

EXODUS: Lesson Thirteen, Looking It Over ***Exodus – Deuteronomy***

Subject: A review of Moses' writings, life, and times

Main Idea: Moses was involved in matters of eternal consequence.

Principles:

1. *The only things on earth that are eternal are people and the word of God.*
2. *In this lifetime, we may never know the full significance of saying "yes" to God's assignments.*
3. *No one has ever been great for God without prioritizing time spent with Him.*

Introduction

In just twelve lessons, our Exodus study has flown through forty years of Biblical history. In earlier *GOD of the WORD* studies, we learned that the book of Genesis covers 3000 years of human history at the very minimum (and possibly much more than that). Our brief, historical overview actually contained countless days like today: days in which someone rejoiced and someone cried, someone was born and someone else died, and many normal kinds of days in which people merely kept up with the necessities of living – some feeling energized, others feeling ill. It is overwhelming to think that human history really contains that much living, isn't it? Perhaps this is why grave markers and biographical sketches often simply list the individual's day of birth and day of death with a dash between the two. That small dash represents innumerable events.

Have you ever wondered how your own life could really be significant when compared to the lives of Adam and Eve, Noah, Abraham, or Moses? They were such important people! By comparison, our lives seem to have little meaning. But can we be so sure of that? Although no more heroes will be added to the Bible (its record is complete), that does not mean there haven't been many *unnamed* heroes who lived in Bible times or since!

The Bible teaches that, one day, believers will stand before the judgment seat of Christ for evaluation (2 Corinthians 5:10). God's record books will be opened (Revelation 20:12) and He will decide who the heroes have been. Undoubtedly, many faithful individuals whose names were virtually unknown on earth will be among them.

When it is time for believers' lives to be evaluated, what will make the difference between a person whose life is applauded by heaven (Matthew 25:21) and one whose is not? I acknowledge that I am treading on sacred ground, since God alone is our Judge. Yet there *are* principles that the Bible teaches about this. We will only consider a few that are visible in the four Biblical books we have just covered in our *Exodus* study. Perhaps no human being, except the first Adam and the second Adam (Jesus Christ), has a more significant role in the holistic story of the Bible than Moses, Israel's greatest prophet (Deuteronomy 34:10). There is only one Moses. None of us will be called to live the life he lived. However, we started our Exodus study by saying that our interest in Christian things is practical. We are travelers on the journey of the Christian life and there are practical things we can learn from Moses' example about living a life of eternal significance.

I. Eternally Significant Investments: Let's begin by considering Moses' place in Biblical history. He not only had the privilege of being a Biblical writer, He was also Israel's first national leader. A quick review of Old Testament history will point out the significance of his investments.

A. First Biblical Author: Only thirty or forty individuals were privileged with the task of writing a portion of the Bible, and of those, even fewer were instructed to record their own biography. Moses wrote the Pentateuch (a Greek term meaning "five books"), known by Jewish people as "Torah" (meaning "instruction"). The Spirit of God superintended the work of each human writer, so that the words they recorded are entirely true and authoritative, but because of Moses' faithful cooperation, today we have a record of creation and the earliest events of human history. As we review Moses books, consider the importance of his record!

i. Genesis

1. *Primeval History:* The first eleven chapters of Genesis tell us who God is, who we (human beings) are, and some important things about our relationship with Him. We are not told of the origins of evil (later Old Testament prophecies seem to give clues [Isaiah 14, Ezekiel 28], but the New Testament refers to the serpent of Genesis as "Satan, the devil" (Revelation 12:9). When Adam and Eve succumbed to his temptation, the perfect fellowship they had enjoyed with God was broken and sin entered the world. The New Testament explains that ever since, Adam's descendants have inherited a sin nature (Romans 5:12). The first chapters of Genesis record the impact of the devastation of sin as the population grew. However, Moses also recorded God's promise to send a Deliverer, one who would ultimately crush Satan (Genesis 3:15). How privileged Moses was to receive all of this important information from the Lord!
2. *The Patriarchs:* The remainder of Genesis, Moses' first book, tells the story of the family through whom God initiated His promise-plan. God made an unconditional covenant with Abraham, guaranteeing him many offspring, the land of Canaan, and blessing on him and *through him to others* (a hint that Abraham would be the Deliverer's forebearer). In their old age, Abraham's previously barren wife, Sarah, bore him Isaac. Moses explains that God's promises would be fulfilled through Isaac, and Isaac's son Jacob, who was renamed "Israel." Israel had twelve sons. One of these, Joseph, was sold by his brothers into slavery in Egypt. There, he rose to the highest position in the land under Pharaoh. Due to a widespread famine, Joseph advised his father's family to move to Egypt where he could provide for them. Genesis ends with the

deaths of Israel and Joseph in Egypt and the Israelites need for God to “come to their aid” (Genesis 50:24).

ii. Exodus

1. *Moses’ Calling*: Moses personal biography begins in the book of Exodus, with an explanation of the Israelites’ oppressed condition at the time of his birth: the Egyptians had enslaved them. By God’s providence, Moses was raised by Pharaoh’s daughter in the palace of Egypt. Although he only hints at this indirectly in his own writings (Exodus 2:14), the New Testament confirms that, sometime in the first forty years of his life, Moses came to think of himself as his people’s rescuer (Acts 7:25). Yet, at age forty, he ended up living in exile in the desert, where he remained until he was eighty years old! At that time, the very humbled Moses was met by God at a burning bush and called to go back to Egypt, deliver the Israelites from their bondage, and lead them to the Promised Land of Canaan.
 2. *Moses at Sinai*: After a series of plagues and a dramatic miracle that allowed the Israelites to cross the Red Sea on dry land, Moses led the people to Mount Sinai, where they remained for nearly a year. At Sinai, God forged this large people group into a nation, entering a conditional covenant with them that guaranteed He would be their God, bring them into Canaan, where He would richly bless them if they followed His commands. He chose them to be His representatives. God’s commands served as Israel’s law code to govern their morality, their civil life, and their worship. Later in Exodus, Moses recorded the Israelites’ idolatry in worshipping a golden calf and his own intercession with God on their behalf. He also recorded the building of the Tabernacle, their portable center of worship.
- iii. Leviticus: Leviticus largely contains the ceremonial laws for Israel’s priests and worshippers, and establishes the institution of the priesthood, with Aaron as the first High Priest. These and the other laws that God gave Moses were for the purpose of teaching God’s people to live holy lives, because He is holy.
- iv. Numbers: In Numbers, Moses records several censuses that anticipated the need to prepare for military action and for land distribution, once the Israelites reached Canaan. Then, Moses tells us that the Lord led them away from Sinai toward Canaan (Numbers 10:11). However, when they arrived at Canaan’s border, they were afraid of its residents and refused to enter. Because of their rebellion against God and His plan, He sentenced the entire generation to live out the remainder of their lives wandering in the desert. God promised to take their children into Canaan in their place.

On one significant occasion during the thirty-eight years of wandering, Moses disobeyed God and lost the privilege of leading the Israelites into Canaan. However, he did not die until they were fully prepared for their mission and he saw two-and-a-half tribes receive a land inheritance in the Transjordan.

- v. Deuteronomy: As Numbers ends and Deuteronomy opens, Moses reminds us that the Israelites were perched on the border of Canaan, ready to enter the land under Joshua's leadership. Before Moses died, he preached three sermons, reviewing the covenant God had made at Sinai and exhorting the younger generation of Israelites to enter into it with all their hearts. Obeying God's laws, he repeatedly told them, was essential to experiencing God's blessing and remaining in Canaan.

B. Israel's First National Leader Carefully recording all these events was indeed a big job, but it was not Moses' only job. He also had the responsibility of leading the Israelites. The remainder of Old Testament history shows him to have been the first in a long line of Israel's national leaders.

- i. Joshua: Moses' successor was Joshua, for whom the sixth book in our Bibles is named. Joshua led the Israelites into Canaan, served as their military leader and, together with Aaron's successor Eleazar, ensured each tribe received a tract of land as an inheritance.
- ii. Judges: For several hundred years after Joshua's death, the Israelites cycled between serving the Canaanites' gods, experiencing the Lord's discipline at the hand of their enemies, and then pleading with God for deliverance. God raised up military leaders to free them from their oppressors and to rule over them as Judges. The book of the Bible after Joshua is named for them. It tells of the spiritually dark period in Israel's history in which they ruled.
- iii. Kings: Eventually, the Israelites tired of not having a permanent succession of leaders and wanted a monarchy, like the nations around them. They asked Samuel, the last judge, to appoint a king for them. Israel's first king, Saul, lost the privilege of having his sons succeed him because of his disobedience to the Lord. The Lord told Samuel to appoint David as king in Saul's place. David followed the Lord with all his heart. The Lord made a covenant with him, promising that one of his descendants would always sit on Israel's throne. Israel reached its height of blessing and prosperity under the leadership of David and his wise son Solomon. Later in Solomon's life, however, prosperity led to his spiritual downfall. After Solomon's death, the Lord kept one of David's descendants on the throne of the southern half of the land, for David's sake. That portion of Israel became the Kingdom of Judah. The northern

half of the land retained the name “Israel” and was ruled by a succession of almost entirely wicked kings from nine different dynasties.

iv. Prophets

1. Moses was not the first Biblical prophet (Genesis 20:7, 2 Peter 2:5, Jude 14), but he was the first to address the Israelites as a nation. During the divided Hebrew monarchy, the Lord sent many prophets to turn the hearts of His people back to Him. They mistreated them and usually ignored their warnings. Eventually, the spiritual condition of both kingdoms was so serious that, just as Moses foretold (Deuteronomy 30:64), the Lord thrust the Israelites out of the land and scattered them among foreign nations. Although a remnant of the scattered Israelites later returned to the land, as Moses also foretold (Deuteronomy 30:4), this remnant never regained political control of the land and they struggled with discouragement. For 500 years, they lived under the authority of the Persians, then the Greeks, and finally the Romans. Although the Bible is silent during the last 400 years of this period, the end of the Old Testament and extra-biblical records indicate that the Jews longed for the Messiah about whom Moses had prophesied.
2. The last words of Deuteronomy record Moses’ death and are probably a postscript added by Joshua. Deuteronomy 34:10 says, “Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face...” In his lifetime, Moses prophesied that the Lord would raise up from Israel a prophet like him, a prophet with the words of the Lord in his mouth and to whom the people must listen (Deuteronomy 18:15, 18). According to the apostle Peter, that prophet was Jesus Christ (Acts 3:22-23). What an amazing commentary on Moses – that no prophet arose in Israel like him until Jesus Himself came to earth!

Summary Statement: Moses’ roles as a Bible writer and Israel’s leader reveal his commitment to God’s word and to God’s people. These were the things in which God called him to invest.

Principle: *The only things on earth that are eternal are people and the word of God.*

Application: How heavily are you invested in the lives of people and God’s word? You may think, “Moses had a vocational calling to these things, but I am skilled as a factory worker, a farmer, a school teacher, a soldier, a business person or some other job. I cannot devote all my time and energy to serving others and to God’s word as Moses did.”

Every believer must remain open to the Lord's leading in his or her life. The Lord may ask you to leave your current work behind so that you can invest more heavily in these eternal things. Christian workers are in great need around the world.

However, He may also want you to remain in your current role but with changed goals. What would change if you decided to make investing in others and in God's word the main purpose of your current job? Could you rearrange your work area or your schedule to allow for more meaningful conversation with others? Could you devote a greater portion of your income to someone in need? Could you start your day earlier in order to teach a Bible study on a lunch break or in the evening?

How do you use any discretionary time and income you have? Could you devote a holiday to participating in a mission's project? Could you find renewal in scripture memory instead of looking at magazines, newspapers, or some other entertainment to relax? Do you need to assist believers with whom you regularly meet in refocusing the time you spend together so that direct teaching from God's word is a higher priority, so that gossip is not substituted for intercessory prayer, and to ensure a mutual commitment to assisting those in need, both outside the group and within?

Transition: Although Moses reluctantly agreed at the burning bush to invest his life in things of eternal significance, he surely would have been dumbfounded to learn how God would actually use his commitment! He could not have foreseen all that God would do in and through him.

God called him to lead the Israelites out of Egypt to Canaan, but along the way, he also became Israel's Lawgiver and supervised the building of the Tabernacle. These things not only benefited the Israelites; the Exodus, the Law, and the Tabernacle have taught important lessons to people *in every age* about God's salvific plan for human history.

II. Eternally Significant Events

A. The Exodus

- i. Rescue: By saying "yes" to God's call on his life, Moses became involved in the Exodus. The Exodus is, in a sense, the Calvary of the Old Testament. It serves as a symbol of the redemptive work God later accomplished through His Son Jesus' death and resurrection. In Exodus 3:8, God said, "So I have come down to *rescue* them from the hand of the Egyptians and to bring them up out of that land into a good and spacious land, a land flowing with milk and honey..." Colossians 1:13-14, speaking of Jesus, says, "For He has *rescued* us from the dominion of darkness and brought us into the kingdom of the Son He loves, in whom we have redemption, the forgiveness of sins."
- ii. Liberation: The Exodus is a symbol of our God's work in liberating us from bondage. The Lord promised the Israelites they would no longer be

slaves to the Egyptians. He would break the bars of their yoke (Leviticus 26:13). In Jesus, He has freed us from the penalty and power of sin. “If the Son sets you free, you will be free indeed” (John 8:36).

- iii. Fulfillment of God’s Promises: The Exodus occurred in fulfillment of God’s promise to deliver Abraham’s descendants from bondage (Genesis 15:13-16). However, the event also foreshadows the fulfillment of God’s greater promise to crush the head of the enemy (Genesis 3:15) and deliver all those who put their faith in His Messiah. Exactly how much Moses understood of God’s greater plan, we do not know (1 Peter 1:10-12), but one thing is certain: in saying “yes” to God’s assignment, Moses became a part of something with even greater spiritual significance than the event of the Exodus alone. The same is true of his role in giving the Law.

B. The Law

- i. God’s Covenant of Law: In Exodus 19, God initiated a covenant of law with the Israelites that taught the people to be holy. However, since the Israelites were unable to keep the Law, it ultimately served to point out their sin and the need for a Savior who *was* able to keep it.
- ii. Christ’s Fulfillment of the Law: Christ met the standard of the Law. He lived the perfect life we cannot live, qualifying Him to become our Savior and pay the great debt we owe for transgressing the Law.
- iii. The Enduring Purpose of God’s Law: Although other nations were governed by covenants with law codes in Moses’ day, only God’s Law has endured. It not only governed the Israelites’ civic and worship lives, it has informed people of all time about God’s holy character and our sinfulness (Romans 2:14-15).

C. The Tabernacle: Moses personally received God’s instructions for the Tabernacle and oversaw its construction. The Tabernacle was the place where the Israelites brought their sacrifices and worshipped God. It was the place where God dwelt among His people. The furnishings and function of the Tabernacle probably reminded the Israelites of the perfect fellowship that Adam and Eve had enjoyed with God in the Garden of Eden. But the Tabernacle not only pointed back at a time of perfect fellowship, it also anticipated the fellowship that would be made possible by the person and work of Christ. God’s presence among His people in the Tabernacle foreshadowed Christ’s incarnation. John says He “tabernacled” among us (John 1:14). He “did not enter a sanctuary made with human hands... He entered heaven itself” (Hebrews 9:24), fulfilling the meaning of the Tabernacle sacrifices in His death and its priesthood by becoming our Great High Priest. The Tabernacle also pointed ahead to the time in which God will permanently dwell among His people at the end of human history (Revelation 21:3).

Summary Statement: When Moses, albeit reluctantly, stepped into the roles God had for him, he was privileged to become an eternally significant part of history. When God plans, He plans in light of eternity.

Principle: *In this lifetime, we may never know the full significance of saying “yes” to God’s assignments.*

Application: None of us will live the life Moses lived, but by saying “yes” (however timidly) to the assignments God has for *us*, we also become part of something with lasting significance. Are you careful to pray about opportunities that arise? Moses was called to be Israel’s prophet but not Israel’s High Priest; that was God’s role for Aaron. Prayer and the sound counsel of mature believers are important in determining which opportunities we should take and which we should pass by. We cannot meet every need any more than we can live in two places at once.

Even after we determine that God *is* calling us to a task, we may still feel ill-equipped for it, as Moses did (Exodus 3-4). Nevertheless, if God’s people ascertain that we are spiritually gifted for the task *and* the Holy Spirit convicts us of His leading, we can be certain that God will equip us, go with us, prosper us as we continue relying on Him, and bring eternal fruit from our work.

Jesus said, “If you remain in me and I in you, you will bear much fruit; apart from me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). None of us will know the full story of the impact of our lives and our service until we reach Heaven. There may be times God graciously gives us glimpses here and now, but on other occasions we may see little evidence of lasting fruit.

Illustration: Thailand is the among the most Buddhist countries in the world. In the late-nineteenth and early-twentieth centuries, Christian missionaries in Thailand were discouraged. A colleague tells me that one such missionary reported that after seven years of labor, he had not led a single person to Christ. Yet, he and other disheartened missionaries of former years were planting seeds that have now taken root. Today, the gospel is spreading in Thailand, such that Thai Christian leaders have developed a national plan to reach every corner of the country! When we are filling the roles to which God has called us but see little evidence of fruit, we can take encouragement from Jesus’ promise and know that eternal fruit will yet come from our investment.

Transition: Perhaps the strongest declaration any of us will be able to make to God’s glory in eternity will not be with regard to how we were *used* by God, but how we were *transformed* by Him. What *kind* of a man was Moses? What does the Bible reveal about his character and what can we learn from his life about qualities or habits God wants to develop in us for His eternal glory? Three stand out.

III. An Enduring Example

A. A Humble Man

- i. Numbers 12:3: A parenthetical comment in Numbers 12:3 says, “Now Moses was a very humble man, more humble than anyone else on the face of the earth.” The statement that Moses was humble (or meek) has caused some to doubt the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch. Others have suggested that a later editor inserted the comment under divine inspiration (perhaps Joshua or Ezra). While it might possibly be a later insertion, it is not necessary to conclude this, for “as [Moses] praises himself here without pride, so he will blame himself elsewhere with humility.”ⁱ
- ii. Other Evidences of Humility: We do not need to rely on the comment in Numbers 12:3 to know that Moses was humble.
 1. Although as a younger man, he had been surprised that the Israelites had not recognized him as their leader, forty years later, he was hesitant to take on the role. He had been unquestioningly humbled by the long years he spent tending his father-in-law’s sheep in Midian. When the Lord finally called him to lead the Israelites, he begged to be let out of the assignment, saying, “Who am I that I should go... I am slow of speech and tongue... Please send someone else” (Exodus 3:11, 4:10, 13).
 2. The final forty years of his life must also have continually humbled him. Leading Israel was a difficult job that kept him constantly dependent on the Lord. Dennis Cole explains that the Hebrew term used for Moses’ humility in Numbers 12:3 is one that “conveys an individual’s devout dependence upon the Lord.”ⁱⁱ Meekness has sometimes been described as strength under control. We are strongest when we are most dependent on the Lord. On many occasions in which Moses felt overwhelmed and burdened by his responsibilities and the Israelites’ complaints of the Israelites, he cried out to the Lord. But when personally attacked, as he was by Miriam and Aaron, there is no record that he cried out at all. In response to their accusations, Moses simply wrote, “And the Lord heard” (Numbers 12:2). God was watching and ready to defend his servant without Moses’ complaints. Calvin states, “The silence of long-suffering itself is more effectual before God than any cries, however loud.” Moses’ humility is certainly evidenced in his dependence on the Lord.
 3. To say that Moses put others before himself is an understatement. Twice, the Lord offered to do away with the rebellious Israelites and start over again with Moses, making him into a great nation (Exodus 32:10; Numbers 14:12). On both occasions, Moses humbly

and selflessly interceded on behalf of the Israelites instead of accepting the offer.

4. While *God* applauded Moses' life at the end of Deuteronomy, *Moses himself only applauded God!* In his very last recorded words, Moses declared, "There is no one like the God of Jeshurun!" (Deuteronomy 33:26-29). God honors those who know how great He is and how small they are.

B. A Faithful Man: Moses was not only a humble man, he was also faithful. So challenging was his role in leading the Israelites that a lesser a man would have walked away from the post. Moses not only stuck with the job, *he kept doing it until his death*. God honors faithfulness. As we age, it is especially tempting to feel we have already made our contributions and we should hand the work to be done over to others. We may not be in perfect health at 120 years old, as Moses was (Deuteronomy 34:7), but God has meaningful work for us at every age. Even if we can no longer use our bodies, we can still pray for others. Nineteenth century poet Henry Wadsworth Longfellow wrote:

*It is too late! Ah, nothing is too late—
Cato learned Greek at eighty; Sophocles
Wrote his grand "Oedipus," and Simonides
Bore off the prize of verse from his compeers
When each had numbered more than fourscore years;
And Theophrastus, at fourscore and ten,
Had begun his "Characters of Men."
Chaucer, at Woodstock, with his nightingales,
At sixty wrote the "Canterbury Tales."
Goethe, at Weimar, toiling to the last,
Completed "Faust" when eighty years were past.
What then? Shall we sit idly down and say,
"The night has come; it is no longer day?"
For age is opportunity no less
Than youth itself, though in another dress.
And as the evening twilight fades away,
The sky is filled with stars, invisible by day.
It is never too late....*

Moses remained faithful to the work God assigned him until he took his last breath. When we think of Moses' unique and difficult roles, it is tempting to think of him as more than just a man. "How can we possibly follow such an example?" we may ask. There is a very clear answer to that question.

C. A Prayerful Man:

- i. Aloneness with God: During the forty years Moses led the Israelites, he spent much time alone with God. Their relationship was so intimate that their communication was as if they were “face to face” (Exodus 33:11; Numbers 12:8; Deuteronomy 34:10). Twice, Moses spent forty days and nights alone with God on Mount Sinai. Moses regularly entered the Tent of Meeting where he and God communed alone. How fitting that Moses was alone with God when he died (Deuteronomy 34:5-6)!
- ii. A Habit of God’s Leaders: Moses could not have been the effective leader and true representative of the Lord that he was if he had not maintained the practice of spending time with God. It is the number one priority of those who do great things for Him. The Lord Jesus himself was found late into the night or early morning spending time alone with His Father. If Moses needed that, if the Lord Jesus needed that, how much more do we?

Principle: *No one has ever been great for God without prioritizing time spent with Him.*

Illustration: A.W. Tozer was a man known for spending time alone with God. The more he had to do in a given day, the longer he felt he needed to spend in prayer, which is just the opposite of what we might think!

Tozer wrote, “To desire revival... and at the same time to neglect prayer and devotion is to wish one way and walk another.”ⁱⁱⁱ

Application: Do we wish for personal, spiritual transformation and yet neglect time alone with God? Surely, the time Moses spent with God was the secret to his humility and his faithfulness.

Conclusion

The Pentateuch ends with the previously mentioned eulogy for Moses: “Since then, no prophet has arisen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, who did all those signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt – to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel” (Deuteronomy 34:10-12).

This was *God’s* commentary on Moses’ life. What will be written or said about us by others after we have died is certainly important, but what God will have to say about our lives is what will really count! If we want to live lives of eternal significance, Moses has shown us the way.

ⁱ Hengstenberg, *Dissertations*, vol. ii. pp. 141ff. as quoted in Keil, C. F., & Delitzsch, F. (1996). *Commentary on the Old Testament* (Vol. 1, p. 703). Peabody, MA: Hendrickson.

ⁱⁱ Cole, R. D. (2000). *Numbers* (Vol. 3B, p. 202). Nashville: Broadman & Holman Publishers.

ⁱⁱⁱ <http://prayforrevival.wordpress.com/category/a-w-tozer/>