

C h a r l e s A . C l o u g h
D e u t e r o n o m y S e r i e s 2 0 0 9 - 2 0 1 2
Fellowship Chapel, Jarrettsville, MD

Lesson 72--Deut 33:1-29 The Supernatural Blessing of Moses on the Tribes of Israel
31 January 2012

I. INTRODUCTION & REVIEW

1:1-5	Introduction to God's spokesman, the 1 st Prophet Moses
1:6-4:40	1st Exposition of the Torah = <i>motivation</i> to obey from (1) <u>past gracious actions</u> of Yahweh and (2) sovereign <u>destiny</u> of the nation (<u>future gracious actions</u> of Yahweh)
4:41-49	Editorial comment on context of 2 nd Exposition of the Torah
5:1-26:19	2nd Exposition of the Torah = <i>proper response</i> to Yahweh in heart and soul
27:1-29:1	3rd Exposition of the Torah = <i>inauguration of the covenant</i> in the land
29:2-30:20	4th Exposition of the Torah = prophetic fore view of <i>covenant performance</i>
	29:2-29:29 Israel's past, present and (near) future
	30:1-20 Moses' closing challenge
31:1-34:12	Handover procedures from Moses to Joshua and the new generation
	31:1- 29 Inauguration of Joshua
	32:1-43 The Prophetic Anthem of Israel--the investiture of the Covenant witnesses
33:1-29	The Blessing of Moses on Tribes of Israel
	33:1-5 The Glory of the King of Israel
	33:6-25 Specific Blessings on Each Tribe
	33:26-29 The Eternal Relationship of Israel to Yahweh

When an ANE Suzerainty-Vassal Treaty was renewed, the renewal was not put into effect until the new Suzerain was installed after the death of the previous Suzerain.

"When Esarhaddon, king of Assyria dies, you will seat Ashurbanipal, the crown prince, upon the royal throne; he will exercise the kingship (and) lordship of Assyria over you." (669 BC)
Some of these pagan treaty protocols probably derive from biblical contracts with God.

With Israel, however, the conditional Mosaic/Sinai Treaty "rested" upon the prior Abrahamic unconditional contract. Yahweh was great enough to orchestrate national repentance that would satisfy the ethical/spiritual requirements of the Abrahamic promises. There is _[nothing]_ like that in the ANE pagan world ==> revelation of God's sovereign grace.

This contrast reveals the difference between biblical revelation-based thinking and pagan autonomous-based thinking. Only the former has access to information about the design of history; the latter does not. Thus only biblical revelation-based thinking has justification for believing that man can know meaning and purpose in life. The poor unbeliever is left in a schizophrenic state *on one hand denying that a self-revealing Creator has a plan for every aspect of history and therefore affirming that all reality is an irrational mystery while on the*

other hand having to affirm that man's finite mind is sufficient to proclaim that the universe is indeed knowable and that life has meaning after all.

II. THE GLORY OF THE KING OF ISRAEL (33:1-5)

33:1 Moses the man of God

See **Psalm 90** header for this title used for Moses presumably because of his [unique face-to-face] encounter with God on Sinai.

blessed the children of Israel

Cf. blessing of Jacob on his sons in **Gen. 49** which also was delivered in poetic form that carries more emotion than straight narrative. Perhaps the poetic form was more easily memorized. A difference from Jacob's blessing here is its [prayerful requesting] rather than a prophetic announcement.

33:2 ten thousands of saints. . .fiery law

Look at **Deut. 5:5,23** that speaks of "fire" and OT commentary in **Ps. 68:17; 104:4**.

Then observe NT commentary in **Acts 7:30,53; Gal. 3:19; Heb 2:2** where angels are said to have been involved.

Clearly created spirit beings can manifest physically as [fire] (perhaps in our language an electrical presence such as a corona or aurora?)(cf.Pentacost).

NOTE: Here's another example of the radically different cosmology of the Bible compared to contemporary naturalistically-interpreted empirical phenomena. It also shows the fallacy of empiricism, viz., that the finite mind can correctly interpret empirical phenomena without divine revelation.

LORD came (Heb: "rose like the sun to us")

Description of the theophany's appearance.

33:3 surely He loves the peoples. . .his holy ones in Your hand

Pronouns here switch between the 2nd and 3rd persons--maybe indicating the location of the speaker addressing both the LORD and the people at the same time??

NET translation: "And they sit at your feet, each receiving your words." Both angels and Israelites?

33:4 Moses commanded a law. . .

Moses sets himself into the poem for them to remember his role.

33:5 He was King. . .

Now the nouns are shifting between Yahweh and Moses: here the pronoun "he" refers to God.

Jeshurun

As in Deut 32, this word is derived from Heb: *yashar* = upright and points to Israel's ideal position before God.

NOTE: Here is the theology of Divine Kingship of the theocracy and shows why Israel's request for a human king was such a sin--**1 Sam. 8**. It also explains the OT eschatology that looks forward to a time when God again is actual king over mankind (cf. **Isa. 9:6; 52:7**; and the "enthronement psalms--the **90s**").

Moses again prefaces his speech about particular features of Israel with speech about their unique [position] in history which parallels the structure of many NT epistles that speak of our position in Christ prior to discussing specific matters of our behavior.

Principle: Trusting God for specific directions and enablement to follow those directions requires we first believe those directions and promises indeed are really true. Thus biblical authors point to historical revelation as the foundation of our trust.

III. SPECIFIC BLESSINGS ON EACH TRIBE (33:6-25)

These specific blessings relate to specific character traits of each tribe.

NOTE: Here is a consistent assertion of the Bible that within the human race certain people groups retain certain characteristics from their ancestors.

33:6 Let Reuben live. . .nor let his men be few.

This tribe must have had an indecisiveness that threatened their historical survival (**Gen. 49:4; Jud 5:15-16**).

33:7 Judah. . .help against his enemies

Military leader of the nation.

33:8-11 Levi

Though cursed by Jacob, this tribe redeemed itself by its loyalty (note the shift between vv8 and 9).

strike the loins of those who rise against him

In a fallen world, all violence is NOT bad. Here is violence that is socially "just".

33:12 Benjamin

Youngest and beloved son of Jacob.

he shall dwell between His shoulders (i.e., on His chest = like Apostle John in **John 13**).

Benjamin stayed with Judah in the civil revolt after Solomon.

33:13-17 Joseph

precious things of heaven

Agricultural prosperity like that of the forbearer.

Ephraim. . .Manasseh

Two sons became two tribes later.

33:18-19 Zebulun. . .Issachar. . .

seas. . .sands. . .

Apparently their economic lives would be tied to produce derived from the sea.

33:20-21 Gad

lion. . .tares. . .

Though obtaining land east of the Jordan, this tribe apparently would fight fiercely alongside the tribes given occupation west of Jordan.

first for himself

Refers to the transjordanian land allocation given to this tribe.

33:22 Dan lion's whelp (cub)

Strength??

33:23 Naphtali. . .possess

Geographical position and economic prosperity

33:24-25 Asher. . .most blessed of sons. . .feet in olive oil

Great wealth

NET translation: *"The bars of your gates will be made of iron and bronze, and may you have lifelong strength."*

Military security.

IV. THE ETERNAL RELATIONSHIP OF ISRAEL WITH YAHWEH (33:26-29)

33:26 no one like God

Here is religious [exclusivism] that affirms that there are true and false theologies. Contrast with contemporary opinion that all religions are mere subjective opinions of man (neglecting to observe, of course, that this relativistic claim itself is a subjective opinion!).

Jeshurun

Positional name of Israel stressing its uniqueness.

Who rides the heavens to help you

ANE Baal was known as the "Rider of the Clouds" apparently meaning that he controlled the weather that was so important to agricultural economies. The term here deliberately clashes with the pagan counter-claim.

33:27 eternal God is your refuge. . .everlasting arms. . .

This eternality claim for God sets Israel's security for the rest of history. Israel has been elected for an eternal role.

thrust out the enemy. . .say "Destroy"

Again we see violence that is socially just.

33:28 dwell in safety

Perfect security possible because of Yahweh's care.

33:29 who is like you?

Israel's unique should parallel Yahweh's uniqueness.

tread down their high places

Again here is religious [exclusiveness] that ultimately triumphs-an anathema to the contemporary mind.

V. CONCLUSION

Moses' blessing upon Israel implies revelation of the plan of history from God's mind to man's mind.

- It therefore provides the only justifiable belief in the ultimate rationality of the universe.
- It provides the only justifiable basis for true knowledge of reality.
- It therefore supports strong biblical faith for everyday living in a fallen world headed for a culmination in the separation of good from evil.

