

Deafening Silence

We are going to look at chapter 33 in the book of Deuteronomy because I want to deal with a silence that must have been a heartbreak, -- deafening by the fact that something was left out. In Genesis we read the account of Creation, the populating of the Earth, the flood and repopulating of the Earth, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob and his twelve sons. Those twelve sons became the twelve tribes of Israel, - the Jewish people. We read of Joseph going down into Egypt, the eleven sons with Jacob following, the growing of the nation in Egypt, finally coming out under Moses across the Red Sea to the Sinai Peninsula. There was the receiving of the Law at Mount Sinai, and then because they would not go into the land at Kadesh Barnea when they were told, they wandered for forty years.

The account of their exit out of Egypt begins in the book of Exodus. Leviticus tells about the setting up of the priesthood with the sacrifices and offerings. Numbers continues the story of the wanderings in the wilderness and then follows the book of Deuteronomy. Deuteronomy, with only small parts excepting, is Moses' farewell address. This is the longest recorded message in the Bible and we are going to look at the end of

this message. As he comes down to the end, Moses knows his earthly ministry is over. He is going up on a mountain where God is going to have him die and He is going to bury him.

Moses was a type and a picture of the Lord Jesus Christ both by prophecy and by statement in the New Testament. He is now at the end of his last message for the people to whom he has ministered for forty years. We pick up the message in Deuteronomy 33:1, "And this is the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death." When he gets to the end of the message it is almost as if the man, 120 years old and probably white-haired, raises his hands to put a blessing on the people of Israel and begins to lay out the details of that blessing. You can almost see them standing, waiting, wondering, "What will be the blessing we shall receive?". Getting a blessing from someone was a very valuable thing in the Old Testament. Jacob stole the blessing from Esau, -it being so important that he deceived to do it. The deception was wrong but it somehow indicates how important it was to get that blessing. Esau was broken hearted for there was not as much of a blessing left for him; it had all been given to Jacob. Isaac thought that he was blessing Esau and did not realize he had been deceived.

Here Moses is about to give the blessing as verse 2 reads, "And he said, 'The Lord came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints'." (That is almost an echo of the preaching of Enoch according to the book of Jude.) "From his right hand went a fiery law for them. Yea, he loved the people; all his saints are in thy hand: and they sat down at thy feet: every one shall receive of thy words." Here were a people loved by God, a people that are in the hand of God, the saints that are at the feet ready to receive of the words and the blessings to be given. "Moses commanded us a law, even the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob. And he was king in Jeshurun."

Here I pause for a moment. It is interesting that Moses is called a king. We know that David was the first king of the tribe of Judah but he was preceded, because of the impatience of the people, by King Saul as the first king of Israel. Here we read that there was a king before King Saul; that was Moses. Don't choke on this. There is a curious principle in the Word of God that if you read carefully and do some thinking and remembering you might stumble across. There was a king before the first king. You will find that there is a record of a temple before the first temple

that Solomon built. You will find that according to Stephen there was a church in the wilderness; that is, a church before the Church was established. You will find this sort of thing several times in the Bible where there was something before the actual continual type thing is established. God has the preceding as a picture and to help us understand that which He is going to establish at a future time. So, Moses, though he was a leader, was also a king in a very real sense and God calls him that.

Verse 5 continues, "And he was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people and the tribes of Israel were gathered together." Then he begins to put the blessing on them and he begins with Reuben, the firstborn. "Let Reuben live, and not die; and let not his men be few." You can see those people of the tribe of Reuben saying, "Well, I guess we will never shrink as a tribe. We will be alright and we will never die off. We have the blessing, through Moses, from God, that we are going to be blessed in this way." You can picture the other tribes thinking, "I wonder what blessing our tribe is going to receive?" And each of the tribes are waiting.

Moses continues tribe by tribe. We are not going to go through all of the blessings, as that is not my topic, but I want you to get the picture.

This is like a family gathering after a wealthy relative has died and they are waiting to find out which ones get what from the estate as the will is being read. "And to Susie goes such and such. To Henry goes such and such. To Amber goes such and such. Sam gets such and such." They each had their turn. That was how it was with these tribes that were the descendants of the twelve sons of Jacob.

Now, notice the second tribe, Judah, is named in verse seven. The third tribe, Levi, is mentioned in verse eight. The fourth tribe mentioned in verse twelve is Benjamin. The fifth tribe, Joseph, is mentioned in verse thirteen. In verse eighteen the sixth tribe, Zebulun, is mentioned. The seventh tribe is in the same verse, Issachar. The eighth tribe is listed in verse twenty, Gad. In verse 22 is the ninth one, Dan. And in verse 23 is Naphtali and in verse 24 is Asher. How many does that make? How many tribes were there? There were twelve tribes but only 11 were named.

How would you have liked to have been there at the reading of the will and everyone was named but you? How would you have liked to have been there as an entire tribe when every tribe but yours was named? You can just see them clicking off, one, two, three, four... that one gets

this, this one gets that.. and you didn't even get mentioned. It is bad enough for you to know that you were not mentioned, but it is worse that everyone else knows that you were not mentioned. The silence when he finished after eleven and did not say anymore was almost deafening. There was someone left out. It was Simeon who was left out. The question is, why? How did this happen?

I want to stir up your memories as to why Simeon did not get blessed when the others did. It would be an awful thing to come down to a time of blessing and be left out, but that is what happened to Simeon. God did not have to say that Simeon was left out. Those who knew these tribes and those who know their Bible will notice when they read it that someone was missing.

I want to mention several ways the tribes of Israel are listed. Generally, they are listed tribe by tribe, according to the name of their ancestor, the son of Jacob. That is what we see in this passage, although usually it is with twelve tribes. You will find exceptions where ten sons of Jacob are named with Joseph's name missing and instead of Joseph his two sons, (he received the double portion as an inheritance), Ephraim and Manasseh are named. That way the ten sons plus the two sons of Joseph make twelve and the one who was left out was Levi. There are reasons that Levi is the one left

out when the tribes are listed that way. When they were going to war, the Levites were not expected to march as soldiers and so they were not listed in that instance. Ephraim and Manasseh were separate groups in the army.

When they were camped around the tabernacle, the Levites were clustered at the center with the 12 tribes located in groups of three on the four sides (Joseph having the double portion). When it came to the numbering of the people to know the strength of the nation in numbers, it was the ten tribes plus Ephraim and Manasseh. Levi was counted separately on a different age basis because their ministry had to do with a different type of thing than those who marched to war. There was a distinction made between the tribes that went to war and the tribe that was to minister.

When it came to the division of the land Ephraim and Manasseh received portions as individual tribes, but the tribe of Levi did not receive a section of the land, for the Lord was their inheritance and they were to be scattered through the land. That meant they could minister in each of the tribes and they received a bit of land around each of the cities so that they could be there at the focal point for the matter of the ministry. This is all found in the book of Joshua. You begin to understand how God figured the twelve when it

was a matter of war. Ministry was figured differently than when he counted them simply as the descendants of Jacob.

However, when you come to the book of Revelation chapter 7 with the 144,000, you count there are twelve tribes with 12 thousand men each. But this time you will find that Joseph and Manasseh are mentioned with Joseph caring for that of the Ephraim part and Manasseh standing on his own. This time the tribe of Dan is missing. Dan was the tribe that forsook the inheritance they had and went looking for another inheritance and was the first tribe into idolatry. You can read about it in the book of Judges. Because of it they lost opportunity to minister during the tribulation as part of the 144,000.

God's silences suddenly seem quite loud. They reveal some things about how God totals up the tribes. Here we are with 11 sons named instead of the 10 plus the two sons of Joseph. This time there are 11 and God is particularly careful to make sure we understand that Ephraim and Manasseh are part of the classification under Joseph because they come in at the end of the blessing in verse 17 so that they can't be counted separately. Suddenly, we don't have twelve, regardless of how God has figured it in other places in the Bible. Simeon is left out -

conspicuously - so that we would notice that he was missing.

It would be a terrible thing to be left out when it comes down to the time of blessing. He was there at the time of blessing. He was there at the time of the trip down into Egypt. He was there when Jacob told of their character, their past, and some of their future. He was there when they came out of Egypt. He was there as they wandered in the wilderness. He was there throughout all of these times and obtained a piece of the land. But when it comes to blessing, in spite of his having been faithful in traveling, being around in the sacrifices, and being part of the work of God, he is left out. It wasn't like he had left and never showed up at sacrifice time or worship time. It wasn't like he didn't show up at battling time or giving time. He was there. But at blessing time, while he was there, everyone else was blessed except him. This makes me want to study. Why did the others get blessed while Simeon was left out?

In Genesis 49, Jacob, on his deathbed, made some statements about his twelve sons. In verse 5-7 he said, "Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honor, be thou not united: for in

their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel." That was Levi and Simeon.

You say, "Well, Levi got in on the blessing and Simeon didn't." That is right. This is a frightful thing to be pronounced by one at his deathbed on sons. What had brought this about? Some of it is not fully recorded, but again, I stir up your memories. Do you remember when Jacob had come back with his sons into the land of promise there had been a daughter, Dinah? She had decided to go out and see and be seen by the young men of the world. There had been that indiscretion of rape that had occurred by one of the Canaanites and then wanting to cover it with the matter of marriage. The sons of Jacob took things into their own hands and, when they had the whole town where they wanted it, Simeon and Levi had gone up with their swords when the men were weak, and killed every man in the town. It shook Jacob to the roots for he was afraid it would bring down all the towns on them and they would be destroyed. Simeon and Levi said, "We are not going to have anyone mistreating our family this way. Look what they did to our sister. We won't have this." Jacob was troubled.

We find that there was a streak of cruelty in them with anger that boiled out of them. Another time they had digged down a wall and evidently killed several people on several occasions from what is said here. So, while Jacob is putting blessing on many, when it comes to Levi and Simeon he stamps them, "Watch out, O my soul and don't get around that kind. They are dangerous men." You can almost see the other ten cringe at the presence of Levi and Simeon. However, several hundred years later Moses can bless Levi but not Simeon. How is it, when they both had a similar bad start, that one can be blessed and the other left out? They had stood for family honor more than the others had. They may have gone to extremes in the matter of family but they had stood.

In Exodus 32 they had come out of Egypt into the Sinai Desert. The law had been given. God directed Moses to go up on the mountain where He gave him the Ten Commandments. Moses came down to find that during his absence, his brother Aaron had brought the people together, collected gold, and made a golden calf. The people were dancing and making music around it in a pagan type of idolatry. Moses was distressed as he arrived on the scene, realizing this people who had promised to obey God had turned their

backs on Him. Here in chapter 32 verse 26 we read, "Then Moses stood in the gate of the camp, and said, Who is on the Lord's side? Let him come unto me. And all the sons of Levi gathered themselves together unto him. And he said unto them, 'Thus saith the Lord God of Israel, Put every man his sword by his side, and go in and out from gate to gate throughout the camp, and slay every man his brother, and every man his companion, and every man his neighbor.' And the children of Levi did according to the word of Moses: and there fell of the people that day about three thousand men."

This idolatry was so bad that Moses said, "Who is on the Lord's side?" Of the twelve tribes Levi comes and says, "We will stand!". Moses says, "Let us go and deal with all of these who have turned against God.". Now Levi would not only stand and slay for family honor, but he would stand and slay for the honor of God. When the call went out for family honor Simeon said, "I am here.", but when it went out for God's honor Simeon said nothing and did nothing. He cared more about family than he did about God. He would do more for family than he would for God.

Brethren, that is a terrible, terrible condition to be in. Yes, Levi had done wrong, but he had regained his honor with his zeal for the Lord.

Simeon had done wrong and did nothing to regain his honor. "I stood for family. I did right and went all out to take care of my family. Someone else can take care of what needs to be done for the Lord." Zeal for family is all right sometimes, but zeal for God is better. We have a generation today that has more zeal for family than they do for God. They will risk more for family than they will for God. They will go farther for family than they will for God. They don't care what it costs for family, but the cost is almost always too high for God.

The Levites rescued their honor at this point. God began to use the tribe of Levi but He did not do anything for the tribe of Simeon, - He just let them go on. This was at the beginning of the wilderness journey. They had crossed the Red Sea and had proceeded to Mount Sinai where they received the Law. Levi said, "We are going to be zealous for God. If they all want to be idolaters, we will move in and deal with it. We will not care about culture or society or the opinion of man. We are going to do what is right whatever the cost." God honored them and the tribe of Levi became the tribe of the ministers. The descendants of Aaron (who was of the tribe of Levi) became the family of priests. They wandered on through the wilderness and Levi faithfully served God while

Simeon just marched on with the rest. I know Reuben didn't rally, Judah didn't rally, Naphtali didn't rally, and Issachar didn't rally. But they didn't have a blight hanging over their heads to recover from and a need to show their repentance with a great zeal for God. Simeon showed no repentance, while Levi did. One of the fruits of repentance according to II Corinthians 7:11 is zeal. Levi showed zeal as an evidence, or fruit, of genuine repentance.

The Israelites continued marching and we approach the end of the book of Numbers. In chapter 23 we find Balaam. Balaam had a problem. He was a preacher who preached for money. The Israelites had wandered and wandered on the Sinai Peninsula and now are headed North. They are moving up to cross over the Jordan River into the Promised Land. There is the King of Midian and Moab who see this group of conquering tribes coming out of the desert and say, "Whoa! If God blesses them we can't handle it, but if we can get a preacher to preach against them, and maybe put a curse on them, that will solve it." So they offered Balaam a lot of money. Balaam wanted the money and also wanted God's help in putting a curse on them. He has trouble but finally thinks he has worked his way around so that he can go and get the money and still have the

permission of God. God has the donkey talk to him. Nothing daunted, he arrives, goes to open his mouth and curse the Israelites and blessing comes out. He goes elsewhere to another group, trying to pronounce a curse but a blessing comes out. The King said, "I was going to make you rich but you are doing the opposite of what I want. I don't want them blessed, I want them cursed. Go home!"

Before Balaam goes home he and the King sit down and talk. This is the problem that they have: they can't whip the Israelites in war and Balaam had done his best to put a curse on them and couldn't - it always came out a blessing. They couldn't whip God's people straight on and they couldn't curse them straight on. But there was one way to deal with them - that was to get them to compromise and get God to put a curse on them. Balaam said, "Here is how you do it. Promote a bunch of church chicken dinners and invite them in. Have them in to your banquet table and feed them. Show them that you really are good people and there is not really all that much difference between how you and they believe. After all, you are related way back up the line. You have much in common. Emphasize what you have in common. Then, if you can get your girls mixed up with their boys and your boys with their girls you

will have some unequal yokes. Then if you can get some looseness on the standards and strictness and get them loosened up, then God will have to curse them as a people and that will solve your problem." Sounds like nothing new. The devil still understands what Balaam taught, - the Doctrine of Balaam.

We come to Numbers 25:1 and read, "And Israel abode in Shittim, and the people began to commit whoredom with the daughters of Moab. And they called the people unto the sacrifices of their gods: and the people did eat, and bowed down to their gods. And Israel joined himself unto Baal-peor: and the anger of the Lord was kindled against Israel. And the Lord said unto Moses, Take all the heads of the people, and hang them up before the Lord against the sun, that the fierce anger of the Lord may be turned away from Israel. And Moses said unto the judges of Israel, Slay ye every one his men that were joined unto Baal-peor."

Moses said, "You are from these different tribes. You find in your tribe every man who has been doing this and kill them. They are bringing the curse of God down on us and we must deal with it. They have been taught better, they know better, and they are rebelling against what they know." Verse 6 continues, "And, behold, one of

the children of Israel came and brought unto his brethren a Midianitish woman in the sight of Moses, and in the sight of all the congregation of the children of Israel, who were weeping before the door of the tabernacle of the congregation." There they were, weeping over the coming of God's judgment and over the sin that was going on. Then one of them comes flouncing along bringing in a woman who does not belong there. He doesn't care who sees it. Even if God's leader sees it he is not bothered; he is going to go ahead. He doesn't think that anyone can do anything to him. After all, how could you be so rude and crude as to do something about bringing a stranger into the congregation of the righteous under these conditions? People sometimes get brazen about these things. They dare you to say anything and then get after you if you do. Verse 7 tells us, "And when Phinehas, the son of Eleazar, the son of Aaron the priest, saw it, he rose up from among the congregation, and took a javelin in his hand." You can read what he did, but with one stroke he killed both of them and stopped the plague.

I want you to see who all this involved. If you look a bit farther you will find in verse 14, "Now the name of the Israelite that was slain, even that was slain with the Midianitish woman, was Zimri, the son of Salu, a prince of the chief house

among the Simeonites.” The tribe of Simeon was big on family but not great on zeal for God. They marched on and they were around the others, but their judges did not deal with sin in their family. They were not going to be strict in their family. Other families may be strict but not *their* family. It was one in the tribe of Levi, closely related, who had to come over and deal with it. This man was the son of a prince of a tribe. When a group of people has more zeal for family and less for God and they are willing to tolerate and permit sin, they should not be shocked when they do not get a blessing. They come asking, “Why don’t we get blessed like the others?” Well, look back down your trail.

I am convinced that some people have wrongly memorized the Ten Commandments. I think they memorized the first commandment something like this: “Thou shalt have one other god before me: family.” I don’t know that they would say that, but I do know that they live it. Family before God is like Simeon. This incident with Zimri was at the occasion just shortly before Moses raised his hand and people thought, “Simeon got left out! Oh! It is because of Zimri, and the judges, and the tribe of Simeon, and the pronouncement of Jacob” Levi said, “I am changing. I am going to have zeal to do right for

God." Simeon said, "I am just going on - family is what matters." God said, "Then I will make a difference between Levi and Simeon. At one time they were alike, but now they are as different as day and night. One is useful for the priesthood and the other can't even get a common blessing."

The wilderness journey starts in the first chapters of Numbers with the recording of the census of the tribes and the men for battle. At the end of the book of Numbers there is recorded a second census, made at the end of the forty years in the wilderness. The total is close to the same. Stephen called it the church in the wilderness. I don't think that means that it was a New Testament Church, but that you can learn a lot about the Church by studying this. Some of the tribes prospered in the wilderness while others shrunk. It is profitable to study who prospers and who does not under right preaching and teaching in the church. The tribe of Simeon lost, by far, the most during those forty years. They started with 59,300 men of war age and ability. Forty years later they were down to 22,200 men. That is a big drop considering that the total for the nation was largely the same. They were the tribe who emphasized family and yet they still declined.

Brethren, there are many people emphasizing family and losing the blessing of

God. When God pours out His blessing it becomes obvious that they don't get it. They can be where the blessing is, but others are blessed and they don't get blessed. In some situations, I wonder instead of one tribe of 12 being left out if it is not more like ten or eleven being left out while only one or two get the blessing. We have a whole lot of tribes walking in the path of Simeon who never learned the lesson of Simeon.

You may ask what happened in their future. They were given a piece of ground like the other tribes. It was in the southernmost part just below the tribe of Judah. When Solomon died and Rehoboam became King there was a division in the nation in which the north was called Israel and the south was called Judah. In the north there were ten tribes and in the south it was called Judah - that only makes eleven tribes. Simeon was there, but there were not enough of them to count and so the south was just named for Judah. Some say they just joined in with Judah. They do recover enough by the time of the tribulation, but that is a long time to be without the blessing of God on a region of God's earth and on families and their descendents generation after generation, century after century. It would be awful to have this occur, - yet this is all Bible history.

We can learn a bit by application. When we

come to the New Testament we read that every one of us will give an account of himself to the Lord. We must all stand before the judgment seat of Christ to receive for the things that have been done in the body whether they be good or bad. You can see the Saviour at the judgment seat of Christ saying, "Well done good and faithful servant, Enter thou into the joy of my Lord." What a blessing! "Thou hast been faithful in many things and thou shalt be given this responsibility or that. Enter thou in to the joy of thy Lord." This next one ends up with just ashes out of wood, hay, and stubble - saved but so as by fire. There will be no blessing for them. They have a saved soul but a wasted life.

There are some who have made an idol out of family and never really come to the Lord. They might run with God's people but they don't even make it to that judgment. They can give with God's people, work with God's people, fight with God's people standing against error. But remember, Moses is a picture of Christ, and when it comes to the blessing nothing was said to Simeon. When the Lord Jesus was on trial before Pontius Pilate, Pilate heard that He was from Galilee and, knowing that was the territory that King Herod was over, he sent Jesus to Herod. Herod had desired to see Jesus for some time and

when Jesus went over there the Bible says that Jesus spoke to him not a word. He gave Herod the silent treatment. Finally Herod sent Him back to Pilate. Just as Moses said nothing to Simeon, Jesus said nothing to Herod. Wouldn't that be awful? To hear, "Depart from me. I never knew you. I have nothing to say to you. You were good on family and you ran with my people but you were never interested in sacrificing, suffering, or really standing for me. You just wanted to go with the crowd."

This silence of Moses would have been deafening. It would be worse to have silence from God; when the Heavens are as brass and you pray and can't get a hearing. You had a chance and you passed the day of opportunity. God says, "My spirit shall not always strive with man." There comes a time when He is just silent. The opportunity for repentance, for zeal, for taking a stand like you ought to is gone. Your bosom buddy, who was in everything just like you were, has repented and is being blessed of God. Your brethren and your family are around you being blessed of God, and yet God does not have a thing to say to you when it comes time for blessings. I find this a deafening silence.