

Are You Listening?

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[0 : 01] Well, would you return with me please to the passage that we read in the book of Deuteronomy, Deuteronomy chapter 34. Deuteronomy 34, I'm reading verses 5 down to 8.

We read, So Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord. And he buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Bethlehem, but no one knows his grave to this day.

Moses was 120 years old when he died, his eyes were not dim nor his natural vigor diminished. And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab 30 days.

So the days of weeping and mourning for Moses ended. Well, just for a few moments this afternoon, I want to focus on this passage, a passage that tells us a lot about Moses.

It also speaks to us a great deal about ourselves, but primarily it speaks to us about the Lord. And we're going to look at the passage under three headings.

[1 : 13] We're looking at an unbroken promise, and then an untimely passing, and finally an unparalleled prophet. First we have the unbroken promise, and you see that in verses 1 to 4 of this chapter.

And here the author focuses on the promises made to the Lord's people, the promise made to the Lord's people. Now before going any further, it's important that we note the context.

In Deuteronomy, it very much marks the close of Moses' ministry. From Exodus chapter 3, he has been leading the Lord's covenant people from slavery in Egypt to the land of promise.

And Deuteronomy is very much Moses' final address. It is his farewell address. He recounts what the Lord has done for his covenant people, but he also repeats what the Lord requires from his covenant people as he gives them the law a second time.

And this brings us to the site that Moses sees in verses 1 to 3 of his chapter. Moses goes up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo to the top of Pisgah.

[2 : 27] Pisgah was a high mountain range. Mount Nebo was the highest summit on this mountain range, providing spectacular panoramic views for many miles. And following Mount Nebo, the Lord shows Moses all the land.

He looks northward to Gilead and Naphtali. His eye catches sight of Ephraim and Manasseh. He gazes further and sees Judah and the Negev. And finally, he gets a little glimpse of Zoar.

Now it's important to remember that this is more than Moses simply admiring the view. This is a legal transaction in the ancient Near East. When a person was about to take possession of a piece of land, the owner or seller would show him the land, allowing him to survey his purchase.

And here's the Lord letting Moses view the land which the Lord himself has purchased and is gifting it to his covenant people. And we then come to the word that Moses hears in verse 4.

The Lord begins with the word of fulfillment where he says, this is the land of which I swore to give Abram, Isaac and Jacob, saying, I will give it to your descendants.

[3 : 43] You remember in Genesis 12, the Lord promised Abraham that he would bring Abram and his descendants into the land that he would show him. And from Genesis 12 onward, we see the outworking.

We see the unfolding. We see the revealing. The unveiling of this promise. And now the Lord says to Moses, here it is, Moses. Here is the land that I promised your forefathers.

Moses, I have kept my word. Moses, I have fulfilled my promise. However, the Lord also brings a word not only of fulfillment, but a word of disappointment.

It is a poignant and painful moment. As the Lord says to Moses, verse 4, but you shall not go over there. Numbers 20, Moses had sinned against the Lord in the eyes of the people and the Lord had told him that he wouldn't enter the land of promise as a consequence.

And at first Moses had pleaded with the Lord to let him enter the land. Do you see that in Deuteronomy 3? It was Moses' obsession. It was Moses' consuming desire.

[4 : 53] He cries out in Deuteronomy 3, O Lord God, you have only begun to show your servant your greatness and your mighty hand. For what God is there in heaven or on earth who can do such mighty works and mighty acts as yours?

Please, please let me go over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, the good hill country and Lebanon. And the Lord replies in Deuteronomy 3, enough from you.

Do not speak to me of this matter again. As Moses gazed at the land on this particular day, he must have known a sense of great accomplishment, great achievement mixed with great disappointment.

He'd seen the Lord use him to bring the people out of slavery in Egypt. He'd seen the Lord part the Red Sea to let Israel cross over on dry land.

And he'd seen the waves then come crashing in on Pharaoh and his chariots. He'd seen the daily man of provision and the water emerging from the rock. He'd seen the pillar of cloud by day and the pillar of fire by night, assuring the people of the Lord's presence with them, the Lord's protection over them.

[6 : 09] He'd seen the giving of the Lord's law to the people of Mount Sinai and the way the people had begun to emerge as a new nation. He had seen so much, but despite all this, Moses knew that he himself wouldn't be able to cross into the land.

He wouldn't take the people into the land of promise. Great accomplishment mixed with great disappointment. Now as we consider these opening four verses, it's important that we understand the preoccupation with the land promise.

The Lord was eager that his people would have a home. And throughout Genesis to Deuteronomy, he keeps reminding them in these books, I'm preparing a place for you.

Over and over, I'm preparing a place for you. And this promise is designed to sustain them and keep them dependent upon him. This was the promise he gave them during their slavery in Egypt.

I'm preparing a place for you. This was the promise he gave them during the plagues when Pharaoh's heart was so hardened. I'm preparing a place for you. This was the promise he gave them on that great and terrible night when the angel of death swept through the land of Egypt.

[7 : 28] I'm preparing a place for you. This was the promise he gave them as they crossed the Red Sea, as they took those first tentative steps, wondering, will the waves come back on us?

I'm preparing a place for you. This was the promise he gave them as they wandered through the wilderness these 40 years. I'm preparing a place for you.

And we too, friends, have glorious promises in his word. The promise of inhabiting a greater Eden. The promise of inhabiting a greater Canaan. The promise of reigning with the Lord and all his redeemed people in his renewed, restored creation.

The promise of being in the very presence of the Lord and seeing his face. In John chapter 14, Jesus says these words. So some of the most wonderful words we have.

Do not let your hearts be troubled. You believe in God, believe also in me. In my Father's house are many rooms, many mansions. If it were not so, I would have told you.

[8 : 29] I go to prepare a place for you that you may be where I am. And I will come back and I will take you to be with me.

The Lord wants his people to be certain of this promise of home. He wants his people to be not only certain of this promise of home, but sustained by this promise of home.

Rick Phillips writes, how wonderful it is to find a room prepared after a long journey. And all who believe and trust in Christ can know that heaven has been prepared for their arrival.

Our mediator and saviour has carried our names into heaven and made the reservation there for us. No Christian will ever appear in heaven, either unknown or unexpected, for Jesus has prepared a place there for each and every one of his own.

Knowing and trusting in our prepared home is Jesus' antidote to the troubles and anxieties of life.

[9 : 38] I'll say that last bit again. Knowing and trusting in our prepared home in the Father's house is Jesus' antidote to the troubles and anxieties of life.

And so today, friend, I want to ask, are you believing the Lord's unbreakable promise? Are you believing the Lord's unshakable promise?

I'm preparing a place for you. Is that the promise you hold on to as you go to bed each night? I'm preparing a place for you. Is that the promise you hold on to when you wake at three or four in the morning and life seems to be spinning out of control?

I'm preparing a place for you. Is that the promise you hold on to in the hospital, in the workplace, in the home? I'm preparing a place for you. Is that the promise you cling to in a world that can be so full of disappointment?

And it's not only disappointment in the secular world, but even at times when the Lord's people and the Lord's church and the Lord's cause almost seems to disappoint you.

[10 : 47] Do you hold on to the promise? I'm preparing a place for you. Do you believe the promise, friend? I'm preparing a place for you.

That's the first thing, an unbroken promise. We then come to an untimely passing, verses 5 down to 8. And here the author focuses on the passing of the Lord's servant.

Verses 5 and 6 record Moses' death. We're told that Moses was the servant of the Lord. As we go through scripture, we see this title, servant of the Lord, being applied to Moses over 40 times.

It's a title that speaks of his unique status, his unique position in the eyes of the Lord. He may be denied access to the land of promise because of his sin, but that doesn't take away from the fact that he is the servant of the Lord, with a hope that extends beyond a temporal, earthly home.

We're also told that Moses died in Moab according to the word of the Lord. He literally dies at the mouth of the Lord, dies at the orders of the Lord.

[12 : 00] The Lord is sovereign, friends. And he is sovereign over when we die. And he is sovereign over where we die. And he is sovereign over how we die.

In Psalm 139 we're told that he has written the days of his people in his book. George Whitefield, the great evangelist, famously said, we are immortal until our work on earth is done.

And here's the Lord. And he is bringing Moses' earthly work to a close. He gives the command and Moses dies according to the word of the Lord.

And we're told that the Lord buried Moses. It's a beautiful image. In ancient Near East family members were responsible for the burial of their loved ones.

And here's the Lord. And the Lord is taking the responsibility for burying Moses, his servant. It's an incredibly moving scene.

[13 : 01] Moses dies on Mount Nebo. His brother has gone before him. His sister has gone before him. The people are apart from him. He seems to be all alone.

But he doesn't die alone. The Lord had promised in Exodus 3, I will be with you. In Deuteronomy 33, Moses found of the fact that the Lord is an eternal dwelling place for his people.

And underneath are the everlasting arms. And as he dies, the Lord is with him. And when there is no one standing at his grave.

The Lord is with him. And sealing the tomb. Until the great day when the Lord would call again. Arise my love, my fair one.

And come with me. And that is a great comfort. That is a great consolation. That is a great confidence that every Christian has.

[13 : 59] Even though we may die alone. We die knowing that the Lord is with us. We die knowing that not even death shall separate us from the love of God in Christ Jesus our Lord.

We die knowing that not even death shall pluck us from the nail-pierced hand of the Lord Jesus Christ. Do you believe this friend? In verses 7 and 8 then provide a further reflection on Moses' death.

We are told that he was old when he died. In Genesis 50, we read that Joseph died of any old man aged 110. But here we find Moses dying at an even more advanced age.

He is 120. And we are told that Moses was healthy when he died. His eye was undimmed. His vigour was unabated. Moses could easily have entered the promised land.

He wasn't weak. He wasn't ill. He wasn't sickly. It wasn't as if the people of Israel were saying, Do you see how Moses is just falling off a bit?

[14 : 58] He's not what he once was. No! Moses was full of vigour. And he could have entered the promised land. But that wasn't the Lord's will for him.

And finally we are told that all Israel mourned as he was passing. In Numbers 20, Israel mourned for 30 days following the death of Moses' brother, the high priest Aaron.

And they now do the same thing for this man who had led them these 40 years out of Egypt, through the wilderness, to the cusp of the land of promise. They mourn the passing, the death of Moses.

Now as we consider these verses, I want us to reflect on the Lord's burial of Moses just a little further. The author emphasises that no one else was there.

Just the Lord and his servant. Just the Lord and Moses. This is the Lord's way of ensuring that the bones of Moses won't be carried into the promised land like the bones of Joseph were.

[16 : 06] But it's also the Lord's way of ensuring that the people don't set up a shrine to honour Moses on the plains of Mount Nebo. Throughout their history, Israel had this tendency and propensity to fall into this suit of idolatry, where they would even honour the graves of dead prophets, rather than hear the living word of the living God.

You remember how Jesus accuses the Pharisees of this in Matthew 23. And he says, you're honouring the tombs of these dead prophets, but you're ignoring me.

You're ignoring the living word of the living God. And so here's the Lord, and he's not going to let Moses become a rival or a distraction, even in his death.

The Lord is a God who tears the idols of his people away, so that they might worship him and him alone. And if that means burying his greatest servant in an unmarked age, he'll do it.

The Lord will do everything necessary to protect and preserve his people from falling into idolatry. And the danger of idolatry, friends, is never far away from any of us.

[17 : 20] Even as Christians. Even as Christians, we have a tendency to idolise and venerate other Christians. And other Christian leaders.

There's a well-known story told about Ebenezer Erskine. And a woman once attended a communion service where he was one of the preachers. And she was greatly blessed under his ministry.

And decided she would go and hear him at the next available opportunity. And she did so. And she got very little out of his sermon. And she was somewhat upset.

She made such an effort to go and hear him. And so she decided to approach the preacher after the service. And ask him why she got so little out of his sermon. Because it's always the preacher's fault, isn't it?

It's always the preacher's fault when someone never gets much out of a sermon. And so she told him. And she asked him, what's the difference? Well, what is the difference between these two occasions?

[18 : 17] And Ebenezer Erskine said, Madam, the reason is this. Last Sabbath you went to hear Jesus Christ. But today you have come to hear Ebenezer Erskine.

I wonder, friends, have we ever fallen into the sin of giving another Christian the place, the position, the priority, the primacy that belongs to Jesus alone.

One of my favourite preachers is an American, John Piper. And I love his preaching. But one day a friend came up to me and said, Hugh, you need to remind yourself every morning that John Piper did not die and rise for your salvation.

Only Jesus did that. My friend knew that I was on the verge of replacing Jesus with a man who proclaims Jesus. Only Jesus' strength is all sufficient and all satisfying.

Everything and everyone else will ultimately and eventually let us down. And today these verses are giving us that caution to be careful about putting anything or anyone before the Lord.

[19 : 36] At the end of the day these verses are telling us that even a great man, even a godly man, even a servant of the Lord such as Moses, died and was buried outside the land of promise.

Where's our trust, friends? Is it in the Lord's servants or is it in the Lord? How tragic it is.

When the Lord's people, the Lord's servants are seen to have feet of clay and people start losing confidence in the Lord and his cause because they see the fallibility of his own people.

That's the untimely passing. This brings us then finally to an unparalleled prophet. We see that in verses 9 down to 12.

Here the author focuses on the preeminence of the Lord's prophet. Verse 9 records the succession of Joshua. We're told that Joshua, the son of Nun, was full of the spirit of wisdom.

[20 : 49] Throughout Exodus we see men being filled with the spirit who will equip them and will empower them to do the work the Lord's called them to do. Men are filled with the spirit as they embroider the priestly garments in Exodus 28.

Bethel and the holy are filled with the spirit as they craft the tabernacle furniture in Exodus 31. The elders are filled with the spirit as they prepare to assist Moses in his work in Numbers 11.

And here's Joshua and Moses has laid his hands on him and we're told that he has been filled with the spirit of wisdom. And we're also told that the people obeyed Joshua and did as the Lord had commanded Moses.

They mourn Moses' passing. But the days of mourning, verse 8, come to an end. And now verse 9, the people begin to follow Joshua.

A story is told about an old preacher. And he was speaking to a group of younger preachers and he said to them that they ought to remember that they would one day die.

[21 : 55] And he said they're going to put you in a box and they will put the box in the ground and they will throw dirt on your face and they will then go back to the church and eat potato salad.

The point is that leaders come and leaders go, but God's work, God's program, God's agenda continues. It's clear from Deuteronomy 34 that the people aren't to be held back from following Joshua and crossing the Jordan and taking possession of the promised land.

In short, the people must carry on and carry out the work the Lord had called them to do. And that is so practical, friends. It is good to remember the places where we knew the Lord's blessing.

And it is good to remember the people who were a blessing from the Lord to us. But we must never allow nostalgia to hold us back from engaging in the Lord's great commission.

We must never allow nostalgia to hold us back from engaging in the work the Lord has called us to do. The Lord's people, friends, are to be governed not by nostalgia looking back, but by vision looking forward.

[23 : 14] The Lord's people are to be governed in this way where they're not thinking, how can we hold on to the past, but rather, how can we grasp the future? I was having an induction in U.S. a few weeks ago and David MacLeod along the road was quoting Proverbs 29 and the words, Where there is no vision, where churches have no vision for the present or the future.

They stop going out and reaching out to the lost. They stop seeking to share the gospel. And the people in the community die without God, without Christ, without hope. And not only that, but the church itself dies because no one comes in.

So, friends, what is it? Are we governed by vision or by nostalgia? Verses 10 down to 12 then record Moses' eulogy.

The author tells us that there was never a prophet like Moses. In Deuteronomy 33, Moses said, there is none like the Lord. And now in Deuteronomy 34, the Lord, through this inspired author, says, there was never a prophet like Moses.

Isn't that a wonderful theme? Moses says, there is none like the Lord. The Lord says, there is none like Moses. And there's two reasons for this. First, there was no other prophet, we're told, who knew the Lord face to face.

[24 : 48] It's a picture, an image of intimacy and closeness. In Exodus 33, we read that the Lord spoke with Moses as a man speaks with a man.

In Numbers 12, the Lord tells Aaron and Miriam, after they've been criticizing Moses, that Moses is the one whom he speaks to mouth to mouth, clearly and not in riddles, and he beholds the very form of God.

But there was also no other prophet like Moses, we're told, who did such signs and wonders and mighty powers and great deeds. Now, these signs all pointed to the Lord's sovereign and powerful hand.

But they also confirmed Moses to be the Lord's servant, the Lord's prophet. There was none like Moses.

Now, these verses concerning Moses, being such an unparalleled prophet, are significant. Because, if you remember, in Deuteronomy chapter 18, Moses spoke to the people about a prophet who would come after him.

[25 : 58] And he said that the people were to listen to this prophet. They were to follow this prophet. And now, in verses 10 down to 12, we read, You know, it's a fitting tribute to Moses.

It elevates Moses. But there's also this wistful note of longing. The prophet Moses had spoken about hasn't come. What's going on?

And it's not until the New Testament that we see the fulfilling of this promise. We see Moses' words being realized in John chapter 1.

And this serious figure, known only as John, appears. And the people ask him, Are you the prophet? And John points to Jesus.

And he says, This is the one who ranks before me, because he was before me. The one on whom the Spirit has descended. And he will baptize with the Spirit.

[27 : 20] Then in Luke chapter 7, we see Jesus in a village. And he raises a widow's son back to life. And what do the people say? They say, Surely a prophet has risen in Israel.

Then in Luke chapter 9, we see Jesus, and he's standing on a mountain with his disciples, Peter and James and John. And suddenly he's transfigured. And his appearance becomes white like lightning.

And as the disciples look at what's taking place, they see that Moses and Elijah, the two great prophets of the Old Testament, are standing with him. And they're talking with Jesus.

And what are they talking about? Luke says they were talking about his exodus. His great act of redemption. His great act of deliverance.

His great act of salvation. If he were accomplished in Jerusalem. And suddenly a heavenly voice calls out, This is my son. Listen to him.

[28 : 24] Listen to him. Then in Acts chapter 3 and Acts chapter 7, Peter and then Stephen tell the Jews that Jesus is the prophet whom Moses had spoken about, but the people haven't listened to him.

They've rejected him. They have crucified him. They have rejected the cornerstone. The New Testament repeatedly emphasizes that Jesus is the prophet who knew God face to face, the one who was in the beginning with God and was God.

And the New Testament repeatedly emphasizes that Jesus is the prophet who did greater works than Moses. R.C. Sproul writes, it is clear from the Old Testament, no other period of old covenant history had the numbers and varieties of miracles as the days of Moses.

Other prophets performed miracles, but the flurry of miracles in Moses' lifetime was unsurpassed until the ministry of Christ. And today, friends, the most important thing that you and I should be doing is listening to this Jesus.

Hearing the word of this Jesus and acting on the word of this Jesus. that's what really matters.

[29 : 55] He is the one greater than Moses. He is the one greater than Joshua. He is the prophet, the priest, the king, par excellence, who will ensure that all his sheep who hear his voice and follow him will be brought safely home to the place, the true and better Canaan that he has prepared for him.

And the question is, friend, are you listening to him? Are you listening to him? There would be nothing more tragic than if you had sat through this service today and all you go away is talking about a presenter or a preacher and not going away saying, well, we heard something of the voice of Jesus.

Are you hearing the voice of Jesus coming to you through his word? Are you listening?
Are you responding?

Are you following? Are you following? Amen.