

Deut 33:1-29

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I. Verses 1-5: historical background to the blessing

Now this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the sons of Israel before his death. ² He said,

*“The Lord came from Sinai,
And dawned on them from Seir;
He shone forth from Mount Paran,
And He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones;
At His right hand there was flashing lightning for them.*

*³ “Indeed, He loves the people;
All Your holy ones are in Your hand,
And they followed in Your steps;
Everyone receives of Your words.*

*⁴ “Moses charged us with a law,
A possession for the assembly of Jacob.*

*⁵ “And He was king in Jeshurun,
When the heads of the people were gathered,
The tribes of Israel together.*

- a. So, now we see that the writer tells us this is the blessing which Moses gave before his death.
- b. Notice that Moses is not the author at this time.
- c. Dr Rydelnic on Open Line Saturday, February 16, 2019: He believes Moses wrote Genesis one verse one through Deuteronomy chapter 32 someone else, possibly Ezra, added this poem from Moses in chapter 33 and the death of Moses in Deuteronomy 34.
- d. This was recorded after Moses' death.
- e. I like how the author calls Moses “the man of God.” Wouldn't it be nice for that to be said of you? May we all wish to be called a “man” or “woman” “of God.” The ESV Study Bible adds:
The term is most frequently used in the OT of Elijah and Elisha.

- f. This can be confusing to read because it is very poetic.
- g. Notice verse 2, the Lord did confront Moses on Sinai.
- h. Keil and Delitch: *Like the sun when it rises, and fills the whole of the broad horizon with its beams, the glory of the Lord, when He appeared, was not confined to one single point, but shone upon the people of Israel from Sinai, and Seir, and the mountains of Paran, as they came from the west to Sinai. The Lord appeared to the people from the summit of Sinai, as they lay encamped at the foot of the mountain. This appearance rose like a streaming light from Seir, and shone at the same time from the mountains of Paran. Seir is the mountain land of the Edomites to the east of Sinai; and the mountains of Paran are in all probability not the mountains of et-Tih, which form the southern boundary of the desert of Paran, but rather the mountains of the Azazimeh, which ascend to a great height above Kadesh, and form the boundary wall of Canaan towards the south. The glory of the Lord, who appeared upon Sinai, sent its beams even to the eastern and northern extremities of the desert. This manifestation of God formed the basis for all subsequent manifestations of the omnipotence and grace of the Lord for the salvation of His people.*¹
- i. We see other locations here.
- j. The ESV Study Bible shares: *There is no mention of Simeon in the list of tribes, perhaps because the tribe was going to be dispersed (Gen. 49:7) and absorbed by Judah. The blessings are bracketed by statements praising God's uniqueness (Deut. 33:1-5, 26-29).*
- k. The Moody Bible Commentary shares: *The structural constraint of keeping the listing of tribes at 12 meant that one of the tribes would be left out. In this passage Levi is included and Simeon is left out. Why Simeon was left out is not clear. Later on in Joshua's day the tribal allotment of Simeon was totally included in the territory of Judah (Jos 19:1-9) and eventually was absorbed into the tribe of Judah. So the lack of mention of Simeon in Dt 33 may be a foreshadowing of decline for that tribe.*²
- l. The IVP BBC OT gives Geographical Information: *Seir is generally considered the mountainous central region of Edom (elevations generally over 5,000 feet) between Wadi al-Ghuwayr on the north and Ras en-Naqb on the south.*
- m. *Mount Paran is considered by most a poetic variation for Mount Sinai/Horeb.*³
- n. Verse 3 acknowledges the Lord's love for the people.
- o. Verse 4 recognizes the giving of the law.
- p. The Moody Bible Commentary adds: *These last two chapters of Deuteronomy present an interesting portrayal of Moses. He pronounced a blessing on the tribes similar to what a priest would do (33:1), he was called king in Jeshurun (33:5; cf. 32:15) because he exercised royal-like power over Israel, and the next chapter states that no prophet had risen in Israel like Moses (34:10). The NASB capitalizes the pronoun "He" in v. 5, signaling that the translators of that version take the pronoun to refer to God and not to Moses. It is better to take the pronoun as a*

¹ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, [Commentary on the Old Testament](#), vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 1007–1008.

² The Moody Bible Commentary (Kindle Locations 11997-12000). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

³ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament](#), electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 33:2.

reference to Moses since he is the closest antecedent (v. 4). The phrase in v. 26 “God of Jeshurun” would appear to rule out that God is one and the same with Jeshurun. **So embodied in the person of Moses were the offices of priest, king, and prophet, that Moses was a pattern of the coming Messiah.**⁴

- q. Verse 5: Jeshurun would be referring to Israel; the NET Bible shares: *Jeshurun is a term of affection referring to Israel, derived from the Hebrew verb יָשַׁר (yashar, “be upright”).*⁵

II. Verse 6: blessing on Reuben

*“May Reuben live and not die,
Nor his men be few.”*

- a. We can tell the blessings begin in verse 6.
- b. This is an obvious blessing.
- c. These blessings were very important in that day and age.
- d. *The ESV Study Bible points out: Reuben was the eldest son of Jacob, and hence is listed first (as in [Gen. 49:3](#)).*
- e. This is a prayer that his numbers not dwindle.

III. Verse 7: blessing on Judah

*And this regarding Judah; so he said,
“Hear, O Lord, the voice of Judah,
And bring him to his people.
With his hands he contended for them,
And may You be a help against his adversaries.”*

- a. Judah is to be a help against adversaries.
- b. The Moody Bible Commentary points out that Judah was the prominent tribe and the first to set out when the nation moved, so this is a prayer for God’s protection.
- c. Judah would later be the tribe that David came from and eventually the Messiah.

IV. Verses 8-11: blessings on Levi

⁸*Of Levi he said,
“Let Your Thummim and Your Urim belong to Your godly man,
Whom You proved at Massah,
With whom You contended at the waters of Meribah;
⁹Who said of his father and his mother,
‘I did not consider them’;*

⁴ The Moody Bible Commentary (Kindle Locations 12003-12008). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

⁵ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Dt 33:5.

And he did not acknowledge his brothers,
Nor did he regard his own sons,
For they observed Your word,
And kept Your covenant.
¹⁰ “They shall teach Your ordinances to Jacob,
And Your law to Israel.

They shall put incense before You,
And whole burnt offerings on Your altar.

¹¹ “O Lord, bless his substance,
And accept the work of his hands;
Shatter the loins of those who rise up against him,
And those who hate him, so that they will not rise again.”

- a. The Urim and Thummim were a type of Dice that were used in order to know the Lord’s will. So here he asks they these dice belong to a godly man. That is very important.
- b. The NET Bible shares: *These terms, whose meaning is uncertain, refer to sacred stones carried in a pouch on the breastplate of the high priest and examined on occasion as a means of ascertaining God’s will or direction. See Exod 28:30; Lev 8:8; Num 27:21; 1 Sam 28:6.*⁶
- c. The Moody Bible Commentary shares: *The word Urim means “lights” and provides a clue as to how these precious stones might have functioned. They may have supernaturally glowed when used as God intended. In a time before the completed canon God implemented such a device to reveal His clear will. Since we now have the full revelation of God’s Word there is no need for believers to possess such a device.*⁷
- d. The NET Bible makes the case that the reference of “godly man” is to Moses.
- e. Moses was of the tribe of Levi.
- f. In context it makes sense that this is referring to Moses.
- g. These verses talk about their contention at Massah: Ex 17:7; Num 20:13, 24; Deut 6:16⁸
- h. Keil and Delitch share: *The proving at Massah refers to the murmuring of the people on account of the want of water at Rephidim (Ex. 17:1–7, as in Deut. 6:16 and 9:22), from which the place received the name of Massah and Jeribah; the striving at the water of strife, to the rebellion of the people against Moses and Aaron on account of the want of water at Kadesh (Num. 20:1–13). At both places it was primarily the people who strove with Moses and Aaron, and thereby tempted God.*⁹
- i. Verse 9 is believed to be about the Levites; the NET Bible shares: *This statement no doubt alludes to the Levites’ destruction of their own fellow tribesmen following the golden calf incident (Exod 32:25–29).*¹⁰
- j. Verse 10 is referring to the Levites as the priestly tribe. See Deut 31:9-13
- k. Verse 11 is a blessing.

⁶ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Dt 33:8.

⁷ The Moody Bible Commentary (Kindle Location 12021). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

⁸ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

⁹ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, [Commentary on the Old Testament](#), vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 1011.

¹⁰ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Dt 33:9.

- I. The ESV Study Bible shares: *The two main roles of the priestly tribe of Levi were to teach the law ([31:11](#)) and to oversee the sacrificial system.*

V. Verse 12: blessings on Benjamin

¹² *Of Benjamin he said,*

“May the beloved of the Lord dwell in security by Him,

Who shields him all the day,

And he dwells between His shoulders.”

- a. Benjamin was the tribe that Saul would come out of, the first king of Israel.
- b. We have a Picture of the safety of a child sitting on his or her father’s shoulders
- c. Think of the safety and security.
- d. The NET Bible points out: *This suggests the scene in John 13:23 with Jesus and the Beloved Disciple.*¹¹

VI. Verses 13-17: blessings on Joseph

¹³ *Of Joseph he said,*

“Blessed of the Lord be his land,

With the choice things of heaven, with the dew,

And from the deep lying beneath,

¹⁴ *And with the choice yield of the sun,*

And with the choice produce of the months.

¹⁵ *“And with the best things of the ancient mountains,*

And with the choice things of the everlasting hills,

¹⁶ *And with the choice things of the earth and its fullness,*

And the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush.

Let it come to the head of Joseph,

And to the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers.

¹⁷ *“As the firstborn of his ox, majesty is his,*

And his horns are the horns of the wild ox;

With them he will push the peoples,

All at once, to the ends of the earth.

And those are the ten thousands of Ephraim,

And those are the thousands of Manasseh.”

- a. The Moody Bible Commentary shares: *Joseph (v. 13), representative of both Ephraim and Manasseh, received the longest blessing of all the tribes. They were to receive great material prosperity by receiving the choicest of goods as well as military strength*

¹¹ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Dt 33:12.

(represented by the ox). Even though Manasseh was the oldest son, Ephraim is credited with more numbers (ten thousands), as Jacob foretold (Gn 48:17-20).¹²

- b. There is a blessing on the land.
- c. The ESV Study Bible points out: *Joseph here includes the two tribes of Manasseh and Ephraim, the sons of Joseph (see v. 17).*
- d. Verses 16 continues with a blessing on the harvest. The Net Bible points out: *The expression “him who resided in the bush” is frequently understood as a reference to the appearance of the Lord to Moses at Sinai from a burning bush.*¹³
- e. Also about verse 16, the NET Bible shares: *This apparently refers to Joseph’s special status among his brothers as a result of his being chosen by God to save the family from the famine and to lead Egypt.*¹⁴
- f. Keil and Delitch: *The “first-born of his (Joseph’s) oxen” is not Joshua (Rabb., Schultz); still less is it Joseph, in which case the pronoun his ox would be quite out of place; nor is it King Jeroboam II. It is rather Ephraim, whom the patriarch Jacob raised into the position of the first-born of Joseph (Gen. 48:4ff.). All the sons of Joseph resembled oxen, but Ephraim was the most powerful of them all. He was endowed with majesty; his horns, the strong weapon of oxen, in which all their strength is concentrated, were not the horns of common oxen, but horns of the wild buffalo (reem, Num. 23:22), that strong indomitable beast (cf. Job. 39:9ff.; Ps. 22:22). With them he would thrust down nations, the ends of the earth, i.e., the most distant nations (vid., Ps. 2:8; 7:9; 22:28).*¹⁵
- g. Verse 17 is a comparison of Joseph to the horns, which is the strength, of an ox.
- h. The NET Bible shares: *Ephraim and Manasseh were the sons of Joseph who became founders of the two tribes into which Joseph’s descendants were split (Gen 48:19–20). Jacob’s blessing granted favored status to Ephraim; this is probably why Ephraim is viewed here as more numerous than Manasseh.*¹⁶

VII. Verses 18-19: blessings on Issachar and Zebulun

¹⁸ *Of Zebulun he said,*

“Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going forth,

And, Issachar, in your tents.

¹⁹ *“They will call peoples to the mountain;*

There they will offer righteous sacrifices;

For they will draw out the abundance of the seas,

And the hidden treasures of the sand.”

- a. It seems as though Issachar will stay close by and Zebulun will come and go.
- b. They will find treasures.

¹² The Moody Bible Commentary (Kindle Locations 12030-12033). Moody Publishers. Kindle Edition.

¹³ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Dt 33:16.

¹⁴ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Dt 33:16.

¹⁵ Carl Friedrich Keil and Franz Delitzsch, [Commentary on the Old Testament](#), vol. 1 (Peabody, MA: Hendrickson, 1996), 1014.

¹⁶ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Dt 33:17.

Dr Constable: *Zebulun and Issachar* (vv. 18–19) would become special channels of blessing to the other nations through their commercial wealth.

“While this cannot be documented as having taken place in biblical times, the promise has found startling fulfillment in the modern state of Israel, whose major port is Haifa, located in the area of ancient Zebulun.”¹⁷

c. The June 25, 2019 Today in the Word shares the following:

Hidden somewhere in the Rocky Mountains is the Fenn Treasure. Multi-millionaire Forrest Fenn hid more than one million dollars of gold and jewels, then in 2010 published a poem with nine clues for treasure hunters. He wanted to encourage people during a recession and “give hope to those who had a sense of adventure and were willing to go searching.” Since then, Fenn has given other clues on his website. Thousands have searched for Fenn’s treasure, but so far without success.

*Hidden treasure captures our imagination! Somehow the fact that it is hidden makes it more attractive. Anyone might find it! You may even have already thought about Googling “Fenn’s Treasure” to see what the clues are. That’s why phrases such as “treasures hidden in the sand” in today’s reading capture our attention (v. 19). These two verses are Moses’ blessing for the tribes of Zebulun and Issachar, part of a larger passage in which he blesses each of the twelve tribes prior to his death. **Zebulun and Issachar were the two youngest sons of Leah. After the Israelites entered the Promised Land, these two smaller tribes settled in the north as neighbors.***

The description of “abundance of the seas” and “treasures hidden in the sand” refers to wealth or resources gained from the ocean (see also Jacob’s blessing in Genesis 49:13). Zebulun and Issachar were not coastal tribes, but they were located within ten miles of the Mediterranean Sea, so coastal trade routes ran through their territory. In other words, they would profit from the import-export business and maritime trade.

*If treasures can be hidden, they can also be found, but it requires effort and perseverance. After all, treasure quests aren’t supposed to be easy! May we have the same attitude to the treasures of Scripture.*¹⁸

VIII. Verses 20-21: blessings on Gad

²⁰ *Of Gad he said,*

“Blessed is the one who enlarges Gad;

He lies down as a lion,

And tears the arm, also the crown of the head.

²¹ *“Then he provided the first part for himself,*

For there the ruler’s portion was reserved;

And he came with the leaders of the people;

He executed the justice of the Lord,

And His ordinances with Israel.”

a. Verse 20 seems to speak of Gad being enlarged.

¹⁷ Tom Constable, [Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), Dt 33:6.

¹⁸ <https://www.todayintheword.org/issues/2019/june/devotions/june-02/>

- b. Verse 21: He provided the first part for himself—Numbers 32:1-5 talks of how they settle the land ideal for cattle. He brought about justice.

IX. Verse 22: blessings on Dan

²² *Of Dan he said,*

“Dan is a lion’s whelp,

That leaps forth from Bashan.”

- a. The NET Bible shares: *This may refer to Dan’s conquest of Laish, a region just to the west of Bashan (Judg 18:27–28).*¹⁹
- b. The IVP BBC OT shares: *The region of Bashan is centered in the area of the upper Yarmuk River, east of the Sea of Galilee. Its northern border is Mount Hermon. Dan’s territory was originally in the south by the Philistine coast, but the Danites moved north to the region of the city called Dan north of the Sea of Galilee and contiguous to Bashan.*²⁰

X. Verse 23: blessings on Naphtali

²³ *Of Naphtali he said,*

“O Naphtali, satisfied with favor,

And full of the blessing of the Lord,

Take possession of the sea and the south.”

- a. The ESV Study Bible shares: *Naphtali’s land bordered the Sea of Galilee.*
- b. So this blessing is about the land they will possess.

Dr. Constable, Dan (v. 22) settled in an area inhabited by lions (Judg. 14:5) and migrated to northern Israel to an area that abounded in lions (Judg. 18).³⁵⁵ The people of the tribe were also similar to lions in their aggressiveness and strength. Naphtali (v. 23) would enjoy the benefits of a sea coast, the Sea of Chinnereth, and a comfortable area in relation to that body of water.

“. . . but by far the most abundant blessing was the fact that the Messiah spent most of his life and exercised much of his ministry there or in nearby Zebulun (cf. Matt 4:12–17). One can scarcely imagine greater evidence of divine favor.”²¹

XI. Verses 24-25: blessings on Asher

²⁴ *Of Asher he said,*

¹⁹ Biblical Studies Press, [The NET Bible First Edition Notes](#) (Biblical Studies Press, 2006), Dt 33:22.

²⁰ Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament](#), electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 33:22.

³⁵⁵ 355. Keil and Delitzsch, 3:510.

²¹ Tom Constable, [Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), Dt 33:6.

*“More blessed than sons is Asher;
May he be favored by his brothers,
And may he dip his foot in oil.*

²⁵ *“Your locks will be iron and bronze,
And according to your days, so will your leisurely walk be.*

- a. Asher is told they will be more blessed than sons.
- b. This is powerful.
- c. “dip his foot in oil”: oil is always a good thing.
- d. Locks being “iron” and “bronze” have to do with strength.
- e. Their walk will be leisure and so will their days be.
- f. The IVP BBC OT shares: *Washing feet was a constant need and an act of hospitality in the dusty terrain. Only the wealthy and genteel, however, would regularly make use of (olive) oil for the washing. Compare John 12:3. This metaphor speaks of prosperity.*²²

XII. Verses 26-29: general praise and blessings

²⁶ *“There is none like the God of Jeshurun,
Who rides the heavens to your help,
And through the skies in His majesty.*

²⁷ *“The eternal God is a dwelling place,
And underneath are the everlasting arms;
And He drove out the enemy from before you,
And said, ‘Destroy!’*

²⁸ *“So Israel dwells in security,
The fountain of Jacob secluded,
In a land of grain and new wine;
His heavens also drop down dew.*

²⁹ *“Blessed are you, O Israel;
Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord,
Who is the shield of your help
And the sword of your majesty!
So your enemies will cringe before you,
And you will tread upon their high places.”*

- a. Jeshurun is used of Israel once again.
- b. Verse 26 is every worshipful.
- c. Verse 27 is about the Lord’s eternity.
- d. The Lord drove out the enemy.
- e. Verse 28 is a recognition that Israel dwell securely, but they dwell securely because of the Lord. “grain” and “new wine” and “dew” are evidence of blessings.
- f. Verse 29 is more about the blessings upon Israel.
- g. No one is like Israel.
- h. The Lord is their shield.

²² Victor Harold Matthews, Mark W. Chavalas, and John H. Walton, [The IVP Bible Background Commentary: Old Testament](#), electronic ed. (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity Press, 2000), Dt 33:24.

- i. The Lord is their sword.
- j. Shield and sword shows defensive and offensive protection.
- k. Ps 90 is a cross reference
- l. Also: Gen 15:1; Ps 33:20; 115:9–11²³ are about the Lord as a shield.
- m. Dr Constable: *“As we might expect, here at the end of the book, Moses pictures Israel’s dwelling in the land as a reversal of the events of the early chapters of Genesis, when Adam and Eve were cast out of the Garden.”*³⁵⁸ *The Lord has fulfilled these predictions in part, but He will fulfill them completely in the future. This will occur when Israel repents and He brings her back into her land (i.e., during the Millennium).*²⁴

²³ [New American Standard Bible: 1995 Update](#) (La Habra, CA: The Lockman Foundation, 1995).

³⁵⁸ 358. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch . . .*, p. 478.

²⁴ Tom Constable, [Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible](#) (Galaxie Software, 2003), Dt 33:26.