

Deuteronomy 33:6

<https://thebiblesays.com/commentary/deut/deut-33/deuteronomy-336/>

Moses pronounced blessings on the tribe of Reuben.

Moses continues the poem of blessing which he pronounced upon Israel beginning in Deuteronomy 33:1. Just as Jacob blessed his sons before he died (Genesis 49), Moses, as Israel's leader, pronounced blessings on the tribes of Israel before his death. Beginning with Jacob's oldest son, he said, *May Reuben live and not die* (v. 6).

It must be remembered that *Reuben* (which means "behold a son"), the firstborn son of Jacob by Leah, rescued Joseph when his brothers plotted to take his life (see Genesis 37).

Reuben had lost his birthright as the firstborn by laying "with Bilhah his father's concubine" (Genesis 35:22). In doing so, he defiled his father's bed. Consequently, in spite of being "preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power" (Genesis 49:3), Jacob declared that "Reuben might not have preeminence" (Genesis 49:4).

Here in verse 6, Moses blessed *Reuben* in order that his descendants would continue to exist and not die out. He wanted God to protect the tribe of *Reuben* so that they might not disappear. He also did not want *his men to be few*, implying that there would be plenty of men to produce descendants. This would guarantee that the tribe would continue to exist despite its small size.

Another point of view can be seen in other English versions that translate the phrase *Nor his men be few* as "and his men be few." This would imply that the blessing would result in the tribe of Reuben not disappearing, but it would remain small. This harmonizes with the Genesis account in which Reuben was cursed for having a sexual relationship with Bilhah, his father's concubine (Genesis 49:3-4). He also did not see greatness, and he lost his birthright and his father's blessing. It also appears to be in line with the future demise of the tribe of Reuben during the reign of Jehu, as Reuben's territory was taken by enemies (2 Kings 10:32 - 33).

Biblical Text:

**6 May Reuben live and not die,
Nor his men be few.**