

# Moses' last words to Israel

## 2. Moses' introduction to his blessings (Part 2)

David Green

### Deuteronomy 33

- v. 3 Yes, He loves the people;  
All His saints are in Your hand;  
They sit down at Your feet;  
Everyone receives Your words.
- v. 4 Moses commanded a law for us,  
A heritage of the congregation of Jacob.
- v. 5 And He was king in Jeshurun,  
When the leaders of the people were  
gathered,  
All the tribes of Israel together.\*

#### He loves the people

**G**OD SHOWED HIS love for the people of Israel (Heb. 'peoples') in redeeming them from the land of Egypt and providing for their every need throughout their wilderness journey, during which time He cared for them as a father cares for his son: "in the wilderness . . . you saw how the LORD your God carried you, as a man carries his son, in all the way that you went until you came to this place" (Deut. 1:31).

The idea of God caring for His people comes out in the next line of Moses' introduction: "All His saints are in Your hand" (33:3). God is in full control of all their ways and circumstances, just as He was in later years for King David: "But I trusted in thee, O LORD: I said, Thou art my God. My times are *in Thy hand*: deliver me from the hand of mine enemies" (Ps. 31:14,15, AV). The basic idea of the phrase "in Your hand" is that of holding them safe.

God's loving care for His people was because of His promises to their fathers: "The LORD did not set His love on you nor choose you because you were more in number than any other people, for you were the least of all peoples; but because the LORD loves you, and because He would keep the oath which He swore to your fathers . . ." (Deut. 7:7,8).

In verse 3 the Syriac version reads, "And he blessed all His saints", in place of, "All His saints are in Your hand". Apparently there are only two letters difference between these readings when compared in Hebrew, and the differences

are so similar in appearance that one could easily be mistaken for the other.<sup>1</sup>

#### Sitting at God's feet

The second line of the third verse is unusual in that there is a change from the third person (His) to the second person (Your) when referring to God. The RV gives as a marginal rendering "their holy ones" in place of "His saints", so making reference to those of the "peoples" already mentioned in the first line who were God's saints in deed rather than just in name. They are those who were prepared to be taught of God, and are here pictured as sitting at God's feet in order to receive His words. To sit at the feet of a teacher is an idiomatic expression for receiving instruction. For example, Paul was "brought up . . . at the feet of Gamaliel, and taught . . ." (Acts 22:3, AV), and the Gadarene demoniac when he had been healed was found "sitting at the feet of Jesus" (Lk. 8:35).

#### Moses commanded us a law

Since verse 4 refers to the law received "by the direction [AV, disposition] of angels" (Acts 7:53) at Sinai, we must conclude that these words of Moses in verses 2-5 do have a past application. The way that Moses is referred to in this verse has led to it being suggested that it is "an explanatory parenthesis"<sup>2</sup> containing words added by Joshua. However, this seems unlikely, as the verse reads as though it is an integral part of the Hebrew poetry in which the whole of the Blessing is written. There are examples elsewhere where inspired writers refer to themselves in the third person, for example Deborah in Judges 5:15 (*cf.* v. 7) and Solomon in 1 Kings 2:45. The "us" included Moses since he was subject to the Law just as much as the rest of the Israelites. Perhaps Moses referred to himself in the third

\* All quotations are from the NKJV unless stated otherwise.

1. *Adam Clarke's Commentary* on Deuteronomy 33:3.

2. For example, *Old Testament Commentary*, Vol. 2, edited by C. J. Ellicott.

Deuteronomy 33:2	Habakkuk 3:3,4
<p>The LORD came from Sinai, And dawned on them from Seir; He shone forth from Mount Paran, And He came with ten thousands of saints; From His right hand Came a fiery law for them.</p>	<p>God came from Teman, The Holy One from Mount Paran. <i>Selah</i> His glory covered the heavens, And the earth was full of His praise. His brightness was like the light; He had rays flashing from His hand, And there His power was hidden.</p>

person in this verse in order to identify himself with all the people.

### A future application

The similarity between the words of Moses and those of Habakkuk (see table above) suggests that a future application should be sought for in Moses' words. The future tense is used in a number of places in Habakkuk's supplicatory prayer calling for a revival of God's work in the salvation of His people: "O LORD, revive Your work in the midst of the years! In the midst of the years make it known" (3:2). For example, verses 3 and 4 would be more accurately translated, "God [Eloah, Mighty One] shall come from Teman and the Holy One from Mount Paran. His glory covers the heavens, and the earth is full of His praise. And a brightness shall there be, like sunlight, and rays are at His side; and there [in this radiance] is the tabernacle of His power".<sup>3</sup>

From this it can be concluded that Habakkuk's prayer is a prophecy of a future manifestation of God's power on behalf of His people Israel, couched in terms of their past deliverance from bondage in Egypt. Therefore, might not the words of Moses have a future as well as a past application, with the "ten thousands of saints" (v. 2) referring to spiritual Israel?

It should be noted in passing that Teman means 'the south', or 'the southern quarter'.<sup>4</sup> Just as the Israelites initially approached the land of Canaan from the south, so also Jesus, God's 'Holy One', and the saints (Deut. 33:3) will come from the south to save Israel from her enemies and take control of the Promised Land: "Who is this who comes from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah, this one who is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength?" (Isa. 63:1).

This also fits in with the words of Moses that speak of the Lord rising up or dawning "on them from Seir". The "them", not specified by Moses, would be the nation of Israel to be saved

out of "the time of Jacob's trouble" (Jer. 30:7). "From Seir" does not quite fit the journey of the Israelites to the Promised Land in the days of Moses, as they only "skirted Mount Seir" (Deut. 2:1).

As further evidence we have Jude's quotation of the words of Enoch: "Behold, the Lord comes with ten thousands of His saints" (v. 14). This passage, which uses the past tense in the Greek,<sup>5</sup> matches the words spoken by Moses. Yet Jude gives these words an application future to his times. This way of speaking is known as the 'prophetic perfect'. God's purpose is so certain that His prophets speak of things that have not yet happened as though they have already taken place. God "calleth those things which be not as though they were" (Rom. 4:17, AV),<sup>6</sup> and in certain cases His prophets are describing future events that they have already seen happening in vision.

The future application of the introduction to Moses' blessings is set out nicely in the following quotation: "The fulfilment of Moses' blessings awaits the appearance of the Sun of Righteousness who will arise (vv. 1-3) to be king in Jeshurun (vv. 4,5). The true Israel of God will ascend from Sinai to take its place in the Land of Promise then to be made glorious. The sun, shining in its strength, will destroy the darkness of Gentile night, permitting the glory of the future to be revealed in all its majesty".<sup>7</sup>

3. Translation given in *Ellicott's Commentary*. Compare RV margin and *The Speaker's Commentary*.

4. The AV margin reads "the south", and Alfred Jones in *The Proper Names of the Old Testament Expounded* gives the meaning 'Southern Quarter'.

5. *The Interlinear Greek-English New Testament*, literal translation by Alfred Marshall, also *The Interlinear Bible* translation by J. P. Green.

6. The example of this principle given by Paul is that of Abraham, to whom God said, "I have made you a father of many nations" (Gen. 17:5).

7. *The Christadelphian Expositor: Deuteronomy*, H. P. Mansfield, p. 387, Logos Publications.

**Jacob's heritage**

The Law of Moses was referred to by Stephen as “the living oracles” which Moses received “by the direction of angels” (Acts 7:38,53). These living oracles are described by Moses as “a heritage [inheritance, AV] of the congregation of Jacob” (Deut. 33:4). He uses the relatively uncommon Hebrew word *morasha*, which is also sometimes translated ‘possession’.

The Apostle Paul pointed out that the Law was a blessing given to the nation of Israel, marking them out as a special people (Rom. 9:4). He also stated that it was a privilege for the Jews to have been appointed custodians of the “oracles of God” (3:2), which included the Law, though referring to the whole of the Old Testament scriptures.

Moses also set out very clearly to the Israelites the great privilege of this “heritage”, describing their keeping of it as “your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the nations” (Deut. 4:6, AV). He then went on to say that this law contributed to their greatness as a nation:

“And what nation is there so great, that hath statutes and judgments so righteous as all this law . . . ?” (v. 8, AV).

**He was king in Jeshurun**

Jeshurun (33:5) means ‘The Upright One’. We first meet this poetic title for Israel in the previous chapter, where Moses prophesied that Israel would fail to live up to the righteousness that Jeshurun implies: “Jeshurun grew fat and kicked . . . then he forsook God Who made him, and scornfully esteemed the Rock of his salvation” (32:15). The only other place the title is used, other than a further mention in Deuteronomy 33 (v. 26), is Isaiah 44: “Fear not, O Jacob my servant; and you, Jeshurun, whom I have chosen” (v. 2). Jeshurun is a perfect title for the saints, the myriads of holy ones, who are described by Isaiah as “the righteous nation that keeps [remains faithful to, mg.] the truth”, and who will enter into the city of God (26:1,2).

[\(To be continued\)](#)

# The Olivet Prophecy

## 2. The disciples' questions

Stephen Hughes

**A**S WE STRIVE to get to grips with the Olivet Prophecy, we need always to keep in mind that it is primarily Jesus's answer to a series of questions asked by his disciples. He spoke directly to his disciples, and in a sense we also stand there looking over their shoulders. However, we come from a different time and so we need to try to hear Jesus's words from a first-century perspective. So let us put ourselves in the position of the disciples as they stood with Jesus overlooking the temple.

The disciples clearly thought that the Kingdom was going to be established very soon, as we read in Luke 19:11: “And as they [the disciples] heard these things, he [Jesus] added and spake a parable, because he was nigh to Jerusalem, and because they thought that the kingdom of God should immediately appear”. He then gave them a parable about a man who goes into a far country and entrusts each of his servants with a pound of money. This is clearly a parable about Jesus going away to heaven and then com-

ing back to the earth. The disciples thought that the reason Jesus had just arrived in Jerusalem was to establish God's Kingdom on the earth. They did not understand that the suffering had to come before the glory.

Even after Jesus's death and resurrection, the disciples still expected the imminent establishment of the Kingdom. Six weeks later, on the Mount of Olives, possibly at the same place where Jesus gave the Olivet Prophecy, the disciples asked him: “Lord, wilt thou at this time restore again the kingdom to Israel?” (Acts 1:6).

So how are we to interpret the disciples' questions to Jesus at the beginning of the Olivet Prophecy? According to Matthew 24:3 there were three questions:

- When shall these things be?
- And what shall be the sign of thy coming?
- And of the end of the world (age)?

Let us have a look at each of these questions in more detail.