

Deuteronomy
November 30, 2008
Moses' Final Blessing
Chapters 33-34

I. Background

This chapter is reminiscing of Jacob closing words to his sons in Gen. 49, sometimes referred to the Testament of Jacob. The Blessing of Moses is a poetic like the Song of Moses (i.e. last chapter), and might have been put to music. Since this chapter is written in the third person, some claim that this is at least some proof that Moses did not write Chapters 33 and 34. However, writing in the third person is not unknown in the OT.

In Chapter 33, we will review the first three prophecies.

II. What Has God Done?

Deut 33:1-5

33:1 This is the blessing that Moses the man of God pronounced on the Israelites before his death. 2 He said: "The LORD came from Sinai and dawned over them from Seir; he shone forth from Mount Paran. He came with myriads of holy ones from the south, from his mountain slopes. 3 Surely it is you who love the people; all the holy ones are in your hand. At your feet they all bow down, and from you receive instruction, 4 the law that Moses gave us, the possession of the assembly of Jacob. 5 He was king over Jeshurun when the leaders of the people assembled, along with the tribes of Israel.

NIV

- Verse 1: Moses' death represents an end of an era...he gives a glimpse of what is to come. The blessings appear to relate to battle and to the land that is the fruit of the battle. They do not have the far-reaching nature of the prophecies in Gen. 49.
- Verse 1: This is the only place in the Pentateuch that Moses is called the "man of God." Generally, the "man of God" is a designation used for prophets in the later OT. Moses is called a prophet at the end of the next chapter.
- Verse 2: The myriads of holy ones are likely angels. Many commentators suggest that this is the reference for angels from:

Acts 7:53

53 you who have received the law that was put into effect through angels but have not obeyed it."

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Gal 3:19-20

19 What, then, was the purpose of the law? It was added because of transgressions until the Seed to whom the promise referred had come. The law was put into effect through angels by a mediator.

NIV

Heb 2:2

2 For if the message spoken by angels was binding, and every violation and disobedience received its just punishment,

NIV

- Verse 5: Jeshurun is another name for Israel (as discussed last class). Three evidences to the Israelites of God's kingship over Israel were:
1. Liberation of the people in the Exodus

2. Giving of the law at Sinai
3. Victory (to come) in the Promised Land.

III. Chapter 33:6: Prophecy Concerning Reuben

Deut 33:6

6 "Let Reuben live and not die, nor his men be few."

NIV

Even though Reuben is the first born, we hear little of his tribe in the OT.

Gen 49:3-4

3 "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honor, excelling in power.

4 Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel, for you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch and defiled it.

NIV

Although the patriarch of the Reubenites lost his birthright as eldest son because of adultery with his father's handmaiden, the Reubenites would live and not be destroyed as per the law. There is a bit of controversy as to whether the "not" also modifies "few." If "few" (not modified with not) is accepted, then this verse might also be prophecy of the eventual disappearance of this tribe.

IV. Chapter 33:7: Prophecy Concerning Judah

Deut 33:7

7 And this he said about Judah: "Hear, O LORD, the cry of Judah; bring him to his people. With his own hands he defends his cause. Oh, be his help against his foes!"

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This verse is hard to understand. In Num 2:9, Judah is to lead the procession in the desert; perhaps this helps with the meaning; this is also so in battle. As such, this might be asking for help in battle from the LORD.

Gen 49:8-12

8 "Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you.

9 You are a lion's cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness — who dares to rouse him?

10 The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.

11 He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes.

12 His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk.

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Judah was the most successful of the tribes in clearing out their land from the Canaanites. Perhaps this verse is simply telling us that Judah was so successful because its citizens cried out to the Lord.

V. Chapter 33:8-11: Prophecy Concerning Levi

Deut 33:8-11

8 About Levi he said:

"Your Thummim and Urim belong to the man you favored. You tested him at Massah;

you contended with him at the waters of Meribah. 9 He said of his father and mother, 'I have no regard for them.' He did not recognize his brothers or acknowledge his own children, but he watched over your word and guarded your covenant. 10 He teaches your precepts to Jacob and your law to Israel. He offers incense before you and whole burnt offerings on your altar. 11 Bless all his skills, O LORD, and be pleased with the work of his hands.

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This blessing emphasizes priestly mission. At the end of Genesis, Levi did not appear to have a bright future. Like Reuben and Simeon, the men and their tribe appeared to be the dishonored older brother of Judah. In this blessing, we see progress from the earlier prophesy that was combined with Simeon:

Gen 49:5-7

5 "Simeon and Levi are brothers — their swords are weapons of violence.

6 Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly, for they have killed men in their anger and hamstrung oxen as they pleased.

7 Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel.

NIV

The final verse for Levi might deal with the enemies of God who challenge the Levites in doing their work.

The Levites through God's grace have evolved to be caretakers, teachers, and revealers. Reuben disappears entirely. Simeon is absorbed by Judah. Why do these three tribes whose Patriarch was dishonored have such difference future?

VI. Chapter 33:26-29: Conclusion

Deut 33:26-29

26 "There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides on the heavens to help you and on the clouds in his majesty. 27 The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. He will drive out your enemy before you, saying, 'Destroy him!' 28 So Israel will live in safety alone; Jacob's spring is secure in a land of grain and new wine, where the heavens drop dew. 29 Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword. Your enemies will cower before you, and you will trample down their high places."

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Verse 26: In various ways, OT Scriptures reference God's power noting that clouds are at his feet.

If you were an Israelite hearing these words, how would you respond? Why did not they respond that way? What might get in your way when you know what God wants you to do, but when the road is also difficult?

VII. Chapter 34:1-8: Moses' Last Breathes

Deut 34:1-8

34:1 Then Moses climbed Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab to the top of Pisgah, across from Jericho. There the LORD showed him the whole land — from Gilead to Dan, 2 all of Naphtali, the territory of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, 3 the Negev and the whole region from the Valley of Jericho, the City of Palms, as far as Zoar. 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." **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.**

NIV

Moses is led by God to climb the mountain. From it, he can see much of the land; God does not allow Moses to enter the land, but He does allow him to see it.

Verse 4: Again, Moses' own punishment serves as one final warning to the Israelites. He has told them what will happen to them, and then it happens to him! Do you feel sorry for Moses? What do you think would have happened if God had let Moses to live?

Week 6 Moses' body was probably buried in an unknown grave for many reasons, such as:

- People could not find it to vandalize it.
- Enemies could not use the body for their own purposes.
- Even the Devil might want it:

Jude 9

9 But even the archangel Michael, when he was disputing with the devil about the body of Moses, did not dare to bring a slanderous accusation against him, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!"

NIV

If God had allowed the place of Moses' grave to be known, what are the chances that the Israelites would have worshipped the grave?

Week 7 It does not appear that Moses died from a disease or out of old age. Apparently, he died as a pure act of God.

VIII. Moses' Legacy

Deut 34:9-12

9 Now Joshua son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom because Moses had laid his hands on him. So the Israelites listened to him and did what the LORD had commanded Moses.

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

NIV

From near death as a baby slave to the heights of the Egypt to an abject Egyptian failure and a friendless desert nomad to God's anointed... what a life?

Moses' legacy in the NT:

Heb 3:1-6

3:1 Therefore, holy brothers, who share in the heavenly calling, fix your thoughts on Jesus, the apostle and high priest whom we confess. 2 He was faithful to the one who appointed him, just as Moses was faithful in all God's house. 3 Jesus has been found worthy of greater honor than Moses, just as the builder of a house has greater honor than the house itself. 4 For every house is built by someone, but God is the builder of everything. 5 Moses was faithful as a servant in all God's house, testifying to what would be said in the future. 6 But Christ is faithful as a son over God's house. And we are his house, if we hold on to our courage and the hope of which we boast.

NIV