

GENESIS

Lesson 44 - Chapter 49 Continued

As we continue on our study of Genesis 49.....which is essentially a series of prophetic blessings that predestines the character and attributes of the 12 tribes of Israel.....we ended last time with the 4th –born son of Jacob, Judah. And, we saw that Judah seemingly received the Firstborn Blessing. However, what Judah actually received was but a portion of the Firstborn Blessing: the right to rule.

We saw that the Firstborn Blessing consists of two fundamental elements: the right to rule, and the right to inherit a double-portion of the tribe's wealth. So, the receiver of the Firstborn Blessing typically became the richest member of the tribe, at the same moment he became the tribe's ruling authority. But, that is NOT what happened with this blessing by Jacob. Instead, in a Biblically unique event, Jacob SPLIT the Firstborn Blessing, giving the right to rule to Judah, and the double-portion to Joseph, by means of his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh.

Just so that we're clear about what I mean about Joseph receiving the double portion by means of his two sons: at this moment in history, the authority and essence of Joseph's tribe was put into the hands of his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. Because in the Cross-Handed Blessing Jacob had ADOPTED Ephraim and Manasseh, and made them his own sons, Ephraim and Manasseh EACH received a portion of the wealth of Israel, just like their new brothers, Rueben, Simeon, Levi, and all the other 12 tribes. Since Ephraim and Manasseh would, from this point forward, represent the tribe of Joseph, and since they each held a full share of Israel's wealth, the tribe of Joseph therefore held TWO shares of Israel's wealth.....a double-portion. When we get to Joseph in this series of blessings, we'll find another expression used to describe the double-portion part of the Firstborn Blessing, and it is "fruitfulness" and "increase".

RE READ Gen.49:13-15

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 the 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 Zevulun. However, in the “Song of Deborah and Barak”, Zevulun 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 Zevulun’s territory. Though precious little is said in the Bible about Zevulun, what is said could be characterized as positive and complimentary.

Even less is known about Issachar than his brother Zevulun. 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 Zevulun 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 Zevulun 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 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.

RE READ Gen.49:16-18

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 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 2nd 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 1st 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.

RE READ Gen.49:19

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 Rueben, 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 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.

RE READ Gen.49:20

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

RE READ Gen.49:21

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.

Well, 10 down and 2 to go. Up next..... Joseph.

RE READ Gen.49:22-26

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.

Maybe to those who run the good race in their lives, clinging to the faith no matter the circumstances, these words of Jacob reveal Gods 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.

Next week, we'll look at the last tribe of the blessing of Genesis 49, Benjamin, and then fittingly get into the last chapter of the book of Genesis, chapter 50. Next week, will in fact, end our study of Genesis.