

The Resurrection of Moses



SABBATH AFTERNOON

Read for This Week's Study: *Num. 20:1–13, Deut. 31:2, Deut. 34:4, Deut. 34:1–12, Jude 9, 1 Cor. 15:13–22.*

Memory Text: “Yet Michael the archangel, in contending with the devil, when he disputed about the body of Moses, dared not bring against him a reviling accusation, but said, ‘The Lord rebuke you!’ ” (*Jude 9, NKJV*).

As we have seen all quarter, Moses is the central mortal in Deuteronomy. His life, his character, his messages pervade the book. Though, yes, Deuteronomy is about God and His love for ‘*am yisra’el*, “the people of Israel,” God often used Moses to reveal that love and to speak to His people Israel.

Now, as we come to the end of the quarter, the end of our study of Deuteronomy, we also come to the end of Moses’ life, at least his life here.

As Ellen G. White expressed it: “Moses knew that he was to die alone; no earthly friend would be permitted to minister to him in his last hours. There was a mystery and awfulness about the scene before him, from which his heart shrank. The severest trial was his separation from the people of his care and love—the people with whom his interest and his life had so long been united. But he had learned to trust in God, and with unquestioning faith he committed himself and his people to His love and mercy.”—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 470, 471.

As Moses’ life and ministry revealed much about the character of God, so, too, does his death and resurrection.

* Study this week's lesson to prepare for Sabbath, December 25.

The Sin of Moses: Part 1

Time and again, even amid their apostasy and wilderness wanderings, God miraculously provided for the children of Israel. That is, however undeserving they were (and often remained that way), God's grace flowed out to them. We, too, today, are recipients of His grace, however much we are undeserving of it, as well. After all, it wouldn't be grace if we deserved it, would it?

And besides the abundance of food that the Lord had miraculously provided for them in the wilderness, another manifestation of His grace was the water, without which they would quickly perish, especially in a dry, hot, and desolate desert. Talking about that experience, Paul wrote: "And all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ" (*1 Cor. 10:4, NKJV*). Ellen G. White also added that "wherever in their journeyings they wanted water, there from the clefts of the rock it gushed out beside their encampment."—*Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 411.

Read Numbers 20:1–13. What happened here, and how do we understand the Lord's punishment for Moses because of what he had done?

On one level, it's not hard to see and understand Moses' frustration. After all that the Lord had done for them, the signs and wonders and miraculous deliverance, here they are, finally, on the borders of the Promised Land. And then—what? Suddenly, they are short on water, and so they begin to conspire against Moses and Aaron. Was it that the Lord could not provide water for them now, as He had done for them so often before? Of course not; He could have, and was going to do so again.

However, look at Moses' words as he struck the rock, even twice. "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" (*Num. 20:10, NKJV*). One can all but hear the anger in his voice, for he begins by calling them "rebels."

The problem wasn't so much his anger itself, which was bad enough but understandable—but when he said "Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" as if he or any human being could bring water out of a rock. In his anger, he seemed to forget at the moment that it was only the power of God, working among them, that could do such a miracle. He, of all people, should have known that.

How often do we say or even do things in a fit of anger, even if we believe the anger is justified? How can we learn to stop, pray, and seek the power of God to say and do right before we say and do wrong instead?

The Sin of Moses: Part 2

Read again Numbers 20:12, 13. What specific reason did the Lord give to Moses for why he couldn't go over because of what he did? (See also Deuteronomy 31:2 and Deuteronomy 34:4.)

According to this text, there was more to Moses' sin than just his own attempt to take the place of God, which was bad enough. He also showed a lack of faith, which, for someone like Moses, would be inexcusable. After all, this is the man who, from the burning bush (*Exod. 3:2–16*) onward, had had, unlike most people, an experience with God, and yet, according to the text, Moses did not “believe Me” (*NKJV*); that is, Moses showed a lack of faith in what the Lord had said, and as a result he had failed to “hallow Me,” before the children of Israel. In other words, had Moses kept his calm and done the right thing by showing his own faith and trust in God amid their apostasy, he would have glorified the Lord before the people and been, again, an example to them of what true faith and obedience were like.

Notice, too, how Moses had disobeyed what the Lord told him specifically to do.

Read Numbers 20:8. What had the Lord told Moses to do, but what did Moses do instead (*Num. 20:9–11*)?

Verse 9 has Moses taking the rod as the Lord had commanded him. So far, so good. But by verse 10, instead of speaking to the rock, from which water would then have flowed as an astounding expression of God's power—Moses struck it, not once but twice. Yes, hitting a rock and having water come from it was miraculous, but certainly not as miraculous as just speaking to it and seeing the same thing happening.

Sure, on the surface it might have seemed that God's judgment upon Moses was extreme: after all that Moses had been through, he was not going to be allowed to cross over into the Promised Land. For as long as this story has been told, people have wondered why—because of one rash act—would what he had been anticipating for so long be denied him?

What lesson do you think the children of Israel should have learned from what happened to Moses?

The Death of Moses

Poor Moses! Having come so far, having gone through so much, only to be left out of the fulfillment of the promise made to Abram many centuries earlier: “To your descendants I will give this land” (*Gen. 12:7, NKJV*).

Read Deuteronomy 34:1–12. What happened to Moses, and what did the Lord say about him that showed what a special man he was?

“In solitude Moses reviewed his life of vicissitudes and hardships since he turned from courtly honors and from a prospective kingdom in Egypt, to cast in his lot with God’s chosen people. He called to mind those long years in the desert with the flocks of Jethro, the appearance of the Angel in the burning bush, and his own call to deliver Israel. Again he beheld the mighty miracles of God’s power displayed in behalf of the chosen people, and His long-suffering mercy during the years of their wandering and rebellion. Notwithstanding all that God had wrought for them, notwithstanding his own prayers and labors, only two of all the adults in the vast army that left Egypt had been found so faithful that they could enter the Promised Land. As Moses reviewed the result of his labors, his life of trial and sacrifice seemed to have been almost in vain.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, pp. 471, 472.

Deuteronomy 34:4 says something very interesting. “This is the land of which I swore to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, ‘I will give it to your descendants’” (*NKJV*). The Lord was using language almost verbatim from what He had said again and again to the patriarchs and to their children, about giving them this land. Now He was repeating it to Moses.

The Lord also said that “‘I have *caused you to see* it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there’” (*Deut. 34:4, NKJV, emphasis supplied*). There’s no way that Moses, standing where he was, could have seen with normal vision all that the Lord had pointed him to—from Moab to Dan to Naphtali, and so forth. Ellen G. White was clear: it was a supernatural revelation, not only of the land but also of what it would look like after they had taken possession.

In one sense, it would almost seem as if the Lord had been teasing Moses, rubbing it in: *You could have been here had you simply obeyed Me as you should have*, or something like that. Instead, the Lord was showing Moses that despite everything, even despite Moses’ mistake, God was going to be faithful to the covenantal promises that He had made with the fathers and with Israel itself. As we will see, too, the Lord had something even better in store for His faithful but flawed servant.

The Resurrection of Moses

“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 Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day” (*Deut. 34:5, 6, NKJV*). Thus, with these few verses, Moses—so central to the life of Israel, a man whose writing lives on, not only in Israel but also even in the church and in the synagogue today, as well—died.

Moses died and was buried, the people mourned, and that was that. Certainly, the principle of the words of Revelation applies here: “ ‘Blessed are the dead who die in the Lord from now on.’ ” ‘Yes,’ says the Spirit, ‘that they may rest from their labors, and their works follow them’ ” (*Rev. 14:13, NKJV*).

However, Moses’ death was not the final chapter in the story of Moses’ life.

Read Jude 9. What is happening here, and how does this text help explain the appearance of Moses later in the New Testament?

Though we’re given only a glimpse, what an incredible scene is depicted here. Michael, Christ Himself, disputed with the devil about the body of Moses. Disputed over it how? There’s no doubt that Moses was a sinner; indeed, his last known sin, the taking on himself glory that was God’s, was the same kind of sin—“ ‘I will ascend above the heights of the clouds, I will be like the Most High’ ” (*Isa. 14:14, NKJV*)—that got Lucifer himself thrown out of heaven in the first place. The dispute over Moses’ body must have been because Christ was now claiming for Moses the promised resurrection.

But how could Christ do that for a sinner, Moses, someone who had violated His law? The answer, of course, could only be the Cross. Just as all the animal sacrifices pointed ahead to Christ’s death, so obviously the Lord now, looking ahead to the cross, claimed the body of Moses to be resurrected. “In consequence of sin Moses had come under the power of Satan. In his own merits he was death’s lawful captive; but he was raised to immortal life, holding his title in the name of the Redeemer. Moses came forth from the tomb glorified, and ascended with his Deliverer to the City of God.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 479.

How does this account of Moses help us to understand the depth of the plan of salvation, that even before the cross Moses would be raised to immortality?

The Resurrection of Us All

With the added light of the New Testament, the exclusion of Moses from the Promised Land doesn't seem like much of a punishment, after all. Instead of an earthly Canaan and later an earthly Jerusalem (which for all its known history has been a place of war, conquest, and suffering), "the heavenly Jerusalem" (*Heb. 12:22*) is, even now, his home. A much better abode for sure!

Moses was the first known example in the Bible of the resurrection of the dead. Enoch was brought to heaven without having seen death (*Gen. 5:24*), and Elijah, too (*2 Kings 2:11*), but as far as the written record goes, Moses was the first one to have been resurrected to eternal life.

How long Moses slept in the ground we don't know, but as far as he was concerned, it didn't matter. He closed his eyes in death, and whether it was three hours or 300 years, for him it was the same. It also is the same for all the dead throughout history; their experience, at least as far as being dead goes, will be no different than Moses'. We close our eyes in death, and the next thing we know is either the second coming of Jesus or, unfortunately, the final judgment (*see Rev. 20:7–15*).

Read 1 Corinthians 15:13–22. What great promise is found here, and why do Paul's words make sense only if we understand that the dead sleep in Christ until the resurrection?

Without the hope of the resurrection, we have no hope at all. Christ's resurrection is the guarantee of ours; having "purged our sins" (*Heb. 1:3*) on the cross as our sacrificial Lamb, Christ died and rose from the dead, and because of His resurrection we have the surety of ours, with Moses being the first example of a fallen human being raised from the dead. Because of what Christ would do, Moses had been raised; and because of what Christ has done, we, too, will be raised, as well.

Thus, we can find in Moses an example of salvation by faith, a faith made manifest in a life of faithfulness and trust in God, even if he faltered at the end. And all through the book of Deuteronomy, we can see Moses seeking to call God's people to a similar faithfulness, a similar response to the grace given to them as it has been given to us—we, too, who are on the borders of the Promised Land.

Is not God, this same God, calling us to faithfulness, as well? What can we do to make sure we don't make the mistakes Moses forewarned about in Deuteronomy?

Further Thought: “When they angrily cried, ‘Must we fetch you water out of this rock?’ they put themselves in God’s place, as though the power lay with themselves, men possessing human frailties and passions. Wearied with the continual murmuring and rebellion of the people, Moses had lost sight of his Almighty Helper, and without the divine strength he had been left to mar his record by an exhibition of human weakness. The man who might have stood pure, firm, and unselfish to the close of his work had been overcome at last. God had been dishonored before the congregation of Israel, when He should have been magnified and exalted.”—Ellen G. White, *Patriarchs and Prophets*, p. 418.

“Upon the mount of transfiguration Moses was present with Elijah, who had been translated. They were sent as bearers of light and glory from the Father to His Son. And thus the prayer of Moses, uttered so many centuries before, was at last fulfilled. He stood upon the ‘goodly mountain,’ within the heritage of his people, bearing witness to Him in whom all the promises to Israel centered. Such is the last scene revealed to mortal vision in the history of that man so highly honored of Heaven.”—Page 479.

Discussion Questions:

- ① In one sense, yes, Moses was resurrected and brought to heaven shortly after his death. But at the same time, poor Moses (we assume) gets to witness the terrible mess of things down here. How fortunate that most of us will be resurrected after all the struggle on earth is over at the Second Coming. In what ways is this, then, a greater blessing than what Moses experienced?
- ② How does the story of Moses’ death and later resurrection show us how the New Testament, though often based on the Old Testament, does take us further than the Old Testament and can, indeed, shed much new light upon it?
- ③ How is the story of Moses’ life, including smiting the rock in a fit of anger, an example of what it means to live by faith and to be saved by faith, apart from the deeds of the law?
- ④ In class, talk about the promise of the resurrection at the end of time. Why is this so central to all our hopes? Also, if we can trust God on this (that is, on raising us from death), shouldn’t we be able to trust Him for everything else? After all, if He can *do that* for us, what can’t He do?