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The Sermons of S. Lewis Johnson

Deuteronomy 33: 1-29

“The Blessing Of The Tribes”

TRANSCRIPT

[Prayer] Father, we give Thee thanks for our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ. We thank Thee for all of the ways in which we have been blessed through His ministry and we are grateful for the privilege of opening up the word of God and reading it and pondering it. We recognize Lord, that there are many things in the word of God that are beyond our understanding, it seems. But we know that Thou hast been marvelously gracious to us in the gift of the Holy Spirit who teaches us the things concerning the Lord Jesus Christ.

We pray that we may be subject to Him and may learn from Him the things that will be helpful and profitable to us in our Christian life, in our testimony and witness, in all of the experiences that we undergo while we are here. We thank Thee for each one present here tonight and we ask Lord that through the ministry of the Word, there may be a strengthening of each of us. Give us guidance and direction and understanding. We pray in Jesus Name. Amen.

[Message] I had hoped before I left for our visit to Great Britain, that I would be able to finish the series of studies on From Egypt to Canaan, but I hesitate to say I have finished and not consider the last part of Deuteronomy, chapter 33, where Moses sets out

the blessing of the tribes of Israel and I must confess that I am a little bit disturbed by the teaching of this particular passage for this reason. It is probably the most difficult passage in all of the Pentateuch. And I am speaking from the standpoint of the grammar and syntax of Deuteronomy chapter 33 which has puzzled almost all Old Testament scholars.

In fact, I do not know of any single Old Testament scholar who in approaching Deuteronomy 33, does not say, “This is a most difficult chapter. The language of the chapter is in many cases, archaic, hard to simply translate and the result is that, almost all, and I am speaking of believing men as well as unbelieving men, almost all of the students of Deuteronomy 33 have to, in the nature of the case, engage in a good bit of speculation, speculation with regard to simply the translation of the Hebrew text here.

Now, in addition to that, this is a very difficult chapter to interpret, even if we were absolutely sure of the rendering, the translation of Egypt, in the lines of this particular chapter, we would still have a problem because there are so many difficult things about it, but I do not think that we really would be doing justice to our series if we did not at least take Deuteronomy chapter 33 and give a kind of survey of it. Fortunately, to outline the chapter is very simple. Because, it is a very orderly treatise in its broad outlines. There is a hope, we shall see. So, hope you understand that as I approach this chapter, I recognize it is difficult. I think you will find it to be so unless you are very unusual. You may read this chapter 5, 6, or 7 times and when you get through, you will say to yourself, “I wonder what Moses really said about the tribes of Israel.”

Now, you will have a number of things that will come to your mind, of course, but I mean, so far as much of this chapter is concerned, it is a difficult chapter. So, if you are puzzled, if you do not grasp everything that I am saying, take comfort with the rest of us. There are many things about the chapter that I do not understand and since I have passed a very important milestone, where I was gone, I have received so many encouraging and discouraging notes, since I passed this milestone of being 70 years old. I never thought I would ever reach this particular age. I got a nice letter from Paul Martin, who is one who

supports our radio broadcast in the state of New York. He is just about my age exactly. He will reach 70 next month. He says, “You are living on borrowed time from now on.” In fact, he put it this way, “We are living on borrowed time,” but since his birthday is a about later than mine, he always takes pleasure in reminding me that I am older than he is.

So, since I do not understand this particular chapter after studying it for many years off and on, I am afraid that it is going to come to my understanding only when I enter the presence of the Lord. So, let us turn to Deuteronomy 33. Our subject tonight is “The Blessing of the Tribes.” Immediately, you think I have the final words that Jacob gave to his children, his sons, because there is a similarity obviously between them. Jacob looks into the future and in Genesis 49, outlines a number of the things that are going to happen to his sons and since his sons have given their name to the tribes of Israel and now Moses before his death is going to bless the tribes, it is natural that we should seek to compare them.

I must say, if I had to compare these two chapters, Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33, I would say that Jacob wrote and spoke much more plainly in this instance than Moses did. In fact, I do not know why Moses did not learn something from Jacob, and give us something more easily understood, but he did not. So, now coming to Deuteronomy 33, the time of Moses’ death is at hand, the great patriarch has ascended Mount Nebo for a glimpse of the land. Remember, God said, “Because of the way that he had conducted himself at Massah and Meribah, particularly, when he had instead of speaking to the rock, had smitten the rock twice, God had said, ‘Because you did not sanctify me before the people, you are not going to be able to enter the land, Moses.’”

But God did in grace, at least, give him an opportunity to see the land and so, from Mount Nebo, he had glimpse of the Promised Land, and now he is delivering his final blessing before the end of his earthly life and ministry. The resultant Psalm is as I say, unusual and difficult to interpret in its details. The language and grammar being

archaic, make it difficult to understand. We will just leave those questions to Old Testament exegetes because we do not have the time to even attempt to deal with the details, but the general sense and the flow of thought are easier to comprehend. It’s best taken in my opinion as a survey of some of Israel’s later tribal history. Remember, Moses was a prophet. And in fact, this chapter begins with these words, “Now this is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the sons of Israel before his death. And notice the expression, ‘the man of God,’ because, a number of times in the Old Testament, the prophets of the Old Testament are called ‘the men of God.’ So, this is a term that sets forth Moses as a prophet. And if you also remember that it is Moses who has given us in Deuteronomy 18, the great prophecy of the Prophet who is to come, who is greater than He, to whom Israel will listen.

Then you can see that Moses claims to be a prophet. He describes himself here as the man of God, a prophetic term, or a term for a prophet and then in verse 10 of chapter 34, the very next chapter, we read, since then, no prophet has risen in Israel like Moses, whom the Lord knew, face to face. And that chapter records the death of Moses, probably was written by some other person and he describes Moses as a prophet as well. So, I suggest there has been debate over this, but I suggest that Moses is acting as a prophet and is looking down through the years and he is going to give us, in a sense, an insight into the things that are going to happen concerning the tribes of Israel.

Now, if you will study this chapter carefully, you will see that the future that he sets forth is not the far distant future, primarily, though he does refer to that that it is a more limited future, may be a few hundred years later on. One can tell that from some of the things that he says concerning the individual tribes. But again, we would not deal too much with that tonight. I just suggest you read this as a prophecy. Now, it is easy to see the overall flow of Thought. If the details are difficult, the general Thought is very simple.

The first five verses, Moses speaks and gives us a bit of a description of the majesty and the love of Yahweh, or of the Lord. Then, in the sixth verse, through the

25th verse, we have the blessing of the particular tribes of Israel and finally in verse 26 through verse 29, we have a reference to the greatness of the Lord God and surprisingly, I think, the greatness of the Nation Israel. In fact, I like to call this last section, the great original, that is, the Lord God and His blessed people. And now let us look at verse 1 through 5 and as we have been doing recently, I will do the same thing tonight. I am going to read a few verses and just make a few comments concerning the things that are clear to me and that I think are of some importance. So, verse 1 through verse 5, Moses now gives us a prophet’s view of the future of the tribes of Israel. Now, this is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the sons of Israel before his death.

I should have mentioned this tonight, I am reading from the New American Standard Bible. The reason I am doing this is because the translation in the New American Standard Bible of this chapter, is in my opinion, a bit more accurate than the Authorized Version, and so rather than talk about ways in which we would modify the authorization, I thought it would be more simpler for us just to read from the New American Standard Bible. So, that is what I am reading from, in case you are wondering if you have been following along. You know, I had been using the Authorized Version and I hate to change text on you on this particular night but any way, I think it is useful on this occasion. Verse 2,

“He said, The Lord came from Sinai, and dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, and He came from the midst of ten Thousand holy ones; at His right hand there was flashing lightning for them. Indeed, He loves the people; All Thy holy ones are in Thy hand, And they followed in Thy steps; Everyone receives of Thy words. Moses charged us with a law, a possession for the assembly of Jacob. And He was king in Jeshurun.” (Remember, Jeshurun, which we had before in chapter 32, is a word for Israel, an old figurative term that means something like ‘the upright one.’ So,

Jeshurun, we will have it again in this chapter.) “And He was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people were gathered, the tribes of Israel together.”

Now, you can see from reading this that what Moses has done is to give us a figurative picture of the Lord God as the deliverer of the Children of Israel. He makes reference to Mount Sinai. So, it is obvious that he is thinking about the way in which God brought Israel out of the land of Egypt, brought them to Mount Sinai and there gave them the law.

Now, that was very significant because Israel became a nation when they were in Egypt. They were no longer the 75 or so people who had come down with Jacob, Jacob and his sons, but they have now become a vast number of people, and actually had become a nation, and so against the background of that remarkable deliverance, so beautifully picturing the work of the Lord Jesus Christ in the Passover and the passage through the Red Sea, deliverance by blood and deliverance by divine power. Against the background of that, Moses writes here of the Majesty and love of Yahweh, the Lord came from Sinai. So he pictures in them as a deliverer of the people from bondage and of His having brought them out of the land of Egypt and brought them to Mount Sinai and there has given them the law.

There is an interesting expression in verse 3. “Indeed, He loves the people.” This is a reference, of course, to Israel’s divine election and salvation. Now, if you have a New American Standard Bible there or perhaps another modern version, you notice that in the margin, the people is said to be in the Hebrew text, the peoples. That is correct. We have not the word *am* which means ‘people,’ but *amin* which means ‘peoples.’ But the sense of it seems to be as the singular translation of the New American Standard Bible.

Indeed, he loves the people, because the passage seems to lay great stress upon the Nation Israel. And he thinks of them as the peoples in the light of the vast number of them, concerning whom He is speaking. If this is a reference to all peoples, then of

course, the references to the universal love of the Lord God, not that he loves everybody the same, we know that is not true. Scripture makes that very plain. Jacob that I loved is all have I hated. There is a difference in the love of God and if we read here, “He loves the peoples,” the reference is to the fact that He loves both Jews and Gentiles. That is, all kinds of people, is the reference that is made. He loves not simply Israel but he loves the nations as well. That would be of some significance because the tendency of people who have come to know the Lord is to think that the love that he has for them is something special and reserved and limited to them. That is characteristic error that we often make.

Christians often talk in such a way that world feels that they are very arrogant and proud. And some of the sense of the divine election and choice and salvation has changed unfortunately the attitudes of people and made them forget in their salvation, but even Though saved, they are still sinners. We have to remember that, do not we? We are still sinners and as a matter of fact we of all people have a clearer understanding of the fact that we are sinners. World does not, but we of all people, should know that we are sinners, out of all people who should be devoid of proud and arrogance over our relationship to the Lord, it is those who have been brought into relationship to him, we understand or should that we are saved through grace.

Now, the last statement then in verse 5, “And He was king in Jeshurun,” can be a reference to the Lord God and that is likely in the minds of many or can be a reference to Moses as the mediator for he did act as a mediator in giving the Lord to the Israel and then in being the Lord’s spokesman. The balance goes to the blessing of the tribes themselves because this is the major burden of the chapter. And we begin reading with verse 6 and as you look down through these verses, you will notice that He takes up tribe after tribe.

For example, in the 6th verse, we read of Reuben, in the 7th verse, we read of Judah, in the 8th through the 11th verse, we read of Levi, and verse 12 we read of Benjamin, then in verse 13 through verse 17 we read of Joseph and then we read of

Zebulun in verse 18 and Issachar also in verse 18. We read of Gad in verse 20, of Dan in verse 22, of Naphtali in verse 23, and of Asher in verse 24 and verse 25. Now, if you know your tribes of Israel, you recognize immediately that one is missing. What one is missing? Surely, you know the 12 tribes of Israel. [Long pause] Well, to save time, it is Simeon. You flunked the exam. [Laughter]

Now, why that happened? Who knows? I do not know really why that happened and I really do not know of any commentator who has convincingly explained why that happened. Why Moses had to say something about everyone? I do not understand why that was necessary either. So there are number of questions about it that one might raise.

Now we can talk for a long time about some of the things that are set out here, but I want to do because we have limited time is to refer to the comments that he makes rather about Judah, about Levi, and then about Joseph. I think you will see the two largest sections are devoted to Levi and Joseph that might be surprising. Well, that is so much about Levi perhaps, but surely of Joseph. Why does Joseph seem so important? And in fact you might have expected a great deal to have been said about Judah and actually only one verse it is devoted to Judah. So there are lots of questions that arise in your mind as you think about this.

Notice the formula that introduces most of these although the first one in verse 6, Rueben does not have this formula, but in verse 7, we read “And this regarding Judah; so he said”, verse 8, and “And of Levi he said”, verse 12, “Of Benjamin he said”, verse 13, and “And of Joseph he said”, verse 18, and “And of Zebulun he said.” When you are studying the Bible these patterns are very important because they give you clues regarding the flow of the author’s thought. So, notice little things like that and will help you to understand what the author is trying to do.

But first let us just make a note concerning the things that is said about Judah in verse 7, “And this regarding Judah” -- well, I should read verse 6 as well. “May Reuben live and not die, Nor his men be few. And this regarding Judah; so he said, Hear, O Lord,

the voice of Judah, and bring him to his people. With his hands he contended for them, and mayest Thou be a help against his adversaries." Now, I think that is a very vague statement. I want to be critical of Moses, after all he wrote under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, and I acknowledge freely that I do not understand everything in the Bible. I wish I did. I do not. I do not understand why he wrote about Judah so vaguely, because it seems very vague to me.

Now, I am not going to ask you whether it seems vague to you but what I am going to ask you to do is to just turn back and see what Jacob said about Judah and see how much plainer and clearer what Jacob said seems to be as it seems because obviously I do not understand everything on Moses' mind and when I get to heaven, he is probably going to give me a little bit of addressing down and say, "Why did you said that about what I said in Deuteronomy 33. I was very plain and clear. You just are a dummy when it comes to understanding the Pentateuch."

Now, listen to what Jacob says. Genesis 49, verse 8: "Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's sons shall bow down to you. Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him up? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. He ties his foal to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine; He washes his garments in wine, and his robes in the blood of grapes. His eyes are dull from wine, and his teeth white from milk."

Now, well, there are some things that are difficult to understand, I think that is a remarkable prophecy and many others have commented upon verse 9 and 10, particularly the verse 10, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples and Shiloh is Thought almost universally to be a reference to the Lord Jesus Christ, but when we turn to verse 7 of Deuteronomy 33, we read "Hear, O Lord, the voice of Judah, and bring him to

his people. With his hands he contended for them, and mayest Thou be a help against his adversaries." So I think that is vague, not whole lot is said about Judah, not enough is said about Judah in my opinion, but the general Thought is quite similar. Judah is going to have success.

Moses lays great stress upon the fact that he will have success because of the Lord God is helping him and that is fair enough, that is a way it ought to be. Jacob looks at it at a little more definitely as God laying his hand upon Judah for the ultimate rising of the Lord Jesus Christ and the overcoming of the enemies of the Lord.

Now coming to verse 8 through verse 11, we have comments about Levi, and since as much is said about at least by as any of a person here other than about Joseph, obviously Moses thought this was important. May be he thought it was important because he was of the tribe of Levi, but I do not want to blame him too much. You have two things to say to me when I get to heaven.

"And of Levi he said, "Let thy Thummim and thy Urim belong to thy Godly man, whom Thou didst prove at Massah, with whom Thou didst contend at the waters of Meribah; who said of his father and his mother, 'I did not consider them'; and he did not acknowledge his brothers, nor did he regard his own sons, For they observed thy word, and kept thy covenant." Incidentally, therefore they observe thy word and kept thy covenant is a reference to the Levites. "They shall teach thine ordinances to Jacob, and thy law to Israel. They shall put incense before thee, And whole burnt offerings on the altar. O Lord, bless his substance, and accept the work of his hands; shatter the loins of those who rise up against him, and those who hate him, so that they will not rise again."

And this is given in the form of a prayer. Notice verse 8, "Let Thy Thummim and Thy Urim belong to Thy Godly man." The Urim and the Thummim, people have often wondered what in the world are the Urim and the Thummim. It had to do with the

unfolding the will of God and it is thought by Moses that the Urim and the Thummim were stones that were placed in the breastplate of the high priest, but they were stones that could be taken out and they were thrown. Urim is the word that probably comes from the word that means ‘to curse,’ a rare Hebrew verb. Thummim probably is derived from the word *tamiym* which means perfect or complete. So one is a negative and the other is a positive.

And it was thought so biblical scholars feel that these two stones were taken out and they were thrown, very much like dice were thrown in order to gain divine direction concerning a course of action. They believe that God was able to direct, they falling out of these stones. So if they on one side, one side of the all the stones would be the words Urim and on the other side, Thummim and when they were thrown, if both of the Urim’s came up, then of course that was the negative answer. Note, but if the Thummim came up, that was the positive answer and so that was the distinct privilege of the tribe of Levi and the high priest, it was he who had the charge of the Urim and the Thummim and it was he who then in throwing them would give the divine will. The expression of the divine will concerning any particular kind of action.

So that is the reference here to it and it seems rather strange to us, but we have to remember that in the Old Testament, the Holy Spirit was not yet given in the sense in which he is given in New Testament times. Remember the Lord Jesus said, “He is with you,” to the apostles in the Upper Room, “but He shall be in you,” and in fact John the Apostle also says the Holy Spirit has not yet been given in the sense of New Testament period of time, because that Jesus was not yet glorified. So it was necessary for our Lord to come and die and to accomplish his redemptive work in order that the Holy Spirit might then be brought into the heart and life of every single believer as a permanent indwelling presence that was something that in Old Testament times was never experienced.

I know that you may think that, “Well, there are few instances in the Old Testament and in which it says that the spirit was in some one.” I personally feel, that in most instances, that of course is true, but the question is in what sense were they in them, were they in them as a permanent indwelling presence? I do not think so. If one looks at the context of those passages, it becomes evident I think that the Holy Spirit was in them in the sense of in them with endowment of power to perform a specific task.

For example, those who worked on the tabernacle are said to have had the Holy Spirit in them, that is, they were given endowment with power from the Lord God to carry out a specific task. The same is true of Gideon and when you add up all of those instances, there are relatively very few of them, but when our Lord suffers and dies, then the ministry of the Holy Spirit, in the special sense of a permanent indwelling presence is the experience of every believer in Christ. So, if you, in this audience are a believer in Christ, you have the permanent indwelling presence of the Holy Spirit, who is the one who mediates the presence of our Lord in our lives.

So, the Urim and the Thummim, that was something that pertained to particular age in which Moses speaks. We do not need Urim and Thummim today. Someone has said, “It’s the Bible that has taken the place of the Urim and the Thummim and the Bible is the source of our direction and if we will use them in Thummim, we will have divine direction.” I do not think that is such good exegesis to Jesus, but it seems to be popular with some people. There is a whole lot of sense in the fact that if we study the scriptures, we would have gotten some almost all of the major questions in our lives.

Now, let us notice some of the things that are said about Levi. First of all, in verses 8 and 9, it says, “Whom Thou didst prove at Massah, with whom Thou didst contend at the waters of Meribah.” That’s strange. Now, we have studied the incidents at Massah and Meribah. Remember when Moses smote the rock, and then remember when Moses, instead of speaking at the rock, later on, smote the rock twice, but when you read those instances, you do not see any particular reference to the tribe of Levi as being

proved at those places. In fact, the only way in which you could possibly see that is to think of Moses and Aaron who are members of the tribe of Levi, may be, the references to them and the fact that they were generally faithful.

In the case of Meribah, or the second instance at least, then even Moses was disobedient there. So, there may be more lying in the back of this than is given us in the word of God. In other words, it may be that at some of these places, where Moses for example, was unfaithful. The tribe of Levi was faithful. We do not have any reasons for necessarily thinking otherwise. We do know this, that at critical points, the tribes of Levi are representatives, for the tribe of Levi did perform some outstandingly spiritual activities.

Turn, for example, back to Exodus, chapter 32, and I will just read verse 25 through verse 29. This is the instance of the making of the golden calf and we read in verse 25 of Exodus 32, “Now when Moses saw that the people were out of control for Aaron had let them get out of control to be a derision among their enemies, then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, “Whoever is for the Lord, come to me!” And all the sons of Levi gathered together to him.” I will not read the rest of it, but you can see that, here, the tribe of Levi stood before that which was right.

Then in Numbers, chapter 25 and verse 1 through verse 9, a passage we looked at not too long ago, after the experience of the hearing of Balaam’s prophecies in Numbers, chapter 25, we read of how the children of Israel were enticed to play the harlot with the daughters of Moab, and then in the midst of the company of the children of Israel, a man brought in a Midianite woman in the sight of Moses and in the sight of all the congregation, while they were weeping at the doorway of the tent of meeting, and when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he arose from the midst of the congregation and took a spear in his hand, and he went after the man of Israel into the tent and pierced both of them through, the man of Israel and the woman, through the body. So the plague on the sons of Israel was checked.

Now, of course, Phinehas, was of the tribe of Levi. So there may be some reference then to the fact that the tribe of Levi at critical points did indicate their devotion to the Lord God, but at any rate as a result of that, we read in the 10th verse, “They shall teach Thine ordinances to Jacob, and Thy law to Israel. They shall put incense before Thee, and whole burnt offerings on Thine altar.” So, as a result of the faithfulness of the tribe of Levi, they were appointed to dual offices. One was the office of teaching, so that teaching in the children of Israel was done by the priests. They taught the word of God. Malachi makes reference to that in his prophecy. So, as a result of their devotion, they were given the privilege of the teaching of the word of God. That was one thing they did. But we tend to think most of all of their activities as those who carried on the Levitical cultus, and that is referred to as well. So, the tribe of Levi then, because of their faithfulness at critical points was allowed by the Lord God to teach the children of Israel, the law of God and also to carry on the priestly duties and sacrifice.

Now, in verse 11, we read, “O Lord, bless his substance, and accept the work of his hands; shatter the loins of those who rise up against him, and those who hate him, so that they will not rise again.” So, as a result of this, Moses says, or asks in prayer that whenever any one rises up against the priestly tribe of Levi, may the Lord God execute judgment upon them. Again, if you follow through what we have been talking about in this series, you will remember that when Korah in his rebellion, rebelled against Moses and against Aaron, it was over the question of the priestly right of the children of the tribe of Levi and then Korah in effect said, “You should not take all of that to yourself. Well, all, we all have the right to approach the Lord God.” And as a result of that incident, Israel was taught that only those who are appointed by the Lord God had right of access to Him.

Now, we talked about how that has so important an application to us today in that there is only one way of approach to the Lord God, through our Great High Priest, who in His saving work, has done away with all of the shadows of the Levitical cultures and it is

now the Priest after the order of Melchizedek, through whom alone, we can come to God, and if we think that we can come to God through some other way, we are, as our Lord says, thieves and robbers, and judgment awaits any who seek to be justified apart from the mediatorial work of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Thus, all liberalism, which would exclude the saving work of Jesus Christ as the foundation of salvation, comes under the judgment of the Lord God. That is so important, so important to recognize that really all liberalism, and I am speaking of theological liberalism, all liberalism, comes under that specific judgment from the Lord God. There is no way of approach on the part of any man, in himself, to God and if we approach, it is only through our mediator. How marvelous it is to have a mediator. How marvelous it is to know that through Christ, we have access! And, this is open to all who by the grace of God, feel their need and come through Him.

Now, the final comments are concerning Joseph in verse 13 through verse 17. A reference made of the Benjamin is very brief. Paul, remember, was of the tribe of Benjamin. "Of Benjamin he saith," this is verse 12, "May the beloved of the Lord dwell in security by Him, who shields him all the day, and he dwells between His shoulders." Have you ever thought about this, Benjamin dwelling between the shoulders of the Lord God?

Now, one thing that the commentators have suggested is perhaps the references to a Father who is walking along and has his child hanging over his shoulder. You can think of that picture and think of the intimacy of it and also the care of the father for the son. May be that is in view. But at any rate, the point of the figure of speech is to stress the fact that Benjamin has behind him the shoulders of the mighty God. So, the reference is of course to Benjamin's relationship to the Lord and the Lord's mighty power in his behalf.

Now, the longest of the comments were made concerning Joseph, and I will read through verse 13 through 17. "Of Joseph he said, "Blessed of the LORD be his land, with

the choice things of heaven, with the dew, and from the deep lying beneath, and with the choice yield of the sun, and with the choice produce of the months and with the best things of the ancient mountains, and with the choice things of the lasting hills.”

Now, you know, the New American Standard Bible has “with the choice things of the everlasting hills.” I appreciate very much not on translations. I have engaged and worked on at least two of them, and I do not have any feeling of prejudice about a New Translation at all. As a matter of fact, I read the Greek and the Hebrew. That is what I read and in the case of a few chapters in Daniel, in one or two other places, I read the Aramaic as well. So, I do not have any particular ax to grind over a special translation. The inspired text was the original text written by the authors of scripture. Sometimes, however, we fail to appreciate the Authorized Version and for example, it is beautifully rendered in the Authorized Version, verse 15, that last clause, “And with the precious things of the lasting hills.”

Now, I must say, that is better than with the choice things of the everlasting hills, and in fact, the first part of the sentence is better too, with the chief things, that as a minor point, the reason I mention it is at this particular passage, and this particular line in verse 15 has been used by some friends of mine as a title of one of their books, *Choice Things of the Lasting Hills*. John and Isobel Kuhn were missionaries to China and ministered the word of God among the Lisu, out in western China.

In fact, I was going to China as a missionary myself to teach in a theological school in Shanghai. When I was getting through college and seminary, the last year in seminary, they began to teach Hebrew, one of the things that I felt the Lord was leading me to do was to China and teach in the school and when asked by them, and I had not applied for anything. I have never applied for anything. In all of my years of ministry, I never applied for anything. I felt that I should wait on the Lord God and some friends came to me who were Christians and said, “You are getting ready to graduate.” They

knew I was and they asked me if I would come and join their faculty in Shanghai at the China Bible Seminary and teach this, I was planning to do it.

I was interested very much in China for that reason and John and Isobel Kuhn were missionaries to China and they came on the campus in Dallas Seminary, and Isobel Kuhn, particularly, she had really a marvelous way of expressing spiritual things and had a great influence among the students, both the women and the men at Dallas Seminary. Later, few years after, she wrote a book of their missionary experiences among the Lisu and she called it, *The Precious Things of the Lasting Hills* which is the rendering of the Authorized Version of this particular passage. Marvelous little book and explains how God used John and Isobel Kuhn. They are both with the Lord now in the ministry of the word of God in China.

Now these comments about Joseph are of great interest, for example, in verse 16 we read, “And with the choice things of the earth and its fullness and the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush,” now what is that a reference to. “The favor of Him who dwelt in the bush,” but surely you do not have to think back very far to remember that in Moses’ experience, that experience of the burning bush and the experience of the Lord God, there is the thing that greatly impressed him and in a sense, gave a color to all of Moses’ ministry because it was there that he was called to be the mediator and the deliverer of the children of Israel. So not to surprise them that he should say, that Joseph is blessed with the choice things of the earth and its fullness and the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush, let it come to the head of Joseph and to the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers. So Moses thinks of Joseph as the one who stands out among the tribal heads in the children of Israel.

As you know, Joseph and his tribe actually became two tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh. And as a result of that, Joseph was given a double blessing, so that two tribes, were the tribe of Joseph, two of them, Ephraim and Manasseh is two children. So, he winds up by saying in verse 17, “As the firstborn of his ox, majesty is his, and his horns

are the horns of the wild ox; with them he shall push the peoples, all at once, to the ends of the earth. And those are the ten Thousands of Ephraim, and those are the Thousands of Manasseh," Ephraim and Manasseh, the two sons of Joseph.

By the way, the figure of the ox is very interesting, because the ox of course has horns and one of the horns is likened by Moses to Ephraim and the other horn is likened to Manasseh. Beautiful figure of the influence of Ephraim and Manasseh. You may remember that they were the two largest of the tribes of the northern kingdom, and in fact, they were the core of the northern kingdom, so it is not surprising that in Moses' prophecy, a great deal should be said about them.

Now, finally, the last few words, I like to call this the great original and His blessed people. We pass by verse 24, I guess, I should say something about that. Some of you may have invested money in this. I hope not in Believers Chapel, but let me tell you, there are people all over this country, particularly, in the Bible Belt who are putting money in oil rigs in Palestine on the basis of what is said here. And you find that mainly in the charismatic elements, but there is a fellow out in West Texas, I have his name here, and he is a preacher, but he also has some oil wells, and his name is Harold "Hayseed" Stevens. I like that name, Harold "Hayseed" Stevens. That is his nickname, "Hayseed." But he is a preacher and he is a fairly well-to-do preacher and obviously is he feels that here is a reference to a possible oil strike.

"Of Asher," verse 24, "he said, more blessed than sons is Asher; may he be favored by his brothers, and may he dip his foot in oil. Your locks will be iron and bronze." Now, what are the iron and bronze. We all know what the oil is, so Harold "Hayseed" Stevens would probably say, "What is the iron and bronze. Why of course those are on the rigs. The rigs." And, according to your days, so shall you leisurely walk Thee.

Now, I know, you are laughing, but do you know, that is just about a month ago, before I left to go over to Britain, on August 22nd, to be exact, there was a lengthy article on the front page of the newspaper that has the widest national circulation in the United

States, the *Wall Street Journal* and here is the article, lead article on page 1, first column on the left, “Biblical Petroleum, Prophets earn Profit, Motivate Evangelicals Hunting for Israeli Oil. Hundred, these are headlines, hundreds invest in search and many see huge fan bringing the second coming, quest so far, there is no fruit. Literally, millions have been spent, not only that, these people have got the Israeli Government backing them too. They pay 40 cents on the dollar for the digging that is going on, the drilling, and there are any number of people who are involved in this, and they have spent some of hundred thousand dollars.

And even more than this, drilling for oil in Palestine, under the conviction, that if they strike, it is going to be the greatest strike of all, it is going to be better than Saudi Arabia or any of those places over there. It is going to be so massive and it is going to create so much international confusion, that everybody is going to come down and war over the oil there and the result will be, it will institute the events that will lead to the second coming of the Lord Jesus Christ.

Now, I must say to you, I do not know, well, all of that is going to come to pass or not, but I just want to say this, when this text of Scripture says, “May he be favored by his brothers and may he dip his foot in oil.” We are not at all sure that that is the kind of oil that you can put in your automobile and we are not at all sure it is the kind of oil that you can use for your gasoline, because it so happens that Asher was a particular territory of the land that was specially known for olive oil. That is what it was really known for, olive oil.

Now, oil was the sign of prosperity, it is something that people used in the land who had money, so that oil came to be a figure for prosperity. Now, in this instance, there is no certainty at all that this is the kind of oil that these people are drilling for in the land. May be they will hit oil, but as far as exegesis and interpretation is concerned, the chances are that that is not what is meant, when it says, “May he dip his foot in oil.” But that will keep people from doing it and I am not trying to keep people from doing it.

It so happens, some are trying to take advantage of some of the saints. They are calling on them to invest and getting them to feel that they are hastening the second coming of the Lord Jesus by buying stock and some of the components. One share of stock was offered in one particular company for a price of 2 cents a share. It went up to 60 cents per share because the evangelicals around the country were propagandized by probably all kinds of letters, you know the kind of letters, you get them all yourself. If you ever given up a dollar to any Christian organization, they get your name, they sell your name to other groups and you get a lot of mail. In fact, you have to enlarge your mailbox, that is what we have to do, we have to enlarge our mailbox because of the things that we get and I want you to know, however, that that stock did went from 2 cents to 60 cents, is back to 10 now, and after this message tonight, it is going to down to 8 or 6, I am sure.

At any rate, we pass by that and I just want to say a few final words about the last part. This is a magnificent section, this last part. I have a friend. He is a marvelous preacher of the word of God, Warren Weirsbe, and Warren is an individual who is taking over from Theodore Epp as the general director of the Back to the Bible Hour and I have known Warren for many years, I have preached in his church, and he is now engaged in that ministry entirely. He is a very intelligent fellow and he says that when went to theological seminary, that one of his theology professors made a statement a number of times that he never forgot and that statement was, “Remember brethren, that God is infinitely original.”

God is infinitely original! That is a marvelous statement because that indicates really that God is absolutely unique and unique infinitely, that is there is not any thing that is beyond His power, His wisdom, His knowledge, and all of the other things that characterize the attributes of God. Now, listen to the final words that Moses writes because they express the great original and His blessed people. Yahweh prevails for

them. There is none like the God of Jeshuran who rides the heavens to your help and through the skies in His majesty.

He is greater than Phaeton, what we used to say in Greek mythology, Phaeton, you remember Phaeton? Phaeton was the son of Helios, the sun god, so called by different names, sometimes, Titan, and so on, but Helios was the sun god and according to a Greek mythology, Helios got in his chariot with his horses and he raced over the heavens once a day, then to get back to his place, he traveled down a river in a boat. But Phaeton decided he was one of his son by one of the people, I have forgotten her name, it started with a coy— but anyway, Phaeton thought that he could do that just as well as Helios did, and so he got hold of the chariot with the horses and he started across the sky. But being inexperienced, he got into difficulty, and as a result, he began to sink and fall and as a result, he burnt up one of the mountains and in fact, he is supposed to have scorched all of what is today, Libya. It is too bad it did not accomplish is completely, but he did that until finally in order to prevent destruction, Zeus destroyed him with a thunderbolt.

Now that kind of figure in ancient Near Eastern literature is present. It is the figure of a God who is in total control of everything and who rides over the skies. Well, that is the similar figure here. There is none like the God of Jeshuran who rides the heavens to your help and through the skies in His majesty. He is the true Helios, the true controller of the sun, the moon, the skies, the earth, and so on.

Now, he says, “The eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms.” What a magnificent expression of security. “And He drove out the enemy from before you, and said, ‘Destroy!’” So Israel dwells in security, the fountain of Jacob secluded, in a land of grain and new wine; his heavens also drop down dew.” Could you have anything more wonderful that the eternal God is a dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms? God, the security; God, the support of his people and finally in verse 29, “Blessed are you, O Israel; Who is like you, a people saved by the

Lord, who is the shield of your help, and the sword of your majesty! So your enemies will cringe before you, and you shall tread upon their high places.”

What more marvelous thing could be said about the nation Israel that is said here. “Blessed are you, O Israel; Who is like you, a people saved in the Lord.” Now that is something that can be said about us, because we share in those blessings that God has set out for the nation Israel. All the families of the earth are blessed in Abram’s seed, the Lord Jesus Christ, and by God’s grace we have been brought to the knowledge of Him, and thus the things that are said of Israel are things that are true of us. “Blessed are you, O Church of Jesus Christ; Who is like you, a people saved in the Lord, who is the shield of your help, and the sword of your majesty” Nothing could be more wonderful that to have the Lord God as the shield, the refuge, the sword of the believer in the Lord Jesus Christ.

And of course, Moses closes with a note of the ultimate supremacy of the nation Israel. Fortunately, by God’s grace, we who believe in the Lord Jesus Christ are grafted in among them and have become fellow partakers of the fat root of the olive tree. What grounds for rejoicing and boasting in the Lord, we have in Christ. May Lord help us to truly come to a realization of it and an experience of it in our lives!

Next week, the Lord willing, we are going to start on new series of studies and what I want to do is to do a study either on the grace of God, a short study, then I want to, if I do not do that, I am not absolutely certain, we will have it in the bulletin on Sunday, but I would like to do a study on God’s, I will put it this way, on the divine purpose in which we study the ages, the covenants, and the nations, dealing with aspects of covenant theology, aspects of dispensational theology, and an attempt to set forth, what is I think, the kind of theology that most closely approximates the teaching of the word of God.

I am sorry, I have kept you over tonight, 5 minutes over, that is really bad. The tape is probably running out by now, they are pulling the hair out in the tape room. But

I apologize, I am sorry. I will try not to do that in the future. Let us close with a word of prayer.

[Prayer] Father, we are grateful to Thee for the privilege of the study of the scriptures. We thank Thee for these passages, some difficult, but all containing important and precious truths. Who is a God like Thee? And as for the Church of Jesus Christ, who is a body, such as Thee? We give Thee thanks in Jesus’ name. Amen.