

## The Death of Moses

### Deuteronomy 34

**Deuteronomy 34:1-9** – *“Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is across from Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land of Gilead as far as Dan, <sup>2</sup> all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, <sup>3</sup> the South, and the plain of the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. <sup>4</sup> Then the Lord said to him, “This is the land of which I swore to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have caused you to see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.”*

<sup>5</sup> *So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. <sup>6</sup> And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day. <sup>7</sup> Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor diminished. <sup>8</sup> And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. So the days of weeping and mourning for Moses ended.*

<sup>9</sup> *Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses.”*

### Background Notes

Who wrote the book of Deuteronomy? Moses was the author. Moses wrote the Pentateuch, the first five books of the Bible. But what about Deuteronomy 34, that records Moses' death? Did Moses write about his own death? He could have. The Lord could have revealed to Moses ahead of time what to write about his own death. But probably Joshua (or another inspired writer) wrote this chapter. The fact that there is more than one inspired writer for a book in the Bible is not a denial of the doctrine of the inspiration of Scripture. God is the ultimate author of **all** His Word, and He is sovereign. He can use any number of inspired writers - as He so chooses.

What about verse 7? *“Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor diminished.”* Back in Deuteronomy 31:21 Moses said, *“I am one hundred and twenty years old today. I can no longer go out and come in. Also the Lord has said to me, ‘You shall not cross over this Jordan.’”* What's the answer here? Did Moses experience a miraculous rejuvenation? As I mentioned when we studied chapter 31, when Moses said that he was “no longer able to come and go,” that didn't mean he was physically incapable of travel. He meant that the Lord had told him that he would not be allowed to go across the Jordan River and enter the Land. That was God's discipline for Moses' sin of disobedience to God's specific command to **speak** to the rock to obtain water for the people at Meribah (see Numbers 20).

So Moses was given a view of the Land from the east side of the Jordan River, from Mount Nebo, which is opposite Jericho. Then Moses died, and was buried by the Lord Himself.

The view of the Land that Moses got from the top of Mount Nebo was magnificent, and it is still a magnificent panorama. On a clear day you can see north to the ancient tribal territories of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Naphtali, and Dan - and all the way up in the Mount Hermon range (v1-2). You can look west to the central mountains of the Land, beyond which lie the western lowlands and the Mediterranean Sea (v20). To the south your eye moves from Jericho, still the City of Palms, to the southern end of the Dead Sea and Zoar (v3).

Moses did not see all the territory that God gave Israel under the Abrahamic Covenant in Genesis 15, but he saw the portion of the Land that the children of Israel were immediately going to conquer and possess in the Conquest under Joshua.

Before we go to our doctrinal points, let me ask you a question: will Moses ever get into the Land that he only saw from a distance? Yes, of course he will! In the coming earthly millennial kingdom, when all believers will reign with Christ in their resurrected bodies, Moses will be there. And remember, Moses was with the Lord on the Mount of Transfiguration. So Moses got into the Land then – and he will be there in the kingdom, along with all believers.

## Doctrinal Points

### 1. The death of Moses was a test of the children of Israel (v5-9).

If you go to the country of Jordan today, the tour guides will show the supposed grave of Moses. Is it authentic? Of course not! Verse 6 says that no one knows his grave to this day. That was true when this verse was written and it is still true today.

Why did God bury Moses privately, and not let anyone know the place? One answer is that the Lord knew exactly what would happen if people knew where the great leader Moses was buried. His tomb would become a shrine, and people would worship Moses - and the place as well. So the Lord buried Moses in an unmarked grave, and only the Lord knows its location.

How did God bury Moses? Did the Lord appear as a theophany and manually bury him? The Bible doesn't tell us. One good possibility is that the Lord used angels to bury Moses. That would help explain the statement in the book of Jude about the body of Moses. Jude, verse 9: *"Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, 'The Lord rebuke you!'"* Why would the archangel Michael argue with Satan about the body of Moses? Most likely Satan wanted to make the burial place known, so that people's hearts would be drawn away to worship the great human leader rather than worship the living Lord.

The people mourned for Moses for thirty days (v8), as they had mourned for Aaron (Numbers 20:29). Thirty days was a long period of mourning, and it was only done for great people.

Now that Moses was dead, the question was: would Israel follow Joshua, as Moses had instructed them to do? This is still an important question today, whenever there is a transfer of leadership within a church or a Christian ministry. Will the people support and follow a new leader? Sometimes they don't. The new leader may be just as good and faithful and committed, but sometimes the dynamics are just not there. The Lord knew what He was doing when He chose Joshua to follow Moses. Verse 9: *"Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the Lord had commanded Moses."*

"The people did as the Lord commanded" – and that's good news! The children of Israel passed the test and followed Joshua. The death of Moses was a test for the children of Israel.

## 2. The life of Moses is a type of the life of Christ.

**Deuteronomy 34:10-12** - *"But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, <sup>11</sup> in all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, before Pharaoh, before all his servants, and in all his land, <sup>12</sup> and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel."*

Does verse 10 contradict what our Lord Jesus said about John the Baptist in Matthew 11:11? *"Assuredly I say to you, among those born of women, there is not risen one greater than John the Baptist."* Not a contradiction! The Lord's point was that John the Baptist had the greatest position of any of the Old Testament prophets, because he was the forerunner of the Messiah. In addition, Deuteronomy 34:10 says that up to the point in time when Deuteronomy was written, no prophet like Moses had arisen.

Moses was indeed unique - not only because of all the powerful miracles that the Lord did through him against Pharaoh and the land of Egypt at the time of the Exodus, but also because the Lord spoke to Moses face to face! *"So the Lord spoke to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend" (Exodus 33:11)*. I take it that the Lord appeared to Moses in a "theophany" (a manifestation of God that is tangible to the human senses), and He spoke with Moses in Hebrew.

Another way in which Moses is special is that his overall life typifies or illustrates some aspects of the life of Christ. I believe that a divinely intended spiritual picture of Christ emerges in the parallels in their lives. Here are some similarities in the life of Moses and the life of Christ.

1. Both were divinely chosen to be deliverers.

2. Both experienced a time of rejection from the very people they specifically came to help.
3. Both acquired a Gentile bride during their time of rejection. The Gentile bride of Christ is, of course, the Church.
  
4. Both were faithful over “the house” (the people) they were appointed to lead. The author of Hebrews may have had that in mind in Hebrews 3:1-6, *“Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, <sup>2</sup> who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house. <sup>3</sup> For this One has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, inasmuch as He who built the house has more honor than the house. <sup>4</sup> For every house is built by someone, but He who built all things is God. <sup>5</sup> And Moses indeed was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which would be spoken afterward, <sup>6</sup> but Christ as a Son over His own house.”*
  
5. Both Moses and the Lord Jesus had, or will have, a second coming when the Jewish people will have a change of heart and receive the Leader they once rejected.

In the life of Moses we see a type, or illustration, of the life of Christ.

## Practical Application

### Don't enshrine people!

If the Lord had not buried Moses in an unmarked grave, the Jewish people would have enshrined his body - and his gravesite as well. Enshrining people and places takes away from the glory of God, and it lowers the person of Jesus Christ.

Remember what happened on the Mount of Transfiguration, when Peter suggested that three shrines be built for Moses and Elijah along with Christ? A bright cloud overshadowed them and the voice of God was heard, speaking of Jesus Christ: *“This is my Beloved Son, in whom I am well pleased. Listen to Him.”* Then Moses and Elijah disappeared, and only the Lord remained.

The lesson was obvious. Peter had essentially lowered Christ to the level of mere man when he wanted to enshrine Moses and Elijah on the same level as Jesus. Peter meant well, but he was wrong to suggest three shrines where pilgrims would worship and pay devotion to mere humans - and not to **God alone!**

Remember what Jesus said to the Samaritan woman about worship: *“A time is coming when you will worship the Father neither on this mountain nor in Jerusalem... a time is coming and has now come when true worshipers will worship the Father in the Spirit and in truth, for they are the kind of worshipers the Father seeks.”* (John 4:21,23).

So - **don't enshrine people**, either during life, or at the place of their death!