

Refine Women's Ministry
Genesis 49 Jacob's Dozen: Gad, Asher, Naphtali
Lesson 9: April 15, 2020 by Kim Peelen

It is the blessing of the LORD that makes rich, And He adds no sorrow to it. Proverbs 10:22

*The Lord GOD is my strength, And He has made my feet like hinds' feet, And makes me walk on my high places.
Habakkuk 3: 19*

*I have not hidden Your righteousness within my heart;
I have spoken of Your faithfulness and Your salvation; I have not concealed Your lovingkindness and
Your truth from the great congregation. Psalm 40:10*

All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them. He blessed them, every one with the blessing appropriate to him (Genesis 49:28). Jacob continues to bless his sons, and after Dan, he addresses the three remaining sons of the maids of his wives: Gad, Asher, and Naphtali with brief but significant words.

***"As for Gad, raiders shall raid him, But he will raid at their heels."
"As for Asher, his food shall be rich, And he will yield royal dainties."
"Naphtali is a doe let loose, He gives beautiful words."*** Genesis 49: 19 - 21

A review of the complicated family tree - which son belong to which mother – is in order. After Leah has Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, she stops having children. Her sister Rachel, who is also a wife of Jacob, is childless after many years, so she gives her maid Bilhah to Jacob to bear children on her behalf. The sons Dan and Naphtali born from this arrangement are considered Rachel's, not Bilhah's. Leah, inspired by Rachel's strategy of concubinage, offers her maid Zilpah to Jacob, so Gad and Asher are born. Genesis 30 describes how they are named:

*She [Rachel] said, "Here is my maid Bilhah, go in to her that she may bear on my knees [acknowledge as her own], that through her I too may have children." ... 5 **Bilhah** conceived and bore Jacob a son. 6 Then Rachel said, "God has **vindicated** me, and has indeed heard my voice and has given me a son." Therefore she named him **Dan**. 7 **Rachel's maid Bilhah** conceived again and bore Jacob a second son. 8 So Rachel said, "With mighty wrestlings I **have wrestled [struggled] with my sister**, and I have indeed prevailed." And she named him **Naphtali**. 9 When Leah saw that she had stopped bearing, she took her maid Zilpah and gave her to Jacob as a wife. 10 **Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son**. 11 Then Leah said, "**How fortunate!**" So she named him **Gad**. 12 **Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a second son**. 13 Then Leah said, "**Happy am I! For women will call me happy.**" So she named him **Asher** (Genesis 30:3-13).*

Gad: Prepared Warrior, 'A Troop Cometh'

"As for Gad, raiders shall raid him, But he will raid at their heels." Genesis 49:19 [NASB]
"Gad, a troop shall overcome him: But he shall overcome at the last." [KJV]

Though Naphtali is born before Gad, Jacob offers his blessing next to Gad, the firstborn of Leah's maid Zilpah and Israel's seventh son. His name can mean 'fortunate', or the King James Version translates it 'a troop cometh', which are appropriate words from Leah who now has five sons – an entire troop! According to William Varner, "The English version of Scripture

misses Jacob's play on words, which in the Hebrew, four of the six words are some form of the word *Gad*. The following most closely catches the meaning: "*Gad, a troop shall troop upon him, but he shall troop on their heels.*" This passage succinctly prophesies that the tribe of Gad will be harassed by bands of hostile enemies, but will eventually repel their advances" (page 49).

An interesting translation note: The New American Standard, ***raiders shall raid him, But he will raid at their heels*** interprets *troop* with a negative flavor, as well as alludes to Dan's blessing of *a horned snake in the path, that bites the horse's heels, so that his rider falls backward*. The New Living Translation kicks it up a notch to ***Gad will be plundered by marauding bands, but he will turn and plunder them***. Matthew Henry explains, "the cause of God and his people, though for a time it may seem to be baffled and run down, will be victorious at last. It represents the Christian's conflict. Grace in the soul is often foiled in its conflicts; troops of corruption overcome it, but the cause is God's, and grace will in the end come off conqueror, yea, more than conqueror" (page 72). Whichever translation, Gad will be characterized by military battles with many losses, but will eventually be victorious.

This constant warfare is largely due to its proximity to its enemies. The tribal land of Gad, along with Reuben and half of Manasseh, is on the east side of the Jordan River. This vast area is ideal for their flocks, but it also borders the lands of hostile people. These tribes settle here, rather than cross to the west of the Jordan into Canaan, after asking permission from Moses and promising to fight alongside their Israelite brothers when they conquer their lands (Numbers 32 cf Joshua 13:24-28). The geographical name for this area is *Gilead* - a name that often refers to the tribe of Gad in the Old Testament - and lies south of Aram (Syria), and north of Ammon (modern Jordan), Moab, and Edom. The book of Judges describes their perilous position: *Then the sons of Israel again did evil in the sight of the LORD, served the Baals and the Ashtaroth, the gods of Aram, the gods of Sidon, the gods of Moab, the gods of the sons of Ammon, and the gods of the Philistines; thus they forsook the LORD and did not serve Him. 7 The anger of the LORD burned against Israel, and He sold them into the hands of the Philistines and into the hands of the sons of Ammon. 8 They afflicted and crushed the sons of Israel that year; for eighteen years they afflicted all the sons of Israel who were beyond the Jordan in Gilead in the land of the Amorites* (Judges 10:3-8).

During the time of the Judges when Israel is attacked by Jabin king of Hazor and the call for volunteer soldiers goes out, the tribe of Gad and others do **not** respond. The Song of Deborah and Barak point out their refusal to defend the nation: "*Why did you sit among the sheepfolds, To hear the piping for the flocks? Among the divisions of Reuben* There were great searchings of heart. 17 "***Gilead*** [Gad] remained across the Jordan; And why did **Dan** stay in ships? **Asher** sat at the seashore, And remained by its landings. (Judges 5:16-18). However, the tribe eventually forms into a fierce warrior force, likely due to their constant harassment by its enemies.

By the time of David, the tribe of Gad is well known for its valiant fighting men. The Gadites support David in Ziklag when he is fleeing Saul. 1 Chronicles 5:18-22 describes their exploits: *The sons of Reuben and the Gadites and the half-tribe of Manasseh, consisting of valiant men, men who bore shield and sword and shot with bow and were skillful in battle, were 44,760, who went to war. 19 They made war against the Hagrites, Jetur, Naphish and Nodab. 20 They were helped against them, and the Hagrites and all who were with them were given into*

their hand; for **they cried out to God in the battle, and He answered their prayers because they trusted in Him.** 21 They took away their cattle: their 50,000 camels, 250,000 sheep, 2,000 donkeys; and 100,000 men. 22 **For many fell slain, because the war was of God.** And they settled in their place until the exile. Later when David moves north away from Ziklag and is hiding near their tribal land, from the Gadites there came over to David in the stronghold in the wilderness, **mighty men of valor, men trained for war, who could handle shield and spear, and whose faces were like the faces of lions, and they were as swift as the gazelles on the mountains** (1 Chronicles 12:8).

Hundreds of years earlier, Moses predicts Gad's warlike ferocity in Deuteronomy 33:20: *"Blessed is the one who enlarges Gad's territory! Gad is **poised there like a lion to tear off an arm or a head.** 21 The people of Gad took the best land for themselves; a leader's share was assigned to them. When the leaders of the people were assembled, **they carried out the LORD's justice** and obeyed his regulations for Israel"* [New Living Translation].

The most prominent individual from Gad in the Old Testament is *Jair the Gileadite, who arose and judged Israel twenty-two years. 4 He had thirty sons who rode on thirty donkeys, and they had thirty cities in the land of Gilead that are called Havvoth-jair to this day. 5 And Jair died and was buried in Kamon.* (Judges 10:3-5). Another is Jephthah (who may not have been a Gadite, but is from the region of Gilead) whose military exploits certainly are characteristic of the tribe of Gad (Judges 11, 12). In Jewish tradition, the prophet Elijah is from Gad (Varner, p. 50).

Gad's constant readiness to combat its enemies inspires us to day to prepare for spiritual battle against the enemy with as much preparation and diligence. Though we don't have literal shield and spear, we must become skilled at using the spiritual armor the Apostle Paul describes in Ephesians 6:10 -17 in order to fight the most cunning foe: Satan. 11 *Put on the full armor of God, so that you will be able to stand firm against the schemes of the devil. 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the powers, against the world forces of this darkness, against the spiritual forces of wickedness in the heavenly places.*

'But he shall overcome at the last'

Jacob prophesies that Gad, after many defeats, will eventually overcome his enemies. Followers of Jesus have the same promise of hope that the powers of Satan and all his evil will not prevail. John encourages all believers in 1 John 5:2-5: *By this **we know** that we love the children of God, when we love God and observe His commandments. 3 For this is the love of God, that **we keep His commandments**; and His commandments are not burdensome. 4 For whatever is born of God overcomes the world; and **this is the victory that has overcome the world--our faith.** 5 **Who is the one who overcomes the world, but he who believes that Jesus is the Son of God?** Indeed, Jesus the Messiah has overcome each and every enemy through His perfect life He lived, His cruel death He willingly endured, and His supernatural Resurrection He continually proclaims to all who repent and believe in Him.*

Asher: Generous Provider, 'Happy'

"As for Asher, his food shall be rich, And he will yield royal dainties." Gen. 49:20 [NASB]

“Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, And he shall yield royal dainties.” [KJV]

The full brother of Gad is Asher, born by Leah’s maid Zilpah, and is also considered Leah’s son. Asher means ‘happy’ for Leah’s words at his birth, *“Happy am I! For women will call me **happy**”* (Genesis 30:12). His name and his father’s blessing both foreshadow good fortune for Asher and his descendants, specifically in fruitful agriculture that will even grace the table of kings. In fact, during King Solomon’s reign, for each month one of the twelve tribes provided the royal provisions (1 Kings 4:7). The monarch must have anticipated the arrival of Asher’s month with its abundant gourmet delights. Jewish tradition describes Asher as intuitive and open to others, anticipating and meeting their needs generously (Varner, page 51).

Asher’s tribal land allotment spans from the base of Mt. Carmel northward along the coast to the town of Tyre and includes fertile, productive valleys. Matthew Henry comments, “Asher should be a rich tribe. His inheritance bordered upon Carmel, which was fruitful to a proverb” (page 61). The men of Asher may have traded its agricultural capability for any military prowess, for Judges 1:32 explains, *the Asherites lived among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land; for they did not drive them out.* Like several other tribes, they did not completely dislodge their enemies and possess their land fully; however, they did co-exist with the Canaanites enough to still prosper through their fertile farms and orchards.

‘Out of Asher his bread shall be fat [shemen]’

The word translated *fat* in Genesis 49:20 is a feminine form of the Hebrew word *shemen*, meaning oil. Moses elaborates on this idea of Asher’s food being rich, or full of fat, in Deuteronomy 33: 24: *“More blessed than sons is Asher; May he be favored by his brothers, And may **he dip his foot in oil.**”* The word *shemen* appears 190 times in the Hebrew Scriptures and is defined as *the general word for olive oil in its various uses.* In biblical times, olive oil had many purposes: cooking, lighting, medicine, and religious anointing. With so many depending upon olive oil, it is understandable that the tribe that produced this staple for the home would have a steady, prosperous enterprise. Such is the tribe of Asher, as even today, most of the olive oil produced in Israel comes from Asher’s territory. One particularly fertile valley in this area is called “The Valley of the Olive” (Varner, page 52).

Scripture does not describe any judge, military commander, or leader from Asher. The most notable Asherite is the prophetess Anna, who the Bible describes in Luke 2:36 – 38 when she encounters Joseph and Mary bringing infant Jesus to the Temple to be blessed: *And there was a prophetess, **Anna** the daughter of Phanuel, of **the tribe of Asher.** She was advanced in years and had lived with her husband seven years after her marriage, 37 and then as a widow to the age of eighty-four. She never left the temple, serving night and day with fastings and prayers. 38 At that very moment she came up and began giving thanks to God, and **continued to speak of Him** [Jesus, Yeshua] **to all those who were looking for the redemption of Jerusalem.***

This passage is a beautiful testimony to Anna’s faithful ministry to proclaim the arrival of God’s Salvation in the infant Jesus, but also reveals two things about the nation of Israel. First, Jews during the time of Christ still maintain their tribal identity - even though the official records were destroyed with the Temple in 586 BC. Secondly, representatives from the 10

Northern tribes, which Asher is a part, still exist more than 700 years after Assyria captured and destroyed the nation. The so-called '10 Lost Tribes' are not lost after all, just scattered throughout the world (Varner, page 51).

'And he will yield royal dainties'

Asher is also known for generously sharing its bounty with others, including kings, and not hoarding or withholding its products from distribution. Proverbs 11:24-26, 28 could have been written for Asher:

There is one who scatters, and yet increases all the more, And there is one who withholds what is justly due, and yet it results only in want. 25 The generous man will be prosperous, And he who waters will himself be watered. 26 He who withholds grain, the people will curse him, But blessing will be on the head of him who sells it... He who trusts in his riches will fall, But the righteous will flourish like the green leaf.

Paul expresses this same truth in Ephesians 4:28: *He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with one who has need.* God's purpose for abundant resources is always to share them with those in need, not to enlarge one's own financial portfolio.

Naphtali: Swift to Share Good Words, Wrestlings

"Naphtali is a doe let loose, He gives beautiful words." Genesis 49: 21 [NASB]
"Naphtali is a hind let loose; He giveth goodly words." [KJV]

Naphtali is the full brother of Dan, the sixth son of Jacob and the second son of Rachel through her maid Bilhah. Rachel's response to his arrival again reveals the jealousy between the sisters, *"With mighty **wrestlings** [struggles] I have wrestled with my sister, and I have indeed prevailed."* And she named him **Naphtali** Genesis 30: 21. Jacob uses another animal metaphor to describe the future of this son: doe, a deer, a female deer, a hind.

'Naphtali is a doe let loose'

The fleetness and surety of foot of the female deer is a common image in Scripture. David writes in Psalm 18:32-33, *The God who girds me with strength And makes my way blameless? 33 He makes my feet like hinds' feet, And sets me upon my high places.* Just like an agile doe flees from the hunter, so the LORD gives David quickness to escape his enemy Saul. Matthew Henry describes the tribe, "Naphtali is a hind let loose. We may consider it as a description of the character of this tribe. Unlike the laborious ox and ass; desirous of ease and liberty; active, but more noted for quick dispatch than steady labour and perseverance (page 72). The tribe, according to Jacob, will be characterized by speed and agility. In Jewish tradition, Naphtali is a swift runner, supposedly racing all the way from Egypt to his aged father in Canaan with the amazing news that Joseph is alive and well (Varner, page 53).

The tribal allotment of Naphtali lies in the northernmost part of Israel, wedged between Asher at the coast and Manasseh east of the Jordan River (Joshua 19:32-39). Like several other

tribes, however, **Naphtali** did not drive out the inhabitants of Beth-shemesh, or the inhabitants of Beth-anath, but **lived among the Canaanites**, the inhabitants of the land... became forced labor for them Judges 1:33. The men of Naphtali, however, do rise to the challenge later when Israel faces the forces of Jabin (Judges 4, 5). In fact, their swift and strong response is praised in the Song of Deborah and Barak, as one of two tribes praised for outstanding bravery: "**Zebulun** was a people who despised their lives even to death, And **Naphtali** also, on the high places of the field (Judges. 5:18). While many tribes such as Reuben, Dan, and Asher refuse to send volunteers, Naphtali and Zebulun swiftly rush to battle, risking their lives for the defense of the nation, like a doe let loose. Barak, who is the most famous Naphtalite, is the leader of the battle along with Deborah' they engage the fierce enemy and eventually defeat the Canaanite force (Judges 4:6).

'Naphtali gives beautiful words'

Israel also prophesies that Naphtali will speak beautiful words, which is fulfilled in the verses Barak pens in the Song of Deborah. There is another possible application of this promise. As the ministry of Jesus moves to the area of Galilee, He calls His disciples – Peter and Andrew and the sons of Zebedee James and John. These four, as well as other disciples from the area, form the nucleus of Jesus's devoted followers. It is also the area where Jesus begins sharing His message of Salvation as Matthew 4:13 – 17 states: *and leaving Nazareth, He came and settled in Capernaum, which is by the sea, **in the region of Zebulun and Naphtali.*** 14 This was to fulfill what was spoken through Isaiah the prophet: 15 "**THE LAND OF ZEBULUN AND THE LAND OF NAPHTALI, BY THE WAY OF THE SEA, BEYOND THE JORDAN, GALILEE OF THE GENTILES--** 16 "**THE PEOPLE WHO WERE SITTING IN DARKNESS SAW A GREAT LIGHT, AND THOSE WHO WERE SITTING IN THE LAND AND SHADOW OF DEATH, UPON THEM A LIGHT DAWNED.**" 17 From that time **Jesus began to preach and say, "Repent, for the kingdom of heaven is at hand."** It is in the ancient tribal land of Naphtali where Jesus begins to preach His message. Later His disciples will carry the 'beautiful words' of the gospel of the Son of God throughout the entire world. The literal fulfillment of Jacob's blessing!

Summary: Jacob blesses three sons with brief words, but with enduring importance, reaching from ancient times to today. The words have literal fulfillment in his sons, but also have spiritual lessons for followers of Jesus the Christ today.

Gad is a warrior prepared for battle, who suffers many defeats but eventually will be victorious over the enemy. Gad understands that *to every thing there is a season:* as an effective fighting force must anticipate *a time for war and a time for peace.* Like Gad, we are also warriors, but in a spiritual battle, called to train and deploy as soldiers in the Lord's army in order to defend and proclaim the Perfect glory of God.

Asher is a provider, generously sharing resources rather than enriching his own coffers. Asher is blessed with abundant resources, but in order to continue to have productive harvests, the men of Asher must know *the time to plant and a time to pluck or harvest,* just as Ecclesiastes 3 tells us. Similarly, followers of Jesus, if they are to give generously to the Lord's work, they must diligently commit to planting and tending the resources God entrusts to them, so there is abundant fruit to harvest. This fruit is not for us to hoard or accumulate, but rather to further His glory. Asher's fruitfulness is associated with oil, which is a well-known Scriptural symbol for the Holy Spirit. Just as the tribe of Asher produces literal olive fruit for

the good of God's people, so today Christians are to produce the fruit of the Holy Spirit: *But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, 23 gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law* (Galatians 5:22-23).

Naphtali is swift and agile, ready at a moment to share words of beauty. The prophetic words of Jacob describe the speed and agility of Naphtali that also has 'goodly' words to communicate. These wise men with words to share also know the *time to keep silence, and a time to speak*. Christians today can proclaim the same most beautiful of all words as Jesus Christ and His disciples spoke - words of truth, words of true hope, words for any one who asks - the saving truth of God's Salvation in Jesus Christ His Son.

God fights for us

God provides for us

God swiftly answers our plea with beautiful words of healing and salvation

A prayer using the words of Paul from 1 Corinthians 15:1-4, 22-26:

1 Now I make known to you, brethren, the gospel which I preached to you, which also you received, in which also you stand, 2 by which also you are saved, if you hold fast the word which I preached to you, unless you believed in vain. 3 For I delivered to you as of first importance what I also received, that Christ died for our sins according to the Scriptures, 4 and that He was buried, and that He was raised on the third day according to the Scriptures, ... 22 For as in Adam all die, so also in Christ all will be made alive. 23 But each in his own order: Christ the first fruits, after that those who are Christ's at His coming, 24 then [comes] the end, when He hands over the kingdom to the God and Father, when He has abolished all rule and all authority and power. 25 For He must reign until He has put all His enemies under His feet. 26 The last enemy that will be abolished is death.

Group Discussion:

Gad: Overcomes the Enemy

1Peter 5:8 *Be of sober spirit, be on the alert. Your adversary, the devil, prowls around like a roaring lion, seeking someone to devour.*

1. Describe the enemy we fight.

Revelation 19:11 – 16 *And I saw heaven opened, and behold, a white horse, and He who sat on it is called Faithful and True, and in righteousness He judges and wages war. 12 His eyes are a flame of fire, and on His head are many diadems; and He has a name written on Him which no one knows except Himself. 13 He is clothed with a robe dipped in blood, and His name is called The Word of God.*

2. Describe the One who wages war – His name, His clothing, etc.

14 And the armies which are in heaven, clothed in fine linen, white and clean, were following Him on white horses. 15 From His mouth comes a sharp sword, so that with it He may strike down the nations, and He will rule them with a rod of iron; and He treads the wine press of the fierce wrath of God, the Almighty. 16 And on His robe and on His thigh He has a name written, "KING OF KINGS, AND LORD OF LORDS."

3. What does He use to strike down His enemies? What should we use to fight against Satan?

Asher: Be Generous:

1 Timothy 6:17- 21 17 Instruct those who are rich in this present world not to be conceited or to fix their hope on the uncertainty of riches, but on God, who richly supplies us with all things to enjoy. 18 Instruct them to do good, to be rich in good works, to be generous and ready to share, 19 storing up for themselves the treasure of a good foundation for the future, so that they may take hold of that which is life indeed.

4. Who is being instructed? What are they NOT to do? What are they TO do?

5. What are we to 'store up' or accumulate and why? Share ways to do this during this time of social distancing and isolation.

20 O Timothy, guard what has been entrusted to you, avoiding worldly and empty chatter and the opposing arguments of what is falsely called "knowledge"—21 which some have professed and thus gone astray from the faith. Grace be with you.

6. What words are we to not utter (keep the silence)?

Naphtali: Be Swift to share the good news The book of Romans describes two types of feet. Romans 3:15-18 15 *"THEIR FEET ARE SWIFT TO SHED BLOOD, 16 DESTRUCTION AND MISERY ARE IN THEIR PATHS, 17 AND THE PATH OF PEACE THEY HAVE NOT KNOWN."* 18 *"THERE IS NO FEAR OF GOD BEFORE THEIR EYES."*

7. What type of person has this type of feet? What will happen to them?

Romans 10:15 *"HOW BEAUTIFUL ARE THE FEET OF THOSE WHO BRING GOOD NEWS OF GOOD THINGS!"*

8. What is the 'good news of good things'? Practice sharing with each other the gospel message and how it encourages you to live obediently for Jesus.

Homework

1. Read about Joseph in Genesis 37, 39 – 41: His time in captivity. Record any thoughts on his relationships to his father, brothers, mother. His character and what motivates him.

2. Read Genesis 42 – 45:9: Joseph encounters his brothers. Discuss possibilities for his not revealing himself to his brothers for so long. What finally prompted him to identify himself?

3. Read Genesis 45: 10 – 48:22: the entire family of Jacob is reunited in Egypt. How significant is Jacob leaving Canaan (Promised Land) to live in Egypt? See also Genesis 28: 13 – 22, Jacob's encounter with God before he marries.

Resources *Jacob's Dozen: A Prophetic Look at the Tribes of Israel* by William Varner, 1987.

John MacArthur Study Bible, NKJV, 1982

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Matthew Henry's Concise Commentary of the Whole Bible, 1997

The Ryrie Study Bible, New American Standard Translation, 1978