

# When God Says No

## Deuteronomy 3:23-29

Preached by Phillip Kayser at DCC on Sunday, October 5, 2025

### I. Introduction

Early in David Livingstone's life a German missionary to China had issued an urgent call to send some missionary doctors to China to spread the Gospel. And Livingstone felt the call of God upon his soul very strongly. So he immediately began to prepare for that call. From 1836–1840 he studied medicine and theology in Glasgow with a determination to end up in China. But the Opium War broke out and no foreigners were allowed into China any longer. He was stunned. Had God not called me? No, Livingstone knew that God *had indeed* called him to be a missionary doctor, but it was obvious that the door to China had been slammed shut. So he was somewhat puzzled, but determined to trust God. And shortly after that door closed, he met Robert Moffat, a veteran missionary to southern Africa, who pleaded for missionaries to Africa - a continent that had wide open doors *and an enormous need for Livingstone's talents*. It dawned on Livingstone that God's "No" to China was his "Yes" to Africa. Everyone *now* thinks of Livingstone as connected with Africa. That was where his life and witness became a beacon for missions and opened up a whole continent to gospel work. God's 'no' was not a rejection — it was a redirection to something far greater."

### II. The longing plea. Even the godliest saints have had unfulfilled longings. (vv. 23-25)

And you may have had your own unfulfilled longings that have puzzled you. You have prayed and prayed that God would open the door to get married to a specific person, and that door was closed, and you felt crushed. Or you may have had your hopes set on a perfect job, and that job was denied. Even the godliest saints have had unfulfilled longings that have sometimes puzzled them. And Moses may have been similarly puzzled. Was his prayer a model prayer? Well, in some ways it is and other ways it is not. In any case, we will see that even godly desires are sometimes not granted by the Lord. Let's look at his prayer.

#### A. Notice the deepness of his desire (v.23)

First, this was not simply an academic prayer. This was a prayer that reflected the deep desires of a godly heart set on God's purposes. It was after all, God *Himself* who had *commissioned Moses to bring Israel to Canaan*. And since God had called him, that was his heart's desire. He had definitely caught God's vision for Israel. He knew God was a compassionate God, who relents on judgments when there is repentance. The text says, "Then I pleaded with the LORD at that time, saying..." That's what Scripture calls us to do - to "continue *earnestly* in prayer" (Col. 4:2). So what gives? Why is God upset with this prayer? In some ways it *seems* like a model prayer. But God doesn't think so.

## B. Notice his perseverance in prayer (v. 23)

And notice too the *perseverance* in this prayer. You can't see it in the English, but Milton Boyle's book on Hebraic studies demonstrated quite well that the Hithpael form of the Hebrew word "pleaded" here indicates not only the passion and deepness of his desire (which we have looked at in point A), but also the *perseverance* of his prayers. Here's Noonan's summary of Milton Boyle's in-depth study:

[Boyle] then concludes that the function of the Hithpael in Hebrew is to express intensification, which he defines as strong emotion, a profound sense of urgency, repetition of the action, or duration of the verbal activity. According to Boyle, the reflexive usage of the Hithpael is not primary. Rather, its reflexive use is a byproduct of its intensive function, developed from the subject's deep personal interest and involvement in the verbal action.<sup>1</sup>

In other words, in addition to being a prayer of deep passion, the Hebrew indicates that it was also *a constantly repeated activity*. Moses had had his heart set on Canaan for a long time, and he never let up on asking God for mercy regarding how he had blown it forty years earlier and to let him into the land. And aren't we called by God Himself to persevere in prayer? Yes, we are. Colossians 4:2 commands us to "*persevere earnestly in prayer, being vigilant in it with thanksgiving.*" So both the earnestness and the perseverance are commanded. Ephesians 6:18 calls us to be praying always with all prayer... being watchful to this end *with all perseverance.*" Romans 12:12 commands us to be "*continuing steadfastly in prayer,*" and the word "continuing" has the dictionary definition of persevering. So what was wrong with Moses persevering in *this* particular prayer? Why does God say that He has had enough of hearing about it?

## C. Notice his humility (v. 24a)

Notice too his humility. In verse 24 he begins by saying, "O Lord GOD, You have begun to show Your servant." He sees God as the Lord and himself as a servant. He sees himself as being in total submission to God and to God's purposes. And this too seems good. All of the great heroes in the Bible only saw themselves as God's servants. That's what David calls himself in Psalm 143. This is what Jesus, James, Peter, and Jude all do as well. Though Exodus 33 says that the Lord spoke to Moses face to face as a man speaks to his friend, Moses still sees only himself as a humble servant. And this makes God's angry "No" seem all the more puzzling to a majority of the authors of the commentaries that I have. After all, Numbers 12:3 says that "Moses was very humble, more than all men who were on the face of the earth." So what's going on? Isn't seeking God's Lordship and submitting ourselves as servants a good thing? And I am asking these questions because many of you may have been similarly puzzled with God's No's to *your* prayers.

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<sup>1</sup> Benjamin J. Noonan, *Advances in the Study of Biblical Hebrew and Aramaic: New Insights for Reading the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan Academic, 2020), 109–110.

#### D. Notice his faith in God's future plans for Israel (v.24b)

Notice also his *faith* - at least in God's future plans for *Israel*. He said, "You have *begun* to show Your servant Your greatness and Your mighty hand..." He's referring to God letting him get in on the conquest of the Transjordan. That was awesome. That was the *beginning* of the conquest, so it gives him hope that maybe God has indeed overlooked his sin forty years before and may perhaps let him continue with the conquest on the other side of the Jordan River. The word "begun" seems to imply that he believed God would let him see more of God's greatness and mighty hand. He has no doubt that *Israel* will get to Canaan. He sees this conquest of the Transjordan region as just the *beginning* of God's plans for at least *Israel*. But since God had allowed *Moses himself* to experience the beginning of the conquest, he was asking God to allow Moses to experience what would come *after* this beginning. After all, most of Moses' life had revolved around this promise of God to Israel. This *seems* to be a prayer of faith.

#### E. Notice that He grounds his prayer in God's attributes (v. 24)

And notice also that he grounds his prayer in God's nature and attributes. He is not asking for something that is totally contrary to God's nature. Ideal prayer always wants *God's will* to be done and always wants answers that are *consistent* with God's nature and purposes. That's the ideal for *any* prayer. So Moses speaks of "Your greatness and Your mighty hand, for what god is there in heaven or on earth who can do anything like Your works and Your mighty deeds?" He believes that his prayer is consistent with who God is, and he is grounding his request in the very nature of God. What kind of mighty deeds had Moses already witnessed God performing? He had seen the ten plagues on Egypt, the parting of the Red Sea so that Israel could go through on dry land, meeting with God face-to-face on the mountain, manna, quail, water, earthquakes that swallowed rebels alive, healings, victories. There was no shortage of acts, but he wants to see more. He has become addicted to seeing God's power at work in his life. And this is the way it is with God's people. God blesses us with His presence and power. But that makes us want to see *more* of His presence and power. That's not necessarily a bad thing.

#### F. He is hoping that his request that God change His previous pronouncement will be consistent with the above (v. 25)

Next, this seems consistent with his prayers in the past that God had answered with a "Yes." In the past, Moses had interceded successfully when God had said he was going to destroy Israel in Exodus 32, and verse 14 says, "The LORD relented from the harm which He said He would do to His people." So perhaps Moses thought that God would relent on His earlier prohibition of Moses going into the land. And that was not the only time that God had relented due to the prayers of Moses. So Moses prays in verse 25, "I pray, let me cross over and see the good land beyond the Jordan, those pleasant mountains, and Lebanon." His whole life had been dedicated to seeing Israel inherit that land, and that's all he is requesting - to see the final fulfillment of that promise. When God has reversed earlier pronouncements due to his prayer, why was it wrong for Moses to seek a reversal one more time?

### III. Even the godliest saints have had God tell them “No” (v. 26).

#### Things that have puzzled people:

Well, it must have been wrong in *some* way, because in verse 26, Moses gets as clear a “No” as you could possibly get. It says, “But the LORD was angry with me on your account, and would not listen to me. So the LORD said to me: ‘Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter.’” That’s about as clear a “No” as you could get. So it is important to realize that even the most humble, dedicated, and holy of people are often faced with disappointments. Don’t think that you are alone in having disappointments. Holiness does not exempt us from disappointments. Being a powerful prayer warrior does not exempt us from disappointments. Being humble does not exempt us from disappointments. In 2 Corinthians 12:8-9, Paul pleaded three times with God to remove something very difficult from his life, but the Lord refused, saying, “My grace is sufficient for you, for My strength is made perfect in weakness.” The fact that God says “No” to us is not necessarily a negative evaluation of our character, faith, or commitment to the Lord. Moses had all three, yet God still said “No.” And we don’t find Moses complaining about it. He moves on once he knows God’s will on the subject. So I hope you are encouraged by these first few points that show that you aren’t a bad person simply because God says “No” to one of your requests. But there are further puzzles in verse 26 itself.

#### A. God’s strong anger (v. 26a)

The first puzzle is the *strength* of God’s anger. Commentaries point out that the word is usually translated as “furious.” God was furious with Moses. It’s a very strong kind of anger. Maxwell and Ogilvie may be correct when they say that Moses had lost his focus. They say,

The Hebrew wording implies that Moses had been extremely persistent in his request. Moses’ tenacious nature, when channeled in the right direction, made him a great leader. His request was motivated by a natural desire. Neither his persistence nor his natural desire was wrong. But there is a sense in which Moses’ vision had slightly lost its focus. This vision of the Promised Land had turned into a consuming passion to set foot in the land. The focus of the vision had slipped from the Lord of the promise to the promise itself. This shift in focus is what made Moses’ request wrong. It was the Lord Himself who was to remain the true promise and vision of Moses.

How easy it is to get wrapped up in the gift and forget the giver. Moses’ joy should have sprung from the fact that the land was about to be possessed and that God’s promises were true.<sup>2</sup>

If that was indeed true, then God’s anger makes a bit more sense. After all, to whom much is given, much is required. God expects a whole lot more out of leaders than out of followers. And God expects a whole lot more out of *particularly* gifted leaders like Moses than He

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<sup>2</sup> John C. Maxwell and Lloyd J. Ogilvie, *Deuteronomy, vol. 5, The Preacher’s Commentary Series* (Nashville, TN: Thomas Nelson Inc, 1987), 77.

would out of unknown leaders. God had already shown Moses so much, and to not take “No” as an answer, implies that Moses’ focus was not right.

### B. What is meant by “on your account”? (v. 26b)

The second thing that may seem puzzling is that Moses says that “the LORD was angry with me *on your account*.” What does “on your account” mean? While a couple liberal commentaries say that Moses is laying all the blame on Israel for his missing out (“It’s all your fault”), that can’t possibly be true. Conservatives aren’t 100% sure what it means, but conservative commentaries can be grouped into two interpretations. Some say that Moses accepts the blame, but also shares the blame with Israel, while others say that God’s reaction to Moses was intended for Israel’s good. In other words, God said “No” because he cared for Israel. And personally, I think the second interpretation is the more natural way of taking the Hebrew.

But let’s look at the first option. Thompson takes the first approach, saying,

... in the present passage the expression is best understood as meaning that Moses was judged because what Israel did led him also into sin. How great is the responsibility of leaders in every age to act in integrity and according to God’s law despite what others do, even when their actions are provocative.<sup>3</sup>

In other words, though Moses recognizes that it was Israel that led him to sin, he still realizes that he is accountable for his own sin. And we will look at that sin in a bit. But leaders cannot excuse their sins because their congregations provoke them to sin. Sorry, that doesn’t work. God always gives the way of escape that we may be able to bear up under the temptations to be provoked.

But there is a second viewpoint that I think is probably more likely. Raymond Brown represents the second viewpoint when he says,

... we ought to ask what was right for the people. This request was not simply a personal matter between Moses and God. The Lord may have responded to the prayer with such a definite ‘No’ because *by Moses’ exclusion he wanted to both warn and protect the people*.

...When we make requests in prayer we must remember that what we want may not always be best for others. Moses’ exclusion was a perpetual reminder of God’s holiness. It was saying that men and women must not trifle with sin.

Moreover, by the denial the Lord may have been protecting them. Moses was an immensely popular figure; when he died the people wept for a full month (34:8).

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<sup>3</sup> J. A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy: An Introduction and Commentary, vol. 5, Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 1974), 116.

By taking Moses to heaven before he entered Canaan, God may have deliberately prevented the veneration of his tomb with all its attendant dangers.<sup>4</sup>

So those are two possible explanations that conservatives have come up with. Maybe there is a third that I am not aware of, but I've looked at 155 of the 197 commentaries on Deuteronomy that I own, and those are the only two conservative explanations that I have run across. Either way, leaders are never dealt with by God in isolation from those whom they lead. To whom much is given, much is required. But if you are leader, you are certainly accountable for the sheep that God has put into your care. You can't just be thinking about what you want.

### C. Why is God upset with perseverance in prayer (Hebrew) (v. 26c)

One last puzzle that people have had over verse 26 is that God was upset with his *perseverance* in this particular prayer. The English is not clear, but as one commentary words it, "the Hebrew sentence implies that Moses had kept on asking God for permission."<sup>5</sup> It is quite clear that Moses had been *pestering* the Lord with this request for quite some time. The end of verse 26 says, "So the LORD said to me: 'Enough of that! Speak no more to Me of this matter.'" Why? I think Craigie probably nails it in his comments. He said,

The very persistence of Moses in prayer, which aroused the anger of the Lord, was nevertheless one of his greatest gifts; it was his dogged faith and persistence that had finally brought the Israelites to the plains of Moab. So the request made by Moses was probably not in itself illegitimate. But there is a sense in which the great vision of Moses had slightly lost its focus. The vision of the promise had become a consuming passion to set foot in the land, but the vision had slipped from the Lord of the promise to the promise itself. [Let me repeat Craigie's last statement: "but the vision had slipped from the Lord of the promise to the promise itself."] It was the Lord himself who was to remain the true promise and vision of Moses.<sup>6</sup>

And I think this can help to instruct our own prayer life. And I'll go ahead and quote Hughes Kent on this subject. He says,

It is not a lack of faith to add, "If it is your will" after making a request in prayer. It is an acknowledgment that God knows what is best for us. Those with special gifts, such as the gift of healing, may make confident proclamations because they

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<sup>4</sup> Raymond Brown, *The Message of Deuteronomy: Not by Bread Alone*, ed. J. A. Motyer and Derek Tidball, *The Bible Speaks Today* (England: Inter-Varsity Press, 1993), 58–59.

<sup>5</sup> Jack S. Deere, "Deuteronomy," in *The Bible Knowledge Commentary: An Exposition of the Scriptures*, ed. J. F. Walvoord and R. B. Zuck, vol. 1 (Wheaton, IL: Victor Books, 1985), 268.

<sup>6</sup> Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy, The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids, MI: Wm. B. Eerdmans Publishing Co., 1976), 127.

have received a revelation that something is God's will. But most people do not have such discernment, and it would be best for them to combine intensity and earnestness in prayer with an attitude of glad submission to the will of God.<sup>7</sup>

I think that is helpful.

#### D. Notice the transparency of Moses with his people

Before we look at the background to this passage (that I believe completely opens it up), I do want you to notice the *transparency* of Moses with his people. Again, the fact that he admits his sin exemplifies his humility. He doesn't hide the fact that he had blown it forty years earlier. He doesn't hide the fact that God was upset with him. Leaders who make a pretense at being perfect are really not ready to be leaders. And they are not going to be realistic paradigms to follow anyway. People can't relate to leaders who seem perfect. God expects leaders to be open, honest, and transparent about their own lives. And you can't really preach the Word faithfully without letting that Word expose your own weaknesses as well as the weaknesses of others.

### IV. The background (Numbers 20) that explains God's answer

Turn back to Numbers 20. This is the place where God disciplined Moses by prohibiting him from entering the land because he did not follow God's instructions. In verses 1-6 the people had been complaining that they had no water. We'll begin reading at verse 7.

Num. 20:7 Then the LORD spoke to Moses, saying, 8 "Take the rod; you and your brother Aaron gather the congregation together. Speak to the rock before their eyes, and it will yield its water; [Notice the instructions - "*Speak to the rock.*" There is no authorization to strike the rock. He is only authorized to *speak* to it.] thus you shall bring water for them out of the rock, and give drink to the congregation and their animals." 9 So Moses took the rod from before the LORD as He commanded him.

Num. 20:10 And Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly together before the rock; and he said to them, "Hear now, you rebels! Must we bring water for you out of this rock?" [Uhhh! Why the "we"? Continuing in verse 11] 11 Then Moses lifted his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came out abundantly, and the congregation and their animals drank. [He didn't speak to it. he struck it - and he struck it twice. Continuing in verse 12.]

Num. 20:12 Then the LORD spoke to Moses and Aaron, "Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them."

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<sup>7</sup> Hughes Kent R., "A Word to Those Who Preach the Word," in *Preaching the Word: Deuteronomy—Loving Obedience to a Loving God*, ed. R. Kent Hughes (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2012), 109.

**A. In Numbers 20, Moses had messed up the typology of the rock (Ex. 17:5-6; Numb. 20:8-12; with 1 Cor. 10:4; John 7:37; Heb. 10:10-12; 2 Cor 3:13-18)**

What's wrong? There were three things that went wrong in that passage, coupled with some additional reasons for God's answer. The most obvious way that went wrong was that Moses had totally spoiled the typology of the rock. Typology is a big theological word that means the doctrine of types, and a type is a visual illustration of the Gospel in the Old Testament. So what is an example of a type? The tabernacle was a very complex and detailed type or picture of the Gospel. Sacrifices were pictures of Jesus being slain. The water from the rock was a picture of the Holy Spirit being provided because of the Jesus being struck by the Lord. So why was it wrong to strike the rock at *all* at this point? Hadn't God commanded Moses to strike the Rock in Exodus 17? Yes He had. He commanded Moses to strike the rock *once* with his rod so that water would come out, symbolizing the fact that Jesus would only have to be struck by God the Father once and would not have to be sacrificed over and over again. Here God simply wanted Moses to *speak* to the Rock and water would come out. And as several commentaries point out, Moses spoiled a typological lesson about Jesus. 1 Corinthians 10:4 says that this rock was a picture of Jesus; it was a type. It says, "and all drank the same spiritual drink. For they drank of that spiritual Rock that followed them, and that Rock was Christ." So, in Exodus 17 God wanted the rock struck once to show that Jesus would only have to suffer once to atone for the sins of His people and to provide the gift of the Holy Spirit at Pentecost. Never again would He be struck. He is not being perpetually sacrificed as the Roman Catholics and Eastern Orthodox claim. After Jesus paid the punishment of God striking Him on the cross, the Holy Spirit was poured out once and for all time at Pentecost. After that, all that we would need to do is *ask* Jesus, and He would give the refreshing waters of His Holy Spirit. Here is how David Guzik words it:

Worst of all, Moses defaced a beautiful picture of Jesus' redemptive work through the rock which provided water in the wilderness. The New Testament makes it clear this water-providing, life-giving rock was a picture of Jesus (1 Corinthians 10:4). Jesus, being struck once, provided life for all who would drink of Him (John 7:37). But was unnecessary—and unrighteous—that Jesus would be struck again, much less again twice, because the Son of God needed only to suffer *once* (Hebrews 10:10–12). Jesus can now be come to with words of faith (Romans 10:8–10), as Moses should have only used words of faith to bring life-giving water to the nation of Israel. Moses "ruined" this picture of the work of Jesus God intended.<sup>8</sup>

That alone deserves God's anger, doesn't it?

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<sup>8</sup> David Guzik, Deuteronomy, David Guzik's Commentaries on the Bible (Santa Barbara, CA: David Guzik, 2004), Dt 3:23–29.

**B. Moses had disobeyed the Lord (Numb. 20:7-13), dishonored the Lord (“must we bring water for you” - v. 10), and did not uphold God as holy (Numb. 20:12). Therefore for testimony’s sake Moses needed to be disciplined.**

Second, the disobedience of Moses was not simply a sin of ignorance. He dishonored the Lord by saying in verse 10, “must we bring water for you out of this rock?” - as if Moses and Aaron had power in themselves. They did not. That’s why God told Moses in verse 12, “Because you did not believe Me, to hallow Me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.” By ascribing the giving of the water to *himself*, rather than to God, a bad testimony was established. The Reformed writer, Mark Futato, says,

For God to allow Moses to take Israel into the Promised Land, as though a human were their deity, would not have been gracious to the nation or to Moses. Instead, God protects his people’s relationship with himself by denying Moses entry.<sup>9</sup>

Because of unbelief, disobedience, and transferring God’s honor of the miracle to himself, he had to be disciplined. If the people began treating Moses as the *source* of all the miracles, it would have been easy for them to deify Moses. And therefore it was for the sake of the people that he was disciplined. But Mark Futato goes on to say,

But God is also gracious to Moses, allowing his humbled leadership to continue for a time, letting him see the Promised Land, giving him the privilege of charging his successor with faithfulness. In this way God grants Moses the honor of completing the testimony of God’s faithfulness (i.e., the Pentateuch) that will better lead God’s people in all future generations—and, providing for Moses ultimately to arrive in the Promised Land by virtue of Christ’s transfiguration (see Matt. 17:1–13).

Most commentaries honestly are quite confused on this passage, but I think he is spot on.

**C. Teachers are held to a higher standard (James 3:1; cf. Luke 12:48)**

But that brings up the third reason Moses’ discipline was not reversed. Teachers are held to a higher standard. James 3:1 says, “My brethren, let not many of you become teachers, knowing that we shall receive a stricter judgment.” Pastors are judged much more seriously than members.

**D. Moses’ work was done and the transition to Joshua needed to be made (v. 24). But also see last point below.**

But we will jump ahead to verse 24 to see one last reason for the “No.” It says, “But command Joshua, and encourage him and strengthen him; for *he* shall go over before this

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<sup>9</sup> Mark D. Futato, “Deuteronomy,” in *Gospel Transformation Bible: English Standard Version*, ed. Bryan Chapell and Dane Ortlund (Wheaton, IL: Crossway, 2013), 223.

people, and *he* shall cause them to inherit the land which you will see.” This was not all about Moses, and God did not want Moses overshadowing Joshua in the land. We will all die, and leaders need to be raising up leaders to replace us, and to encourage them to be faithful to God’s calling. The transition to Joshua needed to be made. Joshua too would be a type of Christ, and there was much that would be confused if Moses worked side by side with him throughout the time of the conquest.

But, you know what? This text reminds us that none of us is indispensable. The American church has seen a number of godly leaders go to their reward in heaven in 2024 and 2025. God had them on earth for a time, and though they will be sorely missed, no one is indispensable. Gary and I will eventually pass from the scene. That is why we have been working on training leaders. In God’s perfect time, He will raise up replacements for both of us. But until that happens, our desire is to work hard to serve Him.

### V. God’s “No” was paired with a better “Yes” (v. 27 with Matt. 17:1-3)

But I find the next point to be a very encouraging one. We will back up one verse for this. In verse 27 we see that God’s “No” was paired with a better “Yes.” Verse 27 says,

Go up to the top of Pisgah, and lift your eyes toward the west, the north, the south, and the east; behold it with your eyes, for you shall not cross over this Jordan.

God lets him *see* the land that Israel is about to inherit. He can see that his leadership has been successful. That *should* have been encouragement enough. He has brought Israel to the promised land, and they are about to inherit it. He has been a faithful servant for the most part, and he can receive God’s “Well done, good and faithful servant; you were faithful over a few things, I will make you ruler over many things. Enter into the joy of your lord” (Matt. 25:21). Heaven was a far better inheritance for Moses than Canaan. But I think it is so cool that God let Moses stand right *in* the promised land in Matthew 17:1-3. Why don’t you turn there? There is a sense in which Moses’ prayer was ultimately fulfilled in this passage. It’s Matthew 17:1-3. And I think this is so cool. It’s an issue of timing. Matthew 17, beginning to read at verse 1.

Matt. 17:1 Now after six days Jesus took Peter, James, and John his brother, led them up on a high mountain by themselves; 2 and He was transfigured before them. His face shone like the sun, and His clothes became as white as the light. 3 And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him.

Moses (who was a type of Jesus) had the thrill of talking with Jesus *in the land of Palestine*. Jesus was, after all, the one to Whom Moses’s *whole ministry had been pointing towards*. And he got to talk to Jesus *in the Promised Land*. Wow! God’s “No” was paired with a far better “Yes.” But actually, *heaven* (or more accurately for the pre-AD 30 times, Paradise Sheol) was a far better “Yes.”

And we see this with many saints down through history who have been disappointed with God’s answers of “No,” but who then see that this was the best answer God could have

given. Livingstone was disappointed that he couldn't go to China, but his true work (probably far greater work) was to completely open up the continent of Africa to countless missionaries and to the Gospel.

When Joni Eareckson Tada became a Quadriplegic due to a diving accident, she prayed desperately for healing. God could have healed her. We believe in miracles and have seen God miraculously heal conditions that doctors can't heal. But God's answer of "No" to her opened up her Quadriplegic Ministry, Joni and Friends (which some of you are a part of), that has touched the lives of millions. It has likely made her have far more impact for God's kingdom than if she had been healed - *far more impact*. Don't take God's "No" answers to your prayers as reasons to despair. Look for God's *purpose* in saying No. You will often find that it opens the door to a far better "Yes."

But certainly, just as Moses rejoiced in the glories of Sheol-Paradise, and was able to stand on a mountain in Canaan talking with Jesus about His ministry and his imminent death and resurrection, you know he was not complaining at that point. No matter how miserable our life might be down here below, God's reward of heaven will make it all worthwhile.

## VI. The needed interlude (v. 29 with the following chapters)

But there is one more major reason why *Moses had to stay put for a long time*. He had to write the book of Deuteronomy - which would take a while. So verse 29 was a very needed interlude.

### A. Moses submits to God's "No" (v. 29)

But before we get to that, I want to point out that Moses *submitted* to God's "No." It says, "So we stayed in the valley opposite Beth Peor." He didn't move on. He submitted.

### B. Why this interlude was needed (see following chapters)

In any case, it turns out that staying here was an absolutely essential interlude so that Moses could write the book of Deuteronomy and instruct the people in what God had revealed in this book. When you start scanning the rest of the book of Deuteronomy and the incredible gems that are found written in it, I am ever so thankful that God did not let Moses charge over the river and get in on more conquest. Writing a book may not have been as fun for him as engaging in conquest, but God's "No" has produced an incredible blessing upon believers all down through history. And the literal rendering of verse 26 was that "the LORD was angry with me for your benefit" or "for your sake." Saying "No" to Moses hugely blessed Israel. This book is filled with gems of instruction on God, His people, His governments, how they should function, His laws and how they should be implemented, and many other incredible doctrines. God's "No" to Moses (however disappointing that may have been for the moment) has become *our* blessing. At least I hope you find my exposition of the rest of this book to be a blessing. That's my prayer! This book is a gift of God for all ages, and without it we would not have every instruction that we need for life and godliness. So I am ever so thankful that God said, "No" to Moses. God wanted to

not only prepare Joshua for the years to come, but to prepare Israel to be a model community that lives out the Word.

## VII. Conclusion

So in conclusion, let me encourage you to not get discouraged when God closes doors for you. Every closed door will eventually be revealed to be a beautiful guidance that is for our good, for His glory, and often for the benefit of others. And we parents should learn to imitate God in this. Just as God was OK with some of the *first* appeals that Moses had made concerning God's earlier decision, it should be OK for our children to be able to *respectfully* (emphasis on *respectfully*) appeal to us parents on a decision we have made - and perhaps we have made that decision too hastily. The children need to be taught to be super respectful (just like Moses was in these verses). They can even ask if they have permission to appeal. And it is certainly OK for parents to listen to the appeals of their children - *assuming of course they are not whining, but are respectful and have good reasons*. But parents should not be swayed from doing what is the wisest course for their children *just to have peace*. There must come a point where continued appeal is treated as disobedience. And children need to gradually learn that a parent's "No" answer is often the most loving answer. Just as God's "No" to Moses was both a discipline and a mercy, we parents need to make sure that our "No" and "Yes" answers are always in the best interests of the child, have a purpose, flow from wisdom, and are clear.

But my last admonition this morning is that all of us need to praise God when He has definitively shut a door providentially. We can praise Him for His wisdom, His goodness, His care for us, and anything else about his character that we have begun to doubt. You cannot read the rest of the book of Deuteronomy without seeing that Moses definitely had that respectful praise to God for even the painful things that came into his life. Brothers and sisters, learn to rejoice in God's "No" answers. Amen.