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## June 1st: Deuteronomy 33 & Luke 17:20-37

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Moses' blessing of Israel. The coming of the Son of Man.

Reflections upon the readings from the ACNA Book of Common Prayer (<http://bcp2019.anglicanchurch.net/>).

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## Transcript

Deuteronomy chapter 33. This is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the people of Israel before his death. He said, 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, with flaming fire at his right hand. 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 as a possession for the assembly of Jacob, thus the Lord became king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people were gathered, all the tribes of Israel together.

Let Reuben live and not die, but let his men be few. And this he said of Judah, Hear, O Lord, the voice of Judah, and bring him in to his people, with your hands contend for him,

and be a help against his adversaries. And of Levi he said, Give to Levi your Thummim, and your Urim to your godly one, whom you tested at Massah, with whom you quarreled at the waters of Meribah, who said of his father and mother, I regard them not.

He disowned his brothers, and ignored his children, for they observed your word and kept your covenant. They shall teach Jacob your rules, and Israel your law. They shall put incense before you, and hold burnt offerings on your altar.

Bless, O Lord, his substance, and accept the work of his hands. Crush the loins of his adversaries, of those who hate him, that they rise not again. Of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the Lord dwells in safety.

The high God surrounds him all day long, and dwells between his shoulders. And 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 favour of him who dwells in the bush. May these rest on the head of Joseph, on the pate of him who is prince among his brothers.

A firstborn bull he has majesty, and his horns are the horns of a wild ox. With them he shall gore the peoples, all of them, to the ends of the earth. They are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh.

And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice Zebulun in your going out, and Issachar in your tents. They shall call peoples to their mountain. There they offer right sacrifices, for they draw from the abundance of the seas, and the hidden treasures of the sand.

And of Gad he said, Blessed be he who enlarges Gad. Gad crouches like a lion, he tears off arm and scalp. He chose the best of the land for himself, for there a commander's portion was reserved, and he came with the heads of the people.

With Israel he executed the justice of the Lord, and his judgments for Israel. And of Dan he said, Dan is a lion's cub that leaps from Bashan. And of Naphtali he said, O Naphtali sated with favour, and full of the blessing of the Lord, possess the lake and the south.

And of Asher he said, Most blessed of sons be Asher, let him be the favourite of his brothers, and let him dip his foot in oil. Your baths shall be iron and bronze, and as your days, so shall your strength be. There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help, through the skies in his majesty.

The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms. And he thrust out the enemy before you, and said, Destroy. So Israel lived in safety, Jacob lived alone, in a land of grain and wine, whose heavens dropped down dew.

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 triumph. Your enemy shall come fawning to you, and you shall tread upon their backs. Like the preceding chapter of the Song of Moses, chapter 33 of Deuteronomy has a poetic form.

There are a variety of genre types within it, and the blessings of Deuteronomy 33 focus upon Israel's life after it enters into the land. Most of the blessings of Moses are written in a parallel form, consistent with the usual pattern of Hebrew poetry. It is a series of blessings upon the tribes of Israel, similar to those that we have in Genesis chapter 49, when Jacob blessed his twelve sons.

Like Jacob, Moses is about to die, and he is blessing the nation before he departs. If Genesis ended with the blessings and the death of Jacob, the Pentateuch ends with the blessings and the death of Moses. While there are some horrific curses in the Book of Deuteronomy, ending in this way implies that the Lord's primary purpose for Israel is one of blessing them.

Indeed, there are a great many points of similarity between the content of this and the material in Genesis 49. For instance, Deuteronomy chapter 33, verse 16, may these rest on the head of Joseph, on the pate of him who was prince among his brothers. And this can be compared with Genesis chapter 49, verse 26, may they be on the head of Joseph, and on the brow of him who was set apart from his brothers.

However, the blessings of Jacob don't have the same sort of introductory or concluding poetic sections that Moses' blessings have here, even though the blessings of Jacob is the most similar other part of Scripture. While Jacob's blessings were addressed to individuals that were going to become tribes, the blessings of Moses are addressed to tribes and to the larger nation that they form, which comes into focus at the beginning and the end of the blessings, where the whole nation is addressed. There are also similarities with this and the song of Deborah in Judges chapter 5, verse 4-5, for instance.

And then in verses 14-18 of the same chapter. Beyond this, we might also see some ways in which this material could be compared to the blessings of Balaam, in Numbers chapter 23-24. The language of the beginning and the end of the blessings also have various resemblances with elements of certain psalms.

There are ten blessings for the twelve tribes. There is no blessing for Simeon, and Issachar and Zebulun are blessed together as a single blessing. Simeon was judged with dispersal in Genesis chapter 49, verses 5-7.

As Simeon's territory would end up being an enclave of Judah, perhaps Simeon is here included under Judah. Some have noted the fact that Judah's blessing begins with Hear O Lord, with Hear being the verb from which Simeon's name was originally derived. Moses

begins by recalling the verse in Genesis chapter 5, verses 7-8, where the law was given.

The Lord is presented as the great king of Israel. Having led Israel up from the south, Israel followed the Lord like a great military band. And the ordering of the blessings seems to follow a geographical movement through the places where they would finally end up settling in the land.

However, there are clear subgroups. The initial sons of Leah, Reuben, Judah and Levi, followed by the sons of Rachel, Benjamin and Joseph, followed by Issachar and Zebulun, the final two sons of Leah, followed by the handmaid's children. Reuben comes first.

He's the firstborn of Jacob's sons. He was judged in Genesis 49 on account of the fact that he went into his father's concubine, Bilhah. Moses' blessing of Reuben has a sort of ambivalent character.

He desires that the tribe continue, but not that they truly prosper. Judah comes next, and whereas Judah's blessing is quite extensive in Genesis 49, it is fairly short here by comparison. It's not one of the prominent ones.

Judah's blessing is a prayer. As I already noted, Simeon, while not explicitly mentioned, may be included under Judah. Judah's military role, and perhaps his leadership of Israel in this role, is suggested here.

In Numbers chapter 2, the tribe of Judah leads the entire camp as it marches. Levi comes next. Levi proved faithful in guarding the covenant when tested.

The Levites were prepared to slay relatives in Exodus chapter 32 after the sin with the golden calf. Likewise, in Numbers 25, Phinehas the Levite proved faithful in zealously defending the Lord's holiness. For the Levites, the covenant of the Lord took priority over all earthly ties, and Levi was entrusted with the priesthood for this reason, guarding and teaching the law and upholding the true worship of the Lord.

Benjamin follows. Benjamin is the son born to the loved wife in her death. He's referred to as the beloved of the Lord, who is given secure rest in the land.

Joseph follows. He's the older brother of Benjamin by Rachel. In Genesis 49, the two great sets of blessings belong to Judah and Joseph.

Here they belong to the Levites and Joseph. Joseph, of course, includes the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh. Joseph's blessing is one of the bounty of the fertile earth, but also strength in war and leadership.

Elements of the blessing recall parts of Joseph's blessing in Genesis 49, for instance in verses 25-26 of that chapter. There are several parallels between this and Deuteronomy 33, verses 13-16, not least the reference to the blessings of the heavens above and the

deep that crouches beneath. In both places, Joseph's blessing focuses upon elements of the fundamental order of creation.

One interesting feature of Joseph's blessings is the apparent reference to the Lord as him who dwells in the bush, presumably looking back to the story of the burning bush in Exodus. Zebulun is next. The blessing of Zebulun includes Issachar.

Zebulun was the younger of the two sons, but he comes first here before Issachar. We see these two brothers listed as a pair in this order elsewhere in Genesis 49 and also in the son of Deborah in Judges 5. Judah and Levi in this chapter and Benjamin and Joseph are also reversed in birth order. In their blessing, Judah and Issachar are said to enjoy the blessings of the sea, but also to be a territory in which a divine sanctuary would be located, presumably Mount Tabor.

Now we move on to Gad. The blessing of Gad might refer to the fact that Gad was one of the tribes that went ahead of the others in taking possession of the land in the Transjordan region. Dan is described as a lion's cup, perhaps associated with Gad in some ways, but also with Judah, which is described as a lion in Genesis 49.

Words suggest that Israel is guarded by lion tribes in both the north, where Dan finally ended up, and in the south, where Judah was. Naphtali comes next, and Naphtali is in the far north in the Galilee region. Asher ends the list.

His territory may have been more vulnerable to attack, which might explain the blessing upon bars and strength. The end of the blessings frame the entire central section with the introductory section. The Lord is the unique God of Jashurun, a warrior God who will give his people security on all sides and richness of blessing in the land.

These are the verses on which the main message of the book closes. The Lord is incomparable among the gods. He will bless his people, he will secure their future for them, he will give them rest in the land.

A question to consider, what are some of the changes that you can see between the blessings of Jacob and the blessings of What might be the reason for some of these? Luke chapter 17 verses 20-37 Look there! Or look here! Do not go out or follow them. For as the lightning flashes and lights up the sky from one side to the other, so will the Son of Man be in his day. But first he must suffer many things and be rejected by this generation.

Just as it was in the days of Noah, so will it be in the days of the Son of Man. They were eating and drinking and marrying and being given in marriage, until the day when Noah entered the ark, and the flood came and destroyed them all. Likewise, just as it was in the days of Lot, they were eating and drinking, buying and selling, planting and building.

But on the day when Lot went out from Sodom, fire and sulfur rained from heaven and

destroyed them all. So will it be on the day when the Son of Man is revealed. On that day let the one who is on the housetop, with his goods in the house, not come down to take them away.

And likewise let the one who is in the field not turn back. Remember Lot's wife. Whoever seeks to preserve his life will lose it, but whoever loses his life will keep it.

I tell you, in that night there will be two in one bed, one will be taken and the other left. There will be two women grinding together, one will be taken and the other left. And they said to him, Where, Lord? He said to them, Where the corpse is, there the vultures will gather.

Luke chapter 17 ends with a discussion of the coming of the kingdom and the two big questions, when and where. Jesus is asked by the Pharisees about when the kingdom of God is coming. They presume that it is arriving at some point in the future, yet the kingdom is already dawning and present in Jesus.

The Pharisees are also expecting to be able readily to notice when the kingdom arrives. However, the coming of the kingdom is in many respects secret and imperceptible, like leaven working in loaves. The kingdom doesn't come as something whose arrival we can closely monitor and pinpoint.

The kingdom is already in their midst. It's hidden like the leaven. The Pharisees can't see what is taking place in Jesus' ministry.

It's right under their nose, but they cannot perceive it. Jesus then turns to address his disciples after this, as they also have difficulties recognising the coming of the kingdom and the manner it occurs. When the Son of Man is revealed, it will be sudden, dramatic, unmistakable and public.

The time will come when they will long for a manifestation of the Son of Man, but not see it, and people will point them in various directions, but they should not be misled. When the Son of Man is truly revealed, they will know it. References to the Son of Man's day should also remind us of Daniel chapter 7 verses 13-14, when the Son of Man comes on the clouds of heaven to the Ancient of Days and is given the kingdom.

Jesus' coming in judgment will be sudden and catastrophic, and the rejection by and suffering at the hands of the current generation must happen first, a then-catastrophic judgment described in verse 25. Jesus compares the judgment to come upon Jerusalem to the judgment that befell the pre-flood world and Sodom. In each of these cases, things were continuing as usual, until unexpected, catastrophic and final judgment hit, and everything changed.

The day of the Son of Man, the days of Noah and the days of Lot are held alongside each other and paralleled. Jesus, the Son of Man, is the one who leads a new group of people

escaping final judgment, who are saved with him. The story of Lot is one in which there is final judgment upon the cities of the plain.

The angels come to inspect the city of Sodom, and they deliver Lot and his family from it and its downfall. The story of the flood is the story of an end of an old world too. The world before the flood is drowned, and Noah and his family are delivered through it.

The days of Noah and the days of Lot refer to the days of peace and seeming normality before judgment hits. The days of the Son of Man are the days of his personal presence and his ministry with his disciples, the days they are currently enjoying. As the judgment looms, the day of the Son of Man, I can imagine the disciples looking back upon the days by Galilee and wishing that they could return to that time.

The Son of Man will be revealed, and all else will be laid bare. Final judgment on Jerusalem is coming, and all riches must be left behind. Without looking back, the disciples must flee.

They must recognize that anything that ties them down is a liability. Anything that attaches them to that present order is a threat in that day when they need to escape. They must not run back into the burning building.

This, it seems to me, is one of the reasons why the early church in Jerusalem sold its property, its land, and shared the money among them for their needs. Not only was the value of real estate in Jerusalem going to crater as the city was destroyed, it was also a danger to own property that would overly attach you to a place that was doomed. And finally, liquidating their property and using that money to minister to those in need and to build up the body of Christ was laying up treasures in heaven.

Condemned property was thus translated into something that would yield eternal dividends. One would be taken, another would be left. Taken here does not refer to the rapture of the left behind series or anything like that.

Rather, it refers to being taken by the sword. Where will they be taken? The body, the carcass of Israel, is where the eagles, the unclean foreign force of the Romans, will be gathered together. Jerusalem and her people, overthrown Babylon, will become Rome's carrion.

See this described in Revelation chapter 19 verses 17 to 18. A question to consider. What is the lesson of Lot's wife? Why is her example underlined here?