

OUT WITH THE OLD  
Deuteronomy 34  
December 26, 2010 (kit)

---

“We exist to increase the health and size of God’s church, everywhere.”

The glowing embers of 2010 are behind us now. We are on the brink of 2011. It is time to take account, to review and to measure this past year. It is time to notice our blessings and all that went well and all the good things of life. It is time to look back at all the bills that we were able to pay, the parties we attended, the friends we made, the family we loved, and all that went according to plan or even better than planned.

It is also time to take account of our disappointments and unfinished business from this last year. It is time to notice how life has a way of never seeming complete. It is time to take stock of our failures. It is time to see where we were faithless. It is time to look back and remember the hard times that came our way. And it is time to look at both, the triumphs and joys, and the difficulties and tears, and ask, “How should I consider the last year from God’s point of view?” Our text for today finds us looking at the end of the life of a very famous historical figure and the end of an era in the life of Israel.

Moses was born in Egypt, in a time when his people were slaves of Israel. He had grown up 40 years, raised by the Egyptians, but conscience of his heritage as a Hebrew. He knew of the promises made to his fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Then, when he was 40, he witnessed an Egyptian abusing a Hebrew slave. He burned with anger seeing the injustice done to one of his people. So he beat the Egyptian and killed him. This caused him to need to leave his home, as a refugee, running from punishment for murdering his fellow citizen. And that led him to the next 40 years of his life.

God blessed Moses, though he didn’t deserve it. He gave him a wife and a family to live with. He gave him honest work as a shepherd. He lived in land far away from his home in Egypt. Then, God gave him the strength of a younger man and at 80, called to him and commanded him to go back to Egypt. After 40 years away, God said, “I want you to back to Egypt and lead my people out of slavery.” Going back to Egypt was itself a big change for an old man. He would be going back to a place that wouldn’t remember him. But beyond moving, there was the command of freeing a nation of slaves? Seriously? And how was he to do that? A shepherd with a stick was no match for an army. God’s answer was, “Go tell Pharaoh, ‘I said so.’”

This idea didn’t thrill Moses. “Me? Me? Why would he listen to me? I can’t even win an argument with my wife? Just say, ‘My God says please let His people go?’ That’s the plan? I’m not feeling good about this.” God said, “Trust me and do it.” With a little coaxing and the help of his brother, Moses obeyed God and trusted Him. When he got to Egypt he found that his only problem wasn’t Pharaoh. That guy was hard enough to deal with. But when he showed up and told the Jews he was there to rescue them, he was received like Ben Roethlisberger volunteering to chaperone the high school prom.

But, with all the obstacles, God worked it out. And, after a few amazing miracles and one devastating visit by the angel of death, Pharaoh finally agreed to let the people go. God led Moses and Moses led the people into the wilderness. The journey was supposed to be short. They should have arrived in the promised land in a matter of weeks. But the people were unfaithful and stubborn. So, God's punishment for them was that they had to remain in the wilderness for 40 years. Moses unfortunately had to share this sentence with them. He was their leader, their shepherd. They were nasty, whining, biting sheep. But he had to stay with them. He did. It wasn't easy. Many times he wanted to quit. But God was faithful to him. He gave him His word, and His strength, and Moses finished well. But, he didn't finish perfectly. The job was hard. A couple of times he lost his temper and sinned. It's hard to be human.

But now, the 40 years was over. His job was over. His life was about over. The people were now disciplined and faithful. They would enter into the promised land. But Moses couldn't go. He couldn't complete the mission he had been given. He would have to hand off the leadership to someone else. Why not? He would have to largely because the people were unfaithful and forced him to march in the desert, but mainly because he reacted to their unfaithfulness by being unfaithful himself.

One time when the people were unbelieving and whining about where their water would come from, God told Moses to speak to a rock and it would give water. But Moses lost his temper at the people and struck the rock with his stick. God had told him to speak to the rock, not strike it. Now Moses, years before, had been instructed to strike a rock and water flowed from it for the people. But this time, he was not to strike it. But he did. For this, God who holds His leaders to high standard, forbid Moses from crossing over. The rock in the wilderness, according to Paul, was a symbol of God's future Messiah.

God's Messiah is to be struck only once, on the cross. Not twice. Perhaps when Moses struck the rock to get the water instead of speaking to it, he violated the picture of grace that God gives us in Jesus. For you see, Jesus was sacrificed once on the cross, for all people. He was struck down once. But he need never be struck again. There is no need to sacrifice Him again for the sins of man. Instead, the spiritual water of life that is Jesus is received by believing the Word of God.

Perhaps this was what God wanted to picture by the Rock yielding its water without being struck, but only being spoken to. In any case, Moses' temper was unbelief before God. And so he had failed God and would not enter the promised land himself. Yet, God was faithful to him. His life's mission had come to an end. Our text for today describes Moses' last day on earth:

### **Deuteronomy 34:1-12**

Deuteronomy 34:1-12 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. 9 And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him. So the people of Israel obeyed him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses. 10 And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, 11 none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, 12 and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

We can only imagine the thoughts of Moses on this last day on earth for him. Did he look back over his life and wonder at what God had done? Did he feel regret for all the times he had failed, or did he have peace, knowing that God is merciful? Did he feel satisfaction, knowing that his job had come to an end, and he was ending his life in faith, rather than in unbelief? Did he feel faint heartache at the reality that he wouldn't be there when the goal of his life was accomplished? He would die never once having set his foot in the promised land. He never had been to Israel. The greatest prophet in Israel's history never went there. Did he feel the exhilaration of knowing that God is faithful, and the people would enter into the promised land? Did he, like his father Abraham, look at that moment to a city that had not yet come, a kingdom not built with human hands? Did he wonder about the fate of his people without his hand to guide?

As we look back on 2010, and look back on our lives to this point, we can gain wisdom from the example of faithful Moses. Though there are no doubt dozens of lessons to be learned, I have picked out 6 lessons that, if we are wise, we will take away from this story as we look back on this past year.

### ***1. We weren't perfect this past year***

No matter what your hopes for your own performance before God, you were less than perfect. You had goals before God that you wanted to meet and you didn't. Come to grips with this reality and know that this is part of the dissatisfaction of living as a human being in a fallen world, in weak flesh, in the spiritual war zone of this life. But remember this also. God says to you:

Psalm 103:14 *For he knows our frame; he remembers that we are but dust*

It is God's grace that keeps us. We seek to always be faithful, but we won't always be. We will have regrets in this life. We will even miss out on some of God's good plans for us because we are unfaithful just like Moses. But that doesn't mean He ceases to love us and care for us. God loves the weak. This life is not easy.

## ***2. We must end the year faithfully, obedient to God***

Moses was not perfect, but he was faithful. He ended his life a faithful man. He obeyed to the end. Some people, after they have failed, throw in the towel. Have you ever been on a diet? If so then you know that once you decide to cheat on your diet, often you just throw in the towel. You say, “Aw heck” and then start eating like a bloated sow! Or a drinker who quits and falls off the wagon doesn’t just take one drink. He opens the bottle, jumps inside and swims around in it. Often when we fail, we quit.

Some people tragically do this with their faith. They begin well, but when hard times come, when they fail, they take themselves out of the game, disqualify themselves from service. We ought not to do this. This might have been a year of tragic failure and heart break for you. This might have been the year of a divorce, or adultery, or drug abuse, or theft, or failure in a hundred ways. We all fail, from time to time. The question is what do we do afterwards. Do we make it worse by adding sins to sins? Or do we remain faithful, get up, wipe off the seat of our pants, and get back in the game?

*Proverbs 24:16 for the righteous falls seven times and rises again, but the wicked stumble in times of calamity.*

Moses never left his faith, even when he failed. He believed God’s word till the end. God said, “Go up to the mountain.” He went.

## ***3. We must know that God held 2010 in His hand***

God knew long before Moses how his life would end. He knew how far he would get. He knew where he’d be buried. He wasn’t surprised by the events of his life. The good, the bad, and the ugly of this past year, it was all in the hand of God who plans for all things and is always at the ready to rescue His children. This was not a year that God said, “Whoops! Wonder what I’m going to do now.”

*Psalms 139:16 16 Your eyes saw my unformed substance; in your book were written, every one of them, the days that were formed for me, when as yet there were none of them.*

In our lives, we can think that sometime our life is chaos or spinning out of control. Not so. God knew what 2010 held for you before it happened. He has a plan to bless you with those past times even now.

## ***4. We must realize that God’s plan will triumph in spite of you, not because of you.***

Moses was the greatest prophet to live except for Jesus Himself. Yet, in the end, the plan of God was carried out with him and without him. God doesn’t depend on any one of us to get His job done. We are expendable. None of us are God’s gift to the world. His plan wasn’t made by you and I, and it can’t be spoiled by you and I. This should help us to remain humble.

**5. *We must realize that all things come to an end.***

Moses had his day in the sun. But it ended and ages have passed and he is no longer here. The same is true of your life. It is coming to an end. This past year, as you look back, should be considered precious minutes, hours, and days, because you only get a few, and one more year is gone. You will only have a few more, if any. All things come to an end. The day of your strength, the day of your industry, the day of your laughter, the day of your love, the day of our work, the day of your life, is only a moment and soon will end.

Moses wrote one Psalm; number 90. This Psalm might be the oldest words in the Bible, perhaps predating all the others, even Genesis. It was a song that Moses wrote in his lifetime. In it, he reminds us that we are like the summer flowers, like the grass of the field. It is here one day and gone the next. In it he gives us this wisdom:

Psalm 90:12 So teach us to number our days that we may get a heart of wisdom

Wisdom comes in knowing that you are going to die. Wise people think regularly of the day of their death. For this will cause us to live life fully, wisely, not frittering it away. Another year is gone. They will all be gone very soon. Live well, love well, and obey God fully right now, for you will soon be gone.

**6. *You must lay down your head on the pillow tonight in peace.***

It does you no good to lay down your head fretting about the things you could have done better. It does you no good to look backwards on 2010 worrying about the past. Worrying isn't always about the future. Sometimes we don't forget what lies behind us, yet today is what matters. We are here by the grace and kindness of God isn't that right? God was gracious to us yesterday, He's gracious now. He won't change tomorrow. So tonight, lay down your heart in peace. When Moses went up that mountain, he knew the past was what it was. The future he couldn't control. It was in God's hands. He laid down in peace. And God took care of him. The same is true for you. Yesterday is what it is. God loves you now. Be at peace.