

The passing of Moses and the appointment of a new leader.

1. (12-14) God tells Moses of his coming death.

a. You also shall be gathered to your people: Moses was first told he would die before coming to the Promised Land in Numbers 20. It was still many months until Moses would climb to the top of the mountain; able to see Canaan but not able to enter it (Deuteronomy 34). After seeing the land, Moses would die (be gathered to your people).

i. In Deuteronomy 3:23-25, Moses explained that he did – on some occasion – ask God to relent from His judgment that Moses would never set foot in the land of Canaan. God did not relent, and Moses made himself content with knowing he would see the land and be gathered to His God.

ii. “The expression ‘gathered to your people’ describes the Hebrew concept of unity and identity with the faithful forefathers (Genesis 15:15, 25:8, 35:29, 47:30), with whom they would rest and find peace.” (Cole)

b. You rebelled against My command to hallow Me: God reminded Moses of the reason why he would not be allowed to enter Canaan, because of his sin of misrepresenting God at Meribah (Numbers 20:12-13).

i. “The account of his going is given at the end of Deuteronomy, but these words bring the facts before us in this book, which is the book revealing the Divine discipline of failing people; and it serves to keep before us the fact that the most faithful servants of God cannot escape the results of their failure in this life.” (Morgan)

2. (15-17) Moses’ response to God’s announcement.

a. Let the LORD...set a man over the congregation: After hearing of his coming fate, Moses did not try to change God’s mind, and he did not complain. His only concern was for the congregation of Israel, for the people, not for himself.

i. The LORD, the God of the spirits of all flesh: “This is an expressive title of the Lord that speaks of his ultimate sovereignty over all peoples. If God is sovereign of all, then surely God will wish to show his sovereignty over his people in their evident need for a shepherd to follow Moses.” (Allen)

b. That the congregation of the LORD may not be like sheep which have no shepherd: This was the picture used to describe a leaderless people. Sheep without a shepherd are in constant danger. They have trouble finding food and water, and they wander into dangerous places. God wants His sheep to have shepherds.

i. In the ultimate sense, this is fulfilled by Jesus Christ, who is the Good Shepherd, as was prophesied in the Old Testament (Micah 5:2-4) and revealed in the New Testament: I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep. (John 10:11)

ii. In an additional sense, this is also fulfilled by the New Testament office of pastor-teacher. The ancient Greek word for pastor is the word for shepherd (Acts 20:28, 1 Peter 5:2). As 1 Peter 5:4 presents it, Jesus is the Chief Shepherd, and pastors are under-shepherds.

iii. The duty of shepherds was well understood. They were to feed (John 21:15-17), to lead (lead them out and bring them in), and to protect the sheep.

iv. Jesus was also moved with compassion when He saw the people as sheep without a shepherd (Mark 6:34); Moses prefigured the nature of Jesus by his concern that Israel not be left as sheep without a shepherd.

3. (18-23) Joshua chosen and given authority.

So Moses did as the LORD commanded him. He took Joshua and set him before Eleazar the priest and before all the congregation. And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him, just as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.

a. Take Joshua the son of Nun with you, a man in whom is the Spirit, and lay your hand on him: Though Joshua was not of noble birth or a literal son of Moses, there were many things that qualified him to be the successor of Moses.

- Joshua had led the army of Israel against the Amalekites (Exodus 17:8-16).

- Joshua was an assistant to Moses (Exodus 24:13).

- Joshua helped Moses at the tabernacle after the golden calf disaster (Exodus 33:7-11).

- Joshua was zealous to preserve the authority and leadership of Moses (Numbers 11:28).

- Joshua was one of the two faith-filled spies among the total of twelve who spied out the land of Canaan (Numbers 13:30-14:38).

- Joshua was a man in whom is the Spirit, the most important qualification of all. The Holy Spirit would empower and enable him to fulfill the challenging role of leading the nation into Canaan.

- i. "This must certainly mean the Spirit of God; and because he was endued with this Spirit, therefore he was capable of leading the people. How miserably qualified is that man for the work of God who is not guided and influenced by the Holy Ghost! God never chooses a man to accomplish his designs but that one whom he himself has qualified for the work." (Clarke)

- ii. "The prayer was immediately answered and he had not only the satisfaction already referred to of appointing his successor, but, what was far more important to him, that of knowing that the one so appointed was the man of God's own choice." (Morgan)

b. You shall give some of your authority to him: This seems to have been immediate. From this point, Joshua shared some of the authority of Moses in leading Israel. Until the passing of Moses, there were some months of shared leadership and responsibility, a brief transitional period.

c. He shall stand before Eleazar the priest: The appointment of Joshua was not only made evident by Moses but also by Eleazar the priest. The priests would support Joshua's leadership, even though he (unlike Moses) did not come from the priestly tribe of Levi.

- i. The explanation of the role of Eleazar the priest, who shall inquire before the LORD for him, indicates a difference in the place of Moses and the place of Joshua. "Whereas God spoke to Moses face to face (Numbers 12:6-8), Joshua will be instructed by Eleazar the priest, who will use the Urim and Thummim, the sacred lot, to discover God's will." (Wenham)

d. And he laid his hands on him and inaugurated him: This public presentation and laying on of hands upon Joshua was important. It presented Joshua before all Israel as the next leader, the one who should expect to follow as God's appointed leader.

- i. "Jacob placed his hands on his grandsons' heads to bless them (Genesis 48:14); the people placed their hands on the blasphemer's head to transfer their guilt incurred through hearing blasphemy to the blasphemer (Leviticus 24:14); and all worshippers placed a hand on the head of the sacrificial animal to indicate it was taking their place in dying for their sin (Leviticus 1:4, etc.)." (Wenham)