

Joshua 19:24-31 Asher

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Birth: Gen 30:1-13

The March of the Mothers:

- Current score is Leah 4 (Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah), Rachel 0
- Rachel brings in Bilhah, who bears Dan and Naphthali.
- Meanwhile Leah has stopped bearing, so she copies Rachel and gives Zilpah to Jacob, who bears Gad and Asher.

“Asher” means “happy” or “blessed,” cf. Ps. 1:1. Probably “Gad” has a similar sense, not “troop” (which would be *gadud*), but “fortune.” Unlike Rachel in the naming of Dan, Leah has no sense of divine vindication; she has permitted her rival to catch her up in a carnal competition, and is focused on her own happiness and good fortune.

This theme of carnal prosperity pervades the later blessings on Asher.

Blessings

Jacob, Gen 49:20 “Out of Asher his bread [shall be] fat, and he shall yield royal dainties.”

Moses, Deut 33:24 “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”

Both of these blessings concern the comfort and prosperity of Asher. We can understand this if we consider her geographical situation in more detail.

Territory

Reaches to Tyre and Sidon (OT Zidon, NT Sidon)

Judg 1:31 shows that Sidon was potentially theirs.

2 Sam 24:1-9, route of the census-takers reaches to Tyre and Sidon; Israelites lived far north.

The association with Tyre and Sidon places Asher directly in contact with Israel’s major neighbors, the Phoenicians.

- West is the sea
- South and east is desert before you get to the major civilizations

Mercantile Implications

Implications: they were in the middle of the shopping mall! This is most clearly seen in Ezek 27-28 (cf. Isa 23)

- 27:1-25, the riches of Tyre’s commerce. Note:
 - the reference to Zidon in v.8.

- Israel's pastoral contributions in v.17. *pannag* is a hapax, probably (from Akkadian parallels) a kind of meal. "Wheat" and "balm" would be trade goods from transjordan; honey and oil would come from Israel itself.
- 27:26-36, the destruction of Tyre.
- 28:1-10, the fall of the prince of Tyre
- 28:11-19, Satan, the power behind Tyre. Important, because otherwise we do not read a great deal about a threat to religious orthodoxy from Tyre. She does not draw Israel away after Baal or Marduk, as other nations might, but that doesn't mean that there is no spiritual threat—Satan is still behind her.
- 28:20-24, fall of Zidon, Tyre's partner.

Strengthening the Association

Recall that the mountains divide the Levant into three N/S bands:

- The coastal areas (Philistia, Asher, Sidonia)
- The rift valley (Red Sea, Jericho area, Naphthali, the Beqaa valley in Lebanon)
- Eastern highlands (Edom, Moab, RGM/2, Damascus and the Syrians)

David's wars:

- Early in his reign (2 Sam 5), secured the southern coast from the Philistines.
- Later (2 Sam 8, 10) he conquered the eastern highlands.

Relations to the northern coast, in contrast, were made by treaty, not conquest:

- 2 Sam 5:11, Hiram king of Tyre initiated trade with David, perhaps preempting conquest.
- 1 Kings 5:1-12, Hiram supported Solomon in the building of the temple. How would you have liked to be a broker in Asher during this period?
- 1 Kings 9:10-14, details of the transactions
 - Hiram had furnished supplies (11a) and gold (14) during the construction activity
 - Solomon ceded him 20 Israelite cities
 - Hiram rejected them, and (2 Chr 8:1-2) returned them to Solomon. Does this explain Ezek 28:26?
- We are left to guess how Solomon settled his debt with Hiram.

Summary of Israel and Tyre

Israel was the country farmer, dealing with the great merchant power of Tyre.

Tyre looked down on Israel as backwards and dirty; Israel would naturally grow to covet Tyre's riches.

Asher, as the tribe adjacent to Tyre and Sidon, would have profited greatly from the trade between the nations, but would also have been most likely to be corrupted by their carnality.

But notice the power behind Tyre, and her eventual fall. The coastal route was a highway for invaders, and Asher would have suffered early and often in these conflicts: cf. Macmillan Bible Atlas maps:

- 135 (Shalmaneser III, 841 BC)
- 147 (Tiglath-Pileser III, 734-732)
- 153 (Sennacherib, 701)
- 156 (Esarhaddon, 669)
- 172 (Alexander the Great, 334-332)
- 175 (Ptolemy I, 320)
- 180 (Antiochus III, 201-198)
- 184 (Antiochus IV Epiphanes, 170-167)
- etc.

This is the model for the fall of Babylon in Rev. 18:9-14, warning us of the futility of seeking security in material things. God has provided abundantly for us, but we must beware of the danger of “covetousness, which is idolatry” (Col 3:5), and be careful stewards of what God has given us.

National Exploits

Judg 5:17, did not support Deborah and Barak against Jabin king of Hazor; dwelt comfortably by the sea.

Judg 6:35; 7:23, did support Gideon against the Midianites. Perhaps felt that a threat in Jezreel was more damaging to their commercial interests than one up through the rift valley.

2 Chr 30:11, with Manasseh and Zebulun, sent representatives to Hezekiah’s Passover.

After the patriarchal period, only one person is expressly said to come from Asher. That is a woman, and a NT one at that: Luke 2:36-38, Anna the prophetess. (Actually, we have the name of her father as well.)

- Instead of comfort and riches in the mall, we see an aged widow, fasting in the temple.
- Her eyes are open to recognize the Messiah, something that many of her contemporaries missed.