

## Sermon: Moses Dies (Deuteronomy 34 v1-12)

The death of Moses might seem a strange topic for a sermon but let's see where we go.

Moses has lived a long life, and now he dies just before what we can see as the culmination of his life's work.

John Goldingay writes of being told by a Rector that Moses life falls into 3 sections.

1. Learning to be somebody (his years of privilege in Egypt)



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2. Learning to be nobody (the shepherd years in Midian)



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3. Showing what God can do with someone who has learned to be nobody (going back to Egypt and leading the people to the Promised Land)



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Over the last few weeks we've discovered that phase three wasn't an easy journey. There were times when the people wanted to turn back to Egypt and times when they turned away from God in their worship but now we reach the end of the journey.

Moses goes to the top of Pisgah 'and the Lord showed him the whole land.' (v1) Wow!



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The distance Moses could see wasn't so great but it symbolised so much more and Moses looked to the North, West and South. It's easy to get caught up in the next part of this story and see this was a difficult time for Moses. But no, it is a vision to bring joy to Moses. He has fulfilled the task of bringing the people to the Promised Land.

But then God says to Moses: "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.'" (v4) That first part is a record of the fulfilment of

## The Promises

- **To Abraham:** On that day the LORD made a covenant with Abram, saying, 'To your descendants I give this land, from the river of Egypt to the great river, the river Euphrates, the land of the Kenites .... and the Jebusites. (Gen 15:18–21)
- **To Isaac:** ..to you and to your descendants I will give all these lands, and I will fulfil the oath that I swore to your father Abraham. I will ...give to your offspring all these lands (Gen 26:3-4)
- **To Jacob** (in a dream): And the LORD stood beside him and said, 'I am the LORD, the God of Abraham your father and the God of Isaac; the land on which you lie I will give to you and to your offspring (Gen 28:13)

God's promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob, promises made long before Moses was born. It shows us that God's promises endure and are true and trustworthy.

Why was Moses not to enter the Promised Land? God had

told Moses before that ““Because you did not trust in me, to show my holiness before the eyes of the Israelites, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them.”” (*Numbers 20 v12*)

It is a theme that has been returned to several times in *Deuteronomy* and in *Chapter 31*: Moses anoints Joshua to become leader after him and *Chapter 32* concludes with God telling Moses again he will not enter but will be allowed to see it from Mount Nebo.

But is it simply a punishment or is there more to this?

Moses had fulfilled his role – Moses was called to lead the people to the Promised Land and he has done just that.

Was it was time for a new leader with a different way of doing things? We see this in business all the time: one leader brings the company through a period of transition and then someone new comes in to take everything forward afterwards. Perhaps Moses was a leader equipped to lead through the difficult years of wandering; to take them from slavery to their own land, not a leader to help them make the transition to a settled lifestyle. What is clear is that Joshua is to be the one to lead the people into the Promised Land (see *Deuteronomy 3 v28*)

And so Moses dies on the mountain. It's not a death of old age for we are told that he was full of vigour and his sight was unabated (v7) Moses is buried there but no one knows where his body is laid. It cannot become a place of pilgrimage for it is unknown. Instead we are called to think on the life and example of Moses, a servant of the Lord.

After 30 days of mourning, Joshua is confirmed as their leader and takes them into the Promised Land. The baton has been passed. It is a new period in the story of the people of Israel and a new person is there to help guide them.

Today we have reached the end of our journey through the stories of the lives of the patriarchs (and some of the matriarchs), the complexities of family life and their struggles

- Abraham and Sarah who tried to fulfil God's promise for themselves (enter Hagar and Ishmael)
- Isaac and Rebecca who didn't handle the rivalry between their sons Jacob and Esau very well
- Jacob who stole his brother's birth right and had to flee
- Joseph who kept putting his foot in it - making his brothers angry and jealous
- Joseph's brothers who sold him into slavery
- Moses, who burned with anger as a young man

And yet in their stories we also find many positives:

**God fulfils his promises**

- Abraham and Sarah would have a son Isaac
- The descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob would enter the Promised Land

**God works in and through us**

- Rebecca would pray for both her sons
- Joseph would grow into a person of wisdom and humility

- Moses would lead the people to freedom

**God saves us**

- Hagar and Ishmael would be saved by God in the wilderness
- Joseph was saved by being sold into slavery
- The people of Egypt and Joseph's family would be saved from the famine
- The people of Israel would be saved from slavery

As we've journeyed through these passages of the Old Testament, we have seen how our lives are part of a much bigger and longer story.

The story of God's relationship with humanity and our relationship with God.

The story of our human frailty and of God's compassion.

The story of human selfishness and of God's mercy and forgiveness.

The story of God's faithfulness.

The story of the hope we have in God.