

DEUTERONOMY

Chapter 34

The Death of Moses

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 all the 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. 4 And the LORD said to him, “This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, ‘I will give it to your offspring.’ I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there.” 5 So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD, 6 and he buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor; but no one knows the place of his burial to this day. 7 Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated. 8 And the people of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. Then the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended. 9 And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him. So the people of Israel obeyed him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses. 10 And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, 11 none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, 12 and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

34:1-4 The Lord may have granted Moses a onetime, unlimited view of the land as well as a onetime view into the future of Israel’s occupation. (TLSB)

34:1 *Moses climbed Mount Nebo.* In obedience to the Lord’s command in 32:48–52. (CSB)

The mountain traditionally identified as Mount Nebo is located about twelve miles east of where the Jordan River enters the Dead Sea, and rises more than 2600 feet above sea level. The Dead Sea is the lowest spot in the world, 1300 feet below sea level. What a dramatic view of this land that Moses long to see all his life! (PBC)

as far as Dan – To see as far north as Dan or far west as the Mediterranean would have required a supernatural gift from the Lord. (PBC)

34:4 *I let you see it* – By inviting Moses to view the extent of the land, the Lord showed one last act of kindness to this special leader of His people. But maybe it was more than that. Biblical precept, as well as later Roman law, let a man “view” land he was about to possess. Perhaps this was the Lord’s way of giving Moses a legal guarantee that the men and women he led for so long would really inherit the land, though he would die before it happened. (PBC)

The Lord had a far better promised land in mind for Moses. The writer to the Hebrews included Moses on his last list of believers throughout the OT era – Abel, Enoch, Noah, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Joseph, and many others. “All these people were still living by faith when they died,” the author wrote. (PBC)

They did not receive the things promised; they only saw them and welcomed them from a distance. And they admitted that they were aliens and strangers on earth... they were longing for a better country – a heavenly one. Therefore God is not ashamed to be called their God, for He has prepared a city for them. (Hebrews 11:13,16). (PBC)

you shall not go over there – While Moses had done many great things for God and by God's help in leading the Israelites, but there was an incompleteness about his work. Moses had struck the rock twice instead of once like God had told him when water was needed in the desert. There are consequences for sin and this was the price that Moses paid. (CSB)

Moses was allowed to stand in the Promised Land at Christ's transfiguration, however (Mt 17:1–8). (TLSB)

34:5 *servant of the LORD*. A special title used to refer to those whom the Lord, as the Great King, has taken into his service; they serve as members of God's royal administration. For example, it was used especially of Abraham (Ge 26:24), Moses (Ex 14:31), Joshua (Jos 24:29), David (2Sa 7:5), the prophets (2Ki 9:7), Israel collectively (Isa 41:8), and even a foreign king the Lord used to carry out his purposes (Jer 25:9). See notes on Ex 14:31; Isa 42:1–4. (CSB)

The final measure of Moses' long life was that he was the Lord's servant. Moses was in good company. Abraham (Gen 26:24), Joshua (Joshua 24:29), David (2 Sam 7:5), the prophets (2 Kings 9:7), and Paul (Romans 1:1) were also called the Lord's servants. (PBC)

34:6 *no one knows the place of his burial* – Its exact location was not revealed. From the letter of Jude, v.9, we know that the archangel Michael contended with the devil for the body of Moses. (Kretzmann)

LXX takes the verb impersonally ("they buried"), and some Jewish commentators, believe angels were involved in the burial. Unlike Elijah, Moses was not bodily translated into heaven. His burial by the Lord has been interpreted to mean that his lifeless body was immune to decay (cf Jude). Aphrahat says, "Two goodly benefits did his Lord accomplish for Moses in not making known his tomb to the children of Israel. He rejoiced that his adversaries should not know it, and cast forth his bones from his tomb; and in the second place, that the children of his should not know it, and make his tomb a place of worship." (TLSB)

34:7 *a hundred and twenty years old*. Moses lived well beyond eighty years. His 120 years divides neatly into three forty-year spans: the first, in Egypt as a young man in Pharaoh's household; the second, in Midian shepherding his father-in-law's flocks; the third, in the wilderness leading Israel to the edge of Canaan (Exodus 7:7; Acts 7:23-30) (PBC)

eye was undimmed – Moses is described as having such vigor that his eyes were not dim and the appearance of his face had not changed when he died in his one hundred and twentieth year. This is recounted as an outstanding miracle, since it is written that the rest of the fathers, as Isaac, Jacob, Eli, and others, had dimming eyes because of old age;² and to the present day those who are a little more advanced in age fail in eyesight and appearance. (Leupold)

Until his death, Moses was blessed by the Lord with the stamina and vigor to lead God's people. (TLSB)

34:8 *Israel wept*. Most commentators, Jewish and Christian, agree that Joshua wrote this chapter and added it as a sort of postscript to the five books of Moses. (PBC)

34:9 *Joshua the son of Nun was full of the Spirit* – Just as the Lord called Moses and the Holy Spirit sanctified him for the Lord’s work through the Word, now the Holy Spirit would sanctify Joshua to lead God’s people. (TLSB)

laid his hands on him – Signified the public and final transfer of authority to Joshua. Cyril of Jerusalem: “In the days of Moses, the Spirit was given by laying on of hands.... And on you also, who are about to be baptized, shall His grace come” (NPNF 2 7:122). (TLSB)

34:10 *no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses.* (CSB)

face to face. See Nu 12:8 and note. (CSB)

This Moses very great and special. But he still needed Joshua to complete the trip to the Promised Land. And he needed Jesus (the second Joshua) to come and make the trip to heaven complete. On Transfiguration Sunday we see Moses again face-to-face with God and this time can see the completion (death and resurrection) of Jesus’ ministry. That completion will allow all of us to one day see God face-to-face as made our exodus from this earth.

34:12 *there has not arisen a prophet since.* Until Jesus came, no one was superior to Moses. See Heb 3:1–6, where Moses the “servant” (Heb 3:5) is contrasted with Christ the “son” (Heb 3:6). (CSB)

During the entire wilderness journey. Only one prophet is greater than Moses, by his own testimony, namely, the only-begotten Son, who is in the bosom of the Father. Through His life, suffering, death, resurrection, and exaltation He earned for us the eternal redemption from the power of death and hell. (Kretzmann)

Moses’ service was unique because he enjoyed a more intimate relationship with the Lord than any OT prophet before or after him. No other prophet could claim what Moses claimed: “The Lord would speak to Moses face to face, as a man speaks with his friends (Exodus 33:11). Moses’ service was unequalled also because he performed more miraculous signs by the Lord’s power than an OT prophet before or after him. (PBC)

Ch 34 The conclusion of Dt signals a transition in leadership from Moses to Joshua, a transition from the oral communication of the Word to the written communication of the Word, a transition from the wilderness wanderings to the eventual occupation of the Promised Land. Moses’ final messages to the people include both warnings (in the words of a song) and promises (in the words of a blessing). The promises in Moses’ blessing point to the One “counted worthy of more glory than Moses” (Heb 3:3), namely Christ, because while Moses was a faithful servant of God who spoke God’s Word, Christ is Son of God (Heb 3:6), whom God appointed heir of all things (Heb 1:2). “For the law was given through Moses; grace and truth came through Jesus Christ” (Jn 1:17). Although Moses disqualified himself from entering the Promised Land because of his disobedience, God allowed him to see firsthand the fulfillment of all Scripture, for Moses and us, at Christ’s transfiguration. • Father, when I close my eyes in death, awaken me to behold Your glory and see You face-to-face, through Your Son, Jesus Christ. Amen. (TLSB)