



# *Leaves* From the Tree

*Studies from God's Word*

In 2005, Pastor Tim Bourgeois began a daily bible reading to encourage Tree of Life Christian Church and the larger body of Christ to read the entire Bible cover to cover.

The following series of articles are transcripts of Pastor Tim's original emails.

Please use these articles for meditation, personal devotion, Bible study, or your own daily Bible reading.



DEUTERONOMY 33 - 34

## Deuteronomy 33

***33:1-5 - "Now this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the sons of Israel before his death. He said, "The LORD came from Sinai, And dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, And He came from the midst of ten thousand holy ones; At His right hand there was flashing lightning for them. Indeed, He loves the people; All Your holy ones are in Your hand, And they followed in Your steps; Everyone receives of Your words. Moses charged us with a law, A possession for the assembly of Jacob. And He was king in Jeshurun, When the heads of the people were gathered, The tribes of Israel together."***

Before the final stage of his personal journey which will end on Mount Nebo, Moses is stirred by the Lord to pronounce words of blessing upon the tribes of Israel. In this, Moses follows the pattern established by the great patriarch Jacob (Genesis 49). What is unusual here in comparison with Jacob's blessing is that Moses is not the natural patriarch of the nation. Jacob was the father of the twelve sons he blessed before his death. Moses is not the natural father of the tribes he blesses here, and is naturally speaking a member of one of the tribes himself. The difference is significant in that God is displaying a transition in the avenue of His blessing for His people. The special blessing of God for His people is poured out through His chosen representative, which at the origin point of the nation was the patriarch. However, the Lord now shifts the role of the one who blesses the people from patriarch to prophet. In the same way, the Lord made yet another shift in the transition from Old Covenant to New Covenant. The Lord had blessed His people through Moses throughout the duration of the Old Covenant. In the establishment of the New Covenant, the fullness of God's blessing is now poured out exclusively through Christ. The Lord Jesus supercedes both patriarch and prophet as the One through whom God blesses His people (Hebrews 1:1-2, Ephesians 1:3).

Prior to giving specific and different blessings to the individual tribes of Israel, Moses gives an introduction which is aimed at reminding Israel of the God Who is the source of these blessings. He also pronounces the shared blessing that is upon the entire nation and not exclusive to any one tribe. That shared blessing was given to them and remained among them in the form of the written communication from God. The great shared blessing of Israel was the Law of God. Everyone in Israel received this blessing together and together they were made responsible by the Lord for the Law. Their responsibility toward the Law was two fold. First, they were responsible to keep it by obeying its requirements. Second, they were responsible to preserve it for their own lives and for future generations. Moses identifies the Law here as "a possession for the assembly of Jacob." The meaning implicit in this description of the Law as Israel's possession is that it was the special treasure of their nation. No other nation had been given

this kind of written communication from God. They were to guard it as a treasure, and preserve the integrity and accuracy of the book for all generations to follow.

***33:8-9 - "Of Levi he said, "Let Your Thummim and Your Urim belong to Your godly man, Whom You proved at Massah, With whom You contended at the waters of Meribah; Who said of his father and his mother, 'I did not consider them'; And he did not acknowledge his brothers, Nor did he regard his own sons, For they observed Your word, And kept Your covenant."***

This portion is the specific blessing pronounced upon the tribe of Levi. They had been chosen by the Lord for special service that the other tribes would not be allowed to perform. Originally, the Lord had intended all of His people to serve Him as Levi would, but the serious sinful rebellion of the other tribes caused their privilege to be lost. In the great test of faithfulness to the Lord in the Golden Calf incident, only the tribe of Levi rallied to the side of Moses when he called for all who were faithful to the Lord to stand with him. The phrase in these verses referring to Levi not considering his parents, brothers, or sons is the Lord's description of what happened that day. The entire nation had fallen into idolatry with the Golden Calf while Moses was gone for the 40 days on Sinai with the Lord. When Moses returned and Levi joined him, it was their terrible responsibility to carry out the Lord's judgment in the camp of Israel. This meant that the men of Levi had to walk through the camp with swords and execute the Lord's judgment upon any they encountered in the sin of idolatry. Even if they faced their own tribe and family members, they were to show their loyalty to the Lord exceeded their natural loyalty to their own family. This pattern of loyalty to the Lord above all earthly loyalties is a continuing requirement for New Covenant disciples of the Lord. "If anyone comes to Me, and does not hate his own father and mother and wife and children and brothers and sisters, yes, and even his own life, he cannot be My disciple." (Luke 14:26).

***33:26-29 - "There is none like the God of Jeshurun, Who rides the heavens to your help, And through the skies in His majesty. The eternal God is a dwelling place, And underneath are the everlasting arms; And He drove out the enemy from before you, And said, 'Destroy!' So Israel dwells in security, The fountain of Jacob secluded, In a land of grain and new wine; His heavens also drop down dew. Blessed are you, O Israel; Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD, Who is the shield of your help And the sword of your majesty! So your enemies will cringe before you, And you will tread upon their high places."***

As the covenant people of the Lord, Israel (Jeshurun = upright) enjoyed the special attention of the Lord to a greater degree than any other nation. The Lord was for Israel like a heavenly Hero who rode the skies to swiftly come to the help of Israel. Their security and safety was not in any of their difficult and testing circumstances throughout their forty year journey through the wilderness. During

those forty years they physically dwelt in a harsh and unyielding wilderness. But, their true dwelling place was spiritual. The eternal God was their dwelling place. They found all of their security and provision in Him. As long as He was with them they had a roof over their heads, food to eat, water to drink, clothing to wear, and every other necessity of a good and pleasant life.

Even when Israel was weak, stumbled, and fell their covenant connection with the Lord insured their safety and protection. Underneath were the everlasting arms. This image describes the strong outstretched arms of the Lord always ready to catch Israel as they fell. Like a good father close at hand to catch his beloved child when they stumble, the Lord was always always there for Israel when they most needed Him. He is the One who went ahead of them and defeated their enemies and drove them out from before them. He caused them to dwell in true security. He was for them a secluded fountain providing refreshing life giving water. He was the provider of grain and new wine. Israel was blessed above all nations in their salvation. The Lord was for them a shield of protection and a sword of victory in every battle. He caused their enemies to cringe in defeat and for Israel to tread upon the high places of their enemies and take possession of their lands. The reminders in this blessing of Moses of all the Lord had been for them and done for them until now were intended to establish their hearts in trust for the tests ahead as they were about to enter the Promised Land.

### **Questions from Deuteronomy 32:**

**Question:** 32:51 - "because you broke faith with me IN THE MIDST OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL at the waters of Meribah-kadesh, in the wilderness of Zin and the because you DID NOT TREAT ME AS HOLY IN THE MIDST OF THE PEOPLE OF ISRAEL." Would this also be a warning or lesson for leaders in the body, especially the top leadership like elders that not only did Moses break faith and treat God as unholy but that he also did it IN THE MIDST OF THE PEOPLE, which would have a great effect on the people's lives as they were following the authority and leadership that God had placed there?

**Answer:** Yes, the Lord's discipline for the violation of Moses should be applied as a needed warning for all Christian leaders today. We are held to a higher standard of accountability as leaders that represent the Lord. The point that Moses' violation was done in the midst of the people is to be considered as well. Christian leaders are held accountable by the Lord for their sins that affect their leadership which would include even their private and secret sins. However, public sins which are in the midst of the people are in view here. As an example; if a pastor privately believes a false doctrine that is serious, but if he publicly teaches that false doctrine it is even more serious because of the impact on the people of God that he leads.

## Deuteronomy 34

***34:4-6 - "Then the LORD said to him, "This is the land which I swore to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, 'I will give it to your descendants'; I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there. So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD. And He buried him in the valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth-peor; but no man knows his burial place to this day."***

This is an interesting end to the most famous of all the men of the Old Testament era. When Abraham died he was buried in a known location. The location of the burial site of Moses was only known in a general sense in that the valley in which he was buried was in the land of Moab. Those who actually buried him are not named in the text, but we can be confident that Joshua at least knew where Moses was buried as his personal assistant of forty years and the new leader of Israel. The point of this description is not that no one at all knew the location, but that the location was not made public and preserved for the knowledge of future generations. The purpose of the Lord in keeping the burial place of Moses shrouded in uncertainty was most likely to safeguard Israel from the natural temptation to treat the site as an inappropriate shrine. People naturally tend to idolize those who have had a tremendous impact on their lives personally and nationally. The Lord did not want Israel's attention distracted into spiritually unhealthy concern with the remains of Moses like the pagan religions of the world have done with those who are the leaders of those religions. There is a brief reference in the book of Jude to a spiritual controversy over the remains of Moses at his death, which unfolded in a confrontation between Satan and Michael the archangel. "But Michael the archangel, when he disputed with the devil and argued about the body of Moses, did not dare pronounce against him a railing judgment, but said, "The Lord rebuke you!" (Jude 1:9).

There is one further interesting aspect of the personal story of Moses that seems to end here, but which actually continues in a wonderful way at a much later time. Moses was not allowed by the Lord to cross the Jordan River into the Promised Land with Israel, due to his previous disobedience to the Lord when he struck the rock, as we have seen in previous studies. During his life in this world, Moses never did enter the Promised Land and this passage is a testimony to that. However, by the grace of God, Moses did eventually enter the Promised Land in a completely unexpected way. In the event in the life of Jesus that is commonly called the Transfiguration, Jesus went up on mountain with three of His disciples where two of the prophets of the Old Covenant appeared to them to speak with Jesus. Moses was one of the prophets that met with Jesus that day. This was a special event in which God brought Moses to meet with Jesus and speak with Him. Since this mountain where their meeting occurred was in the Promised Land, we can say that the Lord did finally allow Moses to enter the land of Promise through his own relationship with Christ. "Six days later Jesus took with Him Peter and James and John his brother, and led them up on a high mountain

by themselves. And He was transfigured before them; and His face shone like the sun, and His garments became as white as light. And behold, Moses and Elijah appeared to them, talking with Him." (Matthew 17:1-3).

***34:7 - "Although Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died, his eye was not dim, nor his vigor abated."***

Moses did not live as long as some of the ancients from the days before the Flood, but his life was full at 120 years. As noted before, his 120 years were symmetrically divided by the Lord's design into three periods of a 40 year generation each. His first 40 years were his growth and development in Egypt in the court of Pharaoh as the son of Pharaoh's daughter. His second 40 years were hidden years in the wilderness of Midian as a shepherd and family man after he had prematurely attempted to rescue Israel from their harsh life. The third and final 40 years were his years of fruitfulness in ministry from age 80-120. These were the years when most would expect him to be winding down and relaxing into retirement. Instead, by God's plan, his latter years were his best years and the years of his great service to the Lord.

The testimony of his personal condition at the time of his death refers to undimmed eyesight and unabated physical vigor. This does not mean that Moses was as much in his physical prime at 120 as he was at age 30. Instead, the emphasis is that in spite of age and inevitable physical limitations that Moses served the Lord until his last day and breath with full and undiminished fruitfulness. The description for his vigor in this passage is found in other passages as referring to a green tree in contrast to a dry tree. Dry trees are no longer able to bear fruit. Green trees are full of life, and the sap that produces fruit still fills the tree. Moses' fruit in his latter years was not based upon his secret health food diet, or special exercise routine for seniors. His fruit was from His close relationship with the Lord. The Lord had made him fruitful and the Lord kept him fruitful until his last day on earth.

***34:9-12 - "Now Joshua the son of Nun was filled with the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; and the sons of Israel listened to him and did as the LORD had commanded Moses. Since that time no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, for all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to perform in the land of Egypt against Pharaoh, all his servants, and all his land, and for all the mighty power and for all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel."***

The Lord had ordained the death of Moses. This meant that Israel would lose the only leader they had ever known. Moses had faithfully and powerfully led Israel for their entire forty year history as a nation. However, that era now came to an end. The death of Moses would be a challenging experience for Israel. They would be tested in whether their faith was in Moses or in the Lord now. If their

faith was in Moses, then they would be in big trouble because Moses would no longer be with them to lead them. If their faith was in the Lord, then they would mourn the loss of such a godly leader, and then trust the Lord to provide another leader for them just as He had provided Moses. The loss of godly leadership remains a challenge to the people of God in each generation, but the greater purpose of God in these circumstances is to train the hearts of His people to look to Him, and not depend in the wrong way on even good men.

The Lord had chosen a new leader for Israel. Joshua, who had been proven faithful and capable in his service to Moses and his leadership of the army of Israel would take the role of the leader of Israel. The Lord had directed Moses to lay his hands upon Joshua before his death and in that action, the Lord had transferred from Moses to Joshua the spiritual responsibility of the people. According to the ways of God in spiritual leadership, when the Lord appoints a leader to great responsibility, He gives to that man great grace for the work. What were the qualifications of Joshua for such a tremendous position of responsibility? How was Israel to recognize the Lord's appointment of Joshua? At this time in the USA, we are gearing up for the next presidential election in which we will vote as a nation for the next leader of the country. The characteristics that matter in that election include personality, finances, appearance, eloquence and popularity. Interestingly, none of those factor into the appointment of Joshua. The Lord names for us the one critical characteristic that qualifies Joshua above all other possibilities. Joshua "was filled with the spirit of wisdom." What mattered most to the Lord and what should matter most to us is whether those who lead the people of God are first filled with the Spirit of God and the wisdom of God. If they are they will lead as they should, where they should. If they are not filled with God's wisdom, then no amount of natural advantages will make up the difference.