



A FINAL BLESSING

Deuteronomy 32:48–34:12

The death of Moses, the author of the first five books of the Bible, marks the end of an era for Israel. Israel's disobedience and rebellion against God stand in stark contrast to their faithful leader, who leaves them with his example and his gracious blessing for the future.

As the book of Deuteronomy comes to an end, we also come to the end of Moses' life. These last chapters record Moses' final blessings and a final tribute to him from the nation.

In the closing verses of chapter 32, the Lord tells Moses to go up the mountain that stands opposite of Jericho in the land of Moab. He will be given the opportunity to view the promised land from the top of that mountain. Then the Lord will end the life of this old warrior and leader, and his spirit will be taken into paradise.



Area of Jericho viewed from the top of Mount Nebo

Now, before ascending that mountain, Moses pronounces blessings on the tribes of Israel here in chapter 33. These blessings are really more like prayer requests from Moses that God will continue to bless His people as they follow Him into the future.

Moses begins in verse 6 with the tribe of Reuben. His prayer for Reuben is that they will live and flourish. Evidently the tribe had not grown very large at all, although we are not told why.

In verse 7, Moses blesses the tribe of Judah. He prays that the Lord will “be a help against his adversaries.” Just because you're following God doesn't mean you won't have any more enemies; in fact, you might end up having more.

Moses then prays in verse 11 that the priestly tribe of Levi will be blessed in “the work of his hands.” Their work, of course, is teaching the law and presenting offerings and sacrifices before the Lord on behalf of the people.

Concerning Benjamin, Moses says here in verse 12 that God “dwells between his shoulders.” This might actually be a prophetic reference to the fact that the temple will one day be located in Jerusalem, among the “shoulders”—that is, the hills—of Benjamin.



The most space is given to the blessing of Joseph, represented by his sons Ephraim and Manasseh. The prayer here is for God to make their land fruitful. Moses also prays that their military will be powerful, saying in verse 17, “His horns are the horns of a wild ox; with them he shall gore the peoples.”

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The tribes of Zebulun and Issachar are addressed together, just as they were back in Genesis 49. Moses says here in Deuteronomy 33:19, that they will “draw from the abundance of the seas.” These tribes are given land allotments that put them between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. They're going to have a great fishing enterprise; these tribes will benefit tremendously from the produce of the sea.

In verse 20, the tribe of Gad is described as being “like a lion,” while down in verse 22 the tribe of Dan is called a “lion's cub.” Both of these images refer to strength and military power.

Moses then blesses the tribe of Naphtali and their possession of “the lake,” here in verse 23. Naphtali's territory will border the Sea of Galilee and include wonderfully fertile land. They are going to have a beautiful land to inherit and settle.

Finally, for the tribe of Asher, Moses says in verse 24, “Let him be the favorite of his brothers, and let him dip his foot in oil.” The oil refers here to olive oil; this can mean that Asher will become a very prosperous tribe, or more literally, that the tribe of Asher will become known for the production of olive oil. And

let me tell you, the finest chefs today still import and use the olive oil from the Middle East.

It's interesting that the tribe of Simeon is not mentioned in these blessings. Back in Genesis 49, the Lord through Jacob promised that the tribe of Simeon would be scattered throughout Israel.

Finally, Moses delivers a blessing to the nation as a whole in verses 26 through 29. I love the promise of God here in verse 27: “The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.”

It doesn't matter what your property is like. Whether you live by the sea or in the desert, whether your feet dip into the opulence of olive oil or you have only two shekels in your pocket, God is your portion, God is your inheritance, God is your protector. As you walk with Him today, even now, beloved, underneath you are His everlasting arms.

Now that Moses is finished with these final blessings, the final chapter of Deuteronomy begins. Deuteronomy chapter 34 apparently was added under divine inspiration by Joshua or someone else, since it records Moses' death and private burial.

His trip up the mountain must be bittersweet for Moses. He's reached the goal he's had for the last forty years, but his feet will not touch the promised land because of his one great failure when he struck the rock in pride and disobedience.

Verse 7 tells us Moses died at the age of 120. The people mourned for him for a solid month. I think Moses would have been surprised the nation mourned and wept for him that long.

The last three verses of the book of Deuteronomy present a final tribute to Moses. In fact, they give us an inspired epitaph:

There has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD



sent him to do in the land of Egypt . . . and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel. (verses 10-12)

Moses was a prophet like no other. He communed with the Lord and worked through the Lord's miraculous power to deliver the Israelites from bondage in Egypt. He had spent his first forty years in the palaces of Egypt, the next forty years hidden away tending sheep in the land of Midian, and his last forty years leading the Israelites to the front door of the promised land.

Before we close the last page on the book of Deuteronomy, I want to add one note here, which highlights the grace of God. As great as Moses was, he was not allowed to enter the land because he failed to honor the Lord in that moment of pride and anger.

Some 1400 years later, during the earthly ministry of Jesus, there on the Mount of Transfiguration, Jesus revealed his brilliant deity to His disciples Peter, James, and John. But Jesus also had two visitors in bright, glorious apparel, having come from God the Father to encourage the Lord (Luke 9:28-36). Whether this took place on Mount Tabor or Mount Hermon or some other mountain, it was in the promised land.

And those two men who came to visit Jesus were Elijah and Moses. What do you know? Moses was allowed to visit the promised land after all.

Imagine the reality that “underneath you are His everlasting arms.” What thoughts and feelings about God flow from that truth? How does this truth affect your difficulties and disappointments? Who in your life might be encouraged to know they can have a personal relationship with this God too?

What do you see in Moses' character and actions that are worthy of your imitation? What has been the value to you to study the lives of the Old Testament believers? In what ways might the Old Testament stories make it easier for you to introduce yet to be saved people to God?



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