

## Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33: blessing the tribes

### GENESIS 49

**Then Jacob called his sons, and said: "Gather around, that I may tell you what will happen to you in days to come.**

**Assemble and hear, O sons of Jacob; listen to Israel your father.**

**Reuben**, you are my firstborn, my might and the first fruits of my vigor, excelling in rank and excelling in power. Unstable as water, you shall no longer excel because you went up onto your father's bed; then you defiled it--you went up onto my couch!

**Simeon and Levi** are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords.

May I never come into their council; may I not be joined to their company-- for in their anger they killed men, and at their whim they hamstrung oxen.

Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.

**Judah**, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches down, he stretches out like a lion, like a lioness--who dares rouse him up? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and the obedience of the peoples is his. Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washes his garments in wine and his robe in the blood of grapes; his eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.

**Zebulun** shall settle at the shore of the sea; he shall be a haven for ships, and his border shall be at Sidon.

**Issachar** is a strong donkey, lying down between the sheepfolds; he saw that a resting place was good, and that the land was pleasant; so he bowed his shoulder to the burden, and became a slave at forced labor.

### DEUTERONOMY 33

**This is the blessing with which Moses, the man of God, blessed the Israelites before his death.**

He said: YHWH came from Sinai, and dawned from Seir upon us; he shone forth from Mount Paran. With him were myriads of holy ones; at his right, a host of his own. Indeed, O favorite among peoples, all his holy ones were in your charge; they marched at your heels, accepted direction from you. Moses charged us with the law, as a possession for the assembly of Jacob. There arose a king in Jeshurun, when the leaders of the people assembled-- the united tribes of Israel.

May **Reuben** live, and not die out, even though his numbers are few.

And this he said of **Judah**: O YHWH, give heed to Judah, and bring him to his people; strengthen his hands for him, and be a help against his adversaries.

And of **Levi** he said: Give to Levi your Thummim, and your Urim to your loyal one, whom you tested at Massah, with whom you contended at the waters of Meribah; who said of his father and mother, "I regard them not"; he ignored his kin and did not acknowledge his children. For they observed your word, and kept your covenant. They teach Jacob your ordinances, and Israel your law; they place incense before you, and whole burnt offerings on your altar. Bless, O YHWH, his substance, and accept the work of his hands; crush the loins of his adversaries, of those that hate him, so that they do not rise again.

Of **Benjamin** he said: The beloved of YHWH rests in safety-- the High God surrounds him all day long-- the beloved rests between his shoulders.

And of **Joseph** he said: Blessed by YHWH be his land, with the choice gifts of heaven above, and of the deep that lies beneath; with the choice fruits of the sun, and the rich yield of the months; with the finest produce of the ancient mountains, and the abundance of the everlasting hills; with the choice gifts of the earth and its fullness, and the favor of the one who dwells on Sinai. Let these come on the head of Joseph, on the

**Dan** shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a snake by the roadside, a viper along the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider falls backward. I wait for your salvation, O YHWH.

**Gad** shall be raided by raiders, but he shall raid at their heels.

**Asher's** food shall be rich, and he shall provide royal delicacies.

**Naphtali** is a doe let loose that bears lovely fawns.

**Joseph** is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall. The archers fiercely attacked him; they shot at him and pressed him hard. Yet his bow remained taut, and his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, by the name of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel, by the God of your father, who will help you, by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father are stronger than the blessings of the eternal mountains, the bounties of the everlasting hills; may they be on the head of Joseph, on the brow of him who was set apart from his brothers.

**Benjamin** is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey, and at evening dividing the spoil."

All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, blessing each one of them with a suitable blessing.

brow of the prince among his brothers. A firstborn bull--majesty is his! His horns are the horns of a wild ox; with them he gores the peoples, driving them to the ends of the earth; such are the myriads of Ephraim, such the thousands of Manasseh.

And of **Zebulun** he said: Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out; and **Issachar**, in your tents. They call peoples to the mountain; there they offer the right sacrifices; for they suck the affluence of the seas and the hidden treasures of the sand.

And of **Gad** he said: Blessed be the enlargement of Gad! Gad lives like a lion; he tears at arm and scalp. He chose the best for himself, for there a commander's allotment was reserved; he came at the head of the people, he executed the justice of YHWH, and his ordinances for Israel.

And of **Dan** he said: Dan is a lion's whelp that leaps forth from Bashan.

And of **Naphtali** he said: O Naphtali, sated with favor, full of the blessing of YHWH, possess the west and the south.

And of **Asher** he said: Most blessed of sons be Asher; may he be the favorite of his brothers, and may he dip his foot in oil. Your bars are iron and bronze; and as your days, so is your strength. There is none like God, O Jeshurun, who rides through the heavens to your help, majestic through the skies. He subdues the ancient gods, shatters the forces of old; he drove out the enemy before you, and said, "Destroy!"

So Israel lives in safety, untroubled is Jacob's abode in a land of grain and wine, where the heavens drop down dew. Happy are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by YHWH, the shield of your help, and the sword of your triumph! Your enemies shall come fawning to you, and you shall tread on their backs.

**Omitting Simeon**