

June 7, 2020 - Deut. 32:44 – 33:29 - Moses Blesses Israel
Torah Reading: Deuteronomy 32:44 – 33:29 - Moses Blesses Israel
Psalm 148-150
Haftarah: Joshua 1:1-9

Moses Blesses The 12 Tribes Before His Death

Deuteronomy 32:44-45 - "And Moses came and spake all the words of this song in the ears of the people, he, and Hoshea the son of Nun. And Moses made an end of speaking all these words to all Israel:"

Rashi - "He and Hoshea the son of Nun": It was the Sabbath upon which there were two leaders [because the office was being transferred to Joshua, i.e.,] authority was taken from one and given to the other. — [Sotah 13b] Moses appointed a meturgeman [literally, an interpreter, here a spokesman] for Joshua, [to relay to the public what Joshua said,] so that Joshua could expound [on the Torah] in Moses' lifetime, so that Israel would not say [to Joshua], "During your teacher's lifetime you did not dare to raise your head!" - [Sifrei 31:1] And why does Scripture here call him Hoshea [for his name had long since been changed to Joshua (see Numb. 13:16). To imply [lit., to say] that Joshua did not become haughty, for although he was given high status, he humbled himself as he was at the beginning [when he was still called Hoshea]. — [Sifrei 32:44]

This has even greater significance considering that Moses represents the Law, and Joshua is a type of Jesus, announcing the new covenant of grace and life.

Deuteronomy 32:46 - "And he said unto them, Set your hearts unto all the words which I testify among you this day, which ye shall command your children to observe to do, all the words of this law."

Rashi compares this to **Ezekiel 40:4** : "Son of man, behold with thine eyes, and hear with thine ears, and set thine heart upon all that I shew thee."

Also referenced in the Shema:

- **Deuteronomy 6:6-7** - "And these words, which I command thee this day, shall be in thine heart: And thou shalt teach them diligently unto thy children, and shalt talk of them when thou sittest in thine house, and when thou walkest by the way, and when thou liest down, and when thou risest up."

To set our hearts on the Torah is to consider it as vital, spiritually, as the heart is to our physical life; and have it continually flowing throughout our being, like the blood that the heart pumps.

This only becomes fully realized in the New Covenant, when the Law is written in our hearts by the Holy Spirit, through the presence of Christ within us.

Deuteronomy 32:47 - "For it is not a vain thing for you; because it is your life: and through this thing ye shall prolong your days in the land, whither ye go over Jordan to possess it."

"For it is not a vain thing for you" - Even the minutest detail of Torah is life.

- **John 5:39-40** - "Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me. And ye will not come to me, that ye might have life."

Ecclesiastes says, "All is vanity." But this is the exception.

God Tells Moses to Prepare for Death

This scene has already been discussed in **Number 27:12-23**. Traditionally, this happened on the seventh of Adar

Deuteronomy 32:48-49 - "And the LORD spake unto Moses that selfsame day, saying, Get thee up into this mountain Abarim, unto mount Nebo, which is in the land of Moab, that is over against Jericho; and behold the land of Canaan, which I give unto the children of Israel for a possession:"

Mount Nebo (also called Pisgah) is one of the mountains of the Abarim mountain range, across the Jordan from Jericho. It formerly was controlled by Moab, but was taken by King Sihon, who was later defeated by Israel, and the mountain was now in their possession.

Rashi - And the Lord spoke to Moses on that very day: Heb. בְּעֶצְמֵ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה. In three places Scripture employs the phrase: בְּעֶצְמֵ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה [which has the meaning, "at the strongest light of the day"].

- First, regarding Noah, Scripture states, "On that very day (בְּעֶצְמֵ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה) Noah entered [... the ark]" (Gen. 7:13), which means in the glare of full daylight. Noah's contemporaries said: "We swear by such and such, that if we notice him about to enter the ark, we will not let him proceed! Moreover, we will take axes and hatchets and split open the ark!" So the Holy One, Blessed is He, said: "I will have Noah enter at midday, and let anyone who has the power to prevent it, come and prevent it!"

- Second, regarding Egypt, Scripture states, "On that very day, the Lord brought [the children of Israel] out [of the land of Egypt]" (Exod. 12:51). The Egyptians said: "We swear by such and such, that if we notice them about to leave, we will stop them! And not only that, but we will take swords and other weapons, and kill them!" So, the Holy One, Blessed is He, said: "I will bring them out in the middle of the day, and let anyone who has power to prevent it, come and prevent it!"

- Likewise here, regarding Moses' death, Scripture states, "on that very day (בְּעֶצְמֵ הַיּוֹם הַזֶּה)." The children of Israel said, "We swear by such and such, that if we notice Moses [ascending the mountain to die], we will not let him do so! The man who brought us out of Egypt, divided the Red Sea for us, brought the manna down for us, made flocks of quails fly over to us, brought up the well for us, and gave us the Torah-we will not let him!" Thereupon, the Holy One, Blessed is He, said: "I will have Moses ascend the

mountain [to his resting place] in the middle of the day!" - [Sifrei 32:47]

Deuteronomy 32:50 - "And die in the mount whither thou goest up, and be gathered unto thy people; as Aaron thy brother died in mount Hor, and was gathered unto his people:"

Rashi - "Just as your brother Aaron died": [God said to Moses:] "Die with the same death that you witnessed and longed for, that Moses removed Aaron's first [i.e., upper] garment and dressed Eleazar [Aaron's son] with it. Then, Moses did the same with the second garment, and the third. Aaron then saw his son in his glory [of his new office]. Moses then said to him: "Aaron my brother! Go up onto the couch," and Aaron went up. "Stretch out your hands," and Aaron stretched [out his hands]. "Stretch out your legs," and Aaron stretched [out his legs]. "Close your eyes," and Aaron closed [his eyes]; "Close your mouth," and Aaron closed [his mouth], and he passed away. Thereupon, Moses said, "Fortunate is the one who dies a death like this!" - [Sifrei 32:49]

Why was Moses Forbidden to Enter the Land?

Deuteronomy 32:51 - "Because ye trespassed against me among the children of Israel at the waters of Meribah-Kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin; because ye sanctified me not in the midst of the children of Israel."

- **Numbers 20:11-12** - "And Moses lifted up his hand, and with his rod he smote the rock twice: and the water came out abundantly, and the congregation drank, and their beasts also. And the LORD spake unto Moses and Aaron, Because ye believed me not, to sanctify me in the eyes of the children of Israel, therefore ye shall not bring this congregation into the land which I have given them."

God told Moses (and Aaron) to "speak to the rock" in Kadesh, and Moses struck it instead. The words which Moses used on that occasion were, "Hear now, ye rebels; must we fetch you water out of this cliff (Selagh)?" The last words of the sentence are emphatic; and the rock is described as a cliff, not by the name given to the Rock in Horeb (Tzûr). The emphasis laid upon these words has been much discussed by Jewish commentators, though it escapes English readers. I suspect that the mistake Moses and Aaron made, in thinking it needful to strike the cliff, also led them to think it necessary to ascend it, instead of gathering the congregation together beneath it, and speaking to it from below. This view harmonizes with the spiritual significance of the act [1 Corinthians 10:4]. The smitten Rock in Horeb was Christ [and a picture of his crucifixion]; the Cliff not to be smitten in Kadesh pointed also to Christ, [resurrected and] ascended now, needing only the prayer of faith to call down all that He will give. And so Moses himself taught, in some of his latest words. "It is not in heaven that thou shouldest say, Who shall go up for us to heaven, and bring it unto us? . . . But the word is nigh thee, in thy mouth."

- *Ellicott's Commentary*

Deuteronomy 32:52 - "Yet you shall see the land before you; but you shall not go thither to the land which I give the children of Israel."

A picture of all the Old testament saints:

- **Hebrews 11:13** - "These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth."

Moses Blesses the Tribes - Deuteronomy 33

Deuteronomy 33:1 - "And this is the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death."

The title "man of God" is here used for the first time. After Moses, Elijah and Elisha are more especially described by this title ("man of God") in the Old Testament.

i.e. he is "of God" - Moses belongs to God, (he is also called the "servant of Yahweh" - **Deuteronomy 34:5**) and these blessings are not coming from his own mind, but from God.

As stated before, the rabbis believed that Moses delivered these blessings separately at the same time he delivered a copy of the Torah scrolls to each tribe, with one copy going into the side of the Ark. Some say that the angel Gabriel descended, and took the Torah from the hands of Moses, bearing it through each level of heaven to show the piety of its scribe, and that the souls of the holy read from this Torah on Mondays and Thursdays and on festivals. - *Midrash on the Death of Moses* (Midrash Petirat Moshe)

Compare these blessings with those of Jacob to his sons (**Genesis 49**).

Deuteronomy 33:2 - "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."

Rashi - "came from Sinai": He came out toward them when they came to stand at the foot of the mountain, as a bridegroom goes forth to greet his bride, as it is said, "[And Moses brought the people forth] toward God" (Exod. 19:17). We learn from this, that God came out toward them (Mechilta 19:17).

Why from Seir and Paran?

Rashi - Because God first offered the children of Esau [who dwelled in Seir] that they accept the Torah, but they did not want [to accept it]. .. Then He offered the children of Ishmael [who dwelled in Paran] to accept the Torah, but they [also] did not want [to accept it]. — [A.Z. 2b]

But more probably, this describes the journey from Mount Sinai to the Promised Land. The prophetic sign of the brazen serpent occurred on the border of Edom (**Numbers**

21:4). In the Wilderness of Paran Moses repeated the law to the new generation (**Deuteronomy 1:1**).

- **Habakkuk 3:3** - "God came from Teman (an Edomite city), and the Holy One from mount Paran. Selah. His glory covered the heavens, and the earth was full of his praise."

"he came with ten thousands of saints" - The rabbis interpreted saints or "holy ones" as the angels

See **Psalm 68:17** - "The chariots of God are twenty thousand, even thousands of angels: the Lord is among them, as in Sinai, in the holy place. Thou hast ascended on high, thou hast led captivity captive: thou hast received gifts for men; yea, for the rebellious also, that the LORD God might dwell among them." (quoted by Paul, **Ephesians 4:8**)

Rashi - "He came with some of the holy myriads" - With God were only some of the myriads of His holy angels, but not all of them, nor [even] most of them. This is unlike the manner of a mortal, who displays all the splendor of his riches and his glory on his wedding day. — [Sifrei 33:2]

The law itself was "ordained by angels in the hand of a mediator" (**Galatians 3:19**). It is called "the word spoken by angels" in **Hebrews 2:2**. The language of **Daniel 7:10** — "A fiery stream issued and came forth from before Him: thousand thousands ministered unto Him"—supplies a complete parallel. The fiery law came from the ten thousands on "His right hand;" or from them, and from His right hand. - *Ellicott's Commentary*

- **Acts 7:53** - "Who have received the law by the disposition of angels, and have not kept it."

In prophecy:

- **Zechariah 14:5** - "Then the LORD my God will come, and all the holy ones with Him. "

- **Matthew 25:31** - "When the Son of Man comes in His glory, and all the angels with Him, He will sit on His glorious throne."

- **Jude 1:14-15** - "And Enoch also, the seventh from Adam, prophesied of these, saying, 'Behold, the Lord cometh with ten thousands of his saints, To execute judgment upon all, and to convince all that are ungodly among them of all their ungodly deeds which they have ungodly committed, and of all their hard speeches which ungodly sinners have spoken against him.'"

"from his right hand went a fiery law for them."

The Septuagint version is, "at his right hand angels with him." It was called a fiery law,

because it was given out of the midst of the fire (**Deuteronomy 5:26**).

According to the Targum of Onkelos, "the writing of his right hand out of the midst of fire, the law he gave unto us."

The Palestinian Targum on the giving of the Ten Commandments at Sinai:

"The First Commandment, as it would leave the mouth of the Holy One, may His name be praised, like meteors and like lightning bolts and like fiery torches — a fiery torch from His right and a fiery torch from His left — would fly and swoop in the air, and all Israel would see and be afraid, and it would encircle the camps of Israel and return and engrave itself on the Two Tablets of the Covenant and say: 'Oh My people, Children of Israel...'"

Deuteronomy 33:3 - "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."

Rashi - "all his saints are in thy hand" - [This refers to] the souls of the righteous, which are hidden away with God, as it is said, "But my lord's soul shall be bound up in the bundle of life, with the Lord, your God" (I **Sam. 25:29**). - [Sifrei 33:3]

"they sat down at thy feet" - The Targums interpret it as sitting at the feet of the cloud of glory.

They "centered themselves" at God's feet as disciples do with a master, in submission, in order to "shema" or "hear under."

- **John 17:8** - "For I have given unto them the words which thou gavest me; and they have received them"

And this is what they say:

Deuteronomy 33:4 - "Moses commanded us a law, even the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob."

The law is called their inheritance. because the obligation to observe it was hereditary. So the psalmist thought, "Thy testimonies have I taken as a heritage for ever," **Psalms 119:111**.

- **John 1:17** - "For the law was given by Moses, but grace and truth came by Jesus Christ."

Deuteronomy 33:5 - "And he was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel were gathered together."

Possibly an explanatory sentence added later by Joshua. Jeshurun was a term of

endearment for Israel, meaning "upright one."

God is the king referred to. Moses was never recognized as king in Israel (**Deuteronomy 17:14**). He "was faithful in all his house as a servant" :

- **Hebrews 3:5** - "And Moses verily was faithful in all his house, as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken after; but Christ as a Son over His own house, whose house we are if we hold fast the confidence and the rejoicing of the hope firm to the end."

Rashi agrees: "The Holy One, blessed be He! the yoke of His kingdom is upon them for ever."

See **1 Samuel 12:12** - "...ye said unto me, Nay; but a king shall reign over us: when the LORD your God was your king."

The certainty that the King of kings, the Messiah of Israel, was and is the Lawgiver and Teacher, and Keeper of all saints, and that there are none of that character who do not "sit at the feet of Jesus," makes the real meaning of this passage perfectly plain.
- *Ellicott's Commentary*

The Tribal Blessings

Reuben

Deuteronomy 33:6 - "Let Reuben live, and not die; and let not his men be few."

Rashi - i.e. that the incident involving Bilhah not be remembered against him. — [see Rashi on Genesis 35:22; Sifrei 33:6]

Since the word "not" is missing in the Hebrew, you could render the clause as, "Though his men be few."

"Let Reuben live in life eternal," says Targum Onkelos, "and not die the second death."

The Apostle John seems to have borrowed the phrase "second death" and used it in **Revelation 2:11** and **Revelation 20:6**.

Similarly, Rashi has: "'Live' in this world. and 'not die' the death of the wicked in the world to come."

That Reuben's misdeed should not be remembered (**Genesis 35:22**). Rashi also notices the juxtaposition of this record with the sentence, "the sons of Jacob were twelve." Reuben was not cut off, but he was disinherited (**1 Chronicles 5:1**), and his father's blessing (**Genesis 49:4**) had so much in it of disapproval, that Moses' prayer for him was not unnecessary.

The most terrible destruction ever wrought in Israel by the word of Moses came on Dathan and Abiram (who were Reubenites), when "they and all that appertained to them went down alive into the pit." We don't know how much the tribe was diminished by this terrible visitation and the plague that followed (**Numbers 16**), but the fighting men of the tribe had slightly decreased in the second census (**Numbers 1:21; Numbers 26:7**), and only two of all the twelve tribes had a smaller force than Reuben. No judge, prophet or national hero ever arose out of this tribe.

Where's Simeon?

According to Rashi, the tribe of Simeon, which like Reuben was greatly reduced in the wilderness, is not mentioned by Moses because they were settled within the inheritance of Judah, in Canaan, and enjoyed the blessing and protection of that most distinguished tribe (**Joshua 19:1-9**).

But also:

Rashi - Now why did Moses not devote a separate blessing for him? Because he held against him what he had done in Shittim [referring to the sin of Zimri the son of Salu, a leader of the tribe of Simeon, because of the affair of Baalpeor (see Num. 25:1-14)]. So it is written in the Aggadah of Psalms. — [Shocheh Tov 90]

But the Alexandrian MS. of the Septuagint DOES add Simeon: "Let Reuben live, and not die, and let the men of Simeon be many, or not few." Other manuscripts have the opposite - "and Simeon, let his men be few"

Judah

Deuteronomy 33:7 - "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."

The Jewish translation refers back to the previous verse:

"May this [also be] for Judah." And he [Moses] said, "O Lord, hearken to Judah's voice and bring him to his people; may his hands do battle for him, and may You be a help against his adversaries."

Rashi - "O Lord, hearken to Judah's voice": During the entire forty years that Israel was in the desert, Judah's bones were rolling in his coffin, because of the excommunication which he had accepted upon himself [when he took responsibility for Benjamin], as it is said, "If I will not bring him to you... then I have sinned against you all of the days" (Gen. 43:9). [So], Moses said, "Who caused Reuben to [publicly] confess his sin? It was Judah..." i.e. both confessed their remorse over selling Joseph (see Sotah 7b) [and thus, by placing Judah together with Reuben, Moses alluded to this merit of Judah, and, in effect, "May the Lord listen to Judah's voice," is a prayer that Judah's bones would finally come to rest]. And sure enough, "each of Judah's limbs entered its sockets (and

stopped rolling in the coffin)."

"Hearken to Judah's voice" is also interpreted to mean "hear the prayer of Judah's descendants." The prayer of David and Solomon, and the prayer of Asa because of the Ethiopians, and that of Jehoshaphat on account of the Ammonites, and that of Hezekiah because of Sennacherib. — [see Sifrei 33:7] (Of course, we would also add, the prayers of Jesus)

"may his hands 'be sufficient' or 'do battle' for him" - Jesus had to first give up His ability to do and to act by having His hands nailed to the cross. But because of His submission and humility, He was victorious over death and will defeat all enemies at the end of history. The future is in His nail-scarred hands.

Levi

Deuteronomy 33:8-9 - "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; 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."

The Thummim and the Urim were the "lights and perfections," part of the breastplate of the High Priest that acted as an oracle to reveal the will of God, and as a guidance for Israel, as interpreted by the High Priest.

Most of the Talmudic rabbis, and Josephus, following the belief that Urim meant "lights," argued that divination by Urim and Thummim involved questions being answered by great rays of light shining out of certain jewels on the breastplate; each jewel was taken to represent different letters, and the sequence of lighting thus would spell out an answer.

The "Holy One" is interpreted to be Aaron by the Targums, as Moses by others.

Since Christ is our high priest, the authority of the Urim and Thummim reside with Him, and we look to Him - by the Spirit and supported by the scriptures - for guidance and the will of God.

Verse 9 refers to the Levites revenging the disobedience of the idolatry of the Golden Calf on even their own relatives without regard.

- **Exodus 32:27** - "And he said unto them, Thus saith the LORD God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor."

- **Luke 14:26** - "If any man come to me, and hate not his father, and mother, and wife, and children, and brethren, and sisters, yea, and his own life also, he cannot be my

disciple."

Deuteronomy 33:10 - "They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar."

The priests and Levites, being dispersed among each of the tribes, having cities in them allotted to them, taught the people the laws, statutes, and ordinances of the Lord, both moral, civil and ceremonial:

- **Leviticus 10:10-11** - "You must distinguish between the holy and the common, between the clean and the unclean, so that you may teach the Israelites all the statutes that the LORD has given them through Moses."

- **Malachi 2:6-7** - "The law of truth was in his mouth, and iniquity was not found in his lips: he walked with me in peace and equity, and did turn many away from iniquity. For the priest's lips should keep knowledge, and they should seek the law at his mouth: for he is the messenger of the LORD of hosts."

But they eventually failed in this:

- **Ezekiel 22:26** - "Her priests do violence to My law and profane My holy things. They make no distinction between the holy and the common, and they fail to distinguish between the clean and the unclean. They disregard My Sabbaths, so that I am profaned among them."

To remedy this, Christ became our high priest, a priest after the order of Melchizadek (**Hebrews 7:13-17**), and his service is faithful and true.

"they shall put incense before thee" -

- **Revelation 8:3** - "And another angel came and stood at the altar, having a golden censer; and there was given unto him much incense, that he should offer it with the prayers of all saints upon the golden altar which was before the throne."

The angel acts at the direction of Christ, who provides the incense mingled with the prayers of the saints as part of His ministry of intercession.

- **Hebrews 7:25** - "Wherefore he is able also to save them to the uttermost that come unto God by him, seeing he ever liveth to make intercession for them."

As our advocate with the Father (**John 2:1**) Christ provides the incense - the sweet savor of acceptance by God - that carries our prayers to the Father.

"and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar" - This was one of the sweet savor offerings. Christ fulfilled this (as He did all the offerings) by giving Himself over freely and completely to God's will, even unto death on the cross. In fact, Christ typified the altar, the sacrifice, the priest and the offerer all at once.

Deuteronomy 33:11 - "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."

"substance" = *chayil* - The Jewish translation has "army" (The Levites served as God's militia in revenging the disobedience of the Golden calf. Rashi notes that Judah Maccabeus came from a priestly family)

The word can also mean "valor," "host" and "strength," but also "substance and wealth."

Because he had no inheritance in the land, Levi's substance was to be Israel's tithes and firstfruits, and to bless *that* would mean a blessing on the whole land of Israel.

"accept the work of his hands" - The Levites and priests' work was service in the Temple sacrifices, atonement and acceptance, cleansing and teaching. Their work was carried on and fulfilled by Christ.

"smite through the loins of them that rise against him..." - Such as were the companies of Korah, Dathan, and Abiram

"loins = *mothen* - the lower part of the back, usually bound with a girdle or belt; the seat of someone's strength.

- **1 Corinthians 15:25** - "For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet."

Benjamin

Deuteronomy 33:12 - "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."

Benjamin is blessed just after Levi because that tribe was near the Temple where the Levites served. The boundary between Benjamin and Judah actually went through the Temple precincts.

The tribe of Benjamin was beloved by the Lord, as the head of the tribe was by his father Jacob; the first king of Israel Saul was a Benjamite, Jerusalem was located in Benjamite territory, and the Temple was partly within its territory, or on the edge of it, and its land was the most fat and fertile of the land of Canaan, as Josephus observes.

"the LORD shall cover him all the day long" - The presence of the Shekinah glory in the Temple - evidence of God residing in Jerusalem - would have covered Benjamin.

Rashi - "and dwells between his shoulders": The Holy Temple was built on the highest point of his [Benjamin's] land, except that it was twenty-three cubits below the Eitam

Well (see Yoma 31a). Now, it was David's intention to build it there [at the level of the Eitam Well], as is taught in Shechitath Kodashim [Zev. 54b]: [However,] they said to David: "Let us build it a little lower, for Scripture states, 'and He dwells between his shoulders' [which are lower than the head]-and there is no part of an ox more beautiful than its shoulders."

Joseph

Deuteronomy 33:13 - "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,"

Rashi - "the deep": The [waters which lie in] the depth [of the earth] ascend, and moisten the land from below. You find that in the case of each tribe, Moses' blessing resembles Jacob's blessing [to the same tribe. For instance, Jacob blessed Joseph also with the "blessings of the deep that lieth under"] (**Gen. 49:25**).

Deuteronomy 33:14 - "And for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon,"

Rashi - "put forth by the moon" - [This refers to fruits] which the earth expels (מַגְרֶשֶׁת) and brings out [from itself] month (יָרַח) by month. — [Targum Onkelos]

Spiritually this is reflected in **Revelation 22:2** - "...and on either side of the river, was there the tree of life, which bare twelve manner of fruits, and yielded her fruit every month: and the leaves of the tree were for the healing of the nations."

Deuteronomy 33:15 - "And for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills,"

The Jewish translation is: "and with the crops of early mountains, and with the sweetness of perennial hills,"

Rashi - its mountains advance (קָדְמוֹ) the ripening of their fruits [thus, "the early mountains"] Another explanation: [This verse] teaches [us] that their creation [that of the mountains in the territory of Joseph] preceded (קָדְמוֹ) that of all other mountains. — [Sifrei 33:15]

The "lasting hills" or "perennial hills" refer to hills which produce fruit continuously (עוֹלָם) and do not cease [to produce fruit even] because of lack of rain.

Spiritually, the fruit of the land represents the fruit of the Spirit:

- **Galatians 5:22-23** - "But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, longsuffering, gentleness, goodness, faith, meekness, temperance: against such there is no law."

Deuteronomy 33:16 - "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."

Rshi - "him that dwelt in the bush" - And may his land be blessed through the favorable acceptance and contentment of the Holy One, blessed is He, Who first revealed Himself to me in a thornbush (סִנְיָה). (**Exodus 3**)

Deuteronomy 33:17 - "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."

Rashi - "to his firstborn ox": Heb. בְּכוֹר שׁוֹרוֹ [In addition to the simple meaning of "firstborn,"] there are some instances in which the word בְּכוֹר has the meaning of "greatness" and "majesty," as it is said, "I will also make him a great man (בְּכוֹר) [the highest of the kings on earth]" (Ps. 89:28); and similarly, "Israel is My son, my firstborn (בְּכוֹרִי)" [denoting high status] (Exod. 4:22). [Thus:] בְּכוֹר here: The king who will descend from Joseph, namely, Joshua.

The meaning is that Moses transferred some of his attribute of majesty to Joshua, as it is said, [God said to Moses:] "And you shall give some of your majesty to him" [Joshua] (Num. 27:20).

"unicorn" = *re'em* - possibly the great aurochs or wild bulls which are now extinct. The exact meaning is not known.

A horn is a common Scripture emblem of power and force.

Rashi - "and his horns are the horns of a *re'em*": The ox is powerful, but its horns are not beautiful; [on the other hand,] a *re'em* has beautiful horns, but it is not powerful. [Moses thus] blessed Joshua with the power of an ox and the beauty of a *re'em*'s horns. — [Sifrei 33:17]

But Rashi is contradicted by **Numbers 23:22** and **Numbers 24:8**, which mention the "strength of the unicorn (*re'em*)." Both the ox and the *re'em* signify strength.

The two horns represent Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who would push or "gore" their enemies the canaanites together or "mutually" to the "end of the earth" or "the boundaries of the land." They became founders of the two tribes into which Joseph's descendants were split (**Genesis 48:19-20**). Jacob's blessing gave favored status to Ephraim, which may be why Ephraim (the younger who was raised to the honor of firstborn by Jacob) is described as more numerous than Manasseh.

An Alternate Explanation of "They are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh."

Rashi refers this to the ten thousands slain by Joshua, the Ephraimite leader, and the thousands slain by Gideon, who was of the tribe of Manasseh. He expounds nearly the whole of the verse in reference to Joshua and the conquest of Canaan.

The Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem refer "firstborn" to the birthright which belonged to Reuben, and was taken from him, and given to Joseph. "Firstborn" is also used in reference to the Messiah (Zohar n Numb. fol. 103. 4. & in Deut. fol. 117. 3. & 118. 3. Bereshit Rabba, fol. 66. 2.) Joshua, the type of Christ, was from the tribe of Ephraim. Jesus was only begotten Son of God, and "the firstborn among many brethren" (**Romans 8:29**) who by His strength spoiled principalities and powers, and will ultimately vanquish all foes.

Zebulon & Issachar

Deuteronomy 33:18-19 - "And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out; and, Issachar, in your tents. 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."

Zebulon and Issachar were the two last sons of Leah

Zebulun bordered the sea and the fisheries of the Sea of Galilee: and was therefore to thrive by commerce and "going out" to sea. But also, being more warlike than Issachar, in "going out" to war. Zebulun is particularly noted that it produced the officers and tacticians who led and marshaled the host which vanquished Sisera (see **Judges 5:14**) but Issachar is lauded also for service in that war.

Issachar possessed fertile land where it would prosper in farming and by remaining in their "tents" or homes.

But Rashi disagrees:

Prosper when you sit "in your tents" to study the Torah, to sit [in the Sanhedrin] and to [calculate and] proclaim leap years, and to fix the months, as it is said, "And from the sons of Issachar, those who had an understanding of the times" (I Chron. 12:32) [and then the verse continues,] "their chiefs were two hundred" - the chiefs of the Sanhedrin occupied themselves with this, and in accordance with them, the seasons and leap years were fixed [for all Israel].

Rashi - "They will call the people to the mountain" - Through Zebulun's commerce, merchants of the world's nations will come to his land. Now Zebulun is located at the border, so these merchants will say, "Since we have taken so much trouble to reach here, let us go to Jerusalem and see what the God of this nation is like and what they do." And they see all Israel worshipping one God and eating one kind of food [i.e., only what is permissible to them, and they will be astonished], because [among] the nations, the deity of one is not like the deity of another, and the food of one is not like the food of another. So they will say, "There is no nation as worthy as this one!" Consequently, they

will convert to Judaism there, as our verse says, “there, they will offer up righteous sacrifices” [and all of this will be due to Zebulun’s commerce]. — [Sifrei 33:19]

"treasures hid in the sand" - The Targumist Jonathan Ben Uzziel explains this as referring especially to the obtaining of the rich purple dye from the shell of the oyster (*murex Syrius*) used to color some of the Tabernacle hangings and the priest's garments.

Gad

Deuteronomy 33:20 - "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."

"Enlargeth" - either to expand, since the tribe was surrounded by the mountains of Gilead. Or to bring him out of troubles caused by his enemies the Moabites and Ammonites, exposed as he was by settling on the east side of the Jordan.

Rashi - Because Gad was near the border, he is therefore compared to lions, for all those who are located near the border must be mighty [like lions, in order to protect themselves from attack]. — [Sifrei 33:20] Anyone slain by the Gadites could be readily identified: they used to cut off the head together with the arm in one blow. — [Jonathan Ben Uzziel]

Deuteronomy 33:21 - "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."

"He provideth the first part for himself" because he asked and obtained it of Moses, and was the first who viewed his portion in the promised land. "A portion of the lawgiver" could mean this was the only portion that Moses was able to enter. Or, that Moses had granted this part of the trans-Jordan to them, but other tribes had their territories granted by lot under Joshua.

Rashi gives an alternative explanation:

"because there, the portion of the lawgiver is hidden": For Gad knew [through Divine transmission,] that within his territory would be contained a portion of the field designated for the burial of “the lawgiver,” namely Moses. — [Sotah 13b] That portion [of the field, where Moses was buried,] was hidden (סָפֵן) and concealed from every creature, as it is said, “And no man knows his burial place” (**Deuteronomy 34:6**).

"and he came with the heads of the people" or "at the head of the people" - Gad, Reuben and the half tribe of Manasseh became the vanguard of Israel's army in conquering the rest of Canaan. “Pass over, armed, before your brothers” (**Deuteronomy 3:18**).

Dan

Deuteronomy 33:22 - "And of Dan he said, Dan is a lion's whelp: he shall leap from Bashan."

Perhaps meaning to "leap as a predator."

The Jewish translation has "streaming from Bashan" or flowing.

The Targum [Onkelos] renders it ["His land drinks from the rivers that flow from Bashan"]. For the Jordan [river] comes out from Dan's territory, from the Paneas cave, also called Leshem. Dan conquered that territory and incorporated it (**Joshua 19:47**). Dan's territory takes in part of Bashan.

Dan's original inheritance lay in the south, along the seacoast west of Benjamin and Judah. But much of the good land in the plain was overrun by the Amorites (**Judges 1:34**), leaving them only the rocky hill country. So they spied out areas in the north, conquered Laish or Leshem, and settled there (**Judges 18:1**). Other rabbinical sources add that Dan was actually ejected from their land because of their idolatrous practices.

After this, the phrase "from Dan to Beersheba" referred to Israel from north to south.

Interestingly, the word "Bashan" might be a cognate of the Ugaritic and proto-Sinaitic word *b-t-n* "serpent" in which case the line could read, "Who leaps for (or shies away) from a viper."

Jacob's earlier blessing called Dan a serpent:

- **Genesis 49:16-17** - "Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. 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."

Dan means "to judge" or "to procure justice" Or it could mean "to deliver." When Bilhah became pregnant, Rachel said, "God has vindicated me (*dānannī*); he has listened to my plea and given me a son." (Gen. 30:6)

"Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel." - Samson, a judge, was from Dan. The Midrash says Elijah the prophet was from the tribe of Dan.

Like Reuben, the tribe of Dan had a high calling from Moses, but failed by falling into idolatry.

The "serpent" reference of betrayal in Jacob's blessing was because Dan immediately set up an idol in Laish, and later became one of the two places Israel set up a golden calf in the days of Jeroboam - the other was in Bethel (**1 Kings 12:28**).

The tribe of Dan is the only tribe not listed among the 144,000 saved in **Revelation 7:3-8**.

Finally, some see Judas as representing Dan among the 12 tribes/disciples. Judas was from a city in Judah, and his tribe is not mentioned. But some refugees from the 10 lost tribes fled to Judah from the Assyrian invasion, and some speculate he might have been a descendant of the tribe of Dan.

- **Matthew 19:28** - "And Jesus said unto them, Verily I say unto you, That ye which have followed me, in the regeneration when the Son of man shall sit in the throne of his glory, ye also shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel."

- **Revelations 21:14** - "And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb. "

- **Revelation 22:12** - "And had a wall great and high, and had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel"

Naphtali

Deuteronomy 33:23 - "And of Naphtali he said, O Naphtali, satisfied with favor, and full with the blessing of the LORD: possess thou the west and the south."

Jewish translation: "And of Naftali he said, 'Naftali is favorably satisfied and full of the Lord's blessing. Possess the Sea and the south.'"

Rashi - The sea of Kinnereth (Sea of Galilee) fell within Naftali's portion; moreover, he took a rope's length of fishing-coast on its south[ern shore] for spreading out his nets and trawls. — [B.K. 81b]

Asher

Deuteronomy 33:24 - "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.'"

Rashi - I saw in Sifrei the following (33:24): "Among all of the tribes, you will not find one that is blessed with sons as Asher was." But I do not know in which regard.

Asher had 53,400 men of war (**Numbers 26:47**)

"Asher" means "happy," "blessed" or "fortunate." Asher's portion abounded with the best and most remarkable olive oil, which was the most famed of all Canaan's productions.

He will be pleasing to his brothers: Asher pleased his brothers with "Onpakinon oil" [oil of unripe olives, used for anointing one's skin] and tasty foods (?), and they please him [by repaying him] with grain. Another explanation of "He will be pleasing to his brothers" : Because the women who came from Asher were beautiful [and were sought after for marriage]. This is the meaning of what is stated in Chronicles (I Chron. 7:31).

[when it speaks of Malchiel, Asher's grandson] "he was the father בְּרִיָּת [literally, olive-child]" that is to say, his daughters were married to Kohanim Gedolim [High Priests and kings], who were anointed with olive oil (זַיִת) . - [Gen. Rabbah 71:10]

"let him dip his foot in oil" - i.e. have more than enough of it - it was usual not only to anoint the head, but the feet also.

These blessings all are pointing in one way or another to Christ:

- **Luke 7:46** - "My head with oil thou didst not anoint: but this woman hath anointed my feet with ointment."

Deuteronomy 33:25 - "Thy shoes (*min'al*) shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be."

This is a play on words, since in Hebrew *min'al* means both "sandal" and "lock" or bolt.

"Thy shoes shall be iron and brass" - The Jewish translation has "locks" instead of shoes. The word is from a root that means lock or bolt. Asher lay in along the road through which invaders would enter Israel, so it was the vital location to "lock down" Israel's defense and security.

Rashi - Now he [Moses] addresses all Israel, whose strong men dwelled in the border cities and would "lock up" the Land [as it were, with their protection], so that the enemies would be unable to enter. It was as if the Land was closed up with locks and bolts made of iron and copper. Another explanation: Your locks are iron and copper-Your land is "locked in" by mountains, from which iron and copper are mined. [In this respect] Asher's territory was [considered] the "lock of the Land of Israel." — [Sifrei 33:25]

A General Blessing for All Israel

Deuteronomy 33:26 - "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, used earlier in **Deuteronomy 32:15** and **Deuteronomy 33:5**, was the term of endearment for Israel that means "upright one."

The God of Israel rides "upon" the heavens, unlike the storm-god Baal, whose supposed powers extend only up to the clouds. In fact the word means "fine clouds" i.e. the "subtle air" of space or the heavens above the clouds. God brings to pass his will in heaven to enact His counsels in our lower world, managing and directing events as a rider does his horse. He is sovereign, and His purpose is to help Israel.

Thus He sent forth hail, thunder, and lightning on the Egyptians; and cast down hailstones on the Canaanites, and slew many of them; and even "the stars in their course" fought against Sisera (See **Psalm 68:4** and **Judges 5:20**).

The Everlasting Arms

Deuteronomy 33:27 - "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."

A beautiful expression of God's care and protection. (Although the rabbis felt "underneath are the everlasting arms" should be translated as "below are the mighty ones of the world," as a contrast to God above.)

Over Israel is his sheltering protection, and underneath them the support of his everlasting arms.

"refuge" = habitation, used of God to refer to His dwelling in the Temple in **Psalm 76:3**. The idea is that God Himself is our dwelling place, a place reserved in heaven with Him, but also He is our support and foundation in this world.

Jesus referred to this:

- **John 14:2** - "In my Father's house are many mansions: if it were not so, I would have told you. I go to prepare a place for you."

And spiritually, we are there now if we are in Christ:

- **Ephesians 2:5-6** - "Even when we were dead in sins, hath quickened us together with Christ, (by grace ye are saved;) And hath raised us up together, and made us sit together in heavenly places in Christ Jesus:"

"Destroy them" — That is, He will give us power, as well as authority, to root them out.

Just as Jesus and the apostles cast out demons as signs of the presence of the Kingdom of God. Similarly, we can take up this command to apply to our evil inclination - our sinful old man - who resists the Gospel of the kingdom within us.

This is another passage pointing us back to the verses on "revenging the disobedience" through spiritual warfare, with the assurance "He will thrust them out":

- **Ephesians 6:12** - "For we wrestle not against flesh and blood, but against principalities, against powers, against the rulers of the darkness of this world, against spiritual wickedness in high places."

- **2 Corinthians 10:5-6** - "Casting down imaginations, and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ; And having in a readiness to revenge all disobedience, when your obedience is fulfilled."

The Memra / Word / Logos of God

The Targum Onkelos on Deuteronomy 33:27 translates the Hebrew “underneath are the everlasting arms” as “And by His 'Memra' was the world created." This is almost the same wording as **John 1:10**.

‘world’ = *olam* - the world, the universe, but also eternity, the vanishing point, thus “everlasting.”

In Jewish tradition reflected in the Targums, the *Logos*, or the *Memra* or "word" of God is called the firstborn of God. It was a term implying unity with God, and in fact being the same as God, but maintaining a kind of distinctiveness of its own. (The same could be said of references to the 'Angel of the Lord.')

- **Wisdom of Solomon 18:15** - "Thy all-powerful word (*memra*) leaped from heaven, from the royal throne, into the midst of the land that was doomed, a stern warrior carrying the sharp sword of thy authentic command, and stood and filled all things with death, and touched heaven while standing on the earth."

His "Memra has laid the foundation of the earth" (Targum Isaiah 48:13).

And through His Memra Israel shall be justified (Targum Isaiah 45:25).

The Memra is even distinct from the Messiah. It often refers to a personal manifestation of God. The difference in John's description of the Logos is His incarnation and John's identification of these Memra traditions with the pre-incarnate Christ (**John 1:1-18**) and with the crucified and resurrected Jesus of Nazareth.

The Memra as a cosmic power furnished Philo with the corner-stone upon which he built his peculiar semi-Jewish philosophy of the Logos.

See <http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/10618-memra> for a fuller description of Jewish ideas about the Memra.

Deuteronomy 33:28 - "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."

"So the spiritual Israel dwells in the eternal God, their mansion, or dwelling place; in Christ, their rock; and in a strong city, the church, where they are in the utmost safety. God is all around them; Christ is their refuge, strong hold, and tower; the Holy Spirit in the midst of them is mighty; angels are their guardians, and the church their strong city, whose walls and bulwarks are salvation."

- *Gill's Exposition*

Jeremiah relates Israel dwelling safely to the days of Messiah:

- **Jeremiah 23:5-6** - "Behold, the days come, saith the LORD, that I will raise unto David a righteous Branch, and a King shall reign and prosper, and shall execute judgment and justice in the earth. In his days Judah shall be saved, and Israel shall dwell safely: and this is his name whereby he shall be called, THE LORD OUR RIGHTEOUSNESS."

"alone" - Distinct and separate from all other nations

"fountain" = *ayin* - eye, fountain (as the "eye" of the land), blessing (to set one's eye on another with favor) or the opposite - to look askance at someone.

Rashi relates "the fountain" of Jacob to mean "the blessing," and refers it to Jacob's telling Joseph and his brothers, "And God will be with you, and bring you back to the land of your forefathers" (**Gen. 48:21**). - [Sifrei 33:28]

Rashi - "also, their heavens will drip dew": [Why does the verse say "also"? It means:] Also, Isaac's blessing will be added to that of Jacob, which states, "And the God will give you from the dew of the heavens" (**Gen. 27:28**). - [Sifrei 33:28]

Deuteronomy 33:29 - "Happy are you, O Israel: who is like to you, O people saved by the LORD, the shield of your help, and who is the sword of your excellency! and your enemies shall be found liars to you; and you shall tread on their high places."

The Targum of Jonathan has, "O people saved or redeemed in the name of the word of the Lord"

Rashi - After Moses specified the blessings to Israel, he said to them, "Why do I have to specify all the details? In general: Everything is yours! Your salvation depends on God, Who is the Shield that helps you and the Sword of your majesty."

The "Shield of your help" is another phrase for the shield of faith (**Ephesians 6:16**), and the "sword of your excellency or majesty" is "the sword of the Spirit, which is the word of God" (**Ephesians 6:17**), the sword that issues from the mouth of Christ, the Word:

- **Revelation 19:15** - "And out of his mouth goeth a sharp sword, that with it he should smite the nations: and he shall rule them with a rod of iron: and he treadeth the winepress of the fierceness and wrath of Almighty God."

Pull the Curtain Back on the Lie

"your enemies shall be found liars to you" - The first step in defeating our inborn evil inclination and "bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ" is to discern the lies Satan tells us, and the lies we tell ourselves. Satan is "a liar, and the father of it" (**John 8:44**) as well as "the accuser of the brethren" (**Revelation 12:10**).

Once the deceit is revealed, we're on more solid ground to discern the idolatry that goes on "in the dark, every man in the chambers of his imagery" (**Ezekiel 8:12**)

Then "you shall tread on their high places" -

"high places" = *bamah* - any high place, hill, etc; but usually used for the sacred pagan places of idolatry where groves, pillars and altars were set up.

The phrase can also mean to tread on the neck of a defeated enemy, as was ritually enacted after victory in the Ancient Near East.

- **Joshua 10:23-25** - "So they brought the five kings out of the cave — the kings of Jerusalem, Hebron, Jarmuth, Lachish, and Eglon. When they had brought the kings to Joshua, he summoned all the men of Israel and said to the army commanders who had accompanied him, "Come here and put your feet on the necks of these kings." So the commanders came forward and put their feet on their necks. "Do not be afraid or discouraged," Joshua said. "Be strong and courageous, for the LORD will do this to all the enemies you fight."

(I believe this explains the especially visceral, outraged response by anyone who saw the video of the police officer's knee on George Floyd's neck that led to his murder. Everyone subliminally recognizes the spiritual meaning of that kind of domination).

These images are only legitimate when the legitimate sovereign of the universe - God - defeats the enemies of Israel and those who oppose Him.

- **1 Corinthians 15:25** - "For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet."

To tread on, or (as earlier) to ride upon the high places means that they no longer have power to cause fear, or induce worship, or to have any attraction or value, and actually have no positive or negative meaning anymore to you. The idols have been revealed as powerless and so the high place where they stood can be recovered to serve God instead.

This is the last word of advice and blessing that Moses has for Israel, the last teaching of the Torah, and it deals with the overcoming of the high places. The answer to the human problem of idolatry and our evil inclination will be the subject of the rest of the Bible, the historical books, the writings and the prophets, until the coming of Jesus as Messiah, to whom all the scripture points.

The next chapter records Moses' death, and the transfer of leadership to Joshua.