

Deuteronomy 34:1-12

Goodbye Church Sermon Series: Jonathan's Last Cornerstone Sermon

Rev. Jonathan M. Romig / June 26th, 2022

Thank you for calling me to serve as your pastor these last seven years, nine years in the same ministry if you count my time at Immanuel. I love this church, and I love you, and I'm thankful God gave me you. As I was trying to figure out what I should preach for my last sermon, my mentor Sam Kim mentioned this passage. This chapter, the last chapter in Deuteronomy, is also the last chapter of Moses' life and ministry as he led the Israelites out of Egypt and towards the promised land. I don't want to equate myself with Moses, but I think this moment of transition in the life of God's people can help us process our moment of transition.

Moses has seen a lot in his lifetime. When he was just a baby, he was placed in a papyrus basket in the Nile so Pharaoh wouldn't kill him, and that led to Pharaoh's daughter adopting him and growing up in the royal household. But when he killed an Egyptian beating an Israelite, he fled into the wilderness. Then when he was 80, God called him to lead the Israelites out of slavery in Egypt (Exodus 7:7). That led to God sending plagues on Egypt and Pharaoh until Pharaoh let the people go.

Then Moses led the Israelites to the Red Sea, where Pharaoh was about to crush them. But God parted the waters, and they went across on dry ground before God dashed to pieces Pharaoh's army when they tried to cross. Then Moses led the Israelites to Mount Sinai, where they met God, and God gave them the Ten Commandments and the law. But that's also where the Israelites made a golden calf and worshipped it. After they travel up to the edge of the promised land, Moses sends spies in, but all but two say they shouldn't enter. So God judges them and condemns that whole generation to die in the wilderness as they wander in it for the next forty years (Numbers 14:33-34).

It's during this time that Moses disobeys God, striking a rock when God told him to speak to it to get water. So Moses is also judged unworthy to enter the promised land (Numbers 20:1-13; 1 Corinthians 10:4). He, too, will die. As the forty years come to a close, Moses is now 120 years old, and the people are ready to enter the promised land. But Moses will not go with them. Moses has come to the end of his ministry. God takes Moses up on Mount Nebo, just by the Jordan river, to look over the river and see the promised land, Canaan.

God shows Moses the promised land.

I'm going to read the first couple of verses again, and I want you to notice how much of the promised land Moses gets to see from Mount Nebo. You can see a map on the left as we read:

Deuteronomy 34:1-4 (NIV)

Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho.

Mount Nebo would have been the perfect place to see much of the promised land without actually entering the promised land. It was like God was taking a panoramic photo to show Moses. It's fun to imagine that God gave Moses "Legolas eyes." In *The Lord of the Rings*, Legolas the elf has much better vision than the rest of the fellowship and can see great distances. Maybe God helped Moses see further than normal.

There the Lord showed him the whole land—from Gilead to Dan,

God showed Moses the rocky, hilly, but fertile region of Gilead east of the Jordan River all the way to Dan near the Mediterranean Sea.

²...all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh,

This picture of the Kedesh Valley shows a fertile valley, ripe for agriculture and farming. Manasseh covered a much broader territory, and Ephraim is just north of Jerusalem.

...all the land of Judah as far as the Mediterranean Sea,

God showed the Mediterranean sea and its beautiful blue and green waters, but he also showed Moses the parts of the land that weren't so great, like the dry and desert-like Negev. Why show Moses the desert? The promised land is going to be good, but it won't be easy. As you look ahead in your life and ministry, I believe times of fruitfulness are just up ahead, but there will also be dry seasons too. Keep trusting God.

³...the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar.

Jericho is a fortified city, but God will tear down its walls after Joshua and Israel cross the Jordan. While we're not sure where the city of palms is (maybe it's Jericho), Zoar is at the southern tip of the Dead Sea. God shows Moses this wonderful, mysterious, sometimes fruitful, often dry land where God is going to defeat their enemies, provide, and the people will have to trust him. God shows Moses the promised land.

The promised land wasn't about Moses but about God and his people.

Here are the last words God spoke to Moses before taking him home.

⁴ Then the Lord said to him, "This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob when I said, 'I will give it to your descendants.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you will not cross over into it."

The promised land was never about one person. It was about a people—the descendants of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. Moses' mission was not the promised land, which sounds funny to say. Moses' mission was God's people, leading them, guiding them, and caring for them. Moses gets to see from afar what he longed for, but he doesn't get to enter. That's how I feel. I see good things ahead for Cornerstone, but I don't get to go there. But I will be praying for you that the Lord will continue to lead you there in his timing and way.

Deuteronomy 34:5-8 (NIV)

⁵ And Moses the servant of the Lord died there in Moab, as the Lord had said. ⁶ He buried him in Moab, in the valley opposite Beth Peor, but to this day no one knows where his grave is. ⁷ Moses was a hundred and twenty years old when he died, yet his eyes were not weak nor his strength gone. ⁸ The Israelites grieved for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days, until the time of weeping and mourning was over.

Because Moses talked to God face-to-face, like one does a friend, his face radiated the presence of God (Exod 34:29; Num 6:24-26). And at 120 years of age, he still looked young. God actually took his life. And the people of Israel grieved for thirty days. It was really sad that God took Moses from them. It was really sad that Moses didn't get to see what would be, except from afar. But the promised land was never about Moses but about God and his people. Cornerstone has always been about God's people, his church. God loves you, Cornerstone, and he is going to take care of you. He is going to take care of the elders, the deacons, the worship team, the missions team, our children, youth, college students, parents, and retired.

As I think about Cornerstone's future, I see the Kedesh Valley with its fruitful watered plain. I see that through some of our recent discipleship efforts as a church. They've given us a place to water the soil and to grow. Keep going and growing. As we come out of Covid, there's a real opportunity to grow in relationship with each other and to reach the community of Westford in new ways. The land of plenty could be just around the bend. Keep trusting God and walking forward in faith.

But, it won't always be easy. It sure has felt like we've been wandering in the wilderness at times. The dry desert Negev region is also in the promised land, but it's not all of the promised land. There will be fruitful seasons of ministry, and there will be dry ones. Jesus simply calls us to put one foot in front of the other, walking in faith day by day.

Almost two years ago, I was reading through Isaiah 6 again when God asks who will go to his people for him, and Isaiah answers, "Here am I. Send me!" I prayed for a fresh calling to Cornerstone, for the Lord to send me again to Westford. And I felt like the Lord said, "No!" That was pretty startling. But helped me start to realize that my time as your pastor was coming to an end, even though the "no" was not immediate. I feel like God did send me temporarily for two more years. But if you were to pray that same prayer, "Here am I. Send me to Westford!" I bet most of you would hear a different answer. "Yes!"

God calls his people into the promised land and leads them there.

Moses doesn't go any further. But God's people do. Here's how God leads his people, you, forward:

a. Spirit-Filled Leadership

In our [women in the kingdom series](#), we talked about the importance of Spirit-filled leadership. Moses had raised up and trained up Joshua as his apprentice, but even a well-trained leader wasn't good enough. Joshua needed what Moses had, the Spirit of the living God.

⁹Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him.

As I step out of Cornerstone, I think God is giving you Spirit-filled leadership. Our elders want to be full of the Holy Spirit and are trying to spend time in prayer. Let's all do that. And as you think about your next pastor, don't just look for the best résumé or the most ministry experience. Pray that the Lord would bring [the right fit and flourish](#) and that he would bring a pastor who prays and listens and seeks the Holy Spirit.

b. Multigenerational Ministry

I don't want us to miss that Moses was part of the first wave of leadership for Israel, and Joshua was a part of the second wave of leadership for Israel. Under Joshua's leadership, Israel does well. And if we were to read to the end of the book of Joshua, we would see Joshua give away his leadership (Joshua 24). This last year I was reading [Playing God: Redeeming the Gift of Power by Andy Crouch](#). A big part of his studies is about how to create flourishing institutions. He says the biggest test of any institution is whether or not it will transfer from the first generation to the second generation.

One of the reasons I believe now is the time for me to step back at Cornerstone is because I want to empower a new generation of leadership. As your first pastor, I have wanted to hold onto leadership and authority to get things right so that we could have a flourishing church. But, over time, I've come to the conviction that in order to have a flourishing church, I need to release Cornerstone so that another pastor and other leaders can come in and use their gifts to take Cornerstone to the future the Lord has in store.

How might you as a church be thinking about that next generation and intentionally creating multigenerational ministry? The goal is not one generation of ministry but many generations. And that takes sacrifice, laying down myself for the sake of the next. Here's the third way we get to the promised land.

c. Humble Obedience

The first generation of Israelites didn't believe in God's promises, and so they died in the wilderness. But see how this next generation responds.

So the Israelites listened to him and did what the Lord had commanded Moses.

We don't want to be like the generation that was too fearful of entering the promised land. Instead, my prayer is that this community will step forward in humble, prayerful, faithful obedience to Jesus. Our mission as a church is "to make, mature, and multiply followers of Jesus." But we're not going anywhere Jesus has not already been. He calls us to obey because he was perfectly obedient, and his obedience counts as ours.

Jesus wandered through the wilderness so that we can enter his promised land.

Our passage ends like this:

Deuteronomy 34:10-12 (NIV)

¹⁰Since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face,¹¹ who did all those signs and wonders the Lord sent him to do in Egypt—to Pharaoh and to all his officials and to his whole land. ¹²For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.

And no prophet had arisen at the time this was written during Joshua's lifetime. But can the same be said of today? Has a prophet arisen who has known the Lord faced to face? Has a prophet arisen who went to Egypt? Has a prophet arisen who performed signs and wonders? Has a prophet arisen who has shown mighty deeds in the sight of all Israel? Feeding the 5,000? Healing the lame and the blind and the diseased? Calming the storm? But one who was even greater than Moses and raised the dead? "Jesus" is the Greek transliteration of the Hebrew name, "Yeshua?" When we say "Yeshua" in English, we pronounce it "Joshua."

Jesus was tempted in the wilderness for 40 days (Matthew 4:1-11). Jesus climbed up on a mountain to give God's people a new law, the sermon on the mount (Matthew 5-7). Jesus, ultimately, sacrifices himself so that we, his people, might enter the promised land. At the end of the day, there's only one thing you need, Cornerstone. There's only one person you need, Cornerstone, Jesus. Seek him. Seek Jesus with everything you got. Jesus will take you from wandering in the wilderness into his eternal promised land. *Jesus wandered through the wilderness so that we can enter his promised land.*

Pastor Jonathan Romig preached this sermon at Cornerstone Congregational Church in Westford, MA. You can listen to his other sermons at CornerstoneWestford.com.

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Service & Sermon

You can watch the [full service on Facebook](#) or only the [sermon on YouTube](#).

Discussion Time

Ice-Breaker – What’s your favorite hike?

Personal Prayer – Do you have a prayer or praise you’d like to share?

Bible – Read Deuteronomy 34. What do you notice about this transition moment in the life of Moses and Israel? How might it help Cornerstone process our moment of transition?

Gospel – How does Deuteronomy 34 help us understand the gospel? How does it point to Jesus? Do any other scriptures come to mind that help connect the dots?

Church Prayer – Take some time and pray for Cornerstone and this transition.

Recap – What’s your one-sentence takeaway from today?

Sermon Slides

See on the website.