one knows his burial place to this day. ⁷ Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died; his sight was unimpaired and his vigour had not abated. ⁸ The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab for thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended.

Deuteronomy 34:6-8

He was buried in a valley in the land of Moab. Unlike Joseph, whose remains were eventually buried in the land in Joshua 24:32, Moses is buried by God himself outside of the land.

Notably, the Lord buried Moses. This was more complicated than it sounds, because the devil contended with God over the body of Moses. Jude speaks of an occasion when Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses. Apparently, there was a contention over the body of Moses and, according to Jude, Michael the archangel won this contest as he appealed to the Lord’s authority: <<*The Lord rebuke you!*>> (Jude 9). Yet why Michael contended with Satan over the body of Moses is less clear. Some

say that the devil wanted to use Moses' body as an object of worship to lead Israel astray into idolatry. Others think that Satan wanted to desecrate the body of Moses, and claimed a right to it because Moses had murdered an Egyptian. But consider that God had another purpose for Moses' body, which Satan wanted to defeat: Moses appears in bodily form with Elijah, whose body was caught up to heaven in 2 Kings Chapter 2, at the Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-3); and many consider Moses and Elijah to be the two witnesses of Revelation Chapter 11. Apparently, God had a purpose to fulfil with the body of Moses before the time of general resurrection, so God made special provision to bury the body of Moses himself. And, perhaps, God preserved the body of Moses in some way. God wanted to protect the body of Moses, so no one knows his grave to this day. Seemingly, they searched for it, as would be expected, out of a desire to memorialise this great leader of the nation.



A memorial stone claiming to mark the burial place of Moses on Mount Nebo

Beth-peor was the place the Israelites encamped in preparation for their crossing into the Promised Land. It was also the location of another act of rebellion in Israel's wilderness years, when Israel worshipped the Baal of Peor; refer to Numbers 25:1-5. Beth-peor means 'house or temple of Peor,' perhaps referring to the altars Balaam had built there.

But no one knows his burial place to this day. This statement indicates that this record was written many years after the death of Moses and many believe it was added by Joshua after the land was settled and the tribal allocations made. As already stated, the location remains unknown but certain places are identified as being the likely location, mostly for drawing in tourists and pilgrims.

Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. Moses' life was neatly divided into three equal parts. He spent 40 years as the crown prince of Egypt, 40 years as a humble shepherd in the wilderness, and 40 years leading the children of Israel to their destiny in the Promised Land. The first two thirds were in preparation for the last one third. Moses was willing to let God prepare him for 80 years.

His sight was unimpaired and his vigour had not abated. This confirms what was observed at Deuteronomy 31:2b: <<*I am no longer able to get about*>>. Moses was not hindered by physical infirmity, but by the command of God: <<*the Lord has told me, "You shall not cross over this Jordan"*>> (Deuteronomy 31:2c).

The Israelites wept for Moses in the plains of Moab for thirty days; then the period of mourning for Moses was ended. As great as Moses was, the days of mourning for him ended. It was time to move on. God's programme did not end with Moses, nor does it end with any man. The torch is passed on and God's work must be continued by those who come afterwards

⁹ Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, because Moses had laid his hands on him; and the Israelites obeyed him, doing as the Lord had commanded Moses.

Deuteronomy 34:9

Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom. On the commissioning of Joshua to succeed Moses, refer to Deuteronomy 31:7-8, 31:14, and 31:23. On his being full of the spirit, refer to Exodus 28:3, 31:3 and 35:31, Micah 3:8, Luke 1:15, and Acts 6:3. Wisdom was one of the essential qualities for any leader: <<*Choose for each of your tribes individuals who are wise, discerning, and reputable to be your leaders*>> (Deuteronomy 1:13).

Moses had laid his hands on him. Moses' prayer for Joshua was answered. Joshua was indeed full of the spirit of wisdom. Best of all, the Israelites obeyed him. The true test of leadership is to see if people actually follow.

The laying on of hands by church leaders and elders has become the normal method for commissioning people for the work of Christ. It is also used in healing through the Holy Spirit and as blessing for those who come to faith. For example: <<*They brought to him a deaf man who had an impediment in his speech; and they begged him to lay his hand on him*>> (Mark 7:32), <<*Then*

Peter and John laid their hands on them, and they received the Holy Spirit. Now when Simon saw that the Spirit was given through the laying on of the apostles' hands, he offered them money, saying, 'Give me also this power so that anyone on whom I lay my hands may receive the Holy Spirit'>> (Acts 8:17-19), <<Do not neglect the gift that is in you, which was given to you through prophecy with the laying on of hands by the council of elders>> (1 Timothy 4:14), <<For this reason I remind you to rekindle the gift of God that is within you through the laying on of my hands>> (2 Timothy 1:6), and: <<Therefore let us go on towards perfection, leaving behind the basic teaching about Christ, and not laying again the foundation: repentance from dead works and faith towards God, instruction about baptisms, laying on of hands, resurrection of the dead, and eternal judgement>> (Hebrews 6:1-2).

¹⁰ Never since has there arisen a prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. ¹¹ He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt, against Pharaoh and all his servants and his entire land, ¹² and for all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

Deuteronomy 34:10-12

There has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses. There was an expectation that God will raise up a prophet like Moses; refer to Deuteronomy 18:15-19 and the associated comments. Ultimately Jesus alone fulfils this prophecy: <<And they asked him, 'What then? Are you Elijah?' He said, 'I am not.' 'Are you the prophet?' He answered, 'No'>> (John 1:21), and: <<Moses said, "The Lord your God will raise up for you from your own people a prophet like me. You must listen to whatever he tells you. And it will be that everyone who does not listen to that prophet will be utterly rooted out from the people." And all the prophets, as many as have spoken, from Samuel and those after him, also predicted these days>> (Acts 3:22-24). Joshua was a capable leader for Israel, and God's work went on, but that did not diminish Moses' unique legacy.

Whom the Lord knew face to face. Moses was unique because of his personal intimacy with God. The term face to face does not literally mean 'physical face to physical face,' but it has the idea of free and unhindered communication. Moses had a remarkably intimate relationship with God: <<Thus the Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, as one speaks to a friend>> (Exodus 33:11).

He was unequalled for all the signs and wonders that the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt. Moses was unique in the number and kind of miraculous works he was associated with.

For all the mighty deeds and all the terrifying displays of power that Moses performed in the sight of all Israel. Moses was unique in the power and authority with which we led the nation of Israel.

There were greater rulers over Israel than Moses, greater leaders, greater prophets, and greater priests. But before the coming of Jesus the Messiah, there was never one man who held all these offices so gloriously as Moses did. He was a true and faithful servant of God and his passing marked a major event in Israelite history. His legacy, however, lives on.