

Parashah 54

V'Zot HaBrachah

וזאת הברכה

“This is the Blessing”

Deuteronomy 33:1 – 34:12

Torah Together



This last portion of the *Torah* records Moses' final blessing on the Israelites which includes prophetic statements about the tribes. As the last *parashah* of the *Torah*, it also records Moses' death and burial.

1. Moses Blesses the Tribes - 33:1-29

a) One of Moses' last deeds was to pronounce a blessing over the sons of Israel. Who else did this before his death? Where can you read about this blessing?

Jacob pronounced a blessing over his sons just before his death. (They were in Egypt at the time.) Read about it in Genesis 49.

b) Verses 2-5 are a preamble to Moses' blessings. Do you find any significance in the places named in this section? Who do you think the “myriads of holy ones” are? Who or what is Jeshrun that God would be king over them?

Sinai, where the Israelites received the Torah, is south of Israel. Seir is in Edom, near present-day Petra in Jordan. Mount Paran is in the Wilderness of Paran which is in the north part of the Sinai peninsula, on the southern border of Israel. The myriads of holy ones may be angels. (Some believe that angels accompanied God when the Torah was given. See Galatians 3:19, Hebrews 2:2). Jeshrun means “the upright one,” a reference to Israel.

c) Do you find any significance in Moses' blessing over Reuben? What about Judah? Do you think it significant that today's Jews are primarily descendants of Judah?

It is not clear whether the text should read “nor let his men be few” or “but let his men be few.” In any case, the Reubenites were eventually conquered and exiled by the Assyrians (I Chronicles 5:26). It seems that Judah was to be a leader among the Israelites, which the Jews are today.

Scripture Link:

Genesis 49 records another blessing over the Tribes of Israel.

Hint: See **Galatians 3:19** and **Hebrews 2:2** for the possible identity of the “myriads of holy ones.”

Scripture Link:

See **I Chronicles 5:26** for information on what eventually became of the tribe of Reuben.

d) What was special about Moses' blessing over Levi, considering the role the Levites played in Israel? Is it clear how they were to treat their special responsibilities?

The text says that Levi "watched over your word and guarded your covenant" and that "he offers incense before you and whole burnt offerings on your altar." This clearly describes the role of the Levites as priests. The statements saying that Levi had no regard for his father and mother and did not recognize his brothers are meant to imply that the Levites role as priests took precedent over even their family responsibilities.

e) Can you find any significance in Moses' blessing over Benjamin? Where was Benjamin's tribal inheritance located? Might this relate to Moses' blessing?

The territory of Benjamin included the future city of Jerusalem which may explain the comment that "the one YHWH loves rests between his shoulders."

f) What tribes were blessed in Moses' blessing over Joseph? In general terms, what does Moses see in Joseph's future? Do you find any prophetic significance in verse 17?

Moses' blessing over Joseph includes the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. Moses foresees prosperity and abundance for them. The territory of these tribes was in the northern part of Israel, some of its most productive land. Verse 17 refers to the tribes of Joseph as "goring the nations, even to the ends of the earth," a possible reference to the dispersion of these tribes.

g) What do you find interesting in Moses' blessing over Zebulun and Issachar? Why might these two tribes be considered together?

It could be interpreted that Zebulun would be an exploring tribe and that Issachar would be a tribe of scholars ("in your tents"). Zebulun and Issachar were the last two sons that Leah gave to Jacob.

h) In blessing Gad, why do you think Moses said, "He chose the best land for himself"?

Gad (along with Reuben and half the tribe of Manasseh) chose the fertile land of Gilead (north and east of the Jordan) for their inheritance.

i) Can you find any significance in Moses' blessing over the tribe of Dan?

The destiny for the tribe of Dan seems to involve strength and surprise.

j) What do you find interesting in Moses' blessing over Naphtali? Based on the location of Naphtali's tribal inheritance, what "lake" do you suppose Moses is referring to?

The tribe of Naphtali would be greatly blessed. The lake is probably a reference to the Sea of Galilee.

Most Bibles contain maps that show how the Land of Israel was divided among the tribes. The actual division is described in detail in the book of **Joshua, chapters 13 – 19**. As for this prophecy of Moses, some particularly interesting passages concern the tribe of Simeon (**Joshua 19:9**) and the tribe of Benjamin (**Joshua 18:28**). The study of the tribal inheritances in the Land of Israel can be fascinating.

Scripture Link: Numbers chapter 32 tells the story of the tribes that chose for themselves land east of the Jordan River as their tribal inheritance.

k) How was Asher to be viewed by his brothers? What do you think it means to “bathe his feet in oil”?

The tribe of Asher would enjoy favor among the tribes. Bathing one’s feet in oil was a symbol of luxury. They inherited the northern sea coast.

l) What tribe was omitted from Moses’ blessings? Do you think this has any significance?

The tribe of Simeon was omitted from Moses’ blessings. Their inheritance was wholly contained in the land of Judah and eventually they were absorbed into the tribe of Judah.

m) In verses 26 - 29, Moses concludes his blessing with a description of the God of Jeshrun (Israel). As an Israelite, how would you feel about Moses’ words?

Israelites should feel very special to be so favored and blessed by God.

“For no one has ever shown the mighty power or performed the awesome deeds that Moses did in the sight of all Israel.”

Deuteronomy 34:12

2. The Death of Moses - 34:1-12

a) Where did Moses go after blessing the Israelites? What did God show him there?

After blessing the Israelites, Moses climbed to the top of Mount Nebo where God showed him the whole land of Israel.

b) How old was Moses when he died? Who buried him? Can his grave be located today?

Moses died at 120. The text implies that God himself buried Moses. No one knows precisely where his grave is.

c) Who replaced Moses as the leader of the Israelites?

Joshua replaced Moses as the leader of the Israelites.

d) Has there been a “prophet like Moses” since this time?

Until Yeshua, there had not been another prophet like Moses.

Scripture Link:

Read **Jude 5-11** for an interesting story about the archangel Michael quarrelling with the devil over Moses’ body. What insights do you gain about angels and the afterlife from this story?

Digging deeper

1. The majority of the Torah tells the story of Moses and the Israelites (**Exodus** through **Deuteronomy**). Reflect back on the life of Moses. What conclusions can you draw from his life? How did he change over the course of his life? What parts of Moses' life would be good models for you?

It would seem that Moses was always a man who loved God and sought to do His will. Early in his life, we see him trying to do God's will out of his own strength (slaying the Egyptian taskmaster and then fleeing Egypt for his life). After 40 years in the desert tending sheep, he meets God at Mount Sinai. Even then, however, Moses' still has much to learn about how to do God's will. As we see him lead the Israelites, we also see him learn to be more and more dependent on God. And he is truly a humble man, refusing God's offer to destroy the Israelites and start over with him. Moses' humility and obedience to God are at least two things we could do well to emulate.

2. Carefully read **Psalm 119**. This is the longest Psalm and the longest chapter in the Bible. In Hebrew, each line in a stanza begins with the same letter of the Hebrew alphabet, an acrostic. What is the subject of this Psalm? Do you agree with its conclusion? Are there any parts that are particularly meaningful to you? How do you feel about the Torah?

Psalm 119 is completely devoted to the perfection and excellence of the Torah. It concludes over and over again that the only way to truly live a life pleasing to God is by obeying his commandments. By studying the Torah, you learn the heart of God and you grow nearer to Him. "Let me live that I may praise you and may your Torah sustain me." (Psalm 199:175)

For further study, see

Haftarah : Joshua 1:1-18

Brit Hadashah : Matthew 17:1-9; Mark 9:2-10; Luke 9:28-36;
Jude 3-4, 8-10

Congratulations on finishing the study of God's *Torah*! Stop and reflect for a moment: Has God blessed you since you've begun studying His Word?