

# MOSES: The Servant of God

F. B. Meyer, B. A

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## CHAPTER TWENTY-SEVEN

### PREPARING FOR PISGAH

**“And Moses said unto them, I am a hundred and twenty years old this day; I can no more go out and come in: also the Lord hath said unto me, Thou shall not go over this Jordan”**  
(Deuteronomy 31:2).

JUST before the dark River through which Pilgrims pass to the City of Gold, Bunyan places the land of Beulah; where the sun ever shines, the birds sing, and every day the flowers appear on the earth. The air is very sweet and pleasant. It is within sight of the City, but it is beyond the reach of Giant Despair; and they who come thither cannot so much as see the turrets of Doubting Castle. And in some such blissful experience saintly men have sought to spend a brief parenthesis between the press of life's business and their entrance into the welcome of CHRIST. But such was not the experience of Moses. The last year of his life was as full of work as any that had ever passed over his head.

*There was, first, the conquest of Eastern Canaan.*

Dean Stanley speaks of it as that mysterious eastern frontier of the Holy Land, so beautiful, so romantic, so little known. Its original inhabitants had been expelled by the kindred tribes of Moab and Ammon; but they, in their turn, had been dispossessed of a considerable portion of the territory thus acquired, by the two Canaanite chiefs, Sihon and Og, whose names occur so frequently in this narrative. The attack of the Israelites was justified by the churlish refusal of Sihon to the request that they might march through his borders on their way to Jericho. He not only refused them passage, but gathered all his people together, and went out against Israel on the frontier line between his territory and the wilderness. The song which commemorated the victory lays special emphasis on the prowess of the slingers and archers of Israel, afterwards so renowned: **“We have shot at them; Heshbon is perished.”**

These words suggest the probable reason for the overthrow of this powerful monarch, under the providence of God. The sword followed on arrow or stone, so that the army was practically annihilated; no further resistance was offered to the march of the victorious foe. The cities opened their gates; and this fertile region between the Arnon and the Jabbok, consisting of “a wide table-land, tossed about in wild confusion of undulating downs, clothed with rich grass, and in spring waving with great sheets of wheat and barley,” came into possession of the chosen people.

But this was not all. North of this lay Bashan, which has been described by Canon Tristram and others as a rich and well-wooded country, abounding in noble forests of oak and of olive trees, interspersed with patches of corn in the open glades. It was and is the most picturesque and the most productive portion of the Holy Land.

Og, its king, was renowned for his gigantic stature. According to Josephus' narrative, he was coming to the assistance of Sihon, when he heard of his defeat and death. But, undaunted, he set his army in array against the hosts of Israel. The battle took place at Edrei, which stood to guard the entrance of a remarkable mountain fastness; and it ended in the complete victory of Israel.

The result is told in the strong, concise narrative of Moses. **"They smote him, his sons, and all his people, until there was none left him remaining; and they possessed his land."**

Nothing could have accounted for the marvellous victories, which gave Israel possession of these valuable tracts of country with cities fenced with high walls, gates, and bars, together with a great many unwallled towns but the interposition of God. He had said beforehand, **"Fear not! I have delivered him into thy hand;"** and so it befell. Immense swarms of hornets, which are common in Palestine, seemed to have visited the country at this juncture; so that the people were driven from their fortresses into the open plains, where they were less able to stand the assault of the Israelites.

Moses, at their urgent request, proceeded to allot this rich and beautiful territory to the Reubenites and Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, after receiving their solemn pledge to bear their share in the conquest of Western Palestine. **"I commanded you,"** he said afterwards, **"that ye shall pass armed before your brethren, the children of Israel, until the Lord give rest unto your brethren, as unto you."**

*Next came his last charge to the people.*

This was delivered in a series of farewell addresses, which are contained in chapters 1-30 of the Book of Deuteronomy. This book is to the four preceding ones much what the Gospel according to John is to the other three. It is full of the most pathetic and stirring appeals. Memory of the past, gratitude, fear, self-interest, are the chords made to vibrate to this master-touch. Well may it be said of Moses that he loved the people; and in these pages we may trace the course of the molten lava which poured from his heart.

The key-phrases of that remarkable book are: Keep diligently; Observe to do; and, The Lord shall choose.

It abounds with exquisite descriptions of the Land of Promise, which may be spiritually applied to those rapturous experiences denoted by the phrase, The Rest of Faith. It is, indeed, as old Canaan was, a good land, a land of brooks of water, of fountains and depths springing out of valleys and hills. There we drink of the river of the water of life; there we eat the bread of life without scarceness, and lack nothing that we really need. The 28th chapter anticipates the Beatitudes of our Lord's Sermon on the Mount; and happy is he that can appropriate them in blissful experience, and go in to possess the land.

In our judgment the much-debated question of authorship is settled by the distinct affirmation of the New Testament. Take, for instance, the quotation of Deuteronomy 30:11-14 in Romans 10:6-10. The Apostle Paul distinctly speaks of Moses as having written these words.

*Next came his anxiety about a successor.*

Moses spake unto the Lord, saying, **“Let the Lord, the God of the spirits of all flesh, set a man over the congregation, which may go out before them, and which may go in before them; which may lead them out, and bring them in, that the congregation of the Lord be not as sheep which have no shepherd. “**

In answer to this request, he had been directed to take Joshua, the son of Nun, in whom was the Spirit, to, bring him before Eleazar, the priest, and before all the congregation, and to give him a charge. This he seems to have done; but as death drew near he apparently gave him a second charge (compare Numbers 27:16, 17, and Deuteronomy 31:7, 8).

What a striking scene it must have been when, on his one-hundred-and-twentieth birthday, the aged law-giver called unto Joshua, and said unto him in the sight of all Israel, **“Be strong and of a good courage: for thou must go with this people unto the land which the Lord hath sworn unto their fathers to give them; and thou shalt cause them to inherit it. And the Lord, He it is that doth go before thee; He will be with thee; He will not fail thee, neither forsake thee; fear not, neither be dismayed. “**

Immediately afterwards the pillar of cloud stood over the door of the Tabernacle, and Moses and Joshua were summoned to present themselves before God in its sacred precincts. There, in almost identical words to those which He had spoken by the lips of Moses, God gave Joshua his commission to bring the children of Israel into the land which He had sworn unto them, together with the promise that He would be with them.

*His last acts were to arrange for the custody of the Law and the perpetuation of its reading.*

He did the first by depositing the book, in which he had recorded the Divine revelations made to him, in the side of the Ark of the Covenant. It was to be kept under the custody of the Levites; and passages were to be read from it at the end of every seven years, when all Israel appeared before God in the place which He should choose.

And as to the second, Moses put his exhortations and entreaties into two magnificent odes, the one dealing out warnings against apostasy, the other dwelling seriatim on the characteristics of the tribes, and giving them a parting blessing, after the fashion of the dying Jacob.

The thirty-second chapter of Deuteronomy is one of the sublimest human compositions on record. It was Moses swan song. It is the store from which later Scripture writers draw plentifully. It has been called the Magna Charta of Prophecy. It is worthy to be compared to one only song else, the Song of the Lamb, with which it is combined by the harpers on the margin of the glassy sea: **“They sing the song of Moses, the servant of God, and the song of the Lamb.”**

- The repeated comparisons of God to a Rock;
- The lavish kindness with which He had treated his people since He first found them in a desert land;
- The comparison of the Eternal to a mother eagle in teaching its young to climb the unaccustomed steep of air;
- The ingratitude with which his marvellous kindness had been requited;
- The dread fate to which their rebellion must expose them;
- The mercy with which their repentance would be greeted all these are recorded in glowing, eloquent words, that stand for ever as a witness of how stammering lips may speak when they have been touched with the live altar coal.

Or take the closing verses of the Benediction on the tribes.

- The lonely glory of the God of Jeshurun, who rides on the heavens to help and save his people; the home which men may find in his eternal nature;
- The underpinning everlasting arms;
- The irresistible might with which He thrusts out the enemy from before the forward march of the soul He loves;
- The safe though isolated dwelling of Israel;
- The fertility of the soil and the generosity of the clouds;
- The blessedness of having the Lord as the shield of help and the sword of excellency all these features of the blessed life are delineated by the master-hand of one who dipped his brush in the colours mixed by his own experience.

What glimpses we get of the inner life of this noble man! All that he wrought on earth was the outcome of the secret abiding of his soul in God. God was his home, his help, his stay. He was nothing: God was all. And all that he accomplished on the earth was due to that Mighty One indwelling, fulfilling, and working out through him, as his organ and instrument, his own consummate plans.

Thus Moses drew his life-work to a close. Behind him, a long and glorious life, before, the ministry and worship of the heavenly sanctuary. Here, the shekinah; there, the unveiled face. Here, the tent and pilgrim march; there, the everlasting rest. Here, the promised land, beheld from afar, but not entered; there, the goodly land beyond Jordan entered and possessed. What though it was a wrench to pass away, with the crowning-stone not placed on the structure of his life; to depart and be with God was far better!

~ end of chapter 27 ~

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