

# Truth for Today

*The Bible Explained*

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## Last Words: The Last Words of Moses

Good morning and welcome to *Truth for Today*, where we are beginning a new series of four talks centred around the last recorded words of four Bible characters. Next week, my colleague David Pulman, will be considering Joshua's words from Joshua 24. On the following Lord's Day, Paul Thomson will be taking us through Psalm 72, or possibly, 1 Chronicles 29, where the great King David, nearing the end of his life, looks back at the faithfulness of God. In the fourth talk, the series will be wound up by Paul Callicott with the stirring words of the Apostle Paul as he finished his course, as recorded in 2 Timothy 4.

Today, I shall be looking at the words Moses used to bless the Israelites as he reached the end of his life. So to set the scene, I will read Deuteronomy 33:1. I ought to say at this point that all the quotations from Scripture, this morning, will be from the English Standard Version of the Bible, unless I say otherwise. *"This is the blessing with which Moses the man of God blessed the people of Israel before his death"* (Deuteronomy 33:1).

As this blessing takes almost thirty verses, (Deuteronomy 33:1-29), I state now that we will not be dealing with the whole chapter. I do want us to notice, however, that this faithful leader was not filled with nostalgia for past times, rather was he reaching out for richer blessings for his people.

Deuteronomy 33:2-5 opens with expressions of grateful praise to the LORD for His gracious dealings with His people. Deuteronomy 33:3 is especially noteworthy as it speaks of the LORD'S love: *"Yes he loved his people, all his holy ones were in his hand; so they followed in your steps, receiving direction from you"*

Whatever else we understand from the Holy Scriptures, we must grasp the important truth that we worship a God who has revealed His love to us.

As I have said, previously, the verses in Deuteronomy 33:7-25, where Moses refers specifically to the various tribes, will be passed over, not because they are irrelevant, but because I want to consider those verses that highlight the faithfulness of God towards the tribes that Moses led through the wilderness, for I believe that these verses will encourage us this morning.

I emphasise this latter point of encouragement, for we have not chosen this series of "Last words" out of morbid interest. For example, there is a book, that had quite a wide circulation on the second-hand market, entitled *"Last Words of Five Hundred Remarkable Men"*. As a dealer in used books, I have come across more than one copy and I can assure you that there is not much value in the recorded sayings, nor were the men selected by the author, as worthy of inclusion, very remarkable. It is so different with the men that have been selected as the subjects for our talks.

We must now turn from this rather lengthy introduction to consider our theme, though before we do, I want you to have noticed from Deuteronomy 33:1 that I read a few moments ago, where Moses was called a *"man of God"*, a title that Scripture gives to very few other men (David - Nehemiah 12:24 and 2 Chronicles 8:14; Samuel - 1 Samuel 9:6-10; Shemaiah - 1 Kings 12:22 and 2 Chronicles 11:2; Elijah - 1 Kings 17:18, 24; 2 Kings 1:9-13; Elisha - 2 Kings 4:7-8-19; Hanan - Jeremiah 35:4; Timothy - 1 Timothy 6:11). Therefore, we should expect to receive wise counsel and hear a faithful witness when we listen to Moses speaking to us in Deuteronomy 33, for he speaks out of a deep and long experience of walking with his God.

Deuteronomy 33:2 brings before us an important point for those with eyes to see and faith to experience, for it tells us: *"The LORD came from Sinai and dawned from Seir upon us; He shone forth from Mount Paran; He came from the ten thousands of His holy ones, with flaming fire at His right hand."*

The point I want isolate and emphasise is the presence of God with His people. We, today, can take assurance from this, as we are promised the presence of God as we travel through life serving Him. That well-known, and oft-quoted, verse in Matthew's Gospel tells us exactly this: *"Go therefore and make disciples of all nations, baptizing them in the Name of the Father and of the Son and of the Holy Spirit, teaching them to observe all that I have commanded you. And behold, I am with you always, to the end of the age"* (Matthew 28:19-20)

So, right at the beginning of our time together this morning we have this precious promise that ought to encourage us, especially if we are feeling lonely.

Many years ago, I was listening to a preacher who taught us a chorus, which I have never heard before or since, yet I have remembered the words for over fifty years. It might not be deep theology, though as I write this I feel moved to repeat the words for the benefit of those of you who are feeling isolated or alone today:

*“Sing a little song to me,  
Sing a song of Galilee,  
Sing of Jesus only,  
Comfort for the lonely,  
Sing a little song to me.”*

Anon

Though it is rather simplistic, I would suggest that the preciousness of the presence of the Lord, when we are housebound and unable to get out, is a great blessing. It was something that Moses prized as he led the Israelites through the desert.

I trust that you will keep your Bibles open at Deuteronomy 33 as we shall be referring to verses and thoughts in that chapter during this broadcast. We have already seen that Deuteronomy 33:3 tells us the Lord loves His people, and they are in His Hands. We have a parallel thought in the New Testament, when John records the Lord's words for us in John 10:27-28: *“My sheep hear my voice, and I know them, and they follow me. I give them eternal life, and they will never perish, and no one will snatch them out of my hand.”*

So often, in our practice of Christianity, we want the blessings and privileges, but not the responsibilities or commitment. Sometimes, I have noticed a tendency in my own life to almost use the New Testament's teaching on justification by faith alone to excuse me from performing some act of service for the Lord that does not appeal to me. Deuteronomy 33:5 counteracts this perversity of our relationship with God. Because of time constraints, I will read only the first part of the verse: *“Thus the LORD became king in Jeshurun.”*

Jeshurun is a little used term for God's people and unknown to many, though Charles Wesley used it in at least one of his hymns. My point, however, is not the term Jeshurun, but the commitment that is signalled in the phrase *“became king.”* The people addressed by Moses, had accepted God's rule over them. As believers in Jesus, we have recognised His supremacy and that He is Lord and ever will be. It might take some time for this to be woven into every aspect of my behaviour and for Him to become 'my Lord'. Notwithstanding this, our initial act of belief in Him should cause us, through grace, to recognise His supremacy and to acknowledge Him as Lord, as Romans 10:9 states: *“...because, if you confess with your mouth that Jesus is Lord and believe in your heart that God raised him from the dead you will be saved.”* Now we must move on.

Move down the chapter to Deuteronomy 33:12, where Moses is speaking of Benjamin: *“The beloved of the LORD dwells in safety. The High God surrounds Him all day long, and [he] dwells between His shoulders.”*

Now, what was true for Benjamin is true of God's people today. Dwelling in safety is not a talisman to avoid every danger that life throws at us. To be assured of the Lord dwelling with us, and that we dwell between His shoulders, should be an assurance of peace and security. Only today, I was in the town where I live, when I saw a young father, returning to his car, with a little boy on his shoulders. The youngster (who I presume was his son) was obviously glad of the restful ride on his dad's shoulders. No danger now of tired legs or of him being dropped onto the road. What a picture this makes of us travelling through life with the Lord as our companion. Most of us will be aware that one hundred years ago the Great War was being fought, mainly in France. Here is an extract from the last letter of a young Christian, serving with the Household Battalion of the 2nd Life Guards, to his parents: *“Sixteen of us sleep in a sort of tunnel with an exit at both ends. It is about 7 feet wide, 25 feet in length, and 5 feet in height. First I put my waterproof sheet down, then wrap myself round with my overcoat, feet in a couple of clean sandbags, and my tunic up over my head as protection from the feet of patrolling rats.”*

By the time his parents received the letter, the young man had been killed by an exploding shell. No safety then for him you might say. If we had time to read his diary, you would learn how he was waiting upon the Lord. All of his circumstances were in the Saviour's hands, as far as young Charles Mawson was concerned. He was radiant with faith that whether he lived or died he was the Lord's.

We advance now a few verses, to the blessings that Moses promised to the tribe that owed its origin to Joseph. Usually, any reference to this tribe is covered by the names of Joseph's two sons, namely Ephraim and Manasseh,

and so it is important for us to recognise the special status which is given to Joseph in Deuteronomy 33:16: “[Blessed be Joseph] with the best gifts of the earth and its fullness and the favour of Him who dwells in the bush. May these rest on the head of Joseph, on the pate of him who is prince among his brothers.”

I want to give prominence to the word ‘best’ in the verse we have just read, for the Hebrew word translated ‘best’ in our verse occurs another four times in the previous three verses. In Deuteronomy 33:13 it is rendered as ‘choicest’, Deuteronomy 33:14 again ‘choicest’ as well as ‘rich’ and in Deuteronomy 33:15 ‘finest’ and ‘abundance’. I am pointing this out solely because I believe that God’s intention is for each one of us to have His choicest and best blessings, which are all associated with His well-beloved Son. Do you find the Christian life to be filled with an abundance of joy? The Lord Jesus, talking to His disciples, said in John 15:11: “*These things I have spoken to you, that my joy may be in you, and that your joy may be full.*”

Regarding our quality of life He said: “*The thief comes only to steal and kill and destroy, I am come that they may have life and have it abundantly*” John 10:10.

Something else that often seems to be missing from our world is peace, yet this ought to be the present possession of the Christian: “*And the peace of God, which surpasses all understanding, will guard your hearts and your minds in Christ Jesus*” (Philippians 4:7)

I trust those three quotations from the New Testament will be sufficient to make us aware that the Lord has choice gifts available for us, this day and every day, if we follow Him and obey His commands.

I want to make another point from Deuteronomy 33:16, but before I do, can I welcome any who have just joined us and say that you are listening to a message from the *Truth for Today* team on the last words of Moses. The phrase we are considering is “*...Him who dwells in the bush*”, a phrase that the New International Version renders, “*...Him who dwelt in the burning bush.*” It is obvious that Moses is referring to an incident that took place many years previously, when he was looking after his father-in-law’s sheep in the desert. We can read this in Exodus 3:1-22, though I am not going to, for my point about this phrase is that God appeared and spoke to Moses from the midst of the bush. That was the start of Moses becoming the servant of the Lord, which was also something he looked back upon forty years later. Christianity is centred on the incarnation of God, not this time in a burning bush, but in the person of Christ. I am convinced that the truth of God reaching out to the world, through the Lord Jesus, is at the very centre of the Christian Gospel. I only need to quote one famous verse to substantiate my claim that this is biblical: “*For God so loved the world, that He gave His only Son, that whoever believes in Him should not perish but have eternal life*” (John 3:16).

It seems pretty clear to me that He initiated the saving act. There is a hymn that we sometimes sing which encapsulates this truth:

*“To God be the glory, great things He hath done;  
So loved He the world, that He gave us His Son,  
Who yielded His life an atonement for sin,  
And opened the life-gate that all may go in.”*

(Fanny J Crosby 1820-1915)

I pray that all listening to this broadcast this morning recognise that Jesus is Lord and believe that by His death and resurrection they have secured that great atonement, enabling them to praise the Lord for the great things He has done.

I move now to Deuteronomy 33:26, which says: “*There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help, through the skies in His majesty.*”

As this is amongst the final thoughts of Moses, I want to emphasise the truth in Deuteronomy 33:26, therefore I will read it again, this time from the New International Version: “*There is no one like the God of Jeshurun, who rides on the heavens to help you and on the clouds in His majesty.*”

What a picture these words paint! As another has said: “The God of Jeshurun has a unique greatness - He rides on the heavens and on the clouds in His majesty to help His people.” Isaiah, claims this same uniqueness for the Lord, when he says in Isaiah 43:10-11: “*...Before Me no God was formed, nor shall there be any after me. I, I am the LORD, and besides me there is no saviour...*”

The gods worshipped in the pagan world are identified as being ‘formed’. Not so with the LORD, for He is derived from none. Only He is eternal. Our God is unique in being and unique in action. So both Isaiah and Moses testify to the God who enters into His people’s circumstances to accomplish the act of salvation. One final thought regarding the

saving grace of God, this time from the New Testament: *“And we have seen and testify that the Father has sent His Son to be the Saviour of the world.”* Those words are from 1 John 4:14.

As we approach the end of our time together this morning, we must consider a statement, the truth of which has been an encouragement to me for a good many years. It is found in Deuteronomy 33:27: *“The eternal God is your dwelling place, and underneath are the everlasting arms...”*

How extensive is the phrase ‘the eternal God’, for it covers the unknown ages of a past eternity, an age that man could never know yet God was ever there. However far our imagination ranges into the future God is ever there. This God, who is a God of immense power, has revealed Himself to men in such a way that He can be their refuge and dwelling place. However lonely and friendless we feel, or however low we sink when the death of a loved one strikes, or some other calamity interrupts our lives, then rest assured the everlasting arms of the eternal God are ever underneath us to catch and uphold!

There was once a child, who was standing on the edge of an open cellar, which could only be entered by a pair of rickety steps. The little boy wanted to join his father in the cellar, but was frightened to use the steps. However hard his father tried to coax him to climb down the steps, the lad refused, through fear. Finally, the father told the lad to jump and he would catch him, enabling him to safely reach the confines of the cellar. Even though the lad could not easily see his father, owing to the darkness of the cellar, he eventually jumped, trusting that those strong and loving arms of his parent would be there to safely catch him. Are we amongst the faithful who ever trust the living God to safely uphold us all through our lives, even when we cannot see the way ahead?

I finish this morning with Deuteronomy 33:29 which I shall read from the New International Version: *“Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD? He is your shield and helper and your glorious sword. Your enemies will cower before you, and you will trample down their high places.”*

What the eternal God was to Israel, He can, through grace, be to us who are followers of the Lord Jesus. I trust that we all have been brought to faith in the Lord Jesus, so that we can have the great privilege of having the knowledge of the eternal God as we journey through life.

Good morning and thank you for listening.

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