

BREAD OF LIFE TORAH STUDIES

I am the bread of life. He who comes to me shall never hunger... John 6:35

DEUTERONOMY 33-34

In the Jewish Torah cycle, this portion is called *v'zot habrakha*, "And this is the blessing". This is a special portion, not only because it is the last reading of the Torah, but also because it is the only Torah portion that is not read specifically on a Shabbat. Traditionally it is read on 8th day of the Feast of Tabernacles (Sukkot) during the festival of *Simchat Torah*, which means 'rejoicing in Torah,' and it is read along with the first portion of Genesis, thereby indicating that the study of Torah never ends. The idea that Torah study is cyclical finds expression in the joyous ritual of dancing around and around the Torah scroll on *Simchat Torah*.

Moses' Final Blessing on Israel

The final words of Moses are words of blessing to his people. Whereas in the past Moses spoke as a leader, a prophet, a lawgiver, now, on the last day of his life, he speaks as a father about to leave his children—a faithful shepherd taking leave of his people.

And this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death. As we have seen before, when a verse begins with "and" it indicates that it is linked to something before it. At the end of Genesis, Israel received a blessing from their father, Jacob (Gen. 49). Jacob's blessing had ended with the words, "***and this is what their father spoke to them***". Now Moses' blessing begins, "***and this is the blessing...***" This is understood to directly link Jacob's blessing of his sons with Moses' blessing of the tribes.

Moses "the man of God" – This expression is bestowed uniquely upon Moses. He is a man totally consecrated to, and at one with, God.

Moses introduces his blessings by praising the LORD and concludes them in a similar manner - a manner of prayer still followed by Jews today.¹ He brings forth images of God's glory in revealing Himself and His Word to Israel; he speaks of the LORD's love for the people, and within the context of that love—***From His right hand came a fiery law for them.*** God's right hand is said to correspond to the principle of love, and it was through love that He gave the Torah to Israel; but here it is also *fiery*, which speaks of justice—love and justice are forever harmoniously combined in God. Each attribute must be understood in light of the other; they do not compete with each other, but stand side-by-side in complete harmony. How much more is this principle expressed by His giving of His only Son—the Word made flesh— who baptizes in the Holy Spirit and with fire (Mt. 3:11-12).

Was it the pre-incarnate Christ, going forth from the right hand of God that executed His will from the very beginning? We first saw mention of God's 'right hand' after the crossing of the sea in Exodus 15:6: "Your right hand, O LORD, has become glorious in power." Most notable is, Psalm 98:

O, sing a new song to the Lord! For He has done marvellous things; His right hand and His Holy arm have gained Him the victory. The Lord has made known His salvation, His righteousness He has revealed in the sight of the nations.

¹ The daily Shimoneh Esrei prayer begins with 3 blessings; then beseeches the LORD with requests and ends with 3 more blessings of praise. We might compare this with the Lord's Prayer.

Heb. 1:2-3 *...but in these last days he has spoken to us by his Son, whom he appointed heir of all things, and **through whom also he made the universe**. The Son is the radiance of God's glory and the exact representation of his being, sustaining all things by his powerful word. After he had provided purification for sins, **he sat down at the right hand of the Majesty in heaven**.*

4 Moses commanded a law for us, a heritage of the congregation of Jacob. 5 And he was king in Jeshurun, when the leaders of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel together.

These verses speak of the unity and uprightness of the tribes under the unique leadership of Moses, so are a fitting lead-in to the blessings over the tribes, as each has an individual and unique contribution to make to the whole.

Christians are likewise called to oneness and unity under one head. For example, 1Corinthians 12:12-26 refers to unity of the body of Christ; and also Ephesians 4:3 *...being diligent to keep the unity of the Spirit in the bond of peace.* ⁴ *There is one body and one Spirit, just as you were called in one hope of your calling;* ⁵ *one Lord, one faith, one baptism;* ⁶ *one God and Father of all, who is above all, and through all, and in you all.*

Blessing on the Tribes

We will just look at some of the most significant blessings.

33:6 REUBEN – “Let Reuben live, and not die, Nor let his men be few.”

Remember Reuben did lose his firstborn status through sin, but still retains a place in the land for no part of Israel can disappear without permanent damage being done to the entire nation.²

33:7 JUDAH – and he said, Hear, LORD, the voice of Judah—in prayer, which was eminently fulfilled in David, and other kings of this tribe who, when in distress, lifted up their voice in prayer to God, and were heard and delivered. Judah signifies praising, professing, confessing, and this tribe was both a praying and praising people. They profess the name of the Lord, and their faith in him, they confess their sins and unworthiness, they praise the Lord for his mercies, pray to him for what they want—and their voice is heard and answered.

This blessing may refer to the whole tribe in general, or more specifically to David as a type of Christ, who was of this tribe, and whose voice in prayer for his people has always been heard.

... And bring him to his people –

Moses knew from Jacob's prophecy (Gen. 49:10) that: *The scepter shall not depart from Judah*. The sceptre here alludes firstly to King David, the first king from the tribe of Judah. However, again, this verse may also refer to the incarnation of the Messiah King – Matthew's genealogy begins: “The book of the genealogy of Jesus Christ, the son of David...” – and will find its ultimate fulfilment when He returns as King.

... Let his hands be sufficient for him, and may You be a help against his enemies:

The tribe of Judah often had to fight enemies, and defend themselves against their enemies and was very courageous and victorious, always relying on the help of God.

² Simeon's tribe is not mentioned here because it was dispersed within Judah's territory! (Gen 49:5-6)

Psalm 144 reads: *Blessed be the LORD, my rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle;...* This psalm goes on to say v.9 “... O God; On a harp of ten strings I will sing praises to You, the One who ... delivers David his servant from the deadly sword. When David needed deliverance from his enemies he praised God with harp and song.

On another level, Christ's had sufficiency of power and strength in his hands, on a spiritual level, to combat and overcome all his and our enemies—and His Father in heaven surely did hear His voice.

33:8-11 LEVI – Next to Joseph, this tribe has the largest share in Moses' last words; it was after all Moses' own tribe. The character of the High Priest is the principal subject:

Let Your Thumim and Your Urim be with Your holy one – these stones were in the High Priest's breastplate; the words are derived from roots meaning “complete” and “light” and were over Aaron's heart when he went into the presence of the LORD, giving him the means and wisdom to make decisions for Israel. This also has its full accomplishment in our great High-Priest, Jesus Christ, of whom Aaron was but a type. Completeness, light and perfect wisdom are found in Him alone.

Whom You tested at Massah, And with whom You contended at the waters of Meribah. Who “did not acknowledge his brothers,” nor “know his own children,” but “observed Your word and kept Your covenant.” This refers first to when Moses brought water from the rock at Massah (Ex. 17); then to Meribah, when Moses struck the rock a second time, for which he and Aaron were judged harshly (Num.20); and finally to the sin of the golden calf, when the Levites were steadfast in their faithfulness, and were ordered by Moses to draw their swords against their brethren without respect of person (Ex. 32). For their faithfulness they were set apart to minister to the Lord as firstborn sons - priests and intermediaries between the people and God

*They shall teach Jacob Your judgments, and Israel Your law,
They shall put incense before You, And a whole burnt sacrifice on Your altar.
Bless his substance, LORD, and accept the work of his hands;
Strike the loins of those who rise against him, and of those who hate him, that they rise not again.”*

Notice how the plural in the first two lines changes to singular in the last two, where it seems to transition to a messianic prophecy. Note also the correlation between “accept the work of his hands” here, with “Let his hands be sufficient for him,” in Judah's prophecy (v.7).

33:12 BENJAMIN – *Of Benjamin he said, “May the beloved of the Lord dwell in security by Him, who shields him all the day, and he dwells between His shoulders.”*

Benjamin has a special place in the heart of God. The blessing of Benjamin concerns *the* LORD's dwelling place being among the tribe of Benjamin.³ He is thus called by Moses “the beloved of the Lord,” picturing him as a child clinging to his father's neck as he is held in his arms. Benjamin's tiny territory sat on the shoulders of Judah. According to Jewish tradition, the altars and sanctuary of the Temple were in Benjamin, while the courts of the temple were in Judah.⁴

33:13-17 JOSEPH – Joseph also receives a long blessing, as he did in Jacob's deathbed blessing. Most of the verses in this passage speak of the profound natural abundance that will be found within the inheritance of the tribe of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh). This is in keeping with Jacob's words: “Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well, his branches run over the wall.”

³ Benjamin means “son of my right hand.”

⁴ After the destruction of the northern kingdom, Benjamin was absorbed into the southern kingdom.

There is clearly great favour bestowed upon Joseph, who we have previously seen to be a prophetic shadow of the Messiah. Let us look at one more amazing way the Torah teaches us about the person and work of the Messiah through Joseph.

v.16b – *Let the blessing come on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.*

Let's compare this with a verse from Jacob's blessing over Joseph: *They (the blessings of your Father) shall be on the head of Joseph, And on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers* (Gen. 49:26).

Where have we seen the themes of 'crown of the head' and 'separation from his brothers' before? Remember the law of the Nazirite vow?

He shall not make himself unclean even for his father or his mother, for his brother or his sister, when they die, because his separation to God is on his head All the days of his separation he shall be holy to the LORD (Numbers 6:7-8).

This blessing upon Joseph is clearly pointing the reader to see Joseph in relation to the Nazirite Vow. The purpose of the vow was so that the individual could draw closer to the LORD during the period of separation. We have also seen previously, that the Torah intentionally relates the Nazirite vow to the priesthood, particularly the High Priesthood. For example:

- The Nazirite is said to be 'Holy to the Lord' in Numbers 6:7-8; The head-plate of the High Priest was engraved 'Holy to the Lord'.
- The Nazirite has his hair as the "crown of his God" upon his head; The High Priest has the "consecration of the anointing oil of his God" upon his head.
- Neither was able to defile himself by contact with a dead body, even that of their father or mother.

When Jesus said at the Last Supper, 'I will not drink of the fruit of the vine again until...' he was, in effect, taking a Nazirite Vow. He was also about to enter into His function as High Priest – a time of separation from His brothers, and also complete separation from death. He will be re-united with his brothers again when He returns as King.

Note the following short summary of Joseph's life:

Joseph was rejected by His brothers; he was separated from His brothers for a long period of time; and later re-united with His brothers, who accepted his leadership the second time.

Jesus was also rejected by His brothers at His first coming; He is now separated from them; and He will be re-united with His brothers at His second coming, when they will bow the knee to Him.

So we see that Joseph's separation from his brothers was prophetic of the Messiah's separation from His brothers during His period of ministry as a High Priest! This method of thematically connecting the Scriptures is intentional, and represents the wisdom of our God. In summary, the blessing given to Joseph has blossomed into a full blown (and extremely significant) Messianic prophecy!⁵

Continuing to look at Joseph's prophecy we read:

"His glory is like a firstborn bull, and his horns like the horns of the wild ox;"⁶

⁵ I acknowledge *Restoration of Torah Ministries* for the insights outlined here.

⁶ *God brings them out of Egypt and is for them like the horns of the wild ox.* Num. 23:22

*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."*

The two tribes of Joseph – Ephraim and Manasseh – were indeed blessed numerically in Israel. Among the twelve sons of Jacob, the descendants of this one son were far more numerous than all the other tribes. Indeed Ephraim means ‘double fruitfulness’. Jacob bestowed blessing on Joseph’s two sons Ephraim and Manasseh (Gen. 48:19), and said of Ephraim: “his descendants shall become a multitude of nations” – *goyim* – usually considered to refer to gentile nations.

Chapter 33 finishes with these beautiful words:

26 “There is no one like the God of Jeshurun,
Who rides the heavens to help you,
And in His excellency on the clouds.

27 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!’

28 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.

29 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.”

CHAPTER 34 - Moses Dies on Mount Nebo 1-10

It is not known who wrote this chapter, but clearly not Moses himself. The first verses even speak of tribal areas which had clearly not been allocated at this time.

*Moses ascended*⁷ — Mt Nebo and the LORD showed him the entire land, so he would see with his own eyes that he had brought Israel to the brink of entering into the promise the LORD made to the patriarchs.

5 So Moses, servant of the LORD died there, in the land of Moab, by the word (mouth) of the LORD —The highest title of tribute you could give a person in the Old Testament was to call him "servant of the LORD," and this is the first time Moses is referred to as such - one who is totally dedicated to his master.

The word usually translated ‘word’ here is from the Hebrew word *peh*, which actually means ‘mouth’. Midrash says that “the LORD embraced Moses and removed his soul in a divine kiss.”

⁷ We saw this word ‘ascend’ used twice in conjunction with Moses’ death previously in Deut. 32:49-50.

6 And He buried him in a valley in the land of Moab, opposite Beth Peor; but no one knows his grave to this day. 7 Moses was one hundred and twenty years old when he died. His eyes were not dim nor his natural vigour diminished.

Who buried him where? Because Moses was a devoted Servant, the LORD Himself holds that secret, making sure that no-one would know where he lies, because most likely, a monument marking the place would have been set up, which could have led to idolatry. So greatly was Moses esteemed by the Jewish people that a lot of legend exists around his death (or lack of).⁸ One of these legends says that Moses ascended in a cloud. This was picked up by the 1stC historian, Josephus:

Now as soon as they [Moses, Joshua, Eleazar the high priest, and the seventy elders] were come to the mountain called Abarim, he dismissed the senate; and as he was going to embrace Eleazar and Joshua, and was still discoursing with them, a cloud stood over him on the sudden, and he disappeared in a certain valley, although he wrote in the holy books that he died [cf. Deut 34:6-7], which was done out of fear, lest they should venture to say that, because of his extraordinary virtue, he went to God (Josephus, Antiquities 4.325-26).

8 And the children of Israel wept for Moses in the plains of Moab thirty days. So the days of weeping and mourning for Moses ended.

9 Now Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom, for Moses had laid his hands on him; so the children of Israel heeded him, and did as the LORD had commanded Moses.

10 But since then there has not arisen in Israel a prophet like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face,

11 in all the signs and wonders which the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, before Pharaoh, before all his servants, and in all his land,

12 and by all that mighty power and all the great terror which Moses performed in the sight of all Israel.

God said to Moses in Exodus 33 that no-one could see His face and live. John 1:18 agrees, saying that no man has seen God at any time, and Jesus himself says in John 6:46 that no-one has seen the Father except the one who is from God; only he has seen the Father – so how could Moses have known the LORD face to face? Since Moses could not have been speaking face to face with the Father, with whom was he speaking? Perhaps this can be explained by simply emphasizing what we already know—that Jesus is, and always has been, one with God, and functions as the intermediary between God and man.

The Torah would not exist without the faithfulness of Moses and his intimate relationship with the Godhead. Little did he know when he encountered the Angel of the LORD in the burning bush, just how enormously significant and monumental his calling would be. The one thing that has stood out continually is that the entire Torah is all about Israel's Messiah – as Jesus Himself said:

For if you believed Moses, you would believe Me; for he wrote about Me. (John 5:46)

⁸ Jude 9 makes mention of the body of Moses.