

January 23, 2022 **Moses on Mount Nebo: Deuteronomy 34:1-8**

By Senior Pastor Tom Harrison

This week we survey the Book of Numbers, ending with the selection of Joshua as Moses' successor. Moses led the Israelites out of Egypt, but they did not go immediately into the Promised Land. Instead, their lack of faith resulted in constant complaint and mistrust of the Lord and His leader. The people had a once-in-a-lifetime chance to enter the Promised Land, but they sided with the negative report of the ten spies. They believed they were unable to overcome their adversaries. They entered a desolated area. The wilderness was not the destination; it was supposed to be a temporary place. They entered a "neutral zone" to determine their future. The Lord gave His people all they needed to succeed, including the Mosaic Law at Mount Sinai. Moses took the Israelites out of Egypt but had a hard time taking Egypt out of the Israelites. That entire generation, except Joshua and Caleb, had to die before they could enter their destination.

Numbers 20 tells us that Moses lost his trusted confidantes, his sister, Miriam, and his brother, Aaron, but also lost his temper. He struck the rock instead of speaking to it. Moses looked over the Dead Sea from Mount Nebo to see the Promised Land, though he did not get to enter. On the one hand, he had a lifetime of memories and also a glimpse of the future of the Israelites. On the other hand, he had to contemplate his personal loss of entry and his own mortality. Moses was a man who experienced mountains, valleys, and caves.

APPLICATION: Our theme this week is about dealing with **disappointment**. The postscript about Moses (verses 9-12) tells us there was no one else like him, but even he experienced loss and sadness. Having unfinished business or not getting to cross the finish line is discouraging. When we do not handle the neutral zone well, we can become stuck there. We don't like to think about our own mortality, yet death is 100% certain. What have been major disappointments in your life? What are you struggling with now? Who do you know who is going through a discouraging time? What can you do to help? What hope do you gain from this text?

The story of Moses consists of three 40-year periods:

0-40 Born to Hebrew parents in Egypt when Hebrews were slaves to the Egyptians, the Hebrews were multiplying like rabbits, so the edict was given that all Hebrew baby boys were to be killed. Moses was miraculously drawn out ("Moses") of the water and raised in Pharaoh's court where he had all the privileges in the world. However, when he was 40, he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave and he killed the Egyptian, hid the body only to learn his deed was known.

40-80 He left Egypt as a fugitive and headed east where he would spend his next 40 years in the wilderness tending stubborn sheep.

80-120 When 80, God spoke and told Moses to go back to Egypt to tell Pharaoh to "let my people go." Reluctantly, the fugitive returned and miraculously led the Israelites out of Egypt. They went into the wilderness of Sinai where he received the Law. The wilderness wasn't their destination – the Promised Land was where the infant nation was headed. Spies were sent into the Promised Land. Though the land was wonderful, 10/12 spies said they couldn't overcome the giants who lived there. The Israelite people weren't able to overcome their fear and they believed the negative report of the 10 instead of the confidence of Joshua/Caleb so they spent 40 years wandering in the wilderness until they died out. They were stuck.

Diagram from *Managing Transitions Making the Most of Change: Egypt - Wilderness - Promised Land*

We seldom go from "Egypt" to the "Promised Land" – we inevitably go through a time of wilderness wandering. This is often a time of complaint, depression, disorientation, frustration, and grumbling.

Actually, they started complaining only six weeks after leaving Egypt (Exodus 16:1). They forgot they'd been slaves for 400 years in Egypt and how terrible life had been. Moses was frustrated by the people's lack of faith in God and by their continual murmuring. God gave them Manna as their food and the people complained. **Numbers 11:10-15** *Moses heard the people weeping throughout their clans, everyone at the door of his tent. And the anger of the Lord blazed hotly, and Moses was displeased. Moses said to the Lord, "Why have you dealt ill with your servant? And why have I not found favor in your sight, that you lay the burden of all this people on me? Did I conceive all this people? Did I give them birth, that you should say to me, 'Carry them in your bosom, as a nurse carries a nursing child,' to the land that you swore to give their fathers? Where am I to get meat to give to all this people? For they weep before me and say, 'Give us meat, that we may eat.' I am not able to carry all this people alone; the burden is too heavy for me. If you will treat me like this, kill me at once, if I find favor in your sight, that I may not see my wretchedness."* Moses is so DISAPPOINTED by the people and their grumbling and sabotage that he asked God to kill him. In addition to Moses asking God to take him, so did Elijah, Jeremiah, and Jonah. That's how disappointed they were in God's activity.

Numbers 20:1-13 *And the people of Israel, the whole congregation, came into the wilderness of Zin in the first month, and the people stayed in Kadesh. And Miriam died there and was buried there. Now there was no water for the congregation. And they assembled themselves together against Moses and against Aaron. And the people quarreled with Moses and said, "Would that we had perished when our brothers perished before the Lord! Why have you brought the assembly of the Lord into this wilderness, that we should die here, both we and our cattle? And why have you made us come up out of Egypt to bring us to this evil place? It is no place for grain or figs or vines or pomegranates, and there is no water to drink." Then Moses and Aaron went from the presence of the assembly to the entrance of the tent of meeting and fell on their faces. And the glory of the Lord appeared to them, and the Lord spoke to Moses, saying, "Take the staff,*

and assemble the congregation, you and Aaron your brother, and tell the rock before their eyes to yield its water. So you shall bring water out of the rock for them and give drink to the congregation and their cattle." And Moses took the staff from before the Lord, as he commanded him. Then Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock, and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels: shall we bring water for you out of this rock?" And Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock with his staff twice, and water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their livestock. And the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe in me, to uphold me as holy in the eyes of the people of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land that I have given them." These are the waters of Meribah, where the people of Israel quarreled with the Lord, and through them he showed himself holy.

Moses was disappointed with the people and with God. After this response of losing control of his emotions, he had to be disappointed in himself. This was the first trial Moses had to face as leader of the people without the presence of his sister. (Aaron dies at the end of Chapter 20, too.) For the first time Moses faces a challenge w/o her and for the first time Moses loses emotional control in the presence of the people. He lost an ally and confidant. When we lose these people in our lives, be prepared for a crash.

Deut. 34:1-8

Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho. And the Lord showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan, ² all Naphtali, the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, ³ the Negeb, and the Plain, that is, the Valley of Jericho the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. ⁴ And the Lord said to him, "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, 'I will give it to your offspring.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there." ⁵ So Moses the servant of the Lord died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the Lord, ⁶ and he buried him in the valley in the land of Moab opposite Beth-peor; but no one knows the place of his burial to this day. ⁷ Moses was 120 years old when he died. His eye was undimmed, and his vigor unabated. ⁸ And the people of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. Then the days of weeping and mourning for Moses were ended.

When we moved from 5838 S. Sheridan to 6767 S. Mingo, I thought we would go from Point A o Point B. I found out that there is a Point C, too.

Asbury is headed for the Wilderness again. We've had one transition in senior leadership since 1964 (me in 1993). Now that I've announced my July 31 retirement date, we'll deal with the uncertainty of our next leader. When I came in 1993, I had one assignment: Reach my generation while holding on to Bill's. Bill helped me with that, too. He was like a father to me. I often called him "Moses" and referred to myself as "Joshua." Now Bill has beaten us to heaven, in 2022, so I am like Moses. Our next leader, Joshua, will have the same assignment: reach his generation while holding on to mine. Why do I need to retire? Because we need someone more skilled at reaching his own generation.

However, what is unique about this, is that we don't have just one transition, but two. You may not be aware of it (please check out website) but The United Methodist Church will no longer be "The UMC." It will break apart into two groups – those who are "traditional" and those who are "Progressive." There is uncertainty about when this will happen but please pay attention to our communications and stay connected with our media.

I have two favors to ask of you:

REMEMBER *Deuteronomy 8:1-2 The whole commandment that I command you today you shall be careful to do, that you may live and multiply, and go in and possess the land that the Lord swore to give to your fathers. And you shall remember the whole way that the Lord your God has led you these forty years in the wilderness, that he might humble you, testing you to know what was in your heart, whether you would keep his commandments or not.*

RESPOND: We will have one job this year – help to make our new senior pastor successful. If he succeeds, we all will. *Philippians 4:4-7 Rejoice in the Lord always; again I will say, Rejoice. Let your reasonableness be known to everyone. The Lord is at hand; do not be anxious about anything, but in everything by prayer and supplication with thanksgiving let your requests be made known to God. And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus.*

We don't know what to expect. But don't be like the Israelites. Live in faith nor fear. Don't be anxious. Pray. Trust the Lord. Stay Calm, Stay Connected, Stay the Course, and Stay in Christ. Asbury will continue to be Asbury. Keep a calm, non-anxious presence.