

These passages from three of the last four chapters of Deuteronomy touch on the last acts and words of Moses to the children of Israel as he turns over the responsibility of leading them into Canaan to Joshua. The final verses of Deuteronomy give us an epitaph of the kind of man that Moses was and how God used him.

Deuteronomy 31

1 And Moses went and spake these words unto all Israel.

Verses 1-8 are Moses' presentation of Joshua to Israel as his successor. He is acknowledging that he is nearing the end of his life and cannot be the one that will bring them into the land of Canaan. These are his words as he describes what the LORD is going to do for Israel through Joshua.

2 And he said unto them, I *am* an hundred and twenty years old this day; I can no more go out and come in: also the LORD hath said unto me, Thou shalt not go over this Jordan.

“And he said unto them, I *am* an hundred and twenty years old this day” – Moses gives two reasons for why he cannot be the one to bring the children of Israel into Canaan. The first reason is his age – he is 120 years old and will soon die (Deut. 34:7). Thus we can divide the life of Moses into three 40 year periods. His first 40 years of his life was spent in Egypt (In Acts 7:23, Stephen gives the age of Moses as 40 when he has to flee Egypt). The next 40 years were spent tending the flock of his father-in-law in Midian (Acts 7:30) when he encountered the LORD in the burning bush. Moses' final 40 years were spent in the wilderness with the children of Israel.

“I can no more go out and come in” – The expression refers to the duties and tasks that one needed to do each day. Because of his age, Moses could no longer do the things that he once did and fulfill his responsibilities as the leader of Israel. Despite the fact that he was in good health for his age (Deut. 34:7), his age was preventing him being what the people needed him to be.

“also the LORD hath said unto me, Thou shalt not go over this Jordan” – The second reason Moses cannot be the one to bring them into Canaan is because the LORD had forbidden it (Num. 20:12). The second time that Israel had complained to Moses about the lack of water the LORD had commanded Moses to provide water for the people by speaking to the rock (the first time Moses was to strike the rock). However, Moses had become angry and disobeyed the LORD by striking the rock instead of speaking to it. Thus the LORD would not allow Moses to enter the land of Canaan because of that sin.

3 The LORD thy God, he will go over before thee, *and* he will destroy these nations from before thee, and thou shalt possess them: *and* Joshua, he shall go over before thee, as the LORD hath said.

“The LORD thy God, he will go over before thee” – The people may have been afraid to continue without Moses to lead them, so he now points to the true leader and power that has freed them from the bondage of Egypt, led them for the last 40 years in the wilderness and will now bring them into the land of Canaan: the LORD. Moses had only been the human spokesperson for the LORD, a spokesperson that could and would be replaced.

“and he will destroy these nations from before thee, and thou shalt possess them” – It was not Moses' leadership skills that had brought them this far and it would not have been his leadership skills that would have enabled them to possess the land. Rather, it will be the LORD Who will destroy the nations living in Canaan and will enable the children of Israel to possess the land.

“and Joshua, he shall go over before thee, as the LORD hath said” – The LORD was appointing Joshua to be one who would lead the people into the promised land instead after Moses' death.

Verses 4-15: Moses stresses that Israel should not be afraid because the LORD would be the One that would conquer the nations of Canaan. He then commissions Joshua with the responsibility of bringing the children of Israel into Canaan to claim their inheritance. Moses then wrote the law down and placed the document in the custody of the priests, giving them the responsibility of reading the law to Israel every seven years so that they may obey it. The LORD then commands Moses to bring Joshua to the tabernacle and present him before the LORD.

Verses 16-30: The LORD predicts that the children of Israel will stray from the LORD after Moses' death and follow other gods, bringing the wrath of the LORD upon them. In order to remind them of the error of their ways, the LORD has Moses write a song and teach it to Israel as a testimony that He knew they would rebel against Him. The words of this song are recorded in chapter 32.

Deuteronomy 33

26 *There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky.*

Deuteronomy 33:1-25 records a blessing which Moses pronounced over the children of Israel, which may have been his last recorded words to Israel. The final four verses of this chapter (vs. 26-29) are praise to the LORD apparently intended to encourage Israel to look to the LORD for their strength and help.

“There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun” – The name “Jeshurun” means “the upright one” and is used as a symbolic name for Israel, no doubt to remind them that they must remain faithful to the LORD in order for Him to bless them. Moses is reminding Israel that there is no other God like their God and that they do not need to look to other gods.

“who rideth upon the heaven in thy help” – The LORD traverses the heaven in order to help them. No other god can do this.

“and in his excellency [majesty] on the sky” – Speaks of God's glory as He travels through the sky. Riding the heaven and the sky speaks of the LORD's awesomeness as He comes to Israel's rescue.

27 The eternal God *is thy* refuge, and underneath *are* the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy *them*.

“The eternal God *is thy* refuge” – The LORD is an eternal God – He will never die or become ineffective. This eternal God that they serve is the refuge that they can run to when they encounter any adversity.

“and underneath *are* the everlasting arms” – Not only is He their refuge, but he will cradle them within His arms, which will never cease to hold and support them. His arms will never grow tired or weary.

“and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee” – The LORD will give them victory over their enemies.

“and shall say, Destroy *them*” – The LORD is so powerful that He only has to speak the command and Israel’s enemies will be destroyed.

28 Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob *shall be* upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew.

“Israel then shall dwell in safety alone” – Israel will be able to live securely without the worries of any enemies among them.

“the fountain of Jacob *shall be* upon a land of corn and wine” – “The fountain of Jacob” refers to the descendants that will come from Jacob. The phrase “land of corn and wine” refers to a land of prosperity and fruitfulness, in this case the land of Canaan. The people of Israel will be able to dwell in the land of Canaan, a land flowing with milk and honey (Ex. 3:8).

“also his heavens shall drop down dew” – This phrase could refer to the blessings that the LORD will drop from heaven like dew. It also could refer to the literal heavens (the sky) dropping dew (rain) onto the land to nourish their crops, which is also a blessing from the LORD.

29 Happy *art* thou, O Israel: who *is* like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who *is* the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.

“Happy *art* thou, O Israel: who *is* like unto thee” – The Hebrew word for “happy” is sometimes translated “blessed.” Moses’ is exclaiming how blessed Israel is, and that there has been no nation on earth as blessed as they are.

“O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who *is* the sword of thy excellency!” – The reason Moses called them blessed/happy is because they have been protected by the LORD. The LORD has been their shield to help them and the sword of their excellency (majesty). The LORD has not shown any other nation such favor.

“and thine enemies shall be found liars [*to be deceitful; cringe*] unto thee” – The Hebrew word for “found liars” can mean “to be deceitful” or “to cringe.” Some commentators give it the meaning of “a forced submission” (that is, against their will). Some translations thus render the phrase “shall be found liars unto thee” as “shall submit themselves to you.” The idea seems to be that the LORD will enable Israel to conquer their enemies and force them into submission.

“and thou shalt tread upon their high places” – The “high places” is where the heathen traditionally worship, believing that the altitude brings them closer to their gods. The LORD will enable Israel to tread or trample these sacred worship places as if they were nothing, showing disregard to the heathen gods.

Deuteronomy 34:1-9: Chapter 34 records the death of Moses. The LORD takes Moses to the top of Mt. Nebo (in the plains of Moab near Jericho) and shows him the land that had been promised to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob and their descendants. Then Moses died at the age of 120 and the LORD buried him in a place that is unknown to this day. The children of Israel mourned for Moses 30 days and then Joshua assumed his position as leader of the people of the LORD. The final three verses (v. 10-12) of this chapter (and book) are an epitaph to Moses.

Deuteronomy 34

10 And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face,

The word for “prophet” means “spokesperson” and thus Moses was a prophet because he spoke for the LORD. The first reason given by the writer of this final chapter (obviously not Moses) for Moses being the greatest prophet is because he and the LORD spoke to one another face to face. Moses has only been surpassed by John the Baptist (**Matt. 11:11** “*Verily I say unto you, Among them that are born of women there hath not risen a greater than John the Baptist: notwithstanding he that is least in the kingdom of heaven is greater than he*”) and Jesus Christ Himself (**Deut. 18:15** “*The LORD thy God will raise up unto thee a Prophet from the midst of thee, of thy brethren, like unto me; unto him ye shall hearken*”).

11 In all the signs and the wonders, which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt to Pharaoh, and to all his servants, and to all his land,

The writer then mentions another reason for the greatness of Moses: all the miraculous signs and wonders that the LORD performed through him in front of Pharaoh, the servants of Pharaoh, and all the land of Egypt.

12 And in all that mighty hand, and in all the great terror which Moses shewed in the sight of all Israel.

The writer then mentions the “mighty hand” (great power) that Moses had with God to perform all these signs and wonders as another reason. The final reason mentioned is the “great terror” (fear and reverence) that Israel had for Moses as they saw the great signs and wonders that the LORD performed through him.