**Moses Blesses the Tribes**

The last 2 chapters of Deuteronomy record the end of Moses’ ministry that we began studying in Exodus chapter 1. My notes for that chapter are dated 5/25/21, so we have studied the life of this remarkable man for over 2 years. He enjoyed a unique relationship with God which is unparalleled in the Bible (see Ex. 33:11 and Num. 12:8). His influence continued long after his death as the Israelites sought to follow his teachings. In chapter 33, Moses made his final address to the people in the form of blessing each of the tribes individually much like the blessings that Jacob conferred on his sons in Genesis chapter 49 although Moses did not rebuke the tribes, having expended his ire in the song God gave him which is recorded in chapter 32.

David Guzik wrote that the blessing Moses left Reuben with was tepid, in keeping with a tribe whose namesake forfeited his birthright and who left no legacy of a prophet, king or judge from its midst.

Moses said that the Thummin and Urim used by the Levites belonged to the man they favored (the holy one in KJV which is God) whom they tested (proved, KJV) at Massah and with whom they strove at Meribah. This seems to suggest that the Levites did not side with those who rebelled and they certainly showed their faithfulness to God during the aftermath of the golden calf incident (see Ex. 32:27-29). Verse 9 appears to describe someone who does not love his family but it is actually an acknowledgement of the requirements of the high priest who could not leave his duties to mourn the loss of a family member (see Lev. 10:6-7 and 21:11-12). Verse 10 shows the dual role of the Levites to minister to the people and to minister to God’s dwelling.

Moses’ blessing for Benjamin references that tribe’s future relationship with the tribe of Judah from which Jesus descended. Benjamin’s territory joined that of Judah and included the city of Jerusalem which would become the center of the nation. Benjamin would also become the last tribe which remained faithful to Judah after the other 10 tribes split away (see 1st Kings chapter 12).

The blessing for Joseph (individually rather than Manasseh and Ephraim) is the longest as was Jacob’s blessing. Moses asks God’s blessing of the best the land of Canaan would have to offer. Moses said that Joseph was like a firstborn bull, perhaps an indication that the tribes of Joseph would take Reuben’s place as firstborn. The tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh are mentioned at the end of the blessing noting that Ephraim would be superior. Joshua was from the tribe of Ephraim.

The blessings of Zebulon and Issachar are combined in 2 short verses. Matthew Henry noted that both were sons of Leah and shared a border in Canaan. The 2 tribes were different in their occupations. Zebulon was a trading and sea faring tribe while Issachar dwelled in tents and tended to animals.

Gad, one of the Trans Jordanian tribes, is mentioned next. Moses likens this tribe to a lion and refers to an enlarged domain. Gad did increase its size due to conquests of land it captured after settling Gilead (see 1st Chron. Chapter 5).

The blessing of Dan is the shortest. The tribes is called a lion’s cub springing out of Bashan which may refer to their conquest of Laish (see Judges chapter 18). Samson was from the tribe of Dan.

Naphtali also has a short blessing which includes prophecy about the land they would occupy in Canaan, southward to the lake which was the Sea of Galilee.

The blessing of Asher indicated a tribe that would become wealthy (let him bathe his feet in oil) similar to Jacob’s blessing that they would eat rich food. Their land bordered the Mediterranean Sea so Moses prayed for gates and iron and bronze to keep them safe from attack.

A blessing for Simeon is conspicuously absent. Jacob had pronounced a curse on the tribes of Simeon and Levi for their slaughter of innocent citizens of Shechem. The tribe of Levi redeemed itself but there is no indication that Simeon did and there’s was the smallest tribe whose land was actually subdivided from Judah’s land.

The chapter concludes with a general blessing for the entire nation of Israel.

Chapter 34 is brief, having only 10 verses. It records how Moses climbed to the top of Mount Nebo so he could see the land that God was granting to the Israelites. At the end of the chapter the people mourned Moses for 30 days as they had for Aaron. Verse 10 says that since then, no prophet had risen like him.