

Deuteronomy

Lesson 19

Chapter 33

As begin this last lesson in the book of Deuteronomy, Moses will give his departing blessings to the tribes in the camp. Each tribe is named after a descendant of Jacob. It will be helpful if we review the names of Jacob's sons and give some background before we move into the remaining Scriptures.

The Twelve Sons of Jacob

Jacob had eleven sons born in Haran and one son born in Ramah (Bethlehem). The birth order of the twelve sons is as follows: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Joseph, and Benjamin. Each was the father of a tribe of descendants included in the Nation of Israel.

The Thirteen Tribe Names of Israel

The list of the twelve tribes of Israel should have been simply the names of the twelve sons listed above, but they are not. When studying Leviticus and Deuteronomy, thirteen names are mentioned regularly. The thirteen tribe names of Israel are Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. Each was the father of a tribe of descendants included in the Nation of Israel. Why thirteen tribes?

Joseph and His Two Sons

Among the thirteen tribal names, Joseph's name is missing. His name is replaced with the names of his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. On his death bed in Egypt, Jacob blessed the two sons of Joseph and promised Joseph a double blessing in the Promised Land. In Genesis 48:5, on his death bed, Jacob claims Ephraim and Manasseh as his own. *"Now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are."* Reuben and Simeon were the first two sons born to Jacob. Joseph had more sons besides these two, but Jacob did not claim them. His instruction to Joseph concerning those sons is found in Genesis 48:6. *"But your offspring that have been born after them shall be yours; they shall be called by the names of their brothers in their inheritance."* In other words, all sons born to Joseph after Ephraim and Manasseh will be included with the tribes of Ephraim or Manasseh. After blessing the two sons, Jacob gives the double blessing in Genesis 48:21-22. *"Then Israel (Jacob) said to Joseph, 'Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you, and bring you back to the land of your fathers.' ²² I give you one portion more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow."* Thus, Joseph received a double blessing.

The Twelve Tribes to Take Land in the Promised Land

Now we will look at the twelve tribes that will take land in the Promised Land. They are Reuben, Simeon, Judah, Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulun, Ephraim, Manasseh, and Benjamin. Notice that the tribes of Levi and Joseph are not mentioned. The tribe of Levi became the priests and did not receive an inheritance of land in the Promised Land. They lived on donated land and in donated houses in forty-eight towns throughout the Promised Land. Four towns were located in each tribal area. As for Joseph, his two portions in the Promised Land were named after his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. With that as the background, we will now study Moses' departing blessings to the tribes of the Nation of Israel.

XII. Summary of Moses' Departing Blessings (33:1)

We come to the summary of Moses' departing blessings in chapter 33, verse 1. *"Now this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the sons of Israel before his death. ² He said."* (33:1).

Obviously, from the verse ending with the words *"He said,"* Moses did not write these words. Someone else recorded these words and added them to the text of this book. We believe that the words were recorded by Joshua.

A. A Word for the LORD (33:2-4)

1. His Presence (33:2)

Moses begins the blessing by giving the word for the LORD and His presence. Verse 2. *"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."* (33:2:).

When Moses says, *"The LORD came from Sinai,"* it references his first encounter with the LORD at the burning bush on that mount. But it is also a reference to the majesty and glory that the Nation of Israel experienced with the LORD when Moses led them back with him to Mount Sinai. That same majesty and glory *"dawned on them from Seir."* Seir is the name of the mountain range that runs on the east side of the Dead Sea down to the Sea of Aqaba and on the east side of the Jordan River. *"He shone forth from Mount Paran"* is the mountain range on the west side of the Jordan River and runs down to the Sea of Aqaba. In between the two is the Arabah Valley where the Jordan River runs, or rather, ran before the formation of the Dead Sea the year before Isaac's birth with the destruction of Sodom and Gomorrah.

"He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones" is Moses' way of saying the LORD came from the host of heavenly beings to reside on earth with His chosen people. *"At His right hand there was flashing lightning for them"* is Moses explaining the purpose of the LORD's regular light show on Mount Sinai. It was to call the attention to the LORD when trouble was in the camp below because of His love for the people He had called out of Egypt to be His own.

2. His Love (33:3)

Moses speaks of the love of the LORD for the people. It is His love stated in verse 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."* (33:3).

The chosen people of Israel were to be holy even as the LORD is holy. In that sense, the chosen are the holy ones in the hand of the LORD. They are set apart, different from all the rest of the people in the world. At Mount Sinai, they were a captured audience for the LORD, and no one was excused from hearing the commands of the LORD. He made sure of that with the leadership of Moses.

3. His King (33:4)

With the leadership of Moses, he proclaims the LORD as His King in verse 4. *"Moses charged us with a law, A possession for the assembly of Jacob. ⁷ 'And He was king in Jeshurun, When the heads of the people were gathered, The tribes of Israel together.'"* (33:4).

The LORD gave the law to Moses. The law belonged to the nation. As the law Giver, the LORD was the King of Israel. Here we see the word *"Jeshurun"* again. It means the LORD is the King of the *"supremely happy or prosperous"* people of Israel. Why should they not be happy? The LORD had provided for all their needs in every way.

B. A Word for the Tribes (33:6-25)

1. Reuben (33:6)

Moses then turns with a word for the tribes. It is pure prophecy. But prophecy spoken is not always positive as we will see as Moses begins with the tribe of the oldest son of Jacob – Reuben. Verse 6. *"May Reuben live and not die, Nor his men be few."* (33:6).

On the surface, this looks like a positive blessing; however, the rest of the Scripture proves that it is not. At the first census of Reuben taken after leaving Israel, there were 46,500 men twenty years old and upward (Numbers 1:21). In the second census at the end of the forty years, there were only 43,730 men (Numbers 26). The nation was shrinking. When Jacob made his final states to his sons before he died in Egypt, he said the following Reuben in Genesis 49:3–4. *“Reuben, you are my firstborn; My might and the beginning of my strength, Preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.”*⁴ *“Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence, Because you went up to your father’s bed; Then you defiled it—he went up to my couch.”* (Genesis 49:3–4). The tribe would never be the leading tribe as expected for the firstborn son of a family.

Upon taking the Promised Land, Reuben asked for the portion of land on the east side of the Jordan River, which had been controlled by King Sihon the Amorite, and Moses agreed. The land reached from the Arnon River up to the border with Gad (Numbers 32:34). Subsequently, Reuben’s tribe diminished as idolatry increased due to the influence of the cousin neighbors, the Moabites, to the south. They played the harlot with other gods and suffered at the hand of an invasion by Hazael (2 Kings 10:32ff). Later, Tiglath Pileser, also known as Pul, destroyed most of the people and carried a remnant away to exile in Assyria. *“May Reuben live and not die, Nor his men be few”* came true. Reubenites died on their land, and those who were left in exile became few.

2. Judah (33:7)

Moses addresses the tribe of the fourth son of Jacob next. He passes over the second and third sons, whose names are Simeon and Levi. We will address Simeon and Levi later. For now, we look at Judah. Verse 7. *“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.’”* (33:7).

About Judah, Jacob said from his death bed the following found in Genesis 49:8-14. *“Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father’s sons shall bow down to you.”*⁹ *“Judah is a lion’s whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, And as a lion, who dares rouse him up?”*¹⁰ *“The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”*¹¹ *“He ties his foal to the vine, And his donkey’s colt to the choice vine; He washes his garments in wine, And his robes in the blood of grapes.”*¹² *“His eyes are dull from wine, And his teeth white from milk.”* (Genesis 49:8–12).

For Jacob, Judah is bound for royalty as indicated by the word *“scepter.”* At Mount Sinai, when the LORD directed Moses to order the camp, Judah was placed in the middle on the east side of the Tabernacle complex. As the camp moved from place to place, Judah was always the lead tribe, the first to meet the enemies in battle. Of course, Judah did not meet the enemies alone. The LORD was in front of him, fighting for him before he arrived in battle. Judah became the head of Israel when David became king. All of the kings were to be of Judah’s line, but that changed when ten tribes rebelled against King Rehoboam and divided the kingdom. Nevertheless, the line of Judah continued, and from it came the Savior, our LORD Jesus.

3. Levi (33:8-11)

Moses had much to say about Levi, Jacob’s third son. Verse 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;’*⁹ *Who said of his father and his mother, ‘I did not consider them’; 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.”* (33:8-11).

The *“Thummin and ... Urim”* was a breastplate worn by the high priest that contained twelve stones which the LORD used in some way to communicate with the priests. We do not know how that worked. We must leave that there without speculation.

Moses' reference to Massah and Meribah is the second time in this book. The commentary is found in Deuteronomy 6:16-19 and Exodus 17:2-7. The nation was about three months out of Egypt and had arrived on the west side of Mount Sinai at a place they called Rephidim, which means *resting place*. The word "Massah" means *tested or tried*. Moses also called the place "Meribah." It means *contention*. Moses gave the same place both names. It was a place of testing God and being contentious with God because they were thirsty for water. It was there that Moses struck the rock.

Moses' reference to *"he did not acknowledge his brothers, Nor did he regard his own sons"* goes back to the ordination of Aaron and his sons. The ordination lasted eight days. On the eighth day, two of Aaron's newly ordained sons offered strange fire on the Altar of Incense in the Tabernacle. The LORD struck them dead. Moses told Aaron and the other two sons not to flinch and let relatives carry the dead sons to their graves. Aaron and the living sons obeyed and continued with their duties as priests.

Furthermore, the commandment and the laws for life in the nation were given to the Levites, specifically the Levitical family of the Kohaths, to teach the nation and keep them in obedience to the LORD. They were the ones responsible for teaching the commands, statutes, and ordinances to the nation. Those who obey the teaching of the Levites will rise. Those who disobey will fall.

4. Benjamin (33:12)

Moses speaks to Benjamin in verse 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.'" (33:12).*

The thought is that of a beloved child, protected by his father and riding on his shoulders. A child risen above all others so he can see and be carried along. For Moses, this blessing is a picture of Jacob's relationship with his youngest son, Benjamin. Jacob protected Benjamin as long as he could. He did not send him to Egypt to buy supplies with his other ten sons. He did not want to send him on the second trip when Joseph, still disguised to the ten, requested him. Jacob had lost Benjamin's mother at his birth. He had lost Joseph with only the bloody coat of many colors to show his death. He could not dare allow Benjamin far from his sight.

In the Promised Land, Benjamin's tribal allotment of land was north of Judah's. Although Mount Zion, where the original city of Jerusalem stood, was in the land of Judah, Mount Moriah, where the Temple will be built, was in the land of Benjamin, perched on the shoulder of Judah.

5. Joseph (33:13-17a)

Moses then turns to Benjamin's older full-blood brother – Joseph. Verse 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.'" (33:13-17a).*

Moses' blessing seems to be filled with nothing but goodness – the best of the best of everything. The blessing is so similar to the blessing that Jacob, on his death bed, gave to Joseph in Genesis 49:22-26. It is worth reading now to catch a few more insights.

"Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a spring; Its branches run over a wall. ²³ 'The archers bitterly attacked him, And shot at him and harassed him; ²⁴ But his bow remained firm, And his arms were agile, From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), ²⁵ From the God of your father who helps you, And by the Almighty who blesses you With blessings of heaven above, Blessings of the deep that lies beneath, Blessings of the breasts and of the womb. ²⁶ 'The blessings of your father Have surpassed the blessings of my ancestors Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills; May they be on the head of Joseph, And on the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers.'" (Genesis 49:22–26).

What we needed to see in this passage are the lines, *“The archers bitterly attacked him, and shot at him and harassed him;²⁴ But his bow remained firm, and his arms were agile, From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob.”*

Joseph’s son, Manasseh, took the land on the east side of the Jordan River, closest to the Tigris and Euphrates Rivers, next to the Assyrian Empire to the northeast, and Aram to the North. The tribe of Manasseh will bear the brunt of foreign assaults for hundreds of years. Yet, as Jacob foretells, *“... his arms were agile, From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob.”*

a) Ephraim (33:17b).

But Joseph will not have land named after him. Instead, his two portions of the Promised Land will be recorded in the names of his two sons. The first mentioned in this blessing is Ephraim in verse 17b. *“And those are the ten thousands of Ephraim.”* (33:17b).

All Moses says about Ephraim is the number of soldiers in its ranks – *“the ten thousands.”* Ephraim was Joseph’s second-born, yet Jacob purposefully blessed him as if he was the first. In Genesis 48:17-19, we find the story.

“When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on Ephraim’s head, it displeased him, and he grasped his father’s hand to remove it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head.¹⁸ Joseph said to his father, ‘Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn. Place your right hand on his head.’¹⁹ But his father refused and said, ‘I know, my son, I know; he also will become a people, and he also will be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.’” (Genesis 48:17–19).

The tribal area of Ephraim sat north of Benjamin. It stretched about fifty-five miles by seventy miles. It was surrounded by all the rest of the tribal areas and relatively secure. Other tribes would face all enemies before Ephraim would. West Manasseh sat to its north.

When the Nation of Israel was divided into two kingdoms during the reign of Rehoboam, Jeroboam, the king of the Northern Kingdom, placed his capital in the tribal area of Ephraim to fulfill this prophecy. *“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.’”*

b) Manasseh (33:17c)

Moses then speaks to Manasseh, Joseph’s firstborn in verse 17c. *“And those are the thousands of Manasseh.”* (33:17c). Upon the taking of the Promised Land, Ephraim’s number will be 32,500 men, twenty years and upward. Manasseh’s men will be 52,700 men, twenty years and upward. Manasseh will receive nearly twice as much land as his brother Ephraim upon the division to each family. It makes it hard to justify Moses’ words at first. However, with Manasseh on the forefront of the wall against Assyria’s invaders, Manasseh will fall captured long before the fall of Ephraim in 722 BC. His numbers will dwindle to thousands while Ephraim’s will remain in the ten thousands.

6. Zebulun (33:18a)

Moses looks to Zebulun in verse 18a. *“Of Zebulun he said, ‘Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going forth.’”* (33:18a).

The tribe of Zebulun will always follow Judah in the campaign to take the Promised Land. The tribe was excellent in warfare and was willing to risk their lives for victory (Judges 5:18). In the Chronicles, we hear, *“Of Zebulun, there were 50,000 who went out in the army, who could draw up in battle formation with all kinds of weapons of war and helped David with an undivided heart.”* (1 Chronicles 12:33). His land will run toward the sea but not reach the sea.

7. Issachar (33:18b-19)

In verse 18b, Moses speaks to Issachar. *“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.’”* (33:18b-19).

Issachar was a more peaceful nation with wisdom in war. In Chronicles, we hear, *“Of the sons of Issachar, men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do, their chiefs were two hundred; and all their kinsmen were at their command.”* (1 Chronicles 12:32).

Issachar’s tribal land will be southwest of the Sea of Galilee, and it will border on the Jordan River as it departs the Sea of Galilee. It owns the sandy areas of the Arabah that banks the Jordan River. It borders to the northwest with the Valley of Jezreel, where the most battles have been fought in man’s history. With battles, buried relics are left to claim from the sands.

8. Gad (33:20-21)

Gad comes next in verse 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.’”* (33:20-21).

Gad’s land was located on the east side of the Jordan River. It was once owned by the dreaded Amorite King Sihon. The landmass was large, but it became larger because her land sat on the edge of the desert sands, and she could stretch like the lion and conquer the small villages that made their homes in the sandy desert to the east. *“The first part for himself”* refers to the land being gifted to the tribe before the main portion of the Promised Land was taken after the death of Moses.

9. Dan (33:22)

Moses addresses Dan in verse 22. *“Of Dan he said, ‘Dan is a lion’s whelp, That leaps forth from Bashan.’”* (33:22).

Dan’s allotment of land will be west of Ephraim on the coast of the Great Sea (Mediterranean). But she will not stay there. Later, Dan will populate the area of Laish in the Jordan Valley south of Mount Hermon, north of the Sea of Galilee, overlooking Bashan. But their camps were located in the heights where they could look down on the coming enemies to pounce like a young lion. Dan has moved his boundaries, and that breaks the commands of the LORD.

10. Naphtali (33:23)

To the tribe of Naphtali, Moses speaks in verse 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.’”* (33:23).

The land of Naphtali was extremely fertile, especially the areas that bordered the entirety of the western coast of the Sea of Galilee and the west bank of the Jordan River.

11. Asher (33:24-25)

Moses ends with the blessing to Asher in verse 24. *“Of Asher he said, ‘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.’”* (33:24-25).

Of all the tribes, the least is known about Asher. Jacob said in Genesis 49:20, *“As for Asher, his food shall be rich, and he will yield royal dainties.”* Both blessings seem to have the same thoughts. What we do know about Asher is this her land was the furthest in the northwest portion of the Promised Land and bordered on the west by the Great Sea (Mediterranean). Its northern border touched the Phoenician state that held both Tyre and Sidon. At the time of this blessing, Sidon was the principal trading port on the Great Sea, and was situated on the major trade route that led from Sidon’s seaport to the Euphrates River and down into Babylon, Mede, and Persia. Ships sailed eastward from the coast of Hispania to Sidon and offloaded. Ships from Egypt sailed up to Sidon and offloaded. Caravans from the Babylonian area and beyond would bring their goods to Sidon and offload. Sidon was the marketplace of the world. The unloaded ships and the caravans would then

load with goods that they could only purchase in Sidon and head back to the homes where the whole process would start again. Later, Sidonites would break away from the home town and establish a new and better market port just twenty miles south and call it Tyre. With the market just miles from the tribal area of Asher, Asher flourished with the best the world had to offer.

12. Simeon

Moses did not bless the tribe of Simeon. No one knows the reason why and we must leave it at that.

C. A Word for God (33:26-28)

1. God of Jeshurun (33:26)

After blessing the tribes, Moses turned again to give a word for God, the God of Jeshurun, in verse 26. *“There is none like the God of Jeshurun, Who rides the heavens to your help, And through the skies in His majesty.”* (33:26).

Moses uses the word “Jeshurun” for the *supremely satisfied* Nation of Israel. By that, Moses is saying that God will supply all her needs. He is there to help in all His majestic glory. Moses and all Israel had seen the LORD in the fire on Mount Sinai, the pillar of cloud by day, the pillar of fire by night, and the radiance of the Shekinah Glory of the LORD hovering over the Mercy Seat above the Ark of the Covenant. But we must wonder if the two ever saw the LORD coming from the heavens in the skies the way Job, Ezekiel, and John saw Him riding the heavens and through the skies in His majestic glory on a throne with wheels in the middle of the wheels and four headed creatures at each wheel as His throne where He sat above a raging fire. We do not know. However, because of Job, Ezekiel and John, we know Moses's words are absolutely true.

2. God a Dwelling Place (33:27-28)

But the LORD is more than just a God who rides the heavens to help and the skies in majesty; He is the God, a dwelling place. Verse 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.”* (33:27-28).

The words “dwelling place” means *a place to live*. God is the place that all of the Nation of Israel should live. Where? Underneath His everlasting arms! What place could be better than that? Living under the LORD's arms means He is the protector from all enemies, He is the security and provides the water of the nation's fountain, the food and the drink for man and beast, and glory and majesty of heaven among the clans. Dwelling with the LORD means living in a daily relationship with Him. That is what is important to the LORD, a relationship with Him and no other gods.

D. A Word for Israel (33:29)

1. Saved by the LORD (33:29a)

Moses speaks a word for Israel. She is saved by the LORD. Verse 29a. *“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.”* (33:29a).

To “*cringe*” means to *bend down or crouch in fear*. That is what all the world nations will do when they approach Israel as long as Israel dwells under His arms and allows Him to be her shield of help and sword of majesty.

2. Led by the LORD (33:29b)

If Israel will dwell with the LORD, she will be led by the LORD. Verse 29b. *“And you will tread upon their high places.”* (33:29b).

What are these “*high places*” that the LORD will lead Israel to tread? Every time the words “*high places*” are used in the Bible, they mean *sites of worship*, whether sanctioned by the LORD or not. When Israel moves to take the Promised Land, the LORD's command is to destroy all the “*high place*” of the Canaanite pagan worship. The word “*tread*” means *to step on or trample*. Trample means

to beat down. That is the command of the LORD for Israel when they take the Promised Land. She is to beat down all the pagan sites of worship. The last words of Moses have been recorded. It is time for Moses to die.

Chapter 34

XIII. The Summary of the Death of Moses (34:1b-8)

A. Moses' Death (34:1a-7)

1. Where Moses Went (34:1a)

We believe that Joshua completed the Book of Deuteronomy starting with chapter 33:1, and he will record the summary of Moses's death. With Moses' death, Joshua tells us where Moses went. Chapter 34, verse 1 *"Now Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is opposite Jericho."* (34:1a).

Just east of the Plains of Moab stands a mountain called Mount Nebo. The Hebrews gave the summit or top of Mount Nebo the name *"Pisgah."* The name means *top*. The word *"opposite"* means *forward from*. The word *"forward"* in Hebrew always means *to the east* in the Old Testament. Therefore, Pisgah was east of Jericho.

2. What Moses Saw (34:1b-4)

Once atop Pisgah, Joshua tells what Moses saw in verse 1b. *"And the LORD showed him all the land, Gilead as far as Dan, ² and all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, and all the land of Judah as far as the western sea, ³ and the Negev and the plain in the valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. ⁴ Then the LORD said to him, 'This is the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there.'"* (34:1a-4).

Pisgah had to be very high to see all the way to Gilead, and the land that will become the property of Dan, Naphtali, Ephraim, Manasseh, Judah, the Great Western Sea (Mediterranean) down to the Negev and Zoar. From the Plains of Moab looking north, it is about seventy miles to look into the land of the northernmost tribes. It is one hundred and twenty miles to the northern border of the Promised Land. But Moses did not have to see all the way to the northern border, he only had to see into the northern tribe areas. Looking west to the Great Sea, it is sixty miles. Looking south to the Negev and Zoar southern is only about seventy miles. As with Moses looking to the north and only having to see into the land, Moses only had to see into the land looking south. To do that, he only needed to see about seventy miles in all directions. Mount Nebo is in current-day Jordan and stands 3,280 feet above sea level at its summit. The formula for determining distance is the square root of the altitude times 1.225. At an altitude of 3,280 feet, Moses could see on a clear day about seventy miles. It must have been a clear day!

3. Where Moses Died (34:5)

Joshua tells us where Moses died in verse 5. *"So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD."* (34:5).

Moses did not die in the Promised Land. He died in the land of Moab. Even though Moses and the Nation of Israel had already taken the east side of the Jordan River for the Promised Land inheritance of Reuben, Gad, and half the tribe of Manasseh, Moses did not die on any of that land. The camp was in the land of the tribe of Moab, and Mount Nebo was in the same land.

4. Where Moses Lay (34:6)

Joshua tells where Moses lay in verse 6. *"And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor; but no man knows his burial place to this day."* (34:6).



Valley of Beth-peor

The LORD took Moses from Mount Nebo and buried him in the valley “*opposite*,” which means east, of Beth-peor. Only the LORD knows where Moses' bones are buried in that valley, at least for the next fifteen hundred and fifty-four years. We know what happens to those bones because we have the rest of the Scripture. Those bones cannot ever be found in the valley of Beth-peor today because they are no longer there – they have risen. According to Matthew 27:52-53, the Bible says, “*The tombs were opened, and many bodies of the saints who had fallen asleep were raised; and coming out of the tombs after His resurrection they entered the holy city and appeared to many.*” Moses' bones were raised that day along with the bones of Adam, Noah, David, Daniel, Moses, and the rest of the Old Testament saints, and they walked the streets of Jerusalem before they ascended to heaven. Glory be to the LORD God. His bones are not in the valley any longer.

5. How Moses Was (34:7)

Joshua then tells us how Moses was in verse 7. “*Although Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died, his eye was not dim, nor his vigor abated.*” (34:7).

We would say it like this. Moses died at one hundred and twenty years old in the picture of health. Nothing was wrong with him. It was just time for a new leader to take the nation into the Promised Land, not because of Moses' age or health, but because of his sin. Remember, Moses struck the rock when the LORD told him to speak to the rock, which cost him the blessing of entering the Promised Land. We should pause to think about that. It is not always the big sins that do the most damage to our relationship with the LORD; it is often the little ones we do because we need something from the LORD to help someone else. All Moses needed was water for the grumbling and thirsty people. The LORD would provide but in a different way than He did at Rephidim. Moses tried to bring the water the old way; the LORD wanted the people to see the water in a new way – not with force, but with a word. Moses sinned in his desire to help the people, and it cost him his future in the Promised Land.

B. Moses' Mourning (34:8)

Joshua speaks of Moses' mourning. Verse 8. “*So the sons of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days; then the days of weeping and mourning for Moses came to an end.*” (34:8).

Just a few months before, Aaron had died, and Moses led the people in a thirty-day time of mourning (Numbers 20:29). That set the standard for mourning a national leader in Israel. When Moses died, the people mourned him for thirty days. According to the Targum of Jonathan, the thirty days of mourning ended on Nisan 8th. According to Jonathan, on the 9th of Nisan, the camp packed to make ready for the march across the Jordan. On the 10th of Nisan, the people crossed the Jordan. Joshua 4:19 confirms that date. Think of the importance of that day. It was the day of selecting the lamb for the Passover meal that will occur on the afternoon of Nisan the 14th. But along with choosing the lamb for the Passover, the nation was passing over the Jordan to the land they were hoping to travel to upon leaving Egypt. Joshua 5:11 confirms that the Passover was celebrated for the first time in the new land. The following day, Nisan 15th, the camp ate food from the new land.

Furthermore, on the 16th of Nisan, the LORD stopped providing the manna for the first time in forty years, confirmed in Joshua 5:12. Forty years before, the nation had stepped out of Egypt in the last half hour of the 15th of Nisan and walked in the full moonlight toward the Promised Land on the 16th of Nisan. The nation was on their Promised Land in the spring, in the land flowing with milk and honey. The manna was no longer needed.

XIV. The Conclusion of the Book (34:9-12)

A. Joshua – A Trusted Leader (34:9)

In the conclusion of the book, we find that Joshua was a trusted leader, verse 9. *“Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses.”* (34:9).

The words *“spirit of wisdom”* are used often in Exodus and once in Deuteronomy. Later it will be found in Isaiah. These are the only books where the phrase is used in the Hebrew Old Testament. In Exodus, the LORD uses the words to explain the *skills* of each craftsman Moses selects to build the Tabernacle complex in Exodus chapters 28 through 35. The phrase is used only here in the 34th chapter of Deuteronomy concerning Joshua. Just as the LORD provided Moses with skills to lead the Nation of Israel, Joshua was also provided the skills to lead the nation. How did Joshua obtain those skills? Moses laid his hands on him. In the required offering, described initially in Leviticus chapters 1 through 7, hands were laid on the animals to be sacrificed to symbolically transfer the sin or guilt to the animal. The same is true in this case. Moses symbolically transferred his skill as a leader to Joshua when he commissioned him. The people saw the laying on of hands and accepted Joshua as their new leader. But Joshua had been in training for this job for forty years. He had followed Moses halfway up Mount Sinai and waited for his return. He had journeyed with the twelve to spy out the land thirty-nine years before and, along with Caleb, were the only two to vote to enter the Promised Land then. He had been in training a long time, and he was ready to take the position, and he would hold it until his death at the age of 110.

B. Moses – A Timeless Prophet (34:10-12)

To end the writing in the book of Deuteronomy, Joshua speaks of Moses as a timeless prophet in verse 10. *“Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, ¹¹ for all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land, ¹² and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.”* (34:10-12).

The words of Joshua are true. Moses was used by the LORD to birth Israel out of Egypt, take her through her days of youth in the wilderness, and send her off as a young adult into the Promised Land. With Moses came the covenant, the laws, the commandments, the statutes, the ordinances, the offerings for life, and the tithe as a member of the LORD’s chosen people. No prophet could ever rise in Israel like Moses. Not Jonah, Joel, Amos, Obadiah, Jeremiah, Isaiah, Daniel, or the rest. But one day, One greater than Moses will come. In Hebrews 3:1-6, a message to the saved Israelites of the Church, says the following.

Therefore, holy brethren, partakers of a heavenly calling, consider Jesus, the Apostle and High Priest of our confession; ² He was faithful to Him who appointed Him, as Moses also was in all His house. ³ For He has been counted worthy of more glory than Moses, by just so much as the builder of the house has more honor than the house. ⁴ For every house is built by someone, but the builder of all things is God. ⁵ Now Moses was faithful in all His house as a servant, for a testimony of those things which were to be spoken later; ⁶ but Christ was faithful as a Son over His house—whose house we are, if we hold fast our confidence and the boast of our hope firm until the end. (Hebrews 3:1–6).

Jesus is the only Prophet with more glory than Moses. Jesus, Who is the preincarnate LORD speaking to Moses, revealed all the covenant to Moses initially and then came to verify His everlasting covenant. It was the LORD Jesus Who heard the pleas of Israel in Egypt. It was the LORD Jesus who called to Moses from the burning bush. It was the LORD Jesus Who sent all the plagues on Egypt. It was the LORD Jesus Who opened the Red Sea. It was the LORD Jesus Who

brought the water from the rock. It was the LORD Jesus Who spoke the words of the Ten Commandments to the whole Nation of Israel. It was the LORD Jesus Who dictated the words of Genesis to Moses. It was the LORD Jesus Who heard the sin in the camp and sent Moses to destroy the golden calf. It was the LORD Jesus who designed the Tabernacle complex. It was the LORD Jesus who dictated the Levitical Law. It was the LORD Jesus Who fed manna to Israel for forty years. It was the LORD Jesus Who called for Moses to die on Mount Nebo. It was the LORD Jesus Who buried Moses in the valley. It was the LORD Jesus who selected Joshua to take Moses' place. It was the LORD Jesus Who will fight for Israel as she takes the Promised Land. It was the LORD Jesus Who had first promised the land to Abraham. It was the LORD Jesus Who saved Israel, and He can save you too if you will only trust Him. Ask Him to forgive your sins and give Him your heart. Then He will give you the promise of His eternal, everlasting covenant – eternal life with Him. Praise be to the LORD God.