

October 14, 2007 (LS)

DEATH AND BLESSING OF ISRAEL: PART 2
ALL THE KING'S MEN
GENESIS 49.13-21

Structure within the structure:

- A Zebulun: dominion of the sea (13)
 - B Issachar: the king's beast of burden (14-15)
 - C Dan: serpent striking the heels (16-17)
 - D "I wait for your salvation, O YHWH" (18)
 - C' Gad: raiding at the heels (19)
 - B' Asher: the king's food (20)
 - A' Naphtali: dominion of the land (21)

Summary: *The blessings pronounced upon Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher and Naphtali all relate to the kingly rule of Israel as embodied in Judah. This kingly rule will result in salvation from YHWH, but there remains the possibility of abuse and misuse of these kingly blessings along the way.*

A ZEBULUN: DOMINION OF THE SEA (13)

Zebulun - sixth and last son born to Leah; name refers to "honor" or being lifted up. Leah named him thus believing that because she had borne Jacob six sons that she would be "honored" by him (30.20).

Zebulun's blessing has to do with his relationship—and Israel's relationship—to the Gentiles.

The sea = the Gentiles. They are an unformed and unfilled people. Cp. the beginning of creation. Cf. Isa 60.5.

Zebulun becomes the place where the Gentiles will find safety from the torrents of the sea.

Sidon = a Gentile city (cf. 1Kgs 17.9)

This blessing relates to the promise of kingship given to Judah earlier; which refers back to the blessing/mission of Adam. Cf. 1.26

Animals represent men and nations as well as animals. When God's king is exalted, then all of the nations of the earth will come under his dominion. Or, to put it in terms of the promise given to Abraham: all the nations of the earth will be blessed.

The prophecy and mission of Zebulun (and his parallel in this section, Naphtali): Isa 9.1-2

Matt 4.15-16 - Prophecy is fulfilled in Jesus who begins his ministry in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, Galilee of Gentiles.

So much talk in NT about Jew-Gentile relationships relates to the promise/blessing. Jesus is God's promised king. If Jesus is God's promised king, that means it is time for the Gentiles to enjoy the blessing of Abraham with Israel. Therefore, we have a mission to go and proclaim the kingship of Jesus to the Gentiles.

B ISSACHAR: THE KING'S BEAST OF BURDEN (14-15)

Issachar - fifth son born to Leah; born after Leah "hired" Jacob for conjugal privileges through Reuben's mandrakes. Issachar refers to "wages" or being a "hired man."

Issachar's name relates to work. He reveals the work ethic, if you will, of this kingly nation and how things will be ordered.

Issachar is a strong donkey. Relates to the blessing given to Judah (i.e., "donkey tied to the vine"). The donkey is the one who provides support and bears up the king.

"Strong donkey" - able to fulfill his responsibilities well. He has the capability of working to support the king as he ought.

Issachar as a strong donkey "crouches" between two burdens. Judah is the *crouching* lion. This has strong allusions to Judah's dominion over the serpent who crouches at the door of the Garden.

Issachar participates in the dominion of Judah as he submits to the king.

“Burdens” - “sheepfolds?” “fires?” “Burdens” fits the context best.

Issachar makes a judgment; i.e., he *sees*. Eyes being the instruments of judgment, Issachar passes judgment upon the rest, which is parallel to the land. He sees that the rest (or resting place) is good and that the land is pleasant.

Land = place the vine is planted; i.e., the vine to which the donkey is tied in v. 11. The vine and coming into the land are signs of rest. They are the places over which the king has taken dominion. Issachar judges it good and a delight and submits to the king.

“A slave at forced labor.” Could be negative. But could also be emphasizing Issachar’s willingness to be the king’s servant. Cp. 1Sam 8.10-18; 1Kg 12.4. When the true King comes: Matt 11.28-30.

C DAN: SERPENT STRIKING THE HEELS (16-17)

Dan = first son born to Bilhah, Rachel’s handmaid. He is named Dan because in his birth God vindicated, or judged in Rachel’s favor (cf. 30.6). Dan’s name means “judge.”

Judges = deliverers, saviors. They had kingly responsibilities. They passed and executed judgment.

Prophecy is seen much in Samson. Samson is serpent-like (in a good way). He is cunning and wise.

Ambiguity - the serpent in the Garden turned bad, using his wisdom to attack the woman and the man; i.e., the wrong people. Cp. Joseph’s brothers, and Israel in the time of Jesus.

Note that “heel” is not only associated with seed of the woman in 3.15 but also with the name “Jacob.”

Dan apostatizes. Dan refused to drive out the Canaanites from the land (Jdg 1). Dan engaged in the worship of idols (Jdg 18).

D “I WAIT FOR YOUR SALVATION, O YHWH” (18)

Related to the blessing/prophecy concerning Dan. Judge brings deliverance. When God’s people’s enemies are put down and God’s people are brought out of bondage, that is salvation. This is that for which Jacob longs.

Moses brings. Samson brings (Jdg 13.5). David and Solomon bring. Jesus brings ultimately, submitting to death—our enemy—and is delivered/saved from it through resurrection.

This brings back the ambiguity of the blessing that can only be fully seen through the lens of Christ. He is indeed attacked by the serpent embodied in Israel, who has become, according to John the Baptizer “a brood of vipers.” But it is through this attack that the deliverance of YHWH will come. So, even through the misuse and abuse of their privilege of rule, God is working out his plan for deliverance.

C’ GAD: RAIDING AT THE HEELS (19)

Gad = son of Zilpah, Leah’s handmaid. His name can be associated with “good fortune” or a “troop” or “raider.” Here he is associated with war. Note the plays on his name in the NAS: “As for Gad, *raiders* shall *raid* him, But he shall *raid at* their heels.”

Gad stationed at the entrance to the land. “Heels” and Jacob once again.

B’ ASHER: THE KING’S FOOD (20)

Asher - born to Zilpah, Leah’s handmaid; “happy” or “blessed” (cf. 30.13).

Parallel with Issachar - Issachar serves the king in the land, bearing burdens. Again, this is the king who is taking dominion over the land, planting and harvesting vines (cf. v. 11). Asher joins in this dominion and produces bread.

A’ NAPHTALI: DOMINION OF THE LAND (21)

Naphtali - second son born to Rachel by means of Bilhah; “struggles/wrestlings.” Parallel with Zebulun. Dominion over the land through beautiful words; *the* Word comes out of this region (see above).

(1) Our dominion is taken through work and word. (2) You have privileges that can be abused (though they should not be). (3) Though our true King has come, we still wait for the salvation of our God to be consummated.