

PARASHAH: V'Zot HaBrachah (This is the blessing)
ADDRESS: D'varim (Deuteronomy) 33:1-34:12
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AUTHOR: Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman

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(Note: all quotations are taken from the Complete Jewish Bible, translation by David H. Stern, Jewish New Testament Publications, Inc., unless otherwise noted)

Let's begin with the opening blessing for the Torah:

***“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,
asher bachar banu m’kol ha-amim,
v’natan lanu eht Torah-to.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn.”***

(Blessed are you, O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have selected us from among all the peoples,
and have given us your Torah.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

Life is full of cycles. Beginnings and endings encompass our whole existence. HaShem has masterfully designed everything in creation to work together this way. The rain falls to the land; it is washed down to the sea via rivers and streams; evaporation takes place and clouds form, and then the whole cycle repeats itself. Cycles produce cleansing. Cycles promote growth. With cycles also comes needed change of routine. In the absence of the numerous life cycles, our opportunities for development would be truncated, and our existence might seem rather boring and mundane.

The Torah of HaShem is a book full of cycles. Its pages are teeming with the beginnings and endings of men, families, nations and kings. As soon as one episode ends, another one is just beginning! It is never stagnant! This type of life-action flow makes for adequate challenge to the readers of the Torah, providing the necessary lessons and examples whereby we can shape our own lives into the person HaShem created us to be. It is with this introduction that we embark on the final parashah (portion) of the first five books of the Torah. As we shall see, even this “ending” is really just another “new beginning”.

Our portion gets its name, “**V'Zot HaBrachah**”, from the opening statement of 33:1,

וַזֹּאת הַבְּרָכָה אֲשֶׁר בֵּרַךְ מֹשֶׁה אִישׁ הָאֱלֹהִים
אֶת־בְּנֵי יִשְׂרָאֵל לִפְנֵי מוֹתוֹ

***“V’Zot habrachah asher berach Moshe ish ha'Elohim et-beney Yisra'el
lifney moto”***

(This is the blessing that Moshe, the man of God, spoke over the people of Isra’el before his death).

In many ways, this is one of the saddest portions of the Torah. First, Moshe, the “father” and “mother” of the budding new nation of Isra’el is about to die and pass the leadership onto Y’hoshua, his faithful servant. He has tirelessly lead Am Yisra’el through many difficult times, as well as provided a visible and necessary link between their “untouchable” God and themselves. Were it not for this most famous teacher of Isra’el, the nation surely would not have survived their exodus from the slave land of Egypt.

Second, although he lovingly conveys to each individual tribe a blessing from the conscience of HaShem, the people know that this will be the final instruction and exhortation from this great man. You can almost imagine the somber mood that might have replaced the usual excitement and expectation that normally accompanies the giving of a blessing. In fact, you might even go so far as to imagine HaShem himself being saddened by the loss of his closest friend of that time period. After all, Moshe had been identified as the one whom “God spoke face to face with, as a man speaks to his friend (Exodus 33:11a).” Surely the Father’s heart would miss this type of earthly fellowship as well.

Lastly, despite the unmatched servitude that Moshe provided to HaShem, he and his brother Aharon’s disobedience in displaying the holiness of HaShem to the people, at the Spring of M’rivat-Kadesh (Numbers 20:7-12), warranted the punishment of not being able to cross the River Jordan into the Promised Land. Moshe would only get to view this land from a distance before his death.

Space here does not permit me to conduct a detailed study on each and every blessing that Moshe gave to the Twelve Tribes. I only want to single out one tribe, and comment on the blessing. Then we will examine the final words of Chapter 34.

Judah’s Preeminence

“Of Y’hudah he said: “Hear, ADONAI, the cry of Y’hudah! Bring him to his people, let his own hands defend him; but you, help him against his enemies.”

This blessing, given to the Tribe of Y’hudah, is found in 33:7. This tribe has also, experienced the “messianic” blessing/prophecy (given to the tribe’s father, Y’hudah, in Genesis 49:8-12), since the days of the man Isra’el. What could Moshe be hinting at when he used the phrase **“bring him to his people”**? I would like to make a short midrash (homiletic exposition) on this statement.

Using our current knowledge of the previous prophecy/blessing of Genesis, we remember that the ruler, given the title “Shiloh”, refers to the Messiah. I don’t need to quote the various places where the Talmud makes this association; it is well known in rabbinical circles. This prophecy is quite familiar to many Christians as well. To be sure, Yeshua ben-Yosef was indeed born into the tribe of Y’hudah, confirming the words of this prophecy (Matthew 1:1-16; Revelation 5:5). Since the Messiah fulfilled the prophecy in Genesis, he therefore stands to represent the tribe as its most notable member. Moreover, the Messiah represents the entire Nation of Isra’el as a whole. In Genesis, the blessing that the Messiah would come was in the future tense. Likewise here in our present text, the wording suggests that “Y’hudah” would experience (future) an “exile” of some sort, a distancing of himself (or someone else) from the rest of the people, bringing about a petition to HaShem to return [him] to his people. I suggest that Yeshua is the one of whom the tribe is crying out to (or because of)! **“Bring him (Yeshua) to his people!”**

For too long this Son of Y’hudah has lived in “exile” from the rest of his tribe, the “Y’hudim”, the “Judah-ites”, the “Jews”! The remnant of believing Y’hudim are petitioning the Sovereign LORD, “Please bring HIM unto his people! Return HIM to his tribe, that we may welcome our long “lost” brother, our own flesh and blood!” Indeed, one day, the entire Nation of Isra’el will welcome back into the community, the long awaited Son of Y’hudah!

Moshe: Types and Shadows

Now I want to briefly examine the final eulogy about this man Moshe. The text (34:10) says that Isra’el has not enjoyed a prophet on the same level as Moshe, since his death. From a natural point of view this is true; Moshe stands in a class all by himself. But earlier in the Torah, in Deuteronomy 18:15-19 (**Parashah Shoftim**), Moshe himself told the people that the LORD would raise up another prophet, like himself, for the people to follow. First Century literary sources show that the people living in and around the time of the Second Temple period applied this prophetic passage to the coming messiah figure. Yeshua ben-Yosef was such a figure. To be sure, even the New Covenant echoes these same sentiments.

If we are to understand what the Torah is instructing the people here in our current parashah, then truly no one has ever superceded the reputation that Moshe had. But the truth is, Yeshua, the “second Moshe” is shown to be greater than his predecessor was; this does not upset the truth of what is recorded here for us in Deuteronomy. Many similarities between them can be observed:

- Moshe had his humble beginnings in a relatively unknown family in Egypt, having his life spared by the protection of his immediate family; Yeshua also had his humble beginning in a lowly, unknown family, his parents having saved their lives and his by fleeing to Egypt
- Moshe began his public ministry after a period of “forty”; Yeshua began his public ministry after a period of “forty”
- Moshe was the “giver” of the Torah; Yeshua explained the fullness and correct interpretation of “Moshe’s Torah”
- In more than one instance Moshe acted in the role of intercessor between the people and HaShem; Yeshua became our Great High Priest, interceding for us on behalf of the Father, and forever lives to make intercession on our behalf
- Moshe “instituted” the Old[er] Covenant; Yeshua “instituted” the New[er] Covenant

Thus we see that Yeshua was greater than Moshe in many respects, yet the context of the verse is not compromised. These facts about Moshe and Yeshua are important for us to internalize, because many members of the Jewish Community have taken the words of this prophecy to a literal extreme, discounting any possibility of Yeshua being the Messiah. In fact, a rather famous teacher by the name of Rabbi Moshe ben-Maimon, affectionately known as “RaMBaM” (1135-1204) produced a series of Thirteen Principles (still recited in synagogues today), one of which states that this verse means ‘no prophet has arisen in Isra’el like Moshe, and none ever will’. Consequently, according to RaMBaM, Yeshua could not have been “The Prophet”. (For more information on Deuteronomy 18:15-19, and the subject of “The Prophet”, read my commentary to **Parashah Shoftim**, provided by this web site)

Returning to Our Roots

Our parashah has come to an end, but our study of the Torah should never end. Just to be sure, we invite you to “turn the Torah over again” (a quote by Rabbi ben-BagBag, Talmud: Pirke Avot) by starting in Genesis right after the conclusion of the Fall Feasts. In fact, in keeping with Jewish custom, I want to recite for you the last few verses of the book of Deuteronomy and immediately follow them with the first few verses of Genesis:

וְלֹא־קָם נָבִיא עוֹד בְּיִשְׂרָאֵל כְּמֹשֶׁה אֲשֶׁר
יָדְעוּ יְהוָה פָּנִים אֶל־פָּנִים

לְכָל־הָאֲתוֹת וְהַמּוֹפְתִים אֲשֶׁר שָׁלַח יְהוָה
לַעֲשׂוֹת בְּאֶרֶץ מִצְרָיִם לְפָרְעֹה וְלְכָל־עַבְדָּיו
וְלְכָל־אֶרְצוֹ

וְלִכְל הַיָּד הַחֲזָקָה וְלִכְל הַמּוֹרָא הַגָּדוֹל
אֲשֶׁר עָשָׂה מֹשֶׁה לְעֵינֵי כָּל-יִשְׂרָאֵל

*“Velo-kam navi od b’Yisra’el keMoshe asher yeda’o ADONAI panim el-panim.
Lechol-ha’otot vehamoftim asher shlacho ADONAI la’asot be’erets Mitzrayim le-
Far’oh ulechol-avadav ulechol-artso. Ulechol hayad hachazakah ulechol hamora
hagadol asher asah Moshe le’eyney kol-Yisra’el.”*

(Since that time there has not arisen in Isra’el a prophet like Moshe, whom ADONAI knew face to face. What signs and wonders ADONAI sent him to perform in the land of Egypt upon Pharaoh, all his servants and all his land! What might was in his hand! What great terror he evoked before the eyes of all Isra’el!)

בְּרֵאשִׁית בָּרָא אֱלֹהִים אֶת הַשָּׁמַיִם וְאֶת הָאָרֶץ

וְהָאָרֶץ הָיְתָה תְהוֹ וְבוּהוּ וְחֹשֶׁךְ עַל-פְּנֵי
תְהוֹם וְרוּחַ אֱלֹהִים מְרַחֶפֶת עַל-פְּנֵי הַמַּיִם

וַיֹּאמֶר אֱלֹהִים יְהִי אוֹר וַיְהִי אוֹר

*“B’resheet bara Elohim eht hashamayim ve’eht ha’arets. Veha’arets hayetah tohu
vavohu vechoshech al-peney tehom veruach Elohim merachefet al-peney
hamayim. Vayomer Elohim yehi-or vayehi-or.”*

(In the beginning God created the heavens and the earth. The earth was unformed and void, darkness was on the face of the deep, and the Spirit of God hovered over the surface of the water. Then God said, “Let there be light”, and there was light.)

I challenge you to continue studying God’s Word on your own, or with the aid of a good commentary. You are invited to continue studying with us here at this web site. A weekly commentary is provided for every Shabbat reading of the Torah schedule. You may also wish to consult other various rabbinical commentaries on the Parashot HaShavuah, the Weekly Portions.

It is customary after the completion of a book of the Torah to say,

“Chazak, chazak, v’nit’chazek!”

(Be strong, be strong, and let us be strengthened!)

The closing blessing is as follows:

“Baruch atah YHVH, Eloheynu, Melech ha-‘Olam,

***asher natan lanu Toraht-emet,
v'chay-yeh o'lam nata-b'tochenu.
Baruch atah YHVH, noteyn ha-Torah.
Ameyn."***

(Blessed are you O' LORD, our God, King of the Universe,
you have given us your Torah of truth,
and have planted everlasting life within our midst.
Blessed are you, LORD, giver of the Torah.
Ameyn.)

"Shabbat Shalom!"

Torah Teacher Ariel ben-Lyman yeshua613@hotmail.com