

Text: Dt 33.1-29

THEOLOGICAL OUTLINE OF DEUTERONOMY¹

1. **Consider:** a review of God's faithfulness (1.6–4.40)
2. **Covenant:** an exposition of the law (5–26)
3. **Commence:** preparations for renewing the covenant (27.1–28.68)
4. **Commit:** an exhortation to obedience (29.2–30.20)

We've concluded the major addresses of Moses. Here is an outline of the rest of the book:

1. Leadership Transition (31)
2. The Song of Moses (32) [Last Week]
3. **The Blessing of Moses (33)**
4. The Death of Moses (34)

The blessing of Moses parallels the blessing of Jacob in Gen 49.

"Jacob's dying words, though described as a blessing (Gen 49:28), were also unabashedly predictive. 'Gather around,' he said, 'so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come' (49:1). Then with divinely inspired prescience, he outlined the future for each of his sons.

"Moses' speech was more strictly in the technical form and language of blessing. The passage begins with the words, 'This is the blessing that Moses ... pronounced' (33:1), and each subsection commences with the optative 'let' thus and so take place (vv. 6, 12) or 'may' it happen (v. 13) or such terms occur internally, either explicitly or implicitly. Rather than being formally predictive, then, Moses' utterances concerning the tribes were in the nature of prayerful intercession. They express what he fervently desired for his people and what he confidently expected that God would do."²

The chapter follows these divisions:

Theological Introduction (1-5)

1. Reuben (6)
2. Judah (7)

¹ Adapted from an outline in Lawrence O Richards, *The Bible Readers Companion*, electronic ed. (Wheaton: Victor Books, 1991), 117.

² Eugene H. Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, The New American Commentary, v. 4 (Nashville, Tenn.: Broadman & Holman, 1994), 431–32.

3. Levi (8-11)
4. Benjamin (12)
5. Joseph (13-17)
6. Zebulun and Issachar (18-19)
7. Gad (20-21)
8. Dan (22)
9. Naphtali (23)
10. Asher (24-25)

Joseph represents Ephraim & Manasseh, both sons of Joseph who became tribal heads on their own, see Gen 48.

“Moses did not mention the Simeonites in this blessing. Jacob had prophesied that God would scatter the Simeonites in Israel (Gen. 49:7). Simeon received no tribal allotment of land, but only a few cities in Judah, when Joshua divided the Promised Land. The Simeonites became absorbed into the other tribes, especially Judah.”³

Theological Conclusion (26-29)

A few notes on the Theological Introduction and Conclusion:

1. Moses presents God as a Warrior-King who leads his people forward, grants them the law through Moses, and sits over them as king. The wording might suggest Moses as king, which makes him a prototype of Christ, the ultimate king.
2. Moses concludes by picturing God as Israel’s mighty helper, riding his war horse (the heavens) in patrol over Israel and its affairs. The Lord provides safety and security for Israel.

A few notes on the Tribal blessings:

1. The order is different between Gen 49 and Dt 33. There are marked differences in content. Liberals claim this shows Deuteronomy to be a late addition to the Torah. Merrill gives a faithful response: “No amount of positing late ‘deuteronomistic’ ideology or the like can account for all these differences. It is best to understand that Moses (who, after all, composed both lists) assumed the priority of the Genesis material and

³ Tom Constable, *Tom Constable’s Expository Notes on the Bible* (Galaxie Software, 2003), Dt 33.6.

its familiarity to his own and later readers and, therefore, viewed his present composition as complementary and/or elucidative.”⁴

2. While Simeon eventually disappeared as a tribe, and Levi was likewise dispersed all over Israel, Levi redeemed itself by standing with Moses in the golden calf incident (see Ex 32.25-29). This gained Levi the blessing of the priesthood and temple service.
3. Joseph receives the most notice of any of the tribes in this blessing. Joshua was an Ephraimite, Ephraim would become a leading part of the nation after the conquest. Sometimes Ephraim became an alternate name for the Northern Kingdom (the Ten Tribes).

Despite shortcomings of the current and following generations, God’s blessing is available to each one.

For ourselves, we need to acknowledge that there is great blessing for all people in the Lord, especially those who enter fully into a covenant relationship with him.

⁴ Merrill, *Deuteronomy*, 437.