

PARASHAT VZOT HABARACHAH

(THAT IS THE BLESSING)

DEUTERONOMY 33-34

ETZ CHAYEEM HOO (HE IS A TREE OF LIFE)

Yeshua is a tree of life to those who take hold of Him, and those who support Him are praiseworthy. His ways are ways of pleasantness and all of His paths are shalom. Bring us back YHVH to You, and we shall come, renew our days as of old.

As we begin to study the Torah let us never forget that YESHUA THE MESSIAH is the Living Torah, the Torah-Word of Elohim made flesh. He is the way, the truth and the life — the Living Manna sent from heaven. Without Him living in our lives through the indwelling Presence of his Set-Apart/Kadosh Spirit (Who leads us into all truth and revelation) the Written Torah can become the dead letter of the law!

Haftorah Reading

Joshua 1:1-18

B'rit Chadashah

On sitting at YHVH's feet: **Luke 10:39**;

On Moses giving the law: **John 1:17; 7:19**;

On Moses the prophet: **Acts 3:22-23; 7:37; Hebrews 3:5**

Outline of This Week's Parashah (Torah Portion):

—**33:1** Moses Gives Israel and Each Tribe a Patriarchal Blessing

—**33:25** Moses Gives a Final Blessing to All Israel

—**34:1** The Death of Moses

—**34:10** Moses: a Unique Prophet In Israel Before Elohim

Study Questions For This Week's Midrash (Torah Discussion):

1 **33:1-5**, In the opening remarks of this Parashah, we note three outstanding qualities of Israel: (a) Elohim dwelt among them through the presence of his divine glory; (b) they accepted his Torah; (c) they acknowledged his sovereignty. Can this be said of you?

2 **33:2**, *From his right hand went a fiery law.* What are the two main aspects of YHVH's Torah-law? This is implicated in the cloven tongues of fire that fell on the saints on the day of Shavuot/Pentecost (Acts 2:3) and is specifically mentioned in Romans 8:2. Matthew Henry says of this fiery law in his commentary on this verse, "If received, it is melting, warming, purifying, and burns the dross of corruption; if rejected, it hardens, sears, causes pain, and destroys." On this same phrase the *ArtScroll Kestenbaum Edition Tikkun—the Torah Reader's Compendium* states, "This verse contains an example of a *keri uchesiv*, that is, a word spelled one way in the Torah scroll, but pronounced differently. Here we find ... *eshdote, waterfalls* ... [pronounced] as two words, *esh daht*, literally, *fire of law*. The Torah states that when [Elohim] presented the Torah to Israel, all of Mount Sinai was smoking because [YHVH] had descended upon it in fire (Exod 19:18). Additionally, King David writes of that event: "The earth trembled, even the heavens dripped ... this is Sinai ... A generous rain did You pour down, of [Elohim]," (Ps 68:9-10). Thus the Torah was given through fire and rain" (p. 495). Discuss the implications of YHVH's Word being like both water and fire. (See Eph 5:26; Deut 5:5; Isa 5:24; Jer 5:14; 23:29 for further insights.)

- 3** **33:3**, *For they planted themselves at [YHVH's] feet bearing [the yoke] of [YHVH's] utterances.* This is speaking of the Children of Israel when they received the Torah [instructions of YHVH] at the foot of Mount Sinai. Can this be said of you? Have you firmly placed yourself at YHVH's feet and declared to those around you (your spouse, children, family, employer, spiritual leaders), "All that YHVH has spoken we will do" (Exod 19:8)? Yeshua states that such a determination is a response of love (John 14:15), and John states in his epistle that the only way to intimately *know YHVH* is to *keep his commandments* (obey him) (1 John 2:3–6).
- 4** **33:4**, *The Torah ... is the heritage of the congregation of Jacob.* If you have the faith of Abraham, then you are his children and are therefore a part of the *congregation of Jacob* (Gal 3:7). The *ArtScroll Stone Edition Chumash* states, "The Torah is an inalienable possession of Israel, transmitted from generation to generation," and the difference between an inheritance and an heritage is that "[a]n inheritance belongs to the heirs to use and dispose of as they please. A heritage, however, is the property of generations before and after; it is incumbent upon the heirs to preserve it intact" (p. 1113). How can one keep one's heritage intact if one believes parts of one's heritage "were nailed to the cross," "done away with," "fulfilled," "is a curse and burden" or "spiritualized away"?
- 5** **33:7–12**, *Judah ... Levi ... Benjamin.* Judah was the bearer of national power, Levi was responsible for nurturing the teaching of the Torah and the Sanctuary, and it was in the territory of Benjamin that the Sanctuary (or at least the most set-apart part of it) was placed. That is why these three tribes are grouped together (*The Pentateuch/Deuteronomy*, by R. Hirsch, pp. 672–673).
- 6** **33:13–17**, *And of Joseph he said.* "Power, service of the Torah and the Sanctuary, and the site of the Sanctuary were the distinguishing specialties that marked the tribes of Judah, Levi and Benjamin respectively" (Ibid., by R. Hirsch p. 674). However, Hirsch notes that the richest abundance of the blessing of the soil followed the tribe of Joseph since Joseph inhabited the largest, richest and most productive farmland in Israel (Ibid.). In light of the richness of Joseph's material blessings, it is interesting to note that the two tribes descended from Joseph (i.e., Ephraim and Manasseh) at the height of their material richness after King Solomon were responsible for dragging ten-twelfths of Israel down into idolatry (under Jeroboam). Is this a warning to modern Ephraim (the Christian church, loosely speaking)? What has happened morally in America and England (as well as some of the other rich western, Christian nations) spiritually and morally? One by one they have all fallen from their greatness morally, economically and politically and America stands alone in these areas, but is sinking quickly. What is the spiritual state of the church in America, despite the swan-songs of the false peace and comfort Christian "prophets" who say otherwise? The strength (or weakness) of the church is no more or less than that of the individual. (Read and reflect on Revelation 3:14–22.) How easy it is to apply these admonitions to others, but ASK YOURSELF whether your spiritual walk (level of obedience) is based on convenience or upon discipline, duty and obedience? Do you fit YHVH and loyalty to his Word around your finances, pleasures, convenience (i.e., the gods/idols of one's life) or do you obey him without regard to the physical circumstances based on a heart of devotion, dedication, service and love for him? Have we become so rich with material blessings, as ancient apostate Israel did, that we have become blind to YHVH's higher spiritual purposes for our lives? Are we more a reflection of the hedonistic and materialistic culture around us than of the light of YHVH's Word and Spirit? Don't pass over these questions lightly, for history repeats itself, and we may be the very generation upon whom it repeats itself. Search your heart and mind and ask the Father for revelation in these areas.
- 7** **34:1, and 7**, Moses died in the wilderness, though YHVH in his grace gave Moses a view of the Promised Land. Most of YHVH's servants died without having obtained their promised inheritance and glory of their future state. Despite not being able to enter the Good Land, Moses stayed faithful to the call and mission YHVH had given him to the very end, and Torah records that "Moses was 120 years old when he died: his eye had not dimmed, and his vigor had not diminished" (verse 7). Can this be said of you in your walk of faith before YHVH? Hebrews 11 chronicles those notable saints who all "having obtained a good report through faith, received not the promise" of their heavenly inheritance. Galatians 6:9 says, "And let us not be weary in well doing, for in due season we shall reap, if we faint not."

8 34:9, Moses brought the Israelites to the border of Canaan, but it was the divine mission of Joshua (Yehoshua) to take them into the Promised Land. Of what is this a prophetic shadow-picture? (Read Heb 3–4.) Is it possible to enter the Promised Land of our inheritance through the works of the Torah-law, or by grace through faith alone? (Eph 2:4–10) Was it Moses (the vehicle through which the Torah-law came) who led the Israelites into their inheritance or Joshua (Yehoshua)? What does the name *Yehoshua* mean and to which person does it point who will lead us into our spiritual inheritance? Will we enter into the rest (salvation) of Yeshua (whose name means *Salvation of YHVH*) through our own efforts or through faith (Heb 4:2,10)? Did the Israelites entering the Promised Land under the leadership of Yehoshua, who is a forerunner type of Yeshua, annul the Torah-law given through Moses or rather strengthen and confirm it as the path of righteousness they were to follow to stay in possession of the land, to receive the blessings of the land and to stay in right relationship with YHVH, the Possessor of the land? Who/what led the Israelites into the Promised Land? (Josh 3:6) What were Joshua's first instructions to the Israelites? (Josh 1:8) What was one of the first things the Israelites did after crossing the Jordan River into the land to confirm their allegiance to YHVH's Torah (his instructions in righteousness)? (Josh 8:30–35) What will determine our level of reward—not our salvation—in YHVH's kingdom of heaven? (Matt 5:19)

HAFTORAH READING — JOSHUA 1:1–18

A New Leader; A New Beginning

Although we have just completed the reading of the entire Torah, the purpose of this Haftorah portion is to show us that *now* YHVH's people must go forward in possessing the land and the inheritance that YHVH has for them. They must go forth and carry with them into the Promised Land YHVH's teachings or instructions in righteousness—the Torah—as well as the lessons they have learned in their wilderness experience. This principle applies to us as much as it did to the ancient Israelites, for as Paul said, “these things happened to them for examples [types] and they are written for our admonition upon whom the ends of the world [ages] are come” (1 Cor 10:11).

The saga of YHVH dealing with Israel did not end with the death of Moses. Similarly, the life of a believer does not start and end at the work of Yeshua at his first coming (whom Moses foreshadowed, see Deut 18:15–18). No, as the death of Moses signaled a new beginning for Israel, so Yeshua's death on the cross marks a new beginning for redeemed believers as they make their way into their spiritual Promised Land. As Joshua (in Hebrew, *Yehoshua* meaning “YHVH saves”) led Israel into their physical Promised Land, so Yeshua (the Hebrew word for *salvation*) at his second coming will lead the saints into the “Promised Land” of his millennial kingdom, and then eventually into the spiritual kingdom of the New Heaven and Earth and the New Jerusalem 1000 years later. Read Hebrews chapters three and four for insights and understanding into how Moses and Joshua were prophetic shadow pictures of Yeshua at his two advents.

1 1:1, *Joshua ... Moses' servant*. For how long was Joshua Moses' servant before he became the leader of Israel? What does this teach us about YHVH's discipleship program? How many other servants of YHVH does Scripture reveal spent years in training for the ultimate mission YHVH had for them as leaders of his people? How long was Joseph, Moses, Samuel, David, the disciples of Yeshua and Paul in training, to name a few, before YHVH was ready to use them for his special purposes? As Matthew Henry says in his commentary on this verse, “Those are fittest to rule, who have learned to obey.”

2 1:6,7,9,18, *Be strong and of a good courage*. Four times in the first chapter YHVH encourages the Israelites with this phrase. Why the fourfold repetition of this admonition at this juncture in Israel's sojourn? *Be strong* is the Hebrew word *chazak*/חָזַק (*Strong's* H2388) meaning “to strengthen, prevail, harden, be strong, become strong, be courageous, be firm, grow firm, be resolute, be sore.” According to *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, the majority of times *chazak* is used in Scripture it refers to “being strong in battle.” This word can also mean “to harden one's heart” against YHVH's purposes as was the case with Pharaoh twelve times between Exodus chapters 4 and 14. *Good courage* is the Hebrew word *amatz*/אָמַץ (*Strong's* H553) meaning “to be strong, alert, courageous, brave, stout, bold, solid, hard.” The aspect of this

word that means “to harden one’s heart” can have both a good and bad connotation. One can harden or secure one’s heart with the resolve to obey YHVH, or contrariwise, choose to disobey him with an obstinate heart, as well. Examples in Scripture where *amats* is used in the negative sense are Deuteronomy 2:30 and Amos 2:14. These two words, *chazak* and *amats* almost appear to be synonyms. Why would YHVH use two words with only slight variation in meaning in admonishing the Israelites as they were about to enter the Promised Land? Was he trying to emphasize a point? Perhaps he anticipated that eventually they would grow faint and weary battling the onslaught of evil around them and succumb to the influences of the surrounding pagan nations leading to their apostasy. Perhaps the writer of Hebrews had these two Hebrew words in mind when he wrote the following in Hebrews 3:12–19,

12 Take heed, brethren, lest there be in any of you an evil heart of unbelief, in departing from the living Elohim. 13 But exhort one another daily, while it is called today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin. 14 For we are made partakers of Messiah, if we hold the beginning of our confidence steadfast unto the end; 15 While it is said, To day if ye will hear his voice, harden not your hearts, as in the provocation. 16 For some, when they had heard, did provoke: howbeit not all that came out of Egypt by Moses. 17 But with whom was he grieved forty years? Was it not with them that had sinned, whose carcasses fell in the wilderness? 18 And to whom swore he that they should not enter into his rest, but to them that believed not? 19 So we see that they could not enter in because of unbelief.

What can we learn from our ancient forefathers in this regard as we face the challenges of remaining faithful to YHVH in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation?

3 1:8, *Make your way prosperous ... you shall have good success.* The expanded meaning of the word *prosperous* is literally “to press through, to break out” or “to accomplish satisfactorily what is intended” (according to *The Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*). The *TWOT* continues, “Real prosperity results from the work of God in the life of one who seeks God with all his heart (2 Chr 31:21; Ps 1:3, vol. 2, p. 766). The word *success* literally means “understanding, prudence, good sense, insight, prosperity”]. An alternate rendering of this last phrase of Joshua 1:8 reads, “Make your way successful, and then you will act wisely” (*ArtScroll Stone Edition Tanach*).

But how is that prosperity and success achieved? The answer is to be found in the first part of verse eight where four keys to success are given. From the text, identify what they are and then honestly evaluate your life to see if you are on the road to success or not.

4 1:17, *According as we hearkened unto Moses in all things, so will we hearken unto you.* What is the irony of their statement? In reading in the Torah’s accounts of Israel’s murmuring, rebellion and stiff-neckness, it is a wonder that the Israelites could make such a statement with a straight face! What does such a statement reveal about the condition of the human heart and its proclivity toward self-deception, self-justification, and self-righteousness? (Read Jer 17:9; Prov 16:2 and 21:2.) What do you think the spiritual link is between Israel’s statement above and their statement in the last phrase of verse 17 where they referred to YHVH as “*your* [i.e., Joshua’s] Elohim” instead of “*our* Elohim”? Does this statement reveal some major flaw in their character and their spiritual and personal commitment and devotion to YHVH?

5 1:18, What was Joshua’s response to Israel’s self-delusional and self justificational statement of verse 17? Do you think Joshua was fooled for one minute by what they said? Why do you suppose his answer reflected such a hard-line approach?

