

Joshua 19:17-23, Issachar

08/12/98 7:01 AM

Birth

Gen 30:18, fifth son of Leah, just before Zebulun, thus the two are often associated. Name means “There is a payment,” following Leah’s comment. Conveys sense of hire or wages, and thus sets us up for characteristics of the blessings.

Blessings

Blessing of Jacob

Gen 49:14-15, “Issachar [is] a strong ass couching down between two burdens: 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.” Three characteristics:

1. A lazy donkey lying down beneath its load. “Burden” is a dual, and probably refers to a donkey’s saddle-baskets (even in Judg 5:16, where the image is a shepherd leaning back against his packs). The image may be of Issachar in the valley, between the highlands of Galilee on the north and Ephraim on the south. Lack of initiative.
2. Blessed with a fruitful land. Their territory (Josh 19) includes the plain of Esdraelon, Mount Tabor, Mount Moreh, and on down to Jordan. This is the richest cropland in all of Israel. Led to a great increase in the tribe: 87K fighting men at the time of David (1 Chr 7:5), more than I have found recorded for any other single tribe at any time in Israel’s history.
 - Hill of Moreh is probably what Joshua offered the children of Joseph in 17:14-18.
 - NT Events in this Area
 - Lk 7:11-16, Lord raises son of Widow of Nain, on NW slopes of Moreh
 - Transfiguration, on Mt. Tabor
3. Destined to serve others, rather than undertake great initiatives on his own. Cf. 1 Chr 12:32, when the tribes came up to Hebron to make David king, “the children of Issachar, [... were men] that had understanding of the times, to know what Israel ought to do.” They “saw the writing on the wall” and realized that the time had come to turn their allegiance from Saul to David. May also reflect the destiny of such a territory, coveted both for its richness and for its importance as a thoroughfare, to fall first and often under the hand of invaders. Cf. 2 Chr 35:22; this is the “valley of Megiddo,” where Josiah fell before Necho, and where the last great battle will be fought, Rev 16:14-16.

Blessing of Moses

Same as Zebulun: Deut 33:18,19, “And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and Issachar, in thy tents. 19 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.”

Their joy: Moses associates Issachar with rest and Zebulun with going out; this would accord with Jacob's blessing on Issachar as a lazy donkey.

Their mission: We have no record of anyone from Issachar comparable to Jonah in Zebulun.

People

Mediocre Political Leaders

The prophecies suggest that the tribe is short on ambition and initiative. They produced two political leaders, both mediocre characters.

Tola.—Their judge is the minor judge Tola, Judg 10:1,2, after Abimelech.

Baasha.—1 Kings 15:27-16:14, tribe of Baasha, king of Israel, and his son Elah.

- wicked kings
- took power by killing the previous king with “friendly fire” in war against the Philistines
- object of prophecy of doom by prophet Jehu. Became proverbial as a king who fell under God's judgment, 1 Kings 21:22; 2 Kings 9:9.

Home-Loving Citizens

The characteristic that they are content to enjoy the rich produce of their inheritance is seen in two characters, whom we understand to be of Issachar because the cities with which they are associated fall within its territory.

Naboth the Jezreelite

1 Kings 21:1-3, treasures his vineyard, and is not willing to mar the inheritance of his fathers for the sake of pleasing the king.

Elisha's Shunemmite

2 Kings 4:8-37, note v.13, “I dwell among mine own people.”

2 Kings 8:1-6, seeks restoration of her land after her return from Philistia during a time of famine.

Applications

The risk of indecision. The children of Joseph lost the chance to possess Moreh and its fertile lowlands, and it was later allotted to Issachar.

The danger of ease. The blessings remind us of the risk of growing lazy when our lives lack discipline. “Whom the Lord loves he chastens.” Hardship is healthy, if it is not overbearing.

The virtue of contentment. The Shunemmite and Naboth are examples for us of contentment with the good things the Lord has given us.