

Genesis Chapter 49

1-27

Jacob concludes his life as other saints who spoke a blessing before their end: Isaac (chapter 27), Moses (Deut. chapter 33), Joshua (Joshua chapter 24), and Samuel (1 Sam. chapter 12).

The reference to a lion in verse 9 points to that One who is called “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (in Revelation 5:5).

Verses (11 and 12), describe the millennial prosperity (Isa. 11:1-9; Ezek. 34:23-31; Amos 9:11-15).

Genesis 49:1 "And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you [that] which shall befall you in the last days."

"And Jacob called upon his sons":

Who either were near at hand, and within call at the time Joseph came to visit him, or if at a distance, and at another time, he sent a messenger or messengers to them to come unto him.

"And said, gather yourselves together":

His will was, that they should attend him all together at the same time, that he might deliver what he had to say to them in the hearing of them all.

For what he after declares was not said to them singly and alone, but at a time when they were all before him.

"That I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days":

Not their persons merely, but their posterity chiefly, from that time forward to the coming of the Messiah, who is spoken of in this prophecy, and the time of his coming.

The key expression leading into the poetic content of Jacob's prediction for each son often signifies the last days in prophetic literature (Isa. 2:2; Ezek. 38:16), or points more generally to “the latter days” (Duet. 4:30; 31:29), i.e., in the sense of “in subsequent days.”

This introduces the whole prophecy, and functions in an important way in the Old Testament.

It refers to Israel's future in dual perspective: the period of their occupation of Canaan, and the time of the coming of messiah.

Sometimes the expression refers to Israel at the end of the Great Tribulation (Deut. 4:30; Ezek. 38:16), sometimes to the history of Gentile nations (Dan. 2:28), and sometimes to the present church age in its entirety (Heb. 1:2), or at its conclusion (2 Tim. 3:1; James 5:3).

Jacob's pronouncements in chapter 49 included both prophecy (verse 1), and blessing (verse 28).

Reuben is referred to as being "Unstable as water."

Unstable literally means "a boiling over" of water, a vivid metaphor for unstable emotions (Judges 9:4; Zeph. 3:4, where the same root denotes pride and frivolity).

This is a prophetic Scripture reaching to the last days. The following is a statement to the tribe of each son, and what the future holds.

Verses 2-27

The names of the sons are not given in birth order (29:32-34; 35:18), nor in the pattern of wife, then handmaid (46:8-25).

The order is as per the mother:

- (1) The 6 sons of Leah;
- (2) One son of Bilhah;
- (3) Two sons of Zilpah;
- (4) One son of Bilhah; and
- (5) The two sons of Rachel.

Other than the reversal of Leah's fifth and sixth sons, the others remain in chronological order in relation to their mothers.

No other pattern is discernible.

It may have been nothing more than an associational device, or just how Jacob personally had come to recall them to mind.

Genesis 49:2 "Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father."

"Gather yourselves together":

This is repeated to hasten them, and to suggest that he had something of importance to make known unto them, which he chose to do, when they were together.

"And hear, ye sons of Jacob, and hearken to Israel your father":

These words are used and doubled to excite their attention to what he was about to say, and which is urged from the near relation there was between them.

Israel was about to speak to his sons for all of eternity and he told them not only to listen, but to take heed to what was being said.

Verses 3-4

The seriousness of Reuben's sin (35:22), was not forgotten.

Its consequences erased his birthright (1 Chron. 5:1-3), and whatever dignity and majesty he might have had, his tribe received scant mention in Israelite history and produced not one judge, prophet, military leader, or other important person (Judges 5:15; 1 Chron. 5:1).

Moses prayed for this tribe not to die out (Deut. 33:6).

"Uncontrolled as water" literally means "boiling" and shows instability.

Genesis 49:3 "Reuben, thou [art] my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power:"

"Reuben, thou art my firstborn":

Jacob addressed himself to Reuben first, in the presence of his brethren.

He owned him as his firstborn, as he was (Genesis 29:31), but did not cast him from his family, nor disinherit him, though he had greatly disobliged him, for which the birthright, and the privileges of it, were taken from him (1 Chronicles 5:1).

"My might, and the beginning of my strength":

Begotten by him when in his full strength, as well as the first of his family, in which his strength and glory lay.

So the Septuagint, "the beginning of my children".

And because he was so, of right the double portion belonged to him, had he not forfeited it (Deuteronomy 21:17).

Some versions render the words, "the beginning of my grief", or "sorrow", the word "Oni" sometimes so signifying, as Rachel called her youngest son "Benoni", the son of my sorrow.

But this is not true of Reuben.

He was not the beginning of Jacob's sorrow, for the ravishing of Dinah, and the slaughter and spoil of the Shechemites, by his sons, which gave him great sorrow and grief, were before the affair of Reuben's lying with Bilhah.

"The excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power":

That is, to him of right belonged excellent dignity, power, and authority in the family.

A preeminence over his brethren, a double portion of goods, succession in government, and, as is commonly understood, the exercise of the priesthood.

And so the Targums interpret it, that he should, had he not sinned, taken three parts or portions above his brethren, the birthright, priesthood, and kingdom.

Jacob observes this to him that he might know what he had lost by sinning.

And from what excellency and dignity, grandeur and power, he was fallen.

Genesis 49:4 "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou [it]: he went up to my couch."

"Unstable as water":

Which is not to be understood of the levity of his mind, and his disposition to hurt, and the impetuous force of that breaking forth like water, and carrying him into the commission of it.

Rather of his fall from his excellency and dignity, like the fall of water from a high place.

And of his being vile, mean, and contemptible, useless and unprofitable like water that was spilled on the ground.

And of his weak and powerless condition and circumstances, being deprived of the prerogatives and privileges of his birthright, and having lost all his honor and grandeur, power and authority.

The word in the Arabic language signifies to be proud and haughty, to lift up one's self, to swell and rise, like the puffy and swelling waters.

But though he did thus lift himself, yet it follows.

"Thou shalt not excel":

Not have the outstanding feature of dignity and power which belonged to him as the firstborn.

The birthright and the double portion were given to Joseph, who had two tribes descending from him, when Reuben had but one.

The kingdom was given to Judah, and the priesthood to Levi, as both the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem observe.

As he did not excel his brethren in honor and dignity, so neither in wealth and riches, nor in numbers (see Deuteronomy 33:6), where the word "not" is wrongly supplied.

Nor did he share in the land of Canaan, his posterity being seated on the other side of Jordan, at their request.

Nor did any persons of note or eminence spring from his tribe, because thou wentest up to thy father's bed, then defiledst thou it.

Referring to his incest with Bilhah, his father's concubine wife (Genesis 35:22), which, though done forty years ago, was now remembered, and left an indelible spot on Reuben's character, and his posterity.

"He went up to my couch":

Turning himself to his other sons, to take notice of the crime, as very abominable and detestable.

Affirming the truth of it, and speaking of it with some vehemence, his affections being moved; and it may be could not bear to look at Reuben, but turned himself to his brethren.

Though he had forgiven the sin, and very probably Reuben had repented of it, and had forgiveness of God, which he might have, though in some sense vengeance was taken on this sinful invention of his (Psalm 99:8).

There are various senses given of this phrase; some, as Aben Ezra, "my bed departed from me"; that is, he departed from his bed.

Here, Jacob was saying to Reuben, your morals were bad.

You were wishy-washy; you would not prosper, because you did not have your life set on the solid rock of faith.

Your eyes were set on fleshly pleasures rather than on the things of God.

Verses 5-7

The cruelty and anger of Simeon and Levi at Shechem were not forgotten (34:25).

Their consequences affected Simeon who

(1) Became the smallest tribe in the second census of Moses (Num. 26:14);

- (2) Was omitted from the blessing of Moses (Deut. 33:8); and
- (3) Later shared territory with Judah (Josh. 19:1-9).

Levi was “scattered” (verse 7), throughout Israel; they became, by God’s grace and through their loyalty to God (Exodus 32:26), the priestly tribe and residents of the cities of refuge.

Neither possessed their own designated region in the Land, although Levi’s priestly position was certainly a privileged one (Deut. 33:8-11; Josh. 21:1-3).

“Lamed” means to cut the leg tendons as a means of destroying the animal’s usefulness.

Genesis 49:5 "Simeon and Levi [are] brethren; instruments of cruelty [are in] their habitations."

It is said of “Simeon” and “Levi” that “in their self-will they digged down a wall.”

It is literally, “At their pleasure they lamed oxen.”

This is supplementary to (34:27-29).

What these two men did not capture as plunder they destroyed in the fierceness of their anger.

"Simeon and Levi are brethren":

Not because they were so in a natural sense, being brethren both by father and mother's side, for there were others so besides them.

But because they were of like tempers, dispositions, and manners, bold, wrathful, cruel, revengeful, and deceitful, and joined together in their evil counsels and actions, and so joined together in the evils predicted of them.

"Instruments of cruelty are in their habitations":

Or vessels, utensils, household goods gotten by the violent seizure of someone’s property.

And through the cruel usage of the Shechemites; these were in their dwellings; their houses were full of such mammon of unrighteousness, or spoil.

Or, as others, "instruments of cruelty" are "their swords"; what they should only have used in their own defense.

With these they shed the blood of the Shechemites very barbarously (see Genesis 34:25).

Genesis 49:6 "O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honor, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall."

"O my soul, come not thou into their secret":

Their cabinet counsels, combinations and conspiracies.

This Jacob said, as abhorring the wicked counsel they had took of slaying the Shechemites; and lest any should think he was involved in it, or secretly allowed it, he expressed a detestation of the fact on his dying bed.

"Unto their assembly, mine honor, be not thou united":

The same thing expressed in different words; by his "honor or glory" he means his soul, the more honorable part of man, or his tongue, with which man glorifies God.

Hereby Jacob intimates, that he did not in thought, and much less in express words, give any consent unto, and approval of the deed of those two sons of his, and that he never was, nor never desired to be with them in their meetings and consultations.

"For in their anger they slew a man":

Hamor and Shechem, together with all the males of the city.

And so "man" may be put for "men", the singular for the plural, as is frequent.

The Targum of Jonathan is, a king and his governor; and the Targum of Jerusalem states, kings with governors.

"And in their self-will they digged down a wall":

Not the wall of the city of Shechem, which does not appear to be walled, by their easy access into it.

And if it was, they do not seem to have had proper instruments for such an undertaking, nor a sufficient number for such work, and which would have required longer time than they used, unless it was a poor wall indeed.

Rather the wall of Shechem's house, or the court before it, which they dug down, or broke through to get in and slay Hamor and Shechem, and take away their sister.

Genesis 49:7 "Cursed [be] their anger, for [it was] fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel."

"Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce":

It was sinful anger in the nature of it, and so criminal and detestable.

It was strong, fierce, and furious in its operation and effects, and so justly cursed; not their persons, but their passions.

"And their wrath, for it was cruel":

It issued in the cruel and barbarous slaughter of the inhabitants of Shechem.

The same thing as before in other words repeated, to express his great abhorrence of their wrath and rage.

Aben Ezra thinks that the words may be considered either as a prophecy or a prayer that their anger might cease.

What follows is certainly a prophecy:

"I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel":

Which he is said to do, because he foretold it would be done.

As Jeremiah is said to root out and pull down kingdoms, because he prophesied thereof (Jeremiah 1:10), and this was fulfilled in the tribes of Simeon and Levi.

As for the tribe of Simeon, that had not a distinct part by itself in the land of Canaan, but had their inheritance out of the portion, and within the inheritance of the tribe of Judah (Joshua 19:1), and their cities did not join to one another, as Aben Ezra observes, but lay scattered up and down in the tribe of Judah.

And when they were increased and straitened for room, many of them went without the land, to the entrance of Gedor, where they of Ham, or the Egyptians, had dwelt, and others to Mount Seir in Edom (1 Chronicles 4:39).

And it is a notion which prevails with the Jews, and which Jarchi takes notice of, that a great many of this tribe were scribes and teachers of the law, and even teachers of children, and by which they lived among the several tribes.

And so the Jerusalem Targum, "I will divide the tribe of Simeon, that they may be scribes and teachers of the law in the congregation of Jacob".

And as for the tribe of Levi, it is well known that they had no inheritance in the land of Canaan, but had forty eight cities assigned them in the several tribes here and there; and thus Jacob's prophecy had an exact accomplishment.

This harsh reprimand of Simeon and Levi was because of the cruel way that they avenged their sister, Dinah.

They used, circumcision, their covenant with God, to kill their enemies.

This brought shame and disgrace to the house of Israel.

Jacob had to go somewhere else to live to keep the neighboring tribes from attacking.

Jacob was living in peace with these people, and these two sons brought unrest, and made Israel become a stench to the people around.

He was telling them that they would be divided, and not be a great tribe for this, their sin, the killing unmercifully of the Shechemites.

Verses 8-12

As strong as a young lion and entrenched as an old lion, to Judah's line belonged national prominence and kingship, including David, Solomon, and their dynasty (640 years after this), as well as "the one to whom the scepter belongs," i.e., Shiloh, the cryptograms for the Messiah, the one also called the "Lion from the Tribe of Judah" (Rev. 5:5).

On the march through the wilderness, Judah went first (Num. 10:14), and had the largest population in Moses' census (Num. 1:27; 26:22).

This language (verses 11-12), describes prosperity so great that people will tie a donkey to a choice vine, letting it eat because there is such abundance; wine will be as plentiful as water and everyone will be healthy.

This is likely a millennial prophecy.

Genesis 49:8 "Judah, thou [art he] whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand [shall be] in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee."

"Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise":

His name signifies praise, and was given him by his mother, her heart being filled with praises to God for him (Genesis 29:35), and is here confirmed by his father on another account, because his brethren should praise him for many excellent virtues in him.

And it appears, by instances already observed, that he had great authority, and was highly esteemed among his brethren, as his posterity would be in future times for their courage, warlike expeditions and success, and being famous for heroes, such as David, and others.

And especially his famous seed the Messiah, and of whom he was a type.

Should be praised by his brethren, who are so through his incarnation, and by divine adoption, and who praise him for the glories and excellencies of his person, and the blessings of his grace.

"Thine hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies":

Pressing them down by his superior power, subduing them, and causing them to submit to him.

And which was verified in David, who was of this tribe (Psalm 18:40).

And especially in the Messiah, in a spiritual sense, who has conquered and subdued all his and his people's enemies, sin, Satan, the world and death.

"Thy father's children shall bow down before thee":

Before the kings that should spring from this tribe, and should rule over all the rest, as David and Solomon, to whom civil adoration and respect were given by them.

And before the King Messiah, his son and antitype, in a way of religious worship, which is given him by the angels, the sons of God, and by all the saints and people of God, who are his father's children by adoption.

These bow before him, and give him religious adoration as a divine Person, and submit to his righteousness as Mediator.

And bow to the scepter of his kingdom, and cast their crowns at his feet, and give him the glory of their whole salvation.

This in some Jewish writings is applied to the time of the Messiah's coming.

Genesis 49:9 "Judah [is] a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?"

"Judah is a lion's whelp":

Or as one; the note of likeness or being wanting, as Aben Ezra and Ben Melech observe.

He was comparable to a young lion for his strength, courage, and generosity.

And it may refer to the infant state of this tribe in the times of the judges, who first went up against the Canaanites and overcame them (Judges 1:1).

"From the prey, my son, thou art gone up":

Alluding to the lion going up to the mountains, where it chiefly resides, after it has found its prey and satisfied its appetite with it.

"He stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion":

One that is grown up, and has arrived to its full strength, such a one is a proper emblem of David king of Israel, of his royalty, courage, valor and conquests.

And who having subdued the nations round about him, couched like a lion, and had rest from all his enemies.

And especially this was verified in the times of Solomon his son, when he had peace on all sides, and Judah and Israel dwelt safely under their vines and fig trees (1 Kings 4:24).

"Who shall rouse him up?":

A lion grown up and in its full strength, or a lioness, as some choose to interpret it, and which is the fiercest, and therefore the most dangerous to rouse up when laid down, either in its den, or with its prey in its paws.

So dangerous it was to provoke the tribe of Judah, as its enemies later found out, especially in the times of David.

All this may be applied to Christ, the lion of the tribe of Judah; the lion being the king of beasts, and the strongest among them, may denote the kingly power and authority of Christ, his great strength as the mighty God and mighty Savior, his courage in engaging with all the powers of darkness, and valor in vanquishing all enemies.

His generosity and kindness to those that stoop to him, and his fierceness to his adversaries, who took the prey from the mighty, and then ascended on high, leading captivity captive; where he sat down at the right hand of God at rest and ease.

And who will dare to rouse him up, or be able to stand before him when once he is angry?

This verse in some ancient writings of the Jews is interpreted of Messiah the son of David.

Genesis 49:10 "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him [shall] the gathering of the people [be]."

The key thought is expressed as "the scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be."

The scepter was a symbol of royal power.

Lawgiver, according to Speiser, refers to a mace.

Etymologically, it is something pertaining to a legislator or one in authority, and from the context, an analogue of the scepter.

When a dignitary was seated, the staff would rest between his feet.

Jacob was not saying his rule would end when Shiloh came.

On the contrary, this term denotes the turning point at which the superiority of Judah will continue, not then to cease, but at that time to be enlarged so as to embrace all nations.

Shiloh is a hidden name for Messiah; it is made up of three grammatical parts (*sh-l-oh*), meaning Him to Whom It [the Scepter or Kingdom] belongs.”

The “*sh*” is the relative pronoun, the “*l*” is the possessive, and the “*oh*” is the “pronominal” suffix (the person, thing, or idea that a word or expression stands for; see Ezek. 21:27).

Thus, it is not to be taken as a proper name for Messiah, nor does it refer to the town where the tabernacle was later established, for this would be meaningless prophetically.

“And unto him shall the gathering of the people be”:

This means literally, “And unto him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”

This can refer only to the Messiah.

Of course, we know that Jesus is the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

The statement above saying ... Thine hand being on the neck of his enemy ... was probably referring to the victories of David the king.

Perhaps Solomon was also mentioned in that brief statement.

We do know that lawgivers were from this tribe.

They were not diminished, until the grace given came in Jesus Christ our Lord.

We do know that the gathering, spoken of here, is the gathering together unto Jesus.

These next verses were still about Judah and his descendants' future.

Genesis 49:11 "Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes:"

"Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine":

Which may be understood either of the tribe of Judah, and signify that vines should grow in such plenty, and so large and strong, that a man might fasten his ass to one of them.

And if it ate and destroyed it, it would give no great concern, since the whole country abounded with them.

Or they would be so full of clusters that a man might load an ass from one of them.

Some parts of the tribe of Judah were famous for vines, especially Engedi; hence we read of the vineyards of Engedi (Song of Solomon 1:14), or else of Shiloh the Messiah, which some interpret literally of him, when the prophecy (in Zech. 9:9), was fulfilled, as is recorded (in Matthew 21:2).

But others better, figuratively, of Christ's causing the Gentiles, comparable to an ass's colt, for their impurity, ignorance of, and sluggishness in spiritual things, to cleave to him the true vine (John 15:1).

In the exercise of faith, hope, and love, or to join themselves to his church and people, sometimes compared to a vine or vineyard (Isaiah 5:1).

"And he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes":

A hyperbolical expression, setting forth the great abundance of wine in this tribe, of which there was such plenty.

That if they would, they might have used it instead of water to wash their clothes in, but not that they did do so, only might if they would.

And may denote the great quantity of spiritual blessings flowing from the love of God, which come by Christ.

And of his word and ordinances, which are comparable to wine and milk, and are a feast of fat things, of wine on the lees, well refined (Isaiah 26:6).

And may be applied to Christ, to the garment of his human nature, which, through his sufferings and death, was like a vesture dipped in blood, and he became red in his apparel (Isaiah 63:1).

Genesis 49:12 "His eyes [shall be] red with wine, and his teeth white with milk."

"His eyes shall be red with wine":

Signifying, not the intemperance of this tribe, and their immoderate use of wine, and the effect of it on them.

But the goodness and generosity of their wine, that if drank plentifully of, and especially to excess, would have such an effect (see Proverbs 23:29).

And, as applied to the Messiah, the opposite of Judah, and who was of this tribe, it may denote not so much the beauty of his eyes, as the Targums paraphrase it.

As the joy and pleasure that sparkled in his eyes when he shed his blood on the cross, enduring that, and despising the shame of it, for the joy of the salvation of his people.

Or the clearness of his sight in beholding the actions of his enemies, and especially of the fierceness and fury of his wrath against them, whose eyes are said to be as flames of fire (Revelation 1:14).

"And his teeth white with milk":

Denoting the fruitfulness of his land, producing fine pastures, on which flocks and herds fed, and gave abundance of milk.

And so Onkelos paraphrases the whole verse, "his mountains shall be red with his vineyards, and his hills shall drop wine, and his valleys shall be white with corn and flocks of sheep".

And much the same are the Targums of Jonathan and Jerusalem: the mystical sense may respect Christ and his people.

And be expressive of the purity of his nature, life, and doctrine, and of the holiness of his members, their faith and conversation.

All of this has to do with the blood of Jesus which was shed and remembered through the wine.

In all this, we need to see Christ through the blessings of Judah.

Our lives with Christ are eternal, just as the blessings of Judah were everlasting.

So many shadows of Jesus are in the above.

He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

He is the true Conqueror (over death).

He will draw all men unto Him.

Every word is really speaking of Jesus.

Genesis 49:13 "Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he [shall be] for a haven of ships; and his border [shall be] unto Zidon."

"Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea":

Of the Sea of Galilee, sometimes called the sea of Tiberias and of Gennesaret, and of the Mediterranean Sea.

And accordingly we find that the border of this tribe, when settled in the land of Canaan, was toward the sea (Joshua 19:10), and this was done, not at the discretion of Joshua, or at the choice of this tribe, but by lot.

And which shows that Jacob said this under a spirit of prophecy, and which had its fulfilment two hundred years after.

And is a full proof of the foreknowledge and providence of God.

And who, as he sets the bounds of the people, or of the nations of the world, and also of the tribes of Israel's.

So the bounds of the habitations of particular persons (Acts 17:26).

“And he shall be for a haven of ships”:

Shall have good ports large enough for ships to station in, and to cover them from storms and tempests, this tribe being situated by the sea shore.

"And his border shall be unto Zidon":

Not the city Zidon, for the tribe of Zebulun reached no further than Carmel, as Josephus observes; "the Zebulunites (says he), obtained the land from Carmel, and then the sea to the lake of Gennesaret.

Now Carmel was forty miles at least from Zidon; but Phoenicia is meant, of which Zidon was the chief city.

And so the Septuagint (in Isaiah 23:2), put Phoenicia instead of Zidon.

And whereas Carmel was the border of this tribe that way, it is also said by Jerom to be the border of Phoenicia.

So that Zebulun reaching to Carmel so its border may be truly said to be to Zidon or Phoenicia.

Although Zebulun's territory did not border the Mediterranean or the Sea of Galilee, the tribe was situated to benefit from the important trade route, the Via Maris, traversed by sea trades moving through her territory.

This was more physical than spiritual with Zebulun.

It just marked his territory.

Verses 14-15

Issachar, an industrious, robust, hardy, and stalwart tribe, lived up to the name of their founder whose name meant “man of wages” (1 Chron. 7:1-5; 12:32).

Genesis 49:14 "Issachar [is] a strong ass couching down between two burdens:"

"Issachar is a strong ass":

Or as one, the note of similarity being wanting, as Ben Melech observes; "a bony" one, as the word signifies.

Not one that is lean, and nothing but skin and bones, as some interpret it, but that is strong and powerful, able to carry burdens.

This tribe is compared to an ass, not for stupidity and sluggishness, but for its strength, and its use in farming, in which this tribe was chiefly occupied.

The Targums of Jonathan and Jarchi interpret this figuratively, of his being strong to bear the yoke of the law.

And it is a notion of the Jews, that this tribe had men of knowledge and understanding, either in chronology or astrology.

Or in the proper seasons for husbandry, or for the fixing the beginning of years and months, and the intercalation of them, for keeping the several festivals.

Or rather were men of prudence and wisdom were skillful in the doctrines of the law, and the calculating of years, etc. (from 1 Chronicles 12:32), couching down between two burdens.

One which hung on one side, and another on the other; which Kimchi and Ben Melech interpret of bales of goods.

And may as well be understood of sacks of corn, or anything else, carried by these creatures, which, when they come into a good pasture and for the sake of that and ease, will lie down with their burdens on them, and rise up again with them.

The Targums of Onkelos and Jerusalem paraphrase it, "between two borders", or the borders of his brethren, as Jonathan, Zebulun and Dan, between which this tribe lay.

And this is the reason Aben Ezra gives why Issachar, who was older than Zebulun, is mentioned after him, and between him and Dan, because his land lay between them.

And so it may be observed, that in the division of the land in Joshua's time, Issachar's lot came up after Zebulun's (Joshua 19:10).

But Doctor Lightfoot thinks it refers to the two kingdoms, between which it lay, that of Phoenicia on one side, and that of Samaria on the other.

Genesis 49:15 "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."

"And he saw that rest was good":

Not only the house of the sanctuary, and attendance there, and the service of that, as the Targum of Jerusalem.

Or the rest of the world to come, the happiness of a future state, as that of Jonathan.

But rather, as Onkelos, the part and portion of the good land allotted him.

He saw that a quiet industry exercised in a diligent cultivation and fertilizing his land was preferable to the hurry of a court, or the fatigue of a camp, or the dangers of the seas.

"And the land that it was pleasant":

A fine delightful country, which, if well looked after and improved, would produce plenty of pleasant fruits.

And within this tribe were the rich vale of Esdraelon or Jezreel, and also was the fruitful mountains of Gilboa.

Of the former it is agreed by all travelers the like has never been seen by them, being of vast extent and very fertile, and formerly abounded with corn, wine, and oil (See Hosea 1:5).

And the latter were famous for fruitfulness, through the dews that descended on them (see 2 Samuel 1:21).

"And bowed his shoulders to bear":

The fatigues of ploughing and sowing, and reaping, and carrying in the fruits of the earth.

"And became a servant unto tribute":

Which greatly arises from agriculture and the fruits of the earth.

And this tribe chose rather to pay more tribute than the rest, that they might abide at home and attend the business of their fields, when others were called to go forth to war.

Issachar, it seems, was lazy and would work for others all his life.

He seemed to just drop into obscurity.

Genesis Chapter 49 Questions

1. What Jacob spoke to his sons was for when?

2. When Israel was speaking to his sons, what must they do?
3. Why did he tell Reuben he will not prosper?
4. Simeon and Levi were called instruments of cruelty, why?
5. What had they caused people around to think of Israel?
6. What would the brethren do to Judah?
7. Who is the Lion of the tribe of Judah?
8. The hand being on the neck refers to whom?
9. Who will the gathering be to?
10. Who is the true Conqueror? of what?
11. Where shall Zebulun dwell?
12. What were the two things we learn of Issachar here?