

## Bible Study – Deuteronomy Chapter 33 - 34 Israel's blessings and Moses' death

In our last study, we studied the song of Moses that he gave to the nation of Israel, with the purpose of being a witness against them in the future. At the same time, the Israelites are reminded that their ultimate hope and security can only be found in God alone.

In our study tonight, we conclude our study in the book of Deuteronomy with the blessings given to the tribes of Israel and the narrative of Moses' death.

### Read Deuteronomy 33:1-29

Moses has been a spiritual and theocratic father to the twelve tribes and in the tradition of Isaac and Jacob, pronounces his final blessings to Israel in his final address to the nation before they go into the Promised Land. It starts with a presentation of God before going into the blessings.

**Q. (1-5)** Moses introduces who God is by giving a vivid image of God rising as a sun over the mountains with the holy ones. What do you think this image is to convey to the Israelites? In v. 5, how is “... the Lord became king in Jeshurun...” to be understood, specifically, who is the Lord becoming king? Why is a correct understanding of this verse important?

- The sun represents the source of all physical blessing so therefore, God himself is the source of all the blessings to come.
- Therefore, this could also be a reminder to the Israelites that God himself is the one and only source that can provide for the needs of the Israel
- The Lord manifested himself gloriously to his people from his earthly dwelling places or at least his usual places of self-disclosure, namely, mountaintops – Eugene Merrill
- Majestic and powerful
- The holy ones could be angels
- In verse 5, it seems to refer to God, but in the context of this passage, it actually refers to Moses
- Though the law and commandments come directly from God, it goes through Moses to the tribes of Israel
- If we look at Moses' role over the nation of Israel, he is like the leader of the country (e.g. President, Prime Minister, Supreme Ruler), guiding and directing them as instructed by God.
- In this lens of thought, it makes sense as to how the Israelites are to understand what this passage means and who it refers to.
- **\*\*Leader's note** – The correct basis for understanding the context of this passage will help to understand the following chapter and the language this is used there. More to be revealed when we get there, but this helps to setup the comparison of Moses and Jesus Christ
- **\*\*Leader's note** – note the footnote about replacing “the Lord” with “he”

**Q. (6-25)** Moses begins to bless the tribes, but there is one tribe missing. Which one is it and why? (cf. Genesis 49:7) What lesson can we take away from this? Describe the blessings given to the following tribes and why it may be significant: Levi, Joseph, Zebulun & Issachar, and Naphtali

- Genesis 49:7 – The tribe of Simeon is missing. They were to be scattered and not given their own portion of land in the Promised land. They in fact share land with Judah when they enter the Promised Land.
- This was result of his deceitfulness and violence against Hamor and Shechem (Genesis 34). Also, his anger and cruelty are highlighted, especially in the blessings of Jacob.
- The lesson here is that vengeance belongs to God (cf. Romans 12:19; Deuteronomy 32:35) and to not come from themselves
- Blessings to Levi (v.8 – 11)

- Thummin and Urim are gemstones that were carried by the high priest of Israel on the ephod (priestly garments). They were used to determine God's will in some situations.
- The mention of Massah and Meribah (Exodus 17:1-7; Numbers 20:1-13) may not be to the whole tribe of Levi, but maybe in reference to Moses and Aaron, who were from the tribe of Levi
- They observed the word and kept the covenant (v. 9b)
- Because of this, they were allowed to teach the Israelites God's law and carried out the priestly duties on behalf of the nation of Israel
- The blessing is that the works of their hands be accepted
- Crushing their enemies by making them incapable of producing progeny and destroying one's strength (1 Kings 12:10; Proverbs 31:17; Nahum 2:2)
- Blessings to Joseph
  - Joseph represents the two half tribes that were blessed by Jacob, Ephraim and Manasseh
  - We note such rich blessings (e.g. fine produce, abundance, best gifts) upon this tribe of Jacob
  - We note the strength of this tribe (e.g. firstborn bull – with horns of a wild ox) able to gore the peoples
  - Ephraim is the stronger of the two sons, which is noted in the latter half of verse 17
  - In previous blessings, Ephraim and Manasseh are mentioned separately, but here, Joseph, their father, is mentioned in the blessing
- Blessings to Zebulun & Issachar
  - They would become special channels of blessings to the other nations by means of their commercial wealth
  - Commentators have mentioned that this may not have been evident in biblical times, but it is seen in modern times, especially the port city of Haifa, which is in ancient Zebulun.
  - These two tribes would experience God's blessing as they brought riches into Israel
  - The terms "in your going forth" and "in your tents" is a merism (combination expression) meaning 'in all that you do'. – Driver
- Blessings of Naphtali
  - Enjoy the benefits of a seacoast
  - Towns included Capernaum and Bethsaida
  - By the far, the most abundant blessing was the fact that the Messiah spent most of his life and exercised much of his ministry in Naphtali or in Zebulun (cf. Matthew 4:12-17)

**Q. (26-29)** As Moses closes his address, he focuses on Israel's God again. What key message is Moses trying to convey?

- Moses pictured God as one who is great enough to give the tribes everything that He had promised them.
- The key to Israel's blessing was her God and her relationship to Him
  - He was their God and they were his people
  - Israel was under the protection of a powerful God
- Moses again ends off with the reminder of how great and powerful God was and that Israel had nothing to fear or worry about as long as they were obedient to Him, which has been the main message through the book of Deuteronomy.
- Israel's greatest danger wasn't the armies around them so much as the appetites (or desires) within them

### **Read Deuteronomy 32:48-52; 34:1-12**

In the first part of the passage, God instructs Moses on how he will die and what will precede his death. The second part of the passage shows Moses following these instructions, while giving a eulogy for Moses and an epilogue to this section of the Old Testament.

**Q.** What was the incident at Meribah that prevented Moses from entering the Promised Land (Numbers 20:1-13)? How was Moses' action offensive to God?

- God instructed Moses to speak to the rock so that water could pour out. Instead, he strikes the rock twice, thereby disobeying God regarding how water would be provided for the people
- The root of Moses' sin in disobeying God was unbelief. It was a failure to believe that simple obedience to God's command was best (cf. Genesis 4:1-7).
- There are some other reasons why Moses' action was offensive to God
  - First was the action of striking the rock instead of speaking to it. God wanted to use the spoken word to demonstrate his power.
  - By striking the rock, the implication is that God's word was not powerful enough to bring forth water to the people
  - It may have also showed that the miracle needed Moses help rather than depend on God's power alone. In doing so, he failed to "treat God as holy".
  - If Moses had simply spoken to the rock, it would have been clear to the people that the miracle had come from God
  - Secondly, when he was about to bring forth water, he did not ascribe the forthcoming act to God. With that omission, those who witnessed this act may prescribe the power of the act to Moses instead of God himself.
  - This should be a warning to ministry leaders: thinking that we need to be manufacturers rather than simply distributors of blessing to others.
- This is why we see God stating Moses "broke faith with me ...and because you did not treat me as holy ..."
- **\*\*Leaders Note** – It is interesting (and by the grace of God) that when Moses struck the rock, water still came forth, even though that was not the prescribed way of drawing forth the water. This shows God's grace even though a sin is being committed. This does not condone the sin, but rather, it demonstrates

**Q.** When Moses dies on Mount Nebo, why do you think God did it in this specific way? How does his death fulfill the promise of God? Why was it necessary for Moses to die at this time?

- One explanation is that God chose to bury his faithful servant rather than allowing the Israelites to do so, which may also show the relationship they had – That it was so special that only God wanted to bury Moses and no other.
- Another explanation is that by only God knowing where Moses was buried, it may have prevented the Israelites from taking Moses' body with them to Canaan, thus violating the divine command to disallow Moses entry there – Eugene Merrill
- Another explanation is that if people knew where he was buried, it may have become a spectacle, where a shrine could have been built and Moses being celebrated and perhaps worshipped.
- This fulfills the promise that because of Moses' sin, he would not be allowed to enter the Promised Land, though by God's grace, was allowed to see it before he died.
- Even though Moses was still in relatively good health (his eyes were undimmed and vigor unabated), God decided to take his life at this time.
  - **\*\*Leader's Note** – It should be noted that his death was a punishment (similar to the other Israelites who disobeyed in their disbelief of taking the Promised Land 40 years earlier) and not due to old age.
- One explanation is that the nation of Israel would not move into the Promised Land if they knew that Moses, their leader of over 40 years, was still alive and capable of providing leadership.
- Though Joshua was chosen as his successor, knowing that the 'original' leader is still alive, the nation of Israel may not have obeyed or submitted to Joshua's authority.
- Therefore, for Israel to move forward under Joshua (and the book of Deuteronomy is preparing for the nation of Israel to move forward in short order), Moses could no longer be their leader, and therefore had to die for the benefit of Israel.

**Q.** Moses was a foreshadow of someone greater to come, namely Jesus Christ. In what way are Moses and Jesus similar in terms of their ministry?

- There are many similarities between Moses and Jesus Christ, from the way they were born to how they were taken in death (e.g. in their 'prime'), though we want to focus on certain aspects that would show how Moses and his ministry pointed towards someone greater yet to come.
- Both men were divinely chosen deliverers (cf. Exodus 3:7-10; John 3:16; Acts 7:25)
- Both did mighty signs and wonders (miracles; Deuteronomy 34:11-12; Matthew 4:23)
- Both were mighty in word and deed (Acts 7:22; Luke 24:19)
- Moses was a faithful as a servant over another's house, whereas Christ is faithful as a Son over His own house (Hebrews 3:5-6)
- Both finished the work that God gave them to do (cf. Exodus 39:42-43; 40:33; John 17:4)
- Both were **prophets** (Acts 3:22-23), **advocates** (Exodus 32:31-35; 1 John 2:1-2), **intercessors** (Exodus 17:1-6; Hebrews 7:25), **and leaders or kings** (Deuteronomy 33:4-5, Isaiah 55:4; Hebrews 2:10; Revelation 19)
- **\*\*Leaders Notes** – The cross-references are not included in the questions as I am not sure how much time is available to read them to answer the question. At your discretion and time permitting, you can give the cross references to members of your group to look up and come up with the similar active or attribute of both Moses and Jesus Christ. I would only focus on the ones above. The following similarities can be mentioned in passing and don't have to go into a lot of detail.
- Some other similarities between the two:
  - Both were born into a godly home at a difficult time in Jewish history
  - Both of their lives were threatened when they were infants
  - Both were protected in Egypt
  - Both gave up wealth to benefit others
    - Moses was a prince in the Egyptian royal family
    - Christ, coming down from heaven, to live his life as man
  - Both were servants of the Lord
  - Both experienced glorious transformations – Moses' face (Exodus 34:29-30) and Jesus' entire person (Matthew 17:2)
  - Both enjoyed an intimate relationship with God
- **\*\*Leader's Notes** – the point is that there were a lot of similarities, but also, this was a BIG arrow pointing to someone greater who was coming. The nation of Israel got to experience someone who was a great prophet yet flawed. But if this was an example of someone great, then the person to come, the king of the people of Israel, would be even greater and how blessed would that be for Israel and the children of God.

As Moses ends his ministry in the book of Deuteronomy, as his last act before the nation of Israel, he confers blessings to the tribes of Israel, similar to how Jacob conferred blessings to his sons. These blessings have been partially fulfilled in history, but will be fully realized in the future, when Israel repents, and God brings her back into her land.

We also witness how God is calling one of his faithful servants home to him. Though Moses' sin at Meribah prevents him from entering the Promised Land, it is his faith that saves him (Hebrews 11:26). We see the comparison of Moses and Jesus Christ, showing many similarities from how they were born and their ministry to the people. However, Moses was only a foreshadow of a greater priest-king that was to come, one who would save people from the destruction of their sin and to turn their hearts toward their God. As great as Moses was, Jesus Christ is the ultimate Saviour of his people and creation.