

# (Gaining God's Approval) 6. the Testing of Moses

by Zac Poonen

---

*The sermon highlights the importance of having our human wisdom dethroned and seeking God's wisdom and will above our own desires and ambitions in order to obtain God's approval and become spiritual leaders.*

**Scripture:** Deuteronomy 34:10

**Topics:** "Spiritual Humility", "Godly Leadership"

---

## Description

Zac Poonen preaches on the life of Moses, emphasizing the importance of dethroning human wisdom to obtain Divine wisdom. He highlights how Moses, after years of humbling experiences, was able to fully surrender to God's will, leading to the manifestation of God's glory. Poonen also discusses Moses' unselfish intercession for the Israelites, showcasing the spirit of Christ in putting others before oneself. Additionally, he explores Moses' humble reactions to criticism and opposition, demonstrating the qualities of a true servant of God. The sermon delves into Moses' mistakes, underscoring the high standards God demands from His anointed servants and the consequences of disobedience, while also emphasizing God's compassion and long-suffering towards His faithful servants.

---

## Transcript

Moses was another man who got a certificate of approval from God, God said concerning him, "My servant Moses is faithful in all My household" (Num. 12:7).

It was recorded of Moses at his death that, "since then no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face" (Deut. 34:10).

### The Dethroning of Human Wisdom

It was not through Moses's first forty years of training in the palace and the military academies of Egypt that he became a spiritual leader. No. It was through God breaking the strength of his `Self', when Moses spent the next forty years looking after sheep in the wilderness.

At the age of eighty, with his confidence in his own abilities shattered, Moses could lean upon God and become the deliverer of God's people.

In the construction of the tabernacle in the wilderness, we read one phrase repeated eighteen times in Exodus chapters 39 and 40 - the phrase, "just as the Lord had commanded Moses". The pattern of the tabernacle given by the Lord was a very simple and modest-looking affair. It was a far cry from the fantastic pyramids that Moses had seen built in Egypt.

If Moses had been given the plan of the tabernacle at the age of 40, when the strength of his `Self' was in full bloom, he would certainly have modified it and made it look more attractive. But at the age of 80, Self had so died out, that he did exactly as the Lord commanded him. And that is what brought the glory of the Lord into the tabernacle.

Our human wisdom has to be dethroned if we are to obtain Divine wisdom.

The Bible says, "If any man among you thinks that he is wise in this age, let him become foolish that he may become wise."(1 Cor.3:18).

God could approve of Moses only when the chaff of the wisdom of Egypt had been thrashed out of him.

The apostle Paul had studied for three years at the feet of Gamaliel, the great professor of theology at the Jerusalem Bible school. That's why he had to spend three years after his conversion, in the wilderness of Arabia to have the wisdom of Gamaliel removed from his system and replaced with Divine wisdom. Paul refers to this period in Galatians 1:17,18: "I went away to Arabia.....Then three years later I went up to Jerusalem."

Only then could Paul become a servant of the Lord.

The dethroning of human cleverness is fundamental for anyone who would serve the Lord. Yet there are few who learn this lesson fully.

God tested Moses when he made the tabernacle to see whether he would make it exactly according to the pattern that he had received on the mount. The glory of the Lord coming on that tabernacle was the visible indication of God's satisfaction with Moses' work.

How is it with us in what we do and build for the Lord? Is it exactly according to the pattern found in the Scriptures? Or have we modified it with some of the wisdom of this world? If so, then that must certainly be one reason why the glory of the Lord is not found in our lives.

Not Seeking One's Own

God tested Moses later in another area. Twice God tested him to see whether he would seek his own honour at the expense of the Israelites. In both cases Moses passed the test with flying colours.

The first occasion was when the children of Israel had rebelled against God through making the golden calf. God then told Moses, "Now let Me alone, that My anger may burn against them, and that I may destroy them; and I will make of you a great nation." (Exod. 32:10).

The second occasion was when the Israelites refused to enter Canaan, God then told Moses "I will smite them with pestilence and dispossess them, and I will make you into a nation greater and mightier than they." (Num. 14:12).

On both occasions, God told Moses that He would destroy the Israelites and make Moses and his descendants into a great nation. Moses had the opportunity then to become the inheritor of the promises made to Abraham and to the twelve tribes of Israel.

Lesser men might have failed in that test, but not Moses. On both occasions, he pleaded with God to spare the Israelites. On one occasion, he even went so far as to be willing to die and to spend eternity in hell, if only Israel could be saved.

"Moses returned to the Lord, and said, `Alas, this people has committed a great sin, and they have made a god of gold for themselves. But now, if Thou wilt, forgive their sin - and if not, please blot me out from Thy book which Thou has written!'" (Exod. 32:31,32).

Truly Moses had the spirit of Christ Himself - who was willing to be forsaken by the Father on the cross in order that we might be saved.

God was so delighted with Moses' unselfishness that thereafter He began to speak with Moses very intimately. "The Lord used to speak to Moses face to face, just as a man speaks to his friend." (Ex. 33:11).

God even gave Moses the unspeakable privilege of seeing His glory.

When Moses prayed saying, "I pray Thee, show me Thy glory!", the Lord said, "Behold, there is a place by Me, and you shall stand there on the rock; and it will come about, while My glory is passing by, that I will put you in the cleft of the rock and cover you with My hand until I have passed by. Then I will take My hand away and you shall see My back, but My face shall not be seen." (Ex. 33:18-23).

The most important qualification for a servant of God is that he does not seek his own.

Seeking our own gain or honour is so deeply rooted in all of us, that God has a difficult task to free us from it. He arranges our circumstances so that we can see our self-seeking spirit, so that we might judge ourselves and cleanse ourselves from it. He speaks to us through His Word and is constantly speaking to us through His Spirit (if we have ears to hear) urging us to cleanse ourselves from this self-seeking spirit.

And yet, in spite of all this, very few make the grade and qualify for God's certificate of approval. Moses was one such. Paul and Timothy were two others.

There are not many, but there are a few.

The great lack of a spirit of intercession for others, such as even Moses had under the old covenant, is mainly due to this one fact, that almost everyone, at the bottom of his heart, seeks his own in some way or the other. We gain no honour when we pray for others secretly. That's why few believers ever do it.

Here is where we are tested by God - for He cannot commit Himself to those who seek their own.

#### Reaction to Criticism and Opposition

Another beautiful thing that we see in Moses is his reaction when criticised or opposed. When the people were rebellious and said "Let us appoint another leader," Moses just fell on his face and kept quiet.

We read that, "Moses and Aaron fell on their faces in the presence of all the assembly of the congregation of the sons of Israel." (Num. 14:5).

He refused to vindicate himself.

When Korah and about 250 other leaders of Israel rebelled against Moses' leadership, again we read that, "when Moses heard this, he fell on his face." (Num. 16:4).

He would not defend himself, or hold on to his position, or assert his authority.

When his own sister and brother criticised him behind his back and God began to judge them for it, again Moses was on his face praying that God would show them mercy.

"Moses cried out to the Lord, saying, "Oh God, heal her, I pray!" (Num. 12:13).

Truly he was the humblest man on earth during his lifetime. The Bible records that, "Moses was very humble, more than any man who was on the face of the earth." (Num. 12:3).

God can commit himself only to such men.

Power and authority over others have a way of corrupting people. There is a saying in the world that "Power corrupts, and absolute power corrupts absolutely!"

But absolute power did not corrupt Moses even slightly. God tested him again and again through the rebellion of his flock. Each time Moses passed the test.

Spiritual leadership has great dangers attached to it. But blessed are those who know how to fall on their face in the dust again and again, and how to hold their tongues and refrain from self-justification and self-assertion .

God's promise to His servants is that He Himself will vindicate them. He has said, "No weapon that is formed against you shall prosper; and every tongue that accuses you in judgement you will condemn. This is the heritage of the servants of the Lord, and their vindication is from Me" (Isa. 54:17).

It is best therefore to leave such matters to God rather than to take them into our hands. Our only task is to commit our cause to Him Who judges righteously, as Jesus did.

"While being reviled, Jesus did not revile in return; while suffering, He uttered no threats, but kept entrusting Himself to Him who judges righteously." (1 Pet. 2:23).

Three times in Isaiah 53:7, it is recorded that Jesus was silent - when afflicted, when sheared and when led to the slaughter.

"He was oppressed and He was afflicted, yet He did not open His mouth. Like a lamb that is led to slaughter, and like a sheep that is silent before its shearers, so He did not open His mouth." (Isa. 53:7).

One who does not know how to keep silent on such occasions can never expect to be a spiritual leader.

The opposition that we face is one means by which God tests our faith, to see whether we can trust Him to take care of the situation or not.

The Mistakes of God's Servant

The biographies of the men of God in the Bible are an encouragement to us, because unlike modern biographies, they show us the weak sides of those men too. A man who never made a mistake in his life would be no encouragement to us who make so many mistakes.

But the mistakes of men of God in the Bible are recorded not only for our encouragement, but for our warning as well.

The standards that God demands from His anointed servants are far, far higher than what He demands from other believers. From those to whom much is given, much is also required.

God gave ten chances to the unbelieving Israelites, before denying them entry into Canaan. He said concerning them, "Surely all the men who have put Me to the test these ten times shall by no means see the land which I swore to their fathers." (Num. 14:22,23).

But He gave Moses only one chance. And when Moses acted in unbelief and disobedience just once - and that too in a very small way - God was quick to deny him entry into the promised land. The incident is recorded for our warning in Numbers 20:7-12:

"The Lord spoke to Moses saying, 'Take the rod; and you and your brother Aaron assemble the congregation and speak to the rock before their eyes, that it may yield its water. You shall thus bring forth water for them out of the rock and let the congregation and their beasts drink.' So Moses took the rod from before the Lord, just as He had commanded him; and Moses and Aaron gathered the assembly before the rock. And he said to them, 'Listen now, you rebels; shall we bring forth water for you out of this rock?' Then Moses lifted up his hand and struck the rock twice with his rod; and water came forth abundantly, and the congregation and their beasts drank. But the Lord said to Moses and Aaron, 'Because you have not believed Me, to treat Me as holy in the sight of the sons of Israel, therefore you shall not bring this assembly into the land which I have given them.'"

God had told Moses to speak to the rock this time, for the water to flow. The rock had already been smitten once, forty years earlier as we read in Exodus 17:6: "The Lord said to Moses, 'Behold, I will stand before you there on the rock at Horeb; and you shall strike the rock, and water will come out of it, that the people may drink.' And Moses did so in the sight of the elders of Israel."

That symbolised Christ being crucified once and once only. There was no need to strike the rock a second time.

But Moses lost his temper and struck the rock (Num. 20:10). The water still came forth - despite the disobedience of God's servant. The fact that the water flowed only proved that God loved the people who were thirsty. It did not sanction the disobedience of God's servant.

This explains the reason why there is blessing even in the ministry of men and women who disobey God's commands in their personal lives.

But Moses could not get away with his disobedience, just because the water flowed. God punished him severely. And He will punish all disobedient servants of His one day.

For forty years Moses had looked forward to the day when he could enter Canaan; and now at the border of Canaan, he was disqualified. It is possible to preach to others, and yet to be disqualified oneself - even towards the end of one's life.

Paul recognised this and said, "I buffet my body and make it my slave, lest possibly, after I have preached to others, I myself should be disqualified." (1 Cor. 9:27).

The Bible says, "He made known His ways to Moses, His acts to the sons of Israel." (Psa. 103:7).

The Israelites had only seen God's EXTERNAL ACTIONS, but Moses had the privilege of knowing God's WAYS. Therefore more was expected from Moses than from the other Israelites.

The privileges of God's servants are many but their accountability is correspondingly more.

Little did Moses realise at Meribah, that God was testing him. If he had known, he might have been more careful. Little do we realise that God is testing us too, weighing our actions and our motives, in the situations of daily life, . Even if people are blessed through our ministry, we will still have to answer for our personal lives one day at the judgment seat of Christ.

Once earlier in Moses' life, God had given him an indication of the strict demands that He made on His servants.

Soon after calling Moses to be Israel's deliverer, God almost took away his life for his disobedience in not circumcising his son. In deference to the wishes of Zipporah, his Gentile wife, Moses had not circumcised his son. But God would not tolerate any disobedience in Moses, at any cost.

The incident is recorded for our warning in Exodus 4:24-26: "Now it came about at the lodging-place on the way that the Lord met him (Moses) and sought to put him to death. Then Zipporah took a flint and cut off her son's foreskin and threw it at Moses' feet, and she said, 'You are indeed a bridegroom of blood to me.' So He (the Lord) let him (Moses) alone."

Even though Moses was, at that time, the most important person on earth for the fulfillment of God's purposes, that made no difference to God. He would take away even the life of a Moses, if He saw disobedience in him. There is no partiality with God.

Although God denied Moses the privilege of leading the Israelites into Canaan, yet, because he had been such a faithful servant of God all through, God graciously allowed him, 1500 years later, to enter the promised land and to stand with Jesus on the mount of transfiguration, as we are told in Matthew 17:2,3: "Jesus was transfigured before them (Peter, James and John).....and behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him. (Mt. 17:2, 3).

God is very long-suffering and compassionate and He is not unrighteous to forget anyone's sacrificial labours of love.

"God is not unjust so as to forget your work and the love which you have shown toward His name, in having ministered and in still ministering to the saints." (Heb. 6:10).

But God is also very strict.

"Behold then the kindness and the severity of God." (Rom. 11:22).

To offer to God a service that is acceptable to Him, we must walk with godly fear.

"Therefore, since we receive a kingdom which cannot be shaken, let us show gratitude, by which we may offer to God an acceptable service with reverence and awe; for our God is a consuming fire." (Heb. 12:28,29).

Like Timothy we too must be diligent to be workmen "approved by God." (2 Tim. 2:15).

---

Source: <https://sermonindex.net/speakers/zac-poonen/gaining-gods-approval-6-the-testing-of-moses/>

# *Grow in Your Walk with Christ*

---

Listen and read messages that will stir your heart for Christ and point you to deeper repentance and devotion.

- 50,000+ Sermons from speakers past and present
- 3,900+ Classic Christian Books freely readable online
- 1,200+ Bible Translations and Commentaries
- Over 450k forum posts — Join our vibrant online Christian forum

**[www.sermonindex.net](http://www.sermonindex.net)**