

GENESIS 49:19-21 **(THE BLESSING UPON GAD, ASHER, AND NAPHTALI)**

Introduction: In the Bible, God records events especially from the central point of Israel and in particular Jerusalem. When directions are noted, they are normally from that vantage point. In the same way, when a celestial occurrence is noted, such as the rising of the sun, it is given from man's perspective on earth.

The sun doesn't really rise. The earth is spinning on its axis and as the earth turns, the perception for us though is that the sun is rising. This, along with many other examples of heavenly occurrences in the Bible, are noted from our perspective on earth. A constellation from any other angle wouldn't be the constellation as we know it.

And yet, God has included constellations in His word, clearly showing us that they have relevance to us from how He placed them, which is from our vantage point, directed from earth looking upward. The same is true with other signs in the heavens which are spoken of in both testaments of the Bible.

These are never to be used for divination, and yet, God shows us what they are to be used for, which is understanding His working on our behalf. Again, as we have seen for the last three sermons, we will witness Jacob speaking under the Spirit of prophecy words which point to the heavenly signs God has placed in the sky - all of which reveal His plan of redemption, centering on the work of Christ.

Text Verse: He counts the number of the stars;
He calls them all by name.

⁵ Great *is* our Lord, and mighty in power;
His understanding *is* infinite. Psalm 147:4, 5

God spoke the universe into existence and by the power of His word, it stood firm. From nothing came all things. In a mere six days he fashioned everything suitable for His highest creation, man - a temporal/spiritual being; one intended to fellowship with Him in a unique way.

But before He made the man, He knew the man would fall. The spiritual would be lost and man would be separated from Him. And so, to show that He has complete control over that state of affairs and that the spiritual side of man would be healed, He placed the stars in heaven in a way which would show the entire healing process.

Along with that plan, He slowly revealed Himself through His word. As the heaven's testified, so His word confirmed. There is a plan, there is hope, and there is redemption. And it is all to be found in the giving of His son, Jesus Christ.

Not a story, paragraph, or even a word in the Bible is without relevance. And all of it, even the smallest letter is there because God placed it with infinite wisdom and care. And the care is because it reveals to us His entrance into His own creation in the Person of Jesus Christ.

The key to understanding where all of human history is heading is found in His superior word, so let's turn to that wondrous book once again and... May God speak to us through His word today and may His glorious name ever be praised.

I. The Blessing Upon Gad (verse 19)

¹⁹ "Gad, a troop shall tramp upon him,

In these three sons today, Jacob will continue to bless the sons of his concubines. Dan was the first and he has received his blessing. Jacob now turns his attention to his seventh-born son, Gad. He is the third son born to a concubine and the first born to Leah's maidservant Zilpah. The record of Gad's birth is found in Genesis 30:9-11 -

"When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took Zilpah her maid and gave her to Jacob as wife. ¹⁰ And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son. ¹¹ Then Leah said, "A troop comes!" So she called his name Gad."

The name Gad is an interesting study and it's difficult to pin down its exact meaning or what Leah was thinking when she named him. It could be, as

some speculate, that Leah stopped bearing children because Jacob stopped going in to her.

If this is the case, then her giving Zilpah to Jacob seemed as much of a necessity as what Rachel did because she was barren. She may have been desperate to find the love that had eluded her by having more children through the maidservant.

Gad could mean either "troop," as in a large group, or "fortune." If it's a troop, then she was excited about the large family which had come from her - a whole troop. Or if fortune, her exclamation would be that she had good luck in her struggle to find that love and affection she desired.

It seems that either way, the name Gad is a reflection of Leah's sad state. Unlike her other children, she never invoked the name of the Lord when he was born. Instead, He was completely left out of the struggle that existed between herself and her sister in either thanks or praise.

And now, at the end of Jacob's life, regardless of what Leah was thinking when Gad was born, either troop or fortune, Jacob ties his name in with the word "troop" by using the Hebrew word *gedud* which is a marauding band.

In these words of blessing are found a beautiful three-fold alliteration known as a paronomasia which will provide a double-play on the name of the tribe of Gad. Jacob exclaims, *gad gedud yegudennu* (2:59).

Unfortunately, it is lost in translation, but several translators have done their best to keep this amazingly alluring alliteration alive. One translation from Keil says "Gad - a press presses him, but he presses the heel" Another, *The Speaker's Commentary* translates it as "troops shall troop on him, but he shall troop on their retreat."

Jacob's prophecy is looking forward to the character of the tribe that will come from him. They will be warlike as 1 Chronicles 12:8 later describes them -

"Some Gadites joined David at the stronghold in the wilderness, mighty men of valor, men trained for battle, who could handle shield and spear, whose faces *were like* the faces of lions, and *were* as swift as gazelles on the mountains:" 1 Chronicles 12:8

The reason for Gad being warlike was because of necessity. As a tribe, they settled to the east of the Jordan instead of the land of Canaan. Because of this, they were exposed to sudden incursions of plunderers without the protection of the greater body of Israel around them.

In their many conflicts and difficulties recorded in the Bible, they made war alongside the other tribes who settled to the east of the Jordan. In 1 Chronicles 5:18-22, we read this about them -

"The sons of Reuben, the Gadites, and half the tribe of Manasseh *had* forty-four thousand seven hundred and sixty valiant men, men able to bear shield and sword, to shoot with the bow, and skillful in war, who went to war. ¹⁹They made war with the Hagarites, Jetur, Naphish, and Nodab. ²⁰And they were helped against them, and the Hagarites were delivered into their hand, and all who *were* with them, for they cried out to God in the battle. He heeded their prayer, because they put their trust in Him. ²¹Then they took away their livestock—fifty thousand of their camels, two hundred and fifty thousand of their sheep, and two thousand of their donkeys—also one hundred thousand of their men; ²²for many fell dead, because the war *was* God's. And they dwelt in their place until the captivity."

Along with these groups, they are noted as fighting against the Ammonites, Moabites, and Arameans. Jacob's prophecy perfectly suites what occurred in the history of Gad. But finally, there was a point where the land of Gad was overrun and occupied by outsiders. This is recorded in Jeremiah 49 -

"Thus says the LORD:
'Has Israel no sons?
Has he no heir?
Why *then* does Milcom inherit Gad,
And his people dwell in its cities?'" Jeremiah 49:1

Despite this exile, Jacob assures them that they would finally overcome as we continue with verse 19...

19 (con't) But he shall triumph at last.

The Hebrew words are *v'hu ygud aqev*. Literally, "and he presses the heel." It is a symbol of victory similar to what is seen in Joshua 10 where Israel stood in victory over the kings they defeated by placing their feet on their necks. Here is how that is recorded -

"So it was, when they brought out those kings to Joshua, that Joshua called for all the men of Israel, and said to the captains of the men of war who went with him, 'Come near, put your feet on the necks of these kings.' And they drew near and put their feet on their necks." Joshua 10:24

Some scholars see this as prophecy to Gad fulfilled at the time of David when the Moabites and Ammonites were finally subdued. But this isn't correct. Just a minute ago we saw in Jeremiah that their land was overtaken by the enemy which was after the time of David.

However, just one verse later, the Lord, through Jeremiah, promised that Israel would again assume control of the land. This is recorded in the later chapters of Ezekiel which speaks of the future, where the tribe of Gad is given an inheritance in the land. And Gad is also one of the sealed tribes recorded in Revelation 7.

Matthew Henry likens this to the cause of God and all his people. In his poetic way of describing things, here is what he says about Gad triumphing at last -

"The cause of God and his people, though for a time it may seem to be baffled and run down, will be victorious at last. It represents the Christian's conflict. Grace in the soul is often foiled in its conflicts; troops of corruption overcome it, but the cause is God's, and grace will in the end come off conqueror, yea, more than conqueror." Henry

This may be true in a certain sense, but the words of Jacob, like all of them thus far, point to the work of Christ. In Micah 5, the word used for "troop" here is used again. It concerns the gathering of the Babylonians against Israel.

But there in the same passage is also the promise of the coming Messiah. This gathering of troops beautifully reflects Jacob's word to Gad -

"Now gather yourself in troops,
O daughter of troops;
He has laid siege against us;
They will strike the judge of Israel with a rod on the cheek.

²'But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah,
Though you are little among the thousands of Judah,
Yet out of you shall come forth to Me
The One to be Ruler in Israel,
Whose goings forth *are* from of old,
From everlasting.'

³Therefore He shall give them up,
Until the time *that* she who is in labor has given birth;
Then the remnant of His brethren
Shall return to the children of Israel.

⁴And He shall stand and feed *His flock*
In the strength of the LORD,
In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God;
And they shall abide,
For now He shall be great
To the ends of the earth;

⁵And this *One* shall be peace." Micah 5:1-5

In the second half of the prophecy, the Hebrew indicates that He will press them with his heel. The word for "heel" in this verse is used several times in this same construct. Of them, one is in Genesis 3:15 when the Lord spoke to the serpent -

"And I will put enmity
Between you and the woman,
And between your seed and her Seed;

He shall bruise your head,
And you shall bruise His heel." Genesis 3:15

Another use is in the 41st Psalm when referring to Judas who would betray Jesus. There it says -

"All who hate me whisper together against me;
Against me they devise my hurt.
⁸'An evil disease,' *they say*, 'clings to him.
And *now* that he lies down, he will rise up no more.'
⁹Even my own familiar friend in whom I trusted,
Who ate my bread,
Has lifted up *his* heel against me." Psalm 41:7-8

The symbolism is perfectly clear. Though the devil struck the heel of the Messiah by having one of His own disciples lift up his heel against Him, He prevailed by pressing His own heel to crush the serpent's head. The entire prophecy, though proclaimed over Gad, and also fulfilled in him, is ultimately a prophecy of Christ to come.

In the witness of the stars, Gad is represented by the sign Pisces, the fish. In Hebrew, there is an anagram on his name. Gad is spelled gimel, dalet. Reversing these to dalet, gimel produces the word *dag*, or fish.

The connecting constellations to Pisces are the *Band* which unites the fish, *Andromeda* - the Chained Woman, and *Cepheus* - the Crowned King. The Egyptians called Pisces "the fishes of Him that cometh." The Band specifically means "He cometh." And Andromeda is named *Set*, meaning, set up as a queen.

EW Bullinger notes that this constellation, Pisces the fish, has always been interpreted as Israel. However, there are two fish in the constellation. These two fish of Pisces refer, with certainty, to all the redeemed, both Jew and Gentile.

The picture is clear and easily understood from the prophecy given by Jacob. And how interesting it is that the symbol of the fish, even from the

earliest days, has been a symbol of Christianity. The stars witness to the plan of redemption formulated by God from the time of creation.

*Out of you shall come forth to Me
The One to be Ruler in Israel
Whose goings forth are from of old, from eternity
Even from everlasting, as My word does tell*

*Therefore He shall give them up then
Until she who labors has given birth as My word does foretell
Then the remnant of His brethren
Shall return to the children of Israel*

*And He shall stand and feed His flock
In the strength of the LORD
In the majesty of the name of the LORD His God
And they shall abide, this My spoken word*

*For now He shall be great
Even to the ends of the earth
And this One shall be peace
The end of sadness, pain, and dearth*

II. The Blessing Upon Asher (verse 20)

²⁰ **"Bread from Asher *shall be rich,***

The next blessing falls to Jacob's eighth-born son, Asher. He is the fourth son born to a concubine and the second born to Leah's maidservant Zilpah. Genesis 30:12, 13 records Asher's birth -

"And Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son. ¹³ Then Leah said, 'I am happy, for the daughters will call me blessed.' So she called his name Asher."

There is no dispute on the meaning of Asher - it means happy. It comes from a verb, *ashar*, which means "to be straight" or "to go straight." For

most of us, we tend to like the straight and quick path to where we are going, whether literally or in a project. This is what makes us happy.

When an arrow flies straight, it hits its mark. When we put up a wall, we want it to be straight, not crooked. In each of these things, being straight gives us the sense of what is correct and what leads to happiness.

Leah was happy at his birth and gave the reason by saying, "the daughters will call me blessed." As before, she didn't mention her husband, nor did she include the Lord in her statement.

Not much is seen or heard of from Asher in the rest of the Bible, other than standard genealogies and the like. But there is one calling of them, along with other tribes, to go to war in Judges 6 and 7.

Also, after Israel divided into two nations, 2 Chronicles 30 says that some of the people from Asher came to Jerusalem at King Hezekiah's request to celebrate the Passover and humble themselves before the Lord.

But of the times that Asher is noted, the most famous is actually found in the New Testament where a woman of great faith from the tribe of Asher was granted the honor of beholding the Messiah before her death. Something that surely made her happy. She is noted in Luke 2 -

"Now there was one, Anna, a prophetess, the daughter of Phanuel, of the tribe of Asher. She was of a great age, and had lived with a husband seven years from her virginity; ³⁷ and this woman *was* a widow of about eighty-four years, who did not depart from the temple, but served *God* with fastings and prayers night and day. ³⁸ And coming in that instant she gave thanks to the Lord, and spoke of Him to all those who looked for redemption in Jerusalem." Luke 2:36-38

Jacob's prophecy of Asher was fulfilled literally in the land allotment to the tribe when it was granted. It is in the lowlands along the seacoast between Mt. Carmel and Tyre and is an area fertile and abundant in both grain and oil.

20 (con't) **And he shall yield royal dainties.**

Because of the rich soil of the area, Asher was certainly fit to provide, as the Hebrew reads, *maadaneh melekh*, or "delicacies of a king." In 1 Kings 4, one of the governors appointed under Solomon was from Asher and it was his responsibility to provide "food for the king and his household... for one month of the year."

Again, the blessing points to Christ, as each has thus far. Asher's bread shall be rich. This is certainly an illusion to the body of Christ. His words indicate that His body is the richest of all breads. In John 6:35, He said, "I am the bread of life. He who comes to Me shall never hunger, and he who believes in Me shall never thirst."

In John 6:41, He then spoke saying, "I am the bread which came down from heaven." And then repeating Himself and expanding on that, He said in John 6:51, "I am the living bread which came down from heaven. If anyone eats of this bread, he will live forever; and the bread that I shall give is My flesh, which I shall give for the life of the world."

In the second half of the verse, it says "he shall yield royal dainties." The word "dainties" is from the same root as the word *eden* which is used in Psalm 36 which speaks of the river of pleasures, a picture of the water flowing from the royal throne of God in the New Jerusalem -

"How precious *is* Your lovingkindness, O God!

Therefore the children of men put their trust under the shadow of Your wings.

⁸They are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house,
And You give them drink from the **river of Your pleasures.**

⁹For with You *is* the fountain of life;
In Your light we see light." Psalm 36:7-9

Though the blessing is upon Asher and his tribe, it ultimately looks forward to what is realized in the coming Messiah. Even the name of Asher which comes from that verb, *ashar*, which I mentioned earlier is used when speaking of the God of Israel, where in Psalm 72 this is recorded -

"His name shall endure forever;
His name shall continue as long as the sun.
And *men* shall be blessed in Him;
All nations shall call Him **blessed**.
¹⁸ Blessed *be* the LORD God, the God of Israel,
Who only does wondrous things!
¹⁹ And blessed *be* His glorious name forever!
And let the whole earth be filled *with* His glory.
Amen and Amen." Psalm 72:17-19

In the witness of the stars, Asher, whose bread is rich, is represented by Virgo who is seen holding a full ear of wheat, from which bread is derived.

The three accompanying constellations are *Coma* - the desired; *Centaurus*, the Centaur with two natures, holding a spear and piercing a victim; and *Bootes*, a man walking bearing a branch called Arcturus. Each of these specifically points to the work of Christ in the history of redemption. And each are well detailed by EW Bullinger in his book, *The Witness of the Stars*.

*How precious is Your lovingkindness, O God!
Therefore the children of men put their trust in You
Under the shadow of Your wings and guided by your rod
To You alone are all our praises due*

*We are abundantly satisfied with the fullness of Your house
And You give drink from the river of Your pleasures
For with You is the fountain of life
In Your light we see light eternal without borders or measures*

*To You we look and our hope is in Your gospel story
Only to You who does such wondrous things
And let the whole earth be filled with Your glory
As we behold the unfolding of your counselings*

III. The Blessing Upon Naphtali (verse 21)

²¹ **"Naphtali is a deer let loose;**

The final blessing upon the son of a maidservant falls to Jacob's sixth-born son, Naphtali. He is the second son born to a concubine and the second born to Rachel's maidservant Bilhah. The record of Naphtali's birth is found in Genesis 30:7, 8 -

"And Rachel's maid Bilhah conceived again and bore Jacob a second son.
⁸ Then Rachel said, "With great wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, *and* indeed I have prevailed." So she called his name Naphtali."

The meaning of Naphtali isn't as easy to determine as some of the others. Naphtali means either "my wrestling" or "my twisting." If it is *wrestling*, then it is referring to the struggle Rachel felt she was in with Leah - one of being the preeminent wife of Jacob.

If so, her exclamation at his birth is, "With great wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed." They were in a battle and she is now on top.

But the name Naphtali comes from the word *patal* which means to "twist." And so one translator says, "By the twistings of God, I am entwisted with my sister."

The difference in the translation is important because in the first, it is her struggle against her sister and she has prevailed. But in the second it is God's designs that have allowed her to participate in building the family which previously was only by her sister.

If it is the first translation, she was showing an arrogance in condemning her sister even after God had been gracious to her through children. If it is the second, then she was showing gratitude to God for allowing her to be included in His plans as He built up Jacob's home. As you can see, differences in translation really do matter.

But whichever is correct for the naming of him at birth, Jacob's blessing upon him sets him free. Instead of being caught in a wrestling or a twisting, Jacob says that Naphtali is a deer let loose.

In other words, he isn't pursued by hunters, and he also isn't caged up in a pen. Naphtali is free to roam and feed upon any pastures he desires. Again, there isn't much concerning Naphtali in the Bible. In Judges 5, they are noted along with Zebulun for jeopardizing their lives to help in a time of need during a great battle.

They did the same during another battle in Judges 6 and 7. And later in 1 Kings 7, a craftsman named Hiram whose mother was from Naphtali was hired by Solomon to cast the main implements used in the temple in Jerusalem.

^{21 (fin)} **He uses beautiful words.**

Whatever the connection to the future of Naphtali that this verse is pointing to, the Bible doesn't make any direct reference to it. Because of this, it is more than likely a prophecy specifically speaking about the ministry of the Lord, and only generally to the people of Naphtali.

Again as before, the words were given by the Spirit through Jacob and ultimately point to Christ. The work of God in Christ is what sets a man free. Using the same symbolism of the deer, we read this about the Lord in the 18th Psalm -

"He makes my feet like the *feet of deer*,
And sets me on my high places." Psalm 18:33

It is the Lord who sets the deer free and allows him to run in the open places. And in Jacob saying that Naphtali uses beautiful words, nothing could be more appropriately said about Jesus.

The power of the gospel, unlike any other power in history, has been displayed more through words of beauty than by any display of force. The land of Naphtali ran all along the shores of Galilee and it is from there that

sweet voice of the Lord most strikingly went out. As John Gill notes concerning this verse -

"Galileans, were swift to obey his call, and left all and followed him, and were sent out by him to preach his Gospel; and both he and they may be said to "give goodly words", as the doctrines of the Gospel are, words of grace, truth, and life; wholesome, comfortable, pleasant and delightful; good tidings of good things, of peace, pardon, righteousness, salvation and eternal life by Christ: and the inhabitants of this country in Christ's time were swift to run after him, and hear him; panted after him as the hart after the water brooks, and both received and gave out the goodly words of the Gospel, and were made free thereby, and so like an hind let loose."
John Gill

It is to this group of people, along with Zebulun, that Isaiah made his prophecy of the great Light which would fill the land -

"Nevertheless the gloom *will not be* upon her who *is* distressed,
As when at first He lightly esteemed
The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali,
And afterward more heavily oppressed *her*,
By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan,
¹ In Galilee of the Gentiles.
² The people who walked in darkness
Have seen a great light;
Those who dwelt in the land of the shadow of death,
Upon them a light has shined." Isaiah 9:1, 2

Matthew used this very verse from Isaiah to show that it was fulfilled, in its entirety in the Lord Jesus. Certainly every word of the prophecy points to the One who spoke it through the breath of his dying servant Jacob.

In the witness of the stars, Naphtali is revealed by a play on his name *Naphtali*. It is used to form the word *taleh*, which is a ram or a lamb - the sign of Aries. The three conjoining constellations of Aries are *Cassiopeia*, the Enthroned Woman; *Cetus*, the Sea Monster; and *Perseus*, the Breaker.

For those familiar with the rest of the Bible, the imagery, especially of the Lamb is everywhere, pointing to Christ. The other conjoining constellations are very well described by Bullinger in his book and point to the work of the Messiah in defeating the devil and leading His people in a glorious procession.

Particularly exceptional is the connection to Perseus, the Breaker. This work of Christ is wonderfully seen in the words of Micah which say this -

"The one who **breaks** open will come up before them;
They will **break** out,
Pass through the gate,
And go out by it;
Their king will pass before them,
With the LORD at their head." Micah 2:13

The Hebrew name of Perseus is Perez and its where the Greek name we use is derived from. This is the same word used to describe the one who breaks forth in this passage from Micah.

As you can see again, as we have seen in every blessing so far, Jesus is perfectly and exactly revealed in these words of Jacob to his sons.

And likewise, the stars themselves witness to the splendor of what God has done, is doing, and will complete in and through His Son, our Lord Jesus. As David says in the 19th Psalm -

"The heavens declare the glory of God;
And the firmament shows His handiwork.
² Day unto day utters speech,
And night unto night reveals knowledge." Psalm 19:1, 2

Everything that God has revealed is to us shows us His great love for us. Were it not so, He wouldn't have taken the time to give us His plan in the heavens, His word for our guide, and His Son for our redemption. This is how much God loves us and how certain it is that He desires us to know Him personally.

And the only way we can do that is to call on Jesus and come to know Him through His word.

Closing Verse: Your word is a lamp to my feet

And a light to my path.

106 I have sworn and confirmed

That I will keep Your righteous judgments. Psalm 119:105, 106

Next Week: Genesis 49:22-26 (The Blessing Upon Joseph and Benjamin)
(127th Genesis Sermon)

The Lord has you exactly where He wants you and He has a good plan and purpose for you. Call on Him and let Him do marvelous things for you and through you.

Triumph, Royal Bread, and Beautiful Words

Jacob blessed his sons before he died

Three of them were Gad, Asher, and Naphtali

By these precious words we are notified

Of a portion of God's plan of redemption in history

Upon these three, these words he did pronounce

Prophecies of things to come which God's Spirit did announce:

“Gad, a troop shall tramp upon him,

But he shall triumph at last.

“Bread from Asher shall be rich,

And he shall yield royal dainties.

“Naphtali is a deer let loose;

He uses beautiful words.

Just three verses, so short and to the point

And yet filled with treasures immeasurable

Upon the dying lips of Jacob he did anoint

Pictures of Christ which are ascertainable

Such wisdom and splendor revealed in God's word
Hints of the future not discernable in nature alone
Words which tell us of our precious Lord
Of His life and of His death which for our sins do atone

The glory of God is written in the stars above
And it is explained so carefully in His precious book
There we see of the plan, the Life, the love
And so let our eyes to it every day take a look

Be not weary and skip over this pleasure
In it you will find the greatest of treasure

Hallelujah and Amen...