

18. The end of Moses' era

March 24, 2011

I think that you all would agree with me on this, finishing well is far more important than starting well. Because when we start something new, everybody is excited for the new thing and start to work on it feverishly, until people lose their momentum or steam. One by one, people start to neglect what they are supposed to do; and pretty soon, that new thing become an old hat. But there are some people who keep their pace, steadily continue their work all the way through to the end. They are the kind of people we all applaud.

Moses was the case in point. His life of 120 years can be divided neatly in three sections:

From his birth to 40 years old, he was the next in line of the Pharaoh of Egypt though he was born as a Hebrew. After he murdered an Egyptian, he had to flee to the Midian desert.

Next 40 years, Moses was rather content being a shepherd who took care of the sheep of his father-in-law Jethro.

The last portion of his 40 years was filled with exciting events after events. Starting with the Burning Bush where he got his call of God to be the leader, prophet, and judge of the Israelites, as well as a friend of God. After God's extraordinary interventions, he and two million Hebrew people were able to exodus from Egypt to the Promised Land. While they were wondering around in the wilderness, all the first generation of the Exodus died with the exceptions of Moses, Joshua and Caleb. Now the people of the new generation were about to enter into the Promised land.

In short, Moses tried to be somebody with his own power, but became nobody; then God used the nobody to bring everybody into the Promised Land.

Three more things must be done before they entered into the Land, teaching the song of warning, the blessings to the tribes, and the death of Moses.

A. YOU WILL CORRUPT

Deuteronomy 31:16-21 And the Lord said to Moses: "Behold, you will rest with your fathers; and this people will rise and play the harlot with the gods of the foreigners of the land, where they go to be among them, and they will forsake Me and break My covenant which I have made with them. 17 Then My anger shall be aroused against them in that day, and I will forsake them, and I will hide My face from them, and they shall be devoured. And many evils and troubles shall befall them, so that they will say in that day, 'Have not these evils come upon us because our God is not among us?' 18 And I will surely hide My face in that day because of all the evil which they have done, in that they have turned to other gods. 19 Now therefore, write down this song for yourselves, and teach it to the children of Israel; put it in their mouths, that this song may be a witness for Me against the children of Israel. 20 When I have brought them to the land flowing with milk and honey, of which I swore to their fathers, and they have eaten and filled themselves and grown fat, then they will turn to other gods and serve them; and they will provoke Me and break My covenant. 21 Then it shall be, when many evils and troubles have come upon them, that this song will testify against them as a witness; for it will not be forgotten in

the mouths of their descendants, for I know the inclination of their behavior today, even before I have brought them to the land of which I swore to give them."

What a prophecy for Moses to hear from the Lord about his people! He was told that the people would betray the Lord after the death of his and Joshua and they would commit idolatry all over the nation.

We need to understand that the Lord's anger does not rise up against His people for no reason, whether they were the Hebrews from the OT or the followers of Jesus in the NT and now – unless they provoke His anger with their disobedience and idolatry.

In v18, the Lord said, *"I will surely hide My face."* What does it mean? What do we lose when we don't get to see Him? Everything important. It doesn't mean that we actually get to see the face of the Lord in any way while we are on earth.

Since the Israelites wanted to seek after the worthless idols, the Lord simply granted their wishes and hid His face from them by not speaking to them through their prophets, not protecting them from the enemies' attacks, not providing them with abundance of provision and the most of all, His presence in Israel.

When we say, *"We seek His hands,"* it means that we are asking for God's provision for our living through our prayer requests and supplications. But when we say, *"We seek His face,"* that means that we desire His presence in our lives and communion with Him. In my opinion, seeking His face is more important than seeking His hands.

Matthew 6:33 But seek first the kingdom of God and His righteousness, and all these things shall be added to you.

While we seek God's face through His Word, the Bible, we get to know His hearts – what He likes; what He doesn't like; what pleases Him; what makes His anger rise. In other words, we get to have a close relationship with God Almighty. That is what He wants and what we want.

If we choose not to seek His face because of the drive from our carnal desires, we are the ones who miss out on the greatest thing any human can have.

Moses prefaced the song with the solemn reminder that, after his death, they would abandon the Lord and consequently invite the chastening of the Lord. This sounds something like Joshua's farewell speech to the officers and the people in Joshua 23 and 24 and Paul's last words to the Ephesian elders in Acts 20.

B. THE WITNESS AGAINST YOU

Deuteronomy 31:26 "Take this Book of the Law, and put it beside the ark of the covenant of the Lord your God, that it may be there as a witness against you;

We love to find refuge in God's Word in our times of stress and trouble, but we don't often consider that God's Word, if we reject Jesus and rebel against Him, is no friend to us. It is a witness against us, a witness that rises up to testify against us. We don't want to go there at all.

C. THE WARNING SONG OF MOSES

Can you name three songs, including a psalm, that are written by Moses? Exodus 15, Psalm 90, and Deuteronomy 32. Here is a quick Bible trivia of the day.

This song has four major divisions:

- 1) The character of God – Deuteronomy 32:1-4
- 2) The kindness of God to His people – Deuteronomy 32:5-14
- 3) The faithfulness of God to chasten His people – Deuteronomy 32:15-25
- 4) The vengeance of God against His adversaries – Deuteronomy 32:26-43

The song traces God's dealings with Israel and is a concise review of the nation's history, from their wilderness sojourn to the judgments in the end times. It has both historic and prophetic aspects.

You would think that Israel would have exalted such a great God and counted it a privilege to know Him and serve Him, but they didn't. Instead, they turned to idols and corrupted themselves. What a way to repay their God for all He had done for them! We expect unconverted people to be twisted and corrupt, but not the people of God.

Let's not look down on them. Because they were no different than us. How often do we see Christians who are lukewarm, carnal, or backslidden? God's Word applied then, still applies now.

In v15-25, Moses warned the people that their undeserved prosperity in the land would tempt them to become proud and forget the Lord, and then He would have to chasten them; and that's exactly what happened.

"Jeshurun" is a nickname for the people of Israel and means "the upright one." As far as their heritage standing before God was concerned, He has not held them back because of their iniquities; but when it came to their conduct, God stood ready to chasten His beloved people for not living up to their standing. He has a similar problem with the church today, because we don't always walk worthy of our high calling.

God doesn't overlook the evil deeds of Israel's enemies but has His weapons ready so that He can vindicate His people. He had done it before and will do it again. What Iran and other muslims are doing is nothing more than digging their own graves. The Lord will keep His promise to protect Israel.

D. MOSES' BLESSINGS FOR THE TRIBES OF ISRAEL

Deuteronomy 33:1-5 Now this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death. 2 And he said: "The Lord came from Sinai, And dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, And He came with ten thousands of saints; From His right hand Came a fiery law for them. 3 Yes, He loves the people; All His saints are in Your hand; They sit down at Your feet; Everyone receives Your words. 4 Moses commanded a law for us, A heritage of the congregation of Jacob. 5 And He was King in Jeshurun, When the leaders of the people were gathered, All the tribes of Israel together.

Moses could not leave this earth without a final blessing of the people he has loved and served in the Lord for these 40 years.

This chapter is similar in its effect to the blessing of Israel by Jacob upon his twelve sons as recorded in Genesis 49. Since Moses was the one who recorded Genesis , it is not a stretch to think he consciously modeled his blessing on Jacob's previous one.

Though the final blessing Moses bestowed on his people is saturated with grace and mercy. It's quite a contrast to the "blessing" Jacob gave his sons before he died, revealing their hidden character and exposing sin.

Moses reminds them and us that God's sovereign grace and love are never reasons for pride on the part of sinful people. Rather, they are truths that should humble us and make us want to serve Him with all our hearts.

God would be their helper, their shield, and their sword, so they had nothing to fear. Israel's greatest danger wasn't the armies around them so much as the carnal desires within them. Their hearts needed to stay away from their love for idols and the sins associated with idol worship.

In the end, the Jews accepted and worshiped the gods of the nations they defeated; and this led to the spiritual and moral decay of the nation. Instead of "treading on their high places", Israel sank lower and lower into the pits of sin, until God had to send them into captivity.

E. COUNTING THE FINAL HOURS

Deuteronomy 34:1-4 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, 2 all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, 3 the South, and the plain of the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. 4 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."

When children hear that their parents are going to take them to Disney Land, they count the days to the departure. For Moses, he was not counting days like he said in his Psalm 90:

Psalm 90:12 So teach us to number our days, that we may gain a heart of wisdom.

He now was counting his hours, because it would soon be time to leave the camp of Israel, climb Mount Nebo, and surrender himself into the loving arms of God to be put to sleep.

This also shows me the character of this godly man. I wonder how many born-again Christian people willingly go to the place where the Lord says, "You are going to die here today." Moses would not have any other way than the Lord's.

Someone might say, "Isn't the punishment too greater than the offense?" Moses would answer, "I was the leader and the law giver of the Israel. I knew that the greater the privileges meant the greater the responsibilities.

F. THE EPILOGUE OF MOSES

Deuteronomy 34:5-12 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 a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day. 7 Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor diminished. 8 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. 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. 10 But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, 11 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, 12 and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

Some raise objections at this point, wondering who wrote the last three chapters of Deuteronomy, because the text says that Moses finished here. No doubt, Joshua had the remainder of Moses' words and deeds recorded and added to the end of his magnificent work.

Moses, the servant of the Lord, God, in spite of all the very human weakness, was a faithful and godly man. In fact, in the matter of faithfulness, Moses is even compared with Christ.

Hebrews 3:1-2 Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of the heavenly calling, consider the Apostle and High Priest of our confession, Christ Jesus, 2 who was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was faithful in all His house.

Moses finished well.

G. APPLICATIONS

- 1) Finishing well is far more important than starting well.
- 2) Seeking His face is more important than seeking His hands.
- 3) The same Word of God that gives us a refuge in our trouble, can give a testimony against us when we rebel against the Lord.
- 4) Our worst enemy is not satan. It lives in all of us – our carnal desire within.

We must defeat it every moment by surrendering ourselves to the Lord.