

Deuteronomy 34:9-12

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-34/deuteronomy-349-12/>

This last section of the book serves as an epitaph (words written in memory to someone who has died) to Moses. In addition to presenting Joshua as the new leader of the Israelites, the epitaph then describes the unparalleled relationship Moses had with his suzerain LORD.

After the death of Moses, *Joshua the son of Nun* (v. 9) took over and led the people of Israel into the land of promise. Joshua was not unknown to the Israelites. Earlier, he was “the attendant of Moses from his youth” (Numbers 11:28). As Moses’s assistant, Joshua proved himself to be a capable leader when Moses commanded him to gather some men “to go and fight against Amalek, he did as Moses told him” (Exodus 17:9-10). Joshua prevailed because the LORD fought for him and gave the battle to him.

Joshua was equipped to lead the Israelites into the Promised Land because he was *filled with the spirit of wisdom*. The basic idea conveyed by the word *wisdom* (Hebrew, “*hokmâ*”) is that of skill in practical application of knowledge. It is used to refer to the skilled artisans and craftsmen that built the tabernacle (Exodus 28:3, 31:3, 35:31). In the wisdom literature of the Old Testament (i.e., Proverbs), it referred to the “skill of living”, the ability to live one’s life intelligently, to make the correct choices (choosing to do the work of the LORD and therefore gain the best possible outcome for one’s self), and to act on those choices with prudence.

This principle applies to New Testament Christians today. In the New Testament, Paul prayed that the Father would give the believers in Ephesus a *spirit of wisdom* (Ephesians 1:17).

Though *spirit* can refer to a person’s inner self, the source of this wisdom is the Holy Spirit (Isaiah 11:2). Joshua was given the wisdom that was necessary in order to govern the people of Israel after Moses’ death.

The bestowal of this wisdom occurred when *Moses had laid his hands on him*. This was a ritual that symbolized an ordination of leadership. In this case, it was a transfer of covenant authority from Moses to Joshua. Simply stated,

Joshua was empowered and equipped to fulfill his duties as the new leader of Israel. Just as the LORD was with Moses, He would also be with Joshua (Joshua 1:5). As a result, *the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the Lord had commanded Moses*.

Nevertheless, Moses was to be remembered as an exceptional leader because he had an intimate relationship with God. The text tells us that *since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses* (v. 10). The term translated as *prophet* here is the Hebrew word “nābî.” It is used for someone who received a call from God to be His spokesman. He was an authorized envoy for God with a message that originated with God, as indicated by the frequent prophetic formula *Thus says the LORD* (Jeremiah 11:3; Jeremiah 33:2; Isaiah 48:17).

A prophet usually received his divine message through dreams or visions (Numbers 12:6). These statements show that God usually revealed Himself to His prophets through dreams and visions in Old Testament times.

Moses, on the other hand, received it directly from God because *the LORD knew him face to face*. That means that the LORD spoke with Moses without mediation. Moreover, Moses’s exceptional leadership is emphasized by his actions. He would be remembered *for all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land* (v. 11). The *signs and wonders* are a reference to the plagues upon Egypt (Exodus 7-12).

Moses would also be remembered *for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which he performed in the sight of all Israel* (v. 12). The *mighty power* and *great terror* could be a reference to both the plagues and the destruction of the Egyptian army during the crossing of the Red Sea (Exodus 15:16).

Many great prophets arose after Moses—Samuel, Elijah, Isaiah, Ezekiel, Jeremiah, Daniel, Amos, Hosea, Obadiah, and many more. They were good and faithful servants of God. But they were not like Moses, because Moses received a special grace from God to perform mighty deeds in the sight of Israel.

Moses was a great and mighty man, but there was no man on earth as humble as he (Numbers 12:3). This is likely stated because Moses saw himself as he

truly was, no more and no less. Moses understood that his role was to serve Israel by leading them well and interceding for them, and he did so with all his might. As with many other great leaders, Moses did not seek his position; he was called to it, and was quite reluctant to accept the call (Exodus 3:11).

Ultimately, however, there came one prophet who was superior to Moses—His name is Jesus (John 1:45). According to the writer of Hebrews, Jesus *has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses* (Hebrews 3:3). Jesus arose as the one like Moses through whom God would speak directly to the people in the form of a human, as they requested (Deuteronomy 18:18). However, Israel did not recognize the One whom they requested when He appeared. Among many other things, the gospel of Matthew can be seen as presenting Jesus as the second Moses, the One who fulfilled the prophecy of Deuteronomy 18:18.

Biblical Text:

⁹Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the Lord had commanded Moses. ¹⁰Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face, ¹¹for all the signs and wonders which the Lord sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land, ¹²and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.