

### Moses Blesses the Tribes of Israel

#### Deuteronomy 33:13-29

**Deuteronomy 33:26-29** – *“There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides the heavens to help you, and in His excellency on the clouds.*

*<sup>27</sup> The eternal God is your refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms;*

*He will thrust out the enemy from before you, and will say, ‘Destroy!’*

*<sup>28</sup> Then Israel shall dwell in safety, the fountain of Jacob alone, in a land of grain and new wine. His heavens shall also drop dew.*

*<sup>29</sup> Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the Lord, the shield of your help and the sword of your majesty! Your enemies shall submit to you, and you shall tread down their high places.”*

#### Background Notes

Moses blessed the twelve tribes of Israel while they were encamped on the plains of Moab, right before the people crossed over the Jordan River and entered the Land that God had promised them. Moses pronounced the blessing shortly before he died: *“Now this is the blessing which Moses, the man of God, blessed the children of Israel before his death” (v1).*

The closing of the blessing was at the end of this chapter, and in his conclusion, Moses returned to the wonderful theme with which he began the blessing: **“The Great God of Israel.”** He is the “God of Jeshurun,” a term of endearment for His people (v26). He is the gracious God who upholds His people with His everlasting arms (v27). He is the eternal God, with such majesty and power that He can - and **will** - make good on all the promises contained in the blessing that Moses pronounced on the tribes of Israel (v28-29).

In our last Talk we mentioned that some of the predictions in this blessing on Israel have been fulfilled already in history. However, some await to be fulfilled completely in the future, when the Lord returns. At that time Israel will return fully to the Land - a land of grain and new wine, where the descendants of Jacob will dwell securely (v28). (And by the way, the “fountain of Jacob,” or “the descendants of Jacob” are the **Jewish people**. This phrase should **not** be improperly interpreted as referring the Church!)

Israel does not dwell securely today, but restored Israel will dwell securely when the Lord returns and subdues all of Israel's enemies (v29).

## **Doctrinal Point**

### **The blessings of Moses on the tribes of Israel are both past and future.**

In our last Talk we looked at the blessings on Reuben, Judah, Levi, and Benjamin. Now let's move to the blessing on Joseph.

#### **e. The blessing on Joseph (v13-17).**

*And of Joseph he said: "Blessed of the Lord is his land, with the precious things of heaven, with the dew, and the deep lying beneath, <sup>14</sup> with the precious fruits of the sun, with the precious produce of the months, <sup>15</sup> with the best things of the ancient mountains, with the precious things of the everlasting hills, <sup>16</sup> with the precious things of the earth and its fullness, and the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush. Let the blessing come 'on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.' <sup>17</sup> His glory is like a firstborn bull, and his horns like the horns of the wild ox. Together with them He shall push the peoples to the ends of the earth. They are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh."*

In the tribal structure of the nation of Israel, Joseph, the son of Jacob, was represented by his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Both Ephraim and Manasseh became significant tribes in Israel. After the kingdom split, they were the largest tribes in the northern kingdom of Israel. In fact, the northern kingdom is even called "Ephraim" throughout the book of Hosea.

These verses predict that the land of Ephraim and Manasseh would be blessed and productive in both the valleys and the hills, and this is just as true today as it was in ancient days. The reference to the "horns of the wild ox" (v17) means that these tribes would be militarily strong. The reason for "ten thousands" for Ephraim and only "thousands" for Manasseh is that Ephraim, although he was Joseph's younger son, received the birthright, and became the greater of the two tribes. The phrase, "Him who dwelt in the bush" (v16) is a reference to the burning bush where God revealed Himself to Moses.

#### **f. The blessing on Zebulun and Issachar (v18-19).**

*"And of Zebulun he said: "Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out, and Issachar in your tents!*

*<sup>19</sup> They shall call the peoples to the mountain. There they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness, for they shall partake of the abundance of the seas and of treasures hidden in the sand."*

Zebulun and Issachar are linked together, not only in this blessing of Moses, but also in the blessing of Jacob in Genesis 49, and the song of Deborah in Judges 5. Zebulun and Issachar were adjacent tribes in the north of the Land. These verses reveal that Zebulun and Issachar would not only be blessed themselves, but through their commercial wealth they would be special channels of blessing to others. This prophecy has been fulfilled - and is being fulfilled as we speak!

Their tribal territory included the fertile valley of Jezreel, and the area of Zebulun is near the Mediterranean coast and the modern port of Haifa where Israel ships many of its exports, even today.

But more is yet to come in the future when the Lord returns, and the Land produces abundantly. Ezekiel 48 reveals that, at that time, the Mediterranean Sea will be the western boundary of the territories of both Zebulun and Issachar - and it looks like the Dead Sea will be their eastern boundary. Thus the plural “seas” in verse 19. Ezekiel 47 says that at that time the Dead Sea will be fresh water, and very productive.

Calling the people to the mountain for worship (v19) is probably a reference to leading the people up to Jerusalem to worship the Lord.

#### **g. The blessing on Gad (v20- 21).**

*“And of Gad he said: “Blessed is he who enlarges Gad. He dwells as a lion, and tears the arm and the crown of his head. <sup>21</sup> He provided the first part for himself, because a lawgiver’s portion was reserved there. He came with the heads of the people. He administered the justice of the Lord, and His judgments with Israel.”*

Gad was one of the 2 1/2 tribes that asked to receive their portion of the Land on the eastern side of the Jordan River. The tribe of Gad was aggressive in possessing their good-sized portion of the Land, and they built a number of fortified cities (Numbers 42). They were commended for helping the rest of the tribes to conquer the Land on the west side of the Jordan (v21).

#### **h. The blessing on Dan (v22).**

*“And of Dan he said: “Dan is a lion’s whelp. He shall leap from Bashan.”*

The tribe of Dan was pictured as an active and aggressive young lion. The blessing of Moses includes the prediction of the migration of the tribe of Dan to Bashan in the north - a prophecy that was fulfilled in Judges 18.

#### **i. The blessing on Naphtali (v21).**

*“And of Naphtali he said: “O Naphtali, satisfied with favor, and full of the blessing of the Lord, possess the west and the south [to the sea].”*

The Sea of Galilee was included in Naphtali’s territory that stretched from the Mount Hermon range in the north to the northern edge of the Jezreel Valley in the south. If you’ve ever travelled in this mountainous area surrounding the beautiful Sea of Galilee, you’ll appreciate the fact that Naphtali was favored and blessed of the Lord.

#### **j. The blessing on Asher (v24-25).**

*“And of Asher he said: “Asher is most blessed of sons. Let him be favored by his brothers, and let him dip his foot in oil. <sup>25</sup> Your sandals shall be iron and bronze. As your days, so shall your strength be.”*

Asher was promised prosperity and security. “May he dip his foot in oil” was a reference to olive oil, as a figurative expression for abundance.

The idea, based on this verse, that crude oil or petroleum will be discovered in the ancient territory of Asher is probably a fanciful interpretation - fanciful hermeneutics. The ancient territory of Asher is slightly boot-shaped, and the city of Caesarea on the Mediterranean Sea coast is located at the toe of the boot. On this basis, some well-meaning and well-to-do Christians have backed the drilling for oil in this area. Thus far it has met with limited success.

The promise that “your sandals [or gates] shall be iron and bronze” is figurative expression for security. The territory of Asher borders Lebanon, where many attacks against Israel originate, so this promise of security in verse 25 is right up to date. The enemies of Israel will attack - but they will not prevail!

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## Practical Application

### **We can be sure that “our strength will equal our days.”**

Look again at the end of Asher’s blessing: “*As your days, so shall your strength be*” (v25). Some translations render this verse, “As your days, so shall your rest be [or, so shall your leisurely walk be].” However, I believe that “As your days, so shall your **strength** be” seems to fit the context better. In addition, that concept is taught in the rest of Scripture.

We don’t know how long our individual lives will last, but one thing we know as believers: the Lord will give us the strength to accomplish whatever the Lord asks us to do in our lives as believers. This does not mean that we won’t get old, or we’ll always have good health, or that we won’t eventually become feeble or disabled. And it doesn’t mean that the Lord will give us the strength to do what He has **not** called us to do!

But we can be sure that whatever service the Lord or life experience the Lord asks of us - even if it’s the hard work of an unpleasant ministry, or the hard work of raising a family for the Lord, or the hard task of enduring a crippling disease - we can be sure that “our strength will equal our days.”