

Blessing of Moses
Deuteronomy 32:48-33:29
Study Guide

Final statements are especially memorable. The last words of people are words that are held dear by their loved ones. They are usually words that are spoken out of a wisdom that comes from a lifetime of experience. The older generation has experienced the toils, struggles, and pleasures of this life, and when they speak their last words of wisdom, we listen.

This passage contains the final words of Moses to the children of Israel. He chooses his final words to be words of blessing. He blesses each of the tribes of Israel. Moses has spent over forty years with these people and he knows them extremely well. He knows each of the tribes individually, knows their distinctive characteristics, and their particular temptations.

This song of blessing which is warm and compassionate is a balance to the previous song which was intentionally severe. Moses knew that such a balance was necessary. To be harsh without compassion would leave the people broken, but to be compassionate without giving warning would leave the people without direction. And so Moses gives Israel his final address in which he blesses them. In this farewell, Moses acclaims the God who eternally loves His people and a people eternally saved by their God (33:27-29).

Read Deuteronomy 32:48-52

1. What mountain was Moses commanded by God to go up on? What 3 things was he to do on this mountain?

2. Explain the phrase, "be gathered to your people." (See Gen. 25:8, 17; 35:29; 49:33; Num. 20:24, 26; 31:2).

3. What reason does God give for giving Moses this command?

4. How could it be said that Moses "did not hallow" God? What did Moses' sin have to do with hallowing God? (See Numbers 20:12).

5. Can you think of a good reason why God wanted Moses to see the land, even though he was not allowed to enter? Was God being gracious to Moses or was He "rubbing it in his face"? (Look up the cross references for help).

6. Moses failed to take God at His Word. Because of his lack of faith in the way God told him to release water from the rock, God was dishonored. Because God was dishonored, Moses was punished. Think of some examples of how your lack of faith and obedience has ended up dishonoring God to others. Ask God to forgive you for not treating God as holy before others and commit to living a life that honors Him and treats Him as holy.

Read Deuteronomy 33:1-5

1. While Moses had his flaws, nevertheless, he was one of God's choice servants. What term is used in verse 1 to describe Moses?
2. God came down and gave the Law on Sinai, Seir, and Paran with "ten thousands of saints." Read Acts 7:53; Gal. 3:19; Heb. 2:2. To whom are these "saints" referring?
3. In verse 3 we are given a portrait of God as Israel's king. We see Israel gathered around Him and receiving His wise words. He is a king who "loves the people." How can God be a king who loves His people, and at the same time be a God who gives His people demanding laws, harsh warnings, and devastating punishments?
4. The word used in verse 4, "heritage" literally means "possession" or "an inheritance that is received." In what sense could the commands of the law be "an inheritance?" How can you apply this principle?

5. Recognize that God gives His commands to you in kindness and love. They provide both temporal and eternal blessings to those with a heart to obey it. Ask God to help you to praise Him for His initiative in loving you, his protection over you, and His word which guides you and gives you hope for present and future blessings.

Read Deuteronomy 33:6-11

1. Moses knows that future conflict is inevitable. The soldiers of Israel may feel outnumbered by the masses living in the land of Canaan. In anticipation of this, what is Moses' prayer for Reuben? His prayer for Judah?
2. Why does Moses' prayer for the tribe of Levi contain language such as "Thummim," "Urim," "incense," and "burnt sacrifice"?
3. The Levites were required to put God's will even before the demands to their families. Levi said "of his father and mother, 'I have not seen them'; nor did he acknowledge his brothers, or know his own children" (v. 9). The incident of the golden calf is brought up so as to remind us of when Levi was used by God to punish the evil doers, even if they consisted of their own family members. Here is a great principle for us: obedience to God must take precedence over all other loyalties. Read Matthew 6:33 and 10:34-39. Write down a scenario where you may have to choose between your loyalty to God and your loyalty to the closest of your human relationships. How will you deal with such a choice?

4. What educative responsibilities did the Levites have? What were their liturgical (worship, service) responsibilities?

5. According to the New Testament, believers are all priests before God. You no longer need a person who holds a special office to go to God on your behalf. While this position has great privilege, it also has great responsibility. You too must recognize that God has claim on every one of your allegiances and so you must insist on pursuing His will whatever the cost. Pray that God will help you worship (acknowledge God's worth) by your expression of dependence upon Him and your sacrificial surrender of your body.

Read Deuteronomy 33:12-17

1. The tribe of Benjamin had limited numbers and resources. In fact, David refers to this tribe in the Psalms as "little Benjamin" (Psalm 68:27). When Israel's first king, Saul, was chosen, he responded in surprise by saying, "Am I not a Benjamite, of the smallest of the tribes of Israel?" However, Moses blesses them so that they will dwell in safety by the Lord who will shelter them. What does the expression "dwell between His shoulders" mean? What does this tell you about the nature of God and how can you derive comfort from this truth?

2. Moses' last words for the dependence of Joseph is the longest of these blessings to the tribes. He begins by blessing his land. What 7 blessings does Moses place upon the land inhabited by Joseph?

3. Moses asks that Joseph's family would have the "favor of Him who dwelt in the bush" (v. 16). To what incident is this referring? Write down the reference of this incident and why you believe that Moses is referring to it.

4. Moses refers to Joseph as one "who was separate from his brothers. To what incident does this refer? Whom is Moses quoting (See Genesis 49:26)? Why is this significant enough to bring up in Moses' blessing?

5. Who are Ephraim and Manasseh? Why does Ephraim have ten thousands and Manasseh only have thousands? (Genesis 48:1-22)

6. The blessings that God will bestow upon the land reminded the tribes of their total dependence on God. God is the means of fruitfulness. Bounty is a gift from Him. We cannot manufacture the morning dew, the rays of the sun, or the orderly seasons of the year. Pray that God will help you to recognize Him as the source of all good things. Ask Him to give you the resolve to depend upon Him for your daily bread, especially in this modern age which depends upon the ingenuity of man.

Read Deuteronomy 33:18-29

1. While the tribes were feeling apprehensive and uncertain about entering into the land, God assures them that He has their needs in mind. God has exciting and loving plans for their future. Once they are settled in their territories, what two resources would Zebulun and Issachar partake of?
2. Tribes of Israel would soon be split up to inherit their particular section of the land. This causes Moses to reassure the people of the omnipresence of God. Whatever their geographical location, God was with them. From verses 26 and 27, how is God depicted, where is He in relation to Israel, and what will He do for Israel?
3. Why should Israel be “happy” (v. 29)?
4. What will be Israel’s shield? What will be Israel’s sword?

5. All God desired of Israel is that they rely upon God to provide for their needs. He wanted them to trust and have faith in His great help and majesty. We know from the rest of the story that Israel ultimately failed to trust in God's strength and failed to drive out all of the Canaanites. As a result, the Canaanites and their abominable practices influenced Israel and they began putting their trust in gods of wood and stone.

Does your fear of the unknown cause you to doubt the promises of God? Your lack of faith displays one of two things. You either do not believe God is able to help you or you believe He is able but unwilling to help you. Repent of these attitudes and ask God to help you depend upon His word. In it, He has promised to never fail you or forsake you.