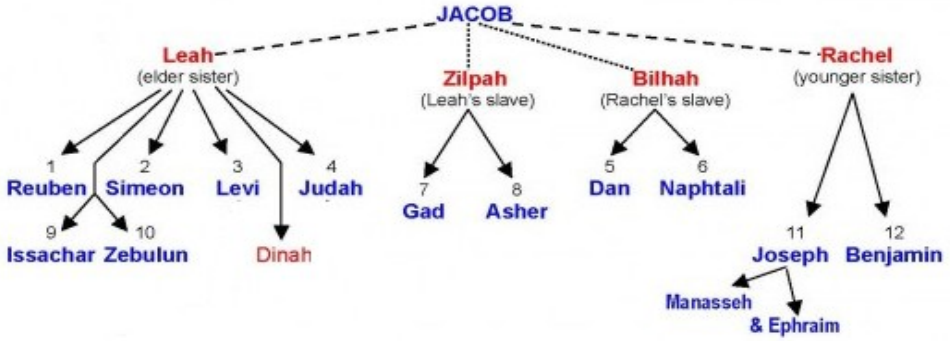
The Tribal Blessings



	BY JACOB, Gen 49	**BY MOSES, Deut 33**
Reuben	Verse 3 my firstborn, my might	Verse 6 Let not his *men* be few
Simeon & Levi	Verse 5 *Brethren*	Verse 8 Thy *Urim* and thy *Thummim*
Judah	Verse 9 A *lion*, &c.	Verse 7 Bring him unto his people: let his *hands* be sufficient for him
Zebulon	Verse 13 He shall *dwell*	Verse 18 Rejoice, Zebulon, in thy *going out* or forth
Issachar	Verses 14 and 15 A *strong ass*; he saw his *resting-place*, that it was good	Verse 18 Issachar, in thy *tents*
Dan	Verse 17 *A serpent by the way*	Verse 22 He shall *leap* or *spring* (as the adder)
Gad	Verse 19 A *troop* shall pierce him. "He shall be pierced in the heel"	Verse 21 He provided the *first part* for himself, &c.
Asher	Verse 20 his bread *shall be* fat	Verse 24 *Let Asher be* blessed
Naphtali	Verse 21 A *hind let loose*, released, or sent forth	Verse 23 Satisfied with favour, and filled with the blessing of the Lord
Joseph	Verse 25 blessings of the breasts, and of the womb	Verse 16 the precious things of the earth and fulness thereof
Benjamin	Verse 27 The *wolf* shall tear: in the morning he shall feed on the prey, in the evening he shall divide the spoil	Verse 12 The *beloved* of the Lord shall dwell between his shoulders

Introduction

The above table gives a brief overview of the main elements of the "blessings" and is not meant to replace an in-depth analysis. The blessings have been exhaustively discussed in scholarship, specifically with composition history in mind. This article will take a "traditional view" of the "blessings", namely that they are prophetic of the latter day history of Israel ("which shall befall you in the last days", Gen 49.1). However critical analysis provides useful insights and asks valid questions which should not be lightly dismissed.

Critical scholars understand the blessings as reflecting historical developments of a later age.[1] For example, the blessings of Jacob in Gen 49 promote Judah above his blood-brothers (Reuben, Simeon & Levi), and the sons of Joseph (particularly Ephraim) comes to the fore. As Judah and Ephraim form the two most important tribes of the monarchical era this is thought to indicate a later date of composition. Moreover, almost 60% of the blessings are concerned with the brothers of Judah and with Joseph, making the blessings of the remaining tribes peripheral. To this we add the observation that Reuben, Simeon and Levi can hardly be regarded as a "blessing" and some of the other "blessings" are rather ambiguous (sometimes this may be due to misunderstanding). Critical scholarship understands the "blessings" of Gen 49 as a composite work from different sources and there may be some truth to this as Israelite Hebrew (IH) can be detected in the blessings of the northern tribes[2] but on the other hand the "blessings" of Judah (and his blood-brothers) and Joseph show remarkable uniformity.

If we turn to the blessings of Moses in Deut 33 we find notable differences but also similarities. One difference is that whereas Levi and Simeon are mentioned together in Gen 49 the tribe of Simeon is missing from Deut 33 but Ephraim and Manasseh are mentioned by name in Deut 33 with Ephraim only hinted at in the blessing of Joseph in Gen 49.[3] The blessings of the other tribes demonstrate awareness but also divergence with Gen 49.

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[1] For an in depth analysis and discussion see Kent Sparks, Genesis 49 and the Tribal List Tradition in Ancient Israel, (presented at SBL Boston 1999, *ZAW* 115.Bd., S. 327-347 © Walter de Gruyter, 2003)

[2] Gary A. Rensburg, Israelian Hebrew Features in Genesis 49, *MAARAV* 8 (1992):161-170

[3] Some suggest that Simeon is left out in order to give a total of twelve tribes with Ephraim and Manasseh substituting Joseph.

The original birth order and naming of the tribes commences in Gen 29.29 and when attempting to reconstruct a development history scholars compare the "blessings" of Gen 49 and Deut 33 with the birth names. Within this matrix the northern tribe list of Judges 5.14-18[4] is introduced and for comparative reasons the generic "blessing of Balaam"[5] in Num 24.5-9 is also often discussed. Various hypothesis regarding development history and date of composition have been proposed which will not be pursued in this article. Suffice to say that other explanations are possible that do justice to the original context but allow for a form of development/redaction at a later stage.

For example, the tribal "blessings" (or should we call them sayings) probably circulated orally within each tribe before being collected and written down. This would explain the occurrence of Israelite Hebrew in the "northern blessings". We can imagine that tribal patriotism would censor negative or disapproving sentiments (like those given to Reuben, Simeon and Levi) and is therefore likely that whoever collected and recorded the "blessings" gathered the "evidence" with difficulty and composed Judah-Reuben-Levi-Simeon as a unit. This would then explain the semantic-linguistic differences in the "blessings" recognised by critical scholarship.

Is it possible that the "blessings" were redacted at a later stage for political-historic reasons? All that can be said is that such theories are largely speculative and while it is true that the "victor" always writes history it is hard to imagine that such an influential tribe as the priestly Levites would allow such a negative assessment to stand unless it was common knowledge. As to why they should be called blessings when some of the content is disapproving or negative is explained by Dods - Jacob's blessing is not for an individual, but for a family, and more than that, for a nation. Dods writes, "a unit that God will bless, but this unit is now no longer a single person—as Abraham, Isaac, or Jacob—but one people, composed of several parts, and yet one whole."[6] Jung sums it up as follows; "Consequently, it cannot be said that the blessing of Jacob is not a true blessing because part of the twelve sons was condemned. All sons share the blessing of the father together in the name of Israel. Only there are differences among brothers according to their role and capacity".[7] What follows is a brief examination of the blessings from a canonical aspect (i.e., regarding the text holistically) and analysing the intertextual-historic context.

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[4] The account in Judges 5 is regarded as ancient even by the critics.
[5] Balaam does not name any particular tribes but is interesting from the perspective of form criticism.
[6] Marcus Dods, The Book of Genesis, (New York: Armstrong and Son, 1887), 415.
[7] Kwangbong Jung, The condemned Sons in the Blessing of Jacob (Gen.49:3-7): The Problem of Curses in the Blessing, (Diss., University of the Free State, 2010),207

Analysis of the Blessings

The blessing of Reuben

KJV **Genesis 49:3-4** Reuben, thou *art* my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: 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.

LXE **Genesis 49:3-4** Ruben, thou *art* my first-born, thou my strength, and the first of my children, hard to be endured, *hard and* self-willed.4 Thou wast insolent like water, burst not forth with violence, for thou wentest up to the bed of thy father; then thou defiledst the couch, whereupon thou wentest up.

KJV **Deuteronomy 33:6** Let Reuben live, and not die; and let *not* his men be few.
LXE **Deuteronomy 33:6** Let Ruben live, and not die; and let him be many in number.

Alter translates[8] paraphrases "the first yield of my manhood" and comments that the Hebrew *'on* is associated with "vigour" i.e. male potency and the Hebrew *re'shit* with the "first yield of a crop". Alter says, "The biological image of Reuben the product of Jacob's first inseminating seed sharpens the evocation in the next line of his violation of his father's concubine. The nation of Israel was also typified as the "**firstborn**" (Exod 4.22) brought to Sinai at Pentecost as the "first fruits" of Yahweh's harvest where the nation committed idolatry with the golden calf. The punishment meted out by Moses was analogous to the "waters of jealousy" for suspected adultery (Deut 9.21, Num 5.17).

Obedience to the Law was a prerequisite to remaining in the land (Deut 30.9); "I have set before you life and death, blessing and cursing: therefore choose life that both thou and thy seed may live". The request by Moses is that Reuben may "live and not die". In this sense Reuben represents the nation as a whole. Many of the other tribes are likened to animals but that seems to be absent in the Reuben saying although the emphasis on "strength" and "fertility"[9] has Jacob resembling a bull in his prime and Reuben a young bull challenging the authority of the dominant bull for the right to mate with the females in the herd. Reuben is depicted as unstable as water and this has been variously translated as turbulent, reckless, foaming etc seemingly giving the idea of something uncontrollable, which fits with the idea of sexual incontinence. The golden calf is the bull-face of the cherubim and is a suitable symbol for the nation as a whole and Reuben in particular.

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[8] All references to Alter come from his commentary on Genesis which is annotated by chapter and verse. Robert Alter, Genesis: Translation and Commentary, (W. W. Norton & Company, New York: London, 1996)

[9] **Job 39:10-12** Canst thou bind the unicorn (רְאֵם re'em) with his band in the furrow? or will he harrow the valleys after thee? 11 Wilt thou trust him, because his strength is great? The unicorn is the great aurochs or wild bulls which are now extinct.

It signified the glory of God as represented in the "wild-bull" that had been domesticated under the Law as a beast of burden. Jeroboam made two bull-calves (winged ox cherubim) and placed them in Dan and Bethel (1 Kings 12.28-33). Effectively Jeroboam had turned the ten tribes into the "mercy seat" with a cherub at each end! This was done to counter the centralisation of the cult in Jerusalem by the Davidide and Paul alluding to the golden calf in the wilderness says; "Who changed the truth of God into a lie, and worshipped and served the creature more than the Creator" (Rom 1.25). Worshipping the ox-calf (living creature) was tantamount to worshipping themselves (self divinization) as the calf represented Israel under the Law. It is the original *Causa sui* project, as that is what the Law had become. Reuben (the young bull) usurped his Father's prerogatives in the same way the nation over reached their authority and position. The marriage covenant had been degraded.

The blessing of Simeon and Levi

> KJV **Genesis 49:5-7** Simeon and Levi *are* brethren; instruments of cruelty *are in* their habitations. 6 O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. 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.

> LXE **Genesis 49:5-7** Symeon and Levi, brethren, accomplished the injustice of their cutting off. Let not my soul come into their counsel, and let not mine inward parts contend in their conspiracy, for in their wrath they slew men, and in their passion they houghed a bull. Cursed be their wrath, for it was willful, and their anger, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.

> KJV **Deuteronomy 33:8-11** And of Levi he said, *Let* thy Thummim and thy Urim *be* with thy holy one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, *and with* whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah; 9 Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant. 10 They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar. 11 Bless, LORD, his substance, and accept the work of his hands: smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again.

> LXE **Deuteronomy 33:8-11** And to Levi he said, Give to Levi his manifestations, and his truth to the holy man, whom they tempted in the temptation; they reviled him at the water of strife. 9 Who says to his father and mother, I have not seen thee; and he knew not his brethren,

> and he refused to know his sons: he kept thine oracles, and observed thy covenant. [10] They shall declare thine ordinances to Jacob, and thy law to Israel: they shall place incense in *the time of* thy wrath continually upon thine altar. [11] Bless, Lord, his strength, and accept the works of his hands; break the loins of his enemies that have risen up against him, and let not them that hate him rise up.

Most translations have either "instruments of cruelty" or "weapons of violence" but Dahood suggests "Circumcision knife" [10] which makes sense within the context of the incident of Gen 34 which is often called "the rape of Diana". However, the older translations have "humiliated" rather than "raped" or "violated". In any case the Prince actually loved her and wanted her as his wife. It is obvious that the brothers of Diana did not want her to marry a foreigner and perhaps the only way the Prince could achieve his goal was through kidnapping and deflowering her thus making her unmarriageable. It is clear that he was amenable to enter into the covenant of circumcision thus joining himself and his people with the God of Israel. This is a love story gone wrong rather than a brutal rape. The brothers Simeon and Levi responded with deception and violence because family "honour" had been besmirched – this was an "honour killing" and it bears resemblance to the boast of Lamech (Gen 4.19-24) about another "honour killing" because Naamah (=loveliness) had been taken by a young man.[11] The KJV mentions "digging down a wall" whereas the LXX has "houghed a bull" the better translations[12] have "hamstrung an ox" (NKJ/NIV) or "hocked an ox" (ASV). The reference is to cutting an animal's tendon in order to immobilise it and to a man the scholars suppose that this was done so that the inhabitants of Shechem could not engage in pursuit on their oxen! This misses the point altogether – the inhabitants of Shechem were hamstrung through the act of circumcision – they were attacked on the third day "when they were sore" (Gen 34.25) so that they offered minimal resistance.

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[10] Dahood, "MKRTYHM in Gen 49.5," 54-56; idem., "Hebrew-Ugaritic Lexicography IV," 418.

[11] This probably informs the background of **Genesis 6:2 -** The sons of God saw the daughters of men that they *were* fair (i.e., lovely); and they took them wives of all which they chose. Note also that Solomon (the Son of God cf. 2 Sam 7.14) loved many strange (foreign) women (1 Kings 11.1) and had his heir by an Ammonitess called Naamah (1 Kings 14.21).

[12] Jung [p.115] remarks; "Probably to avoid a contradiction with Genesis 34: 28 some ancient versions change שׁוֹר to שׁוּר "wall" [*Tar. Onq*., Pesh., Aq., Symm., Vulg., and KJV] and עִקְּרוּ to עִקְּרוּ "they destroyed." However, few today make this claim because the verb עקר in the piel is only used to denote the laming of big animals, not the demolishing of a certain structure (cf. Josh. 11:6, 9; 2 Sam. 8:4 = 1 Chron.18:4)". Alter translates this as "they tore down ramparts" and in the footnotes of Gen 49.6 Alter comments; "With many critics, the translation here reads *shur*, a poetic term for "wall", instead of *shor*, "ox", as the Masoretic Text has it. The verb, if it refers to oxen, would mean to maim or hamstring the captured warhorses of an enemy, but it would have been foolish to hamstring captured oxen, which could be put to peaceful use. Moreover, since Jacob is speaking of the massacre at Shechem, the narrative there explicitly noted that the cattle and other livestock were carried off not maimed". . Robert Alter, Genesis: Translation and Commentary, (W. W. Norton & Company, New York: London, 1996). Alter is correct in concluding that this is not (literally) about hamstrung oxen but neither is it about a "wall". It seems strange that even Alter does not draw the obvious analogy between hamstrung oxen and circumcision –both being cut with a knife to immobilise them.

The main theme of the "blessing" of Levi and the incident at Shechem is that of joining or unity. The Prince of Shechem "clave" (v.3) to Dinah, "to be one people" (v.22); but Jacob will not be united with his sons in their despicable act.[13] The name Levi means "joined" or "twinned" and the brothers acted in unison in their violent act. What they did was not for the family honour, they acted "dishonourably" in contrast with the young prince who "was more honourable than all the house of his father" (Gen 34.19). Just as Reuben had denigrated the marriage covenant the Levites had denigrated the covenant of circumcision.

The situation with Levi is somewhat redeemed in Deut 33 because of their support for Moses during the golden calf incident of Exod 32.26-28 which also compensated for their failure at Meribah. The tribe of Simeon is notable for its absence in Deut 33 probably done in order to achieve the desired balance of twelve tribes (i.e., Ephraim and Manasseh replace Joseph) and Simeon was understood in some aspects to be inseparable from his brother.

As punishment Levi and Simeon were divided and scattered in Israel so that they could no longer perpetrate violence in unison. Levi, which comprised the priestly tribe and temple functionaries, was dispersed among the other tribes and received no tribal land of their own; the tribe of Simeon, ended up with certain cities allocated within the territory of Judah (Josh 19.1). Simeon was the third largest tribe at 59,300 (Num 1.23) but had dropped to 22,200 by the time that they entered the land (Num 26.14). Wood [14] speculates that this was caused by the sin with the Midianite women at Baal-Peor in which the Simeonites were leaders as the punishment was only halted when Zimri "a prince of a chief house amongst the Simeonites" (Num 25.14) was killed. Wood notes that elements from Simeon migrated northwards and settled along the northern border of Manasseh with the rest remaining in Judah, [15] which may account for the "war –like" language of Deut 33.11 (if this is directed at Simeon rather than Levi). Critical scholars believe that Deut 33.11 has been dislocated as it better suits the very short blessing of Judah that occurs in verse 7 (above Levi) others even argue that vv.7-11 is all about Judah and replace "Simeon" with "Judah" but the blessing is so obviously directed at Levi that it is difficult to understand how they reach such conclusions and Driver rightly dismiss such conjectures.[16]

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[13] On Gen 49.6 Alter remarks; "The Hebrew says literally, "in their assembly let my presence not join", but this is clumsy as English, and in any case the point is that Jacob is ostracizing the two brothers. *Ibid*, Alter, Genesis.
[14] Leon J. Wood, "Simeon, the tenth tribe of Israel," Journal of the Evangelical Theological Society,14.4 (Fall 1971): 221-225:222 http://www.etsjets.org/files/JETS-PDFs/14/14-4/14-4-pp221-226_JETS.pdf [retrieved June 2017]
[15] *Ibid*, Wood, 224
[16] SIMEON, TRIBE OF. Emil G. Hirsch, Caspar Levias, Wilhelm Bacher Jewish Encyclopedia (1906) http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/13677-simeon-tribe-of [Retrieved June 21017]

In any case, although Simeon is not named in Deut 33 it is a given that the "blessing" applies to both as their destinies were intertwined and therefore both tribes were divided and scattered in Israel –their brotherly allegiance was broken up.

The blessing of Judah

> KJV **Genesis 49:8-12** 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. [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? [10] The sceptre 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*. [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: [12] His eyes *shall be* red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.
>
> LXE **Genesis 49:8-12** Juda, thy brethren have praised thee, and thy hands shall be on the back of thine enemies; thy father's sons shall do thee reverence. [9] Juda is a lion's whelp: from the tender plant, my son, thou art gone up, having couched thou liest as a lion, and as a whelp; who shall stir him up? [10] A ruler shall not fail from Juda, nor a prince from his loins, until there come the things stored up for him; and he is the expectation of nations. [11] Binding his foal to the vine, and the foal of his ass to the branch *of it*, he shall wash his robe in wine, and his garment in the blood of the grape. [12] His eyes shall be more cheering than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.

> KJV **Deuteronomy 33:7** And this *is the blessing* of Judah: and he said, Hear, LORD, the voice of Judah, and bring him unto his people: let his hands be sufficient for him; and be thou an help *to him* from his enemies.
>
> LXE **Deuteronomy 33:7** And this *is the blessing* of Juda; Hear, Lord, the voice of Juda, and do thou visit his people: his hands shall contend for him, and thou shalt be a help from his enemies.

Of all Leah's sons Judah is the one that seemingly reaps a true "blessing" in Gen 49 and he is even told that his father's sons (presumably referring to his blood brothers Reuben, Levi and Simeon) will bow down to him. Judah is depicted as preeminent amongst Leah's sons. This seems odd because in the context of Genesis it was Joseph (not Judah) who saw all his brethren and his father and mother bow down to him (Gen 37.10).

Although the blessing of Judah seems extravagant it is Joseph who received a superlative blessing (not Judah), which is in fact a double blessing inherited by both his sons (the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh). Some scholars present the possibility that Jacob's blessing on Judah was declared in sarcasm as with the elder sons.[17] Goldingay asserts, "It seems that Judah is disqualified from leadership by his marrying out and his recourse to an apparent prostitute: in realm of marriage and sex he behaves more like Reuben (and Shechem, who provoked Simeon and Levi's sin) than Joseph, as chapter 39 will now portray him." [18]

It was through Joseph that the family were saved and it is at the end of the "Joseph story" that the blessings of Genesis 49 appear, it is therefore fitting that Joseph should receive the greatest blessing. On the other hand the conduct of Judah can hardly be described as much better than his blood brothers, particularly in the matters of Joseph's faked death and the neglect of Tamar. Is the blessing of Judah sarcastic-ironic and if so how is this apropos in relation to a messianic prophecy?

Alter has an interesting observation on the phrase; "from the prey, my son, thou art gone up" which he translates as "from the prey, O my son, you mount". Alter comments as follows; "Amos Funkenstein has astutely suggested to me that there is a double meaning here. The Hebrew can also be construed as "from the prey of my son you mounted", introducing a shadow reference to Judah's leading part in the plan to pass of Joseph as dead. When the bloodied tunic was brought to Jacob, he cried out, "Joseph is torn to shreds (*tarof toraf*), and the term for "prey" here is *teref".* He adds, "you mount – "This is the same verb that is used above for Reuben's act of sexual violation, but here it refers to a lion springing from the prey it has slain"….he also comments on the noun *mace* (sceptre) in v.10; " The Hebrew *meḥoqeq* refers to a rulers long staff, a clear parallel to "sceptre". There is no reason to construe it, as some have done, as a euphemism for phallus, though the image of the mace between the legs surely suggests virile power in political leadership".[19] This last phrase is rendered in the KJV as "nor a lawgiver from between his feet" and contra Alter we will argue (and will demonstrate shortly) that the Hebrew deliberately alludes to the fact that Judah "mounted" Tamar and lost his "rulers staff" to her.

[17] Good, "The Blessing on Judah," 427-32. Carmichael, "Some Sayings in Genesis 49," 435-444
[18] Goldingay, "The Patriarchs in Scripture," 12.
[19] *Ibid*, Alter, Gen 49.9

This indicates that the "blessing" is not as straightforward as it seems as Judah is being mocked for his stance toward Joseph and his sexual indiscretion with Tamar. It is however, more than that as Judah abused the custom of Leverite marriage just as Reuben abused the marriage covenant and Levi the covenant of circumcision. Accepting "praise" from his blood-brothers is therefore intended ironically – as if to say; "you are in good company". The KJV has "and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?" This may also be a euphemism – with the Hebrew verb meaning "rise up" or "erect". The KJV has "old lion" but other translations have "lioness"- the Hebrew has more than one word for lion, however, the feminine lioness is inappropriate here as the Hebrew literally means "parent lion" (ISA) as in a mature lion and therefore the KJV is probably correct. Judah is being depicted as the dominant lion tearing at his prey (Joseph) and then mounting (Tamar) and loosing (from between his legs) his rulers staff!

That this reading is correct is confirmed by the enigmatic mention of **Shiloh** which is none other than **Shelah**[20] who was promised in marriage to Tamar but Judah did not honour his word. This connection has been missed by most commentators except Good. Youngblood[21] dismissively remarks; "Notable only for its eccentricity is the proposal that it be read as the personal name Shelah, the third son of Judah, on the basis of the reading *šlh* attested in many MT MSS and some Samaritan MSS (Good, 430)". Although Youngblood's offers a good summary of the issue he presents no arguments for his disparaging remarks and like most commentators fails to contextualize the "blessing" and therefore misses the point altogether.

The context is the loss of tribal authority by Judah in the case of Tamar (Gen 38.17-18) who acted faithfully in accordance with the custom of Leverite marriage. This was necessary in order to raise "seed to the dead" but Judah reneged on his promise. Tamar was prepared to remain a widow in Judah's house (Gen 38.5) "until Shelah was grown" (cf. until Shiloh comes). She circumvented Judah's duplicity by means of a ruse, thereby raising "seed to the dead" directly with the tribal chieftain rather than wait for a son who would never be given to her. Judah acknowledged that she had acted righteously within the confines of the Leverite marriage tradition, whereas he had not. The child was not only Judah's son but in accordance with Leverite custom the child was also regarded as his grandson as it would keep the inheritance of the dead son alive. As the only remaining son alive (that we know off) the staff of tribal authority would pass to him (Shelah). In other words, Judah got his staff back until Shelah came off age.

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[20] שֵׁלָה Shelah, שִׁילֹה Shiyloh

[21] See the endnote where Youngblood's entry in *NIDOTTE* is reproduced.

Note that Judah kept the loss of his staff very quite because he was in danger of becoming a laughingstock amongst his brothers when the story came out. We can safely surmise that the "blessing" and "praise" is mocking – it is ironic.

How then does Shelah become Shiloh and achieve messianic status? From a text critical point of view this demonstrates the early origins of the "blessing" – it can hardly have been written during the monarchical period – pocking fun at the ruling tribe - we can speculate that the "blessing" was well known among the other tribes during the early monarchy and an object of merriment with the "old lion", "mounting" and "rising" and hints at losing his "staff". The blessing by Moses in Deut 33 is also hardly effusive and does not point to Judah's "dominance", so neither blessing has the hallmarks of a late invention. The obfuscation of Shelah with Shiloh probably did occur at a later stage (whether through deliberate reinterpretation or scribal emendation) in the monarchical period when the tribe of Judah had became dominant as Shiloh takes the "sting" out of the "blessing" and points the reader away from an ironic reading, showing Judah as the only tribe vying with Joseph (Ephraim) for the ultimate blessing.

However, that said, the incident involving Tamar does point to the messiah as Christ "raised seed to the dead" (Adam) and faithful Tamar is included in the genealogy of Christ. Without her courage and faithfulness the messiah would not have resided in the line of Judah, moreover, tribal authority (and much more) now resides permanently with Shelah (Shiloh) the Davidide who inherited eternal life and keeps safe an "inheritance in Israel" for all those who would otherwise remain dead in Adam.

To summarise: Judah is represented as a Lion and like his blood-brothers he was guilty of <u>abusing the covenants and traditions of his day</u>. However, the "blessing" does contain messianic elements with the mention of Shelah[22]/Shiloh and this is picked up by the later prophets (Ezek 21.27), moreover, the blessing of viticulture –where grapes and wine are depicted as so plentiful that a donkey is allowed to graze from the vine and wine is used for washing garments is realized during the reign of Uzziah (2 Chron 26.10).[23]

[22] Strong's gives the meaning of Shelah as "petition" probably reflecting Tamar's petition to Judah for the hand of the young man in marriage in order to raise seed to the dead. The messianic elements are obvious with the faithful petitioning God for the messiah to "raise seed to the dead" with the messiah acting as kinsman redeemer (On this see the book of Ruth another Judahite story with a similar theme).

[23] This King also lost his ruling authority – his "sceptre" and lived the rest of his life as one "dead" in the lazar house; the seed of Judah almost became extinct (cf. unfaithful Ahaz) until the "suffering servant" (Hezekiah) was raised from his deathbed – "**Isaiah 53:10;** "He shall see *his seed*, he shall prolong *his* days, and the pleasure of the

The blessing of Zebulun

> KJV **Genesis 49:13** Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he *shall be* for an haven of ships; and his border *shall be* unto Zidon.
>
> LXE **Genesis 49:13** Zabulon shall dwell on the coast, and he *shall be* by a haven of ships, and shall extend to Sidon.
>
> KJV **Deuteronomy 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.
>
> LXE **Deuteronomy 33:18-19** And to Zabulon he said, Rejoice, Zabulon, in thy going out, and Issachar in his tents. They shall utterly destroy the nations, and ye shall call *men* there, and there offer the sacrifice of righteousness; for the wealth of the sea shall suckle thee, and so shall the marts of them that dwell by the sea-coast.

The blessing of Zebulun is associated with the abundance of the sea and dwelling by the coast and this is questioned in critical scholarship because whereas the territory of Asher lay on the coast the territory of Zebulun abutted Asher and therefore lay inland.[24] There are number of solutions to this problem [25] and notably, even in later history (Isaiah/NT/Josephus) the connection between Zebulun and the sea was not lost. Josephus[26] says the lot of Zebulun included the land which "lay as far as the Lake of Gennesareth, and that which belonged to Carmel and the sea." Perhaps, however, the limits changed from time to time. So far as the words in Genesis 49.13 are concerned, Delitzsch thinks they do not necessarily imply actual contact with the sea; but only that his position should enable him to profit by maritime trade. Zebulun certainly did profit from the great caravan route, "the way of the sea", passed through his territory.

LORD shall prosper in his hand". The blessing is therefore appropriate to God keeping the "seed' of Judah alive until the arrival of the messiah.

[24] In Joshua 19.11 (KJV) the border of Zebulun is described thus; "And their border went up toward the sea, and Maralah, and reached to Dabbasheth, and reached to the river that *is* before Jokneam". The CLV translates Gen 49.13 as follows; "He tabernacles toward the sea shore; he lies toward the shore for ships, with his flank toward Sidon".

[25] Jackson, Wayne. "What About Jacob's Prophecy Regarding Zebulun?" *ChristianCourier.com*. Access date: June 13, 2017. https://www.christiancourier.com/articles/1141-what-about-jacobs-prophecy-regarding-zebulun

[26] *Antiq.,* 5.1.22

The prophet Isaiah (9.1) refers to this and it is quoted in Matt 4.15: "Nevertheless the dimness *shall* not *be* such as *was* in her vexation, when at the first he lightly afflicted **the land of Zebulun** and the land of Naphtali, and afterward did more grievously afflict *her by* **the way of the sea**, beyond Jordan, in Galilee of the nations". This was the trade route that skirted the Sea of Galilee, so Zebulun found that its fortunes lay in commercial trade probably linking costal trade routes with routes around Galilee.

Extra-biblical sources also testify to this association. The *Testament of Zebulun* has much to tell about successful fishing, and *Targ. Onk.* even speaks of subduing provinces with ships,[27] whilst *Talm. Shabb. 26* refers to the wealth derived from traffic in purple dyes, to which *Targ.pseudo-Jon.*, adds the making of glass. Clarke's commentary[28] has the following information;

> *Jonathan ben Uzziel* has probably hit upon the true meaning of this difficult passage: "From the sand," says he, are produced *looking-glass* and *glass* in general; the *treasures—the* method of finding and working this was revealed to these tribes." Several ancient writers inform us that there were havens in the coasts of the Zebulunites in which the *vitreous* sand, or sand proper for making glass, was found. See Strabo, lib. xvi.; see also Pliny, Hist. Nat. I. xxxvi., c. 20; Tacitus, Hist. l. v., c. 7. The words of Tacitus are remarkable: *Et Belus amnis Judaico mari illabitur; circa; ejus os lectae admixto nitro in vitrium excoquuntur.* "The River Belus falls into the Jewish sea, about whose mouth those sands, mixed with nitre, are collected, out of which glass is formed," or which is melted into glass. Some think that the celebrated shell-fish called *murex,* out of which the precious *purple dye* was extracted, is here intended by the *treasure hid* in *the sand:* this also Jonathan introduces in this verse. And others think that it is a general term for the advantages derived from navigation and commerce.

The great sea trading power of the day was Phoenicia also known for trading glass and powdered Tyrian purple. Shmuel Aḥituv believes that the reign of Solomon, who collaborated in the Tyrian commerce, can explain how Zebulun suits a blessing of benefit from the abundance of the sea.[29]

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[27] Presumably across the Sea of Galilee.

[28] A. Clarke, Holy Bible, with a comm. and critical notes, (1836,Original from Oxford University), 848

[29] Shmuel Aḥituv's book is summarised as follows; "The blessing of Jacob describes Zebulun as a maritime tribe (Gen 49.13). This, and the description of Zebulun and Issachar in the Blessing of Moses (Deut 33.18-19), led the Rabbis to assume that the tribe of Zebulun was engaged in commerce, including overseas trade. The inheritance of Zebulun is described in Josh 19.10-16 as separated from the sea by the inheritance of the tribe of Asher. Curiously, Asher's blessing has no reference to his allotment by the sea, from Mount Carmel northward, not in the Blessing of Jacob nor in the Blessing of Moses. Only in the Song of Deborah is Asher described as a coastal tribe. This description is quite similar to that of Zebulun in the Blessing of Jacob. The reign of Solomon, who collaborated in the Tyrian commerce, can explain how Zebulun suits a blessing of benefit from the abundance of the sea" Shmuel Aḥituv, Zebulun and the Sea: Studies in Historical Geography and Biblical Historiography, (Brill, 2000).

It seems that Zebulun was closely related with Phoenicia and this is even reflected in the name of Zebulun which means "exalted" or "excellency". The naming of Zebulun is in fact a paronomasia, a play on Zebulun;

> KJV **Genesis 30:20** And Leah said, God hath endued (zabad) me *with* a good dowry (zebed); now will my husband dwell (zabal) with me, because I have born him six sons: and she called his name Zebulun.
>
> BHT **Genesis 30:20** wattṓʾmer lēʾāʰ zəḇāḏánî ʾĕlōhîm ʾōṯî zḗḇeḏ ṭôḇ happáʿam yizbəlḗnî ʾîšî kị̂-yāláḏtî lô šiššāʰ ḇānîm wattiqrāʾ ʾeṯ-šəmô zəḇulûn

The verb *zbl* is found only in Gen 30.20. In the Ugaritic texts the word *zbl* occurs frequently as a title for the Canaanite deities.[30] The title is also used in reference to the sea god Yam *(zbl Ym)* "the exalted one, Yammu." Phonecia also uses this root in the name *b'l' zbl*, Baal (cf. Beelzebub) is exalted. The nom./adj. is found 5x when Solomon describes the exalted temple (*bêt zᵉbul*) in 1 Kings 8.13; 2 Chron. 6.2 and used to describe the heavens in Hab. 3.11. The Hebrew word for "sea" is also "Yam," therefore "the exalted one of the sea" is no longer a Phonecian or Canaanite "god" but has been replaced with the tribe of Zebulun. Leah's husband would "honour (exalt)" her (zabal) and her son would become the "exalted one" (*zbl*) of the sea. The blessing of Moses in Deut 33.18-19 mentions Zebulun and Issachar together probably as a contrast – Zebulun would rejoice in his "going out" and Issachar "in his tents" – one would go out into the world and trade the other would find contentment in agriculture and horticulture.

They shall call the people unto the mountain; there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness (Deut 33.19) the mountain here is often thought to be "Jerusalem" but is actually mount Tabor which looks like a giant rounded mound in the middle of an otherwise flat plain. It formed the border of three tribes: Zebulun, Issachar and Naphtali. There may have been a Levite city on this mountain, Ewing Summarises; "[Tabor is] one of the towns in the territory of Zebulun, given to the Merarite Levites (1 Chronicles 6:77). The parallel list in Joshua 21:24 f contains no name like this. There is no indication of its position. Some have thought that it may correspond to Daberath in the territory of Issachar (21:28), now represented by Deburiyeh on the western slope of Mt. Tabor; others that it may be the mountain itself; and yet others that it may be a city on the mountain, which probably was occupied from very early times.

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[30] Further reading see Smith (2290) *NIDOTTE*, vol 1., 1074 and Michael L. Humphries, Christian Origins and the Language of the Kingdom of God,(Southern Illinois University Press; 1st edition,1999),20

There is a Tabor mentioned as on the border of Issachar (Joshua 19:22); but that is almost certainly the mountain. It has been suggested that Tabor in 1 Chronicles 6:17 may be a contraction of Chisloth-tabor (Joshua 19:12), the modern Iksal, 3 miles West of the mountain. No certainty is possible".[31]

The blessing of Issachar

> KJV **Genesis 49:14-15** Issachar *is* a strong ass couching down between two burdens: 15And 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.
>
> LXE **Genesis 49:14-15** Issachar has desired that which is good; resting between the inheritances. 15And having seen the resting place that it was good, and the land that it was fertile, he subjected his shoulder to labour, and became a husbandman.

The blessing of Issachar is often viewed negatively by commentators.[32] It is confidently stated that Issachar was negligent in removing the Canaanites and was therefore put to tribute but this runs counter the earliest mention of the tribe where together with Zebulun, Naphtali won a great victory against the Canaanites under Deborah and Barak (Judges 4-5). They are described by the Chronicler as "valiant men of might in their generations" (1 Chron.7.2), were supporters of David at Hebron and responded to Hezekiah's call to attend the Passover. In later Rabbinic writings they are portrayed as scholars, intellectuals and leaders. It is therefore an injustice to portray them as either too lazy or cowardly to realize their inheritance as this contradicts their portrayal as resourceful and brave. Issachar was sandwiched between the tribes of west Manasseh and Zebulun, it was located primarily in the Jezreel valley. Some of the confusion is probably caused by the use of archaic language (demonstrating the antiquity of the blessing). The LXX (Septuagint) offers a different reading (possibly from a different Hebrew *Vorlage*) which has Issachar resting between the inheritances (two burdens KJV)[33] which is probably a reference to Mount Tabor and Mount Gilboa on the tribal borders -indicating that Issachar puts down roots in the valley of Jezreel and commits to the hard work of agriculture (LXX). The discussion focuses on the word translated "hire", "wages", "tribute", "reward" or "labour"; however

[31] Orr, James, M.A., D.D. General Editor. "Entry for 'TABOR'". "International Standard Bible Encyclopedia". 1915.
[32] See the Article by Joel D. Heck, Issachar: Slave or Freeman? (Gen 49:14-15) JETS 29/4 (December 1986) 385-396.
[33] Various suggestions are between the "sheepfolds" or "saddlebags" or "(fire) pots" the commentators are obviously unsure but these two mountains (especially Tabor) might suggest a basket or pot.

whatever meaning is chosen must relate to the naming of Issachar in Gen 30.18, where Leah says; "God hath given me my hire (שָׂכָר sakar), because I have given my maiden to my husband". In the previous verses Leah had "hired" a night with Jacob by giving the mandrakes (aphrodisiac) to her sister Rachel but in the next verse she relates her pregnancy as a reward (hire) for her generosity in giving her maiden (slave) as a concubine to Jacob. In this light the MT reading (which uses a completely different word denoting "tribute") seems unlikely as the blessing indicates a place of rest and the reward found in fruitful physical labour.[34] The blessing is therefore positive with Issachar portrayed as a raw boned (strong) ass.

The Blessing of Dan

> KJV **Genesis 49:16-17** Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. 17 Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.
>
> LXE **Genesis 49:16-17** Dan shall judge his people, as one tribe too in Israel.17 And let Dan be a serpent in the way, besetting the path, biting the heel of the horse (and the rider shall fall backward),
>
> KJV **Deuteronomy 33:22** And of Dan he said, Dan *is* a lion's whelp: he shall leap from Bashan.
>
> LXE **Deuteronomy 33:22** And to Dan he said, Dan *is* a lion's whelp, and shall leap out of Basan.

The naming formula is found in Gen 30.6 (KJV); "And Rachel said, God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son: therefore called she his name Dan". Judged should be understood as "has vindicated me" (NIV/NIB), the name Daniel means God is Judge.

Dan is depicted as a נָחָשׁ (nāḥāš), and as a שְׁפִיפֹן (šəp̄îp̄ōn); usually translated as snake and adder. The latter word is ignored altogether by the LXX although the LXX uses the similar ṣip̄ʿōnîm in Jer.8.17 as an attributive adjective modifying the noun into "deadly snakes" (LXX) "venomous snakes" (NIB) and serpents, cockatrices (KJV). The Hebrew verb form ***śrp*** is similar to the Ugaritic ***šrp,*** both mean to burn (i.e., fiery). The phrase may well mean "a serpent, a fiery stinger" or it may denote a specific species; "a serpent, a horned adder".

[34] **Ecclesiastes 3:13** And also that every man should eat and drink, and enjoy the good of all his labour, it *is* the gift of God.

The Targum (Num. R. ii.) makes the serpent the emblem of the tribe on its standard.[35] The tribe of Dan was both a Northern *and* Southern tribe. Initial pressure from the Philistines and Amorites caused some of the tribe to migrate northwards.[36] It was during this journey that they seconded a corrupt Levite priest and conquered Laish (Judges 17-18). Laish is a poetical term for lion which explains the reference to "a lion's whelp" in the Moses blessing of Deut 33.22 and the otherwise unexplained reference to Bashan (which territory was never held by Dan) is probably the direction of the attack as it "reflects this post of vantage over the entrance of invaders from the North".[37] A member of the tribe of Dan was the first to blaspheme God (Lev 24.10-16) and Dan was the first tribe to commit idolatry in the land. When Jeroboam erected the golden calves, one was located in Dan; the tribe became a cultic centre of worship, the symbol of the northern kingdom's religious deviance. Both Jeremiah (8.16-17) and Amos (8.14) prophesied against Dan, Amos predicting their extinction as a tribe. The blessing of Dan is therefore negative, yet despite this one of the greatest Judges, Samson, was a Danite. In many ways Samson typified his tribe – he broke his Nazarene vows and was led astray by his appetites but he died in faith, "out of weakness were made strong" (Heb 11.34).

KJV **Genesis 49:18** I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD.

It is not certain that the cry for help (prayer) articulated by Jacob has anything to do with the previous "blessing" accorded to Dan by Jacob. The Hebrew root form for salvation (yeshuw`ah) is very similar to the name of Jesus. However, there is possibly an indirect connection with the blessing as the first time *yeshuw`ah* occurs is in Exod 14.13 and Exod 15.1-2 where the Israelites are exhorted to wait patiently for the "salvation of the Lord" and "the horse and his rider hath he thrown into the sea" which links with the "rider [of the horse] falling backwards" in Dan's blessing. The Rabbi's see the blessing as a reference to Samson harassing the Philistines but it may well refer to the damage caused by Dan's idolatry. Perhaps the blessing is meant as a contrast, i.e. that despite tribal transgressions (Dan causing Israel to fall backwards) God would work salvation (make the enemy fall backwards) through the messiah (prefigured by Joseph saving the family fortunes) and this was acted out when the Israelites left Egypt at the Passover (as was promised to Abraham –a prophecy that Jacob was surely aware of).

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[35] DAN. By: Emil G. Hirsch, Eduard König, Kaufmann Kohler, Jewish Encyclopedia,(1906) [Retrieved June 2017] http://www.jewishencyclopedia.com/articles/4866-dan

[36] For a good summary of the history, maps and geography of all the tribes [Retrieved June 2017] see: http://www.israel-a-history-of.com/12-tribes-of-israel.html

[37] Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges, Deut 33.22 [Retrieved June 2017] http://biblehub.com/commentaries/cambridge/deuteronomy/33.htm

So, despite all their flaws (and future transgressions) the tribes (family) had to wait patiently until the salvation of Yah was revealed.

The blessing of Gad

> KJV **Genesis 49:19** Gad, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last.
>
> LXE **Genesis 49:19** Gad, a plundering troop shall plunder him; but he shall plunder him, *pursuing him* closely.
>
> KJV **Deuteronomy 33:20-21** And of Gad he said, Blessed *be* he that enlargeth Gad: he dwelleth as a lion, and teareth the arm with the crown of the head. 21 And he provided the first part for himself, because there, *in* a portion of the lawgiver, *was he* seated; and he came with the heads of the people, he executed the justice of the LORD, and his judgments with Israel.
>
> LXE **Deuteronomy 33:20-21** And to Gad he said, Blessed *be* he that enlarges Gad: as a lion he rested, having broken the arm and the ruler.[21] And he saw his first-fruits, that there the land of the princes gathered with the chiefs of the people was divided; the Lord wrought righteousness, and his judgment with Israel.

Gad was included in "the sons of Bilhah and the sons of Zilpah" (Dan, Naphtali, Gad and Asher) who tended the sheep when Joseph "told tales" to his father Jacob about their bad behaviour (Gen 37.2). The allotment of the tribe of Gad[38] was allocated by Moses himself before they entered the land. This first period was the allotment of land east of the Jordan River to the tribes of Reuben, Gad, and the half-tribe of Manasseh, or East Manasseh. Reading between the lines it seems that Gad played a prominent role in the battle against King Sihon and they requested the rich rolling hills and watered pasture lands facing the Jordan and this was given on the proviso that the fighting men of the tribe would leave their families behind and accompany Israel in the conquests on the other side of Jordan. They formed the vanguard in these attacks – an elite army of shock-troops known for their courage and fighting skills. When David was fleeing Saul and became the focus of a rebel army he was joined by men from Gad; "Some Gadites defected to David at his stronghold in the desert.

[38] For a good summary of the history, maps and geography of all the tribes [Retrieved June 2017] see: http://www.israel-a-history-of.com/12-tribes-of-israel.html

They were brave warriors, ready for battle and able to handle the shield and spear. Their faces were the faces of lions, and they were swift as gazelles in the mountains" (1 Chron.12.8). They are further described in vv.14-15 as if they are a commando unit; "These Gadites were army commanders; the least was a match for a hundred, and the greatest for a thousand. It was they who crossed the Jordan in the first month when it was overflowing all its banks, and they put to flight everyone living in the valleys to the east and to the west."

The NIB gives a clearer dynamic rendering of the blessing by Moses; "About Gad he said: "Blessed is he who enlarges Gad's domain! Gad lives there like a lion, tearing at arm or head. He chose the best land for himself; the leader's portion was kept for him. When the heads of the people assembled, he carried out the LORD's righteous will, and his judgments concerning Israel."

Gad had very rich pasture land and formed a buffer state on the eastern border of Israel as a consequence it was under constant pressure from enemies. At one stage the tribe of Gad fell under the yoke of Hazael but managed to regain their territory, eventually they fell to the super power of the day (Assyria) and were deported. The prophet Jeremiah spoke concerning Gad and Ammon. "Concerning the Ammonites: "This is what the Lord says: 'Has Israel no sons? Has she no heirs? Why then has Molech taken possession of Gad? Why do his people live in its towns? But the days are coming,' declares the Lord, 'When I will sound the battle cry against Rabbah of the Ammonites; it will become a mound of ruins, and its surrounding villages will be set on fire. Then Israel will drive out those who drove her out,' says the Lord" (Jer.49.1).

It seems then that God will restore the territories of the "ten lost tribes" at some future stage and Gad will "overcome at the last". The name of Gad means "Good luck has come", Alter comments that the translation (Gen 30.11) follows the long established practice in separating the enigmatic single word of the Masoretic Text, *bagad*, into *ba' gad*. However, as noted by Alter, in Gen 49.19 a sound play is made in the Hebrew *gad gedud yegundenu* (you shall be goaded by raiders) and the verse ends <u>yet he shall goad their heel</u>. Alter comments; "The phrase may be reminiscent of "and you shall bite his heel", which is addressed to the serpent in the Garden. There could be carryover then of the snake imagery of the preceding lines. The snake, one should keep in mind, is not "demonic" but an image of darting, agile, lethal assault". The Hebrew "heel" is translated as "last" in the KJV of Gen 49.19 and therefore translated dynamically as in "the hinder-part" (i.e. the heel – at the last). However, if rendered literally (as

Alter does) it demonstrates how well the poem is integrated into the wider context of Genesis as Jacob himself was a "heel grabber" (Gen 25.26), and Dan and Gad are "heel biters" and as Alter notes several ancient versions render the next blessing as "Asher's heel shall be rich" as they "quite plausibly, attach the initial constant *mem* ("from") to the end of the preceding word *'aqev* ("heel"), turning it into "their heel". In Gen 30.13 (the naming of Asher) is translated by Alter as "What good fortune! For the girls have acclaimed me fortunate"; Alter remarks that, Asher's name is derived from *'osher*, "good fortune", and the entire name is thus closely parallel to the name of Gad. This noun *'osher* produces a common biblical verb *'isher*, the basic meaning of which is to call out to a lucky person, *'ashrei*, "happy is he" (or, here, "happy is she").

The take away point is that the "blessings" are interconnected with each other *and* within the wider context of Genesis and can therefore hardly be later "interpolations". They are very carefully crafted with multiple word-plays and associations and while "Gad" means "Good fortune" the word–play highlights Gad's military prowess – "a troop" or "army".

The blessing of Asher

> KJV **Genesis 49:20** Out of Asher his bread *shall be* fat, and he shall yield royal dainties.
>
> LXE **Genesis 49:20** Aser, his bread *shall be* fat; and he shall yield dainties to princes.
>
> KJV **Deuteronomy 33:24-25** 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. Thy shoes *shall be* iron and brass; and as thy days, *so shall* thy strength *be*.
>
> LXE **Deuteronomy 33:24-25** And to Aser he said, Aser *is* blessed with children; and he shall be acceptable to his brethren: he shall dip his foot in oil. His sandal shall be iron and brass; as thy days, so *shall be* thy strength.
>
> KJV **Genesis 30:13** And Leah said, Happy am I, for the daughters will call me blessed: and she called his name Asher.

The blessing of Asher bears resemblance with the general blessing given to Israel in Deut 8:9; "A land wherein thou shalt eat bread without scarceness, thou shalt not lack any thing in it; a land whose stones are iron, and out of whose hills thou mayest dig brass".

The reference to "iron and brass" in the blessing is not to Asher's "sandals" but to "bars", [39] as in fortified city gates, "The bolts of your gates will be iron and bronze, and your strength will equal your days" (NIV). Similarly the word translated "strength" [40] is nothing more than a guess which demonstrates the antiquity and archaic nature of the poem. However, the idea expressed is quite clear, one of fertility (children) and abundance. The land of Asher was known for its olive orchards. Asher produced such large amounts of oil that it became exceedingly wealthy. A big reason for Asher's wealth, coupled with its natural production of olive oil,[41] was its proximity to the markets of Phoenicia. The tribe of Asher became a leader in the olive oil trade in Canaan. Asher occupied the highlands, and the settlements on the slopes of the western mountains and hills which merged with the coastal strip; they more or less "shared" the coast with the Phoenicians and Philistines who controlled much of the coastal strip. This cannot have been a peaceful or symbiotic relationship perhaps that is why iron and brass fortifications are referenced but it was probably tolerated because of lucrative trading. Asher must have had its own ships as the tribe is admonished by Deborah for not joining the fight; "Gilead remained across the Jordan; and why did Dan stay in ships? Asher sat at the seashore, and remained by its landings" (Judg.5.17).

The history of the tribe is chequered as it offered no support to Deborah but played a decisive role in Gideon's defeat of the Midianites, killing the two Midianite chiefs. They also sent a large number of men to King David in Hebron, in support of his claim to the throne but broke of relationships and joined the ten tribes with the split that occurred after Solomon.[42] Asher was the second fastest growing tribe after Manasseh adding 20,500 men between the first and second census (Num 1 and Num 26). Asher also suffered deportation under the Assyrians but surprisingly we find the prophetess Anna from the tribe of Asher in Luke 2.36 demonstrating that members of the tribe retained their identity into the New Testament era. It is probably wrong to speak of "ten lost tribes" as remnants remained in the land (elements of Asher responded to Hezekiah's reformation) and although some tribes were "absorbed" in exile it is quite possible that isolated families still retained their identity both inside and outside the land.

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[39] [bars] Heb. *min'al*, found only here, but the meaning is confirmed by that of the similar form *man'ul*, Nehemiah 3:3, etc., and by the Sam. The shoes of A.V. and R.V. marg. and the LXX ὑπόδημα are a false conjecture from *na'al*, sandal. Thy, LXX his. Cambridge Bible for Schools and Colleges [Retrieved June 2017] http://biblehub.com/commentaries/cambridge/deuteronomy/33.htm

[40] [strength] So Sam., LXX, Targ., perhaps reading *robe'* for the Heb. *dobe'*, which is not found elsewhere and is of unknown meaning. Some render rest after the doubtful analogy of Ar.; Vulg. old age, as if reading *d'b* for *db'*. *Ibid*, Cambridge.

[41] Rabbinical Literature, as pointed out by the Jewish Encyclopedia, supports this notion. It is believed that in times of scarcity and during the Rabbinical era, Asher supplied all of Israel with oil.

[42] Perhaps Solomon over-taxed their trade –he also gave away some of their cities to Hiram of Tyre.

Asher is depicted as abundant and fertile and able to yield luxury goods (dainties) for the royal table, the blessing is therefore largely positive.

The blessing of Naphtali

> KJV **Genesis 49:21** Naphtali *is* a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words.
>
> LXE **Genesis 49:21** Nephthalim is a spreading stem, bestowing beauty on its fruit.
>
> KJV **Deuteronomy 33:23** And of Naphtali he said, O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the LORD: possess thou the west and the south.
>
> LXE **Deuteronomy 33:23** And to Nephthali he said, Nephthali *has* the fulness of good things; and let him be filled with blessing from the Lord: he shall inherit the west and the south.
>
> KJV **Genesis 30:8** And Rachel said, With great wrestlings have I wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed: and she called his name Naphtali.
>
> LXE **Genesis 30:8** And Rachel said, God has helped me, and I contended with my sister and prevailed; and she called his name, Nephthalim.

Naphtali means "struggle" or "wrestling" --- it not only reflects the competition between Rachel and Leah for Jacob's affection, but also the major theme of Jacob's life – his wrestling against his brother Esau and against his uncle (and father-in-law) Laban and finally against God. Although the Mosoretic Text and Septuagint version of Gen 49.21 is markedly divergent the underlying themes are similar, namely something "let loose" or "spreading" resulting in something "beauty" or "goodly". In light of the other animal idioms the MT seems more likely, particularly because the image of a hind or gazelle struggling to wrestle free from a trap suits the background to naming Naphtali. The MT reference to "goodly words" seems to be a non sequitur and Alter translates "lovely fawns" commenting "The Hebrew *'imrei shafer* is in doubt. The translation follows one prevalent conjecture in deriving the first word from the Aramaic *'imeir*, which usually means "lamb"". Both the NIV and NIB follow this route; ""Naphtali is a doe set free that bears beautiful fawns" as does the RSV (comely fawns) and YLT (beauteous young ones). Naphtali possessed the east and the north of the country. In other words the tribe was bordered by the sea (of Galilee) and laid to the south of Dan (the tribe previously mentioned in Moses' blessing). Naphtali had some of the most fertile land in the whole country suitable as pasture land and for agriculture.

The blessing of Joseph

KJV **Genesis 49:22-26** Joseph *is* a fruitful bough, *even* a fruitful bough by a well; *whose* branches run over the wall: [23] The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot *at him*, and hated him: [24] But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty *God* of Jacob; (from thence *is* the shepherd, the stone of Israel:) [25] *Even* by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: [26] The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.

LXE **Genesis 49:22-26** Joseph is a son increased; my dearly loved son is increased; my youngest son, turn to me. [23] Against whom men taking evil counsel reproached *him*, and the archers pressed hard upon him. [24] But their bow and arrows were mightily consumed, and the sinews of their arms were slackened by the hand of the mighty one of Jacob; thence is he that strengthened Israel from the God of thy father; [25] and my God helped thee, and he blessed thee with the blessing of heaven from above, and the blessing of the earth possessing all things, because of the blessing of the breasts and of the womb, [26] the blessings of thy father and thy mother-- it has prevailed above the blessing of the lasting mountains, and beyond the blessings of the everlasting hills; they shall be upon the head of Joseph, and upon the head of the brothers of whom he took the lead.

KJV **Deuteronomy 33:13-17** And of Joseph he said, Blessed of the LORD *be* his land, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew, and for the deep that coucheth beneath, [14] And for the precious fruits *brought forth* by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon, [15] And for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills, [16] And for the precious things of the earth and fulness thereof, and *for* the good will of him that dwelt in the bush: let *the blessing* come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head of him *that was* separated from his brethren. [17] His glory *is like* the firstling of his bullock, and his horns *are like* the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they *are* the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they *are* the thousands of Manasseh.

> LXE **Deuteronomy 33:13-17** And to Joseph he said, His land *is* of the blessing of the Lord, of the seasons of sky and dew, and of the deeps of wells below, [14] and of the fruits of the changes of the sun in season, and of the produce of the months, [15] from the top of the ancient mountains, and from the top of the everlasting hills, [16] and of the fullness of the land in season: and let the things pleasing to him that dwelt in the bush come on the head of Joseph, and on the crown *of him who was* glorified above his brethren. [17] His beauty *is as* the firstling of his bull, his horns *are* the horns of a unicorn; with them he shall thrust the nations at once, even from the end of the earth: these *are* the ten thousands of Ephraim, and these *are* the thousands of Manasse.

The first line of this blessing is translated as follows by the YLT; "Joseph *is* a fruitful son; a fruitful son by a fountain, daughters step over the wall". There is no mention of a vine or branches and some translations have "Joseph is a wild ass" reading *porat* as *per'e* but as Alter notes; "A link between *porat* and the root *p-r-h*, to be fruitful is less of a grammatical stretch, and is encouraged by Joseph's play on the same root in naming his son Ephraim". Another crux (noted by Alter) is that "run" [over] in the KJV and "step" [over] in the YLT is a feminine singular verb. This makes sense because the reference is to the "daughters". It is obvious that the translators (even the LXX translators) struggled with interpreting the archaic poetry but the dynamic rendering of the modern versions (and the KJV) is probably correct with Joseph's sons depicted as a fruitful vine by a well or spring and his daughters as branches growing over a wall (or rampart) behind which Joseph flexes his bow in order to return fire to his enemies.

The phrase in parenthesis in the KJV is also notoriously difficult; (from thence *is* the shepherd, the stone of Israel). This is translated by Alter as "through the hands of the Champion of Jacob, through the name of the Shepherd, and Israel's rock". Alter comments; "along with some of the ancient versions, the translation here reads *mishem* for the Masoretic *misham*, "from there" which is obscure". However, Alter translates (as do some versions) the noun, אֶבֶן, *'eben* as "rock" (*ṣûr*) when "stone" is more exact. God is usually referred to as a "rock" not a "stone" as the noun plays on the Hebrew for "son" (*ben*) even though it is in the feminine construct here. The YLT translates: "Whence is a shepherd, a son of Israel". The Cambridge Bible comments; "the word *mis-shâm* (= "from thence") seems more prosaic and less impressive than *mis-shêm* (= "from the Name")" and the JPS reads thus; "from thence, from the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel" which has a definite messianic flavour as does the ASV and NKJ.

This seems to be supported by the "separation" of Joseph from his brethren – a reference to priestly dedication or consecration in imitation of the high priest in the Nazirite vow "of him that was separate נָזִיר (naziyr) from his brethren". The Rabbi's accord a priestly function to the "coat of many colors" worn by Joseph and this would explain the envy of his brethren. The favorite son, by the favorite wife was also appointed as the family priest by his father Jacob. It is therefore not certain at this stage whether the messiah would come from the tribes of Joseph or Judah. It is certainly significant that the messiah was raised by Joseph in Nazareth – the "territory" of Joseph although by descent coming from Judah. Of course, the tribe of Joseph did not exist but was represented by his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh with Ephraim promised the ascendancy (ten thousands of Ephraim and the thousands of Manasseh); therefore Joseph receives a "double blessing" which is superlative and extravagant far outweighing any of the previous blessings. This can be seen in the usage of the title "Almighty" (El Shadday) which denotes fertility and blessing.[43] The major theme of this blessing is therefore fruitfulness and fertility.

The blessing of Benjamin

> KJV **Genesis 49:27** Benjamin shall ravin *as* a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.
>
> LXE **Genesis 49:27** Benjamin, as a ravening wolf, shall eat still in the morning, and at evening he gives food.
>
> KJV **Deuteronomy 33:12** *And* of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the LORD shall dwell in safety by him; *and the LORD* shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders.
>
> LXE **Deuteronomy 33:12** And to Benjamin he said, The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in confidence, and God overshadows him always, and he rested between his shoulders.
>
> KJV**Genesis 35:17-18** And it came to pass, when she was in hard labour, that the midwife said unto her, Fear not; thou shalt have this son also. [18] And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing, (for she died) that she called his name Benoni: but his father called him Benjamin.

[43] On this see, P. Wyns, El Shadday, ***CEJBI***, Vol. 4. No. 2, 2010. Available online [Retrieved July 2017] http://www.biblaridion.info/resources/Shad.pdf

The tribe of Benjamin was a tribe of "left hander's" [44] named the "son of the right hand" he was a "son of sorrow" causing the death of his mother but was a joy and comfort of his father's old age. He represents contradiction as does his blessing – two different sides of the same coin. The tribal allotment of Benjamin was next to Judah probably reflecting the bond established by Judah when he was prepared to offer himself as surety for Benjamin (Gen. 44.3). It seems that Jerusalem (Jebus) lay in the territory of Benjamin but became part of Judah when it was conquered by David. Benjamin is likened to a "ravening wolf" and this is prophetic of the disgraceful incident at Gibeah which in many ways echoes what occurred at Sodom, an incident that almost led to the extinction of the tribe at the hands of their brethren as a judgement on Benjamin's wickedness (Judges 19-21).

The tribes took an oath not to allow their daughters to marry the men of Benjamin but when they saw that the consequence was tribal extinction they devised a "work around" by allowing the men of Benjamin to "kidnap" their daughters (Judg 21.20-23). In the morning the young men of Benjamin would lurk around the vineyards like wolves staking out their prey and when the young women were dancing at the evening harvest festivals at Shiloh where the tabernacle resided[45] the young men would strike; kidnapping the girls and taking them back to the territory of Benjamin so that they could "divide" the spoils. There was a tacit agreement to turn a blind eye to this unusual "courtship" arrangement which was a face saving result born of desperation. But there is much more to this prophecy as in the "morning" of Israel's history the first king of Israel – Saul persecuted David and in the "evening" of Israel's history Saul of Tarsus persecuted Christ. On both occasions we have a prominent member of Benjamin acting like a "ravening wolf" towards a Davidide from the tribe of Judah.

However, according to the blessing of Moses; "The beloved of the LORD shall dwell in safety by him" and this is surely a reference to Judah living safely next to Benjamin. The YLT renders the blessing thus; "Of Benjamin he said: -- The beloved of Jehovah doth tabernacle confidently by him, Covering him over all the day; Yea, between his shoulders He doth tabernacle". The reference to "tabernacling" and "between his shoulders" indicates the high priests "breastplate" which he wore over his heart (Exod. 28.29-30). In the time of David (the beloved) both Shiloh and Jerusalem were places of worship because David brought the ark to Jerusalem and housed it in a tent.

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[44] It seems that they were ambidextrous warriors (1 Chron. 12.2)

[45] "And they said: 'Behold, there is the feast of the LORD from year to year in Shiloh, which is on the north of Beth-el, on the east side of the highway that goeth up from Beth-el to Shechem, and on the south of Lebonah." (Judges 21.19)

So Benjamin literally dwelt between the two holy places and David made a covenant with Jonathan for "he (Jonathan) loved him: for he loved him as he loved his own soul" (1 Sam 20.17). This was an everlasting covenant between the house of the beloved (David) and Jonathan which was honoured when Christ stopped Saul of Tarsus of the tribe of Benjamin on the road to Damascus and spared his life. Benjamin therefore shows great contrasts – loyalty and persecution – right and left hand – sorrow and joy – a ravening wolf and a devoted friend.

Endnotes

Ronald F. Youngblood, *NIDOTTE*, vol 4 (ed., vanGemeren, Paternoster, 1996), 1222-1223;
The traditional understanding of "Shiloh" in Gen 49:10 (as a name of or a metaphor) for the Messiah (cf. NIV footnote; KJV) goes far back at least as far as *b. Sanh.* 98b: Rabbi Yohanan said concerning the messiah, 'What is his name…..Shiloh is his name, as it is said, "Until Shiloh comes"'". But the Babylonian Talmud was compiled between the 3rd and 6th century AD, and the NT does not cite Gen 49:10 as a messianic text. Indeed the Christian interpretation of Gen 49:10 did not become popular until the late 16th century. 4QPBless, a commentary on Gen 49.10, apparently understands "Shiloh" in that verse as messianic: "Until the Messiah of Righteousness [i.e., the Legitimate Messiah], the Shoot of David comes"(lines 3-4; cf. Allegro 174-6;cf. also, with modifications, Margulius, 202-5 [esp. 205 n.6]). But since the word "Shiloh" does not appear in 4QPBless (or in 4Q*252*, a similar text; cf. Bateman 20-21) we cannot know what in the text is being commented on. Indeed the ancient versions are virtually unanimous in reading the word in their Heb. *Vorlage(n)* in ways other than a proper nom.(cf. conveniently Moran, 414-415; Treves, 354 n.4). In any case the Heb. K reading *šylh* in Gen 49:10 is unique and, thus, offers no solace to those who wish to understand it as a messianic title (NASB, NKJV) or, for that matter, as the place name Shiloh (e.g., Wordsworth, 142; Eissfeldt, 141; Treves, 356; Saboottka, 226; Schley, 89,163). Notable only for its eccentricity is the proposal that it be read as the personal name Shelah, the third son of Judah, on the basis of the reading *šlh* attested in many MT MSS and some Samaritan MSS (Good, 430).

The phrase *'d-b' 'šr-lw hmšpt*, "until he comes to whom it rightfully belongs" (Ezek 21:27 [32]), is often pointed out as a parallel to the phrase *'d ky kb' šylh* in Gen 49:10. On the basis of the Ezekiel text, many have pointed *šylh* as *šellōh* and translated the Genesis phrase "until he comes to whom it belongs" (NIV; cf. JB; REB; RSV), often citing support from the ancient versions. Such a reading is not only grammatically difficult but is also "artificial" and "needlessly obscure" (Moran, 410).

The most satisfying solution of the anomalous *šylh* in Gen 49:10 is to divide the consonants into two words and repoint them as *šay lōh ,* "tribute to him." The word *šay* means "gift offered as homage" (BDB, 1009), "tribute," and is attested elsewhere in Ps 68:29 (30); 76:11 (12);Isa 18:7 (NIV "gifts" in each case). The intimate relationship of the passage to the obedience of the nations is his" (NIV). The intimate relationship of the passage to Ezek 21:27(32) remains unaffected (for details cf. Moran, 415-24) -and so, for that matter, does its messianism. Initially fulfilled in David, it will eventually be fulfilled in Jesus Christ. He, after all, is the King of kings and is, therefore, ultimately the one to whom the tribute and obedience of all nations must come (Matt 2:11; Phil 2:10; Rev 7:9; 11:15).