



Understanding the Parsha

Devarim Deuteronomy 33:1-34:12

We will Learn how to

- 1) interpret the main theme (subject) of a Parsha (weekly reading from the Torah),
- 2) make thematic connections to that Parsha (study the Scriptures related by a common theme [subject], line upon line and precept upon precept)
- 3) learn how to gain greater understanding of the Parsha we are looking at through its thematic connections to other portions of Scripture.

Introductory Verses to V'zot HaBrakha

Let's see if we can understand what Adonai is teaching in these first few verses.

Read Devarim 33:1-5. What is the main theme of Devarim 33:1-2a?

That Adonai drew near / approached the people.

What is the main theme of Devarim 33:2b-4?

Adonai's gift of the Torah borne out of His love for the people.

Notice how often Moses made mention of the Torah that was given to Am Yisrael. This is a central theme in these first few verses. So far, the Torah has painted a picture of Adonai approaching Am Yisrael with the Torah. In other words, it's almost as if He is coming with a gift!

How would Devarim 33:3-4 support such an idea?

It speaks of Adonai's heredity for the people. It is telling us that He came to them with the Torah, which is characterized as "a heritage of the congregation of Jacob."

Once again, we can plainly see that the Torah was meant to be a gift, not a curse, as many incorrectly teach. We can strengthen the idea that the Torah was given as a gift by making another thematic connection concerning the phrase, "all His saints are in Your hand." Isaiah 49:16 states the following: "Behold, I have engraved you (Am Yisrael—The People of Israel) on the palms of my hands." These verses are speaking of Adonai's profound love for Am Yisrael; that He would never forget them! This thematic connection strengthens the idea that Devarim 33:1-4 retells the giving of the Torah within the context of Adonai's great love for the people! The Torah is not a curse. Nor was it given as a curse upon Am Yisrael. It was given as a gift of love, from a loving Creator to the creation He loves.

Jewish legend teaches that as Adonai spoke the words of the Torah, the words came forth as a fiery substance and had an incredible effect on the people.

Can you think of a thematic connection within Devarim 33:1-4 that would support such an idea?

Read Devarim 33:2 says that the fiery Torah came from His right hand!

Another passage that supports this idea is Devarim 18:16. See how the words of Torah are thematically connected to a fiery substance.

*"The LORD your God will raise up for you a Prophet like me from your midst, from your brethren. Him you shall hear, according to all you desired of the LORD your God in Horeb in the day of the assembly, saying, 'Let me not hear again the voice of the LORD my God, nor let me see this great **fire** anymore, lest I die (Devarim 18:16)."*

As you can see, sometimes there is plenty of evidence within the Scriptures to support some of the oral legends that have been passed down from generation to generation.

And This Is the Blessing

Let's look at the blessings Moses placed upon Am Yisrael (the people of Israel). Have you wondered why Moses blessed them in the order that he did? The sages of Israel have asked this question. Why is it important? Well, when you study the Scriptures thematically, and begin to compare and contrast thematically related passages, these questions will naturally come up. For example, **what other passage of Scriptures do you think might be thematically related to Devarim 33:6-24**

When the tribes were blessed (Read Genesis 49:1-28)!



A blessing has been spoken over Am Yisrael before (see Genesis 49) and the order of the tribes blessings is different. Let's look at the orders in Table below. Notice, Simeon isn't even mentioned!.

Blessing of Genesis 49	Blessing of Deuteronomy 33
Reuben	Reuben
Simeon	Judah
Levi	Levi
Judah	Benjamin
Zebulon	Joseph
Issachar	Zebulon
Dan	Issachar
Gad	Gad
Asher	Dan
Naphtali	Naphtali
Joseph	Asher
Benjamin	



The obvious question is, “Why is the ordering different?” Also, don't you wonder why Simeon was left out! Let's look at these blessings individually and find any common themes relating them. Instead of looking at them in order, instead, let's look at them randomly.

Read Devarim 33:7. This is the blessing for the tribe of Judah. After reading this passage, can you guess why Moses prays that Adonai will hear the voice of Judah, strengthen his hands, and help him against his enemies?

Moses wants Judah to be successful in W warfare.

Did you notice the language. It's the language of warfare. Why would Moses' blessing be given within the thematic context of warfare?

Because, Am Yisrael are about to cross the Jordan to possess the l land. They will possess the land by taking it from its inhabitants through W warfare.

That's right. Warfare with the inhabitants of the land is unavoidable. This is our first clue concerning the reason for this set of blessings.

Read Devarim 33:8-11. I'm not sure of the meaning of Devarim 33:8. I have tried to make connections, but I don't have any good answers yet, maybe you can find them. About Devarim 33:9, do you know what this passage is referring to? If not, let me help you. See how the passage says the tribe of Levi “did not acknowledge his brothers,” nor “know his own children.” And, it says that he said of his mother, “I have not seen them.” These three phrases seem to imply that Levi disregarded his blood relatives in some manner. With that as a background, look at how the last third of Devarim 33:9 says that Levi, “observed Your word and kept Your covenant.”

Can you think of a time, when did Levi disregard his own family members in order to obey Adonai's covenant?

At the incident of the g golden c calf.

Read Exodus 32:25-29. This passage is a perfect thematic match. In it, the sons of Levi were the ones who disregarded their family connections, joined the cause of Adonai and even slew their own sons and brothers who had partaken in the sin of the golden calf. See how Exodus 32:29 says that Levi would receive a blessing specifically because of their actions of opposing their sons and brothers! **How is this thematically connected to Devarim 33:8-11?**

In this passage, L_{Levi} is given a b_{blessing} for their actions in Exodus 32.

Read Devarim 33:10-11a. When will the tribe of Levi fulfill its duties of teaching Torah to Am Israel and doing the sacrificial services?

When they have settled the l_{land}. That's right.

Do you see a connection between Devarim 33:11 and Devarim 33:7?

In both passages, a reference is made to Adonai accepting the work of the h_{hands} and both passages are using in m_{military} word pictures.

As we can see, both passages contain the theme of warfare, right? In other words, it seems that both passages are expecting the battles that lay ahead in the Promised Land.

So far, we learned that Levi was instrumental in fighting idolatry within the midst of Am Yisrael (the sin of the golden calf was the sin of idolatry). How is Levi's role as a defender of the faith thematically related to the battles ahead in the Promised Land?

Their z_{zeal} in fighting against i_{idolatry} will be needed as Am Yisrael battles for the land because of the many different kinds of idols and idol worshippers in the Promised Land. Remember how often

Adonai has w_{warned} them about the idol worship of the pagans who lived in the l_{land}.

As you can see, Levi's zeal to fight idolatry is definitely thematically connected to the coming battles in the Promised Land! This is the second blessing that has had a thematic connection to the battles that loom ahead for Am Yisrael.

Read Devarim 33:22. What theme can you see in the blessing given to Dan?

This is a m_{military} theme because Dan is compared to a lion in w_{warfare}.

Once again, we see a military theme associated with the blessing.

Read Devarim 33:20-21. What is the general theme of Devarim 33:20?

w_{warfare}.



Sound familiar? **What do you think the meaning of the phrase, “He provided the first part for himself, is?**

Gad (along with Reuben and half the tribe of Manasseh) chose an i inheritance place dwelling for themselves on the east side of the Jordan. In this manner, they “provided the first part for themselves.”

This blessing has a dual theme of warfare and inheritance. Let’s continue.

Read Devarim 33:12. How is this blessing thematically related to any of the previous blessings?

This verse speaks of the d dwelling p place of Benjamin. So, it is about his inheritance, just as the blessing given to Gad was thematically connected to his inheritance.

Read Devarim 33:13-17. How is this blessing thematically related to any of the previous blessings?

This blessing is strongly related to the i inheritance of the tribe of Joseph.

Most of the verses in this passage speak of the incredible natural abundance that will be found within the inheritance of the tribe of Joseph (Ephraim and Manasseh).

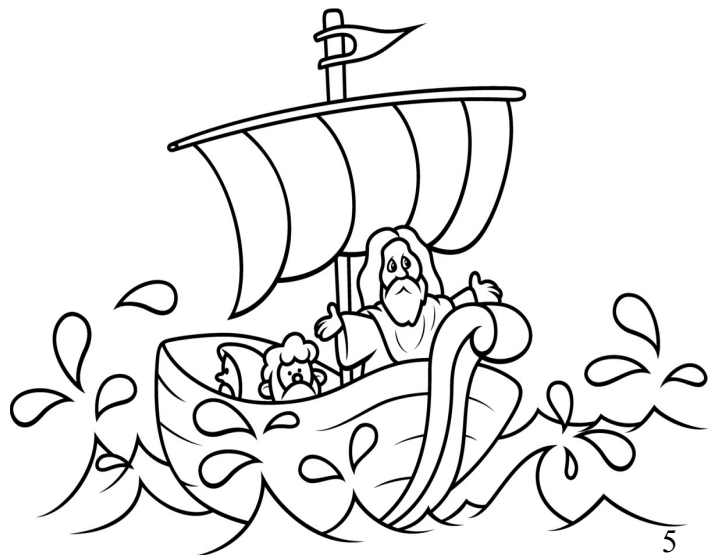
Read Devarim 33:18-19. What do you make of the phrase, “in your going out?” Going in and coming out is a military idiom meaning to go out and come in from war (see Numbers 27:15-23, Devarim 31:2, II Kings 11:8! Concerning Issachar, this passage says they are to rejoice in their tents. Tents also mean dwelling places, i.e., their inheritance. Once again, we can see a blessing that combines the themes of warfare and inheritance. According to the sages of Israel, Zebulun’s territory was situated near the Mediterranean Sea. And, Zebulun was the tribe that excelled in seafaring or nautical dealings. Devarim 33:19c speaks of the blessing of the seas Zebulun would receive and 33:19d speaks of the abundance of blessing from the land of Issachar (treasures hidden in the sand). What’s most important though, is that we have made more connections between the blessing and military conquest/inheritance.

Read Numbers 27:15-23. How is the Urim and Thummim thematically connected to warfare?

According to Numbers 27:21, Joshua will know when to go out to W war because of the Divine direction he will receive from the p priests. The priests will know whether or not to go out to war based on answers from the U Urim and T Thummim!

Did you notice that I didn’t make any comment about the importance of the Urim and Thummim when we talked about the Levites in Devarim 33:8-11? With your present understanding of the words the Urim and Thummim, what is the thematic importance of the Urim and Thummim in Devarim 33:8a?

Now that we know the Urim and Thummim were used by the p priests to decide whether or not Am Yisrael were supposed to go to W war, we can figure out



that it was mentioned in Devarim 33:8a because of its thematic connection to the theme of warfare, which is a constant theme throughout these blessings.

Wow! As you can see, even the Urim and Thummim are thematically connected to warfare!

Read Devarim 33:23. How is this verse thematically related to the blessings before?

The blessing is about his i inheritance.

Read Devarim 33:24-25. With help from some of my sources, I have learned that Asher's blessing (Devarim 33:24) refers to the abundance of olive trees (olive oil). Here is an alternate translation of Devarim 33:25.

"May your borders be sealed like iron and copper and like the days of your prime, so may your old age be (The ArtScroll Series/Stone Edition of Tanakh)."

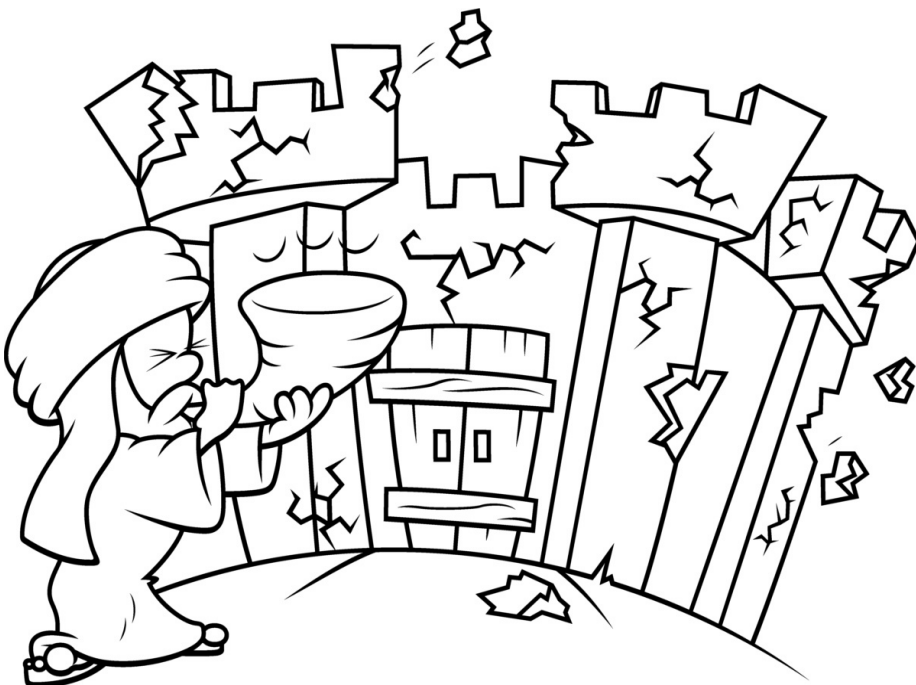
As you can see, this translation is very different from the English translations. I don't know which one is best; however, notice how The Tanakh translation fits with the theme of warfare (borders sealed from the enemy)!

Read Devarim 33:6. We have seen how each blessing related to either warfare, inheritance or both. With that in mind, how would this verse be thematically connected to the other blessings?

Although Reuben had taken his possession of land east of the Jordan, they had promised to go armed before Am

Yisrael and h help secure the inheritances of all the other tribes BEFORE returning to claim their inheritance (Numbers 32:16-32).

Maybe this was a special prayer on behalf of the Reubenites that they be spared great loss of life since they had promised to help secure the inheritances of their brothers first. Once again, we see that the blessing is thematically connected to the inheritance and warfare of the land.



In almost every case, we've seen that the blessings were thematically related to
1) the tribe's inheritance or
2) the warfare involved in coming into that inheritance.

It's not difficult to see how inheritance and warfare are thematically connected. The tribes will inherit their land only through warfare. So, we can conclude that the blessings are related to the inheritances of the tribes. Perhaps, now we can answer our first question which was, **"Why were the blessings of the tribes ordered as they were instead of according to age?"** In order to see this, you will need a Bible that contains a map of Israel and the borders of each tribe. The main point I want to make is that the tribes were listed ac-

cording to their inheritance in the land. You will also need to know one other fact. Although there may be another primary reason for listing the tribes in a particular order (inheritance, in this instance), the tribes born to Jacob's two wives, Rachel and Leah, always come before over those born to the handmaidens.

Looking at a map of the inheritance territories, you will see that the blessings are listed according to the land inheritances from south to north! But remember that Leah and Rachel's children always come first in order.

Back to our question before, what about Simeon? It seems that Simeon was left out? Not exactly. If you look at your map, you may get the impression that Simeon's inheritance was further south than Judah's. Actually, Simeon's tribe was scattered within Judah's territory! Why is this so? In order to answer this question, you will need to make a thematic connection concerning

- 1) Simeon,
- 2) his inheritance and
- 3) a blessing.

Do you know where the answer is?

Read the answer in Genesis 49:5-7. This passage is about Joseph's blessings of the tribes. This passage says

that the tribes of Levi and Simeon will be S within Israel!

scattered

Remember how the tribes of Levi and Simeon killed all of the males of Shechem because of the rape of their sister Dinah by Shechem, the son of Hamor? Well, as punishment for their sin, their tribes did not receive their own land inheritance. Now you know why the tribe of Levi was scattered throughout Israel. Now you also know why the tribe of Simeon was scattered mainly throughout Judah. Neither tribe received their own land inheritance because of their anger in the matter concerning Dinah their sister.



Hazak, hazak, v'nit'chazek!

Be Strong! Be Strong! And May We Be Strengthened!

Can you find the words from this Parsha?

H	A	B	R	A	C	H	A	H	T	A	Z
I	E	E	S	N	A	G	A	P	A	D	E
D	I	S	R	A	E	L	F	B	D	N	A
O	W	A	R	F	A	R	E	F	E	A	L
L	G	O	D	S	R	E	M	E	N	L	T
S	E	C	N	A	T	I	R	E	H	N	I



HABRACHAH
WARFARE
INHERITANCE
LAND
IDOLS
PAGANS
ZEAL
ISRAEL