

Adult Bible Class

The Book of Deuteronomy - Chapters 33 - 34

Deuteronomy Chapter 33

Moses Blesses the People

Deuteronomy 33:1 (NLT) This is the blessing that Moses, the man of God, gave to the people of Israel before his death:

The previous chapter is the Song of Moses with its warnings and future calamities. In this next chapter, Moses speaks to the tribes of Israel and blesses them as he bids them farewell. The blessings given here are similar to the way Jacob blessed his sons in Genesis 49.

2 "The Lord came from Mount Sinai . . .
with flaming fire at his right hand.

3 Indeed, he loves his people;
all his holy ones are in his hands.

They follow in his steps and accept his teaching.

4 Moses gave us the Lord's instruction,
the special possession of the people of Israel.

5 The Lord became king in Israel— . . . "

6 Moses said this about the tribe of Reuben:

"Let the tribe of Reuben live and not die out, though they are few in number."

Though Reuben was the firstborn of Jacob, his rights as firstborn were taken from him when he sinned against his father. Therefore, his blessing is minimal. Nothing notable can be said about the tribe of Reuben. No prophet, judge, or king came from this tribe.

7 Moses said this about the tribe of Judah:

"O Lord, hear the cry of Judah

and bring them together as a people.

Give them strength to defend their cause;

help them against their enemies!"

The name *Judah* means "praise." Moses said, "Hear the cry of *praise.*" Moses knew that Jacob's prophecy said that "*The scepter shall not depart from Judah*" (Genesis 49:10). King David was from the tribe of Judah, and his descendant, the Lord Jesus Christ, will rule as King of kings upon His return.

8 Moses said this about the tribe of Levi:

"O Lord, you have given your Thummim and Urim—the sacred lots—

to your faithful servants the Levites. **9** The Levites obeyed your word

and guarded your covenant.

They were more loyal to you than to their own parents.

They ignored their relatives and did not acknowledge their own children.

Deuteronomy 33:10 They teach your regulations to Jacob;
they give your instructions to Israel.
They present incense before you and offer whole burnt offerings on the altar.
11 Bless the ministry of the Levites, O Lord,
and accept all the work of their hands . . .”

The Levites were more dedicated to the ministry of the Tabernacle than to their own families.

Jacob prophesied, *“I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel”* (Genesis 49:7). The tribe will be scattered throughout all the other tribes, not having land set apart for them like the other tribes possess. Moses asked God to *“bless the ministry of the Levites.”*

12 Moses said this about the tribe of Benjamin:

“The people of Benjamin are loved by the Lord
and live in safety beside him.
He surrounds them continuously
and preserves them from every harm.”

As the youngest child of Rachel, Benjamin was a beloved son of Jacob. The city of Jerusalem was located in Benjamin.

13 Moses said this about the tribes of Joseph:

“May their land be blessed by the Lord
with the precious gift of dew from the heavens
and water from beneath the earth . . .
15 with the finest crops of the ancient mountains . . .
16 with the best gifts of the earth and its bounty,
and the favor of the one who appeared in the burning bush . . .
17 . . . This is my blessing for the multitudes of Ephraim
and the thousands of Manasseh.”

The birthright, and therefore the double portion, was taken from Reuben (the firstborn) and given to Joseph. The two tribes of Joseph were Ephraim and Manasseh (Joseph’s two sons). The descendants of Joseph through these two tribes were far more numerous than all the other tribes.

18 Moses said this about the tribes of Zebulun and Issachar:

“May the people of Zebulun prosper in their travels.
May the people of Issachar prosper at home in
their tents . . . ” **19** . . . They benefit from the riches of the sea. . .

The tribes of Zebulun and Issachar were located by the Sea of Galilee.

20 Moses said this about the tribe of Gad:

“Blessed is the one who enlarges Gad’s territory!
Gad is poised there like a lion to tear off an arm or a head.
21 The people of Gad took the best land for themselves . . . ”

The tribe of Gad provided many fine soldiers for King David. First Chronicles 12:14 says, *“These warriors from Gad were army commanders. The weakest among them could take on a hundred regular troops, and the strongest could take on a thousand!”*

Deuteronomy 33:22 Moses said this about the tribe of Dan:

“Dan is a lion’s cub, leaping out from Bashan.”

History records that Dan was a troublesome tribe. The tribe of Dan introduced idolatry into Israel (Judges 18:30). During the time of the divided kingdoms of Israel and Judah, Jeroboam set up a golden calf in the territory of Dan, and later Dan became a center of idol worship in Israel (Amos 8:14).

The reference to Bashan (a region in northern Israel) means that Dan moved its location. They were originally assigned territory in the southern part of Israel but eventually migrated north, not content with the land that God gave them.

23 Moses said this about the tribe of Naphtali:

“O Naphtali, you are rich in favor
and full of the Lord’s blessings;
may you possess the west and the south.”

Naphtali was located by the Sea of Galilee - and Jesus did much of His teaching and ministry there.

24 Moses said this about the tribe of Asher:

“May Asher be blessed above other sons;
may he be esteemed by his brothers; may he bathe his feet in olive oil.
25 May the bolts of your gates be of iron and bronze; may you be secure all your days.”

Asher (which means “happy”) was blessed with resources.

26 “There is no one like the God of Israel.

He rides across the heavens to help you,
across the skies in majestic splendor.

27 The eternal God is your refuge,
and his everlasting arms are under you.

He drives out the enemy before you; he cries out, ‘Destroy them!’

28 So Israel will live in safety,
prosperous Jacob in security, in a land of grain and new wine,
while the heavens drop down dew.

29 How blessed you are, O Israel!

Who else is like you, a people saved by the Lord?
He is your protecting shield and your triumphant sword! . . . ”

Deuteronomy Chapter 34

The Death of Moses

Deuteronomy 34:1 (NLT) Then Moses went up to Mount Nebo from the plains of Moab and climbed Pisgah Peak, which is across from Jericho. And the Lord showed him the whole land, from Gilead as far as Dan; **2** all the land of Naphtali; the land of Ephraim and Manasseh; all the land of Judah, extending to the Mediterranean Sea; **3** the Negev; the Jordan Valley with Jericho—the city of palms—as far as Zoar. **4** Then the Lord said to Moses, “This is the land I promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob when I said, ‘I will give it to your descendants.’ I have now allowed you to see it with your own eyes, but you will not enter the land.”

The Israelites were camped on the plains of Moab by the Jordan River. Moses went east up Mount Pisgah so he could see the entirety of the Promised Land from the height of the mountain. It must have been a very clear day as Moses gazed upon the land he would not personally enter.

The next verses could have been written by Moses if God gave him the words to write before he died. Some Bible scholars think that Joshua wrote these last verses.

5 So Moses, the servant of the Lord, died there in the land of Moab, just as the Lord had said. **6** The Lord buried him in a valley near Beth-peor in Moab, but to this day no one knows the exact place. **7** Moses was 120 years old when he died, yet his eyesight was clear, and he was as strong as ever. **8** The people of Israel mourned for Moses on the plains of Moab for thirty days, until the customary period of mourning was over.

Moses is called “*the servant of the Lord.*” He is no longer called a Prince of Egypt, or even the one who parted the Red Sea. He is not called the deliverer of the people of Israel. Instead, he is given the greatest title of all - the servant of the Lord.

The Lord buried Moses. God, in His wisdom, knew that the tomb of a great man such as Moses would have been worshiped by the people. Therefore, the place of his burial was never known. The book of Jude says that the archangel Michael contended with the devil when he disputed about the body of Moses (verse 9). That Scripture gives us just enough information to be curious about Moses’ burial! We do know that Moses appeared with Elijah (who did not see death) on the Mount of Transfiguration (Matthew 17:1-3).

9 Now Joshua son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him. So the people of Israel obeyed him, doing just as the Lord had commanded Moses.

10 There has never been another prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. **11** The Lord sent him to perform all the miraculous signs and wonders in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, and all his servants, and his entire land. **12** With mighty power, Moses performed terrifying acts in the sight of all Israel.

Moses Reviewed

Moses is one of the most well-known figures in the Old Testament. Abraham is known as the “Father of the Faith” and “Friend of God.” Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob were the patriarchs of the Hebrew nation. But Moses was the man chosen to bring redemption to His people Israel. God chose Moses to lead the Israelites from captivity in Egypt to salvation in the Promised Land. Moses is also recognized as the mediator of the Old Covenant and is commonly referred to as the giver of the

Law. Finally, Moses is the author of the Pentateuch, the foundational books of the Bible (Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus, Numbers, and Deuteronomy). Moses' life in the Old Testament is a type and shadow of the Lord Jesus Christ in the New Testament.

We first encounter Moses in the first few chapters of the book of Exodus. In chapter 1, we learn that, after the patriarch Joseph rescued his family from the great famine and invited them to live in the land of Goshen in Egypt, the descendants of Abraham lived in peace for several generations until there rose to power in Egypt a pharaoh who "knew not Joseph" (Exodus 1:8). This pharaoh enslaved the Hebrew people and forced them to construct his massive building projects. In spite of all this, God blessed the Hebrew people to multiply greatly. The Egyptians began to fear the increasing number of Hebrews living in their land. So, Pharaoh ordered the death of all male baby boys born of the Hebrews (Exodus 1:22).

In Exodus 2 we see Moses' mother placing her infant child in a basket and putting the basket into the Nile - for the purpose of saving his life. The basket was found by Pharaoh's daughter, and she adopted him as her own and raised him in the palace of the pharaoh. As Moses grew into adulthood, he began to empathize with the plight of his people. After he saw an Egyptian beating a Hebrew slave, Moses intervened and killed the Egyptian. In another incident, Moses attempted to intervene in a dispute between two Hebrews, but one of the Hebrews rebuked Moses and sarcastically commented, "Are you going to kill me as you did the Egyptian?" (Exodus 2:14). Realizing that his deed was made known, Moses fled to the land of Midian where he again intervened. This time he rescued the daughters of Jethro from some ruffians. In gratitude, Jethro gave his daughter, Zipporah, to Moses in marriage (Exodus 2:15-21). Moses lived in Midian for forty years.

The next major part of Moses' life was his encounter with God at the burning bush (Exodus 3-4), where God called Moses to be the deliverer of His people. Despite his initial excuses and his plea that God send someone else, Moses finally obeyed God. God agreed to send Aaron, Moses' brother, along with him.

Moses and his brother, Aaron, go to Pharaoh and demand that he let the people of Israel go to worship their God. Pharaoh stubbornly refuses, and ten plagues of God's judgment fall upon the people and the land, the final plague being the slaying of the firstborn. Prior to this final plague, God commands Moses to institute the Passover, which is commemorative of God's saving act in redeeming His people from bondage in Egypt.

After the exodus, Moses led the people to the edge of the Red Sea where God performed one of the greatest miracles of all time - parting the waters of the Red Sea and allowing the Hebrews to pass to the other side while drowning the Egyptian army (Exodus 14).

Then Moses brought the people to the foot of Mount Sinai where the Law was given and the Old Covenant established between God and the newly formed nation of Israel (Exodus 19 - 24).

The rest of the book of Exodus and the entire book of Leviticus take place while the Israelites are encamped at the foot of Mount Sinai. God gives Moses detailed instructions for the building of the tabernacle and for making the furniture

and utensils for worship, the priestly robes, and the ark of the covenant, symbolic of God's presence among His people as well as the place where the high priest would perform the annual atonement. God also gives Moses explicit instructions on how God is to be worshiped and guidelines for maintaining purity and holiness among the people.

In the book of Numbers the Israelites move from Sinai to the edge of the Promised Land, but they refuse to go in when ten out of twelve spies bring back an evil and faithless report, claiming that Israel is unable to conquer the land. God condemns this generation of Jews to die in the wilderness for their disobedience and subjects them to forty years of wandering in the wilderness. By the end of the book of Numbers, the next generation of Israelites is back on the borders of the Promised Land and poised to trust God and take it by faith.

In the book of Deuteronomy, Moses gives several sermon-type speeches to the people, reminding them of God's saving power and faithfulness. He gives the second reading of the Law (the word "Deuteronomy" means *second hearing*) and prepares this young generation of Israelites to receive the promises of God. Moses himself is prohibited from entering the land because of his sin at Meribah (Numbers 20:10-13). At the end of the book of Deuteronomy, Moses' death is recorded (chapter 34). He climbs Mount Nebo and is allowed to look upon the Promised Land. Moses was 120 years old when he died, and the Bible records that his "eye was undimmed and his vigor unabated" (Deuteronomy 34:7). The Lord Himself buried Moses (Deuteronomy 34:5-6), and Joshua took over as leader of the people. Deuteronomy 34:10-12 says, *"There has never been another prophet in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew face to face. The Lord sent him to perform all the miraculous signs and wonders in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, and all his servants, and his entire land. With mighty power, Moses performed terrifying acts in the sight of all Israel."*

What can we learn from Moses' life? Moses' life is generally broken down into three 40-year periods. The first is his life in the court of Pharaoh. As the adopted son of Pharaoh's daughter, Moses would have had all the privileges of a prince of Egypt. He was instructed *"in all the wisdom of the Egyptians, and he was mighty in his words and deeds"* (Acts 7:22). As the plight of the Hebrews began to disturb his soul, Moses took it upon himself to be the savior of his people. As Stephen says before the Jewish ruling council, *"[Moses] supposed that his brothers would understand that God was giving them salvation by his hand"* (Acts 7:25). From this incident, we learn that Moses was a man of action as well as a man possessed of a hot temper and prone to rash actions. Did God want to save His people? Yes. Did God want to use Moses as His chosen instrument of salvation? Yes. But Moses acted rashly and impetuously. He tried to do in his timing what God wanted done in His timing. The lesson for us is obvious: we must be aware of not only doing God's will, but doing God's will in His timing, not ours. As is the case with so many other biblical examples, when we attempt to do God's will in our timing, we make a bigger mess than originally existed.

Moses needed time to grow and mature and learn to be meek and humble before God. This brings us to the next chapter in Moses' life, his 40 years in the land of Midian. During this time, Moses learned the simple life of a shepherd, a husband, and a father. God took an impulsive and hot-tempered young man and began the process of molding and shaping him into the perfect instrument for God to use. What can we learn from this time in his life? If the first lesson is to wait on God's timing, the second lesson is to not be idle while we wait on God's timing. While the Bible doesn't spend a lot of time on the details of this part of Moses' life, it's not as if Moses were sitting idly by waiting for God's call. He spent the better part of 40 years learning the ways of a shepherd and supporting and raising a family. These are not trivial things! While we might long for the "mountain top" experiences with God, most of our lives is spent doing the day-to-day things that make up a life. We need to be living for God daily before He will enlist us into His special service. It is often in the seemingly trivial things of life that God trains and prepares us for His call in the next season.

Another thing we see from Moses during his time spent in Midian is that, when God finally did call him into service, Moses was resistant. Though he was a rash "man of action" early in his life, Moses, now 80 years old, became overly timid. When called to speak for God, Moses said he was "slow of speech and tongue" (Exodus 4:10). Some commentators believe that Moses may have had a speech impediment. Perhaps, but then it would be odd for Stephen to say Moses was "mighty in words and deeds" (Acts 7:22). Perhaps Moses was afraid of the pharaoh who wanted to kill him forty years ago.

There are two things Moses seemed to have overlooked. One was the obvious change that had occurred in his own life in the last 40 years and the new pharaoh that had come to power in Egypt. The other, and more important change, was that God would be with him. Moses failed at first not so much because he acted impulsively, but because he acted without God. Therefore, the lesson to be learned here is that when you discern a clear call from God, step forward in faith, knowing that God goes with you! Do not be timid, but be strong in the Lord and in the power of his might.

The third and final chapter in Moses' life is the chapter that Scripture spends the most time chronicling, namely, his role in the redemption of Israel. Several lessons can be gleaned from this segment of Moses' life as well. First is how to be an effective leader of people. Moses essentially had responsibility over two million Hebrew refugees. When things began to wear on him, his father-in-law, Jethro, suggested that he delegate responsibility to other faithful men, a lesson that many people in authority need to learn (Exodus 18). We also see a man who was dependent on the grace of God to help with his task. Moses was continually pleading on behalf of the people before God (falling on his face before the Lord). If only all people in authority would petition God on behalf of those over whom they are in charge! Moses was keenly aware of the necessity of God's presence and even requested to see God's glory (Exodus 33). Moses knew that, apart from God, the exodus would be meaningless.

Moses' life also teaches us the lesson that there are certain sins that will continue to haunt us throughout our lives. The same hot temper that got Moses into trouble in Egypt also got him into trouble during the wilderness wanderings. In the incident at Meribah, Moses struck the rock in anger in order to provide water for the people. However, he didn't give God the glory, nor did he follow God's precise commands. Because of this, God forbade him from entering the Promised Land. In a similar manner, we all succumb to certain besetting sins which plague us, sins that require us to be on constant alert.

These are just a handful of practical lessons that we can learn from Moses' life. However, if we look at Moses' life in light of the Scripture, we see larger theological truths that fit into the story of redemption. In Hebrews 11, the author uses Moses as an example of faith. We learn that it was by faith that Moses refused the glories of Pharaoh's palace to identify with the plight of his people. The writer of Hebrews says, "[Moses] *considered the reproach of Christ greater wealth than the treasures of Egypt*" (Hebrews 11:26). Moses' life was one of faith, and we know that without faith it is impossible to please God.

As mentioned earlier, we also know that Moses' life was a type and picture of the life of Christ. Like Christ, Moses was the mediator of a covenant. Again, the author of Hebrews goes to great lengths to demonstrate this point:

Jesus Is Greater Than Moses

Hebrews 3:1 (NLT) And so, dear brothers and sisters who belong to God and are partners with those called to heaven, think carefully about this Jesus whom we declare to be God's messenger and High Priest. **2** For he was faithful to God, who appointed him, just as Moses served faithfully when he was entrusted with God's entire house.

3 But Jesus deserves far more glory than Moses, just as a person who builds a house deserves more praise than the house itself. **4** For every house has a builder, but the one who built everything is God.

5 Moses was certainly faithful in God's house as a servant. His work was an illustration of the truths God would reveal later. **6** But Christ, as the Son, is in charge of God's entire house. And we are God's house, if we keep our courage and remain confident in our hope in Christ.

7 That is why the Holy Spirit says,

"Today when you hear his voice,

8
don't harden your hearts
as Israel did when they rebelled,
when they tested me in the wilderness.

9
There your ancestors tested and tried my patience,
even though they saw my miracles for forty years.

10
So I was angry with them, and I said,
'Their hearts always turn away from me.
They refuse to do what I tell them.'

11

So in my anger I took an oath:

‘They will never enter my place of rest.’”

12 Be careful then, dear brothers and sisters. Make sure that your own hearts are not evil and unbelieving, turning you away from the living God. **13** You must warn each other every day, while it is still “today,” so that none of you will be deceived by sin and hardened against God. **14** For if we are faithful to the end, trusting God just as firmly as when we first believed, we will share in all that belongs to Christ. **15** Remember what it says:

“Today when you hear his voice,
don’t harden your hearts
as Israel did when they rebelled.”

16 And who was it who rebelled against God, even though they heard his voice? Wasn’t it the people Moses led out of Egypt? **17** And who made God angry for forty years? Wasn’t it the people who sinned, whose corpses lay in the wilderness? **18** And to whom was God speaking when he took an oath that they would never enter his rest? Wasn’t it the people who disobeyed him? **19** So we see that because of their unbelief they were not able to enter his rest.

Moses predicted that the Lord would raise up another prophet like him from among the people:

Deuteronomy 18:15 Moses continued, “The Lord your God will raise up for you a prophet like me from among your fellow Israelites. You must listen to him.

John 5:46 If you really believed Moses, you would believe me, because he wrote about me.

In so many ways, Moses’ life was a precursor to the life of Christ. As such, we can catch a glimpse of how God was working His plan of redemption in the lives of faithful people throughout human history. This gives us hope that, just as God saved His people and gave them rest through the actions of Moses, so, too, will God save us and give us an eternal rest in Christ, both now and in the life to come.