

Deuteronomy 33:13–17

Moses pronounces blessings on the tribe of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh).

Moses continues the poem of blessing he pronounced upon Israel that he began in Deuteronomy 33:1. After blessing Benjamin, Moses then turned to Joseph, Rachel's first biological son with Jacob (Genesis 30:22–25). Since Rachel was the wife of Jacob's choice, the one he desired, it could be that Joseph's coat of many colors represented Jacob's choice of Joseph to gain the birthright inheritance of the eldest, being the right to rule the family. The blessings Moses pronounced on Joseph (specifically, the two tribes of his sons Ephraim and Manasseh) are divided between a request for material prosperity from the produce of the land (vv. 13–16) and another for military power (v. 17).

Moses' prayer here was: *blessed of the LORD be his land* (v. 13). This referred to the material prosperity and fertility that he wished would come upon Joseph.

Moses prayed that this prosperity be blessed with *the choice things of heaven, with the dew, and from the deep lying beneath*. The phrase *choice things* translate the Hebrew word "megeg," meaning "the best," "most precious," or "choicest," and it is used five times in vv. 13–16. His desire was for God to send the *dew* from beneath the ground (and rain from the sky) to enable Joseph's crops to grow.

Moreover, he asked that the land of Joseph be blessed *with the choice* (Heb. "megeg" as in v. 13) *yield of the sun, and with the choice produce of the months* (v. 14). The Hebrew word translated as *months* is literally "moon" and it nicely fits the parallelism here. In fact, both *the sun* and *the moon* relate to the seasons, thus enabling the crops to mature at various times during the year. Suffice it to say, *the sun* and the moon would serve as agents to cause Joseph's produce to grow during the *months*.

Furthermore, Joseph's *land* was to be blessed *with the best things of the ancient mountains, and with the choice things* (Heb. "megeg" as in v. 13) *of the everlasting hills* (v. 15). The products of the *mountains* and the *everlasting hills* (which characterize the land of Joseph's tribes Ephraim and Manasseh across the

middle of Canaan) would include such things as wood, stone, and metals, such as copper (Deuteronomy 8:9). All those bountiful products would be part of Joseph's blessings.

These blessings would be from the heavens (the sun and the moon) or the mountains and hills. Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh) was also to be blessed *with the choice things* (Heb. "megeḏ" as in v. 13) *of the earth and its fullness* (v. 16). He would receive gifts from all the inhabitants of the earth.

The text makes clear that the source of all these blessings was God Himself, the one *who dwelt in the bush*, a reference to the LORD appearing to Moses at the burning bush on Horeb (Sinai) (Exodus 3:1-6). It is this same God who would show *favor* (Heb. "rāṣōn," "good will") to Joseph, causing his tribes (Ephraim and Manasseh) to become prosperous. Using striking imagery, Moses prayed that all these material blessings would *come to the head of Joseph, and to the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers*. This is similar to what Jacob prayed, that the LORD make these blessings a crown on Joseph's head, showing his dominance over the other tribes (Genesis 49:26). This probably refers to Joseph's status as leader of the other brothers, as apparently chosen by Jacob (the coat of many colors) then as manifested while they dwelt in Egypt (Genesis 45-47).

In addition to Joseph's prosperity, Moses prayed that Joseph might be strong militarily. He asked the LORD to make him like *the firstborn of his ox* (v. 17) having *majesty*, and that *his horns* might be *the horns of the wild ox to push the peoples all at once, to the ends of the earth*. The ox (or, the wild ox) was a large, domesticated animal used essentially in Israel for farm work such as plowing (Deuteronomy 22:10). It was used to transport burdens and was often used as a symbol of fertility and strength (Numbers 23:22). The term *horn* is also used here metaphorically for "strength." Joseph would thus become strong to fight against his adversaries to defeat them.

The reference to the *horns of the wild ox* have to do with military action against other nations (peoples) that *push the peoples all at once, to the ends of the earth*. This could be a picture of the conquest of Canaan by Joshua, an Ephraimite (1 Chronicles 7:22-27). The Hebrew word translated "earth" is most often translated as "land." And the word translated "all at once" can also be translated "together." So the phrase *push the peoples all at once, to the ends of the earth* is likely a prayer request that the tribes of Joseph will swiftly

occupy their assigned territory and push any remaining occupants beyond its borders in one operation.

To add to this picture of strength, Moses said that *those are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and those are the thousands of Manasseh*. Ephraim and Manasseh were the two sons of Joseph (Genesis 48:14–20). Though Manasseh was the oldest, Ephraim became the prominent son and the dominant tribe in the northern kingdom over time. That is why the *ten thousands* are associated with Ephraim and the *thousands* were connected to Manasseh. The numbers (representing huge numbers) likely refer to the greatness or magnitude of these tribes (Genesis 48:19–20).

Biblical Text:

¹³ **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,
¹⁴ And with the choice yield of the sun,
And with the choice produce of the months.
¹⁵ And with the best things of the ancient mountains,
And with the choice things of the everlasting hills,
¹⁶ And 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.
¹⁷ “As the firstborn of his ox, majesty is his,
And his horns are the horns of the wild ox;
With them he will 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.**