

Second Baptist Church of Doylestown
Bible Study Notes
11-30-22

Deuteronomy 33

Moses Blesses the Tribes – Verse 1

¹ This is the blessing that Moses the man of God pronounced on the Israelites before his death.

33:1 Moses the man of God: As he looked at Israel with a shepherd's heart, he could not leave them without blessing them. It must be this way. Moses could not leave this earth without a final blessing of the people he has loved and served in the LORD for these 40 years.

This chapter is similar in its effect to the blessing of Israel (Jacob) upon his twelve sons as recorded in Genesis 49. Since Moses was the one who recorded the blessing of Israel in Genesis 49, it is not a stretch to think he consciously modeled his blessing on Jacob's previous one.

The Glory Of God's Revelation To Israel – Verses 2-5

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.

33:2-5 The LORD came from Sinai: In the midst of images of God's glory in revealing Himself and His word to Israel (He shone... with ten thousands of saints... a fiery law... He was King). This adds a sense of drama and grandeur to Moses' prophetic words to each tribe.

The Blessing Of Reuben – Verse 6

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

33:6 Let Reuben live: This is a general blessing for the tribe of Reuben. Moses prayed, "Nor let his men be few," asking that the tribe of Reuben be blessed with growth. Live and not die: This tepid blessing is in line with Jacob's prophecy concerning the tribe of Reuben (you shall not excel, Genesis 49:4). The tribe of Reuben never did excel; as far as we know, there never came a prophet, a judge, or a king from the tribe of Reuben.

Judah: May You Be A Help – Verse 7

⁷ And this he said about Judah: "Hear, 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!"

33:7 Hear, LORD, the voice of Judah: Since the name Judah means praise, Moses prayed that the LORD would hear the voice of praise. Let his hands be sufficient: Essentially, Moses prayed for the blessing and sustaining of the tribe of Judah, no doubt until it could fulfill its prophetic destiny to bring forth the Messiah. Moses knew this destiny for the tribe of Judah from Jacob's prophecy in Genesis 49:10: The scepter shall not depart from Judah.

Levi: They Shall Teach Israel Your Law – Verses 8-11

⁸ About Levi he said: “Your Thummim and Urim belong to your faithful servant. 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, LORD, and be pleased with the work of his hands. Strike down those who rise against him, his foes till they rise no more.”

33:8-9 They have observed Your word and kept Your covenant: Because of this, Levi had a blessed place among the tribes of Israel. Moses prayed that the substance of Levi would be blessed and that their enemies would be defeated.

33:10-11 They shall teach Jacob Your judgments, and Israel Your law: Especially, Levi had the blessed place of teaching Israel the word of God. They would accomplish this as they were scattered in Israel, as Jacob had prophesied (Genesis 49:7). The prophecy I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel (in Genesis 49:7) was given to both the tribes of Simeon and Levi. For the tribe of Levi, it was a blessing, as they were scattered throughout the nation to minister to the people and to bring God’s word to the whole nation. For the tribe of Simeon, the scattering was a significant curse; they are not even mentioned among the tribes being blessed here.

Benjamin: The Beloved of the Lord – Verse 12

¹² About Benjamin he said: “Let the beloved of the LORD rest secure in him, for he shields him all day long, and the one the LORD loves rests between his shoulders.”

33:12 The beloved of the LORD: The place of special love and blessing Benjamin had would be prophetically fulfilled in a Benjaminite city becoming the center of the nation — Jerusalem. Shall dwell in safety by Him: Thus, though the tribe of Benjamin was indeed fierce and warlike (Jacob’s prophecy described Benjamin as a ravenous wolf, Genesis 49:27), the tribe was greatly beloved of the LORD.

Joseph: Let The Blessing Come – Verses 13-17

¹³ About Joseph he said: “May the LORD bless his land with the precious dew from heaven above and with the deep waters that lie below; ¹⁴ with the best the sun brings forth and the finest the moon can yield; ¹⁵ with the choicest gifts of the ancient mountains and the fruitfulness of the everlasting hills; ¹⁶ with the best gifts of the earth and its fullness and the favor of him who dwelt in the burning bush. Let all these rest on the head of Joseph, on the brow of the prince among his brothers. ¹⁷ In majesty he is like a firstborn bull; his horns are the horns of a wild ox. With them he will gore the nations, even those at the ends of the earth. Such are the ten thousands of Ephraim; such are the thousands of Manasseh.”

33:13-17 Blessed of the LORD is his land: The two tribes of Joseph — Ephraim and Manasseh — were indeed blessed numerically in Israel. The descendants of this one son among twelve sons of Jacob were far more numerous than all the other tribes. Ten thousands of Ephraim... thousands of Manasseh: This fulfilled Jacob’s prophecy in Genesis 49:22 (Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; his branches run over the wall).

Zebulun and Issachar: They Shall Partake Of The Abundance Of The Seas – Verses 18-19

18 About Zebulun he said: “Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out, and you, Issachar, in your tents. **19** They will summon peoples to the mountain and there offer the sacrifices of the righteous; they will feast on the abundance of the seas, on the treasures hidden in the sand.”

33:18-19 They shall partake of the abundance of the seas: Both the tribes of Zebulun and Issachar were in the Galilee region and were blessed to take advantage of the Sea of Galilee. Treasures hidden in the sand: This is consistent with what Jacob said of Zebulun in Genesis 49:13 (Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea).

Gad: He Dwells As A Lion – Verses 20-21

20 About Gad he said: “Blessed is he who enlarges Gad’s domain! Gad lives there like a lion, tearing at arm or head. **21** He chose the best land for himself; the leader’s portion was kept for him. When the heads of the people assembled, he carried out the LORD’s righteous will, and his judgments concerning Israel.”

33:20-21 The people of the tribe of Gad received the best of the new land because they obeyed God by punishing Israel’s wicked enemies. Punishment is unpleasant for both the giver and the receiver, but it is a necessary part of growth. If you are in a position that sometimes requires you to correct others, don’t hold back from fulfilling your task. Understand that realistic discipline is important to character development. Always strive to be both just and merciful, keeping in mind the best interests of the person who must receive the punishment.

Dan: A Lion’s Whelp – Verse 22

22 About Dan he said: “Dan is a lion’s cub, springing out of Bashan.”

33:22 He shall leap from Bashan: This may not be a complimentary phrase. History records that Dan was a troublesome tribe. They were the tribe to introduce idolatry into Israel (Judges 18:30); Jeroboam set up one of his idolatrous golden calves in Dan (1 Kings 12:26-30), and later Dan became a center of idol worship in Israel (Amos 8:14). Indeed, Jacob said of Dan in Genesis 49:17, Dan shall be a serpent by the way.

33:22 From Bashan: The tribe of Dan originally was allotted land in the southern part of Israel but migrated to the north hundreds of years after this (Judges 18). Moses’ reference to Bashan (a region in northern Israel) prophetically anticipated this migration.

Naphtali: Full Of The Blessing Of The Lord – Verse 23

23 About Naphtali he said: “Naphtali is abounding with the favor of the LORD and is full of his blessing; he will inherit southward to the lake.”

33:23 O Naphtali, satisfied with favor: The tribe of Naphtali was indeed satisfied with favor. Naphtali’s land was in a key portion near the Sea of Galilee, the region where Jesus did much of His teaching and ministry. No wonder Moses says this tribe is full of the blessing of the LORD, and that Jacob said of Naphtali in Genesis 49:21, he gives goodly words.

Asher: Most Blessed Of Sons – Verses 24-25

²⁴ About Asher he said: “Most blessed of sons is Asher; let him be favored by his brothers, and let him bathe his feet in oil. ²⁵ The bolts of your gates will be iron and bronze, and your strength will equal your days.

33:24 Bathing one’s feet in oil was a sign of prosperity. Abundance of the tribe of Asher was also expressed by Jacob in Genesis 49:20

33:24-25 Note the difference in blessings God gave each tribe. To one he gave the best land, to another strength, to another safety. Too often we see someone with a particular blessing and think that God must love that person more than others. Think rather that God draws out in all people their unique talents. All these gifts are needed to complete his plan. Don’t be envious of the gifts others have. Instead, look for the gifts God has given you, and resolve to do the tasks he has uniquely qualified you to do.

Happy Are You, O Israel – Verses 26-29

²⁶ “There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides across 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 enemies before you, saying, ‘Destroy them!’ ²⁸ So Israel will live in safety; Jacob will dwell secure in a land of grain and new wine, where the heavens drop dew. ²⁹ Blessed are you, 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 tread on their heights.”

33:27-29 Moses’ song declares that God is our refuge, our only true security. How often we entrust our lives to other things—perhaps money, career, a noble cause, or a lifelong dream. But our only true refuge is the eternal God, who always holds out his arms to catch us when the shaky supports that we trust collapse and we fall. No storm can destroy us when we take refuge in him. Those without God, however, must forever be cautious. One mistake may wipe them out. Living for God in this world may look like risky business. But it is the godless who are on shaky ground. Because God is our refuge, we can dare to be bold.