



Bible & Life

Bible Teaching Newsletter

BIBLICAL DOCTRINE & NEW TESTAMENT ASSEMBLY LIFE

Vol. 22, No. 4

September 1, 2015

Like Unto Moses

by David Dunlap

“And there arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face.” —Deuteronomy 34:10

Ask a Jew. Ask a Christian. Ask a Muslim. They will all give the same answer: Moses was a mighty man of God. Moses was a prophet indeed. Turn to a Jew again and ask why his people still revere the name of Moses more than 3,000 years after his death. There are many reasons that will be given. Was not Moses the man who first gave them in written form an early history of the Jewish people? And was not Moses himself a central figure in that important history?

Again, was it not Moses who first gave them a sense of national cohesion when he challenged the greatest military power of that day and secured their freedom from Egypt? He found the Jewish people suffering as slaves, even threatened with extinction, and then rescued them from the rigors of Goshen for a new life in Canaan. At the same time, he drew them away from the idolatry of Egypt and called them back to faith in the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

Once free of Egypt, Moses marched the Jews to the Sinai desert where he “brought forth the people out of the camp to meet with God” (Ex. 19:17). It was there that Moses received from Jehovah’s hand a body of laws for the new born nation. He then codified those laws and presented them to the people for their guidance in every area of life: personal, social, and national. If Abraham was their father as a people, Moses might be considered their father as a nation. H. I. Haldeman once unfolded the importance of Moses with a series of contrasts:

“He was the child of a slave and the son of a queen.
He was born in a hut and lived in a palace.
He had the wisdom of Egypt but the faith of a child
He was backward in speech but talked to God.”

God’s Appraisal of Moses

More important than the opinion of a Jew, Christian, or Muslim is the divine appraisal of Moses. We read, “There arose not a prophet since in Israel like unto Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face” (Deuteronomy 34:10). Written at the end of Moses’ life, these words mean much more than the customary commentation of those that have passed. Years before, when Moses’ credentials were being questioned by his own family, the Lord intervened in a most dramatic way: “If there be a prophet among you, I the Lord will speak unto him in a dream. My servant Moses is not so...With him

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D. L. Moody
(1834-1899)

will I speak mouth to mouth...and the similitude of the Lord shall he behold" (Num. 12:6-8). "Mouth to mouth" and "face to face"—these are staggering words when viewed in the context of Scripture as a whole. On the one hand, we see a mere mortal, Moses, the author of Psalm 90 with its emphasis on the frailty of man and the brevity of life. On the other hand, we have the eternal God, Creator of the universe, "the blessed and only Potentate...dwelling in the light which no man can approach unto." Yet Moses was able, by divine invitation, to enter the Tabernacle in the wilderness and commune with the Almighty. "When Moses was gone into the Tabernacle of the congregation to speak with Him, he heard the voice of One speaking unto him"(Numbers 7:89).

Moses and His Prophecies of Christ

When the law was given at Mount Sinai amid dreadful thunders and lightnings, only a select few were allowed even to approach the mount, but "Moses alone shall come near the Lord." A privileged man indeed! And who but Moses could have foreseen the coming of Christ and presumed to say, "A prophet shall the Lord raise up of your brethren like unto me?" (Deut. 18:8). This might appear as conceit on the part of Moses, but it was a prophetic utterance based on a divine revelation. Of all the Old Testament worthies who prefigured Christ, Moses alone seemed to be aware of the fact.

The Lord Jesus reminded the Jews of Moses' prophecy: "Had ye believed Moses, you would have believed Me; for he wrote of Me" (John 5:46). Quoting those words of Moses in one of his post-Pentecost sermons, Peter insisted that Christ was indeed "that Prophet" (Acts 3:22-23). Stephen likewise used the same passage to convince his bloodthirsty hearers that in crucifying Jesus of Nazareth they had murdered their Messiah, the One Moses had both predicted and prefigured (Acts 7:37). Later prophets in Israel continually referred the people back to Moses and his writings, indeed his name is mentioned after his death more than any other Old Testament character. It was also from the writings of Moses that the Lord quoted three times during this temptation by Satan (Matt. 4, Mk. 1). Then after Christ's resurrection, He explained the Messianic prophecies which began with Moses' writings (Luke 24:27).

Moses, the Servant of God

Thus Moses stands without peer among the Hebrew prophets. But Moses was not just a prophet; he was a man of various offices. Scripture also refers to Moses as a priest (Ps. 99:6), not in the official sense like Aaron but as the man who represented the people before God, even when Aaron failed. Indeed much of his time after the Exodus was spent in teaching and beseeching—teaching the law of God and beseeching Him for mercy when the people broke the laws. On a human level, he represented the people before Pharaoh Amenhotep II, but on a higher level, before the King of Glory. It was here he excelled as an intercessor, a true type of the One who "ever lives to make intercession for us"(Hebrews 7:25). Before Moses could intercede for others, he first needed to know something of personal communion with God. He learned that time spent in the presence of God was never wasted time. A servant of God may be too busy if he doesn't spend time in fellowship with God. We are warned, "They made me keeper of the vineyard but my own vineyard I have not kept"(Song of Solomon 1:6). It is of note that the perfect Servant said, "The Lord God has given Me the tongue of the learned, that I should know how to speak a word in season to him that is weary: He wakens morning by morning, He wakens my ear to hear as the learned"(Isaiah 50:4). In service for the Master the "ear" and

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**C. H. Mackintosh
(1820-1896)**

the “tongue” are intimately connected. One cannot stand to speak to others before he has knelt to listen to God. This was an indispensable part of the life of Moses, the servant of God.

Moses in God’s School of Higher Learning

By any standard Moses was an acknowledged leader among men. It was no mean task to take some two million unorganized and spiritless serfs weld them together as one, and then lead them to victory against one of the world’s greatest powers. For this position, the Lord trained His servant in two very different schools: first by his princely upbringing in the Egyptian palace and later in the desert as a shepherd among harsh conditions. In Egypt, he was trained in all the wisdom of the Pharaohs, as well as the protocol and tactics of the court. In the desert, with a shepherd’s rod in his hand, he learned patience, humility, and faith in the school of God. Concerning this school of God, Bible teacher C. H. Mackintosh writes:

“The ‘backside of the desert’—that sacred spot where the flesh is laid in the dust, and God alone is exalted. God’s voice alone is heard, His light enjoyed, His thoughts received. This is a place where all must go to be educated for the service of God.”¹

Bible historian Luke tells us that Moses’ life is divided into three segments of forty years each (Acts 7:23, 30). During the first forty years in Egypt, Moses was trained to serve as a leader in Pharaoh’s court. For the second forty years, he was enrolled in the school of God on the backside of the desert learning in classroom of faith. The third forty years, Moses was raised up to lead the children of Israel into the land of Canaan in fulfillment of God’s promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. The respected evangelist Dwight Lyman Moody (1834-1899), once described these three periods of Moses’s life in this way:

“Moses spent his first forty years thinking he was somebody. He spent the second forty years learning he was a nobody. He spent his third forty years discovering that God was everything and what God could do with a nobody!”²

Moses quickly learned that in service to God there must be nothing of self but all of God. Life in the presence of God transforms the servant of God more and more into His likeness and puts to death the dominion of the flesh. The short-tempered Moses, who killed an Egyptian, learned how to wait on God. The man who was strong in his own eyes learned how truly weak he was in the sight of God. The man who was proud in his intellectual abilities learned to be “the meekest man of all the earth”(Numbers 12:3). This godly man learned that God’s desires must be his desires. He learned that his timing for serving God was not always God’s timing and that waiting on God’s divine call was not wasted time. He learned that the school of God on the backside of the desert was worth more than all the learning in schools of Egypt. We read, “By faith, he forsook Egypt, not fearing the wrath of the king: for he endured, as seeing Him who is invisible” (Hebrews 11:27). Moses discovered, as all Christians must, that walking with God is to “Unlearn, Learn, and Relearn” over and over again.

God’s Way to Spiritual Strength

As Christians, we often think that it is God’s purpose to daily make us spiritually strong. We cry out to God in prayer, “Lord, make me spiritually stronger.” We think that a spiritual leader is someone who is spiritually

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by morning, He
wakens my ear
to hear as the
learned.”*** (Isa. 50:4)

Prophet Isaiah
8th century, Judah



Bible & Life Ministries, Inc.
3116 Gulfwind Dr., Land O' Lakes, FL 34639

September 2015

INFORMATION

Bible and Life is published periodically and sent out free of charge, supported entirely by the free will offerings of the Lord's people. Checks should be made out to "Bible and Life Ministries, Inc."

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strong—a spiritual “bruise” in God’s kingdom and someone to whom others can really look up to and desire to imitate.

But in reality, spiritual growth in the Christian life takes place in a very different way. When God transforms a man or woman into the servant He wants him to be, He doesn’t make him day by day stronger but day by day weaker. He makes us so weak that we have the spiritual feeling that we cannot do anything for God. We read in John’s Gospel, “Without Me you can do nothing” (John 15:5). God must make us weak that we learn that we need to daily trust God in all things. Earlier in Moses’ life, we read that “he was mighty in word and deed” (Acts 7:22). But after his schooling in the desert of Horeb, when God calls, Moses replies, “Who am I?” (Ex. 3:11). Lord, send someone else! It is noteworthy that when Moses was mighty in word and deed, God could not use him. But now, when he is in his own eyes small, humble, and unusable, God says, as it were, “Now, this is a man I can use.”

“Like unto Moses”

Moses was a man who was great in the eyes of all Israel but so very small in his own eyes. Moses was meeker than any other man but mighty in the eyes of God. We read of God’s assessment, “There arose not a prophet since in Israel like Moses, *whom the Lord knew face to face*” (Deut. 34:10). We do not read, “whom *Moses* knew face to face,” but rather, “whom *the Lord* knew face to face. The emphasis is laid not upon Moses but upon God. This may be the secret in the life of Moses. Just like Moses, we may become so angry that we kill a man. We may be so full of doubt that we, time after time, turn away from the call of God. We may be so full of self-pity and remorse that we ask God to take our lives. But there is another side: God’s side. God chooses us to serve Him despite our weakness, flaws, and shortcomings. God fills our lives of weakness with strength, fortifies our stammering tongues with boldness, and replaces our doubt and self-pity with confidence so that the kingdoms of men might acknowledge that the most high God reigns (Dan. 4:17).

Endnotes

- 1.C. H. Mackintosh, *Notes on the Pentateuch: Exodus*, (New York, NY: Loizeaux, 1945), p. 39
2. Charles Swindoll, *Moses*, (Nashville, TN: Word Publishing, 1999), p. 20