

INTRODUCTION TO DEUT. CHAPTER 34

Having read how Moses finished his testimony, we are told here how he immediately after finished his life. This chapter could not be written by Moses himself, but was added by Joshua or Eleazar, or, as bishop Patrick conjectures, by Samuel, who was a prophet, and wrote by divine authority what he found in the records of Joshua, and his successors the judges. We have had an account of his dying words, here we have an account of his dying work, and that is work we must all do shortly, and it had need be well done. Here is,

I. The view Moses had of the land of Canaan just before he died, **#De 34:1-4.**

II. His death and burial, **#De 34:5,6.**

III. His age, **#De 34:7.**

IV. Israel's mourning for him, **#De 34:8.**

V. His successor, **#De 34:9.**

VI. His character, **#De 34:10-12.**

Ver. 1. thru. Ver. 4.

Here is,

I. Moses climbing upwards towards heaven, as high as the top of Pisgah, there to die; for that was the place appointed, **#De 32:49,50.** Israel lay encamped upon the flat grounds in the plains of Moab, and thence he went up, according to order, to the mountain of Nebo, to the highest point or ridge of that mountain, which was called Pisgah, **#De 34:1.** Pisgah is an appellative name for all such eminences. It should seem, Moses went up alone to the top of Pisgah, *alone without help*--a sign that his natural force was not abated when on the last day of his life he could walk up to the top of a high hill without such supporters as once he had when his hands were heavy (**#Ex 17:12**), *alone without company.* When he had made an end of blessing Israel, we may suppose, he solemnly took leave of Joshua, and Eleazar, and the rest of his friends, who probably brought him to the foot of the hill; but then he gave them such a charge as Abraham gave to his servants at the foot of another hill: *Tarry you here while I go yonder and die:* they must not see him die, because they must not know of his sepulchre. But, whether this were so or not, he went up to the top of Pisgah,

1. To show that he was willing to die. When he knew the place of his death, he was so far from avoiding it that he cheerfully mounted a steep hill to come at it. Note, Those that through grace are well acquainted with another world, and have been much conversant with it, need not be afraid to leave this.

2. To show that he looked upon death as his ascension. The soul of a man, of a good man, when it leaves the body, *goes upwards* (**#Ec 3:21**), in conformity to which motion of the soul, the body of Moses shall go along with it as far upwards as its earth will carry it. When God's servants are sent for out of the world, the summons runs thus, *Go up and die.*

II. Moses looking downward again towards this earth, to see the earthly Canaan into which he must never enter, but therein by faith looking forwards to the heavenly Canaan into which he should now immediately enter. God had threatened that he should not come

into the possession of Canaan, and the threatening is fulfilled. But he had also promised that he should have a prospect of it, and the promise is here performed: *The Lord showed him* all that good land, [#De 34:1](#).

1. If he went up alone to the top of Pisgah, yet he *was not alone, for the Father was with him*, [#Joh 16:32](#). If a man has any friends, he will have them about him when he lies a dying. But if, either through God's providence or their unkindness, it should so happen that we should then be alone, we need *fear no evil* if the great and good Shepherd be with us, [#Ps 23:4](#).
2. Though his sight was very good, and he had all the advantage of high ground that he could desire for the prospect, yet he could not have seen what he now saw, all Canaan from end to end (reckoned about 160 miles), and from side to side (reckoned about fifty or sixty miles), if his sight had not been miraculously assisted and enlarged, and therefore it is said, *The Lord showed it to him*. Note, All the pleasant prospects we have of the better country we are beholden to the grace of God for; it is he that gives the *spirit of wisdom* as well as the *spirit of revelation*, the eye as well as the object. This sight which God here gave Moses of Canaan, probably, the devil designed to mimic, and pretended to out-do, when in an airy phantom he showed to our Saviour, whom he had placed like Moses upon an *exceedingly* high mountain, all the kingdoms of the world and the glory of them, not gradually, as here, first one country and then another, but all in a moment of time.
3. He saw it at a distance. Such a sight the Old-Testament saints had of the kingdom of the Messiah; they *saw it afar off*. Thus Abraham, long before this, saw Christ's day; and, being fully persuaded of it, embraced it in the promise, leaving others to embrace it in the performance, [#Heb 11:13](#). Such a sight believers now have, through grace, of the bliss and glory of their future state. The word and ordinances are to them what Mount Pisgah was to Moses; from them they have comfortable prospects of the glory to be revealed, and rejoice in hope of it.
4. He saw it, but must never enjoy it. As God sometimes takes his people away from the evil to come, so at other times he takes them away from the good to come, that is, the good which shall be enjoyed by the church in the present world. Glorious things are spoken of the kingdom of Christ in the latter days, its advancement, enlargement, and flourishing state; we foresee it, but we are not likely to live to see it. Those that shall come after us, we hope will enter that promised land, which is a comfort to us when we find our own carcasses falling in this wilderness. See [#2Ki 7:2](#).
5. He saw all this just before his death. Sometimes God reserves the brightest discoveries of his grace to his people to be the support of their dying moments. Canaan was *Immanuel's land* ([#Isa 8:8](#)), so that in viewing it he had a view of the blessings we enjoy by Christ. It was a type of heaven ([#Heb 11:16](#)), which faith is the substance and evidence of. Note, Those may leave this world with a great deal of cheerfulness that die in the faith of Christ, and in the hope of heaven, and with Canaan in their eye. Having thus seen the salvation of God, we may well say, *Lord, now let thou thy servant depart in peace*.

Ver. 5. thru Ver. 8.

Here is,

I. The death of Moses ([#De 34:5](#)): *Moses the servant of the Lord died*. God told him he must not go over Jordan, and, though at first he prayed earnestly for the reversing of the

sentence yet God's answer to his prayer sufficed him, and now he *spoke no more of that matter*, #De 3:26. Thus our blessed Saviour prayed that the cup might pass from him, yet, since it might not, he acquiesced with, *Father, thy will be done*. Moses had reason to desire to live a while longer in the world. He was old, it is true, but he had not yet *attained to the years of the life of his fathers*; his father Amram lived to be 137; his grandfather Kohath 133; his great grandfather Levi 137; #Ex 6:16-20. And why must Moses, whose life was more serviceable than any of theirs, die at 120, especially since he felt not the decays of age, but was as fit for service as ever? Israel could ill spare him at this time; his conduct and his converse with God would be as great a happiness to them in the conquest of Canaan as the courage of Joshua. It bore hard upon Moses himself, when he had gone through all the fatigues of the wilderness, to be prevented from enjoying the pleasures of Canaan; when he had borne the burden and heat of the day, to resign the honour of finishing the work to another, and that not his son, but his servant, who must enter into his labours. We may suppose that this was not pleasant to flesh and blood. But *the man Moses was very meek*; God will have it so, and he cheerfully submits.

1. He is here called *the servant of the Lord*, not only as a good man (all the saints are God's servants), but as a useful man, eminently useful, who had served God's counsels in bringing Israel out of Egypt, and leading them through the wilderness. It was more his honour to be the *servant of the Lord* than to be king in Jeshurun.
2. Yet he dies. Neither his piety nor his usefulness would exempt him from the stroke of death. God's servants must die that they may rest from their labours, receive their recompense, and make room for others. When God's servants are removed, and must serve him no longer on earth, they go to serve him better, to serve him *day and night in his temple*.
3. He dies in the land of Moab, short of Canaan, while as yet he and his people were in an unsettled condition and had not entered into their rest. In the heavenly Canaan there will be no more death.
4. He dies *according to the word of the Lord. At the mouth of the Lord*; so the word is. The Jews say,

"with a kiss from the mouth of God."

No doubt, he died very easily (it was an *εὐθανασία*--a *delightful death*), there were no bands in his death; and he had in his death a most pleasing taste of the love of God to him: but that he *died at the mouth of the Lord* means no more but that he died in compliance with the will of God. Note, The servants of the Lord, when they have done all their other work, must die at last, in obedience to their Master, and be freely willing to go home whenever he sends for them, #Ac 21:13.

II. His burial, #De 34:6. It is a groundless conceit of some of the Jews that Moses was translated to heaven as Elijah was, for it is expressly said that he *died and was buried*; yet probably he was raised to meet Elias, to grace the solemnity of Christ's transfiguration.

1. God himself buried him, namely, by the ministry of angels, which made this funeral, though very private, yet very magnificent. Note, God takes care of the dead bodies of his servants; as their death is precious, so is their dust, not a grain of it shall be lost, but the covenant with it shall be remembered. When Moses was dead, God buried him; when Christ was dead, God raised him, for the law of Moses was to have an end, but not the gospel of Christ. Believers are dead to the law that they might be married to another, even *to him who is raised from the dead*, #Ro 7:4. It should seem Michael,

that is, Christ (as some think), had the burying of Moses, for by him the Mosaic ordinances were abolished and taken out of the way, *nailed to his cross*, and buried in his grave, [#Col 2:14](#).

2. He was buried in a valley *over against Beth-peor*. How easily could the angels that buried him have conveyed him over Jordan and buried him with the patriarchs in the cave of Machpelah! But we must learn not be over solicitous about the place of our burial. If the soul be at rest with God, the matter is not great where the body rests. One of the Chaldee paraphrasts says,

"He was buried over against Beth-peor, that, whenever Baal-peor boasted of the Israelites being joined to him, the grave of Moses over against his temple might be a check to him."

3. The particular place was not known, lest the children of Israel, who were so very prone to idolatry, should have enshrined and worshipped the dead body of Moses, that great founder and benefactor of their nation. It is true that we read not, among all the instances of their idolatry, that they worshipped relics, the reason of which perhaps was because they were thus prevented from worshipping Moses, and so could not for shame worship any other. Some of the Jewish writers say that the body of Moses was concealed, that necromancers, who enquired of the dead, might not disquiet him, as the witch of Endor did Samuel, to *bring him up*. God would not have the name and memory of his servant Moses thus abused. Many think this was the contest between Michael and the devil about the body of Moses, mentioned [#Jude 1:9](#). The devil would make the place known that it might be a snare to the people, and Michael would not let him. Those therefore who are for giving divine honours to the relics of departed saints side with the devil against Michael our prince.

III. His age, [#De 34:7](#). His life was prolonged,

1. To old age. He was 120 years old, which, though far short of the years of the patriarchs, yet much exceeded the years of most of his contemporaries, for the ordinary age of man had been lately reduced to seventy, [#Ps 90:10](#). The years of the life of Moses were three forties. The first forty he lived a courtier, at ease and in honour in Pharaoh's court; the second forty he lived a poor desolate shepherd in Midian; the third forty he lived a king in Jeshurun, in honour and power, but encumbered with a great deal of care and toil: so changeable is the world we live in, and alloyed with such mixtures; but the world before us is unmixed and unchangeable.
2. To a good old age: *His eye was not dim* (as Isaac's, [#Ge 27:1](#), and Jacob's, [#Ge 48:10](#)), *nor was his natural force abated*; there was no decay either of the strength of his body or of the vigour and activity of his mind, but he could still speak, and write, and walk as well as ever. His understanding was as clear, and his memory as strong, as ever.

"His visage was not wrinkled," say some of the Jewish writers; "he had lost never a tooth," say others; and many of them expound it of the shining of his face ([#Ex 34:30](#)), that that continued to the last.

This was the general reward of his services; and it was in particular the effect of his extraordinary meekness, for that is a grace which is, as much as any other, *health to the navel and marrow to the bones*. Of the moral law which was given by Moses, though the condemning power be vacated to true believers, yet the commands are still binding, and

will be to the end of the world; the eye of them is not waxen dim, for they shall discern the thoughts and intents of the heart, nor is their natural force or obligation abated but still we are *under the law to Christ*.

IV. The solemn mourning that there was for him, **#De 34:8**. It is a debt owing to the surviving honour of deceased worthies to follow them with our tears, as those who loved and valued them, are sensible of our loss of them, and are truly humbled for those sins which have provoked God to deprive us of them; for penitential tears very fitly mix with these. Observe,

1. Who the mourners were: *The children of Israel*. They all conformed to the ceremony, whatever it was, though some of them perhaps, who were ill-affected to his government, were but mock-mourners; yet we may suppose there were those among them who had formerly quarrelled with him and his government, and perhaps had been of those who spoke of stoning him, who now were sensible of their loss, and heartily lamented him when he was removed from them, though they knew not how to value him when he was with them. Thus those who had murmured were made to learn doctrine, **#Isa 29:24**. Note, The loss of good men, especially good governors, is to be much lamented and laid to heart: those are stupid who do not consider it.
2. How long they mourned: *Thirty days*. So long the formality lasted, and we may suppose there were some in whom the mourning continued much longer. Yet the *ending of the days of weeping and mourning* for Moses is an intimation that, how great soever our losses have been, we must not abandon ourselves to perpetual grief; we must suffer the wound at least to heal up in time. If we hope to go to heaven rejoicing, why should we resolve to go to the grave mourning? The ceremonial law of Moses is dead and buried in the grave of Christ; but the Jews have not yet ended the days of their mourning for it.

Ver. 9. thru Ver. 12.

We have here a very honourable encomium passed both on Moses and Joshua; each has his praise, and should have. It is ungrateful so to magnify our living friends as to forget the merits of those that are gone, to whose memories there is a debt of honour due: all the respect must not be paid to the rising sun; and, on the other hand, it is unjust so to cry up the merits of those that are gone as to despise the benefit we have in those that survive and succeed them. Let God be glorified in both, as here.

I. Joshua is praised as a man admirably qualified for the work to which he was called, **#De 34:9**. Moses brought Israel to the borders of Canaan and then died and left them, to signify that *the law made nothing perfect*, **#Heb 7:19**. It brings men into a wilderness of conviction, but not into the Canaan of rest and settled peace. It is an honour reserved for Joshua (our Lord Jesus, of whom Joshua was a type) to do that for us which *the law could not do, in that it was weak through the flesh*, **#Ro 8:3**. Through him we enter into rest, the spiritual rest of conscience and eternal rest in heaven. Three things concurred to clear Joshua's call to this great undertaking:--

1. God fitted him for it: *He was full of the spirit of wisdom*; and so he had need who had such a peevish people to rule, and such a politic people to conquer. conduct is as requisite in a general as courage. Herein Joshua was a type of Christ, in whom are hidden the treasures of wisdom.
2. Moses, by the divine appointment, had ordained him to it: *He had laid his hands upon him*, so substituting him to be his successor, and praying to God to qualify him for

the service to which he had called him; and this comes in as a reason why God gave him a more than ordinary *spirit of wisdom*, because his designation to the government was God's own act (those whom God employs he will in some measure make fit for the employment) and because this was the thing that Moses had asked of God for him when he laid his hands on him. When the bodily presence of Christ withdrew from his church, he prayed the Father to send another Comforter, and obtained what he prayed for.

3. The people cheerfully owned him and submitted to him. Note, An interest in the affections of people is a great advantage, and a great encouragement to those that are called to public trusts of what kind soever. It was also a great mercy to the people that when Moses was dead they were not as sheep having no shepherd, but had one ready among them in whom they did unanimously, and might with the highest satisfaction, acquiesce.

II. Moses is praised (#De 34:10-12), and with good reason.

1. He was indeed a very great man, especially upon two accounts:--

(1.) His intimacy with the God of nature: *God knew him face to face*, and so he knew God. See #Nu 12:8. He saw more of the glory of God than any (at least of the Old-Testament saints) ever did. He had more free and frequent access to God, and was spoken to not in dreams, and visions, and slumberings on the bed, but when he was awake and standing before the cherubim. Other prophets, when God appeared and spoke to them, were struck with terror (#Da 10:7), but Moses, whenever he received a divine revelation, preserved his tranquillity.

(2.) His interest and power in the kingdom of nature. The miracles of judgment he wrought in Egypt before Pharaoh, and the miracles of mercy he wrought in the wilderness before Israel, served to demonstrate that he was a particular favourite of Heaven, and had an extra ordinary commission to act as he did on this earth. Never was there any man whom Israel had more reason to love, or whom the enemies of Israel had more reason to fear. Observe, The historian calls the miracles Moses wrought *signs and wonders*, done with a *mighty hand and great terror*, which may refer to the terrors of Mount Sinai, by which God fully ratified Moses's commission and demonstrated it beyond exception to be divine, and this *in the sight of all Israel*.

2. He was greater than any other of the prophets of the Old Testament. Though they were men of great interest in heaven and great influence upon earth, yet they were none of them to be compared with this great man; none of them either so evidenced or executed a commission from heaven as Moses did. This encomium of Moses seems to have been written long after his death, yet then there had not arisen any prophet *like unto Moses*, nor did there arise any such between that period and the *sealing up of the vision and prophecy*. By Moses God gave the law, and moulded and formed the Jewish church; by the other prophets he only sent particular reproofs, directions, and predictions. The last of the prophets concludes with a charge *to remember the law of Moses*, #Mal 4:4. Christ himself often appealed to the writings of Moses, and vouched him for a witness, as one that *saw his day* at a distance *and spoke of him*. But, as far as the other prophets came short of him, our Lord Jesus went beyond him. His doctrine was more excellent, his miracles were more illustrious, and his communion with his Father was more intimate, for he *had lain in his bosom from eternity*, and by him God does now in these last days speak to us. Moses was faithful as a servant, but Christ as a Son. The history of Moses leaves him buried in the plains of Moab, and concludes with the period of his government; but the history

of our Saviour leaves him sitting *at the right hand of the Majesty on high*, and we are assured that *of the increase of his government and peace there shall be no end*. The apostle, in his epistle to the Hebrews, largely proves the pre-eminence of Christ above Moses, as a good reason why we that are Christians should be obedient, faithful, and constant, to that holy religion which we make profession of. God, by his grace, make us all so!