



**Temple Baptist Church**  
**Wilmington, North Carolina**  
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**Until Jesus**  
**Deuteronomy 34:1-12**

Through the years, the great African-American Baptist preacher Dr. W. A. Jones was a frequent visitor to North Carolina. He's with the Lord now, but for more than three decades he served as pastor of the Bethany Baptist Church of Brooklyn in New York City. He was the guest preacher or lecturer for Campbell University's annual Pastors' School a number of times, and preached on multiple occasions at various Baptist conferences here in our state.

I remember hearing Dr. Jones say on more than one occasion something like this . . .

“As I get older, I pray a three-pronged prayer every day: Lord, don't let my body outlast my mind; don't let me outlive all my mourners; and don't let me get almost to shore only to drown in shallow water.”

Dr. Jones had seen the agony of Alzheimer's and other types of dementia and prayed to be spared from it. He didn't want to outlive all his mourners because, as he put it, “I want somebody to be sad when I'm gone!” And he had seen some fellow-ministers serve well, then fail in some way late in their ministries. He wanted to serve well and faithfully up to the very end, and finish well.

Despite one of the most difficult ministry assignments ever, Moses had served well and faithfully—well, except for that one incident . . . In fact, he had served so well and so faithfully that our text here tells us that no prophet had arisen in Israel like Moses. He was the greatest of the great, the prophet *par excellence*! God had used him in an incredible way! The LORD knew him face to face, and sent him and empowered him to do incredible signs and wonders in Egypt. As the text says, ***For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel*** (34:12).<sup>1</sup>

***From the top of Pisgah . . .***

Here in Deuteronomy 34, we find Moses climbing up Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab, where the Israelites were camped on the brink of the Promised Land east of the Jordan River. Nebo was near the northeast corner of the Dead Sea, about twelve miles from Jericho. Pisgah was a spot near the top of Nebo where you could get a good look at the Promised Land from the north as far as Mount Hermon to the west and south as far as southern Judah.<sup>2</sup>

You know how it is in the mountains . . . When you're near the top of a high mountain, like driving on the Blue Ridge Parkway, the view goes on and on, especially on a clear day. Jo Ann and I were blessed to go to the Holy Land in 2014. Near the end of that trip, our group visited Mount Nebo at the area Moses viewed the Promised Land from. And I can promise you, it was

an incredible view!

So there was Moses at the top of Pisgah, looking over into the Promised Land. The LORD had sent him to Egypt to bring the Israelites out of bondage and through the wilderness to the land of Canaan—the land that the LORD had promised to Abraham and his descendants more than four centuries earlier. The LORD was allowing Moses to see it, but he wouldn't let him go in.

Why? Well, as I said earlier, despite one of the most difficult ministry assignments in history, Moses had served God well and faithfully—except for one incident.

### *Moses' story . . .*

Moses had been born at a time when the Pharaoh was afraid that the Hebrew population would grow to the point that they'd become a threat to the Egyptian empire. So he had ordered the Egyptians to throw any newborn Hebrew boys into the Nile River so they'd drown.

When Moses was born, his mother managed to hide him for three months. When she couldn't hide him any longer, she took a papyrus basket and sealed it with tar and pitch so it would float. She put him in it and set him afloat among the reeds along the bank of the Nile River. It just so happened—it was providential, of course—that it was Pharaoh's daughter who found him, and she had compassion on him and adopted him as her own son. Moses' sister was watching to see what happened, and offered to get a Hebrew woman to care for him. Guess who she got? His mother! So for the early part of his life, she cared for him, *and* got paid for it (Exodus 2:1-10)!

Moses grew up, knowing full well his Hebrew lineage, though he was brought up in Pharaoh's court. One day when he was about forty years old, he killed an Egyptian who was mistreating a Hebrew, and when he realized someone else had seen it, he had to flee to the land of Midian. He spent the next forty years in the wilderness as a shepherd, taking care of the flocks of his father-in-law Jethro, also known as Reuel.

And then one day God spoke to Moses from the burning bush and called him to go to Egypt and bring his people out of bondage. Moses spent the next forty years of his life leading the people through the wilderness. They could have gone into the Promised Land just a few months after they came out of Egypt, but they wouldn't trust the LORD to give them the victory over the people of Canaan. So they were condemned to wander through the wilderness until all the men of that generation died out except Joshua and Caleb. Out of the twelve spies Moses had sent into Canaan, they were the only two who believed the LORD would give them the victory and the land (Numbers 13-14).

So for forty years, Moses had been dealing with these faithless, rebellious Israelites. Hardly anything he did pleased them or satisfied them. Time and time again they rebelled against the LORD's clear instructions through Moses. More than once they mounted outright rebellions against him and his leadership. And they grumbled and complained *constantly*.

Not long after they came out of Egypt, when they were camping at Rephidim, there was no water. The people were grumbling and complaining as usual, and some were even apparently talking about stoning Moses. As Moses prayed about the situation, the LORD told him to take his staff and some of the elders of the people to a certain rock and strike it with his staff, and water would come from it for the people to drink. He did, and it did (Exodus 17:1-7).

Sometime later, when the people were camping in the Desert of Zin, they were again without water. They again grumbled against Moses and Aaron. Moses and Aaron went to the entrance to the tent of meeting and fell on their faces to pray. The LORD's glory appeared to them, and he told Moses to take his staff and with Aaron gather the assembly of the people. They were simply to *speak* to the rock, and it would pour out its water.

Moses and Aaron gathered the people as the LORD had told them. In obvious anger and frustration, Moses told them, **“Listen, you rebels, must we bring you water out of this rock?”** Then rather than simply *speaking* to the rock as the LORD had said, Moses *struck* the rock—not once, but *twice* with his staff. And the water gushed out.

Who knows why he did it—maybe it was frustration and anger, maybe it was a hope that if it looked like they had made the water come out, it would put an end to the constant griping and rebellion.

But the consequences were staggering. By striking the rock twice rather than simply speaking to it, Moses had failed to honor the LORD as holy among the Israelites. The LORD told him that it was a matter of trust—Moses had not trusted him enough to honor him as holy. And because he hadn’t, he would not bring the people into the Promised Land (Numbers 20:1-13).

That seems harsh, doesn’t it? Maybe so, but God’s holiness is nothing to be trifled with! Moses had tried to make the people look to him because of his own awesome power rather than because he was the servant of the LORD.

So now, he was getting a glimpse of the land he would never enter, and then he would die at the ripe old age of a hundred and twenty—still in full strength. And except for this one incident, he had been otherwise faithful.

At the LORD’s direction, Moses had already commissioned Joshua to lead the people into the land and conquer it. And Joshua was certainly competent. But he was no Moses. And so this text that brings the Books of Moses to a close tells us that there was no other prophet like Moses in the history of Israel.

And that was true for well over a millennium. As impressive as Samuel, Elijah, and Elisha were, they were not Moses. As eloquent as Isaiah, Amos and Micah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel and all the other writing prophets were, none equaled Moses.

No one was as great as Moses, no one like Moses—*until Jesus!*

### *Until Jesus . . .*

Earlier in our service today, we heard the reading of Hebrews 3:1-6. There the writer tells us that Jesus ***was faithful to the one who appointed him—God—just as Moses was faithful in all God’s house.*** But he goes on to say that ***Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself.*** In other words, ***Moses was faithful as a servant in all God’s house . . . . But Christ is faithful as the Son over God’s house.*** Jesus was God’s suffering servant, yes; but more than that, he was God’s saving Son!

It’s like comparing the best high school basketball player in the nation with Michael Jordan in the prime of his professional career. Or like comparing the nicest house in New Hanover County with the Biltmore House in Asheville or one of the royal palaces of Europe.

The writer of Hebrews goes on throughout the book to show how Jesus is a better priest than the sons of Aaron, and how belonging to a greater priesthood after the order of Melchizedek, he is the mediator of a better covenant that he ratified with his own blood, and how he offered a better once-for-all sacrifice in the heavenly temple than the repeated sacrifices offered under the old covenant that Moses mediated.

So what does all this mean for us?

Simply this: *As much greater as Moses was than all the others, Jesus is greatest of all.*

It is *Jesus* who is the unique, the only begotten Son of God—indeed, God the Son who took on human flesh, who is truly God and truly Man.

It is *Jesus* who lived an absolutely perfect life and showed us what perfect obedience and absolute loyalty to the Father and his purpose looks like.

It is *Jesus* who offered the perfect sacrifice of himself on the cross that is once and for all sufficient for the forgiveness of our sins, who through his sacrificial death and his victorious resurrection conquered sin and Satan and death to set us free.

It is *Jesus* who calls us to deny ourselves, take up our cross, and follow *him* in his way, walking in his light as a part of his people, the church, his body through which he now works on earth.

It is *Jesus* who is present with us now through the Holy Spirit to empower us for discipleship and ministry and mission as he lives his faithful life out through us.

It is *Jesus* who commands us to make disciples for him from all the nations.

It is *Jesus* who will return in glory to raise the dead, to judge the world in righteousness, and to set everything right in new heavens and a new earth.

It is *Jesus* who saves us by his grace when we simply hear the good news, repent of our sin and put our faith in him, who forgives us, cleanses us, and gives us new life.

No one was as great as Moses—*until Jesus!* And no one will *ever* be what Jesus is!

Do you love him? Have you put your faith in him? Will you trust him now?

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<sup>1</sup> Scripture quotations taken from The Holy Bible, New International Version® (2011 edition).

<sup>2</sup> *The Interpreter's Dictionary of the Bible*, Vol. 3 (Nashville: Abingdon, 1962), 528-529, 819.