

47 – Vezot Ha’Bracha - Outline

Vezot HaBracha Summary:

- the only portion usually read on a weekday
 - often gets skipped in the teaching cycle
- it’s a very weighty moment for Moses, the culmination of his life with Israel, his last moment to shape the nation
- the Salvation Pattern in Moses’ blessing introduction:
 - “...The LORD came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; He shone forth from Mount Paran; He came from the ten thousands of holy ones; from His right hand went a fiery law for them. Yes, He loved his people, all His holy ones were in His hand; so they followed in Your steps, receiving direction from You, when Moses commanded us a law, even the heritage of the congregation of Jacob. And He was King in Yeshurun, when the heads of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel as one” (Deuteronomy 33:2-5)
 - the Salvation Pattern:
 - light from darkness; God dawns on Israel from the darkness
 - place names are all “darkness:”
 - “Sinai” = “thorn”
 - an allusion to the curse after the fall
 - thus, the Torah is given at this place because it is a central step in reversing the curse
 - “Seir” = “hairy”
 - territory God gave to Esau; Esau is the more physical twin (thus, dark)
 - Mt. Paran = “place of caverns” (BDB H6290)
 - a place a darkness
 - more importantly, connected to Ishmael, the wilderness area where Ishmael was raised
 - Ishmael is the son of Abraham born of human reasoning rather than faith
 - the first light is from God, Himself
 - God reduces the light to the Torah
 - “from His right hand went a fiery law for them”
 - fiery law = “esh-dot”
 - a reduced form of God’s light that is comprehensible to mankind
 - God teaches Israel the way of righteousness
 - “Yes, He loved his people, all His holy ones were in His hand; so they followed in Your steps, receiving direction from You, when Moses commanded us a law”
 - establishing of kingdom
 - “And He was King in Yeshurun”
 - oneness within the body in the kingdom

- “...when the heads of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel as one”
 - oneness in the human body (kahal) that God inhabits is the end goal of the Salvation Pattern
 - this is why the end of the Bible is focused on letters helping to instruct local bodies in how they are to serve each other and be a healthy body
- Summary of the Tribal Blessings
 - Reuben – that he would live and be numbered
 - Judah – that God would hear his voice, connect him to his people, and fight against his adversaries
 - Levi has one of the longest blessings – to receive the Thummim and Urim and teach the Torah and do the work of the priesthood because, in order to obey God, this tribe didn’t regard even their own families
 - Benjamin – called the beloved of the LORD, “yedid Adonai,” and blessed with dwelling in safety surrounded by God all day long and also being a resting place for God
 - Joseph – especially blessed regarding the abundance of his land, the best of the earth, and Moses also calls Joseph a firstborn bull that will overpower the peoples to the ends of the earth
 - Zebulun and Issachar are put together, as they usually are, Zebulun blessed in his going out, Issachar in his tents; they are further blessed that people come to them to receive treasures from the seas and the sand
 - Gad and Dan’s blessings also seem connected in that Gad is described as a lion and Dan as a lion’s cub; Gad is blessed as a commander and warrior and with the responsibility of executing justice and judgments in Israel
 - Naphtali – blessed with satiation, with fullness, and given possession of the lake and the south
 - Asher – blessed to be the favorite brother and that he would dip his foot in oil, and that his door locks be made of strong iron and bronze
- final chapter of the Torah: the death and burial of Moses
 - repetition yet again that Moses is not allowed to go into the Land, but God shows it to him from the top of Mt. Nebo
 - Moses dies and is buried by God in the valley
 - the people mourn 30 days
 - Joshua, filled with the spirit of wisdom, takes leadership and is respected
 - final sentence:
 - “And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel”
(Deuteronomy 34:10-12)

- at that time, there had not arisen the Prophet like Moses, but He has come, and He is coming again – Yeshua the Messiah

Poured Out Like a Drink Offering in the Desert

- an example from trees:
 - we are learning that when trees determine they are unlikely to survive, they push their remaining nutrients and energy out through the soil fungal network to the surrounding saplings and other trees, even other species; then they collapse
 - they are trained in giving during their lives so that giving all is already established for them by the end
 - this is how we are to finish the race
 - like Paul in Philippians 2, nearing the end of his race and describing being poured out like a drink offering for the sake of those he has ministered to in life
 - this pouring out is what Moses is doing here
 - with his last breaths on earth, Moses is not just sharing pretty words; he knows the tribes intimately at this point and has been put in a position to pull down blessing from God to help shape the future of the tribes according to the personalities and giftings he sees in them
 - Zohar: the Hebrew for “blessing” is found in the word hamavrich, found in the Mishnah, meaning “to draw down” (https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4161209/jewish/Why-Can-Mere-Humans-Bless-Gd.htm)
 - his blessing is not general but given to the tribes individually
 - empowering each tribe to differentiate, to specialize, to fully realize and develop its God-given place
 - this is the essence of the Sukkot season, life in the body
 - we literally build a house in this season, a body
 - we pick up the Four Species and bind them together and rejoice before God, and they atone for each other
 - we always read this portion at the end of Sukkot, when we are receiving the seed that, on the other side of the calendar, bears the fruit of “body,” including the “leveling up” of the body at Passover (mixed multitude)

Moses’ Blessings as the Building of a Home

- the fact that this portion is always connected to Sukkot should lead us to seeing in these blessings the idea that Moses is here building a house from the tribes; he is putting in place the seeds that will help Israel’s parts specialize with each being fitted together to become the home that God indwells

- the blessing order has puzzled commentators; connecting to the season is key
- Moses' blessings as the building of a home
 - Reuben: the *idea* of building the house
 - Reuben is the firstborn of Jacob
 - first energy is strong but unstructured, unbounded, and this is the essence of Reuben
 - can go either way, and sometimes trips up Reuben
 - "Let Reuben live, and not die, but let his men be few/be counted"
 - "let his men be counted" is the blessing that the *idea* of Israel being built into a house get its finite, physical form, the blessing that the idea be "brought down" to a finite expression
 - Judah: the foundation
 - the foundation is low but affects everything; in a sense, it's the lowly foundation that is the real ruler of the structure
 - if the foundation sinks, the whole building sinks; if it bends, the whole building bends
 - Judah's essence is humility, the humbling that leads to being raised up
 - "Yehudah" from "hod," "to praise/to acknowledge"
 - praise is admitting God's superior greatness; praise requires humility
 - Judah's humility is the foundation for the house that God indwells
 - in the same way that the foundation serves the rest of the house, Judah serves through leadership of the nation
 - Levi: the walls
 - one of the longest blessings
 - "Levi" = "joined to"
 - walls are about connection: left and right, forward and backward, and up and down (connecting foundation to roof)
 - the tribe of Levit, dispersed throughout the nation, becomes the tribe that connects the nation together and connects the tribes (and even the Land, itself) to God
 - Benjamin: the roof
 - "Of Benjamin he said, 'The beloved of the LORD dwells in safety. THE HIGH GOD COVERS HIM ALL DAY LONG, and dwells between his shoulders'" (Deuteronomy 33:12).
 - Benjamin leans toward the upper realm, the spiritual side (the roof)
 - "Benjamin" = "son of the right hand"
 - right is spiritual; left is physical
 - the altar is built in Benjamin's territory
 - in Jacob's blessing, he appears as the wolf; the activity of the altar is to liberate the spiritual from the physical so that it can return to its Source above
 - God covers Benjamin, so Benjamin can cover Israel

- the word “chopheph” is used here in this blessing, “to cover”
- Joseph: the life (both the life from the soil and the family, itself)
 - “Yosef” = “Adonai adds”
 - ie, He breathes the spirit into the vessel
 - both the life added to the land around the house (plants, crops) and, more importantly, the family that will indwell the house
 - the longest blessing
 - focused on the fertility of Joseph’s land
 - we can find the family encoded in the blessing
 - begins with Joseph but ends with Ephraim and Manasseh
 - father and mother: early in the blessing we have the opposite pairs of heavens and deep, sun and moon (months)
 - children: the two horns mentioned here are the outgrowth from the head, the strength of the animal, which is the children; these horns are then named as Ephraim and Manasseh
 - as the central purpose for the home, Joseph’s blessing comes in the middle of the entire blessing, with 12 verses before and after Joseph’s 5 verses
- the remaining brothers: physical/spiritual pairs that speak to both the remaining elements of the house and the good works that are to fill the house
 - Joseph is the joining of spiritual and physical, so the brothers that follow Joseph’s blessing are physical-spiritual pairs
 - the physical elements: doors and windows, the furnishings and decorations, the outer protective wall to enclose a courtyard and protect the house, a well or cistern for water, a gate in the outer wall
 - the spiritual elements: Torah study, victory over the flesh, brotherly love
- Simeon excluded
 - the tribe is included in Revelation 7:7
 - Moses’ lack of inclusion doesn’t mean the tribe disappears
 - until certain difficult-to-master potentials are brought under control, they have no place in the early building of the home
 - Israel is about to cross the Jordan to settle the Land – a foundational stage
 - because the work of salvation has not yet touched Simeon deeply enough, Moses limits him at this early, formative stage (by not including him)
 - he is also limited numerically at this time, apparently, if it’s the case that many die due to the sin of Peor – the tribe shrinks in population in the wilderness years
 - Simeon is known for anger (Shechem) and, in the sin of Peor, sexual promiscuity
 - a primal, powerful energy, which, until mastered, has no place in the building of the home

- fast forward to Yeshua being brought to the Temple as a baby, and we see a picture of a rectified Simeon who eagerly and wholeheartedly awaits the salvation of Israel, righteous, filled with the Holy Spirit, and clear-eyed
 - when such destructive impulses as anger or sexual promiscuity are turned around, such people are often on fire for the Lord
- altogether, it's an incredible picture!

Moses Cannot Go In

- this idea is repeated here again
 - it is one of the most-repeated ideas in the Torah, despite the fact that it puts Moses in a negative light (and the Torah doesn't do that if it doesn't have to)
 - therefore, we need to understand this idea
 - why is Moses not able to take the people across the Jordan? Instead, he must pass the baton to Joshua to lead them in
- one level of understanding: Yeshua is the Rock in the wilderness
 - the Sages say Moses' error is striking the rock at Meribah rather than speaking to it
 - 1 Corinthians 10: the Rock that followed Israel in the wilderness is Yeshua
 - therefore, in striking the Rock, Moses subtly aligns himself with the legalistic leaders of Yeshua's generation that "strike" Yeshua, killing Him;
 - Moses adds another lash onto the Messiah's back
- the Torah calls Moses' stumble a lapse of faithfulness (Numbers 20:10-12; Deuteronomy 32:48-52)
 - "unfaithfulness" is a key idea here
 - the unfaithfulness leads to God not being held up as holy in the eyes of the people
- a small leap: Moses represents the Mosaic Covenant, and Joshua represents the New Covenant
 - Moses is the mediator of the Mosaic Covenant, and Yeshua (name similar to Joshua, Yehoshua) is the mediator of the New Covenant
 - Moses passing the baton to Joshua is like the Mosaic Covenant giving way to the New Covenant
 - the name "Moses" comes to represent the Mosaic Covenant in the Apostolic Scriptures in places like Hebrews
 - rephrasing the question:
 - what is it about THE MOSAIC COVENANT that doesn't quite get us into the Land?
 - what is it about the Mosaic Covenant that doesn't quite open the door to the full life, the mature life, the life of thorough victory over our enemies especially in our own flesh?

- what is it about the Mosaic Covenant that ends, eventually, in an UNFAITHFULNESS to God that results in God not being elevated properly in the eyes of others and also results in another lash to Yeshua's back?
- keep in mind this **foundational understanding**: we must be attached to God for a time under the Mosaic Covenant (our youth), and **every step we take forward with God also requires a period of relating to God via the Mosaic Covenant** (every step is a process of birth, youth, and maturity)
 - the Mosaic Covenant does not have the power to enable us to be entirely faithful, but **what it does do is bring us to repentance** (which is the preparation for the step of maturity)
 - the Mosaic Covenant exposes the darkness and weakness in our hearts, leading to repentance
 - the Mosaic Covenant emphasizes strict justice, gevurah, which leads to repentance
 - gevurah is what we require in our youth
 - note the gevurah (awe, power, justice) in the final verses of the Torah, which summarize how the people "saw" Moses:
 - "And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, none like him for all the SIGNS AND THE WONDERS that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the MIGHTY POWER AND ALL THE GREAT DEEDS OF TERROR that Moses did in the sight of all Israel" (Deuteronomy 34:10-12)
 - we should hear in the Mosaic Covenant the echo of John the Baptist's forthright language to his generation, the gevurah leading to repentance:
 - "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, "We have Abraham as our father," for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.'" (Matthew 3:7-10)
- the New Covenant
 - after we receive the truth spoken in this strict way through the Mosaic Covenant, leading to repentance, God pours out His grace through Yeshua Who mediates the New Covenant
 - emphasizes His mercy and compassion, His chesed
 - a better Mediator, Yeshua
 - the substance of the priesthood that the earthly priests are a shadow of
 - perfect, and His offering is perfect – His own blood as a sacrificial offering, the blood of a perfect life

- earthly priests can't even dream of bringing such an offering
- more – in addition to our physical copies of the Torah, a copy of the Torah is written in our hearts
 - the heart being in the middle of the person, represents the entire person
 - the Torah speaks to our minds from inside us, fills us with warmth and passion inwardly in the heart, and brings the instinct to act from love (gut), helping to check the animal instincts
- therefore, the New Covenant **comes with the power to be faithful**
 - it is Yeshua Who must lead the people across the Jordan, the “Yarad Dan,” the river that descends from judgment and ends in death (the Dead Sea), the river that is backed up all the way to Adam when Israel crosses
- the problem is not with the Torah
 - the Torah is the same under both covenants
 - both covenants are the agreement, and both are good
 - we need both covenants to step forward with God
 - we need repentance at each step

Yeshua and the Coming Rains

- the rains arrive just after Yeshua arrives; what's the relationship?
 - praying for abundant rains is a part of Sukkot (the Water-Drawing Ceremony)
- what is water?
 - water is the element of transition from above to below, the spiritual to the physical, in which the spiritual is put into the physical vessel
 - the physical vessel is formed in the “middle” element of water
 - therefore, water is also the context for the spirit filling the vessel
 - as with the child's body formed in the waters of the womb
 - fire separates the spirit-vessel pair, allowing the spirit to return to its Source and the body to return to the dust
- the rains are the words of Yeshua, His teachings
 - each word He speaks forms a vessel for truth that we absorb, and this truth of Yeshua finds its way to the lowest parts of us, the nitty-gritty of mundane life, which is what Yeshua comes to show us how to elevate
 - the farmers in Israel are getting ready to plant the next grain crops, and it is the coming rains that will help them to grow through the winter
 - we too are receiving a seed now for the coming winter, and Yeshua's teachings are the water for the spiritual seed in us
 - Yeshua calls out on the last day of Sukkot: “If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink” (John 7:37)
 - maybe why Israel has the early and latter rains – reflecting two comings of the Messiah, two periods of His instruction and leadership, His words

“Chazak, chazak, v'nit chazek!”

“Be strong, be strong, and may we be strengthened!”

47 – Vezot Ha’Bracha – Transcript (not exact)

Hello and welcome to Beth Tikkun and the Spiritual Seasons series, where we are exploring the Torah portions and annual mo’edim in the light of the yearly calendar and God’s overall pattern of salvation. This week we are in parsha Vezot Ha’Brachah, Deuteronomy 33 and 34, the final two chapters of the Torah. The actual reading this Shabbat outside of Israel is the Shemini Atzeret reading taken from the middle of Deuteronomy, and Vezot Ha’Brachah will be read the day, Sunday. It’s the only portion that is usually not read on a Sabbath, and for that reason, it sometimes gets skipped altogether in the teaching cycle, which is a shame, since it’s the last portion! You won’t find as many Vezot Ha’Brachah teachings online as you will for the other portions. Since we covered Shemini Atzeret somewhat in the Sukkot teaching, we’ll do Vezot Ha’Brachah this week.

Well, here we are, at the end of the Torah cycle. It has been quite a journey this year, a wonderful ride. When the year started, I did not intend to be doing a weekly teaching, but that’s eventually what God brought forth. And doesn’t He work like that sometimes? He gets your foot in the water in a way you can handle, and then one thing leads to another, and suddenly you find yourself doing something you wouldn’t have dreamt of doing at the beginning. I’ve certainly learned a lot doing these weekly teachings this year. Lord willing, I’m going to be doing one more parsha teaching next week, for B’reisheet, the first portion, because that will be the only portion missing from this set of Spiritual Seasons teachings, since we started in parsha Noach. With God’s leading, I do plan to continue doing teachings, though not weekly. I’ll share a bit more about that in next week’s teaching.

Vezot Ha’Bracha Summary

For now, let’s turn to the parsha. “Vezot ha’bracha” means “and this is the blessing.” The first extraordinarily weighty verse of the portion reads, “And this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the people of Israel before his death” (Deuteronomy 33:1). I say “extraordinarily weighty” because we sense the great weight of Moses’ life here being poured out and funneled down into these words. His heart has been for Israel. He has delivered many words to Israel for decades. And here now is the old man, the “man of God,” and what is he going to do with this final opportunity to speak words to the people. What is he going to try to accomplish with these words? What will this first leader of the nation try to give to the nation with his last breaths on earth? It’s a Jewish understanding that one’s final moments somehow contain the whole of one’s life in them. What will that look like as Moses stands there in front of the people of Israel for the last time? What does someone described as “the man of God” say in blessing to the people he has dedicated his life to, the people for whom he came to the point of saying to God after the sin of the golden calf, probably with tears in his eyes, “But now, if You will, forgive their sin—but if not, please blot me out of Your book that You have written” (Exodus 32:32). Moses attached himself to Israel as never before in that moment of pleading for God to spare them. His soul is entwined with the nation, and now we come to the unwinding. It’s not a simple moment, this blessing.

Turning to the blessing itself, it begins with soaring, poetic language fitting to the occasion: “...The LORD came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; He shone forth from Mount Paran; He came from the ten thousands of holy ones; from His right hand went a fiery law for them. Yes, He loved his people, all His holy ones were in His hand; so they followed in Your steps, receiving direction from You, when Moses commanded us a law, even the heritage of the congregation of Jacob. And He was King in Yeshurun, when the heads of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel as one” (Deuteronomy 33:2-5).

The image Moses is so poetically painting here in this brief introduction covers the whole of salvation, the salvation pattern. It begins with light from the darkness, which is always the beginning. God dawns forth from the gloom. Each of the place names mentioned here – Sinai, Seir, Mt. Paran – speaks to darkness and fallen physicality, and God dawns on Israel from those dark places. “Sinai” is thought to mean “thorn,” which is an allusion to the curse. We can say that the reason the Torah is given at Sinai, the place of the thorn, is because what God does at Sinai is pivotal for reversing the fall and the curse that mankind has been dealing with from the beginning. The second place name, “Seir,” means “hairy;” it’s the territory God gives to Esau (Gen 27:39), Esau being more physical of the twin brothers. One translation of the final place name here, “Paran” is “place of caverns,” (BDB H6290), which is a place of darkness, but more importantly, “Paran” is connected to Ishmael. The wilderness of Paran is where Ishmael grew up. Ishmael is the more physical firstborn, not born from faith and the promise but from human reasoning. And so the idea here is that out of the gloom of mankind’s fall and Israel’s struggles with Esau and Ishmael, the sun rises. At first the light is the brightness of God, Himself, but then God reduces the light to Torah, which mankind can comprehend, and so Moses says here, “from His right hand went a fiery law for them,” like a torch to light the way. Moses then moves on to the idea that God *trained* Israel in the Torah and in the way of following God because He loved Israel. And finally he says God was King in the ideal Israel, Yeshurun. This mention of God as King as we’re nearing the end of the introduction is not accidental; “kingdom” is an end-time theme. And the very last idea here is that the people are gathered together as a body, which, again is the goal of the process, becoming the body that God dwells within. At the end of the introduction, Moses says, “when the heads of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel as one.” The whole process of salvation is contained within these few lines: God dawning from the gloom, His giving of the Torah, His training us in righteousness, His establishment as King over a kingdom, and the formation of a body that God dwells within. There’s really a lot happening in these few lines, and it’s amazingly condensed language. This is biblical poetry here at its finest.

Moving on from these opening lines, the majority of the portion is the individual blessings to the tribes. I’ll quickly summarize them now.

- Reuben is blessed that he would live and be numbered.
- Judah is blessed that God would hear his voice, connect him to his people, and fight against his adversaries.

- Levi has one of the longest blessings. Moses blesses Levi to receive the Thummim and Urim and teach the Torah and do the work of the priesthood because, in order to obey God, this tribe didn't regard even their own families.
- Benjamin is called the beloved of the LORD, "yedid Adonai," and blessed with dwelling in safety surrounded by God all day long and also being a resting place for God.
- Joseph is especially blessed regarding the abundance of his land, the best of the earth, and Moses also calls Joseph a firstborn bull that will overpower the peoples to the ends of the earth.
- Zebulun and Issachar are put together, as they usually are, Zebulun blessed in his going out, Issachar in his tents. They are further blessed that people come to them to receive treasures from the seas and the sand.
- Gad and Dan's blessings also seem connected in that Gad is described as a lion and Dan as a lion's cub. Gad is blessed as a commander and warrior and with the responsibility of executing justice and judgments in Israel.
- Naphtali is blessed with satiation, with fullness, and he is given possession of the lake and the south.
- Asher is blessed to be the favorite brother and that he would dip his foot in oil, and that his door locks be made of strong iron and bronze.

The final chapter of the Torah describes the death and burial of Moses. He climbs Mt. Nebo, where God shows him the Land from north to south. God says to him: "This is the land of which I swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob, 'I will give it to your offspring.' I have let you see it with your eyes, but you shall not go over there" (Deuteronomy 34:4). Moses dies, and God, Himself, buries him in the valley there on the east side of the Jordan in the territory that is allotted to Gad. Moses was 120-years-old and his vigor had not dimmed. The people mourn his loss for 30 days. The text then mentions that Joshua was filled with the spirit of wisdom and that the people obeyed Joshua.

The last 3 verses read: "And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, none like him for all the signs and the wonders that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the mighty power and all the great deeds of terror that Moses did in the sight of all Israel" (Deuteronomy 34:10-12). Grant points out that when this was written, it was true, but we know that the expected Prophet like Moses did, in fact, come, and He is coming again, and we should all look to the sky now and then and pray for His return. He is Yeshua the Messiah.

Poured Out Like a Drink Offering in the Desert

Well, a few more words in general about this remarkable last act of Moses, the offering of these blessings. You know, we're learning that a tree, when it realizes that it will not survive for whatever reason, does not try to hang onto its stored nutrients but will suddenly push them out through the fungal network in the ground to the surrounding saplings and other trees, even trees of other species, then collapse. (<https://blogs.scientificamerican.com/artful-amoeba/dying-trees-can-send-food-to-neighbors-of-different-species/> ; <https://radiolab.org/podcast/from-tree-to-shining-tree> 27m). Trees know how to finish the

race. We're learning that the trees of the forest are constantly giving to each other, especially when one of them needs a little boost to get through a tough time, and at the end, when they know their time is up, they end by doing what they have learned to do in life; they end by giving up everything. This is a great lesson to us from nature about how we are not to hang onto what we acquire in this life as we near the end. It is very much like what Paul describes as he is nearing the end of his own race when he says in Philippians 2 that he is being poured out as a drink offering for the sake of those he has ministered to in life, and he rejoices in it (Philippians 2:17).

And this is what we see Moses doing here at the end of the Torah, too. He is not just sharing pretty words. He is using the last bits of time and human energy allotted to him NOT for the preservation of his own name but to help shape the future for each tribe. Having led the 13 tribes, having dealt with their leaders, having listened to their disagreements, having received their holy offerings, Moses knows all of the tribes as no other person does, and God has put him in a position of authority to serve and bless them. And so he clearly takes his time and crafts the words he speaks out, knowing that God will honor the words he chooses to speak in this final moment with the nation. The Zohar explains that the Hebrew word for "blessing" is related to the word *hamavrich* (הַמְבַרֵּיךְ) found in the Mishnah, which means TO "DRAW DOWN" (https://www.chabad.org/library/article_cdo/aid/4161209/jewish/Why-Can-Mere-Humans-Bless-Gd.htm). Picture Moses drawing down into himself a great inspiration and energy from God and using that to help give shape and definition to the role and place of each tribe. It's like Moses is helping to carve into the loosely-shaped clay figures that Jacob handed to him. But the power for truly affecting the tribes ultimately comes from God. Moses is just drawing it down.

In this formation process, Moses does not bless the tribes in general but individually. He is empowering each tribe uniquely. His blessing is helping them to differentiate, to specialize, to find their specific giftings and place in the world, to be lodged in the proper places in the Land that suit their personalities and their giftings. Moses is blessing them to be a single body made up of specialized parts, an interdependent kingdom, a nation of members that give and receive what the others are enabled to give.

And this idea of body and kingdom and building of the body are central to this season when we build sukkot and live in them, this season when we pick up the Four Species and bind them together and rejoice before the Lord, and the Four Species atone for each other, covering what is lacking in the others. We are receiving a seed for the journey ahead, the journey in the darkness of winter, and that journey ends in the fullness of life in the body, the harmonious life in God's kingdom. Sukkot, when we read this portion, is the final part of the seed of that which will come forth at the end, on the other side of the calendar at Purim and also at Passover; Passover is a sort of "leveling up" for both the spirit and the BODY of Israel.

Moses' Blessings as the Building of a House

This idea of focusing on building the body at Sukkot leads us into the frame for understanding the blessings that I want to put forward today. Again, remember that this portion is always connected to Sukkot, this time when we build a house. It is publicly read every year on the 8th

day of Sukkot in Israel and on Simchat Torah outside of Israel. The tribes make up a house, a body, a dwelling place for God. And a house is constructed of different parts like the foundation and the walls and the roof. And these pieces of the house have to be put together in a certain order if the house is going to be stable and strong, and that's what Moses is doing here with his blessings; he's pulling down the blessings to make a house from the tribes of Israel. Moses' ordering of the tribes has been a bit puzzling to commentators over the centuries. I think the key to understanding the order is found in the season within which we always read this portion, Sukkot, and this concept of building a home. I don't know if this idea exists in the Jewish literature somewhere – I'd be surprised if it's not, to be honest. So, our topic is how these blessings reflect order of building a house.

First mentioned in Reuben, the firstborn of Jacob. We're going to call Reuben the IDEA of the house. Before a thing is made, it is first an idea, or even just that quick moment of inspiration which is, "I should build a house." Reuben's blessing is one short line, but it has troubled translators. In the NASB it reads: "Let Reuben live, and not die, but let his men be few" (Deu 33:6). It's a blessing for that beginning spiritual root, life itself. But it's also a blessing for limitation, "Let Reuben live, and not die, but let his men be few." Another way to translate that would be, "Let Reuben live and not die; let his men be numbered" or "counted." Reuben, being the firstborn, is the burst of inspiration, first energy, but without form or defined boundaries yet. This energy without clear boundaries is the essence of Reuben, and we know that the lack of boundaries can get him in trouble. The first energy has to be channeled and given form, and it can go in a positive direction or a negative direction, but nothing starts without him. The second part of his blessing, that Reuben's men be numbered, can be understood as the blessing that Israel's potential, in the end, come to a physical, finite expression, that the idea of Israel as a body receive, in the end, a fixed and defined shape that can be filled with the spirit of life to act and influence this world for the good.

What comes after the *idea* of the building, the building plans? We start the actual construction with the foundation. And this brings us to the second blessing, which is for Judah. What does Judah have to do with the foundation? In short, it's because Judah's essence is founded in humility, the kind of lowness that God raises up to a place of leadership, in the same way that the foundation of a building is both the lowest part but the part that more than any other controls the rest of the building. If the foundation sinks, the whole building sinks. If the foundation bends, the whole building follows. The name "Yehudah" derives from the word "hod," which is "praise" and "acknowledgment." Praising is acknowledging and admitting to God's greatness and His supremacy and that He is the Source of life and the Source of everything, ultimately. So there is a humility at the root of the act of praising God, and this kind of humility expressed as praise is the foundation of the body that God indwells.

Next we have the tribe of Levi. Levi's is one of the longest blessings. More than the other tribes, Levi is the tribe of connection, which is what his name means, the idea of being joined. Levi is the walls of the building. The walls not only connect to the other walls left and right and forward and backward, they also connect below to above. They connect the foundation to the roof. In the same way, Levi connects everything together within the tribes of Israel, being

dispersed through Israel, and they connect Israel to God, too, below to above. Through their work at the Temple, they even connect the Land, itself, to God above.

Next is Benjamin. It's another short blessing: "Of Benjamin he said, 'The beloved of the LORD dwells in safety. The High God covers him all day long, and dwells between his shoulders'" (Deuteronomy 33:12). Benjamin is the roof. Benjamin leans toward the upper realm, the spiritual side. His name means "son of the right hand," and we know that the right is the side of spirituality, the left physicality. Benjamin is connected to the wolf that devours, which is a reference to the altar, which is later in Benjamin's territory. The altar takes that which is below and makes it ascend above. Here, Moses' blessing of Benjamin mentions safety and even covering, "chopheph," the idea that God covers him. God covers Benjamin, and this allows Benjamin to be the upward-oriented covering over the building of Israel.

Next is Joseph. Joseph has the longest blessing here. It's a blessing focused on the land bringing forth life, a blessing of great fertility. It begins, "...of Joseph he said, 'Blessed by the LORD be his land, with the choicest gifts of heaven above, and of the deep that crouches beneath, with the choicest fruits of the sun and the rich yield of the months, with the finest produce of the ancient mountains and the abundance of the everlasting hills, with the best gifts of the earth and its fullness and the favor of him who dwells in the bush. May these rest on the head of Joseph..." (Deuteronomy 33:13-16). On the one hand, we can think of Joseph as the blessing on the land that surrounds the house, the breathing of life into it so that it produces abundantly. But more importantly, I think Joseph is also the idea of the people, themselves, inhabiting the house, making the house a home, the fertility of marriage and family, including children. "Joseph" comes from the root that means "to add," "Adonai adds." Joseph is the adding of the spirit to the vessel, the people to the home. And the sense we can take from this blessing is that it's a description of a family – the father, mother, and children. This blessing begins with the name Joseph but ends with Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph's two sons. And early in Joseph's blessing, we see the contrasts of opposites – the heavens and the deep, the sun and the moon. This is father and mother. And then it goes on to talk about the two horns of the ox, and these are the offspring of Joseph, the two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh that are powerful in their numbers. And so I think what we have here in Joseph's blessing is the realization of the purpose for the home, which is to provide the vessel for the family. And this central purpose comes at the middle of Moses' words here, with 12 verses on both sides of Joseph's blessing. Again, the purpose of building the house is to be a home for the spirit that lives there and acts through that vessel.

The brothers that follow seem to come in pairs: Zebulun and Issachar, Gad and Dan, and Naphtali and Asher. Why should this be? If Joseph is that point of the spiritual and physical meeting, joining, then it makes sense that we would see physical-spiritual pairings with the remaining brothers. And so from Joseph onward, we have both the elements of the physical vessel and the spirit that indwells it. And so we could find with these remaining brothers in their pairs, on the one hand, the physical parts of the house that remain to be built along with the good deeds that fill the house. The house, itself, needs the finishing parts like the doors and windows, the furnishings and decorations, the outer protective wall to enclose a courtyard and

protect the house, a well or cistern for water, a gate in the outer wall – these are the physical side of the picture with these remaining blessings. And the more spiritual sides can be understood to be Torah study, victory over the flesh, and brotherly love.

Altogether, it's quite an amazing thing that Moses is doing here. With his last moment before the nation, he's doing what he can to make Israel into a unified house, a house made of distinct parts that all have their God-given roles, a house that God, Himself, will indwell.

Lastly here on this topic, many comment that one of the brothers is missing from Moses' blessing, Simeon. Regarding Simeon, let's first notice that the tribe of Simeon is, indeed, mentioned in Revelation 7:7. So Moses' lack of inclusion here doesn't mean that this tribe disappears. So, what *does* it mean? I think what it means is that until certain difficult-to-master potentials are brought under control, they have no place in the early building of the home. Israel is about to cross over the Jordan to settle the Land. This is a foundational stage of building, and Simeon needs to be limited at this point, at the point of the transfer from Moses to Joshua, because the work of salvation has not yet touched Simeon deeply enough. Simeon is known for anger and, in the sin of Peor, sexual promiscuity. There's a primal energy here with Simeon that, until its mastered, really doesn't have a place in the home. But if we fast forward to the birth of Yeshua, we see a righteous man named Simeon, filled with the Holy Spirit and waiting for the consolation of Israel. He rejoices when he sees Yeshua as a baby. Simeon's eyes are open and clear. And isn't it the case that those who fall low from such destructive impulses as anger and sexual promiscuity, when they get that turned around, they are absolutely on fire for the Lord. That's what I see in this Simeon who was hanging on and waiting so eagerly for even a glimpse of the Messiah.

Moses Cannot Go In

Lastly here before we turn to a focus on Yeshua, I want to address an important idea that is mentioned once again here in the last portion, the idea that Moses is not allowed to cross over into the Land. It seems to me that this is one of the most often-repeated ideas in the whole Torah. It keeps cropping up in portion after portion. Was Moses, the author of the Torah, just bitter, and so he kept mentioning it? Hardly. If the Torah keeps repeating this idea, then it's important, and it's important that we try to understand it. The repetition of this idea keeps putting Moses in a negative light, and the Torah wouldn't do that if it didn't have to. Why is it that Moses is not allowed to lead the people into the Promised Land but instead must pass the leadership over to Joshua first, and it is Joshua who leads the people in.

We mentioned one level for answering this question in a previous teaching. The Sages say that what Moses did wrong at the Waters of Meribah was hit the rock to bring forth water rather than speak to it, as he was told to do. And we are told in 1 Corinthians 10 that the rock that followed Israel in the wilderness is Yeshua. Therefore, in striking the Rock, Moses subtly aligns himself with those legalistic spiritual leaders in the future who would strike Yeshua, killing Him. So, Moses had a stumble, and that stumble put another lash onto the back of the Messiah.

The Torah calls this stumble of Moses a lapse of faithfulness. In both Numbers 20 and Deuteronomy 32, it says that Moses wasn't faithful, and the result of that unfaithfulness was that he didn't hold God up as holy in the eyes of the people (Numbers 20:10-12; Deuteronomy 32:48-52).

Now, as we go deeper here, we need to take a little leap, but I think it's an appropriate one. Moses comes to be basically synonymous with the Mosaic Covenant. We see this in the Apostolic Scriptures in places like the book of Hebrews, where the Mosaic Covenant and the New Covenant are compared. The New Covenant is mediated by Yeshua, whose name is almost the same as Yehoshua, Joshua. So there's a clear parallel here between Moses handing over the leadership to Joshua and the Mosaic Covenant being followed by the New Covenant.

So we can ask the question about Moses not going into the Land this way: what is it about THE MOSAIC COVENANT that doesn't quite get us into the Land? What is it about the Mosaic Covenant that doesn't quite open the door to the full life, the mature life, the life of thorough victory over our enemies especially in our own flesh? Here's another way to ask the question: what is it about the Mosaic Covenant that ends, eventually, in an UNFAITHFULNESS to God that results in God not being elevated properly in the eyes of others and also results in another lash to Yeshua's back?

In answering this, first let's establish that WE MUST BE ATTACHED TO GOD FOR A TIME under the Mosaic Covenant. This is the covenant that is in force at a certain stage of relating to God. Our early relationship with God is defined by this covenant. Here's a key piece though: as with Moses the man, the Mosaic Covenant doesn't have the power to enable us to be entirely faithful, but WHAT IT DOES DO IS BRING US TO REPENTANCE. The Mosaic Covenant exposes our hearts and leads to repentance, and that is a vital step in our development process. We need our eyes opened if we are to move on to a deeper relationship, the next stage with God. We can't take a single step upward without this repentance.

And this repentance is the fruit of a covenant that emphasizes strict justice, *gevurah*. We need *gevurah* first. And Moses, himself, is associated with this quality of strict justice and awe and fear of God, the Almighty God Who devastates Egypt. Listen again the final lines of the Torah, where we hear the Torah summarize how the people saw Moses and related to him: "And there has not arisen a prophet since in Israel like Moses, whom the LORD knew face to face, none like him for all the SIGNS AND THE WONDERS that the LORD sent him to do in the land of Egypt, to Pharaoh and to all his servants and to all his land, and for all the MIGHTY POWER AND ALL THE GREAT DEEDS OF TERROR that Moses did in the sight of all Israel" (Deuteronomy 34:10-12). Moses is connected to awe and fear and God's powerful arm of justice, and so is the covenant Moses mediates, the covenant that brings us to repentance. We should hear in the Mosaic Covenant the echo of John the Baptist's forthright language to his generation, the message of strict justice that leads to repentance for the people as John is preparing them for the ministry of Yeshua that follows. Listen to the justice and *gevurah* in these words from John: "But when he saw many of the Pharisees and Sadducees coming to his baptism, he said to them, 'You brood of vipers! Who warned you to flee from the wrath to come? Bear fruit in

keeping with repentance. And do not presume to say to yourselves, “We have Abraham as our father,” for I tell you, God is able from these stones to raise up children for Abraham. Even now the axe is laid to the root of the trees. Every tree therefore that does not bear good fruit is cut down and thrown into the fire.” (Matthew 3:7-10)

Praise God that after we receive the truth spoken in this strict way through the Mosaic Covenant, leading to repentance, God pours out His grace through Yeshua Who mediates the New Covenant, which is the covenant that emphasizes God’s attributes of mercy and compassion. It is *gevurah* first and *chesed* second. Whereas the Mosaic Covenant does not bring with it the power for faithfulness, the New Covenant does.

The difference with the New Covenant starts with the One Who mediates it, Yeshua. He is the substance of the priesthood that the earthly priests are a shadow of. He is perfect, and the sacrificial blood He brings into the true Tabernacle above is His own perfect blood, the offering of a perfect human life, which is something the earthly priesthood cannot bring, cannot even dream of bringing. So the New Covenant is starting out on a superior footing from the beginning by virtue of the High Priest Who mediates it and the perfect offering He brings.

But there’s more! What is so incredible about the New Covenant is that in addition to the inheritance we have of the Torah written out on stone and parchment, WE EACH GET A COPY OF THE TORAH TRANSPLANTED INTO OUR HEARTS, which is effectively a transplant into our whole being, including our mind, emotions, and gut. In other words, what is external to us with the Mosaic Covenant becomes a voice that speaks to us in our minds, and a warm rush of love that infuses our emotions, and an instinct to walk out love that puts boundaries on our lower instincts. This is a REVOLUTION for us, and it’s the key to the empowered walk of faithfulness. It’s the key to staying faithful when we come to that same spot where Moses stumbled.

And this is why Moses can’t quite get the people across the Jordan River, the *Yarad Dan*, the river that represents God’s judgment ending in death, the Dead Sea. This river of God’s judgment is reversed all the way to the town of Adam when Israel crosses over. It’s only under Yeshua that God’s judgment can be reversed backward to Adam and forward to the end of everything because it’s only under Yeshua and by His blood that God is willing to pour out His mercy on us to individually write the Torah inside of each of us, which is the empowerment we need to walk in faithfulness.

Now, let me be clear that the problem is not with the Torah. It is the same Torah written on stones that is written on the heart. We’re talking about different covenants here, covenants that are the promises that define a relationship. And once again, the Mosaic Covenant is not a bad covenant. In fact, it is good, and it is a part of every step forward with God. It is an early step in our relationship with God that prepares the way for the maturing step in our relationship with God.

Yeshua

Well, let's make one final point here today that is directly related to Yeshua and the season we are in, an aspect I haven't touched on much. The rains are about to begin in Israel. Praying for abundant rains is what the big festive water-drawing ceremony during Sukkot is all about. Why are the rains associated with the arrival of Yeshua and His special leadership through the journey ahead?

To answer that question, we need to understand what water is. To put it simply, water is the element of transition from above to below, the spiritual to the physical, in which the spiritual is put into the physical vessel. Through the element of water, the physical shell is prepared, and so it is also the context for the spirit to enter the vessel in the same way that the body of a child is formed in the womb. Fire, on the other hand, is the element of transition from below to above. Fire takes the physical-spiritual pair and separates them, liberating the spiritual to return to its Source above and the physical to return to the dust below.

I think one way we are to look at the beginning of the rains is that they are Yeshua's words, His teaching. Everything Yeshua speaks is like water coming to a land that has been dried out by the long, parched summer. Each word that Yeshua speaks forms a vessel for the spiritual to come down. It is by taking in this rain that we bring the spiritual into the nitty gritty of life, the mundane things of life, as the water seeks the lowest place within us. A seed needs water to grow. Israeli farmers will be preparing the ground soon to receive the new grain seeds. We, too, are now receiving a seed for the coming journey. And the true water for the seed that is being placed within us is the teaching of our Master, Yeshua. And this is why Yeshua speaks out in the Temple on the last day of Sukkot: "If anyone thirsts, let him come to Me and drink" (John 7:37). And maybe this is also why we have the early rains and the latter rains, the rains having two comings like Yeshua does.

Well, that's all for today. Thank you for listening. There is a link to an outline posted below. As I mentioned earlier, I plan to do one more teaching in this series on parsha B'reisheet. And, Lord willing, I'll explain a bit of what I hope to do in the season ahead. So stay tuned for that.

May God make us people like Moses and Paul who, to the very end, didn't think of their own comforts and their own plans first but, instead, they poured out for those around us. May we be overcomers who rise above fear and comforts to join with others to become a body, to build a temple for God to inhabit. And may we rise up to be the people He has made us to be. Shalom!

And as we say upon finishing a book of the Torah:

"Chazak, chazak, v'nit chazek!"
"Be stong, be stong, and may we be strengthened!"

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