

# MOSES'

# *Final* Blessing

The "Lost" Chapters of Deuteronomy

By Dr. Jim Solberg, National Director, Bridges for Peace USA

Several years ago I had the privilege of writing a book for Bridges for Peace attempting to introduce Christian readers to the daily and weekly reading of the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.), supported by a daily Christian devotion. That book is titled *Sinai Speaks*, and it is available through Bridges for Peace offices around the world.

In preparing that book, I took the traditional *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) reading schedule as used in synagogues and yeshivas throughout the world and packaged it into 52 weekly chapters, each chapter having six daily devotions—one for each day of the week, with one day off to gather in your local congregation. It has been very encouraging to receive comments from many who have enjoyed the book. But, there is one special reader in South Africa who has carefully gone through every chapter and noticed that there is no devotion or reading for the two last chapters of Deuteronomy. She has asked “where are the lost chapters of Deuteronomy?” And, how did this happen?



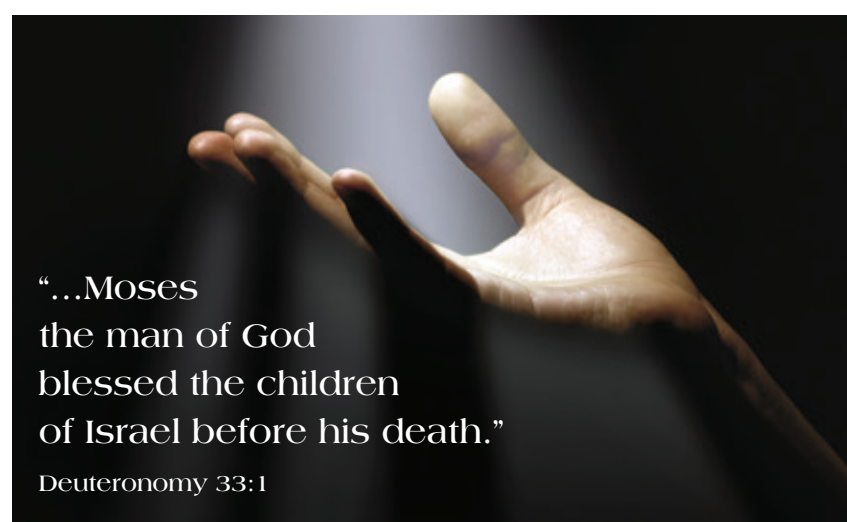


## A Never-ending Cycle

In Jewish tradition, the reading of the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) is a never-ending cycle. At the end of the annual reading schedule, a special holiday called *Simchat Torah* (Rejoicing in the Law) is celebrated. A portion known as *Vezot Haberakhah* (“and this is the blessing”) contains the last two chapters of Deuteronomy and is read along with the first chapter of Genesis, combining the end and beginning of the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) to create a never-ending loop.

Thus, the last two chapters of Deuteronomy are not included in the regular weekly *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) portions, but are in fact, always included and read in the annual *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) cycle. This reading includes the blessings Moses gave each of the tribes, as well as the story of Moses’ death. When I organized *Sinai Speaks* according to the traditional weekly *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) portions, I began with Genesis 1:1, *Beresheet*, and ended with the last reading before *Simchat Torah* (Rejoicing in the Law). In doing so, these last two chapters of Deuteronomy were “lost.” The remainder of this teaching letter will correct that oversight and share some Christian devotional thoughts on these last two chapters.

The letter follows the format of *Sinai Speaks*, and is divided into six daily sections. The concept is to use one section per day for six days; and on the seventh day to attend your congregation for public worship. This organizational idea is borrowed from Judaism, as are the breaks between recommended Scripture portions. In the synagogue the weekly reading is divided into seven sections known as *aliyot*, typically each read by a different person during synagogue service. I’ve used these same typical break points to organize the devotional thoughts which follow, combining the readings from the sixth and seventh *aliyot* to make six sections.



“...Moses  
the man of God  
blessed the children  
of Israel before his death.”

Deuteronomy 33:1

### Day One: Deuteronomy 33: 1–7

*“Now this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death” (Deut. 33:1).*

What will be most on your mind the last day of your life? Of course many of us will die unexpectedly, unable to consciously choose our last words. But Moses was given the gift of knowing he was about to die and having a choice of what he would do. I might focus on pleading with God for forgiveness of known wrongs. I might work on putting my financial affairs in order, or seeking to set right any wrongs or hurts within my family, or even sharing requests regarding my funeral arrangements. What would you do?

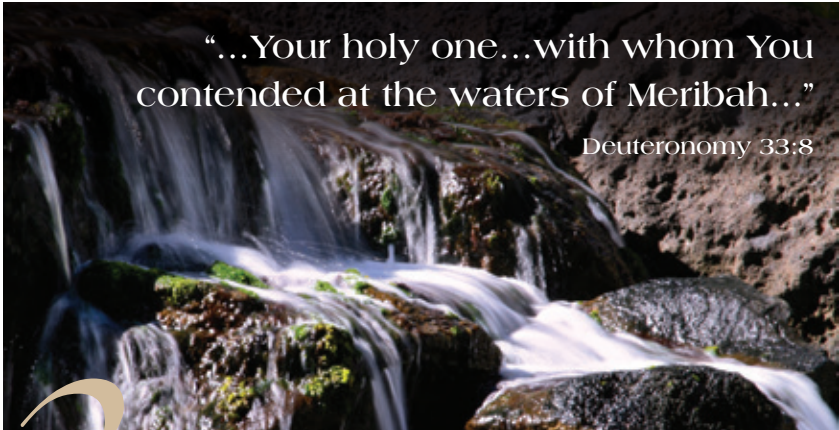
Moses chose to end his life by proclaiming blessings over those he had led and served for many years. This certainly included his family, but the record we have of his speech demonstrates concern for all the children of Israel. To the end he is acting as God’s spokesman—the definition of a prophet then as it still is today. He is proclaiming blessing, opportunity and godly challenge. Past hurts and memories of rebellion are forgotten and his own imminent death is ignored as he focuses on blessing his people one last time.

More than 3,000 years after his death his last recorded words remain a challenge and an example to all of us. He must have thought and prayed deep and hard to know the right words to say, and the blessings to impart. Can we, will we, follow his example?

#### Prayer:

Lord, help us to leave a legacy of wise words and blessing for our family and those we love and serve. Amen





“...Your holy one...with whom You  
contended at the waters of Meribah...”

Deuteronomy 33:8

## Day Two: Deuteronomy 33: 8–12

*“And of Levi he said: ‘Let Your Thummim and Your Urim be with Your holy one,  
whom You tested at Massah, and with whom You contended  
at the waters of Meribah...’” (Deut. 33:8).*


Levi is the tribe chosen to carry and use the *Thummim* and the *Urim* to reveal the will of God. No one knows for certain exactly what the *Thummim* and *Urim* were, or how they worked, but Scripture is clear that they provided a way of asking for and receiving God’s specific direction. Immediately following Moses’ proclamation that Levi would be responsible for these mysterious elements, Moses reminds them (and us) that they were among the rebellious people tested at Massah (which means “test”) and Meribah (which means “arguing”). See Exodus 17:7.

In these verses we find a message of God’s incredible grace and patience. As far as Scripture reveals, the entire nation, including the tribe of Levi, rebelled at Meribah, fearing that the Lord had abandoned them to die of thirst. Yet, it is here, in the midst of rebellion, that God does a great miracle and brings forth water from the rock. To these same rebellious people, God gives special tools, the *Thummim* and the *Urim* to provide a sure way for them to discover His will and know His decisions.

How awesome that God is the same yesterday, today and forever. We still rebel and challenge Him. At times we doubt His power or His love but He is always faithfully there for us. Often He does His greatest works when we are most in doubt; and despite our unbelief, He gives us the gifts of His Word and prayer that we may seek and know His will.

### Prayer:

Lord, help us to trust You in times of trial, and to use every means You provide for us to know Your will. Amen



“Blessed of the  
LORD is his land,  
with the precious  
things of heaven,  
with the dew, and  
the deep lying  
beneath...”

Deuteronomy 33:13

### Day Three: Deuteronomy 33:13–17

*“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, with the precious fruits of the sun, with the precious produce of the months...’” (Deut. 33: 13–14).*


At first reading we are struck by the clear and bountiful blessings God through Moses is promising to the descendants of Joseph. Although these blessings are specific and particular to Ephraim and Manasseh, a closer look reminds us that we, too, have many of these blessings.

Wherever in the world you live, you experience the precious blessings of heaven on the land. There is dew in the morning, even in desert climates. Wherever you live, the sun rises and plants bring forth fruit in season. And, no matter where you make your home, it is easy to take these blessings for granted, because they occur everywhere every day.

This passage reminds us that God created and sustains the heavens and the earth. Each morning, each drop of dew, each ray of sunshine and each plant that blossoms in harvest is a gift from Him. Different lands have different blends of geography, plants, water, heat and cold—but every day when the sun rises we experience gifts from God. I believe these specific promises were given to Joseph’s descendants not only because their land would be particularly blessed, but also to cause them to remember that He is the source of every blessing.


#### Prayer:

Lord, help us to see the wonder in the world around us, and to treasure the gifts you give us in the world you have created. Amen

A close-up photograph of two ripe, bright orange oranges hanging from a tree. The oranges are positioned in the lower-left and lower-right areas of the frame. They are surrounded by numerous large, vibrant green leaves that fill the background and foreground. The lighting is bright, highlighting the texture of the orange peels and the veins on the leaves.

“...with the  
precious fruits of  
the sun, with the  
precious produce  
of the months...”

Deuteronomy 33:14



“Blessed is he  
who enlarges  
Gad; he dwells  
as a lion...”

Deuteronomy 33:20

## Day Four: Deuteronomy 33: 18–21

*“Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out, and Issachar in your tents! 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.’” (Deut. 33:18, 20).*

The rabbis interpret the blessing to Zebulun “*as you go out*” as a blessing in trading and business; and they interpret the blessing to Issachar “*as you stay home*” as a blessing of *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) study. Gad is blessed with strength.

Zebulun and Issachar were full brothers, both sons of Jacob and Leah. Gad was a half brother, son of Jacob and Leah’s maid Zilpah. Again we see that God is not a “respector of persons,” but knows and forms us each individually. The full brothers Zebulun and Issachar are given almost opposite blessings, and presumably opposite skills and personalities. Gad, however, who might have been thought of as the least, is given both strength and praise in these blessings.

What hope for each of us. Our future is not determined by our parentage or birth order, but by God’s plans and blessings for our lives. We join the psalmist David in proclaiming:

*“Your eyes saw my substance, being yet unformed. And in Your book they all were written, the days fashioned for me, when as yet there were none of them. How precious also are Your thoughts to me, O God! How great is the sum of them!” (Ps. 139:16–17).*

### Prayer:

Lord, may we live with hope and expectation each day that You have fashioned for us, seeking to be all and to accomplish all that You have prepared for us. Amen



“Asher is most  
blessed of sons...  
let him dip his  
foot in oil...”

Deuteronomy 33:23



## Day Five: Deuteronomy 33:23–26

*“‘O Naphtali, satisfied with favor, and full of the blessing of the LORD, possess the west and the south.’ 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’” (Deut. 33:23-24).*

Outside of what you just read in these two verses, what can you tell me about Naphtali and Asher? If the answer is “not much,” don’t be too ashamed. There is little written in Scripture about these two brothers or their descendants. These might be the two least remembered and least known tribes.

Naphtali is Jacob’s son through Bilhah, Rachel’s maid; and Asher is his son through Zilpah, Leah’s maid. In the family birth order, Asher is number six, and Naphtali number eight—arguably both suffering from what today we would describe as middle child syndrome. Naphtali’s name means “struggling or wrestling,” but Asher means “happiness.”

Despite their relative anonymity, look at the blessings they are promised. In fact, if you read through the whole list of Moses’ prophesied blessings to the twelve tribes, you might agree with me that these are the best. Who wouldn’t like to brim with blessings and be the favorite?

These verses and promises give us hope. No matter where we stand in our family, we are each special and chosen by God. Others may never know it or see it, but our blessings may well exceed those of the rich and famous. In fact, many of the rich and famous would tell us they would gladly abandon all wealth and fame for peace, joy and privacy.

### Prayer:

Lord, help us to seek and enjoy the blessings you have selected individually for each of us. In You may we find true joy and abundance. Amen

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## Day Six: Deuteronomy 33:27–34:12

*"Then Moses went up from the plains of Moab to Mount Nebo, to the top of Pisgah, which is across from Jericho. And the LORD showed him all the land of Gilead as far as Dan, all Naphtali and the land of Ephraim and Manasseh, all the land of Judah as far as the Western Sea, the South, and the plain of the Valley of Jericho, the city of palm trees, as far as Zoar. Then the LORD said to him, 'This is the land of which I swore to give Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, saying, "I will give it to your descendants." I have caused you to see it with your eyes, but you shall not cross over there.' So Moses the servant of the LORD died there in the land of Moab, according to the word of the LORD."*

Deuteronomy 34: 1–5



View from Mount Nebo

Is this an end or a beginning? Moses, the only leader that these Israelites had ever known is taken away. A few verses later we read that the Israelites mourned Moses' passing with weeping for thirty days.

And yet, even in Moses' passing, God repeats His promise for the future. He has given the Land of Israel to the people of Israel. As lovers of Israel we often quote Genesis 12:3 where we read of God promising the Land to Abraham and his descendants. But this is not an isolated or one-time promise. It is a promise repeated multiple times to multiple people and recorded in multiple chapters and verses. God Himself reminds Moses and us that He has made this promise not only to Abraham, but specifically also to Isaac and Jacob—that the promise flows through their lineage—whom today we call the Jewish people. Heartbroken though Moses must have been that he could not personally enter the Land; he stood with generations of the Jewish people knowing and trusting God's promise that the Land was their everlasting possession.

The story was not ending, but transitioning. As Moses passed, Joshua was installed as the new leader, and would guide the people on to even greater victory than Moses had done. Perhaps God comforted Moses by letting him know that for the future to be fulfilled, he needed to let go and let another lead. May we each have the grace and wisdom to recognize that time with people we lead and responsibilities we hold. It was not the end; it was a new beginning. The Jewish tradition of an unending cycle of *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) reading in itself is a message that God's Word and God's will continue unbroken through the millennia.

### Prayer:

Lord, may we trust Your promises, and Your timing, knowing You never fail. It is a gift to be used by You, but remind us that completion of Your will and Your promises does not depend on any of us—not even on Moses. Amen

## In Closing...

Each time I have the privilege of speaking, writing or teaching about the Bible, I am re-amazed at the depth and wonder of God's Word. The rabbis teach that all knowledge and all truth are contained in *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.). I would personally broaden that some, but I have come to believe that all knowledge and truth are contained, although not always obvious, in Scripture. I hope these few comments on some of our lesser-studied verses have fanned the flame of your desire to look deeper and learn more of God and His Word.

In closing, I can't resist mentioning a quote from the late radio broadcaster Paul Harvey. He would close his daily radio show, which aired for over 40 years, by saying "and now you know the rest of the story." So, with apologies to Paul Harvey, I leave you by saying: "and now you know the rest of the *Torah*."

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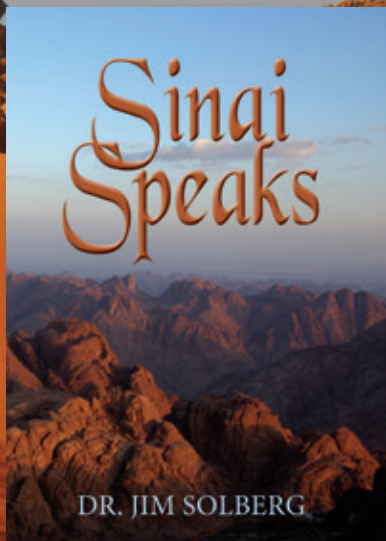


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For millennia, the Jewish people have read the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) through every year, allowing their ancestral desert experience to speak to them wherever they were, whatever their need. After centuries of neglect, Christians are re-discovering the *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) and its relevant messages for life today.

We've given you a brief glimpse into Dr. Solberg's devotional, *Sinai Speaks*. If you are curious about the study of *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.)...if you would like the Scriptures to speak to you today...if you are already a *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) student but have friends or family that you would like to introduce to this life-changing endeavor...*Sinai Speaks* is for you. Written for the beginning *Torah* (Gen.–Deut.) student, this amazing devotional will open your eyes to a whole new realm of Bible study as ancient stories with modern applications bring you ever closer to the God of Israel.



The book can be ordered through your  
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