

# To The Edge

## Deuteronomy 31 & 34

### Pierre Cannings, D. Phil.

## I. Beginning of the End

### Numbers 20:1-13 Deuteronomy 32:51

#### a. Uncrossable

##### i. Not Believed Me

1. The Lord told Moses only to *speak* to the rock for its flow must not be attributed to his own efforts but to the Lord's miraculous provision. **Moses**, however, at the breaking point of his endurance and patience (he called the people **rebels**), drew attention to his own authority as covenant mediator by striking **the rock twice with his staff**. The **water** came because of God's beneficent grace, but because **Moses and Aaron** had drawn attention to themselves rather than trusting in **the LORD** they were denied entrance to **the Promised Land**. *The principle here is clear: "From everyone who has been given much, much will be demanded" (Luke 12:48). A lesser man than Moses might not have suffered such divine displeasure and denial. So striking was both the miracle and its aftermath that the place was called Meribah ("quarreling").*
2. Yahweh, and that they did not "sanctify" him (להקדישני) in the eyes of Israel. The general effect is to suggest that *they* have prevented the full power and might of Yahweh from becoming evident to the people, and have thus robbed him of the fear and reverence due to him. This would correspond very well with the view that the speech to the people in v 10 was uncalled for, and that it was in some measure a claim that they had the power to provide the water. In Num 20:24; 27:14 the author accuses Aaron and Moses of "rebellion" (מררה), a root always used in the Pentateuch of defiance against God.
3. The former term (Heb. *mā' al*) has the basic idea of treachery or unfaithfulness, suggesting here that Moses, as covenant mediator, had proved to be disloyal to that covenant commitment in a time of unusual trial. The verb occurs in numerous other places where the issue of covenant is central (cf. Lev 26:40; Num 31:16; 1 Chr 5:25; Ezek 17:15–19; 20:25–27)

##### ii. Treat Me as Holy

1. *In the sight of Israel*

2. Instead they addressed the people harshly and intentionally struck the rock. This failure to follow instructions, coupled with a rebellious and invective attitude against God's people, was a violation of the holiness of God. In Exod 17:2–6 Moses was instructed by God to strike the rock in order to produce water, and he did so faithfully in the presence of the elders of Israel. He acted faithfully and God was glorified. This time the situation was similar, but the instructions and results were quite dissimilar. That Moses "did not trust in me enough to honor me as holy" means that he had let the Lord down by his rash unfaithfulness and obstinate attitude toward the Lord and his people. The prophet who previously had been called "more humble than any other man on the face of the earth" (Num 12:3) had acted haughtily; the servant of Yahweh who was the exemplar of faithfulness (12:7) had fallen; and the one who was said to have spoken with the Lord "face to face" (12:8) had brought defamation to his Lord
3. Again the covenant implications are clear, especially in Moses' act of rebellion. The Lord had told him to speak to the rock (Num 20:8), the mere act of speaking being designed to demonstrate the power of God who creates by the spoken word. To strike the rock was to introduce an interruptive element and thus to diminish the significance of the powerful word. By doing this, Moses betrayed not only anger and disobedience but he correspondingly reflected on the God whom he served by implying that God could not bring forth water by the divine word alone.

## II. Before It's Over vs. 31:14-30

- a. Future Warning 31:14-18
  - i. They will play the Harlot v.16, 29
  - ii. God will hide his face v. 17
- b. Last Message - Song of Witness 31:19
  - i. Put it on their Lips
    1. Me against Israel
    2. After their Promise Land they will turn v.20
    3. Chapter 32 Song
- c. Next Leaders - Joshua Commissioned 31:23-20
  - i. God will be with Joshua v.23
    1. The "spirit of wisdom" that rested on Joshua was a divine gift to enable him to govern justly, like that which Solomon received in 1 Kgs 3:7–12. The act of Moses laying "his hands" on Joshua is connected with the idea of a transference of authority in a rite of investiture.

### III. Last View vs. 34:1-7

#### a. God Showed

##### i. All the Land

1. The spot referred to can be fixed, at least approximately, with tolerable confidence. The table-land (the *Mishor*, 3:10) or Moab, a plateau about 3000 ft. above the level of the sea, descends gradually to the Jordan-valley by a multitude of irregular mountain ridges and summits
2. Anyone who stands atop Mount Nebo and looks across the great Rift valley toward the land of Israel knows full well that Moses saw much more than the normal human eye can see, for God enabled him to “see” the whole promised land. Today we see the northern end of the Dead Sea, the green of the palm trees in the oasis of Jericho down in the valley below, and dimly on top of a distant ridge on the horizon there in front of us, beyond the valley, is the tiny speck of the Tower of the Ascension (of the Russian Orthodox monastery) on top of the Mount of Olives.
3. Moses was given a vision of the promised land in its entirety that no tourist today can see without ascending into the skies. Perhaps this fact helps to explain the subsequent tradition known as *The Assumption of Moses*, with its account of Moses being taken directly to heaven rather than dying a natural death. Jude 9 appears to refer to such a tradition, which was apparently well known in early Jewish circles. At any rate, it would require such an airborne experience for Moses to actually see all that the biblical text says he saw in his vision from the summit of Mount Nebo. At this point Moses is once again told that he “shall not cross over” into the promised land (cf. 3:27; 4:21–22; 32:42; and Num 20:12).

#### b. Land Promised

##### i. See

##### ii. Not Go

1. Tragically, Moses was once more to hear the words of Yahweh denying him access to all he saw before him (v. 4b; cf. Num 20:12; 27:14; Deut 1:37; 3:26–27). The prohibition here was very simple—“You will not cross over into it”—but there was no reason stated. This, of course, was not necessary since Moses had heard it many times (Deuteronomy 32:51)

#### c. The End

##### i. Servant of the Lord

1. the servant of the LORD” (v. 5), a designation few others were privileged to bear (cf. Josh 24:29; Judg 2:8; 2 Sam 3:18; 7:5, 8; 1

Kgs 11:13; 14:8; 2 Kgs 18:12; 19:34; 21:8; Job 1:8; 42:8; Isa 20:3; 41:8–9; 42:1; 44:1; 52:13; 53:11).

ii. Died in Moab

1. No man knows the Buriel

- a. Most likely the sepulchre remained hidden precisely to prevent the Israelites from taking Moses' body with them to Canaan, thus violating the divine command to disallow Moses entry there.
- b. In his death, Moses was faithful, and that the prohibition against entering the land had not separated him from God's presence

iii. 120 Years Old

1. Eyes not dim

- a. No feeble

2. Vigor Not Abated

- a. his virility had not departed"—all his juices were still there; he had not "dried up."

3. Not human inability but God's capability

- a. That Moses' death was premature, even though he was 120 years old, is clear from the assessment that "his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone" (v. 7). In other words, he did not fail to enter Canaan because he died, but he died because he failed to enter Canaan. Regardless, the people of Israel rightly viewed him for what he was—a mighty champion for
- b. Moses died because he reached the limit God had set for him, namely 120 years. Unlike the senile David at the time of his death at a later point in time (1 Kgs 2), Moses died at the height of his physical strength shortly after he had commanded the tribes of Israel in battle against the Canaanite kings, Sihon and Og, and immediately after he had climbed to the summit of Mount Nebo alone. He died forty years after the exodus from Egypt, which took place when he was eighty (Exod 7:7; cf. Deut 1:3). Though forty more years had passed, he had not aged.
- c. Although his vision and vigor were not impaired, he was no longer able to fulfill all the onerous responsibilities of leadership he was no longer able to fulfill all the onerous responsibilities of leadership.

## IV. Remembered vs. 34:10-12

- a. No Prophet Like Him
  - i. No Prophet

1. The greatness of Moses lies not in his character or even in his astounding achievements. It is true that he took a self-willed and stiff-necked people of disparate backgrounds and forged them into a nation. With a profound love for his people, which burned like a consuming fire, he was willing to have his own name blotted out in their behalf. His enthusiasm, his compassion, and his sound judgment inspired the people of Israel to dream the impossible dream and see it come to pass. Nonetheless, all this does not explain his unique greatness, for God used him as he did no other until the time of Jesus, as an instrument of revelation. The Torah of Moses was the foundation on which all subsequent leaders in Israel and the early Christian church would build. Jesus did not come to do away with that marvelous edifice, but to complete it. On the Mount of Transfiguration, one of the figures with Jesus was none other than Moses himself (Matt 17:3; Mark 9:4; Luke 9:30).
  2. The statement that “there has not risen a prophet since in Israel like Moses” makes a sharp contrast between Joshua and Moses. Although Joshua succeeded Moses, neither he nor any other prophet after him is to be compared with Moses
    - ii. Face to Face
      1. The point of the text is that Moses had the most direct contact with God of any prophet, and hence had the clearest knowledge of Him and His will.” As the “Word of God” incarnate, and the ultimate fulfillment of the promise of a “prophet like (Moses)” at some future point in time (Deut 18:15, 18),
- b. All God used Him for
- i. Signs
    1. Thus the unique aspect of Moses’ prophetic ministry is to be found in the role he played in a unique and vitally important event in Israel’s history. That unique event, emerging from the Exodus and the forming of the covenant at Sinai, was the formation of the kingdom of God in the nascent, theocratic state of Israel, in which the Lord was King (Exod. 15:18; Deut. 33:5). The event began with the great liberation from Egypt and it was sealed by the new commitment at Sinai.
  - ii. Wonders
  - iii. Mighty Power
  - iv. Great Terror
    1. Moreover, no other prophet had till then performed such signs and wonders ( *’ōtôt* and *môpē’ētîm*; cf. Exod 7:3; Deut 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 26:8; 29:3; Neh 9:10; Ps 78:43; 105:27), awesome displays to Pharaoh and all Egypt that Yahweh alone is God (v. 11). Nor was their effect intended only for the pagan world. Israel also needed to be reminded over and over again of the power and protection

of Yahweh manifested through his humble and faithful servant Moses (v. 12).

2. The words denote the special pre-eminence of Moses among the prophets.—**11–12.** Two verses calling attention to Moses' pre-eminence in other respects, viz. on account of the wonders wrought by his instrumentality.
  3. The significance of these words does not lie simply in the character of Moses, but rather it is to be found in the nature of his achievement, in God's strength.
- v. All Israel
1. Deuteronomy concludes with the phrase "before the eyes of all Israel." In the phrase "all Israel" we find an envelope around the book as a whole (see 1:1) that tells the reader we have reached the end of a long journey, which is also the beginning of another even longer journey for God's people

## Comment

**1** The summit of the Pisgah was one of the places to which Balak, king of Moab, took the prophet Balaam in his attempt to get him to curse the hosts of Israel (Num 21:20). In that context we learn that the Pisgah range overlooks the Jeshimon (see *Comment* on 32:10). The summit of Pisgah refers to a promontory of a particular mountain, the Ras es-Siyaghah, which is slightly lower than the summit of Mount Nebo and separated from it by a saddle. It is an ideal place from which to view the Rift valley and points beyond in the promised land—and the wilderness region known as the Jeshimon (cf. Num 21:20), in the “plains of Jericho” (cf. Josh 4:13), where Joshua subsequently set up battle camp to take possession of the land YHWH showed Moses. YHWH “let him see all the land”—beginning with Gilead, the Transjordanian hill country extending from the Arnon River northward beyond the Yarmuk River into what is elsewhere called Bashan.

**2–4** See the *Comment* on 33:23. “Ephraim and Manasseh” include the central hill country in the land of Canaan, which extends from Judah in the south to the Esdraelon Valley in the region of Galilee. The reference to “the plain” here probably refers to the Jordan Valley immediately north of the Dead Sea (cf. “the great plain” in Josephus *J. W.*<sup>1</sup> 4.8.2 §§452–56), which includes “the valley of Jericho city of palm trees.” Here the phrase “as far as Zoar” refers to the southern end of the Dead Sea, which is not visible from the summit of Mount Nebo, because of the mountain range extending to the viewer’s left that blocks the view such that only the northern part of the Dead Sea is visible. Moses was given a vision of the promised land in its entirety that no tourist today can see without ascending into the skies. Perhaps this fact helps to explain the subsequent tradition known as *The Assumption of Moses*, with its account of Moses being taken directly to heaven rather than dying a natural death. Jude 9 appears to refer to such a tradition, which was apparently well known in early Jewish circles. At any rate, it would require such an airborne experience for Moses to actually see all that the biblical text says he saw in his vision from the summit of Mount Nebo. At this point Moses is once again told that he “shall not cross over” into the promised land (cf. 3:27; 4:21–22; 32:42; and Num 20:12).

**5** “Moses the servant of YHWH died there.” According to Josephus (*Ant.*<sup>2</sup> 4.8.49 §327), Moses died on the first of Adar, the twelfth month—exactly six months after the death of Aaron. Moses died “as decreed by YHWH,” that is, at YHWH’s command (lit.<sup>3</sup> “at the mouth of”). The midrashic interpretation that Moses died at a kiss from God (see *b. B. Bat.* 17a) is the source of the Jewish idiom “death by a kiss,” which refers to “sudden, painless death in old age” (Tigay [1996] 338).

**6** Though the subject of the clause ויקבר אתו, “he buried him,” is ambiguous, the context makes clear that it is God who “buried him in a valley” in the vicinity of Mount Nebo and Beth-peor. “Many commentators have conjectured that Moses’ gravesite was kept secret to prevent people from making it a shrine, ... the statement ... could be polemical, intended to undermine claims that a particular site is Moses’ grave” (Tigay [1996] 338, citing F. M. Cross, “Reuben, First-Born of Jacob,” *ZA<sup>4</sup>W Sup* 100 [1988] 50–52).

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<sup>1</sup>*J. W. Josephus, Jewish Wars*

<sup>2</sup>*Ant. Josephus, Antiquities of the Jews*

<sup>3</sup>lit. literally

<sup>4</sup>*ZAW Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*

7 “Moses was one hundred and twenty years old at his death.” Gen 6:3 refers to 120 as a limit imposed by God on the life span of human beings, a limit that applies specifically only to Moses in the Bible (see *Comment* on 31:2). The number 120 may have been “based on a combination of empirical observation and ancient Near Eastern mathematics,” as Tigay suggests ([1996] 338). At the same time, however, it should be noted that the scribes of ancient Israel had their own system of “biblical mathematics” (see Christensen, *PSR* 14 [1987] 59–65; and C. J. Labuschagne, *Numerical Secrets of the Bible: Rediscovering the Bible Codes* [N. Richland Hills, TX: BIBAL Press, 2000]).

The statement that “his eye was not dim” makes clear that Moses was not feeble. Indeed, “his virility had not departed”—all his juices were still there; he had not “dried up.” The noun *חלה*, translated “virility,” appears only here in the Hebrew Bible, though two occurrences in Ugaritic are known, from which Albright concludes that it means “sexual power” (*BASOR* 94 [1944] 32–35). Though Tigay interprets this verse, with Ibn Ezra and others, to mean “he had not become wrinkled,” in the sense that despite his years he did not look aged, this does not do justice to the Hebrew idiom (see Albright’s arguments). Moreover, his claim that “Moses’ vigor had, in fact abated (31:2)” is incorrect (see *Comment* on 31:2 above). Moses died because he reached the limit God had set for him, namely 120 years. Unlike the senile David at the time of his death at a later point in time (1 Kgs 2), Moses died at the height of his physical strength shortly after he had commanded the tribes of Israel in battle against the Canaanite kings, Sihon and Og, and immediately after he had climbed to the summit of Mount Nebo alone. He died forty years after the exodus from Egypt, which took place when he was eighty (Exod 7:7; cf. Deut 1:3). Though forty more years had passed, he had not aged.

8 The people mourned Moses’ death for “thirty days,” which is the normal period in ancient Israel to mourn for the dead (cf. 21:13 and Num 20:29 for the death of Aaron).

9 The “spirit of wisdom” that rested on Joshua was a divine gift to enable him to govern justly, like that which Solomon received in 1 Kgs 3:7–12. The act of Moses laying “his hands” on Joshua is connected with the idea of a transference of authority in a rite of investiture. Daube has challenged Robertson Smith’s assertion that only in the case of the scapegoat was the laying on of hands to be interpreted as indicating transference; elsewhere, in the case of sin and burnt offerings, the idea was the same as in acts of blessing and consecration, namely, a general identification, by means of physical contact, of the person imposing his hands with the person or animal on whose head he imposed them. Sansom has explored five contexts for the use of Hebrew *סמך*, “leaning on (of hands),” and concludes as follows: “Some, but not all, of Moses’ authority is given to Joshua. He is to be dependent upon Eleazar, who is to enquire of the Lord. Yet he is appointed to lead the people. We may therefore take the laying-on of hands as the official investiture to that task, and we may confidently accept that the hand-laying is connected with the idea of a transference—although this time of authority rather than of guilt” (*ExpTim* 94 [1983] 325). It should be noted, however, that there is no “apostolic authority” here; for Joshua does not appoint a successor. Indeed, he is the only one on whom hands are laid. Hands are not laid on priests or on the elders (Exod 18:13–27), even though it is sometimes assumed that in the case of the elders they were. As Tigay notes ([1996] 339), the gesture of *סמכה*,

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<sup>5</sup>*BASOR Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research*

<sup>6</sup>*ExpTim The Expository Times*



“laying (of hands),” became part of the ceremony of rabbinic ordination. From this point on, the people of Israel “hearkened to him”—they began to obey Joshua as their leader.

**10** The statement that “there has not risen a prophet since in Israel like Moses” makes a sharp contrast between Joshua and Moses. Although Joshua succeeded Moses, neither he nor any other prophet after him is to be compared with Moses (on the concept of incomparability in the Bible, see C. Labuschagne, *The Incomparability of Yahweh in the Old Testament* [Leiden: Brill, 1966]; and Knoppers, *CB<sup>7</sup>Q* 54 [1992] 411–31). See also the *Comment* on 18:18. In subsequent tradition, this promise that God would “raise up a prophet like (Moses)” was fulfilled in the succession of canonical prophets in ancient Israel, and culminated in the person of Jesus Christ, to whom the words of 31:10 apply in a more complete sense—there has not risen a prophet since.

By saying “YHWH knew” Moses, the Hebrew means that YHWH “chose” Moses by singling him out to speak with him “face to face.” This statement, however, poses somewhat of a puzzle, as Tigay’s discussion suggests ([1996] 380). Exod 33:11 affirms that God spoke to Moses “face to face, as one speaks to a friend” (NRS<sup>8</sup>v); but at the same time, God spoke different words a few verses later in Exod 33:20, when he declared: “you cannot see my face; for no one shall see me and live” (NRS<sup>9</sup>v). According to Num 12:8 Moses did see God, who spoke with him “mouth to mouth,” that is, plainly and not in riddles. The phrase is used differently in Deuteronomy (cf. 4:12–15 and 5:4), where it has become an idiom that indicates “in person,” or “directly,” “without mediation.” As Tigay puts it ([1996] 340), “The point of the text is that Moses had the most direct contact with God of any prophet, and hence had the clearest knowledge of Him and His will.” As the “Word of God” incarnate, and the ultimate fulfillment of the promise of a “prophet like (Moses)” at some future point in time (Deut 18:15, 18), Jesus had even deeper personal contact with God and God’s will for his people.

The statement that “there has not risen a prophet since in Israel” has an interesting parallel in the Mari documents, as A. Malamat notes (“A Forerunner of Biblical Prophecy: The Mari Documents,” in F<sup>10</sup>S F. M. Cross [1987] 44). In the case of the professional prophets noted there, the actual message given is preceded by the verb “to arise” (*tebû*), “which alludes to the stimulation of the prophets in the temple (perhaps getting up from a sitting or crouching position)” (p. 44; cf. *CT<sup>11</sup>A* 4.1.23; 4.3.30; 4.4.32; etc.). Mayes finds the presentation of Moses here to be in conflict with 18:18 ([1981] 413). It is better to see these two verses as forming an inclusion around Deut 18–34, which anticipates the whole of the Former Prophets, where indeed there is no prophet “in Israel like Moses.” In the Latter Prophets we find the expectation of the appearance of the prophet like Moses, which becomes an essential part of eschatological speculation within apocalyptic literature—and in the *NT*, where Jesus is seen as the fulfillment of this hope.

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<sup>7</sup>*CBQ Catholic Biblical Quarterly*

<sup>8</sup>NRSV New Revised Standard Version

<sup>9</sup>NRSV New Revised Standard Version

<sup>10</sup>FS *Festschrift*

<sup>11</sup>*CTA* A. Herdner, *Corpus des tablettes en cunéiformes alphabétiques*, 2 vols. (Paris: Imprimerie Nationale, 1963)

**11–12** “The signs and the wonders” that God performed through Moses in the exodus from Egypt demonstrate that the words of Moses really do come from God. These same signs and wonders are invoked in 4:32–40 to show God’s uniqueness and his incomparability. “The great awesome deeds that Moses did” refer to what my teacher G. E. Wright often described as “the *Magnalia Dei*” (the title of his *Festschrift* [1976]). Deuteronomy concludes with the phrase “before the eyes of all Israel.” In the phrase “all Israel” we find an envelope around the book as a whole (see 1:1) that tells the reader we have reached the end of a long journey, which is also the beginning of another even longer journey for God’s people, one that extends from Joshua to another “Joshua” in times to come, for “Jesus” is simply the Greek form of “Joshua.”

### **Explanation**

Anyone who stands atop Mount Nebo and looks across the great Rift valley toward the land of Israel knows full well that Moses saw much more than the normal human eye can see, for God enabled him to “see” the whole promised land. Today we see the northern end of the Dead Sea, the green of the palm trees in the oasis of Jericho down in the valley below, and dimly on top of a distant ridge on the horizon there in front of us, beyond the valley, is the tiny speck of the Tower of the Ascension (of the Russian Orthodox monastery) on top of the Mount of Olives. That very building calls attention to the fact that the “prophet like Moses,” who is described as being greater than Moses (Heb 3:3), also looked out on the whole promised land as he ascended into heaven (Acts 1:9). The city of Jerusalem is on the other side of that mountain. There is no way from that spot for us to see with Moses “all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea” (v 2).

At the “burning bush” on Mount Sinai, God revealed his presence to Moses and called him to lead the people of Israel out of slavery in Egypt, and to take them “home” to the promised land. Moses now gazed on that very land, which he himself was not permitted to enter. “And Moses the servant of YHWH died there in the land of Moab, according to the mouth of YHWH” (v 5). According to rabbinic tradition, he died “with a kiss from the mouth of God,” which is a midrashic rendering of the Hebrew text, as Tigay notes ([1996] 338, 412 n. 7). God arranged a private burial; for Moses was buried “in a valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor, and no one knows his burial site to this day” (v 6). Moses needs no grave or funerary monument to preserve his memory. His name is engraved in history by virtue of his work, which is far more enduring than any granite sarcophagus.

Joshua was praised as being “filled with a spirit of wisdom” (v 9). The prophet Isaiah envisioned that same “spirit of wisdom and understanding” resting on “a shoot from the stump of Jesse” (Isa 11:1–2), whose name was also “Joshua,” or Jesus, as a Greek version of that Hebrew name has come to us. It is an honor reserved for this second Joshua to do “what the law [Torah], weakened by the flesh, could not do” (Rom 8:3). For God sent “his own Son in the likeness of sinful flesh, and to deal with sin, he condemned sin in the flesh, so that the just requirement of the law might be fulfilled in us, who walk not according to the flesh, but according to the Spirit” (Rom 8:3–4 <sup>NRS</sup><sup>12</sup>v).

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<sup>12</sup>NRSV New Revised Standard Version

The greatness of Moses lies not in his character or even in his astounding achievements. It is true that he took a self-willed and stiff-necked people of disparate backgrounds and forged them into a nation. With a profound love for his people, which burned like a consuming fire, he was willing to have his own name blotted out in their behalf. His enthusiasm, his compassion, and his sound judgment inspired the people of Israel to dream the impossible dream and see it come to pass. Nonetheless, all this does not explain his unique greatness, for God used him as he did no other until the time of Jesus, as an instrument of revelation. The Torah of Moses was the foundation on which all subsequent leaders in Israel and the early Christian church would build. Jesus did not come to do away with that marvelous edifice, but to complete it. On the Mount of Transfiguration, one of the figures with Jesus was none other than Moses himself (Matt 17:3; Mark 9:4; Luke 9:30).<sup>13</sup>

**34. The narrative of Moses' death.**—The death of Moses will naturally have been narrated by all the principal Pentateuchal sources; and accordingly it is not surprising that the present chapter should comprise elements derived from J<sup>14</sup>E, <sup>15</sup>D, and P. The analysis is in most cases sufficiently clear; the only uncertainty is in one or two places where the phraseology displays so little that is characteristic that it might have been used by any narrator.

To <sup>16</sup>P belong—

- V. 1 certainly *from the Steppes of Moab unto Nebo* (see 32:49: and note that *Steppes of Moab* is peculiar to P: *L.O.T.*<sup>17</sup> p. 128, No. 50); and probably *that is fronting Jericho* as well (see on 32:49).
- V. 7a to *when he died* (note the exact conformity of the sentence with Nu. 33:39; also with the other similarly constructed sentences Gn. 12:4, 16:16, 17:24, 21:5, 25:26, 41:46, 50:26, Ex. 7:7,—all P); perhaps also v. 7b.
- V. 8–9 (in v. 8a notice “the Steppes of Moab,” and the great similarity in form of Nu. 20:29b: v. 9a points back directly to P’s account of the institution of Joshua, Nu. 27:18b, 23a; v. 9b to Nu. 27:20 מוֹשֶׁה; and with *And they did according as Jehovah commanded Moses*, comp. Lev. 8:4, 16:34b, Nu. 20:27, 27:22, 31:31,—all P).

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<sup>13</sup> Duane L. Christensen, [\*Deuteronomy 21:10–34:12\*](#), vol. 6B, Word Biblical Commentary (Dallas: Word, Incorporated, 2002), 871–875.

<sup>14</sup>JE Denoting the other Pentateuchal sources

<sup>15</sup>D The Deuteronomist.

<sup>16</sup>P Denoting the other Pentateuchal sources

<sup>17</sup>*L.O.T. An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, by S. R. Driver (Edinburgh, 1891; ed. 5, 1894; ed. 7, 1898).

The references are to the pages of edd. 1–5, which are indicated in edd. 6 and 7 by figures in heavy type inserted in square brackets in the text.

Probably also v. 5 end “at the command of Jehovah” (see Nu. 33:38a, of Aaron; and note that על פי is a standing expression of P’s, *L.O.T.*<sup>18</sup>. p. 127, No. 41).

The rest of the chap. shows no signs of P’s style. “The mention of *Pisgah* v. 1 (Nu. 21:20, 23:14: also Dt. 3:27), the phrasing of v. 4a (which agrees verbally with Ex. 33:1b), the characteristic expressions in v. 6, 7b, and the affirmation, v. 10, of the fact that no prophet had since arisen in Israel whom Jehovah had known ‘face to face’ (see Ex. 33:11; and cf. Nu. 12:7–8), all point unmistakably to the prophetic narrative of J<sup>19</sup>E” (Westpha<sup>20</sup>, p. 46 f.). One or two expressions in v. 5, 6a are, however, possibly additions by <sup>21</sup>D: and v. 11–12 (which abounds with Deut<sup>22</sup>. phrases) is a supplement to v. 10, attached certainly by a Deuteronomist hand.

1. *From the Steppes of Moab* (עֲרֻבוֹת מוֹאָב) Nu. 22:1, 26:3, 63, 31:12, 33:48–50, 35:1, 36:13, Jos. 13:32<sup>23</sup>†. The term (which is used only by P) denotes the open plain, between Jordan and the mountains of Moab, into which the Jordan-valley expands immediately N. of the Dead Sea, now called the *Ghôr-es-Seisebān*, about 9 miles from N. to S., and 5–7 miles from E. to W. The corresponding plain on the W. side (about 8 miles from N. to S., by 6½ from E. to W.) is called the *Steppes of Jericho* (Jos. 4:13, 5:10, 2 K. 25:5, Jer. 39:5, 52:8). The term is elsewhere used of a desert land (Is. 35:1, 51:3 *al.*), and seems to have been given to the region in question on account of its barren, unproductive soil: at least, the plain about Jericho (except the immediate environs of the city; see on v. 3) has this character (Jos. *BJ.* iii. 10, 7 ἐρημίαν; Rob. *BR*<sup>24</sup>. i. 542; *S. & P*<sup>25</sup>. 296, 297; *PEF*<sup>26</sup>. *Survey*, iii. 168),—the *Ghôr-es-Seisebān*, is, however, described as well watered, and covered with trees (Tristram, *Moab*, p. 349; *Land of Israel*, 513 f.).—*Went up*] Nebo would be more than 3500 ft. above the level of the Jordan-valley.—*Unto Mount Nebo, to the top (or head) of Pisgah, that is fronting Jericho*] a comparison of 3:27 with 32:49 shows that “Mount Nebo,” and “the top (head) of Pisgah” are two alternative designations of the same spot—the one, perhaps, fixing it more precisely than the other—used by different writers: here they are combined,—probably by the final compiler of the Pent., who to the words of J<sup>27</sup>E, “And

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<sup>18</sup>*L.O.T. An Introduction to the Literature of the Old Testament*, by S. R. Driver (Edinburgh, 1891; ed. 5, 1894; ed. 7, 1898).

The references are to the pages of edd. 1–5, which are indicated in edd. 6 and 7 by figures in heavy type inserted in square brackets in the text.

<sup>19</sup>JE Denoting the other Pentateuchal sources

<sup>20</sup>Westphal Westphal, Al., *Les Sources du Pentateuque*, Étude de critique et *d.histoire*. i. (1888) Le problème littéraire; ii. (1892) Le problème historique.

Extremely well-written, the author often rising to real eloquence. Vol. i. contains an historical account of the rise and progress of the critical study of the Hexateuch; vol. ii. a comparative study, literary and historical, of the documents of which the Hexateuch is composed.

<sup>21</sup>D The Deuteronomist.

<sup>22</sup>Deut. “Deut.,” attached to citations from Jud. or Kings, indicates that the passages referred to are the work of the Deuteronomist compilers of the books in question (see p. xci f.).

<sup>23</sup>† The sign following a series of references, indicates that all examples of the word or form in question, occurring in the OT., have been quoted.

<sup>24</sup>*BR.* Robinson, Edw., *Biblical Researches in Palestine, &c.*, ed. 2 (London, 1856).

<sup>25</sup>*S. & P. Sinai and Palestine in connection with their History*, by A. P. Stanley, ed. 1864.

<sup>26</sup>*PEF.* Palestine Exploration Fund.

<sup>27</sup>JE Denoting the other Pentateuchal sources

Moses went up to the top (*or* head) of Pisgah” (cf. 3:27; and in J<sup>28</sup>E, Nu. 21:20, 23:14), added the geographical definitions of <sup>29</sup>P (cf. 32:49). On the name *Pisgah*, see on 3:17.—*Fronting*] על פני usually suggests *East of* (cf. on 11:29): so *e.g.* Gn. 25:18, 1 K. 11:7.

The spot referred to can be fixed, at least approximately, with tolerable confidence. The table-land (the *Mishor*, 3:10) or Moab, a plateau about 3000 ft. above the level of the sea, descends gradually to the Jordan-valley by a multitude of irregular mountain ridges and summits, intersected by numerous Wādys. Among these ridges there is one which “runs out west from the plateau, sinking gradually; at first a broad brown field of arable land, then a flat top, crowned by a ruined cairn, bearing the name *Nebā*”: this is just 5 miles S.W. of Ḥeshbon, and 9½ miles due E. of the N.E. end of the Dead Sea; its height is 2643 ft. above the Mediterranean Sea, or 3935 ft. above the Dead Sea. West of *Nebā*, the ridge becomes narrower: at about a mile from *Nebā* are the ruins (Byzantine) of *Ṣiāghah*; and ½ a mile S. W. of this, the ridge terminates in a projecting spur called *Rās Ṣiāghah* (the head of *Ṣiāghah*), whence the slopes fall steeply on all sides down to the Jordan-valley, and the Dead Sea, 3586 ft. below (Conder, *Heth and Moab*,<sup>3</sup> p. 132 f.).<sup>30\*</sup> About a mile N. of these two heights, the ridge of which they form part slopes down into the picturesque Wādy ‘Ayūn Mūsa, in which are the cascades mentioned on 3:17. This ridge is stated to bear indifferently the names of *Nebā* and *Ṣiāghah*. *Nebā* is doubtless the ancient *Nēbō*. The name *Pisgah* has not been preserved. Presumably, it was the ancient name of the entire ridge. רֶאֱשִׁית פִּיִּסְגָּה may be rendered either the *top* or the *head* of *Pisgah*; if רֶאֱשִׁית be *top*, the locality meant will have been the modern *Nebā*, the culminating point of the ridge; but in view of the fact that it is described in Nu. 21:20 as *looking forth over Jeshimon* (whether this be the wilderness of Judah, or the long tract of barren land on the E. of Jordan, N. of the Dead Sea), it is more natural to understand it of the projecting headland at the W. extremity of the ridge, the *Rās Ṣiāghah*, which commands the better prospect of the Jordan-valley below.

From neither point is there much to be seen towards the E. and S., the high plateau of Moab behind, and the ridge of Maslubiyeḥ on the S., intercepting the view in those directions. But towards the N., W., and S. W., the panorama is superb, though the terms of Dt. 34:1–3 are hyperbolic, and must be taken as including points filled in by the imagination, as well as those actually visible to the eye (see the notes). Actually the prospect embraces—on the N.E., the Belga (p. 52), a “waving ocean of corn and grass”; on the N. the undulating forests of the Southern half of Gile‘ad, terminating in the *Jebel ‘Osha* (3650 ft. above the sea), behind *es-Salt*; the snowclad top of *Ḥermon*; *Tabor* (in *Zebulun*); *Rās Ibzīḳ* (*Bezeḳ*), S. of *Gilboa* (in *Issachar*); *‘Ebal* and *Gerizim*, with the cleft between them indicating where *Shechem* lay; in front, as the eye moves Southwards, the heights of *Benjamin* and *Judah* with the *Jordan-valley* spread out beneath; the gap in the hills leading up from *Jericho*, with the height of *Ḳarantania* on the right; further off, on the horizon, the lofty peak of *Neby Samwil*, the ancient *Mizpeh* (2935 ft.); next, the *Mount of Olives*, with the hill of *Zion* behind, and the ridge on which *Bethleḥem* and *Ḥebbron* lie, stretching out to the left; in the valley below, the lower course of the *Jordan*, fringed with its growth of semi-tropical vegetation, the “pride of *Jordan*” (*Jer.* 12:5, 49:19 = 50:44, *Zech.*

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<sup>28</sup>JE Denoting the other Pentateuchal sources

<sup>29</sup>P Denoting the other Pentateuchal sources

<sup>30\*</sup> On *Ṣiāghah*, see further *Survey of E. Palestine*, pp. 154–156; and of *Nebā*, *ib.* pp. 198–203.

11:3); the plain of es-Seisebān (East of the river), the old Abel Shiṭṭim, immediately beneath the spectator; opposite, the dusky, barren plain of Jericho, with the “rich green islets” of ‘Ain es-Sulṭān and ‘Ain Dûk, underneath the hill of Ḳarantania; lastly, the Dead Sea, as far as ‘Engedi, stretched out like “a long strip of molten metal, with the sun mirrored on its surface,” and bordered by the bare and stern limestone rocks forming the edge of the “Wilderness of Judah.”<sup>31\*</sup>

*And jehovah showed him all the land, (even) Gile‘ad as far as Dan,<sup>2</sup> and all Naphtali, and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah as far as the hinder sea,<sup>3</sup> and the South, and the Round, (even) the plain of Jericho, the city of palm-trees, as far as Zo‘ar]* “all the land” is the obj. of “showed,” the following words to the end of v. 3, defining the extent of land that is meant (RV<sup>32</sup>. renders wrongly). The description begins with the N., and follows the eye round to the S. On Gile‘ad, see on 3:10. The Dan meant can be only the well-known place of that name, formerly Leshem or Laish (Jos. 19:47, Jud. 18:29), near the foot of Ḳermon, where one of the principal sources of the Jordan takes its rise, often mentioned as the extreme N. limit of Canaan (1 S. 3:20 *al.*), now *Tell-el-Ḳāḏi*. Keil and others have supposed that another place of the same name in N. Gile‘ad, mentioned also Gn. 14:14, 2 S. 24:6, is intended; but the existence of such a Dan is extremely questionable (see Del. or Dillm<sup>33</sup>. on Gn. 14:14; *DB*<sup>34</sup>.<sup>352</sup> i. 703, 714: in 2 S. 24:6 read, after <sup>36</sup>, “And they came to Dan, and from Dan they went round unto Ṣidon”); and the terms of the description here imply some well-known locality. The words “as far as (טו) Dan” do not mark the point to which the writer supposed Gile‘ad to reach, but the point to which Moses’ view extended. Dan is not, however, as a matter of fact, visible from Nebā (Conder, *l.c.* p. 139), nor, if Tristram (p. 527) be right, is more than a part (to Jebel ‘Osha) even of the Southern half (3:10) of Gile‘ad; and hence Conder supposes that טו has the force of *towards*. But טו means distinctly *as far as*: no doubt the limit named is intended hyperbolically, and is not to be understood *au pied de la lettre*. Ḳermon being visible from Pisgah, Dan is probably named as the N. limit of Israel, near its foot.—**2.** *And all Naphtali]* the territory N. and N.N.W. of the sea of Gennesareth (on 33:23), reaching a little further N. than Dan. Mentioned as an important Northerly region of Canaan, the hills of which (many about 2500 ft. in height) might (to judge by the map) be discernible in dim outline from an eminence such as Pisgah.—*And all the land of Judah as far as the hinder sea]* *i.e.* the Mediterranean Sea (11:24). This again is not visible from Nebā (Conder, *l.c.*), the view being intercepted by the high central ground of Palestine. The same explanation must be adopted as in the case of Dan.—**3.** *The South]* the *Negeb*, or southern tract of Judah (Jos. 15:21–32); see on 1:7 (p. 13).—*And the Round]* we should perhaps say the *Oval*. *Kikkār*, a *round* (often of a *round* loaf of bread, 1 S.

<sup>31\*</sup> See further Tristram, *Land of Israel*, p. 526 f. (from the “lower Nebbeh,” *i.e.* probably Ṣiāghah, cf. p. 524); *Moab*, pp. 325 f., 329 f.; Conder, *l.c.* pp. 134–139; G. A. Smith, *Geogr.* p. 563 f.

<sup>32</sup>RV. Revised Version.

<sup>33</sup>Dillm. Dillmann, Aug., *Numeri, Deuteronomium und josua*, in the *Kurzgefasstes Exegetisches Handbuch aum AT.*, 1886 (re-written, on the basis of Knobel’s Commentary [Knob. or Kn.] in the same series, 1861).

<sup>34</sup>*DB. A Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by W. Smith, ed. 2 (AARON-JUTTAH), 1893.

<sup>352</sup> *A Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by W. Smith, ed. 2 (AARON-JUTTAH), 1893.

<sup>36</sup>Ⲙ The Greek Version of the OT. (the LXX)

10:3, and of a talent, *i.e.* a *circular* leaden weight, Zech. 5:7), is used technically, as a geographical term, of the circular (or oval) basin into which the Jordan-valley (the 'Arābah) expands, at about 25 miles north of the Dead Sea: so Gn. 13:12, 19:17, 25, 28, 29, 2 S. 18:23, and "the Round of Jordan" Gn. 13:10, 11, 1 K. 7:46 (= 2 Ch. 4:17): RV<sup>37</sup>. "Plain" (with a capital P).<sup>38</sup> here τὰ περὶχωρα, in Gn. and 2 Ch. ἡ περὶχωρος (cf. Mt. 3:5). See S. & P<sup>39</sup>. pp. 284, 287, 488 f.—(Even) *the plain of Jericho*] not "of" (RV<sup>40</sup>.); the words are in apposition to "the Round," and (with *as far as Zo'ar*) define its extent. The expression "Plain of Jericho" occurs only here; but הערב, a broad "cleft," or plain between mountains (see on 8:7), would be quite suitably applied to the broad depressed plain in which Jericho lies.—*The city of palm-trees*] so (in appos. with *Jericho*) 2 Ch. 28:15; alone (as a name of the city) Jud. 1:16, 3:13. Jericho was renowned in antiquity for its palm-groves. The site of the ancient city was, no doubt, close to the beautiful fountain 'Ain es-Sulṭan, or Elisha's Spring, which gushes forth in a copious stream about a mile from the foot of the mountains which lead up into the high ground of Judah. At present the site is neglected, and haunted only by wandering Bedouins; but under cultivation it must have presented a very different appearance. Josephus seldom mentions Jericho, without praising the richness and productiveness of its soil. He calls it the most fertile tract of Judæa; and in speaking of the fountain says that it watered a tract 70 stadia long by 20 broad, covered with beautiful pleasure-gardens (παράδεισοι κάλλιστοὶ τε καὶ πυκνότατοι), and groves of palms of different species, besides many other choice and rare trees (*BJ.* iv. 8, 3, an eloquent description; cf. Rob. *BR*<sup>41</sup>. i. 559).—*As far as Zo'ar*] the site of Zo'ar has been disputed.

In Roman and Mediæval times (cf. Jos. *BJ.* iv. 8, 4; Euseb. *Onom.* s.v. βάλια), a city called Zoara by the Greeks, and *Zughar* by the Arabs, at the S. end of the Dead Sea, was pointed to, as the Zo'ar of the OT.; and it has been located accordingly either (Rob. *BR*<sup>42</sup>. ii. pp. 107, 518, and others) at Mezraa, at the mouth of the Wādy Kerak, on the isthmus of the peninsula *El-lisan*, or (Wetzstein, *ap. Del. Gen.*<sup>4</sup> p. 564 ff.; Dillm<sup>43</sup>.) in the Ghôr eṣ-Ṣāfia, at the S. E. end of the Dead Sea. The fact, however, that here and Gn. 13:10, 19:20, 22, 23 (cf. 14:2, 8) Zo'ar is alluded to as being in (or very near to) the *Kikkār* (see above) of Jordan, which was visible from the E. of Bethel (*ib.* 13:10, see v. 3, 12:8),—as is actually the case with the lower course of the Jordan, though not with the S. half of the Dead Sea,—inclines others to believe that it lay in reality somewhere at the *North* end of the Dead Sea: see G. Grove in *BD.*<sup>1</sup> (1863), s.v.; Tristram, *Moab*, pp. 330–334; Conder, *Heth and Moab*,<sup>3</sup> p. 154 f., who identifies it with Tell Shagûr, 6 miles N.E. of the Dead Sea, at the foot of the Moab range, near the Wādy Ḥesbān (though owning, p. 137, that this site is not distinguishable from Rās Ṣiāghah). The S. site is the more probable, and is now generally accepted (Hastings' *DB*<sup>44</sup>. iii. 151): even the present passage implies that Zo'ar was some *distant* place, not one at Moses' foot.

<sup>37</sup>RV. Revised Version.

<sup>38</sup>☞ The Greek Version of the OT. (the LXX)

<sup>39</sup>S. & P. *Sinai and Palestine in connection with their History*, by A. P. Stanley, ed. 1864.

<sup>40</sup>RV. Revised Version.

<sup>41</sup>*BR.* Robinson, Edw., *Biblical Researches in Palestine, &c.*, ed. 2 (London, 1856).

<sup>42</sup>*BR.* Robinson, Edw., *Biblical Researches in Palestine, &c.*, ed. 2 (London, 1856).

<sup>43</sup>Dillm. Dillmann, Aug., *Numeri, Deuteronomium und josua*, in the *Kurzgefasstes Exegetisches Handbuch aum AT.*, 1886 (re-written, on the basis of Knobel's Commentary [Knob. or Kn.] in the same series, 1861).

<sup>44</sup>*DB.* *A Dictionary of the Bible*, edited by W. Smith, ed. 1 (1863).

4. *The land which I swear, &c.] verbatim* as Ex. 33:1. See on 1:8.—*Caused thee to see]* in the Heb., the same verb which is rendered “showed” in v. 1.—*Thou shalt not go over thither]* cf. 1:37, 3:27, 4:21, 22 (<sup>45</sup>D); 32:52, Nu. 20:12 (P).—5. *Moses, the servant of Jehovah]* so often in the Deut<sup>46</sup>. sections of Joshua (1:1, 2, 7, 13, 15, &c.): in Nu. 12:7, 8 (J<sup>47</sup>E) Jehovah calls Moses “my servant.” Also sometimes in later books: 1 K. 8:53, 56, 2 K. 21:8 (Deut<sup>48</sup>). Mal. 3:22, Ps. 105:26, 1 Ch. 6:34, 2 Ch. 1:3, 24:6, 9, Neh. 1:7, 8, 9:14, 10:30, Dan. 9:11. Comp. Jud. 2:8 וימת יהוה עבד יהוה.—*According to the command (mouth) of Jehovah]* so Nu. 33:38 (P), of Aaron. *Mouth* in the sense of *command* is a common Hebrew idiom; and the phrase here used occurs frequently (in P) with reference to Jehovah (e.g. Nu. 3:16, 39, 4:37, 41, 9:18, 20, 23): nevertheless, the Jews understood it here literally; <sup>49</sup> paraphrases על נשיקה מימרא דיהוה; and hence the Rabb. legend that Moses died by the kiss of God.—6. *And he buried him]* though Heb. idiom (see phil. n. on 15:2) would permit the verb to be fairly represented in English by *they buried him* (<sup>50</sup> ἔθαψαν), or *he was buried* (see the RV<sup>51</sup>. of 1 K. 13:9, 2 K. 21:26—the same word as here—Is. 53:9), yet, in view of clause <sup>b</sup>, the subject intended is doubtless Jehovah.—*In the ravine ... in front of Beth-Pe'or]* i.e. in the very ravine in which (according to 3:29, 4:46) Israel at the moment was.

Probably the Wādy Ḥesbān (described in Tristram, *Moab*, p. 343 ff:) for this (to judge by the map in the *Survey of E. Palest.*: cf. also Palmer, *Desert of the Exodus*, p. 525 f.; Tristram, p. 346 [remains in it of an ancient Roman road]) will have been the natural route for the ascent from Livias to Ḥeshbon, which, according to Euseb. (see note on 3:29), passed by Bethpe'or (though the present road is a more circuitous one to the N.). Bethpe'or, it is thus probable, overlooked the Wādy Ḥesbān, the “top of Pe'or” (Nu. 23:28) being an eminence on the hills above it. Cf. on 3:29; and see more fully the writer's art. BETH-PEOR in the *Encycl. Biblica*.

On apocryphal literature relating to the death of Moses, see Jude 9, J. E. Gerhard, *De sepult. Mosis*, 1667; J. A. Schmid, *De morte Mosis*, 1703 (cited by Dillm<sup>52</sup>.); Ew<sup>53</sup>. *Hist.* ii. 224, 226 f.; PRE<sup>54</sup>.<sup>552</sup> xii. 352 f.;

<sup>45</sup>D The Deuteronomist.

<sup>46</sup>Deut. “Deut.” attached to citations from Jud. or Kings, indicates that the passages referred to are the work of the Deuteronomic compilers of the books in question (see p. xci f.).

<sup>47</sup>JE Denoting the other Pentateuchal sources

<sup>48</sup>Deut. “Deut.” attached to citations from Jud. or Kings, indicates that the passages referred to are the work of the Deuteronomic compilers of the books in question (see p. xci f.).

<sup>49</sup>⚡ Targum

<sup>50</sup>Ⓜ The Greek Version of the OT. (the LXX)

<sup>51</sup>RV. Revised Version.

<sup>52</sup>Dillm. Dillmann, Aug., *Numeri, Deuteronomium und josua*, in the *Kurzgefasstes Exegetisches Handbuch aum AT.*, 1886 (re-written, on the basis of Knobel's Commentary [Knob. or Kn.] in the same series, 1861).

<sup>53</sup>Ew. Ewald, H., *Lehrbuch der Hebr. Sprache*, ed. 7, 1863; ed. 8, 1870.

The *Syntax* has been translated by J. Kennedy, Edin. 1881.

<sup>54</sup>PRE. Herzog's *Real-Encyclopädie für Protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, ed. 2, 1877–1888.

<sup>552</sup> Herzog's *Real-Encyclopädie für Protestantische Theologie und Kirche*, ed. 2, 1877–1888.



Schfärer, *NZg*<sup>56.572</sup> ii. 630–638 (where other literature is cited). The (incomplete) *Assumptio Mosis* was first published, in an Old Latin version, by Ceriani, *Monumenta sacra et profana*, 1861, I. i. 55 ff.; Hilgenfeld retranslated it into Greek in his *Messias Judæorum* (1869), p. 437 ff.; the latest edition is Charles' *Assumption of Moses*, 1897: p. 106 ff. of this work contain the patristic quotations referring to the legend of the devil claiming the body of Moses from the Archangel Michael, on the ground that he had been guilty of the murder of the Egyptians, which was repelled by Michael in the words quoted in Jude<sup>9</sup>, ἔπιουμήσατο σοο ὁ θεός. See also the פטירת של משה in Jellinek, *Beth ha-Midrash*, 1853, i. p. 115 ff.

7. *And Moses was an hundred and twenty years old when he died*] the age stated agrees with Dt. 31:2; it was, no doubt, traditional. The clause is derived from <sup>58</sup>P (p. 417): it is the natural complement of Ex. 7:7, Nu. 33:39.—*His eye was not dim* (Gn. 27:1), *neither had his freshness fled*] *freshness* (חַל) occurs only here: but the cogn. adj. חַל means *moist, fresh*, of fruit (Nu. 6:3), or of growing or freshly-cut wood (Ez. 17:24, Gn. 30:37), opp. יבש *dry*. The natural moisture and freshness of his body was not reduced by age.—*Fled*] fig.; cf. of sleep (נָדַד) Gn. 31:40, Est. 6:1, Dan. 6:19 (18). There is nothing distinctive in the phraseology of this clause; hence it is difficult to feel assured whether it belongs to J<sup>59</sup>E, or whether, like cl. <sup>a</sup>, it is to be assigned to P. Wellh.<sup>60</sup> (*Comp*<sup>61</sup>. p. 118) is led by its terseness and force to refer it to J; but it connects so well with cl. <sup>a</sup> that it may be part of P.—8–9. These two verses belong certainly to P.—*And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the Steppes of Moab* (v. 1) *thirty days*] cf. Nu. 20:29 (P), of Aaron: “And all the house of Israel wept for Aaron thirty days.”—9. *Was filled with the spirit of wisdom*] cf. Ex. 28:3 (P).—*Wisdom*] i.e. practical, administrative ability.—*For Moses had laid his hands upon him*] see Nu. 27:18, 23 (P), which is here evidently referred to. The same ceremony (for different purposes) is also mentioned often besides in <sup>62</sup>P (as Lev. 1:4, Nu. 8:10, 12; nowhere else, except 2 Ch. 29:23).—*Hearkened unto him*] Nu. 27:20 “hearken” (RV<sup>63</sup>).

<sup>56</sup>*NZg. Gesch. des Jüd. Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi*, by Emil Schürer, 1886, 1890. The pages of ed. 2 are indicated on the margins of ed. 3 (1898, 1901).

<sup>572</sup> *Gesch. des Jüd. Volkes im Zeitalter Jesu Christi*, by Emil Schürer, 1886, 1890. The pages of ed. 2 are indicated on the margins of ed. 3 (1898, 1901).

<sup>58</sup>P Denoting the other Pentateuchal sources

<sup>59</sup>JE Denoting the other Pentateuchal sources

<sup>60</sup>Wellh. (Wellhausen, J., *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des AT.s*, 1889.

A reprint of the important articles on the composition of the Hexateuch, published by the author to the *Jahrb. für Deutsche Theologie*, 1876, p. 392 ff., P. 531 ff, 1877, P. 407 ff.; and of the matter contributed by him to the 4th edition of Bleek's *Einleitung in das AT.* (1878), on the composition of Jud. Sam. and Kings.

<sup>61</sup>*Comp.* Wellhausen, J., *Die Composition des Hexateuchs und der historischen Bücher des AT.s*, 1889.

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<sup>62</sup>P Denoting the other Pentateuchal sources

<sup>63</sup>RV. Revised Version.

“obey”).—**10.** *Arisen*] Ex. 1:8, Jud. 2:10; also 2:16, 3:9, 15, Dt. 18:15, 18, with which the present passage is not inconsistent, for “like” there expresses similarity, not equality.—*Whom Jehovah knew*] *i.e.* took notice of, deemed worthy of His self-revealing friendship and regard (Gn. 18:19, Am. 3:2; 1 Cor. 8:3).—*Face to face*] in personal converse; so Ex. 33:11 (E): cf. Nu. 12:8 (פָּה אֶל פָּה); and on 5:4. The words denote the special pre-eminence of Moses among the prophets.—**11–12.** Two verses calling attention to Moses’ pre-eminence in other respects, viz. on account of the wonders wrought by his instrumentality. The verses are attached loosely to v. 10b, and express really a new point of view. The phraseology is Deuteronomic; but their imperfect connexion with v. 10 makes it improbable that they are the work of <sup>64</sup>D; they are rather the work of a later (and inferior) Deut<sup>65</sup>. writer, who sought to supplement v. 10 by a notice of particulars in which it seemed to him to be deficient.—*As regards all the signs and wonders, &c.*] for the expressions used, see 4:34, 6:22, 7:19, 11:3, 26:8, 29:1 (2)b.—**11.** *In the eyes of all Israel*] 31:7: cf. also 4:34 end 6:22, 29:1 (2).

**34:7.** הָלַךְ] the older form of the suffix, retained regularly in Moabitish, but in Heb. (in our existing texts) only sporadically, 14 times in the Pent. (as Gn. 9:21, 49:11, Ex. 32:17, 25), some 40 times in other books (as Jer. 2:3, 21, 8:6, 10, 17:24, 20:7, 22:18). See *Samuel*, p. xxxv, and on 2 S. 2:9, 21:1.<sup>66</sup>

**34:1–3** In a previous narrative section (32:48–52) Moses was commanded to ascend Mount Nebo to view the promised land before he died. The epilogue to the Book of Deuteronomy relates the fulfillment of that command.<sup>671</sup> Most ironically, Moses had begun his ministry of covenant mediator at a mountain—Mount Sinai (or Horeb)—and now he ended that ministry on another. The mountain in question was a part of a range of mountains east of the Dead Sea and Jordan, the so-called Abarim (Deut 32:49; cf. Num 27:12; 33:47–48). Pisgah apparently was the north and west part of this mountainous area, perhaps the part sloping west (thus *ʿašdôt happisgâ*, “the slopes of Pisgah”; Josh 13:20). Nebo, then, would have been a prominent peak at the top of the Pisgah slope, one from which the entire Cis-Jordan could be viewed. It is

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<sup>64</sup>D The Deuteronomist.

<sup>65</sup>Deut. “Deut.,” attached to citations from Jud. or Kings, indicates that the passages referred to are the work of the Deuteronomic compilers of the books in question (see p. xci f.).

<sup>66</sup>S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, 3rd ed., International Critical Commentary (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), 417–424.

<sup>671</sup>For the literary and historical issues involved, see R. Lux, “Der Tod des Mose als ‘besprochene und erzählte Welte’: literaturwissenschaftliche und theologische Interpretation von Deut. 32:48–52 und 34,” *ZTK* 84 (1987): 395–425; G. W. Coats, “Legendary Motifs in the Moses Death Reports,” *CBQ* 39 (1977): 34–44.

identified as Jebel Es-Siyâgha today, some five miles southwest of Tel Hesban and about fifteen miles east of Jericho.<sup>682</sup>

From there Moses could see the whole land.<sup>693</sup> The vista before him is described in a counterclockwise direction (vv. 1b–3)—Gilead, just to the north; Dan, a hundred miles to the north; Naphtali, eighty to a hundred miles to the northwest; Ephraim and Manasseh, to the northwest; Judah to the west and southwest as far as the western (that is, Mediterranean) sea; the Negev desert to the southwest; and everything from Jericho to Zoar (that is, the entire length of the Dead Sea), to the immediate southwest and south. It is obvious that some of these place names are latter additions to the text (e.g., Dan, Naphtali, Ephraim, Manasseh, Judah) inasmuch as they would not have been assigned to these sites until after the conquest, some years following Moses' death.

**34:4** All that Moses could see in the panorama before him was promised by covenant oath to the patriarchs (v. 4a). It was Yahweh's pledge based on the royal grant he had first made with Abraham, an unconditional act of grace as sure of fulfillment as the very character of God himself (cf. Gen 12:1, 7; 13:15; 15:18; 26:3; 28:13; Deut 1:8, 21, 25). In line with the original geographical parameters of the land as described to Abraham—"from the river of Egypt [i.e., the Wadi el-Arish] to the great river, the Euphrates" (Gen 15:18)—the reaffirmation to Moses included a territory of more than four hundred miles from southwest to northeast and on both sides of the Jordan. The only time in Old Testament history that this ideal ever reached realization was in the heyday of the United Monarchy under David and Solomon (cf. 2 Sam 10:19; 1 Kgs 4:24). Ezekiel's eschatological vision also anticipated a day when the promise to Abraham would find a geographical fulfillment of such a vast extent (Ezek 47:13–48:29).

Tragically, Moses was once more to hear the words of Yahweh denying him access to all he saw before him (v. 4b; cf. Num 20:12; 27:14; Deut 1:37; 3:26–27). The prohibition here was very simple—"You will not cross over into it"—but there no reason was stated. This, of course, was not necessary since Moses had heard it many times (cf. Deut 32:51). Moreover, this final narrative of the book is overwhelmingly commendatory of Moses; there was no point to underscoring the sin that precluded his entry into Canaan, for this would work against the otherwise positive portrayal. On the other hand, it was impossible to ignore the fact that he died east of the promised land, unable to do more than look longingly upon it.

**34:5–8** The account of Moses' death and burial is both succinct and mysterious (vv. 5–8). In mitigating terms he is called "the servant of the LORD" (v. 5), a designation few others were privileged to bear (cf. Josh 24:29; Judg 2:8; 2 Sam 3:18; 7:5, 8; 1 Kgs 11:13; 14:8; 2 Kgs 18:12; 19:34; 21:8; Job 1:8; 42:8; Isa 20:3; 41:8–9; 42:1; 44:1; 52:13; 53:11).<sup>704</sup> He might be barred from Canaan and even sentenced to death on Nebo, but he was Yahweh's servant nonetheless.

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<sup>682</sup> M. Piccirillo, "Les découvertes du Nebo: Aout 1976," *Bible et Terre Sainte* 188 (1977): 6–19; J. E. Jennings, "Nebo," *The New International Dictionary of Biblical Archaeology*, ed. E. M. Blaiklock and R. K. Harrison (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1983), 331–32.

<sup>693</sup> M. Weinfeld, "The Extent of the Promised Land—The Status of Transjordan," in *Das Land Israel in biblischer Zeit*, ed. G. Strecker (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1983), 67–70.

<sup>704</sup> P. D. Miller, Jr., "Moses My Servant: The Deuteronomical Portrait of Moses," *Int* 41 (1987): 245–55.

He was buried (lit., “he [i.e., Yahweh] buried him) in an unmarked grave in “the valley opposite Beth Peor” (v. 6), that is, just north of Pisgah.

Later Jewish tradition speaks of the peculiar circumstances surrounding Moses’ burial as does the New Testament.<sup>715</sup> Jude relates a confrontation between the archangel Michael and the devil over Moses’ body (Jude 9), a dispute apparently having to do with Yahweh’s purpose for burying Moses in a secret place to begin with.<sup>726</sup> Most likely the sepulchre remained hidden precisely to prevent the Israelites from taking Moses’ body with them to Canaan, thus violating the divine command to disallow Moses entry there. His subsequent appearances to witnesses do little to alleviate the enigmatic character of his death and interment, but they do reveal in a most magnificent manner the reality of the ongoing existence of God’s saints and of his everlasting grace toward them (cf. Matt 17:3; Mark 9:4; Luke 9:30; Rev 11:1–13[?]).

That Moses’ death was premature, even though he was 120 years old, is clear from the assessment that “his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone” (v. 7).<sup>737</sup> In other words, he did not fail to enter Canaan because he died, but he died because he failed to enter Canaan. Regardless, the people of Israel rightly viewed him for what he was—a mighty champion for Yahweh—and so they accorded him all the rites and ceremonies appropriate to the demise of such a leader (v. 8; cf. Num 20:29).

## 2. The Epitaph of Moses (34:9–12)

**<sup>9</sup> Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the LORD had commanded Moses.**

**<sup>10</sup> Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, <sup>11</sup> who did all those miraculous signs and wonders the LORD sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. <sup>12</sup> For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.**

For many years it had been apparent that Joshua son of Nun would someday succeed Moses as covenant mediator and leader of his people. He first appeared as a commander of Israel’s fighting men, leading them to victory over the Amalekites under Moses’ direction (Exod 17:8–16). After the giving of the covenant at Sinai, Joshua, designated as the “aide” (*na‘ar*) of Moses, began to assert a greater spiritual role by partially ascending the holy mountain with Moses to receive the stone tablets of the Decalogue (Exod 24:12–13). Thereafter he continued this close covenant association (Exod 32:17; 33:11), always concerned to maintain Moses’ leadership and to carry out his bidding (Num 11:28; 13:16; 14:6–10). When it was disclosed that Moses could not enter the land of Canaan, the mantle of leadership fell on Joshua, who, from

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<sup>715</sup> S. Schwertner, “Erwagungen zu Moses Tod und Grab in Dtn 34:5, 6,” *ZAW* 84 (1972): 25–45; E. Starobinski-Safran, “La Mort et la Survie de Moïse d’après la Tradition Rabbinique,” *La Figure de Moïse*, ed. R. Martin-Achard et al. (Genève: Éditions Labor et Fides, 1978), 31–45.

<sup>726</sup> For the legendary and midrashic texts to which Jude may have been appealing, see B. Reicke, *The Epistles of James, Peter, and Jude*, AB 37 (Garden City: Doubleday, 1964), 202–3.

<sup>737</sup> W. F. Albright, “The ‘Natural Force’ of Moses in the Light of Ugaritic,” *BASOR* 94 (1944): 32–35.

that day forward, prepared himself with that responsibility in view (Num 20:12; 26:65; 27:15–23; 34:17; Deut 1:38; 3:28; 31:3–8, 14–23).

**34:9** The formal act by which the community understood that Joshua was Moses' successor was the ceremony of "laying on of hands," a rite that symbolized the transference of covenant authority and responsibility from the one to the other. This physical demonstration either accompanied the impartation of the divine Spirit or marked the recipient as one already endowed by that Spirit (v. 9). Thus after Moses had been told that he could not lead the people into the promised land, he was told to "take Joshua son of Nun, a man in whom is the spirit, and lay your hand on him" (Num 27:18; cf. Num 11:16–30; 1 Sam 10:1, 10; 16:13).

The principal gift of the Spirit here was wisdom, a necessary endowment if Joshua was to be able to take Moses' place and successfully complete the conquest and occupation of Canaan. The "spirit of wisdom" (i.e., the spirit that bestows wisdom) appears elsewhere in the Scriptures to meet similar needs (Exod 28:3; 31:3–6; 1 Kgs 4:29; 5:12; 7:14; 2 Chr 1:10–12; Isa 11:2; Acts 6:3; Eph 1:17). However that ministry of the Spirit might manifest itself in general, it was clear to Israel that Joshua was now properly certified and equipped to stand in Moses' place as leader of the community (v. 9b; cf. Josh 1:17).

**34:10–12** The words of praise and adulation of Moses that complete this section (vv. 10–12) have, with the previous reference to his death (vv. 5–8), convinced nearly all thoughtful students that Moses himself could not have written this last part of Deuteronomy. As noted in the Introduction, the Mosaic authorship of the book as a whole is not thereby jeopardized, for there is no reason to deny the rest of it to him and, indeed, Deut 34:5–12 could well be a post-Mosaic addendum to the book which, until the addition, was entirely of Mosaic authorship.

Whoever may have penned vv. 10–12 reflected back on Moses as a prophet without compare, one whom Yahweh knew "face to face" (v. 10). This intimacy is reminiscent of the challenge to Moses' preeminence as a prophet by his sister and brother, who accused Moses of arrogating prophetic privilege only to himself (Num 12:2). Part of Yahweh's response to this challenge was that there were, indeed, other prophets (Miriam and Aaron included); but only to Moses did Yahweh speak "face to face" (Num 12:8).<sup>748</sup>

Moreover, no other prophet had till then performed such signs and wonders (*'ōtôt* and *môpětîm*; cf. Exod 7:3; Deut 4:34; 6:22; 7:19; 26:8; 29:3; Neh 9:10; Ps 78:43; 105:27), awesome displays to Pharaoh and all Egypt that Yahweh alone is God (v. 11). Nor was their effect intended only for the pagan world. Israel also needed to be reminded over and over again of the power and protection of Yahweh manifested through his humble and faithful servant Moses (v. 12). It is no less true today that the unbelieving world as well as the church depends to a great extent upon faithful servants of the Lord to make him known in his saving and sovereign purposes.<sup>75</sup>

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<sup>748</sup> S. R. Driver, *A Critical and Exegetical Commentary on Deuteronomy*, ICC (Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1902), 425.

<sup>75</sup> Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, vol. 4, The New American Commentary (Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers, 1994), 451–455.

### 1. MOSES' VIEWING OF THE PROMISED LAND (34:1–4)

34:1–4. **Moses** went up on **Mount Nebo** as **the LORD** told him to do (3:27; 32:48–50). **The top of Pisgah** probably refers to a ridge extending from the summit of Mount Nebo. The places Moses viewed start in the north and follow to the south in a counterclockwise direction. Though one could not normally view **the western sea** (the Mediterranean) from Mount Nebo, perhaps Moses was supernaturally enabled by the Lord to do so (**There the LORD showed him the whole land**). **Zoar** (cf. Gen. 14:2; 19:22–23) may have been at the southern tip of the Dead Sea. God's mention of the **oath** reminded Moses that even though he was not allowed to lead the people into the Promised Land God would still be faithful to His promise to the patriarchs (**Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob**; cf. Deut. 1:8; 6:10; 9:5, 27; 29:13; 30:20) and bring Israel into her new **land**.

### 2. THE DEATH OF MOSES AND SUCCESSION OF JOSHUA (34:5–9)

34:5–8. Though **Moses** was being disciplined for his act of unbelief (Num. 20:1–13) by not being allowed to enter the Promised Land, he **died** in faith and as an honored **servant of the LORD**. Additional honor was given to Moses for **the LORD** Himself buried him. It is possible to translate the clause **He buried him** as "he was buried" (meaning that men, not God, buried him; see <sup>76</sup>NIV marg<sup>77</sup>). But the statement **to this day no one knows where his grave is** indicates that either the Lord alone or through the agency of His angels buried **Moses**. Jude (v. 9) also seems to confirm this interpretation. Moses' burial site, though unknown, was somewhere **in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor**. This was the valley where the Israelites camped while Moses gave them the instructions and blessings recorded in Deuteronomy 5–33 (cf. 3:29; 4:46).

**Moses** was so special that his last moments on earth were spent in intimate fellowship with God who then permitted no human to take part in his burial. Concerning the remark about Moses' health see the comments on 31:2. After the death of **Moses** at the age of **120.... the Israelites** mourned for **30 days**; the normal time of mourning a dead loved one was 7 days (cf. Gen. 50:10). Centuries later Moses appeared with Elijah at Christ's transfiguration (Matt 17:1–3).

34:9. Then **Joshua ... was filled with the spirit of wisdom**. This accompanied Moses' commissioning of him (31:7). "The spirit of wisdom" may refer to the Holy Spirit (cf. Isa. 11:2) or to Joshua's inner spirit. Either way, God gave Joshua supernatural skill for leading **the Israelites**.

### 3. THE EPITAPH OF MOSES (34:10–12)

34:10–12. **Moses** was unique among all the prophets for his intimacy with **the LORD (whom the LORD knew face to face** as a friend; cf. Ex. 33:11; Num. 12:8) and for his **miraculous signs and wonders** and **mighty power** and **awesome deeds** (Deut. 34:11–12). He introduced a new era into the history of God's people, the Age of the Law. The Israelites waited for God to raise up the Prophet **like Moses** (18:15). Thus the book ends on a prophetic note looking forward to the

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<sup>76</sup>NIV New International Version

<sup>77</sup>marg. margin, marginal reading

day when “another Moses” would be given to **Israel**. That day finally arrived when the Lord Jesus Christ came as a Servant but also as the very Son of God, surpassing even Moses (cf. Heb. 3:1–6). He offered to take Israel into a new era, the Age of His Grace. The Israelites culminated centuries of rebellion by rejecting that gracious offer. However, the Song of Moses still points forward to the day when that offer will be accepted and God will heal and avenge His people (Deut. 32:36, 43)<sup>78</sup>

**1–3** After giving his blessing, Moses leaves the plains of Moab, where the covenant renewal ceremony had been conducted, and ascends Mount Nebo, as he had been instructed (see 3:27 and 32:49). *The summit of Pisgah*—see the commentary on 3:17. The context here suggests more strongly that the word *Pisgah* (used in Hebrew always with the definite article) means “ridge, serrated ridge”; thus the verse could be rendered: “Mount Nebo, the summit of the ridge, which is opposite Jericho...” From the top of the mountain, Moses saw the vast panorama of the land God was about to give to his people; whether he could see all the places, or simply saw on every horizon the different directions in which the promised land would extend, is uncertain. The places are listed as they would appear to an observer facing north, following the horizon round to the west, and then down to the south; then the eye travels, as it were, back to the starting point by encompassing the great rift valley, containing the Dead Sea. Gilead was to the north of Mount Nebo, lying to the east of the Jordan. Naphtali’s territory was northwest, beyond Chinnereth. The lands of Ephraim and Manasseh were west-northwest, situated in the hill country west of the Jordan. Judah’s territory was west-southwest, situated in the hills beyond the Jordan and the Dead Sea. The Negeb lay south of Judah. The *Plain* refers to the region immediately north of the Dead Sea. but given the reference to Zoar (apparently at the southern tip of the Dead Sea), the term may apply to the areas at both ends of the Dead Sea.

**4** See also Exod. 33:1. Moses is permitted to see the land, but not to enter it (see 3:27; 4:21–22; 32:52).

**5–6** *The servant of the Lord*—again, it is emphasized that in his death, Moses was faithful, and that the prohibition against entering the land had not separated him from God’s presence (see also the expression *man of God*, 33:1). *He buried him*—the specific subject of the clause (*he*) is uncertain. The context would indicate *the Lord* (v. 5), which would suggest that the death and burial of Moses was a private matter between God and Moses. Although it is possible to take *he* either as Joshua or as a collective term referring to the people, nevertheless the

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<sup>78</sup> Jack S. Deere, “[Deuteronomy](#),” in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 322–323.

latter part of the verse (*no man knows his grave*) indicates that there was something special about the burial of Moses, and that man did not have a part in it.<sup>791</sup>

**7** On the age of Moses, see also 31:2; although his vision and vigor<sup>802</sup> were not impaired, he was no longer able to fulfil all the onerous responsibilities of leadership.

**8–9** The mourning for Moses lasted thirty days, apparently a conventional period of mourning, as the same time was given to mourning for Aaron (Num. 20:29). *Moses had laid his hands on him* (Joshua)—see Num. 27:22–23. With Moses dead, Joshua now assumed the leadership, having been duly commissioned by Moses and by God (see 31:23).

## F. CONCLUSION (34:10–12)

*10 And a prophet like Moses did not rise again in Israel, one whom the Lord knew face to face—*

*11 none like him for all the signs and the wonders which the Lord sent him to do in the land of Egypt, against pharaoh, and against all his servants, and against all his land;*

*12 and none like him for all his mighty power and all the great awesome deeds which Moses did in the sight of all Israel.*

The last three verses of the book constitute, as it were, the literary epitaph of Moses; they form a fitting conclusion to the Pentateuch, of which the last four books contain an account of the life and work of Moses in Israel. Moses was a prophet, but in his epitaph it is not his knowledge of God that is stressed, but rather the Lord's knowledge of him. God had sought him out and appointed him to a particular task; over the years, the relationship had become intimate, so that to those Israelites who knew Moses, it was evident that his highest communion was with God. And so in his epitaph, written in a book because the grave was not known, God's intimate knowledge of Moses was the most striking memory of the man now departed.

In v. 10, the exceptional nature of Moses' prophetic office is stressed; *a prophet like Moses did not rise again in Israel*. The significance of these words does not lie simply in the character of Moses, but rather it is to be found in the nature of his achievement, in God's strength. The content of the comparison (*a prophet like Moses*) is made clear in vv. 11–12. In v. 11, the role of Moses in the Exodus from Egypt is referred to; in v. 12, it is the great events following the Exodus that are implied. Thus the unique aspect of Moses' prophetic ministry is to be found in the role he played in a unique and vitally important event in Israel's history. That unique event,

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<sup>791</sup> In Martin Noth's treatment of the history of Israel, one of the few exceptions to his generally skeptical view of the "historical Moses" is the "concrete fact" concerning the tradition of the tomb of Moses: Noth, *The History of Israel* (E.I. 1965), p. 136 (n. 2). A slightly more positive attempt to trace the tradition of Moses' tomb, though presented within the framework of a similar understanding of early Israel, is offered by S. Schwertner, "Erwagungen zu Moses' Grab und Grab in Dm. 34:5–6," *ZAW* 84 (1972), pp. 24f. For the historical perspective within which the present commentary is written, see n. 2 in the Introduction, together with the comments in Appendix I.

<sup>802</sup> Heb. *lēhōh*. "vitality, vigor" may refer to a man's sexual force, either literally or as a means of describing full health. On this sense, and the relation of the word to the Ugar. root *lhḥ*, see W, F. Albright. "The 'Natural Force' of Moses in the Light of Ugaritic," *BASOR* 94 (1944), pp. 32–35.



emerging from the Exodus and the forming of the covenant at Sinai, was the formation of the kingdom of God in the nascent, theocratic state of Israel, in which the Lord was King (Exod. 15:18; Deut. 33:5). The event began with the great liberation from Egypt and it was sealed by the new commitment at Sinai. Consequently, however distinguished a subsequent prophet in Israel might be, his ministry would be *within* the community of God's people; the work of the prophet Moses, however, was instrumental, under God, in the formation of that community.

Hence, for the Christian reader, Deuteronomy ends with a pointer toward the future. The earthly kingdom of God, in the founding of which Moses played so important a part, came to an end as an independent state early in the sixth century B. C. The prophets who followed Moses at a later date began to point forward to a New Covenant (see 18:15–22 and commentary). It was in the formation of the New Covenant that at last a prophet like Moses appeared again, but he was more than a prophet. Whereas Moses was a *servant* in the household of God, the coming prophet was a *son*, Jesus Christ (Heb. 3:1–6), who brought with him the liberation of a new exodus and established the relationship of the New Covenant.<sup>81</sup>

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<sup>81</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 404–407.