

# Deuteronomy 33 - Blessing the 12 Tribes

III. Third sermon: What God will do for Israel (Deut 27:1—34:12)

(3) Transition toward New Covenant leadership (Deut 31:1—34:12)

(C) Moses' death (Deut 32:48—34:12)

(b) Moses' blessing upon the tribes (33:1-29)

## Deuteronomy 33

(b) Moses' blessing upon the tribes (33:1-29)

1 Now this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the sons of Israel before his death.

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1 And this is the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death.

2 He said, "The LORD came from Sinai, And dawned on them from Seir; He shone from Mount Paran, And He came from the midst of myriads of **holy ones**; At His right hand there was flashing lightning for them.

2 He said, "The LORD came from Sinai, And dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, And He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; At His right hand there was flashing lightning for them.

2 He said: "The LORD came from Sinai. Rising from Seir upon us, he shone forth from Mount Paran, accompanied by a myriad of his holy ones, with flaming fire from his right hand for them.

2 And he said, The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand went a fiery law for them.

- "...holy ones" - angels (Cf. Ps 68:17; Acts 7:38,53; Gal 3:19)

- Patriarchal blessings (Cf. Gen 27:26-29; 49:1-28)

- The words of a dying father to his sons were considered to be an irrevocable testament, acceptable as decisive evidence in court cases

— Beyond any legal recognition, these patriarchal blessings also had the supernatural aspect of the spirit of prophecy, whereby these men of God spoke what was

divinely revealed to them

3 "Indeed, He loves the people; All Your holy ones are in Your hand, And they followed in Your steps; *Everyone* takes of Your words.

3 "Indeed, He loves the people; All Your holy ones are in Your hand, And they followed in Your steps; *Everyone* receives of Your words.

3 Indeed, lover of people, all of his holy ones are in your control. They gather at your feet to do as you have instructed.

3 Yea, he loved the people; all his saints are in thy hand: and they sat down at thy feet; every one shall receive of thy words.

4 "Moses issued to us *the* Law, A possession for the assembly of Jacob.

4 "Moses charged us with a law, A possession for the assembly of Jacob.

4 Moses commanded with the Law, an inheritance for the community of Jacob.

4 Moses commanded us a law, even the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob.

5 "And He was king in Jeshurun, When the heads of the people gathered, The tribes of Israel together.

5 "And He was king in Jeshurun, When the heads of the people were gathered, The tribes of Israel together.

5 The LORD was king of Jeshurun when the leaders of the people— all the tribes of Israel— gathered together."

5 And he was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel were gathered together.

6 "May Reuben live and not die, Nor may his people be few."

6 "May Reuben live and not die, Nor his men be few."

6 "May Reuben live and not die, though his numbers are few."

6 Let Reuben live, and not die; and let not his men be few.

- The last clause in v6 may be translated "let his men be few" (Cf. NIV marg.) or "let not his men be few." The negative, though not expressed in the Hebrew, is to be carried into this clause from the preceding.

- Though the rights of primogeniture had been withdrawn from Reuben, and Jacob had declared that he should not excel, Moses here assures the tribe of continuance, and even prosperity.

- Their number was not to be small; which was, perhaps, said to comfort them, in view of the fact that their numbers had greatly diminished in the course of their wanderings in the desert (Cf. Num 1:21 with 26:7)

— At no time, however, was this tribe numerous as compared with the others; nor was it ever distinguished either by the enterprise of its members or by the eminence of any of them in the councils of the nation or the management of affairs.

## Reuben

- Firstborn of Jacob by Leah (Gen 29:32)
- His name is connected with the phrase, "the Lord has looked upon my affliction"
- His incestuous act with Bilhah, his father's concubine (Gen 35:22)
- It was Reuben who advised his brothers not to kill Joseph, and returned to the pit to release him (Gen 37:21,29)
- Reuben's forfeited birthright given to Joseph (1 Chr 5:1-2)
- The tribe of Reuben was involved in the rebellion in the wilderness (Num 16:1)
- "Unstable as water, thou shall not excel, have preeminence" (Gen 49:4)
- That tribe, as not aiming to excel, unfortunately chose a settlement on the other side Jordan
- Prophecy of Moses: "Let not his men be few" (Deut 33:6):
  - 1st numbering 46,500 (Num 1:21)
  - 2nd numbering 43,730 (Num 26:7)
  - Most other tribes increased
- No judge, prophet, nor prince, is found of that tribe

**7** And this was regarding Judah; so he said: "Hear, LORD, the voice of Judah, And bring him to his people. With his hands he contended for them, And may You be a help against his adversaries."

**7** And this regarding Judah; so he said, "Hear, O LORD, the voice of Judah, And bring him to his people. With his hands he contended for them, And may You be a help against his adversaries."

**7** He declared this about Judah: "Hear, LORD, the voice of Judah and return him to his people. With his own strength he fights for himself, and you will be of assistance against his enemies."

**7** And this is the blessing of Judah: and he said, Hear, LORD, the voice of Judah, and bring him unto his people: let his hands be sufficient for him; and be thou an help to him from his enemies.

## Judah

- Rev 5:6: Title of the Redeemer: "Lion of the Tribe of Judah"
- The term "Shiloh" was understood by the early rabbis and Talmudic authorities as referring to the Messiah
- Sceptre: Tribal rod or staff of office; tribal identity

- Even in their 70-year Babylonian captivity (and five centuries under the Persian and Greek Empires) the tribes retained their tribal identity
  - They retained their own logistics, judges, etc. (Ezra 1:5,8)
- Name means "praised," root "to praise" (Gen 49:8)
- Intercedes for Joseph's life when brethren were about to slay him; proposes sale to the Ishmaelites (Gen 37:26-27)
- Incest with Tamar, his daughter-in-law (Gen 38:12-26)
- Loyal to the house of David at the time of the revolt of the ten tribes (1 Kings 12:20)
- Led first division of Israel in their journeys (Num 10:14)
- Commissioned of God to lead in the conquest of the promised land (Judges 1:1-3; 4-21)
- Made David king (2 Sam 2:1-11; 5:4-5)

**8** Of Levi he said, "*Let Your Thummim and Your Urim belong to Your godly man, Whom You tested at Massah, With whom You contended at the waters of Meribah;*

**8** Of Levi he said, "*Let Your Thummim and Your Urim belong to Your godly man, Whom You proved at Massah, With whom You contended at the waters of Meribah;*

**8** About Levi he said: "*Let your Thummim and Urim be with the man to whom you showed gracious love, whom you tested at Massah and with whom you struggled at the waters of Meribah,*

**8** And of Levi he said, *Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah;*

- "...Your Thummin and Your Urim" - see note on Ex 28:30

## Levi

- Name is linked with the root "to join"
- Avenged the seduction of Dinah (Gen 34; 49:5-7)
- Zeal against idolatry a cause of their appointment (Ex 32:26-28; Deut 33:9-10; Mal 2:4-5)
- Exempt from enrollment for military duty (Num 1:47-54, with 1 Chr 12:26)
- Subordinate to the sons of Aaron (Num 3:9; 8:19; 18:6)
- Teachers of the law (Deut 33:10; 2 Chr 17:8-9; 30:22; 35:3)
- Were judges (Deut 17:9; 1 Chr 23:4; 26:29; 2 Chr 19:8-11)
- Guarded king's person and house in times of danger (2 Kings 11:5-9; 2 Chr 23:5-7)

**9** Who said of his father and his mother, 'I did not consider them'; And he did not acknowledge his brothers, Nor did he regard his own sons, For they kept Your word, And complied with Your covenant.

9 Who said of his father and his mother, 'I did not consider them'; And he did not acknowledge his brothers, Nor did he regard his own sons, For they observed Your word, And kept Your covenant.

9 the one who told his mother and father, 'I don't know them,' and who would neither acknowledge his brothers nor know his own children. For they kept your word and guarded your covenant.

9 Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant.

10 "They will teach Your ordinances to Jacob, And Your Law to Israel. They shall put incense before You, And whole burnt offerings on Your altar.

10 "They shall teach Your ordinances to Jacob, And Your law to Israel. They shall put incense before You, And whole burnt offerings on Your altar.

10 They will teach your ordinances to Jacob, and your Law to Israel. They will offer incense as a pleasant aroma to you and a whole burnt offering upon your altar.

10 They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar.

11 "LORD, bless his strength, And accept the work of his hands; Smash the hips of those who rise up against him, And those who hate him, so that they do not rise *again*."

11 "O LORD, bless his substance, And accept the work of his hands; Shatter the loins of those who rise up against him, And those who hate him, so that they will not rise *again*."

11 LORD, bless his substance and approve the work that he undertakes. Shatter the legs of those who oppose against him; may those who hate him stand no more."

11 Bless, LORD, his substance, and accept the work of his hands: smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again.

**12** Of Benjamin he said, "May the beloved of the LORD live in security beside Him Who shields him all the day *long*, And he lives **between His shoulders**."

**12** Of Benjamin he said, "May the beloved of the LORD dwell in security by Him, Who shields him all the day, And he dwells between His shoulders."

**12** About Benjamin he said: "The beloved of the LORD will live confidently, the Most High protecting him all day long, and resting in his bosom."

**12** And of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the LORD shall dwell in safety by him; and the LORD shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders.

- "...between His shoulders" - on His sides or borders

— Mount Zion, on which stood the city of Jerusalem, belonged to Judah; but Mount Moriah, the site of the sacred edifice, lay in the confines of Benjamin

## Benjamin

- The youngest son of Jacob, called "son of the right hand" by his father
- "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf" (Gen 49:27)
  - Known as ferocious (Judges 19:16; 2 Sam 2:15-16; 1 Chr 8:40; 12:2; 2 Chr 17:17)
- Notable heroes include:
  - Ehud, who delivered Israel from the Moabites
  - Saul, the first king (1 Sam 9:1)
  - Queen Esther (Esther 2:5)
  - Apostle Paul (Rom 11:1)

The tribe earned a high reputation for bravery and skill in war, and was noted for its slingers with their traditional left-handed action (Judges 3:15; 20:16)

**13** Of Joseph he said, "Blessed of the LORD be his land, With the choice things of heaven, with the dew, And from the deep waters lying beneath,

**13** Of Joseph he said, "Blessed of the LORD be his land, With the choice things of heaven, with the dew, And from the deep lying beneath,

**13** About Joseph he said: "May the blessing of the LORD be on his land: dew from the choicest of the heavens, and from the depths beneath;

**13** And of Joseph he said, Blessed of the LORD be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath,

14 And with the choice yield of the sun, And the choice produce of the months;

14 And with the choice yield of the sun, And with the choice produce of the months.

14 from the choicest products of the sun, the rich fruit of the harvest moon,

14 And for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon,

15 And with the best things of the ancient mountains, With the choice things of the everlasting hills,

15 "And with the best things of the ancient mountains, And with the choice things of the everlasting hills,

15 the choicest portion of the eternal mountains, and the best of the everlasting hills;

15 And for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills,

16 And with the choice things of the earth and its fullness, And the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush. Let it come to the head of Joseph, And to the top of the head of the *one who was prince* among his brothers.

16 And with the choice things of the earth and its fullness, And the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush. Let it come to the head of Joseph, And to the crown of the head of the *one distinguished* among his brothers.

16 from the choicest of the earth and its fullness, and the favor of the one who lived in the burning bush. May blessing rest on Joseph's head, and on the crown of the head of the one set apart from his brothers.

16 And for the precious things of the earth and fulness thereof, and for the good will of him that dwelt in the bush: let the blessing come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him that was separated from his brethren.

### **Joseph**

- Name means "may he (God) add sons" (Gen 30:24)
- Firstborn of Rachel, Jacob's loved wife (Gen 30:22-24)
- Favored, despised, sold, exalted (Gen 37-50)

### **Ephraim**

17 "As the firstborn of his ox, majesty is his, And his horns are the horns of the wild ox; With them he will gore the peoples All at once, *to the ends of the earth*. And those are the ten thousands of Ephraim, And those are the thousands of Manasseh."

17 "As the firstborn of his ox, majesty is his, And his horns are the horns of the wild ox; With them he will push the peoples, All at once, *to the ends of the earth*. And those are the ten thousands of Ephraim, And those are the thousands of Manasseh."

17 May the firstborn of his bull be honorable to him, and may his horns be those of a wild ox. With them may he push people all together, *to the ends of the earth*. These are the myriads of Ephraim and the thousands of Manasseh."

17 His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together *to the ends of the earth*: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh.

### **Ephraim**

- Second son of Joseph (Gen 41:52)
- Adopted by Jacob; Blessed before Manasseh (Gen 48:5)
- Leading tribe of the kingdom of Israel (Is 7:2-17; Jer 31:9,20)
  - Later, sometimes used as a synecdoche for the Northern Kingdom
  - The Northern tribes never desired to yield to David's reign...

## Manasseh

- "Making to forget": First son of Joseph and Asenath (Gen 41:50-51; 46:20)
- Adopted by Jacob (Gen 48:1,5-20)
- The tribe was renowned for its valour:
  - Gideon in the west (Judges 6:15)
  - Jephthah in the east (Judges 11:1)
- Inheritance
  - 1/2 tribe east of Jordan (Num 32:33,39-42)
  - 1/2 tribe west of Jordan (Joshua 16:9; 17:5-11)

**18** Of Zebulun he said, "Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out, And, Issachar, in your tents.

**18** Of Zebulun he said, "Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going forth, And, Issachar, in your tents.

**18** About Zebulun he said: "Zebulun, rejoice as you go out and Issachar, in being inside your tents.

**18** And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and, Issachar, in thy tents.

19 "They will call peoples to the mountain; There they will offer righteous sacrifices; For they will draw out the abundance of the seas, And the hidden treasures of the sand."

19 "They will call peoples to the mountain; There they will offer righteous sacrifices; For they will draw out the abundance of the seas, And the hidden treasures of the sand."

19 They will call the nations to the mountain, and there they will offer righteous sacrifices, for they'll draw from the abundance of the sea and from the hidden treasures of the sand."

19 They shall call the people unto the mountain; there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness: for they shall suck of the abundance of the seas, and of treasures hid in the sand.

## Zebulun

- "Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for an haven of ships; and his border shall be unto Zidon" (Gen 49:13)
- In Galilee, to the north of Issachar and south of Asher and Naphtali, between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean (Joshua 19:10-16)
  - According to ancient prophecy this part of Galilee to enjoy a large share of our Lord's public ministry (Is 9:1-2; Matt 4:12-16)

## Issachar

- Jacob's 9th son, by Leah
  - *sekhari*, "my hire" (Gen 30:18)
- The prophetic blessing pronounced by Jacob corresponds with that of Moses (Gen 49:14-15; Deut 33:18-19)

- Only Judah and Dan stronger
  - 64,300 (Num 26:25)
  - to 87,000 (1 Chr 7:5)
- Richest portion: Jezreel Valley (1 Chr 12:40)

**20** Of Gad he said, "Blessed is the one who enlarges Gad; He lies down as a lion, And tears the arm, also the crown of the head.

**20** Of Gad he said, "Blessed is the one who enlarges Gad; He lies down as a lion, And tears the arm, also the crown of the head.

**20** About Gad he said: "Blessed be the one who enlarges Gad! Like a roaring lion, he crouches, tearing arm and scalp.

**20** And of Gad he said, Blessed be he that enlargeth Gad: he dwelleth as a lion, and teareth the arm with the crown of the head.

21 "Then he selected the choicest *part* for himself, For there the ruler's portion was reserved; And he came *with* the leaders of the people; He executed the justice of the LORD, And His ordinances with Israel."

21 "Then he provided the first *part* for himself, For there the ruler's portion was reserved; And he came *with* the leaders of the people; He executed the justice of the Lord, And His ordinances with Israel."

21 He chose the best part for himself, when the leader's portion was assigned. He came at the head of the people, carrying out the LORD'S justice and his ordinances concerning Israel."

21 And he provided the first part for himself, because there, in a portion of the lawgiver, was he seated; and he came with the heads of the people, he executed the justice of the LORD, and his judgments with Israel.

## **Gad**

- Jacob's 7th son, by Zilpah, Leah's handmaid
- The brother of Asher (Gen 30:11-13; 46:16,18)
- "fortune; luck"
- This tribe was fierce and warlike
  - They were "strong men of might, men of war for the battle, that could handle shield and buckler, their faces the faces of lions, and like roes upon the mountains for swiftness" (1 Chr 12:8; 5:19-22)
  - Elijah was of this tribe (1 Kings 17:1)

The portion allotted to the tribe of Gad was on the east of Jordan, and comprehended the half of Gilead, a region of great beauty and fertility (Deut 3:12) bounded on the east by the Arabian desert, on the west by the Jordan (Joshua 13:27) and on the north by the river

Jabbok. It thus included the whole of the Jordan valley as far north as to the Sea of Galilee, where it narrowed almost to a point.

**22** Of Dan he said, "Dan is a lion's cub; He leaps out from Bashan."

**22** Of Dan he said, "Dan is a lion's whelp, That leaps forth from Bashan."

**22** About Dan he said: "Dan is a lion's cub, leaping forth from Bashan."

**22** And of Dan he said, Dan is a lion's whelp: he shall leap from Bashan.

## **Dan**

- Gen 49:7: Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.
- First to fall into idolatry (Judges 18:30)
- Slighted in genealogies:
  - Names of his sons omitted (Gen 46:23; Num 26:42)
  - Name blotted out (1 Chr 1-10; Rev 7)
  - Mentioned last (Num 10:25; Josh 19:47-49; 1 Chr 27:16-22)

**23** Of Naphtali he said, "Naphtali, satisfied with favor, And full of the blessing of the LORD, Take possession of the sea and the south."

**23** Of Naphtali he said, "O Naphtali, satisfied with favor, And full of the blessing of the LORD, Take possession of the sea and the south."

**23** About Naphtali he said: "Naphtali, full of favor and the LORD's blessing, take possession of the west and south."

**23** And of Naphtali he said, O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the LORD: possess thou the west and the south.

## **Naphtali**

- The 5th son of Jacob, the 2nd born to him by Rachel's handmaid, Bilhah. He was the full brother of Dan (Gen 30:7)
  - At his birth Rachel is said to have exclaimed, "wrestlings of God"—ie., "mighty wrestlings"—"have I wrestled"
- "Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words" (Gen 49:21)
- N & NW of Sea of Galilee: Capernaum, Bethsaida, Chorazin

**24** Of Asher he said, "More blessed than sons is Asher; May he be favored by his brothers, And may he dip his foot in olive oil.

**24** Of Asher he said, "More blessed than sons is Asher; May he be favored by his brothers, And may he dip his foot in oil.

**24** About Asher he said: "May Asher be blessed, along with his descendants, may his brothers be pleased with him, may he dip his feet in oil,

**24** And of Asher he said, Let Asher be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil.

25 "Your bars will be iron and bronze, And as your days, so *will* your strength *be*.

25 "Your locks will be iron and bronze, And according to your days, so will your leisurely walk be.

25 may your bolts be made of iron and bronze, and may your strength be sufficient for each day you live."

25 Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.

### **Asher**

- "Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties." (Gen 49:20)
  - Settled in northern part (Josh 19:24-31)
- "royal dainties" = workmen and materials: to David (2 Sam 5:11) and Solomon (1 Kings 5:1-10)
- Kept Passover under Hezekiah (in contrast to others) (2 Chr 30:1,10-11)
- To this tribe belonged the prophetess Anna (Luke 2:36)

**26** "There is no one like the God of **Jeshurun**, Who rides the heavens to your help, And the clouds in His majesty.

**26** "There is none like the God of Jeshurun, Who rides the heavens to your help, And through the skies in His majesty.

26 "There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens with its lofty clouds to help you.

26 There is none like unto the God of Jeshurun, who rideth upon the heaven in thy help, and in his excellency on the sky.

- "...Jeshurun" - a poetical name for the people of Israel, used in token of affection, meaning, "the dear upright people" (Deut 32:15; 33:5,26; Is 44:2)

27 "The eternal God is a hiding place, And underneath are the everlasting arms; And He drove out the enemy from you, And said, 'Destroy!'

27 "The eternal God is a dwelling place, And underneath are the everlasting arms; And He drove out the enemy from before you, And said, 'Destroy!'

27 The God of old is a dwelling place, with everlasting arms underneath. He drove out your enemies before you and said: 'Destroy them!'

27 The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms: and he shall thrust out the enemy from before thee; and shall say, Destroy them.

28 "So Israel lives in security, The fountain of Jacob secluded, In a land of grain and new wine; His heavens also drip down dew.

28 "So Israel dwells in security, The fountain of Jacob secluded, In a land of grain and new wine; His heavens also drop down dew.

28 So Israel lives in confidence, isolated as the fountain of Jacob in a land of grain and new wine, where the heavens rain down dew.

28 Israel then shall dwell in safety alone: the fountain of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn and wine; also his heavens shall drop down dew.

29 "Blessed are you, Israel; Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, The shield of your help, And He who is the sword of your majesty! So your enemies will cringe before you, And you will trample on their high places."

29 "Blessed are you, O Israel; Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, Who is the shield of your help And the sword of your majesty! So your enemies will cringe before you, And you will tread upon their high places."

29 How blessed are you, Israel!" Who can be like you, a people delivered by the LORD, your shield of help and your finely crafted sword. May your enemies cower before you. You will tread down their high places."

29 Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! and thine enemies shall be found liars unto thee; and thou shalt tread upon their high places.