

# Genesis

## Chapter 49



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**Chapter 49: The Tribes Prophetically**  
**The 12 Tribes, names transliterated:**

Gen 29:32	Reuben	“Behold a son”
Gen 29:33	Simeon	“Heard”
Gen 29:34	Levi	“Joined to”
Gen 29:35	Judah	“Praise”
Gen 30:6	Dan	“Judge”
Gen 30:8	Naphtali	“Wrestling;” “Struggles”
Gen 30:11	Gad	“Troop;” “fortune”
Gen 30:13	Asher	“Happy”
Gen 30:18	Issachar	“Recompense”
Gen 30:20	Zebulun	“Exalted”
Gen 30:24	Joseph	“YHWH has added”
Gen 35:18	Benjamin	“Son of the right hand”

**Jewish Study Bible Introduction:**

Jacob’s tribal sayings. Although the prose superscription has Jacob speaking to his sons themselves (v.1), the content of the poetry that follows applies to the tribes descended from these twelve men. The closest parallel to this collection of tribal sayings is thus Deut. Ch 33, in which Moses blesses most of the tribes just before he dies. A more distant parallel is Judg. 5:14-18, in which the judge, Deborah, and her general, Barak sing of the courage of some of the tribes and the failure of others in a time of military crisis. Like Judg. 5:14-18, and unlike the blessing of Moses, however, 49:1-28 interlaces commendation and condemnation. Rich in word plays impossible to capture in English as well as cryptic phrasings and rare expressions (including unusual, and probably very ancient, divine names), Jacob’s tribal sayings have long provoked disagreements among interpreters. There are also considerable variations in wording among the ancient versions. The collection of sayings is organized according to the tribal mothers, in the order of Leah, Zilpah (her handmaiden), Bilhah (Rachel’s handmaiden), and Rachel (29:31-30:24; 35:16-19). The first four Leah tribes – Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah – appear in the order of their births, as do those descended from Rachel – Joseph and Benjamin. But whereas in the narrative the sons of the handmaidens appear in the order of Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, and are followed by Leah’s last two sons, Issachar and Zebulun, in the tribal sayings of ch. 49 the order is Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali.<sup>1</sup>

**Torah Class Introduction:** Last week we finished examining the Cross-Handed Blessing of Jacob, as told in Genesis 48; this was a prophetic blessing made upon Ephraim and Manasseh, but the primary target of this blessing was Ephraim. We discovered that Ephraim would in some way, not yet fully clear, be a blessing to the gentile world. And, as we looked yet again at Ezekiel 37, learned why the prophecy that Ephraim and Judah would be reunited in the Land of Israel, never to be removed, had everything to do with what we are witnessing today, in our time.

This week we are going to look at another, separate set of blessings made by Jacob.

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<sup>1</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

Recall that we are speaking of a time when the 12 tribes of Israel were in Egypt; Joseph was the Vizier of Egypt, and Israel were honored guests of Pharaoh. So, it's probably around 1700 to 1750 B.C. when the events of Genesis 48 and 49 occurred.

In Genesis 49, we are going to look at the destinies, as described in the form of blessings, which were prophetically called out for each of the 12 tribes of Israel. We have come a long way, haven't we? In earlier parts of Genesis we saw Israel created by God via giving Jacob a name transplant (to Israel), and now we will see prophecies concerning the future of the individual tribes of Israel called out hundreds of years before their fulfillment. Much of what we will learn about them is already fulfilled prophecy. What we can take from this is the absolute inerrancy, and the literal nature, of Bible prophecy. And, that is important to us in our time, because there are **STILL** many prophecies about the tribes of Israel that are in process of being fulfilled, and others that soon will be. True enough, some of these prophecies are a little obscure, and their meaning cloudy, but the veil IS starting to lift. I think that if you pay close attention to what we'll study about these tribes, the book of Revelation in particular will have new meaning to you. Recall that last week, for instance, we discovered that the make-up of the 12 tribes of Israel looks different in Revelation 7, than it does in the Torah; with Ephraim and Dan being removed, and Joseph and Levi being added back in.

Now, as we read through Genesis 49, we need to put it in proper perspective; what Jacob was pronouncing was overall pictures of each of these tribes. These were not prophecies about things they would necessarily **DO**, they were prophecies about what each of these tribes would **BECOME**. Jacob would pronounce what each of these tribes' **CHARACTERISTICS** and attributes would be over the long haul. Not exactly how they would behave at some given moment in time, though we can see moments when a certain tribe eerily reflected the blessing Jacob gave it. We need to keep in mind that it was more than 3500 years ago that Jacob made these pronouncements concerning what the traits of the **DESCENDANTS** of the sons gathered around his deathbed would look like, if one could look at the history of each tribe from beginning to end. And, let's remember: from here on out, when the Bible speaks of a one of the 12 Israelite tribes such as Reuben, or Judah, or Ephraim, it's not speaking about the destiny of any particular man.... for these men, these 12 sons of Jacob, were long dead before the individual tribes that went by their names grew large enough to even form identifiable characteristics. Rather, the Bible is speaking of **the thousands and millions of descendants** of each of these men who stayed together in family groups called tribes; this was the typical social structure then, and it might surprise you to know that the largest part of the world population today is still tribal. So, far from tribalism being a thing of the past, it is alive and well and how it operates has everything to do with the intractable troubles we face in the Middle East, as well as the horrible genocides of modern day Africa.

Like a modern-day family, sitting around a table while an executor reads the will of the departed one who had held sway on all the family wealth and power, there was an air of anticipation among the 12 brothers. The 12 sons of Jacob were anxiously waiting to hear what their particular blessing might be; and, like the family at the reading of the will, some were going to be pleasantly surprised at their portion, while others would be drained with disappointment. And, still others would walk away content however modest their lot.

Later, after it all had time to sink in, hard feelings would also likely result as some of those sons of Jacob who received the lesser blessing burned with envy against those who received the greater. Of course, those who received the greatest blessings looked down smugly upon those who never deserved as much as they had rightfully received, anyway. And, time doesn't necessarily solve these hurts and rejections; sometimes it can actually magnify the animosity. Such would be the case as we follow the history of Israel from this point forward. For we will find some of the tribes of Israel will have long term hatred against other tribes of Israel, and at times they will actually war against one another.

The 12 sons of the last Patriarch, Jacob, called Israel, gathered around their father who has just enough strength left in that aged body to perform his final duty on earth; and, they listen intently as the all-important blessings begin, predictably, with Rueben, the firstborn, and progress in approximate, but not exact, accordance with the order of their birth.<sup>2</sup>

### **Disciple's Study Bible Introduction:**

**History, God's People**—History is not an unchanging way for all God's people. Various parts of God's people have various gifts, opportunities, and challenges. The different prospects for the tribes of Israel mirror the different histories of God's people through the ages. See note on 25:23.

**Election, Predestination**—The patriarch under divine guidance pronounced the tribal fortunes before tribes were formed or the nation settled in the land. God knows the future, but His knowledge is not a causative factor which prohibits the exercise of human freedom. Election involves the mystery of God's foreknowledge and God's decision to respond in free relationship to free humans He created.

**Prayer, Blessing**—See note on 48:15-20. Prayer reaches into the future as well as seeking help for the present. Jacob's blessing gave national identity to his future descendants as they formed the nation Israel. Differing characteristics and locations did not separate the tribes, for the blessing of Abraham tied them to a joint mission under the one God. Each had a role to play. Reading Jacob's blessing on them would call each new generation to fulfill that role under the Creator of nature and of the nation.<sup>3</sup>

**McGee Introduction:** This is another remarkable chapter, as it is the deathbed scene of old Jacob. In fact, in the previous chapter we saw him on that deathbed as he strengthened himself, sat upon the bed, and blessed the sons of Joseph.

After that interview, the rest of Jacob's sons came in, so that around him now are all twelve of his sons. He has a farewell message for each of them. He begins with the eldest and goes right down the list. Anything that a man says on his deathbed is important because generally, if he ever tells the truth, he tells it on his deathbed. This deathbed message is dramatic because it is prophetic. It tells what will happen to the twelve sons of Jacob when they become tribes. What was prophetic then has now become largely historical.

This is our final opportunity to see another evidence of faith in the life of Jacob. He spoke to his boys who were to become the twelve tribes in the nation of Israel and would

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<sup>2</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

<sup>3</sup> Disciple's Study Bible

be dwelling in the land of Canaan. What faith! Remember that the Canaanite was then in the land and that Jacob's family was favorably situated in Egypt.<sup>4</sup>

### **Genesis 49:1**

**And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you *that* which shall befall you in the last days**

**[that which shall befall you in the last days]** A prophecy outlining the future history of each son and tribe even unto the future reign of the Messiah (Genesis 49:10).

**[last days]** The first of 33 times in Scripture (Genesis 49:1; Numbers 24:14; Deut. 4:30; Deut. 31:29; Job 19:25; Isaiah 2:2; Jeremiah 23:20; Jeremiah 30:24; Jeremiah 48:47; Jeremiah 49:39; Ezekiel 38:16; Daniel 2:28; Daniel 10:14; Hosea 3:5; Micah 4:1; John 6:39,40,44,54; John 11:24; John 12:48; Acts 2:17; 1 Tim. 4:1; 2 Tim. 3:1; Hebrews 1:2; James 5:3; 1 Peter 1:5,20; 2 Peter 3:3; 1 John 2:18; Jude 1:18). The "last days" here could only refer to days before both the first and second comings of the Messiah.

**Jacob called unto his sons**—It is not to the sayings of the dying saint, so much as of the inspired prophet, that attention is called in this chapter. Under the immediate influence of the Holy Spirit he pronounced his prophetic benediction and described the condition of their respective descendants in the last days, or future times.<sup>5</sup>

“In the last days” is clearly a reference not only to the future but also to the closing period of history. The author of Hebrews said the “last days” began with the coming of Christ (Heb 1:1, 2).<sup>6</sup>

**[in the days to come]** refers to Israel's future in dual perspective: the period of their occupation of Canaan, and the time of the coming of Messiah. Sometimes the expression refers to Israel at the end of the tribulation period (Deut. 4:30; Ezek. 38:16), sometimes to the history of Gentile nations (Dan. 2:28), and sometimes to the present church age in its entirety (Heb. 1:2) or at its conclusion (2 Tim. 3:1; James 5:3). Jacob's pronouncements in Gen. 49 included both prophecy (v. 1) and blessing (v. 28).<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>4</sup>McGee, J. V. (1997, c1981). *Thru the Bible commentary*. Based on the Thru the Bible radio program. (electronic ed.) (1:191). Nashville: Thomas Nelson.

<sup>5</sup>JFB Commentary

<sup>6</sup>Believer's Study Bible

<sup>7</sup>The Ryrie Study Bible

## **Genesis 49:2**

**Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father.**

**Patriarchal blessings:** (Cf. Gen 27:26-29; Gen 49:1-28; and later Moses will do likewise, Cf. Deut 33.) The words of a dying father to his sons were considered to be an irrevocable testament, acceptable as decisive evidence in court cases. Beyond any legal recognition, these patriarchal blessings also had the supernatural aspect of the spirit of prophecy, whereby these men of God spoke what was divinely revealed to them.

**patriarchal blessing.** In the biblical material the patriarchal pronouncement generally concerns the destiny of the sons with regard to fertility of the ground, fertility of the family and relationships between family members. Blessings or curses pronounced by the patriarch of the family were always taken seriously and considered binding, even though they were not presented as prophetic messages from God.<sup>8</sup>

**Torah Class:** In V1, Jacob begins by saying something that has an unclear meaning to scholars even to this day: he says “.....that I may tell you what shall befall you in the days to come”. Some versions say “in the latter days”, and still others say “in the last days”. Now, the Hebrew used here is *acharit ha'yamim*. In its MOST literal sense, it means “in the end of the days”. Some Rabbis and scholars say that this speaks of the time when Israel’s days in Egypt will be over, and Moses leads them out. Others say this is speaking of the latter days and end-times of the world, as we are so prone to call it. There have been very reasonable arguments for both sides. Probably, Jacob’s sons were not thinking in terms of thousands of years into the future. But, as with every pronouncement in the Bible that is of God, as were these blessings, we must remain aware that there is simultaneously **a physical** AND a **spiritual** manifestation. Certainly, Jacob’s sons could only see the physical, material side. But, we can, with hindsight, also see the spiritual.

About 1000 years after this blessing 10 of the twelve tribes, all but Judah and Benjamin (and the tribe of special category, the Levites), would just about vanish; therefore one would have to think that indeed the meaning of Jacob’s words, “the end of days”, spoke of a time BEFORE they vanished; a time that represented the state of each tribe in the years that would lead up to their exodus from Egypt. This as opposed to Jacob’s words referring to the end-times of the world. Yet, as we are just now suddenly aware that Ephraim who represents all those currently lost tribes, is supposed to mysteriously reappear in some form in the end-times, it leaves open the possibility that indeed Jacob DID mean endtimes of the world, and not simply the end of Israel’s time in Egypt. Of course, it could mean both. Time will tell. Likely, it has some elements of both past and future; for we see many Biblical prophecies repeat themselves. Bible prophecy tends to create patterns as much as they foretell future events. For the present, I prefer to leave this as an unknown, rather than to dogmatically say it means one thing over the other. Perhaps over the next few months and years, God will make this more clear to us. With that, let’s examine the blessing given to each son.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Bible Background Commentary

<sup>9</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

### **Genesis 49:3**

**Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power:**

**[excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power]** The right of the firstborn, but some have been unworthy.

Reuben as the first-born had a right to a double portion of all that the father had; see Deuteronomy 21:17

The eminence or dignity mentioned here may refer to the priesthood; the power, to the regal government or kingdom—In this sense it has been understood by all the ancient Targumists. The Targum of Onkelos paraphrases it thus: “Thou shouldst have received three portions, the birthright, the priesthood, and the kingdom:” and to this the Targums of Jonathan ben Uzziel and Jerusalem add: “But because thou hast sinned, the birthright is given to Joseph, the kingdom to Judah, and the priesthood to Levi.” That the birthright was given to the sons of Joseph we have the fullest proof from 1 Chronicles 5:1.<sup>10</sup>

### **Genesis 49:4**

**Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch.**

**[Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it]** Weak in willpower to restrain lusts, you shall lose your place as the firstborn. Like Esau, Reuben sacrificed his birthright to his passion (1 Chron. 5:1-2). During its history this tribe was inferior in position and power.

Jacob heaped praise upon Reuben, his firstborn, but this collapsed when he announced that Reuben had defiled his father's couch, clearly a reference to Reuben's adultery with Jacob's concubine Bilhah (35:22). Reuben was entitled to leadership and a double inheritance, but because he had the ungoverned impulse of boiling water (turbulent as the waters) he would fail in leadership. In the time of the Judges (Judg 5:15-16), the tribe of Reuben was characterized by irresolution.

**(Deut 33:6)** *Let Reuben live, and not die; and let not his men be few.*

### **Reuben**

The firstborn of Jacob by Leah (Gen 29:32), his name is connected with the phrase, “the Lord has looked upon my affliction.” He is noted for his incestuous act with Bilhah, his father's concubine (Gen 35:22). It was Reuben who advised his brothers not to kill Joseph, and returned to the pit to release him (Gen 37:21, 29). Reuben's forfeited birthright given to Joseph (1 Chr 5:1,2). The tribe of Reuben was involved in the rebellion in the wilderness (Num 16:1).

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<sup>10</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary

**By-Pass of Firstborn:** Seth – Cain; Shem – Japheth; Isaac – Ishmael; Jacob – Esau; Judah, Joseph – Reuben; Moses – Aaron; David – All his brothers. Reuben forfeited his natural rights: His place as the favored *first-born* was given to Joseph. His privileges as *priest* were to pass to the sons of Levi. His right to be the head of the tribes of Israel, i.e., his *kingly right*, would go to Judah.

“Unstable as water, thou shall not excel, have preeminence” (Gen 49:4). Reuben’s tribe, as not aiming to excel, unfortunately chose a settlement on the other side Jordan. Prophecy of Moses: “Let not his men be few” (Deut 33:6): 1st numbering, 46,500 (Num 1:21); 2nd numbering, 43,730 (Num 26:7); most others increased. No judge, prophet, nor prince, is found of that tribe.<sup>11</sup>

**Pouring out like the waters**—This is an obscure sentence because unfinished. It evidently relates to the defilement of his father’s couch; and the word פָּחַז *pachaz*, here translated pouring out, and in our Version unstable, has a bad meaning in other places of the Scripture, being applied to dissolute, debauched, and licentious conduct. See Judges 9:4; Zephaniah 3:4; Jeremiah 23:14, 32; 29:23.

**Thou shalt not excel**—This tribe never rose to any eminence in Israel; was not so numerous by one third as either Judah, Joseph, or Dan, when Moses took the sum of them in the wilderness, Numbers 1:21; and was among the first that were carried into captivity, 1 Chronicles 5:26.

**Then thou didst defile**—Another unfinished sentence, similar to the former, and upon the same subject, passing over a transaction covertly, which delicacy forbade Jacob to enlarge on. For the crime of Reuben, see Clarke on Genesis 35:22 (note).<sup>12</sup>

The allusion is probably to the event cryptically reported in 35:22. Although Reuben, as the first-born tribe, may once have been important, it has left little mark in biblical history. The blessing of Moses regards it as small and in danger of extinction (Deut. 33:6), and the song of Deborah chastises it for its indecision (Judg. 5:15-16; see Gen. 42:36-38n.).<sup>13</sup>

**Torah Class:** Though we are not told the reaction of any of the sons, it should not be hard to imagine the crushing blow dealt to Reuben; for at this instant, humiliated in front of his brothers, he was disowned from his position as the NATURAL firstborn of Israel. One can imagine he SHOULD have suspected such a result, particularly since his younger brother Judah had been relied on more and more by Jacob for leadership over the past few years.

Reuben knew the wrongs he had committed against his father; but hit with the unalterable finality of it all, a brutally depressed Reuben had to be the result. Jacob says of Reuben, you are.....”unstable as water.....you shall not have preeminence.....because you defiled my bed”. In other words, you do not have the necessary attributes to lead Israel, so you shall not receive the firstborn blessing.

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<sup>11</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

<sup>12</sup> Adam Clarke’s Commentary

<sup>13</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

This “bed defiling” incident is recalled for us in Chronicles. PLEASE TURN TO THIS SCRIPTURE. We need to take in VERY carefully what it says, for it is key to our understanding of the blessings that Jacob will give his sons, AND more.

**1Chronicles 5:1-2** “The sons of Rueben the firstborn of Israel.....he was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father’s bed, his birthright was given to **the sons** of Joseph the son of Israel, though not in such a way as for him to be regarded in the genealogy as the firstborn. For Judah became greater than his brothers, inasmuch as the ruler came from him; nevertheless, the birthright went to Joseph.”

Now, in a long way around the barn, this verse tells us a couple of things: first, the cause of Jacob passing over Reuben was that he had slept with Jacob’s concubine, Bilah; straightforward enough. But, what also happened was, in essence, the honors and blessings that traditionally went to the firstborn **got split between two other sons:** Joseph and Judah. Or, as we saw in Genesis 48, actually the firstborn rights got split between Ephraim, Joseph’s son, and Judah. So, the Chronicler tells us that the EARTHLY reason behind Jacob’s Cross-Handed Blessing upon Joseph’s sons was to disinherit Reuben because of what Reuben had done. Of course, God had other reasons to allow this scenario to unfold.

There are two major components that make-up the traditional firstborn blessing: **first**, was the double-portion, which meant that the firstborn was to receive two shares (or more) of the tribe’s wealth instead of one. **Second**, was that the firstborn was given the right of authority to LEAD, to rule over, the whole tribe. If all had gone as normal, Reuben would not only have been the leader of the tribe his own birth had created (the tribe of Rueben), he would have become the leader over all of Israel....he would have ruled in his father, Jacob’s, place.....over the full 12 tribes. AND, he would have received a double-portion, twice as much of the tribe’s wealth as any of his brothers received.

Rueben got none of this. Instead, we see that Joseph would receive the double portion (by means of his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh) and Judah would receive the right to rule and lead. Now, let me tell you: this is strange action that Jacob took, in splitting the firstborn blessing. But, also keep in mind a very important element that the writer of Chronicles explains: genealogically speaking, Judah’s family was the one who would carry forth authority. So, in matters of Israel where genealogy was the deciding factor.... such as who would be the first legitimate King of Israel (David), and who would be the King forever (Jesus).... It would be Judah’s bloodlines that would be used.....not Joseph’s and not Rueben’s. Yet, in a strange way, Joseph ALSO received the firstborn blessing. Let me show you how that happened.

Here’s the thing: often we will see the Bible use the terms “double-portion blessing” and “birthright” and “firstborn blessing” interchangeably. BUT..... we need to understand, that even though in the common vernacular of that day the term double-portion was used synonymously with firstborn blessing, technically, the double-portion was only PART of the firstborn blessing. It was ASSUMED, according to tradition that whoever was awarded the firstborn blessing got every element that traditionally went with it. That is, whoever received the double-portion of the family’s wealth ALSO automatically received the right to rule over the tribe. But, Jacob did something very novel in splitting the firstborn blessing between two heirs, two sons, two tribes of Israel. In my opinion the reason that the writer of Chronicles worded these verses in the way he did, is because he didn’t fully comprehend what it all meant, and what it would all lead

to. WHY the Firstborn blessing was divided between two sons, the writer obviously doesn't know because it wasn't usually done this way. In fact, I'm unaware of anywhere else in the Bible that the splitting of the firstborn blessing, as Jacob did, ever again occurred. This event seems to be completely unique. So, all the writer of Chronicles does is to assert the facts, as he understands them, without further explanation.

Now, let's see how Jacob's blessing of Reuben worked out.....the prophesy that Reuben's descendants would be as unstable as water, and that they would not be leaders.

When we search the scriptures, we will find that the tribe of Reuben did not produce one single military leader, king, prophet, nor judge.....not one of Reuben's descendants are mentioned in the Bible as having attained a position of particular value or honor, nor accomplishing anything of significance. We also find that after the 12 tribes, led by Moses, approached the promised land of Canaan, the tribe of Reuben decided NOT to enter the Promised Land, but rather to settle for "good enough". They took some territory as their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan River, outside the land of Canaan. We even find that Reuben's tribe began a steady decline in their population. Moses was apparently so concerned about the condition of the tribe of Reuben that he prayed (Deut.33:6) "Let Reuben live, and not die; and let not his men be few".

The tribe of Reuben was destined to become an asterisk in the history of Israel, due to Reuben's unstable ways and his sin. It is a simple, yet profound, Biblical principle that while our sins are most certainly forgiven and paid for, the consequences of our sins can be enduring throughout our lifetimes and on into the lives of our children, our children's children, and beyond. We may not like it, but it is so. Our sinful ways can introduce characteristics into our families that are detrimental and long lasting in their effects. And, all we have to do is live long enough to know the truth of that statement.<sup>14</sup>

## **Genesis 49:5**

**Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations.**

[**Simeon and Levi**] The second and third sons of Leah (Genesis 29:33-34).

[**instruments of cruelty are in their habitations**] They led in the slaughter of Shechem (Genesis 49:5-7; Genesis 34:25).

**Simeon and Levi are brethren**—Not only springing from the same parents, but they have the same kind or disposition, head-strong, deceitful, vindictive, and cruel.

**They have accomplished, etc.**—Our margin has it, Their swords are weapons of violence, i. e., Their swords, which they should have used in defense of their persons or the honorable protection of their families, they have employed in the base and dastardly murder of an innocent people.

The Septuagint gives a different turn to this line from our translation, and confirms the translation given above: Συνετελεσαν αδικια εξαιρεσεως αυτων· They have accomplished the iniquity of their purpose; with which the Samaritan Version agrees. In the Samaritan text we read *calu*, they have accomplished, instead of the Hebrew כלי

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<sup>14</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

keley, weapons or instruments, which reading most critics prefer: and as to **מכרתיהם** mecherotheyhem, translated above their fraudulent purposes, and which our translation on almost no authority renders their habitations, it must either come from the Ethiopic **מכר** macar, he counselled, devised stratagems, etc., (see Castel), or from the Arabic macara, he deceived, practiced deceit, plotted, etc., which is nearly of the same import. This gives not only a consistent but evidently the true sense.<sup>15</sup>

### **Genesis 49:6**

**O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall.**

**[come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly]** Do not let me come into and be held responsible for their secret council and what their assembly decided to do (Genesis 34:25).

**[honour]** Honour must be understood as an equivalent of soul in the first clause. This could be translated, "I myself will not be united with them in their sin."

**[digged down a wall]** Some translations read, "they murdered guiltless men and joyfully murdered a prince," referring to the prince that defiled Dinah. Others read "hamstrung an ox," but this seems foreign to the idea of Genesis 34:25-29 to which this refers.<sup>16</sup>

**Into their secret council, etc.**—Jacob here exculpates himself from all participation in the guilt of Simeon and Levi in the murder of the Shechemites. He most solemnly declares that he knew nothing of the confederacy by which it was executed, nor of the secret council in which it was plotted.

If it should be said that the words **תבא** taba and **תחד** techad should be translated in the future tense or in the imperative, as in our translation, I shall not contend; though it is well known that the preterite is often used for the future in Hebrew, and vice versa. Taken thus, the words mark the strong detestation which this holy man's soul felt for the villany of his sons: "My soul shall not come into their secret council. My honor shall not be united to their confederacy."<sup>17</sup>

**And in their pleasure**—This marks the highest degree of wickedness and settled malice, they were delighted with their deed. A similar spirit Saul of Tarsus possessed previously to his conversion; speaking of the martyrdom of St. Stephen, St. Luke says, Acts 8:1: **Σαυλος δε ην συνευδοκων τη ανααιρεσει αυτου**. And Saul was gladly consenting to his death. He was with the others highly delighted with it; and thus the prediction of our Lord was fulfilled, John 16:2: Yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And it is represented as the highest pitch

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<sup>15</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary

<sup>16</sup> Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

<sup>17</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary

of profligacy and wickedness, not only to sin, but to delight in it; see Romans 1:32. As the original word רצון ratson signifies, in general, pleasure, benevolence, delight, etc., it should neither be translated self-will nor willfulness, as some have done, but simply as above; and the reasons appear sufficiently obvious. They murdered a prince—Hamor, the father of Shechem. Instead of שור shor, which we have translated a wall, and others an ox, I read שר sar, a prince, which makes a consistent sense; (see Kennicott’s first Dissertation, p. 56, etc.); as there is no evidence whatever that Simeon and Levi either dug down a wall or houghed the oxen, as some have translated the passage; Or *houghed oxen*; on the contrary, the text, Genesis 34:28, 29, proves that they had taken for their own use the sheep, oxen, asses, all their wealth, their wives, and their little ones.<sup>18</sup>

### **Genesis 49:7**

**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.**

**[I will divide them]** Fulfilled in that Simeon, as the smallest tribe, was not given a separate portion of land, but a part of Judah with which it appears to have joined (Joshua 19:1; Joshua 21:9; 1 Chron. 4:23-43). Levi had no inheritance in Israel but was given scattered cities among the tribes (Joshua 13:33; Joshua 21:1-45).

**[Jacob]** First time Jacob is used of all Israel.

*(Deut 33:8-11) And of Levi he said, Let thy Thummim and thy Urim be with thy holy one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, and with whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah; Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant. They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar. Bless, LORD, his substance, and accept the work of his hands: smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again.*

### **Levi**

Levi’s name is linked with the root, “to join.” He avenged the seduction of Dinah (Gen 34; 49:5-7). His zeal against idolatry was a cause of the tribe’s priestly appointment (Ex 32:26-28; Deut 33:9,10; Mal 2:4,5). This tribe was exempt from enrollment for military duty (Num 1:47-54, with 1 Chr 12:26) and subordinate to the sons of Aaron (Num 3:9; 8:19; 18:6). They were teachers of the law (Deut 33:10; 2 Chr 17:8,9; 30:22; 35:3) and

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<sup>18</sup> Adam Clarke’s Commentary

were judges (Deut 17:9; 1 Chr 23:4; 26:29; 2 Chr 19:8-11). They guarded the king's person and house in times of danger (2 Kgs 11:5-9; 2 Chr 23:5-7).<sup>19</sup>

### **Simeon**

Simeon is the second son of Jacob by Leah (Gen 29:33) and is associated with Levi in the terrible act of vengeance against Hamor and the Shechemites (Gen 34:25,26). He was detained by Joseph in Egypt as a hostage (Gen 42:24). His father, when dying, pronounced a malediction against him; to be “divided and scattered” (Gen 49:5-7): decreased in the wilderness by 2/3 (Num 1:23 26:14 ); dwindled in number; sank into insignificance. Moses pronounces no blessing on this tribe. They didn't lose their identity: e.g., 13 Simeonite princes in days of Hezekiah (1 Chr 4:34-38).<sup>20</sup>

**Cursed was their anger**—The first motions of their violence were savage; and their excessive or overflowing wrath, עברה ebrah, for it was inflexible—neither the supplications of the males, nor the entreaties, tears, cries, and shrieks of the helpless females, could deter them from their murderous purpose; for this, Genesis 49:5, they are said to have accomplished.

I will divide them out, אהלקם achallekem, I will make them into lots, giving a portion of them to one tribe, and a portion to another; but they shall never attain to any political consequence. This appears to have been literally fulfilled. Levi had no inheritance except forty-eight cities, scattered through different parts of the land of Canaan: and as to the tribe of Simeon, it is generally believed among the Jews that they became schoolmasters to the other tribes; and when they entered Canaan they had only a small portion, a few towns and villages in the worst part of Judah's lot, Joshua 19:1, which afterwards finding too little, they formed different colonies in districts which they conquered from the Idumeans and Amalekites, 1 Chronicles 4:39, etc. Thus these two tribes were not only separated from each other, but even divided from themselves, according to this prediction of Jacob.<sup>21</sup>

Simeon and Levi are a pair only in Gen. ch. 34, where they also suffer their father's rebuke (v. 30). The dividing and scattering predicted here probably refers to Simeon's absorption into Judah and Levi's redefinition as a priestly tribe, without land of its own (Deut. 18:1-2).

**Torah Class:** Another harsh verdict; and, undoubtedly, two more stunned inheritors. Jacob sees his 2<sup>nd</sup> and 3<sup>rd</sup> born sons in the same light, with similar personal attributes and characteristics, therefore apparently.... and I underline the word APPARENTLY... sharing a common destiny. They are brothers in violence, and so they shall be brothers in their transgressions.

Unlike Rueben's primary offense which was done in secret, Simeon and Levi had committed their greatest offense for everyone to see, and were proud and unrepentant for

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<sup>19</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

<sup>20</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

<sup>21</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary

what they had done, to boot!

Let's revisit just what the great offense of Simeon and Levi was, as told in Genesis 34.

**READ Genesis 34:1,2 5-7, 13-15, 25-27**

The primary thrust of this blessing was that neither Simeon nor Levi would partake in the promised land in the same proportion as their brothers; this as a result of their bloodlust and cruelty, as demonstrated upon the citizens of Shechem. They would, instead, be divided and scattered. And, that is exactly what took place. But, let me give you a hint in advance of our look at what happened to Simeon and Levi: remember that one of God's Governing Dynamics is to divide....divide, separate, and elect. It's a deceived mankind that looks upon division as an automatic negative.

Let's look first at Simeon, who would become the smallest tribe by the time of the census of Numbers 26; and, like Rueben, struggled simply to stay in existence and to maintain a separate tribal identity. In a census reported in the early part of the book of Numbers, Simeon is said to have had a population of 59,300. Within a mere 40 years, however, the census of Numbers 26 shows their population has shrunk by over 50% to 22,200. Now, just for the sake of clarity, the census would have been ONLY of men....and only of men in the prime and middle portions of their lives. This is often expressed in the Hebrew idiom as "men capable of bearing arms". So, this is probably something on the order of ages 20 to 50 years old. Males younger and older than this, children, the elderly, the disabled, were not counted. Neither were females of any age or status.

Further, when we find Moses officiating over the handing out of the tribes' land inheritances, Simeon is given territory WITHIN Judah's territory..... technically, and more accurately, certain cities within Judah's territory. Simeon's territory was like the round bulls eye in the center of a target: they were completely surrounded by the tribe of Judah. Worse yet, the area they occupied within Judah was primarily the Negev.....an arid desert.

Simeon was probably the first tribe to be completely absorbed by the other tribes, with some of them joining with Judah, and others joining what would eventually come to be known as the 10 northern tribes of Ephraim. There was even mention in 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles of some members of the tribe of Simeon leaving the Holy Land altogether, and joining with Edom.....recall that Edom was the descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother. Jacob said they would be scattered..... how true this proved to be.

Levi suffered a similar, though not destructive, fate as concerns land and territory. Levi, as with Simeon, was not given its own territory.... rather, it too was given cities.....48 cities.....but within the tribal boundaries of EVERY tribe. However, Levi was divided and separated out to become God's own priests....in Hebrew, God's cohanim. It was the Levites who would officiate all matters at the Wilderness Tabernacle, and then the Temple. So, while Simeon was destined to the loss of it's tribal identity and near extinction, Levi's separation from Israel became a holy matter.

What an incredible thing it is that Jacob's prophesy so accurately depicts the ironically similar, yet opposite, fates of Simeon and Levi. Look once again at V7, the end of it, where it says ".....I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel". Both actions happened, but each in its own way. Levi was divided, separated and elected away from the other tribes to become priests to God, and Simeon was utterly scattered into all the other tribes of Israel. Levi maintained their identity, and Simeon lost theirs.

Often we will see in Scripture two phrases or sentences, back-to-back, that appear to simply be a repetition..... like in V7, “....I will divide.....I will scatter”. Usually this is just a standard Hebrew literary device called a doublet or a couplet. At other times, though, there is a subtle and important message being introduced and it is not the same thing being said, just in two different ways.

Let me also mention, as an aside, that whereas particularly in the Prophets it looks to be unarguable that there is much repetition, in fact, its because of the near impossibility to translate Hebrew word structure into English. And, one of the reasons that this is so, is because the Bible was originally created in a structure meant to be learned through the spoken word and through hearing. This is as opposed to our English, Latin, French, and German translations that were written in a style meant to be absorbed by reading. While to those of us who are not literary professionals, the difference between creating a speech designed to be absorbed by the ears, versus creating a manuscript designed to be absorbed by the eyes, might not seem apparent.....the differences are substantial. It is interesting to notice that even up to our time, the Levites are seen as separate from the rest of Israel. Jews do NOT regard Levites as Jews.....they are separate and distinct. Even if the rest of the world, through ignorance, doesn't make this distinction, God does, and considering where we are in prophetic times, it might be wise for US to understand and acknowledge it, because the time is near that the Levites are going to once again play a prominent role in Judaism.

So, the end result of Jacob's pronouncements are that the first 3 brothers, the eldest, are now dispossessed and their blessings look more like a curses, to them. Now, we come to the 4<sup>th</sup> in line, Judah.<sup>22</sup>

### **Genesis 49:8**

**Judah, thou *art he* whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand *shall be* in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee.**

[**Judah**] The fourth son of Leah (Genesis 29:35).

[**praise**] Judah means praise (Genesis 29:35).

[**bow down before thee**] This has been and will yet be eternally fulfilled in Jesus Christ who came from Judah (Phil. 2:10; Psalm 72:1-14). Also fulfilled in David (2 Samuel 5:1-8).

**hand on the neck.** Jacob's blessing of his son Judah is reflective of the great importance attached to the tribe of Judah in later history. One sign of its power is found in the phrase “your hand will be on the neck of your enemies,” which signifies control or subjugation of Judah's foes.

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<sup>22</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

### **Genesis 49:9**

**Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?**

[lion] A symbol of Judah (Rev. 5:5).

[who shall rouse him up?] Question 148. Next, \*Genesis 50:19. A picture of Judah as a tribe to be feared (cp. Numbers 24:9).<sup>23</sup>

### **Genesis 49:10**

**The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.**

The term “scepter” refers to their tribal identity and the right to apply and enforce Mosaic Laws and adjudicate capital offenses: *jus gladii*. It is significant that even during their 70-year Babylonian captivity (606-537 B.C.) the tribes retained their tribal identity [Josh MacDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, pp. 108-168.] They retained their own logistics, judges, etc. (Ezek 1:5,8) The term “Shiloh” was understood by the early rabbis and Talmudic authorities as referring to the Messiah. (*Targum Onkelos, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, and Targum Yerusahmi, The Messiah: An Aramaic Interpretation; The Messianic Exegesis of the Targum*, Samson H. Levy, Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, 1974.)

[The Hebrew word *shiloh* should be rendered “whose it is,” that is, the scepter will not depart from Judah until He comes to whom it belongs.] In A.D. 6-7, King Herod's son and successor, Herod Archelaus, was dethroned and banished to Vienna, a city in Gaul. Archelaus was the second son of Herod the Great. The older son, Herod Antipater, had been murdered by Herod the Great, along with other family members. (It was quipped at the time that it was safer to be a dog in that household than a member of the family!) After the death of Herod (4 B.C.?), Archelaus had been placed over Judea as “Entharch” by Caesar Augustus. Broadly rejected, he was removed in A.D. 6-7. He was replaced by a Roman procurator named Caponius. The legal power of the Sanhedrin was immediately restricted and the adjudication of capital cases was lost.

This was normal Roman policy (Josephus, *Wars of the Jews*, 2:8. Also, *The Jerusalem Talmud*, Sanhedrin, folio 24.) The scepter had, indeed, been removed from Judah, **but Shiloh had come**. While the Jews wept in the streets of Jerusalem, a young son of a carpenter was growing up in Nazareth. He would present Himself as the *Meshiach Nagid*, Messiah the King, on the very day which had been predicted by the Angel Gabriel to Daniel five centuries earlier (Dan 9:24-27).<sup>24</sup>

[sceptre] Hebrew: *shebet* (HSN-7626), translated tribe and tribes 140 times; rod 34 times; staff (2 Samuel 23:21; 1 Chron. 11:23); darts (2 Samuel 18:14); and sceptre (Genesis 49:10; Numbers 24:17; Psalm 45:6; Isaiah 14:5; Ezekiel 19:11,14; Amos

<sup>23</sup> Dake's Study Notes, Dake's Study Bible

<sup>24</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

1:5,8; Zech. 10:11). It means the sceptre of government and rule shall not depart from Judah; i.e., Judah shall be the ruling tribe and from him shall come the Messiah who shall rule eternally and bring obedience to the people.

**[lawgiver]** Hebrew: *chaqqaq* (HSN-2710), translated lawgiver (Genesis 49:10; Numbers 21:18; Deut. 33:21; Psalm 60:7; Psalm 108:8; Isaiah 33:22); appointed (Proverbs 8:29); decree (Proverbs 8:15; Isaiah 10:1); and governors (Judges 5:9,14). The true meaning is, "the kingly sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the lawgiver's staff from between his feet until Shiloh come" (Genesis 49:10). Judah is called God's lawgiver (Psalm 60:7; Psalm 108:8; cp. Isaiah 33:22; James 4:12). Some versions read "a leader's staff," and others "a commander's staff."

**[until Shiloh come]** Judah's dominion lasts until:

1. Shiloh comes (Genesis 49:10). Shiloh is an epithet of the Messiah and can have no other meaning. It refers to the second coming of Christ who will fulfill the next part of the verse.
2. He gathers the people (Genesis 49:10). Unto Him (Shiloh) shall the people gather; that is, at Christ's second coming Israel will be gathered from the four quarters of the earth (Isaiah 11:10-12; Isaiah 60:8-9; Isaiah 66:19-21; Ezekiel 37; Matthew 24:31). The Messiah will rule Israel (Isaiah 9:6-7; Luke 1:32-33) and all nations when He comes (Daniel 2:44-45; Daniel 7:13-14,27; Zech. 14; Rev. 11:15; Rev. 20:4-6; Rev. 22:5).

**From Judah the scepter shall not depart**—The Jews have a quibble on the word **שֶׁבֶט** *shebet*, which we translate scepter; they say it signifies a staff or rod, and that the meaning of it is, that "afflictions shall not depart from the Jews till the Messiah comes;" that they are still under affliction and therefore the Messiah is not come. This is a miserable shift to save a lost cause. Their chief Targumist, Onkelos, understood and translated the word nearly as we do; and the same meaning is adopted by the Jerusalem Targum, and by all the ancient versions, the Arabic excepted, which has *kazeeb*, a rod; but in a very ancient MS. of the Pentateuch in my own possession the word *sebet* is used, which signifies a tribe. Judah shall continue a distinct tribe till the Messiah shall come; and it did so; and after his coming it was confounded with the others, so that all distinction has been ever since lost.

**Nor a teacher from his offspring**—I am sufficiently aware that the literal meaning of the original **מִבֵּין רַגְלָיו** *mibbeyn raglaiv* is from between his feet, and I am as fully satisfied that it should never be so translated; from between the feet and out of the thigh simply mean progeny, natural offspring, for reasons which surely need not be mentioned. The Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel, and the Jerusalem Targum, apply the whole of this prophecy, in a variety of very minute particulars, to the Messiah, and give no kind of countenance to the fictions of the modern Jews.<sup>25</sup>

Why was Judah—known for selling Joseph into slavery and trying to defraud his daughter-in-law—so greatly blessed? God had chosen Judah to be the ancestor of Israel's

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<sup>25</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary

line of kings (that is the meaning of “the scepter will not depart from Judah”). This may have been due to Judah’s dramatic change of character (Genesis 44:33-34). Judah’s line would produce the promised Messiah, Jesus.<sup>26</sup>

“Until he comes to whom it belongs” may also be translated, “until Shiloh comes.” What is *Shiloh*? The meaning of this difficult passage is disputed. Shiloh may be another name for the Messiah, because its literal meaning is “sent.” Shiloh might also refer to the Tent of Meeting set up at the city of Shiloh (Joshua 18:1).<sup>27</sup>

The preeminence of Judah (v. 8; cf. 27:29) is doubtless associated with King David’s derivation from that tribe (see 38:27-30). Scepter and ruler’s staff may thus be royal symbols, although they can also designate the stick or club of any military commander or tribal leader (cf. Num. 21:18, where the word rendered here as ruler’s staff is translated as the “maces” of “the nobles of the people”). V. 10 has traditionally been viewed as a messianic prophecy in both the Jewish and Christian traditions. Some commentators, beginning as early as the Aramaic translation known as *Targum Onkelos*, read the word rendered here as tribute ... to him as “his due” (Heb “*shelo*”): God Shall uphold His promise to Judah even till the royal figure comes to claim the dominion that is his due. Ibn Ezra, on the other hand, considers it possible to retain the traditional wording, “Shiloh,” in place of “*shai loh*” (tribute ... to him). Reading shall come in the sense of “shall come down,” like the setting sun (in Lev. 22:7, the verb is translated “sets”), he connects this verse to Ps. 78, which reports that God “forsook the tabernacle of *shiloh*,” “did choose the tribe of Judah” and “David, His servant” (vv. 60, 68, 70; see 1 Sam. 3:19-4:22; Jer. 7:12-15).<sup>28</sup>

### **Genesis 49:11**

**Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass’s colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes:**

In Genesis 49:11-12 the material prosperity of Judah is pictured—asses, vineyards, clothing, flocks, and milk.

**washing robes in wine.** In this blessing of Judah, the future prosperity of that tribe is symbolized by abundant fertility. Wine will be so plentiful that they will be able to wash their clothes in it. It is also possible this is a reference to the dyeing industry, but that would figure into future economic prosperity.

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<sup>26</sup> Life Application Notes

<sup>27</sup> Life Application Notes

<sup>28</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

## **Genesis 49:12**

**His eyes *shall be* red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.**

*(Deut 33:7) And this is the blessing of Judah: and he said, Hear, LORD, the voice of Judah, and bring him unto his people: let his hands be sufficient for him; and be thou an help to him from his enemies.*

### **Judah**

Judah's name means "praised," root "to praise" (Gen 49:8). He Intercedes for Joseph's life when brethren were about to slay him; proposes sale to the Ishmaelites (Gen 37:26,27). He has incest with Tamar, his daughter-in-law (Gen 38:12-26). His tribe is loyal to the house of David at the time of the revolt of the ten tribes (1 Kgs 12:20); led first division of Israel in their journeys (Num 10:14); commissioned of God to lead in the conquest of the promised land (Judg 1:1-3; 4-21) and made David king (2 Sam 2:1-11; 5:4,5).<sup>29</sup>

**Torah Class:** The first thing we notice is that Jacob has a lot more to say to Judah than to Judah's older brothers. Many excellent commentaries now tell us that Judah here receives the firstborn blessing. Well, that's only partially so. As I mentioned earlier, what Judah actually receives is only part of the blessing that goes to the firstborn. Since there are two primary elements to the firstborn blessing, 1) receiving double the amount of tribal wealth as any other inheritor, and 2) the official assumption of the leadership and authority over the tribe, we see that what Judah inherited was only the 2<sup>nd</sup> part: tribal authority and leadership. Back in Genesis 48, Joseph was given the other part of the firstborn blessing, the double-portion, and this was in the form of making Joseph's two sons equal with all of Jacob's sons. Therefore, Joseph received 2/12ths of all that was Israel, through his two sons.

Judah is the lion....an ancient symbol of regal status... Judah is the new leader of Israel. And, true to his name, Judah, which means praise, will have the praise of his brothers, and eventually the whole world, because out of him would come God's anointed Kings of Israel, and the Messiah. The royal line of David will come from Judah, and the right to rule Israel will remain with the tribe of Judah until, finally, Shiloh comes. Now, take a look at V10. This is another controversial verse in this chapter. Some Bibles use, like in mine, the words "to whom obedience belongs" in place of the word Shiloh. Let's take a look at this, because it is most interesting, if not important.

First, the word Shiloh appears in the oldest manuscripts we have, and in the Septuagint which was a Greek translation of the OT created 250 years before Christ. So, the word Shiloh, by everything reasonably evident, is part of the original text. Later in the OT, we will see that there is a town in Canaan called Shiloh, and it's there that the Tabernacle of the Wilderness will rest for many years. Interestingly, Shiloh will be in the territory of Ephraim. This is actually the first Holy City of the Holy Land. While we all think of Jerusalem in that regard, in reality Shiloh was first, and later the honor of being the holiest city was transferred to Jerusalem. But, even then, Shiloh remained a holy city in Israel for centuries to come, 2<sup>nd</sup> only to Jerusalem. Some scholars believe that this city of

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<sup>29</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

Shiloh is what was being referred to in this verse, though of course it was not yet in existence at the time of Jacob's blessing. But, if we render the meaning of Shiloh in Jacob's blessing to be the name of a future city, the verse doesn't make a lot of sense. For most certainly the scepter...that is, the authority to rule.... did not depart from Judah when the city of Shiloh was founded, nor did Judah's leadership decline as prophesied here, so we ought not to take this to mean a city.

The next popular explanation is that Shiloh is but a word that has the meaning "to whom obedience belongs", and that is what we find in most Bible versions. While this most certainly has the implication of referring to a Messiah, in order to achieve this meaning it takes actually assuming that one of the letters in the word "Shiloh" was handed down to us incorrectly...that is, that the Hebrew was misspelled (that the Hebrew letter "sheen" should have been a "seen"). There is no evidence that this was the case, and even if it seems to afford us a nice answer to what "Shiloh" is, we should not accept such a thing that does not trust the scripture to be what it is, without modifying it to help achieve an answer that suits us.

The last, and most appropriate, explanation is that Shiloh is another name for the Messiah. In other words, Shiloh is a proper noun, in this case, a name. What's kind of ironic is that the previous explanation is an attempt to prove the Messianic nature of this verse by modern day Christians who regarded the original Hebrew word Shiloh as having no literal meaning that they could discover.... so, they made one up.

Yet, beginning with the most ancient Hebrew commentary in existence (called Bereshit Rabba), the majority of Hebrew sages and scholars from times long past, agree that Shiloh is purely messianic in nature. It speaks of the Messiah, Shiloh. So, in the end, if Christians had not, for the last 1900 years, such an animosity towards the Jews, they could have had very early sources for their belief that this "Shiloh" was talking about the coming Yeshua of Nazareth; instead, they had to twist some meaning around, to our shame, that eventually wound up with the same result, anyway!

So, beginning right here in Genesis 49, we have it prophesied that the Messiah will come from the Hebrews, the nation of Israel, the tribe of Judah, the family of David. With the benefit of the hindsight we now have, knowing who the Messiah is, it would in no way be incorrect to read Genesis 49:10 as fulfilled prophecy, right? ..... "The scepter shall not pass from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his legs, until it is handed over to Jesus Christ." And, of course, that ruler ship has indeed been passed to Jesus.

One more thing about Judah, and we'll move on. Religious Jews have a big problem today. They continue to assert, correctly, that the Messiah... or, at least ONE of the Messiahs (because many Jews believe there will be 2)... is to be from the tribe of Judah, and more precisely, from the Jewish royal family of David. But, of course, they do NOT acknowledge that Yeshua, who revealed Himself about 30 AD, is that Messiah. So, the problem is that when that expected day arrives and a "messiach" reveals himself as such, how will the Jews ever be able to prove that it is actually Him, in the manner they prefer to prove such things.....by genealogy? Because, in 70 AD, the house of records in Jerusalem, and every document that proved the lineage of every Jewish family, was destroyed. Coupled with the nearly 1900 year exile and dispersal they suffered through after that, before returning to a re-born Israel in 1948, there is absolutely no way for any one alive today claiming to be Jewish, to prove it genealogically. Jesus WAS able to prove it, and His genealogy has never been, right up to this day, disputed by the Jews.

Even ultra-Orthodox Jews today readily admit that Yeshua of Nazareth existed, that He WAS of the tribe of Judah that he WAS of the line of David. Yet, due to the blindness that has overcome so many Israelites, they cannot see the reality of Jesus' being Messiah, or that it is hopeless that they could, by their very own requirements, EVER prove that whoever it is they think will be Messiah, actually is.<sup>30</sup>

### **Genesis 49:13**

**Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he *shall be* for an haven of ships; and his border *shall be* unto Zidon.**

*(Deut 33:18-19) And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and, Issachar, in thy tents. They shall call the people unto the mountain; there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness: for they shall suck of the abundance of the seas, and of treasures hid in the sand.*

#### **Zebulun**

Zebulun would be enriched by seaborne trade, between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean (though it did not actually border the Mediterranean; cf. Josh 19:10-11). In area of Galilee, to the north of Issachar and south of Asher and Naphtali, between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean (Jos 19:10-16), according to ancient prophecy was to enjoy a large share of our Lord's public ministry (Isa 9:1,2 Mt 4:12-16).<sup>31</sup>

**[Zebulun]** The sixth son of Leah (Genesis 30:19-20).

**[haven of ships]** Zebulun had great trade with Tyre and Sidon.

Zebulun's lot or portion in the division of the Promised Land extended from the Mediterranean Sea on the west, to the lake of Gennesareth on the east; see his division, Joshua 19:10, etc. The Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel paraphrases the passage thus: "Zebulun shall be on the coasts of the sea, and he shall rule over the havens; he shall subdue the provinces of the sea with his, ships, and his border shall extend unto Sidon."<sup>32</sup>

The boundaries of Zebulun in Josh. 19:10-15 suggest that it was an inland tribe, but perhaps this was not always the case.

### **Genesis 49:14**

**Issachar is a strong ass couching down between two burdens:**

**[Issachar]** The fifth son of Leah (Genesis 30:17-18).

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<sup>30</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

<sup>31</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

<sup>32</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary

**[strong ass couching down between two burdens]** Speaking prophetically of Issachar paying tribute (Genesis 49:14-15).

**Issachar is a strong ass**—חַמֹּר גֵרֵם *chamor garem* is properly a strong-limbed ass; couching between two burdens—bearing patiently, as most understand it, the fatigues of agriculture, and submitting to exorbitant taxes rather than exert themselves to drive out the old inhabitants.

The two burdens literally mean the two sacks or panniers, one on each side of the animal's body; and couching down between these refers to the well-known propensity of the ass, whenever wearied or overloaded, to lie down even with its burden on its back.<sup>33</sup>

**donkey habits.** The blessing of Issachar contains this characterization of a strong animal, which is sometimes stubborn and lazy and may sit down unexpectedly in an inconvenient place. The idea may also be suggestive of a tribe that allies itself with outsiders or is forced to serve others (contra Judges 5:15).<sup>34</sup>

### **Genesis 49:15**

**And he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute.**

#### **Issachar**

The word *hàamor gerem*, literally, *bony ass*, designates a powerful beast of burden that submits himself to the galling yoke without complaint in order that he may be free to lie quietly in ease and comfort. Issachar, located in the fertile broad pleasant plain of Esdraelon, was often subject to invading armies. Jacob was predicting that the tribe of Issachar would submit to the Canaanite invader, who would fasten the yoke upon them. Instead of fighting, the men of this tribe would submissively allow themselves to become slaves of the peoples of the land. They would prefer shame and slavery to courageous action.

Issachar was Jacob's 9th son, by Leah, *sekhari*, "my hire" (Gen 30:18). The prophetic blessing pronounced by Jacob corresponds with that of Moses (Gen 49:14,15; Deut 33:18,19); only Judah and Dan were stronger (64,300, Num 26:25 to 87,000, 1 Chr 7:5). Issachar got the richest portion: Jezreel Valley (1Chr 12:40).<sup>35</sup>

**[rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute]** The valley of Esdraelon was fertile and subject to raids. Rather than give up their portion or defend it by the sword, the tribe consented to pay tribute (Genesis 49:14-15).

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<sup>33</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary

<sup>34</sup> Bible Background Commentary

<sup>35</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

The pronouncement on Issachar seems to be a criticism. It is a strong, but lazy, tribe that became a toiling serf, presumable for Canaanites in the northern regions that were its home (cf. Judg. 1:33). There is probably a play here on the tribe's name (as if it were "*ish sakhar*," "hired man"). Influenced by 1 Chron. 12:33, the Midrash reconceives Issachar's service as the teaching of Torah and the rendering of *halakhic* (i.e., legal) rulings (Gen. Rab. 99:10).<sup>36</sup>

**Torah Class:** What we see here is that it is said that Zebulun's destiny is to be in commercial ventures: he'd be a merchant and a trader. Even more, his ancestors would have much to do with shipping and other maritime industry. And, hundreds of years into the future, we find that Zebulun's territorial allotment will put them as a land bridge between the Sea of Galilee, and the Mediterranean. Now, they never really possessed territory all the way to them seashore, but they had shipping and trade interests on both Seas. But more, directly through their territory ran one of the greatest trading routes of their era or any other: Via Maris, the Way of the Sea. It began in Damascus, and wound its way all the way to Egypt, and was an enormous economic boon for the tribe of Zebulun. Just as Zebulun's blessing is short and sweet, so is the tribe's Biblical history. Very little is said about them. No person of significance is mentioned as coming from the tribe of Zebulun. However, in the "Song of Deborah and Barak", Zebulun is mentioned as being one of several tribes that committed many men to fighting against the King of Hazor, in the Valley of Jezreel, which was in Zebulun's territory. Though precious little is said in the Bible about Zebulun, what is said could be characterized as positive and complimentary. Even less is known about Issachar than his brother Zebulun. In fact, so little is known about Issachar, that the ancient Israelite scholars went out of their way to invent good things to say about his descendants. Primarily, it is that while the ancestors of Zebulun toiled away as merchants, it was to support the tribe of Issachar who were great Torah scholars. Now, this is so easy to debunk as simply a self-serving fable, because after Babylon, when the vast amount of rabbinical writings and rulings and commentary was created, is when the Tradition was created that Torah study was the highest calling of any Jew. Conversely, being a merchant, being absorbed with dealing with such material matters as trade and money, was the lowest. So, the notion that the merchant tribe would be the supporters of the tribe of learned Torah scholars was quite an ideal, and fit in very well with the social agenda of the Jewish post-Babylon time when these legends and traditions concerning Issachar and Zebulun were created.

This might be a good time to mention that while an enormous wealth of information and exciting finds are waiting for anyone who can find the time and stamina to study the Talmud, one should only use it for the purpose of its historical content, helping to understand societal structure in those ancient times, what their thought processes and agendas were and how they evolved, even how certain ceremonies occurred, what they represented, how they were performed; sometimes the Talmud can help us put certain things from the Bible in proper chronological order. But, what is there is not inspired of God. It is in no way on par with the Holy Scriptures. Yet, it is not a pack of lies or inaccuracies either. Generally speaking, the writers and commentators were the best and finest Jewish scholars, sages, and historians of their day. But, what is written can only be

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<sup>36</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

counted upon as earthly wisdom and knowledge, not of the Spirit. Unfortunately, the Jewish people have for thousands of years put the Talmud, Tradition, on par with, or even above, the Holy Scriptures. And, Jesus really throttled and verbally scourged the academic elite of His day for doing that; even telling them their so-called knowledge of Godly matters was really of their TRUE father, the Devil. He was referring to the huge and growing body of Tradition that was dominating Jewish life.

One more thing about Issachar and we'll move forward with the next son's blessing. Issachar being called an "ass" or a "donkey" sounds pretty demeaning to us; it could get you kicked out of class or even smacked around a little bit for saying that to somebody. But, it was not so to the ear of people in Jacob's day. This was not a derogatory remark; donkeys were valued creatures that were a combination of taxicabs and the trucking industry of that era. In sports today, we might call a player a "diesel", short for diesel truck. And, of course, it means that athlete is powerful, single minded and straightforward, no-nonsense; the opposite of finesse. Athletes that are referred to as "diesels" wear that title proudly. It would have been the same with Issachar being referred to as a strong donkey.<sup>37</sup>

### **Genesis 49:16**

**Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel.**

[Dan] First son of Bilhah, Rachel's maid (Genesis 30:5-6).

Govern ("yadin") puns on the tribe's name ("dan").

### **Genesis 49:17**

**Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.**

The Danites became loose in morals and unscrupulous in reprisal against neighbors who invaded them often.

**Dan shall be a serpent**—The original word is נָחָשׁ *nachash*, and we have seen on Genesis 3 that this has a great variety of significations. It is probable that a serpent is here intended, but of what kind we know not; yet as the principal reference in the text is to guile, cunning, etc., the same creature may be intended as in Genesis 3.<sup>38</sup>

**horse domestication.** Reference to a rider on the horse assumes an advanced level of domestication of the horse. This was achieved in the third millennium. In Mesopotamia horseback riders are depicted in the middle of the third millennium, but in Egyptian

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<sup>37</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

<sup>38</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary

materials not until a millennium later. Horses were usually used for pulling chariots, and horseback riding was not common.

## **Genesis 49:18**

**I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD.**

*(Deut 33:22) And of Dan he said, Dan is a lion's whelp: he shall leap from Bashan.*

### **Dan**

Dan shows another disparity between calling and achievement (cf. vv. 3-4). Dan was to provide justice ("Dan" means "judge"), but the tribe chose treachery, like a snake by the roadside. Hebrew *nahàash* signifies not only a snake in the grass, but a venomous reptile with deadly fangs. In the time of the Judges the first major practice of idolatry appeared in the tribe of Dan (Judg 18:30). In 931 B.C. Jeroboam set up a golden calf in Dan to provide opportunity for pagan worship. The omission of Dan in Rev 7 is commonly attributed to this.

This tribe was the first to fall into idolatry (Judg 18:30); slighted in genealogies: names of his sons omitted (Gen 46:23; Num 26:42); name blotted out (1 Chr 1-10; Rev 7); mentioned last (Num 10:25; Jos 19:47-49; 1 Chr 27:16-22).<sup>39</sup>

In the middle of his prophecy to Dan, Jacob exclaimed, "I look for your deliverance, O LORD." He was emphasizing to Dan that he would be a strong leader only if his trust was in God, not in his natural strength or ability. Those who are strong, attractive, or talented often find it easier to trust in themselves than in God who gave them their gifts. Remember to thank God for what you are and have so your trust does not become misplaced.<sup>40</sup>

This verse seems to be a devout interpolation unrelated to the context (cf. Ps. 119:166). It contains the only mention of the four letter name of God (Lord) in ch. 49.<sup>41</sup>

**Torah Class:** We now have finished with the first group of 6 of Jacob's sons, all provided by his wife Leah. Next we see the blessings given to the 4 children of Jacob's concubines. But, these 4 were actually born after Leah produced Judah, but before she bore Issachar and then Zevulun. These concubines are often referred to in the Bible as the handmaidens Zilpah and Bilah; servants to Jacob's two wives, Leah and Rachel. While among themselves we can be sure that the 12 sons of Jacob had established a pecking order, we can also be sure that the 4 sons born to the handmaidens were often pushed to the bottom of the totem pole. Other than for Jacob's unabashed favoritism towards his wife Rachel and the 2 sons she gave him, Joseph and Benjamin, there is no indication that Jacob himself thought any less of these 4 sons produced by Zilpah and

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<sup>39</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

<sup>40</sup> Life Application Notes

<sup>41</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

Bilah, than the other 8. But, traditions of the era demanded that sons of concubines didn't carry an equal status as the sons of a man's legal wives.

Aware that his 12 sons were only too human, Jacob was probably concerned that those 4 sons not in any way be construed as 2<sup>nd</sup> class citizens. And, this likely explains the kind of odd statement in V16 where Jacob says, "Dan will judge his people **as one of the tribes of Israel.**" Why would Jacob say "as one of the tribes of Israel"? While obvious to us that all 12 sons were legitimately of Israel, because Dan was one of these 4 sons of his concubines and not his 2 wives, Jacob wanted to make it clear that they were all 12 part of Israel. ....one as much as the other.

Dan's name means "judged". Although Bilah, Rachel's handmaiden, was Dan's biological mother, Rachel as her master had the rights to name the child. And, Rachel exclaimed, "God has judged me", when she couldn't produce a child for Jacob, but her servant girl did. It was a great shame upon on a woman who was unable to bear her husband children. So, this child was stuck with the name, "judged".

Probably the most famous descendant of Dan was the super-naturally strong Samson. And, Samson was one of the 12 judges (in Hebrew, shofet) mentioned in the Bible, that were raised up by God over a 250 year period called the time of the Judges. That is, the time frame covered by the book of Judges in our Bibles. Judges appeared in many of the 12 tribes, not just Dan.

Dan was given the unenviable territorial allotment that had them sharing a border with the fierce, and seemingly unconquerable, Philistines. Just a quick note: Palestine is simply the Greek word for Philistine. So, when we talk about the Palestinians of the West Bank, or the creation of a Palestinian State, what we are actually saying is Philistines of the West Bank, and the creation of a Philistine state. And, it might shake you up a tad to know that, prophetically speaking, the Bible tells us that exact thing is supposed to happen in the last days.

Samson was brought forth by God as a deliverer for the tribe of Dan from the oppression of the Philistines. Even though all the Biblical Judges, the Shofet, were called by the same title of "Judge", in fact they performed different functions. Some were prophets, some were military leaders, others were rulers, and some were deliverers like Sampson. It is interesting to note that there is mention of a "serpent" in describing Dan's future characteristics. And, while every tribe of Israel struggled with idolatry, giving in to Satan, perhaps none were as vexed by this problem as the tribe of Dan. Even the great Judge Sampson had a terrible time resisting the pagan influences of the Philistines, as we see in scripture how he imbibed himself with prostitutes, loved to party with these pagans, had a fling with Delilah, and even married a Philistine girl.

Many in the tribe of Dan so wearied of battling the Philistines that they eventually gave up control over their land inheritance, and moved northward, near the border of modern day Lebanon. They conquered a city called Laish, renamed it "Dan", and many of the tribe moved to the area. By the way: the ruins of this city are visible today, and many in this class have visited them. Immediately the leaders of Dan set up a carved image, an idol, assigned priests to it, and the city became a center of pagan cult worship, and stayed that way for the next several hundred years.

Dan's tribe diminished, over time, in size and importance. In fact, not only are they not even mentioned in the O.T. listing of tribal genealogies of 1<sup>st</sup> Chronicles 2, they are

omitted in the N.T. listing of tribes that will make up the 144,000 sealed Israelite witnesses told about in Revelation 7.

Now, does their being excluded in the tribal makeup of Revelation 7 mean that Dan is extinct, for all time? Apparently not; for in the Millennial Kingdom, the 1000-year reign of Christ as described in Ezekiel 48, Dan DOES receive an inheritance. We need to remember that the timing of the 144,000 sealed Israelites takes place during what Christians call the Tribulation period (what the Jews call the Time of Jacob's Troubles) and the Millennial Kingdom comes after that. So, Dan is around during the Tribulation, but possibly he's up to his old tricks and there's not a single Danite worthy to be part of the 144,000 sealed witnesses. I guess we'll have to wait and see.

Now, let me show you something that I think answers some questions about Dan. I told you that Dan means "judge" or more accurately "judged" (at least as we think of in our modern English language). Now, as I have explained often, Hebrew is what is called a root-word language. You take a word (that has a specific meaning), add, subtract, or change a letter or two (usually what is being changed are the vowel sounds), and PRESTO, we have a new word. BUT.....that new word is related in meaning to the original word. For instance, in Genesis 15:14, God says: "But I will also JUDGE that nation whom they serve.....". The Hebrew word used for judge in this verse is *din*.....notice the relationship to the word *dan*. In between the letter dalet and nun (d and n), only the vowel has changed, so the two words are related. The point is, that *din* and *dan* both carry the idea of judgment. That is, a retaliation, a punishment, a penalty. Now, this is as opposed to another entirely different use (in the English language) of the word "judge", as we find in those books of the Bible called Judges....in Hebrew, shofet. Shofet means a person who is a magistrate; usually a person who makes legal rulings, or is a leader or a decision maker. A good analogy is our modern American legal system where we have a judge presiding over a court of law. So, here we have two words, dan and shofet, that both wind up being translated using the English word "judge". But, they have two totally unrelated meanings in Hebrew.

Point being that the name Dan was not indicating a person who presides over a court, or makes legal rulings, or leads. Rather, Dan indicates someone receiving a divine judgment against them. And, of course, that was the sense of the word that Rachel used to name this child.....Dan.....born by her handmaiden Bilah.....because Rachel felt that the reason her own womb had dried up was that she had been "judged"... ..punished... ..by God. So, as was tradition, she named her child after some event or circumstance that surrounded that child's birth.

And, here we have this son named "judged", Dan, having all sorts of calamitous things happening to it.....even being omitted from the list of tribes in Revelation 7.....and so Dan's destiny was completely reflective of his name.

Verse 18 of Chapter 49 has Jacob suddenly saying "I wait for your deliverance, Adonai". Or, better. "I wait for your salvation, Yehoveh". It is unknown whether this statement was meant to be attached to the blessing of Dan, or that Jacob in a moment of ecstasy, knowing that his time was but moments away, shouted this out to the Lord in praise. Some think that the mention in the previous couple of verses concerning **the serpent that bites the heel**, is a reminder of the scene in Genesis 3:15, about how the woman will produce a seed who will crush the head of the serpent (Satan), and the serpent will bruise the heel of that seed.....all this an obvious Messianic reference. If

that's the case, then Jacob shouting out "I wait for the Savior" is all the more meaningful. But, it really isn't clear enough for me to say for sure that is what is happening here, and I don't want to allegorize to make it appear so. So, we'll just have to wonder.<sup>42</sup>

### **Genesis 49:19**

**Gad, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last.**

*(Deut 33:20-21) And of Gad he said, Blessed be he that enlargeth Gad: he dwelleth as a lion, and teareth the arm with the crown of the head. And he provided the first part for himself, because there, in a portion of the lawgiver, was he seated; and he came with the heads of the people, he executed the justice of the LORD, and his judgments with Israel.*

Three of the six Hebrew words in verse 19 are a play on the name Gad ("attack"): **Gad will be attacked by** a raid of *attackers*, **but he will attack**. The verb *gadad* means "to break into" or "to attack." Border raids were often experienced by the tribes settled east of the Jordan River (1 Chr 5:18-19).

#### **Gad**

Gad was Jacob's 7th son, by Zilpah, Leah's handmaid and the full brother of Asher (Gen 30:11-13;46:16,18). His name means "fortune; luck." This tribe was fierce and warlike; they were "strong men of might, men of war for the battle, that could handle shield and buckler, their faces the faces of lions, and like roes upon the mountains for swiftness" (1Chr 12:8 5:19-22). Elijah was of this tribe (1Kgs 17:1).<sup>43</sup>

**[Gad]** First son of Zilpah, Leah's maid (Genesis 30:9-11).

**[a troop shall overcome him]** Gad would struggle to hold his possession.

**[but he shall overcome at the last]** All Israel will overcome all enemies under the Messiah (Isaiah 11:10-16; Zech. 14).

The Hebrew plays repeatedly on Gad's name.

**Torah Class:** The tribe of Gad, another of the children of Jacob's 2 concubines, was next up. And, his blessing is quite short..... only about a dozen words in length. Basically, it says that Gad is going to be constantly oppressed and under attack, but in the end, Gad will overcome.

If we look at the territory Gad was eventually given, we see that Gad will be one of the tribes that, like Reuben, decided NOT to enter into the Promised Land. Instead, Gad's descendants settled on the EAST side of the Jordan River. His borders were very exposed to several longtime enemies, including the Moabites and the Ammonites (descendants of

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<sup>42</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

<sup>43</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

Lot), and much like Dan, the tribe of Gad found themselves constantly at war. On the other hand, this constant warfare led to Gad becoming regarded as the fiercest of warriors.

Interestingly, Gad is not credited in the Bible with any particular outstanding person belonging to that tribe. Elijah, by Tradition, is said to be a Gadite, but that is strictly legend and has never been verified. The most famous was probably Jair, who was a Shofet, a judge, a leader, over Gad for a time.

In the O.T., we will occasionally run into the geographical name of “Gilead”. Gilead and Gad are generally used interchangeably to describe where the tribe of Gad settled.<sup>44</sup>

### **Genesis 49:20**

**Out of Asher his bread *shall be fat*, and he shall yield royal dainties.**

*(Deut 33:24-25) And of Asher he said, Let Asher be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil. Thy shoes shall be iron and brass; and as thy days, so shall thy strength be.*

#### **Asher**

Asher would be fertile and productive, providing rich food. That tribe settled along the rich northern coast of Canaan: Mt. Lebanon to Mediterranean (Josh 19:24-31). “Royal Dainties” = workmen and materials: to David (2 Sam 5:11) and Solomon (1 Kgs 5:1-10). This tribe kept Passover under Hezekiah (in contrast to others); 2 Chr 30:1,10,11 and to this tribe belonged the prophetess Anna (Lk 2:36).<sup>45</sup>

**[Asher]** Second son of Zilpah, Leah's maid (Genesis 30:12-13).

**[his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties]** Referring to the bountiful prosperity of this tribe.

The royal dainties may have been served to Canaanite kings (cf. Judg. 1:32, on Naphtali; and vv. 14-15 n., above).

**Torah Class:** Asher is the 3rd of Jacob’s concubines’ 4 sons, and once again we can’t help but notice the very short and succinct nature of the blessing given to him. Ashur means “happy”, and certainly the blessing Jacob gave to Ashur and his descendants was one of wellbeing, if not downright good fortune.

Ashur’s portion of land was some of the most fertile in the Holy Lands. Stretching between the land of Tyre on to Mount Carmel, their corn and olive oil was famous for its quality and quantity. Apparently Ashur shunned military conflicts, and chose a very

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<sup>44</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

<sup>45</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

peaceful life of agriculture. Consequently, we read of no great military commander, leader, or even judge coming from Ashur.<sup>46</sup>

## **Genesis 49:21**

**Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words.**

*(Deut 33:23) And of Naphtali he said, O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the LORD: possess thou the west and the south.*

### **Naphtali**

Naphtali, like a doe, would be a free mountain people. Deborah sang of the people of Naphtali risking their lives “on the heights of the field” (Judg 5:18). That tribe settled northwest of the Sea of Kinnereth (Galilee). He was the 5th son of Jacob, the 2nd born to him by Rachel’s handmaid, Bilhah. He was full brother of Dan (Gen 30:7). At his birth Rachel is said to have exclaimed, “wrestlings of God”—i.e., “mighty wrestlings”—“have I wrestled.”<sup>47</sup>

**[Naphtali]** Second son of Bilhah, Rachel's maid (Genesis 30:7-8).

**[he giveth goodly words]** Expressing the poetic and speaking characteristics of this tribe (Genesis 49:20).

**Torah Class:** Naphtali is the last of the 4 sons of Jacob’s wives’ handmaidens. And, true to form, Naphtali is given a very abbreviated blessing.

Naphtali is told that his descendants shall be as a *hind* let loose. A hind is female deer, a doe. And, we find many passages throughout the Bible that make reference to a “hind” . . . always in a favorable light.

We’re told in this single verse that Naphtali is destined to be of graceful beauty . . . Swift, and quick to react.

When we look at Naphtali in times after they entered into the promised land, we find the most prominent mention of that tribe in Judges 5, in the Song of Deborah and Barak, where Barak and his tribe of Naphtali are singled out for the special acts of bravery in a significant military conflict between the Israelites and some Canaanite tribes. For me, though, most significant is an unprecedented honor the tribe of Naphtali received; for it was in Naphtali’s territory, now part of the Galilee, that Jesus recruited the most of His disciples and then began His ministry. Interestingly, the prophet Isaiah, in Chapter 9 verse 1, prophesied that the insignificant territory of Naphtali would be seen as a receiving a great light. And, of course, Isaiah 9 is one of the greatest prophecies concerning the coming of Christ in the entire Bible. So, Naphtali was greatly blessed, even if not one other thing of importance could be said about this tribe.<sup>46</sup>

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<sup>46</sup> Torahclass.com/index.html, Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

<sup>47</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

### **Genesis 49:22**

**Joseph is a fruitful bough, *even* a fruitful bough by a well; *whose* branches run over the wall:**

**[Joseph]** First son of Rachel (Genesis 30:22-26).

**[fruitful bough, *even* a fruitful bough by a well; *whose* branches run over the wall]**

Referring to the fruitfulness of Joseph through Ephraim and Manasseh (note, "Genesis 48:5).

Joseph was indeed fruitful, with some heroic descendants. Among them were Joshua, who would lead the Israelites into the promised land (Joshua 1:10-11); Deborah, Gideon, and Jephthah, judges of Israel (Judges 4:4; Judges 6:11-12; Judges 11:11); and Samuel, a great prophet (1 Samuel 3:19).

Like Judah (v. 9), Issachar (v. 14), Naphtali (v. 21), and Benjamin (v.27), Joseph is described as an animal. (Even if the alternative suggested in the translation note is accepted, the image is still one of fertility and vigor.)<sup>48</sup>

### **Genesis 49:23**

**The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot *at him*, and hated him:**

**[archers have sorely grieved him, and shot *at him*, and hated him]** Picturing many enemies of Joseph and his descendants, beginning with his own brothers and including others who fought against Ephraim and Manasseh.

### **Genesis 49:24**

**But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty *God* of Jacob; (from thence *is* the shepherd, the stone of Israel:)**

Jacob took up the promise of fruitfulness from the name of Joseph's son Ephraim ("fruitful") and lavished the promise of victory (Gen. 49:23-24a) and prosperity (v. 25b) on Joseph's two tribes. Victory in battle was experienced by Joshua, Deborah, and Samuel, all of the tribe of Ephraim, and by Gideon and Jephthah, both of Manasseh's tribe.

**[his bow abode in strength]** Expressing the strong moral character of Joseph in his afflictions and the strength of his descendants.

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<sup>48</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

**[made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob]** God was the source of Joseph's strength.

**[from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel]** From God will come the Messiah, the Shepherd and the Stone of Israel (John 10; 1 Peter 2:4-8,25). See The Messiah—Seven Figures in Genesis.

These verses celebrate the times God rescued Joseph when his enemies attacked him. So often we struggle by ourselves, forgetting that God is able to help us fight our battles, whether they are against men with weapons or against spiritual forces. Joseph was able to draw closer to God as adversity mounted. To trust God to rescue you shows great faith. Can you trust him when injury or persecution is directed at you? Such spiritual battles require teamwork between courageous, faithful people and a mighty God.

Like the rest of the tribal sayings, the image of Joseph under assault relates to the subsequent history of the tribe. It also recalls, however, Joseph's brothers' early hostility in the preceding narrative (ch. 37).

The unusual titles of the deity, *the Mighty One of Jacob* (or bull of Jacob"), *the shepherd*, and *the Rock of Israel* may attest to an early date and Canaanite affinities.

### **Genesis 49:25**

***Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb:***

**[who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee]** Predictions that God would help and bless Joseph and his seed with manifold blessings (Genesis 49:25-26). These blessings made Ephraim, the successor of Joseph, one of the strongest tribes which inherited the very center of Palestine. It was as strong as Judah and contended with Judah for the sovereignty. The struggles between the two helped bring about the division of Israel after Solomon.

**[blessings of heaven ...]** Seven blessings of Joseph:

1. Fruitfulness in offspring (Genesis 49:22)
2. Help from God in adversity (Genesis 49:23-25)
3. Blessings of heaven (rains, Genesis 49:25)
4. Blessings of the deep (Hebrew: *tehowm* (HSN-8415), the deep, seas;
5. Blessings of the breasts (Genesis 49:25)
6. Blessings of the womb (Genesis 49:25)
7. Blessings of Jacob (Genesis 49:26)

**Blessings lying in the deep beneath**—Whatever riches could be gained from the sea or rivers, from mines and minerals in the bowels of the earth, and from abundant springs

in different parts of his inheritance. Our translation of this line is excessively obscure: Blessings of the deep that lieth under. What is it that lies under the deep: By connecting **ברכה** bircoth, blessings, with **רבעת** robetseth, lying, all ambiguity is avoided, and the text speaks a plain and consistent sense.<sup>49</sup>

**The blessings of the breasts and of the womb**—A numerous offspring, and an abundance of cattle. The progeny of Joseph, by Ephraim and Manasseh, amounted at the first census or enumeration (Numbers 1). to 75,900 men, which exceeded the sum of any one tribe; Judah, the greatest of the others, amounting to no more than 74,600. Indeed, Ephraim and Manasseh had multiplied so greatly in the days of Joshua, that a common lot was not sufficient for them. See their complaint, Joshua 17:14.<sup>50</sup>

**Torah Class:** One can only imagine Jacob's anticipation of getting around to the official blessing of his most favored son. One can also only imagine his eleven brothers bracing themselves for what they knew was coming: praise heaped upon praise....blessing heaped upon blessing; the double-portion going to Joseph seeming to them to be double of theirs, AT THE LEAST!!

But, let us remember a very important factor in this blessing of Joseph: while it would happen in the NAME of Joseph, it would come about under the tribal authority of Ephraim and, to a lesser degree, Manasseh. For all practical purposes, once Joseph's two sons reached maturity, married, and had children of their own, there would be no more named tribe of Joseph: just Ephraim and Manasseh. Joseph would just be a memory. And, as we can recall from Genesis 48, it was Ephraim to whom all the rights and honors of Joseph would accumulate because Jacob also gave Ephraim the firstborn blessing, even though Manasseh would also prosper of its own right. Now, let me say that again: remember, when Jacob gave Joseph the firstborn blessing, he did it in the form of naming Ephraim and Manasseh to supersede Joseph, and further, he pronounced that Ephraim was to be considered the firstborn. Joseph did not get the honor that a father typically gets to pronounce the firstborn blessing upon his own children; because, at the moment of that cross-handed blessing, Jacob became those two boys father..... instead of Joseph.

Perhaps the overriding theme of this blessing upon Joseph, which is to be carried forward primarily under the banner of Ephraim, is FRUITFULNESS. This fruitfulness is not only told of Joseph's personal life, it tells of his descendants' destiny. Yet, this fruitfulness came with a high cost; Joseph endured much in his life. His fruitfulness was not a result of cleverness, or good fortune, or having things just handed over to him. His fruitfulness was a result of his faithfulness. And, His faithfulness a result of His absolute, unwavering trust in God. I wonder how many of us could have endured all those years in prison under false charges, let alone being rejected by our family the way Joseph was, and then forgiving all. Not only forgiving but then blessing those who had done to him such incredibly pitiless, merciless, wrongs.

And, beyond even that, having such a sustaining faith that he refused all bitterness, because he knew without doubt, that this was all part of God's divine plan for his life..... even if as it happened it made absolutely no sense, and was so painful.

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<sup>49</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary

<sup>50</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary

Maybe to those who run the good race in their lives, clinging to the faith no matter the circumstances, these words of Jacob reveal God's heart towards them..... towards us: blessing upon blessing upon more blessing.

Historically speaking, the fruitfulness of Ephraim and Manasseh was most apparent. Manasseh received the largest of the territorial allotments, spanning both the east and west banks of the Jordan River.

In the first chapter of Numbers, we see that together, the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh (that is, the WHOLE tribe of Joseph) was the largest at 75,900 men. Not surprisingly, the tribe who received the other half of the split firstborn blessing, Judah, was second largest at 74,600. Yet, by the time of the census of Numbers 26, something around 40 or so years later, Judah's population only grew marginally to 76,500, while the combined population of Ephraim and Manasseh jumped to 85,200. Fruitfulness was promised to Joseph, and fruitfulness is what he got.

And, as we are only now, within the last decade, beginning to understand, Ephraim's fruitfulness may have grown to proportions that are staggering. Remember, it was Ephraim that eventually dominated and absorbed every tribe of Israel except for Judah and Benjamin. Further, when that one huge super-tribe named Ephraim that was made up from 10 tribes, was overcome by the Assyrians and scattered throughout the known world....the known GENTILE world..... most of Ephraim joined their genes with the genes of the gentiles. And, as we have recently discovered, the tribes of Ephraim who retained their identity throughout the centuries.....but live in isolated areas of the world....also number in the millions. Who among us in this world has the genes of the tribes forming Ephraim in them, we don't know. But, one could guess that it's in the hundreds of millions. Fruitfulness fulfilled.

And, that in itself is yet another fulfillment of Genesis 48, verse 19: ".....his (Ephraim's) descendants will become the fullness of the gentile nations". This has literally happened. The one thing that is still not completely clear, though its getting clearer, is the precise way this matter of the split blessing going to Ephraim is going to fully manifest itself. Will this be a strictly physical matter..... genealogical.... that those gentiles who biologically, but unknowingly, possess Ephraim's genes in their bodies are in for a significant blessing? Or, will it be a strictly spiritual matter, that God's blessing upon the gentile world was predicated upon those who have benefited from identifying with Ephraim-Israel? That is, that we gentile believers identify, spiritually, with Israel, as Paul instructs us in Romans 11. Or, could it possibly be some combination of both the physical and the spiritual?

What we need to take away from this is that ALL Believers in Yeshua are destined to identify with Israel. And, Ephraim sits smack in the middle of making this identity real, and not merely philosophical or a wonderful ideal. Ephraim is like a magnificent bridge that organically and spiritually connects the world of the Jews, with the world of the gentiles.<sup>51</sup>

Shaddai is presumable a variant of El Shaddai

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<sup>51</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

## Word Focus

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### Almighty

(Heb. shadday) (17:1; 28:3; 35:11; 43:14; 48:3; 49:25; Job 37:23) H7706: This divine name in Hebrew is 'El Shadday. 'El means God, and Shadday is probably related to the Akkadian word for “mountain,” or to a Hebrew verb meaning “mighty.” God is “mountainlike.” He is powerful, majestic, awe-inspiring, and enduring. Just like a mountain, He provides a shelter from the elements and from evil (Ps. 91:1, 2). Therefore, 'El Shadday can mean “Majestic Deity” or “the God Who Provides My Refuge.”

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### **Genesis 49:26**

**The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.**

*(Deut 33:13-17) And of Joseph he said, Blessed of the LORD be his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath, And for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon, And for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills, And for the precious things of the earth and fulness thereof, and for the good will of him that dwelt in the bush: let the blessing come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him that was separated from of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh.*

### **Joseph**

Jacob bestowed on Joseph the greater blessings because he was the prince among his brothers (cf. 41:41). His name means “may he (God) add sons” (Gen 30:24). He was the firstborn of Rachel, Jacob’s loved wife; favored, despised, sold, exalted (Gen 37-50) cf. over 100 ways a “type” of Christ.

### **Ephraim**

He was the second son of Joseph (Gen 41:52) and was adopted by Jacob; blessed before Manasseh (Gen 48:5); became the leading tribe of the Northern Kingdom (of “Israel”); Isa 7:2-17; Jer 31:9,20. Later, sometimes used as a synecdoche for the Northern Kingdom. The N tribes never did desire to yield to David’s reign...

### **Manasseh**

His name means (“Making to forget”): First son of Joseph and Asenath (Gen 41:50,51; 46:20). Also adopted by Jacob, this tribe was renowned for its valor: Gideon in the W

(Judg 6:15); Jephthah in the E (Judg 11:1). Their inheritance was ½ tribe east of Jordan ( Num 32:33,39-42) and ½ tribe west of Jordan ( Josh 16:9; 17:5-11).<sup>52</sup>

The term my ancestors (“*horay*”) is otherwise unattested. The Septuagint and the parallels in Deut. 33:15 and Hab. 3:6 suggest that the word is actually “mountains” (“*harerei*”) and that the word after it (“*ad*”) means not “to,” but “ancient.” Utmost bounds (“*ta’avat*”), another unique term, is then more plausibly derived from a root associated with “desire” (“*vh*”). If this reconstruction were to be accepted, the first sentence would read: “The blessings of your father Surpass the blessings of the ancient mountains That which is most desired in the eternal hills.”<sup>53</sup>

### **Genesis 49:27**

**Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.**

*(Deut 33:12) And of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the LORD shall dwell in safety by him; and the LORD shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders.*

“...between his shoulders”: that is, on his sides or borders. Mount Zion, on which stood the city of Jerusalem, belonged to Judah; but Mount Moriah, the site of the sacred edifice, lay in the confines of Benjamin.

### **Benjamin**

The youngest son of Jacob, called “son of the right hand” by his father. The old English word *ravin* means “to prey with rapacity.” It speaks of fierce cruelty, which describes a tribe violent in spirit: a ravenous, devouring wolf (cf. the cruel Benjamites in Judg 20, and Saul, a Benjamite, in 1 Sam 9:1-2; 19:10; 22:17). Notable heroes include: Ehud, who delivered Israel from the Moabites; Saul, the first king (& Jonathan); Queen Esther; and the Apostle Paul. The tribe earned a high reputation for bravery and skill in war, and was noted for its slingers with their traditional left-handed action (Judg 3:15).<sup>54</sup>

**[Benjamin]** Second son of Rachel (Genesis 35:16-20).

**[as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil]** Picturing the characteristics of the Benjamites who were distinguished for courage, cunning, and fierce determination. Their position among the tribes afforded them full opportunity to display their warlike traits.

**shall ravin like a wolf**—This tribe in its early history spent its energies in petty or inglorious warfare and especially in the violent and unjust contest (Judges 19:1-20:48), in

<sup>52</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

<sup>53</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

<sup>54</sup> Chuck Missler, Notes on Book of Genesis Commentary, Genesis Study, KHouse.org

which it engaged with the other tribes, when, notwithstanding two victories, it was almost exterminated.<sup>55</sup>

### **Genesis 49:28**

**All these *are* the twelve tribes of Israel: and this *is it* that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them.**

[**twelve tribes of Israel**] Ephraim took the place of Joseph and Manasseh took the place of Levi as two of the tribes of Israel. Levi had no inheritance among the twelve tribes and became the ministers of the whole nation (Joshua 13:33; Joshua 21:1-45).

**Every one according to his blessing**—That is, guided by the unerring Spirit of prophecy, Jacob now foretold to each of his sons all the important events which should take place during their successive generations, and the predominant characteristic of each tribe; and, at the same time, made some comparatively obscure references to the advent of the Messiah, and the redemption of the world by him.<sup>56</sup>

And so, just before he leaves this world, Jacob has bidden farewell to the twelve tribes of Israel – the people promised to his grandfather long ago (12:2), the people that against all odds and in the face of multiple and formidable challenges, external and internal, has now, by the grace of God come into existence, the people that at long last stands united as it faces the new challenges that lie ahead.<sup>57</sup>

### **Genesis 49:29**

**And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that *is* in the field of Ephron the Hittite,**

[**charge them**] Commanded concerning his body.

### **Genesis 49:30**

**In the cave that *is* in the field of Machpelah, which *is* before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a buryingplace.**

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<sup>55</sup> JFB Commentary

<sup>56</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary

<sup>57</sup> The Jewish Study Bible, Tanakh Translation, Berlin & Brettler, Jewish Publication Society, Oxford Press

### **Genesis 49:31**

**There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah.**

**[There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah]** Jacob's burial made three couples in the cave—Abraham and Sarah (Genesis 23:1-20; Genesis 25:7-11); Isaac and Rebekah (Genesis 35:27-29); and Jacob and Leah (Genesis 49:31; Genesis 50:1-14). Nothing is said of the burial of Leah except in Genesis 49:31. Rachel was buried near Bethlehem (Genesis 35:19-20; 1 Samuel 10:2).

### **Genesis 49:32**

**The purchase of the field and of the cave that is therein was from the children of Heth.**

### **Genesis 49:33**

**And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.**

**[yielded up the ghost]** The soul and spirit (inner man) leaves the body at death (James 2:26; 2 Cor. 5:8; Phil. 1:21-24; Eccles. 12:7; Numbers 16:22; Numbers 27:16; Luke 8:49-56; Luke 16:19-31; Luke 23:43; Rev. 6:9-11; 1 Kings 17:20-22; 2 Samuel 12:19-23).

**[gathered unto his people]** Meaning death and burial of the body which returns to dust (Genesis 3:19; Eccles. 3:20; James 2:26).

**He gathered up his feet into the bed**—It is very probable that while delivering these prophetic blessings Jacob sat upon the side of his bed, leaning upon his staff; and having finished, he lifted up his feet into the bed, stretched himself upon it, and expired!

**when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons**—It is probable that he was supernaturally strengthened for this last momentous office of the patriarch, and that when the divine afflatus ceased, his exhausted powers giving way, he yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.<sup>58</sup>

He drew his feet into the bed closes the action begun at 48:2, when he “sat up in bed.” The intervening material is thus presented as Jacob’s last will and testament.

**Torah Class:** Lastly, we come to Benjamin. And, a total of ONE verse is dedicated to the blessing of Benjamin. If we really need any more proof that it is the Holy Spirit guiding these blessings, then Benjamin’s should be all that we require. For, Jacob’s

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<sup>58</sup> JFB Commentary

second favorite, and youngest, son was given a blessing that was anything but flattering even though we have been shown in Scripture that Jacob carefully protected and fawned over Benjamin. Benjamin was characterized as a predator... a wolf... viscous and merciless. And, this would prove to be true.

Benjamin had a rather schizophrenic future. Though it would have contact with, and even play a part in, the royalty of Israel, Benjamin was also ferocious and stiff-necked. Much of the outcome of the descendants of Benjamin had to do with their between-a-rock-and-a-hard-spot territorial tribal allotment: for they were placed in the unenviable position as a buffer state between Ephraim and Judah. Further, the rather narrow strip of land they occupied that both the major north-south, and east-west, trade route highways passed through the territory of Benjamin. Sometimes we get these incorrect mental pictures of these multi-thousand man ancient armies scampering over hilltops like mice, and blazing new trails as they went. Not true. As any military man can tell you, wars are fought around and over and by means of the major highways of a nation, because the well-established roadways were where the armies had to travel. The roadways were placed where they were because there was water available and the terrain was friendlier. Even back in the days of Abraham wagons and carts were in use and so there needed to be a rather flat and wide trail to accommodate the rather fragile wheel and axle mechanisms of those early wooden vehicles.

Those trade routes that crossed through Benjamin also likely produced a valuable source of income for Benjamin; in the form of Benjamin attacking and plundering those merchant caravans. For remember, one tribe pillaging another and taking what they needed to increase their own wealth and serve their own needs is the very essence of the tribal system. And, it remains so to this day. As might surprise you, the Holiest City in all of the land was in THEIR territory; yes, Jerusalem was originally in the territory of Benjamin, not Judah, as many assume. Many other important Israelite cities were also within the boundaries of Benjamin: Mizpah, Ramah, Gibeon, Bethel, and even Jericho.

It is now well established that these various 12 tribes of Israel had battles amongst themselves: but perhaps no tribe was considered as ferocious and self-serving as Benjamin. One excellent example of Benjamin's characteristics is found in the book of Judges, at a particularly bad time for Israel when the Bible says of the condition of the Holy Land: "... every man did that which was right in his own eyes". Benjamin was right at the center of a terribly chaotic series of wars between the tribes of Israel. In the city of Gibeah, an incident occurred that was eerily akin to when Lot was in Sodom and the townspeople wanted to have homosexual sex with the two Angels that had come to bring God's judgment upon Sodom. The crux of the matter was that a man from the tribe of Ephraim was temporarily staying in Gibeah, when he took in a traveler as a guest in his home. The Benjamite men in Gibeah demanded that the traveler be given to them so they could ravage him. The elderly man from Ephraim offered his daughter and his concubine. They took his concubine, and nearly killed her. After they returned her, the man considered his concubine so defiled as to be worthless to him. So he killed her, cut her into 12 pieces, and sent those pieces along with a message to each tribe of Israel. And, the other tribes of Israel were so outraged, that they gathered together and sent an army against Benjamin to punish it. Now, as an aside, we can see here the terrible, unholy condition of the tribes of Israel in the time of the Judges, that would see the mutilation by

this man of his own concubine as not only a justifiable act by him, but also see that all the blame rested upon Benjamin who had ruined her as just a routine matter.

When the battle began, Benjamin devastated the coalition army for the first two days. Interestingly, part of the reason that Benjamin was succeeding was a combination of ferocity, and that they had a group of deadly accurate stone slingers who killed 40,000 people in the ensuing battle. By the way, all of these particular soldiers were left-handed, a trait that was common among members of the tribe of Benjamin.

In the end, the coalition army finally got the upper hand and annihilated the tribe of Benjamin..... nearly to the point of extinction. The tribe of Benjamin never fully recovered.

One of the most famous O.T. men of Benjamin was Saul; often called the first King of Israel. While I don't want to get technical, there is disagreement among both Jewish and Christian scholars as to whether he was really the first King of Israel, or whether he was simply the last Judge, albeit a centralized Judge that attempted to rule over more than his own tribe. He was never really accepted by all of Israel as a King, and his reign was absolute, never-ending turmoil. But, more important, God had never anointed Saul as king, so failure was the result.

Yet, towards the end of O.T. times, we find two members of the tribe of Benjamin rising above that ruinous Benjamite tribal character: Esther, the namesake of the book of Esther, and her cousin Mordecai. The Jewish festival of Purim was established in memory of the brave acts of these two, in saving the Jews from the pagan people's of that time, who were led by a man named Haman.

Other than for Benjamin himself, though, I doubt there is any more famous and influential Benjamite in all the tribal history, than for St. Paul; yes, the Apostle Paul was from the tribe of Benjamin. Yet, it should also be remembered that his saying he was from that tribe was simply a family remembrance; for he also called himself a Jew, which ANY surviving Israelite living in Paul's day would have done. The tribe of Benjamin, as an independent and separate entity, was gone and assimilated by Paul's day, assimilated by the tribe of Judah, and therefore these former Benjamites were called Jews.

And, so we have now completed the blessings of all 12 sons of Jacob: the 12 tribes of Israel. And, we should bookmark Genesis 48 and 49 in our Bibles as a reference, because whether we're studying the O.T. or the New, these blessings explain much of what was going to happen in the centuries following this event, well into a time this is still future to us.

Chapter 49 comes to an end with Jacob commanding his sons that they are to take his body and bury it in the cave back up in Canaan, the one the Abraham purchased, and where Jacob's parents, grandparents, and his own wife Leah lay entombed. Then, Jacob dies.

This paragraph in Genesis 49 is really the first time that Israel is seen as a nation unto itself, rather than just a man (Jacob) with his growing family of 12 sons. In fact, this is the first use of what will become a well-worn Biblical phrase, "the 12 tribes of Israel". Let's not miss the opportunity to once again notice the mindset of the ancients at work, when Jacob says "I am about to be gathered to my kin.....bury me with my fathers." When we can begin to grasp that 99% of everything happening in the Bible must be read BETWEEN the lines, then we can start to make all the Bible characters the real people, living real lives, under real and everyday circumstances, that they were. It is important

that we understand that the terms used and what the phrases and idioms they employed meant, were based entirely on the era in which they were spoken. They are neither universal nor timeless. This era had its own beliefs and traditions about death and its aftermath. Israel was no different. Jacob believed what all the other Middle Eastern societies believed in.....ancestor worship. In no way did this seem in conflict in having trust in Yehoveh, or His teachings. That other gods, for other people and other nations, did not seem to be in conflict with Yehoveh's laws and commands. In fact, to this point in the Bible, there has been no mention of an immortal soul living on in Heaven, or any such thing beyond the haziest kind of general statement. Now, in Egypt, and in a few of the other Middle Eastern cultures, elaborate belief systems and complex rituals concerning the dead had been developed. We don't find that among the Israelites, but neither do we find it amongst the bulk of the ancient cultures. Yet, in Israel, we DO find ancestor worship and respect for the dead and an understanding that there IS something beyond the grave, even if it is not fully evident.

Jacob wanted to be buried with his fathers, because if he wasn't he wouldn't be able to be with them after his death. After all, here Jacob was in Egypt, and his ancestors were way up in Canaan. How could his after-death essence commune with his relatives' after-death essences, if they were interred hundreds of miles apart? That was the thinking. And, notice the last words that end Genesis 49: "...and breathing his last he was gathered to his people." Whoever wrote this down..... and it is usually credited to Moses several hundred years later..... also believed in ancestor worship because it states matter-of-factly that indeed Jacob WAS gathered to his people.<sup>59</sup>

#### **Adam Clarke Summary of Chapter 49:**

**And was gathered unto his people**—The testimony that this place bears to the immortality of the soul, and to its existence separate from the body, should not be lightly regarded. In the same moment in which Jacob is said to have gathered up his feet into the bed, and to have expired, it is added, and was gathered unto his people. It is certain that his body was not then gathered to his people, nor till seven weeks after; and it is not likely that a circumstance, so distant in point both of time and place, would have been thus anticipated, and associated with facts that took place in that moment. I cannot help therefore considering this an additional evidence for the immateriality of the soul, and that it was intended by the Holy Spirit to convey this grand and consolatory sentiment, that when a holy man ceases to live among his fellows, his soul becomes an inhabitant of another world, and is joined to the spirits of just men made perfect.

1. IT has been conjectured (See Clarke Genesis 37:9 (note)) that the eleven stars that bowed down to Joseph might probably refer to the signs of the Zodiac, which were very anciently known in Egypt, and are supposed to have had their origin in Chaldea. On this supposition Joseph's eleven brethren answered to eleven of these signs, and himself to the twelfth. General Vallancy has endeavored, in his *Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis*, vol. vi., part. ii., p. 343, to trace out the analogy between the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve signs of the Zodiac, which Dr. Hales (*Analysis*, vol. ii., p. 165) has altered a little, and placed in a form in which

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<sup>59</sup> [Torahclass.com/index.html](http://Torahclass.com/index.html), Thomas Bradford, Merritt Island, Florida

it becomes more generally applicable. As this scheme is curious, many readers who may not have the opportunity of consulting the above works will be pleased to find it here. That there is an allusion to the twelve signs of the Zodiac, and probably to their ancient asterisms, may be readily credited; but how far the peculiar characteristics of the sons of Jacob were expressed by the animals in the Zodiac, is a widely different question.

1. REUBEN—"Unstable (rather pouring out) as waters"—the sign AQUARIUS, represented as a man pouring out waters from an urn.
2. SIMEON and LEVI—"The united brethren" the sign GEMINI or the Twins.
3. JUDAH—"The strong lion"—the sign LEO.
4. ASHER—"His bread shall be fat"—the sign VIRGO or the Virgin, generally represented as holding a full ear of corn.
5. ISSACHAR—"A strong ass" or ox, both used in husbandry—the sign TAURUS or the Bull.
6. and
7. DAN—"A serpent biting the horse's heels"—SCORPIO, the Scorpion. On the celestial sphere the Scorpion is actually represented as biting the heel of the horse of the archer Sagittarius; and Chelae, "his claws," originally occupied the space of LIBRA.
8. JOSEPH—"His bow remained in strength"—the sign SAGITTARIUS, the archer or bowman; commonly represented, even on the Asiatic Zodiacs, with his bow bent, and the arrow drawn up to the head—the bow in full strength.
9. NAPHTALI—by a play on his name, טלה taleh, the ram—the sign ARIES, according to the rabbins.
10. ZEBULUN—"A haven for ships"—denoted by CANCER, the crab.
11. GAD—"A troop or army"—reversed, דג dag, a fish—the sign PISCES.
12. BENJAMIN—"A ravening wolf"—CAPRICORN, which on the Egyptian sphere was represented by a goat led by Pan, with a wolf's head.

What likelihood the reader may see in all this, I cannot pretend to say; but that the twelve signs were at that time known in Egypt and Chaldea, there can be little doubt.

2. We have now seen the life of Jacob brought to a close; and have carefully traced it through all its various fortunes, as the facts presented themselves in the preceding chapters. Isaac his father was what might properly be called a good man; but in strength of mind he appears to have fallen far short of his father Abraham, and his son Jacob. Having left the management of his domestic concerns to Rebekah his wife, who was an artful and comparatively irreligious woman, the education of his sons was either neglected or perverted. The unhappy influence which the precepts and example of his mother had on the mind of her son we have seen and deplored.

Through the mercy of God Jacob outlived the shady part of his own character, and his last days were his brightest and his best. He had many troubles and difficulties in life, under which an inferior mind must have necessarily sunk; but being a worker together with the providence of God, his difficulties only served in general to whet his invention, and draw out the immense resources of his own mind. He had to do with an avaricious, procrastinating relative, as destitute of humanity as he was of justice. Let this plead something in his excuse. He certainly did outwit his father-in-law; and yet, probably, had no more than the just recompense of his faithful services in the successful issue of all his devices. From the time in which God favored him with that wonderful manifestation of grace at Peniel, Genesis 32, he became a new man. He had frequent discoveries of God before, to encourage him in journeys, secular affairs, etc.; but none in which the heart-changing power of Divine grace was so abundantly revealed. Happy he whose last days are his best! We can scarcely conceive a scene more noble or dignified than that exhibited at the deathbed of Jacob. This great man was now one hundred and forty-seven years of age; though his body, by the waste of time, was greatly enfeebled, yet with a mind in perfect vigor, and a hope full of immortality, he calls his numerous family together, all of them in their utmost state of prosperity, and gives them his last counsels, and his dying blessing. His declarations show that the secret of the Lord was with him, and that his candle shone bright upon his tabernacle. Having finished his work, with perfect possession of all his faculties, and being determined that while he was able to help himself none should be called in to assist, (which was one of the grand characteristics of his life), he, with that dignity which became a great man and a man of God stretched himself upon his bed, and rather appears to have conquered death than to have suffered it. Who, seeing the end of this illustrious patriarch, can help exclaiming, There is none like the God of Jeshurun! Let Jacob's God be my God! Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his! Reader, God is still the same: and though he may not make thee as great as was Jacob, yet he is ready to make thee as good; and, whatever thy past life may have been, to crown thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies, that thy end also may be peace.<sup>60</sup>

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<sup>60</sup> Adam Clarke's Commentary

## **Listing of the 12 Tribes**

### **Genesis:**

- 29-35 Origin; natural order of Jacob's 12 sons
- 46 Entering Egypt
- 49 Jacob's Prophetic Blessing

### **Exodus:**

- 1 Entering Egypt (Joseph omitted, being in Egypt.)

### **Numbers:**

- 1:1-15 Leaders (Levi omitted)
- 1:20-43 1st Census (Levi omitted)
- 2 Order of the camp (Only order given three times: 2, 7, 10)
- 7 Offerings
- 10 Order of March
- 13 Spies (Levi omitted)
- 26 2nd Census (Levi omitted)
- 34 Dividing the Land (Eastern tribes omitted)

### **Deuteronomy:**

- 27 Blessings and cursings
- 33 Blessing of Moses (Simeon omitted).
- Order is geographical: Benjamin is before Joseph.)

### **Joshua:**

- 13-22 Allocation of territories. (In four groups to furnish cities for four classes of priests.)

### **Judges:**

- 5 Song of Deborah. (Judah and Simeon omitted.)

### **1 Chronicles:**

- 2:1,3-8 Genealogies. (Zebulon omitted; Dan in v.7?)
- 12, 27 Officers under David (Gad and Asher omitted in 1 Chr 27.)

### **Ezekiel:**

- 48 Kingdom Divisions, Millennium

### **Revelation:**

- 7 Sealing of 12,000 from each tribe. (Dan omitted)

## **Chapter 49: The Tribes Prophetically**

### **The 12 Tribes**

- |           |                                   |
|-----------|-----------------------------------|
| Gen 29:32 | Reuben "Behold a son"             |
| Gen 29:33 | Simeon "Heard"                    |
| Gen 29:34 | Levi "Joined to"                  |
| Gen 29:35 | Judah "Praise"                    |
| Gen 30:6  | Dan "Judge"                       |
| Gen 30:8  | Naphtali "Wrestling;" "Struggles" |
| Gen 30:11 | Gad "Troop;" "fortune"            |
| Gen 30:13 | Asher "Happy"                     |
| Gen 30:18 | Issachar "Recompense"             |
| Gen 30:20 | Zebulun "Exalted"                 |
| Gen 30:24 | Joseph "YHWH has added"           |
| Gen 35:18 | Benjamin "Son of the right hand"  |

## **Revelation 7**

<b>Judah</b>	Praise the Lord,
<b>Reuben</b>	He has looked on my affliction (and)
<b>Gad</b>	granted good fortune.
<b>Asher</b>	Happy am I,
<b>Naphtali</b>	my wrestling
<b>Manasseh</b>	has made me forget my sorrow.
<b>Simeon</b>	God hears me;
<b>Levi</b>	has joined me,
<b>Issachar</b>	purchased me, (and)
<b>Zebulun</b>	exalted me (by)
<b>Joseph</b>	adding to me
<b>Benjamin</b>	the Son of His right hand.

## **List by Mothers:**

<b>Leah:</b>	Gen 29:32 Reuben “Behold a son” Gen 29:33 Simeon “Heard” Gen 29:34 Levi “Joined to” Gen 29:35 Judah “Praise”
<b>Bilhah:</b> (Rachel)	Gen 30:6 Dan “Judge” Gen 30:8 Naphtali “Wrestling;” “Struggles”
<b>Zilpah:</b> (Leah)	Gen 30:11 Gad “Troop;” “fortune” Gen 30:13 Asher “Happy”
<b>Leah:</b>	Gen 30:18 Issachar “Recompense” Gen 30:20 Zebulun “Exalted”
<b>Rachel:</b>	Gen 30:24 Joseph “YHWH has added” Gen 35:18 Benjamin “Son of the right hand”

## Jacob's Prophecy of the Tribes

### Ten Details of the Past:

1. Reuben was the firstborn of Jacob (Genesis 49:3)
2. The beginning of his might and strength
3. The excellency of his dignity and power
4. Unstable as water (Genesis 49:4)
5. Defiled his father's bed
6. Simeon and Levi cruel by nature (Genesis 49:5)
7. Secretive in acts and words (Genesis 49:6)
8. Quick to be angered (Genesis 49:6-7)
9. Murderous in heart
10. Self-willed and stubborn

### Twenty-seven Prophetic Details of the Tribes:

1. Reuben will not excel (Genesis 49:4).
2. Simeon and Levi shall be divided in Jacob and scattered in Israel (Genesis 49:7).
3. Judah shall be the praise of his brethren (Genesis 49:8).
4. He will be the victor over his enemies (Genesis 49:8; cp. Joshua 14:11; Joshua 15:1; Judges 1:1-2).
5. His brethren will bow down to him.
6. He will be like a young lion starting to kill prey (Genesis 49:9).
7. He will be as bold and fierce as an old lion roused from sleep.
8. The ruling power will be his (Genesis 49:10).
9. The Messiah shall come from Judah.
10. The Messiah shall gather all Israel to Himself.
11. Judah will be prosperous and have asses, vineyards, plenty of clothing, and other material blessings (Genesis 49:11-12).
12. Zebulun shall have his inheritance at sea and be a maritime power (Genesis 49:13). His inheritance stretched from the Sea of Galilee to the Mediterranean.
13. Issachar shall be like a strong ass that lies down with its load if weary or overloaded (Genesis 49:14-15).
14. He will be satisfied and passive toward others if he has only a measure of comfort. He will rather serve than rule if there is any degree of hardship.
15. Dan shall judge his people (Genesis 49:16).
16. He shall be like a serpent in guile and cunning and overthrow those who oppose him (Genesis 49:17).
17. The salvation of Israel will come from God, not from the lion-like Judah, the strong-ass traits of Issachar, or the cunning serpent-like skill of Dan (Genesis 49:18).
18. Gad shall finally overcome his enemies after being overcome (Genesis 49:19).
19. Asher shall be blessed and prosperous in his inheritance (Genesis 49:20).
20. Naphtali shall be like a quick deer let loose and be eloquent in speech (Genesis 49:21).
21. Joseph shall be fruitful as a tree planted by the waters (Genesis 49:22).
22. He shall be hated by others and suffer at their hands (Genesis 49:23).
23. He shall be helped by God who will also send the Shepherd and Stone of Israel (Genesis 49:24-25).

24. He shall be blessed with material prosperity (Genesis 49:25).
25. He shall have abundant offspring (Genesis 49:25).
26. He shall be blessed and Israel shall be upon him forever (Genesis 49:26).
27. Benjamin shall be a war-like and plundering tribe like the wolf (Genesis 49:27).