

Lesson 9. MOSES' DEATH AND SUCCESSOR

READING: Deut. 31 to 34.

AIM: To consider the last messages of Moses, his greatness, and the lessons of his life.

1. BACKGROUND

Israel stood on the borders of the Promised Land and made ready to enter, but without Moses. We have been closely in the company of this outstanding man since the lesson dealing with his birth and early life. We have noted the preparation Moses underwent under God's direction for the great work of delivering the nation of Israel from the bondage of Egypt; beheld him standing before Pharaoh demanding the release of Israel at God's command, then leading Israel as a redeemed people from Egypt. We have listened to his Song of Victory at the Red Sea, watched him as he went up into Mount Sinai to receive the "lively oracles" from God, followed him in the forty years' wandering in the wilderness, sympathised with him when Israel rebelled against God and threatened his life; wondered at his constant intervention and mediation on behalf of the disobedient people; and sorrowed with him when divine punishment forbade his entry into the Promised Land. We know how eagerly Moses entreated God that he might "go over and see the good land that is beyond Jordan" (Deut. 3: 25). But it was not to be. The lesson arising from this incident is clear for all succeeding generations. God alone must be honoured: He demands implicit belief.

2. THE LAST MESSAGES OF MOSES. Deut. 31 to 33

The book of Deuteronomy contains the last messages of Moses, given to the new generation of Israelites who were to go in and possess the Promised Land. Note the following important points:

- Deut. 31:1-6, 9-13, 24-27. Moses encouraged Israel to trust God, who would not fail them. He instructed the Levites to place THE BOOK OF THE LAW in the Ark of the Covenant. It was to be Israel's guide.
- Deut. 31:7-8, 14-15, 23. Moses appointed the new leader, JOSHUA, to go with the people into the land: "Be strong and of a good courage". By experience Moses was able to say about God, "He will not fail thee neither forsake thee".
- Deut. 31:16-22, 28-3. Moses was sorrowful because he knew that after his death they would forsake God.
- Deut. 32. Moses' PROPHETIC SONG.
- Deut. 33. Moses blessed the nation and individual tribes.

3. THE BOOK OF THE LAW. Deut. 31:1-6, 9-13, 24-27; Josh.1: 8-9

The reason for Moses' remarkable faith and obedience to God in the face of great personal risk and provocation from Israel is contained in the words of counsel which Moses wrote in the "Book of the Law" and encouraged Israel to follow.

"Thou shalt read this law before all Israel in their hearing. Gather the people together, men and women, and children, and thy stranger that is within thy gates, that they may hear, and that they may learn and fear the Lord your God, and observe to do all the words of this Law: and that their children, which have not known anything, may hear, and learn to fear the Lord your God, as long as ye live in the land whither ye go over Jordan to possess it" (Deut. 31: 11-13).

In this "Book of the Law" we have the beginning of those "oracles of God" which Paul refers to in Rom.3: 2 and which were "committed to Israel" as a sacred charge and a special privilege and responsibility. The "Book of the Law" was not confined solely to the formal laws given through Moses: it included the whole of the Pentateuch (the first five books of the Bible), in which God's dealings with the human race from the Creation up to that time were recorded.

During the 40 years Moses was with Israel, he wrote of God's dealings with them. See Exod.17: 14; 34: 27; Deut.31: 9, 24-26. Before his death he gave the sacred writings into the custody of the priests and commanded that at the end of every seven years, at the Feast of Tabernacles, the book was to be read "before all Israel in their hearing". Eight

hundred years afterwards, this book (which in the intervening period had been forgotten) was found again (II Kings 22; also Neh. 8: 1-3).

Additions were made to the "Book of the Law" as the history of the nation developed. Thus we read that Joshua wrote these words in the book of the Law of God (Josh. 24:26). When the Old Testament was completed it was divided into three major sections: "The Law", "The Prophets" and "The Writings" (sometimes referred to as "The Psalms").

We have been blessed and entrusted with the Bible - the complete Book of the Law, God's Word and our guide in life. When we depart from its teachings, we become as the Israelites, who were not allowed to enter into the Promised Land because of unbelief, and we are lacking in faith and purpose (Heb. 3:19; 4:1-2).

4. JOSHUA TO SUCCEED MOSES. Deut. 31: 7-8, 14-15, 23; Num. 27: 15-23

Moses' successor was appointed before Moses died (Num.27: 15-23). God selected Joshua, the son of Nun, to "be set over the congregation, that they be not as sheep having no shepherd". Moses was directed by God to bring Joshua before Eleazar, the High Priest, and "give him a charge" in the sight of all Israel.

Moses and Joshua presented themselves at the Tabernacle and the Lord's presence was shown in the pillar of cloud which stood over the door of the Tabernacle (Deut. 31:14-15). Joshua was thus publicly announced to Israel as the divinely appointed successor to Moses to lead the nation into the land promised to them (Deut. 31:23).

5. MOSES' SONG AND THE BLESSING OF THE TRIBES. Deut. 32 and 33

Moses' "song" sets forth the greatness of God whose work is perfect, just and right. At the same time it causes us to reflect upon the one whom the Lord knew "face to face", even Moses, described as the greatest of all the prophets before the coming of Christ. Moses fulfilled the functions of deliverer, mediator, shepherd, lawgiver and ruler, yet like the Lord himself, he was the meekest of all men (Num.12: 3). He led Israel, cared for them, interceded for them, supported them, guided them through the desert, taught them God's laws after their baptism in the Red Sea. Moses was indeed "faithful in all his house" (Heb.3: 1-5) and in his life and work we see a shadow of Jesus Christ, who is the Prophet "like unto Moses" and is also "from among his brethren" (Deut.18:18-19; Acts 7:37). The type was not complete in Moses, so Joshua (the Hebrew equivalent of the Greek name Jesus) was appointed to lead Israel into the Promised Land.

6. THE DEATH OF MOSES. Deut. 34

The time had come for Israel's great leader to die. Although 120 years old, his physical strength was unabated; but his work was finished (Deut. 34:7). Leaving the camp of Israel, Moses ascended Mt. Nebo. God blessed Moses, his worthy and faithful servant, by giving him a broad distant view of the Promised Land. His "eye was not dim" and across the Jordan he would see the fortress of Jericho, the key to the entry of the Land. Beyond Jericho stretched the mountains of Canaan, the valley of Esdraelon, the twin hills of Ebal and Gerizim. In the hills of Judea was the Canaanite fortress of Jehus, standing upon what later came to be known as Mt. Zion. Away to the north was Mt. Hermon and the Lebanons, and in the distance to the west the Mediterranean Sea. Moses died by the command of the Lord and was buried by His angel in a valley in the land of Moab, but "no man knoweth of his sepulchre unto this day" (Deut. 34:6). His burial was unique and a fitting honour for such a great man. Israel mourned for their leader for 30 days. "There arose not a prophet since in Israel whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. 34: 10).

7. CONCLUDING THOUGHTS

Our Lord Jesus fully endorsed Moses and his writings (see Luke 16:29-31; John 5:45-47). Moses appeared with Jesus, and Elijah, on the Mount of Transfiguration - a confirmation of his position as the outstanding representative of the Law. Though Moses was not privileged to lead his people into the land, one day he will stand within its borders. Like so many others he "died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off" (Heb.11: 13). Let us, with full assurance, seek first the Kingdom of God, using and loving the Bible as our only guide in life. And in the day of Christ's Kingdom let us pray that we shall be among the victorious saints who will sing the "Song of Moses and of the Lamb" (Rev.15: 3).

REFERENCE LIBRARY

"The Visible Hand of God", chapters 19 and 21.

"Moses, My Servant", chapter 9.

QUESTIONS

1. Write a character study of Moses.
2. Discuss the Book of the Law in relation to the Bible, as we know it today.
3. Write about "the Prophet like unto Moses".