

Jacob's Testament Once Again (Gen 49:3-27): Messianic Implications in the Chiastic Rearrangement

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1. Introduction

Jacob's last words to his sons in Genesis 49 (vv. 3-27) have long posed a significant challenge for exegetes, further compounded by the presence of archaic words, anomalous syntax, and obscure references.¹⁾ While historical-critical studies of the selective colas in Jacob's testament (Gen 49:1-27) are numerous, the literary artistry of the poetry as a whole and its rhetorical implications have received relatively less attention.²⁾ In partic-

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- 1) Some of the representative commentaries that critically engage with the biblical text are: V. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis* (2 vols.; NICOT 18-50; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1990-1995), 2 (1995); G. J. Wenham, *Genesis* (2 vols.; WBC 16-50; Dallas: Word Books, 1987-1994), 2 (1994); N. M. Sarna, *Genesis* (JPSTC; Philadelphia, PA: JPS, 1989); C. Westermann, *Genesis 37-50: A Commentary* (3 vols.; trans. J. J. Scullion S. J.; Minneapolis, MN: Augsburg, 1986); G. von Rad, *Genesis* (trans. John H. Marks; OTL, rev. ed; London, UK: SCM, 1972); E. A. Speiser, *Genesis* (AB 1; Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1964); John Skinner, *Genesis* (2nd ed; ICC 1; Edinburgh: T & T Clark, 1930).
- 2) See some recent studies in Matthew Michael, "The Dead Trickster and His Shrewd Children?: The Persuasive Use of the Double Quotations of a Dead Patriarch in Genesis 49:29-50:21," *JSOT* 43/2 (2018), 179-90; S. Frolov, "Judah Comes to Shiloh: Genesis 49:10bα, One More Time," *JBL* 131/3 (2012), 417-22; R. C. Steiner, "Poetic Forms in the Masoretic Vocalization and Three Difficult Phrases Blessing: יִתְּרָ שְׂאֵת (Gen 49:3), יְצוּעֵי עֲלָה (49:4), and יְבֹא שִׁילָה (49:10)," *JBL* 129 (2010), 219-26; A.

ular, studies that have conducted a synchronic analysis of the poetic unit have not sufficiently explored the chiasmic structure of Jacob's deathbed testament.³⁾ This article attempts to evaluate the validity of the chiasmic symmetry in Jacob's last words concerning his twelve sons (Gen 49:3-27) and argues that Jacob's utterance of "salvation," as the rhetorical thrust of the concentric chiasm (Gen 49:18), should be understood within the context of Israel's messianic hope.⁴⁾ The analysis will investigate how Jacob's sayings for his sons are formulated by strategically em-

D. Rubin, "Genesis 49:4 in Light of Arabic and Modern South Arabian," *VT* 59/3 (2009), 499-502; N. P. Lunn, "The Last Words of Jacob and Joseph: A Rhetorico-Structural Analysis of Genesis 49:29-33 and 50:24-26," *TynBul* 59 (2008), 161-79; K. M. Swenson, "Crowned with Blessings: The Riches of Double-Meaning in Gen 49,26b," *ZAW* 120/3 (2008), 422-25. See also those in Korean, Kyung-Taek Ha, "'Jacob's Blessings' in the Story of Joseph: An Exegetical Study of Gen 49:1-28," *KPJT* 46/1 (2014), 37-66; Jong Yoo Yoon, "Janus Parallelism in the Book of Genesis: Its Literary Dynamics and Korean Translation," *C&C* 12/2 (2018), 77-104.

3) For example, see Kerry D. Lee, Jr., *The Death of Jacob: Narrative Conventions in Genesis 47.28-50.26* (BI 138; Leiden: Brill, 2016); Karin Schöpfli, "Jakob Segnet Seinen Sohn: Genesis 49,1-28 Im Kontext von Josefs- Und Vätergeschichte," *ZAW* 115/4 (2003), 501-23; Raymond de Hoop, *Genesis 49 in Its Literary and Historical Context* (OTS 39; Leiden: Brill, 1999); Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 452-93; George W. Coats, *Genesis with an Introduction to Narrative Literature* (FOTL 1; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 1983).

4) Chiasmus has been utilized in various forms of literature across civilizations throughout ages, serving rhetorical, aesthetic or liturgical purposes. The beauty and functionality of chiasmic structures in the Bible likewise have been detected by many commentators and were incorporated into the field of rhetorical criticism to better comprehend the pericope's central message. Elie Assis, "Chiasmus in Biblical Narrative: Rhetoric of Characterization," *Prooftexts* 22/3 (2002), 273-74; Mark J. Boda, "Chiasmus in Ubiquity: Symmetrical Mirages in Nehemiah 9," *JSOT* 71 (1996), 56-58. See also in Yehuda T. Radday, "Chiasmus in the Hebrew Biblical Narrative," in *Chiasmus in Antiquity* (Eugene, OR; Wipf & Stock, 1981), 51; David N. Freedman, in *Chiasmus in Antiquity*, 7; Gary A. Rendsburg, "Chiasmus in the Book of Genesis," *BYUSQ* 59/5 (2020), 17-34; J. P. Fokkelman, *Narrative Art in Genesis: Specimens of Stylistic and Structural Analysis* (2nd ed; Sheffield: JSOT, 1991), 93-104.

ploying wordplay, key words, and structural arrangement. This exegetical task will also entail reassessing some widely divergent translations that call for text-critical analyses and comparison of relevant biblical texts—in and outside the book of Genesis—that are interconnected with Jacob's sayings lexically, thematically, or structurally.⁵⁾ Given that Jacob's sayings point forward and backward in time, one of the goals of this study is to trace how various biblical texts, in their final form, are dynamically invoked within this defined rhetorical unit.

First, it is necessary to consider the claim that the twelve sons mentioned in Jacob's last words do not follow a birth order (cf. Gen 29–30) but, rather, a “deliberate chiasmic arrangement.”⁶⁾ Sarna, for example, observes that what we see here is the pattern “LEAH, Bilhah-Zilpah, Zilpah-Bihah, RACHEL.”⁷⁾ Leah's six sons and Rachel's two sons are placed in the outer frame of the chiasm, respectively, with Zilpah's two sons positioned at the core and Bilhah's two sons in between.⁸⁾ This chiasmic design, manifesting asymmetrical balance (Leah's six sons, A vs. Rachel's two sons, A'), is based on the arrangement of tribal list according to the maternal lineage. The apparent imbalance in the outermost frame is mitigated by the weight of the two sons, Judah and

5) See the discussion of “cotext” and “context” in S. A. Groom, *Linguistic Analysis of Biblical Hebrew* (Waynesboro, GA: Paternoster Press, 2003), xxi–xxv. According to Groom, the “cotext” is “the relevant linguistic context,” including sentences and paragraphs, that shapes a word's meaning. The Hebrew Bible in its entirety can be considered as “the wider cotext” when attempting to understand the meaning of a term occurring in any portion of it. This study will evaluate various “cotexts” where cases for syntagmatic juxtaposition can be substantiated and shown to enhance the interpretation of the source text in light of the target text.

6) Sarna, *Genesis*, 331.

7) Sarna, *Genesis*, 331.

8) There are various explanations why Zebulun precedes Issachar in the list, even though Issachar was introduced as the firstborn in the earlier account (e.g., Gen 30:17–20). See in Sarna, *Genesis*, 337–38.

Joseph, who play a prominent role in resolving the crisis of the father beleaguered by the existential threat to his beloved son. It is not readily clear, however, what rhetorical impact the pivotal components (C, C') are intended to have in the asymmetric chiasm, especially given the relatively insignificant roles of Gad and Asher in the narrative of Jacob and his sons (Gen 37-50). A closer examination of the text reveals another literary pattern (see the chart below) when various linguistic and thematic parallels are considered more carefully. The following arrangement of the chiasmic design exhibits a regrouping of Leah's last two sons, Zebulun and Issachar, with Jacob's concubine-born sons—Dan, Gad, Asher, and Naphtali—where Dan (C3) and Gad (C3') occupy the core section. This adjustment parallels the “Galilee-Jezreel tribes,” that is, Zebulun (A3) with Naphtali (A3') and Issachar (B3) with Asher (B3'), in the inner section of the concentric chiasm (A3-A3').⁹⁾

A1) Reuben (Gen 49:3-4)

A2) Simeon and Levi (Gen 49:5-7)

B2) Judah (Gen 49:8-12)

A3) Zebulun (Gen 49:13)

B3) Issachar (Gen 49:14-15)

C3) Dan (Gen 49:16-17)

D3) Jacob's first-person utterance (Gen 49:18)

C3') Gad (Gen 49:19)

B3') Asher (Gen 49:20)

A3') Naphtali (Gen 49:21)

B2') Joseph (Gen 49:22-26)

A1') Benjamin (Gen 49:27a, b)

A2') Benjamin (Gen 49:27c)

9) James Maxwell Miller and John H. Hays, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah* (Louisville, KY: WJK Press, 1986), 98-100.

The rationale for placing Jacob's first-person utterance at the pivot point will be explained in the summary analysis, but for now, it suffices to note that the theologically compact saying is the only instance of Jacob's first-person speech in the inner section of the chiasmic structure (A3–A3'). The outer section of the pattern (A1//A1'; A2//A2'; B2//B2') features Jacob's remaining sons from Leah and the sons of Rachel, with Judah (B2) and Joseph (B2') standing out due to Jacob's more elaborate and exuberant sayings about them. The outermost frame is reserved for Reuben (A1) and Simeon and Levi (A2), matched by Benjamin (A1' and A2') in two separate divisions. Each corresponding pair of the structural arrangement warrants a detailed discussion, with particular attention to how the poetic composition accomplishes the rhetorical effect for ideological purposes.

2. Evaluation of Paired Tribal Eponyms

2.1. Dan (Gen 49:16-17) and Gad (Gen 49:19)

As commentators note, the wordplay on Dan's name, as in "Dan shall judge" (Gen 49:16, דָּן דָּן) evokes Samson, the Danite who judged Israel for twenty years (Judg 15:20; 16:31).¹⁰ It is remarkable that the term "heel/s" (עֵקֶב, Gen 49:17, 19) is repeatedly mentioned in Jacob's saying for both Dan and Gad, and is linked to a hostile conflict with enemy forces. As for Dan, the imagery of a serpent (49:17, שָׂרָפ) or a horned viper

10) See Wenham's remark on the "strange" reluctance of modern commentators to associate Jacob's saying about Dan with Samson. He notes that F. Delitzsch, A. Dillmann, S. R. Driver, and E. König acknowledge the connection, albeit with some reservation. Wenham, *Genesis*, 481.

(49:17, שָׁפִיפֹן) striking at the heels is reminiscent of the Protoevangelium (Gen 3:15). The depiction of a horse-riding opponent falling from his horse (vv. 16-17) retrospectively echoes Israel's victory over the Egyptians at the Red Sea (Exod 15:1). The imagery of an agile serpent capable of delivering a lethal attack on a much larger animal (Gen 49:17) portrays Dan's resilience against enemy aggression, even under dire circumstances. This imagery calls to mind Samson's heroic death at the temple of Dagon, where, despite being chained and blind, he killed more Philistines in his final moments than in his lifetime (Judg 16:23-30). The migration of the Danites to the north (Judg 18) is also relevant for comprehending Jacob's saying for Dan because managed to escape Canaanite encroachment in the south, in the Philistine coastal plain (Josh 19:40-48; cf. Judg 1:34), and resettled in a serene, prosperous site in the north, at the foot of Mount Hermon (Judg 18:27-29).¹¹⁾ The serpentine imagery, conjuring up a stealthy attack on the heels of the enemy, is likewise implicit in Jacob's utterance regarding Gad (v. 19). With an even more resounding pun on his name than Dan's, "Gad, raiders shall raid him, but he shall raid at their heels" (49:19, גַּד גִּדְרֵי יְנֻדְּנוּ וְהוּא יִגְדַּעֲקֵב), Jacob's sayings delineate Gad as the "supplanter" *par excellence*, the heroic warrior overpowering the enemy's heels.¹²⁾ The biblical texts do not explicitly mention a prominent Gadite, but the tribe's loyalty, intrepidity, and deftness are evidenced by the Gadites' military support of David when he was a fugitive from Saul (1 Chron 12:8).

In fact, the wordplay on "heel/s" connects to the struggles of Jacob's own life as a "heel-grabber/supplanter" or "deceiver/trickster" (Gen 27:36). If we consider that Genesis 49 represents

11) The tribe of Dan is "the least successful" in accomplishing the conquest of Canaan, especially when compared to the tribe of Judah. See R. D. Nelson, *Judges: A Critical & Rhetorical Commentary* (New York: T&T Clark, 2017), 24.

12) Unless otherwise noted, all translations in this paper are mine.

the culmination of the *toledot* bloc in Jacob's story,¹³⁾ the double repetition of "heel/s"—a play on Jacob's name—surrounding the heart of his testament irresistibly recalls the years of his life that were "few and evil" (Gen 47:9). The motif of deception permeates Jacob's life: he deceived Esau and Isaac concerning the blessing of the firstborn son (Gen 27:1-40; cf. Gen 25:29-34 regarding the birthright), Laban deceived Jacob about his marriage and wages (Gen 29:21-30), and Jacob was deceived by his sons concerning Joseph (Gen 37:33; 44:28). The theme of deception is stitched throughout the narratives of Samson the Danite and the Danites' tribal migration. Samson, for example, entertained trickery with his riddle to outwit the Philistines (Judg 14-15), deceived Delilah three times before yielding to her seduction (Judg 16:1-21), and feigned weakness in a strategic ploy to destroy them (Judg 16:22-31). Similarly, the Danites secretly stole Micah's idols and cultic artifacts (Judg 18:18), persisted in idolatry, and ensnared the Israelites in their waywardness until their captivity (Judg 18:29-31; cf. 1 Kgs 12:28-30). In this way, Jacob's sayings about Dan and Gad, which highlight both the bright and dark aspects of their history, serve as a rhetorical catalyst for readers to be attuned to Jacob's emphatic, first-person declaration in Genesis 49:18: "For your salvation I wait, O LORD!" Jacob's first-person monologue is eschatologically important (v. 18)¹⁴⁾ and will be discussed further in the final section of this paper since it functions as the focal point of the chiasmic structure of Jacob's testament.

13) Robert E. Longacre, *Joseph: A Story of Divine Providence: A Text Theoretical and Textlinguistic Analysis of Genesis 37 and 39-48* (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1989), 23; Wenham, *Genesis*, 468; Sarna, *Genesis*, 331.

14) Jonathan Huddleston, *Eschatology in Genesis* (FAT 2.57; Tübingen, Germany: Mohr Siebeck, 2012), 228.

2.2. Issachar (Gen 49:14-15) and Asher (Gen 49:20)

What is notable in the saying for Issachar is the irony associated with his name: while Issachar (יִשָּׁכָר) means “there is recompense” or “a man of hire,” he will be subject to a life of *corvée*.¹⁵⁾ The reference to tranquil and prosperous land, as in “He saw that a resting place was good, and that the land was pleasant” (49:15), followed by the mention of their willing enslavement, indicates the tribe’s eventual assimilation with the pagan establishment through concession. The interweaving of expressions such as “to bear” (סבל) and “a servant at forced labor” (לְמַס־עֲבָד) in Genesis 49:14 is reminiscent of language used to describe Israel’s hardship in Egypt (Exod 1:11, וַיִּשְׁיֹמוּ וַיַּעֲבֹדוּ מִסִּיִּם לְמֶעַן עֲנֹתוֹ בְּסִבְלָתָם).¹⁶⁾ This inner-biblical connection presages the dire fate of Issachar, compromised at the expense of their prosperity in the land. It contrasts starkly with the phrase “a servant at forced labor” (Gen 49:15, לְמַס־עֲבָד), employed in the narrative of Joshua’s conquest of the Promised Land (Josh 16:10) and in Solomon’s conscription for building projects (1 Kgs 9:20-21). In both of these cases, the Israelites are depicted as enslaving the Canaanites they failed to destroy utterly. By contrast, Issachar, despite the geographical advantage (Gen

15) An Armana letter (ca. 14th c. BCE) indicates that some indigenous populations in Shunem, an area belonging to Issachar’s allotted territory (Josh 19:18), were subjected to serfdom. Based on this evidence, some commentators suggest that Jacob’s words about Issachar may reflect this historical reality before Deborah’s victory over the Canaanite confederation at Megiddo (Judg 4). Hamilton’s alternative reading of Issachar as “a laboring worker” (לְמַס־עֲבָד) because of the tribe’s absence in Judges 1 is unconvincing in light of the chiasmic structure proposed in this article. Instead, Issachar’s omission in Judges 1 should be understood in light of Jacob’s apparent emphasis on their servitude, aligning the tribe’s fate to other Galilee-Jezreel tribes. Sarna, *Genesis*, 340; Hamilton, *Genesis*, 667.

16) Sarna, *Genesis*, 340.

49:15a), will encounter a reversal of Israel's ideal subjugation of their enemies.

Jacob's remark regarding Asher, tinged with blessing, contrasts with the fate of Issachar (49:14-15), which is unequivocally depicted as reduced to a state of corvée laborers for survival.¹⁷⁾ The immediate impression of verse 20 is that the tribe of Asher will enjoy the abundance of agricultural produce in the allotted land (cf. Josh 19:24-31), fit for royal clients.¹⁸⁾ Some commentators, nevertheless, challenge this straightforward interpretation, noting textual difficulties in the verse. Stanley Gevirtz persuasively contends that the preposition *mem*, prefixed to the name of Asher (אַשֶׁר), and the feminine adjective "fat" (שֶׁמֶנֶה), modifying the masculine noun phrase "his food" (לֶחֶמוֹ), are peculiar, suggesting the need for textual emendation.¹⁹⁾ Indeed, versional witnesses (LXX, Syriac, and Vulgate; cf. ESV, NRSV, NIV, NAS) of the last word in verse 19 (MT עֶקֶב) lend considerable support to Gevirtz's assertion that the *mem* prefix in the MT should have been attached to the preceding word "heel." This would better cohere with the phrase "the heels of horse(s)" in the Dan verses (vv. 16-17), and the similar imagery in the Gad verse (v. 19), both of which reference the "heel-grabbing" prowess of their respective tribal eponyms.

Gevirtz also suggests that the modifier "fat" (שֶׁמֶנֶה) may be incorrect because the feminine adjective does not agree with the masculine noun "(his) food" (לֶחֶמוֹ).²⁰⁾ He proposes a minor correction to the vowel pointing, reading the verse as: "Asher, who rations (שֶׁמֶנֶה*; cf. אֲשֶׁר מֵנֶה, Dan 1:10; שִׁשְׁלִים, Ps 137:8) his bread,

17) Commentators disagree as to whether Jacob's saying for Asher (Gen 49:20) connotes blessing, neutral description, or even sarcasm. Wenham, *Genesis*, 482.

18) For instance, see de Hoop, *Genesis* 49, 559.

19) S. Gevirtz, "Asher in the Blessing of Jacob (Genesis 49:20)," *VT* 37/2 (1987), 154-63.

20) Refer to Gevirtz extensive assessment of the instances in the Bible. Gevirtz, "Asher," 162-63.

he gives delicacies to (the) king!”²¹⁾ While this alternative reading is somewhat speculative, Gevartz is right in perceiving that the verse is not simply a blessing or neutral description of the Asherites’ agricultural wealth.²²⁾ In fact, the latter part of the cola should be translated as “he shall yield delicacies of a king (or to a king),”²³⁾ rather than “royal delicacies,” with the noun “king” referring to a specific ruler rather than acting as an adjectival modifier. This reading frames Asher’s situation as one of subordination, where the tribe is forced to offer tribute to a sovereign.

The sayings for Asher must be understood in light of Judges 1, where the tribe is mentioned alongside Zebulun and Naphtali in relation to their failure to drive out the Canaanites (vv. 30-33). Unlike Zebulun and Naphtali, there is no mention of Asher subjecting these pagan residents to forced labor. The tribe of

21) The author uses italic emphasis to denote inherent “sarcasm.” Admitting that this construction appears to be a lexical feature of Late Hebrew, Gevartz, citing several examples, argues that what is deemed late might instead be explained as a “northern dialect feature.” According to Gevartz, this alternative translation implies the unfortunate plight of the tribe of Asher, which is forced to pay onerous tribute to the reigning king despite being so impoverished that it must “ration” its own food for survival. Gevartz contends that the historical context for Jacob’s utterance lies in the reduced state of the Asherites after ceding twenty towns in the Cabul region to Hiram during Solomon’s reign (Josh 19:30). Their subsequent predicament to endure “the excessive demands of the Solomonic government” is thus portrayed with a tone of cynicism toward bureaucratic tyranny. However, his interpretation that the verse employs political “sarcasm” to criticize Solomon’s imposition of a monthly tribute on Asher finds little support from other biblical texts. Gevartz, “Asher,” 160.

22) In particular, the piel form of the verb מָנַח does not necessarily mean that food was allocated because of scarcity. When used in reference to a food allowance elsewhere in the biblical narrative, it merely signifies that a provider assigned or supplied a certain amount of food to the recipients. In the case of Daniel and his friends (Dan 1:5, 10), for example, they were provided with daily nourishment from the king’s table, which does not imply any shortage of provisions.

23) Cf. Gevartz, “Asher,” 157. Pace de Hoop, *Genesis* 49, 559, based on the structural consideration.

Asher notably receives a double emphasis on the fact that they dwelt among the Canaanites (Judg 1:31-32). Some commentators opine that this indicates the Asherites' political compromise, possibly to maintain favorable relations with their royal clients in the Phoenician city-states, led to their subjugation.²⁴ In this vein, the comments on Asher likely suggest the tribe's interaction with neighboring Canaanite patronages, as implied in the second cola, "and he shall yield delicacies of a king" (v. 20b). A later biblical account records that twenty of the twenty-two towns in the region belonging to the tribe of Asher were eventually absorbed into the Phoenician governance during the Solomonic era (1 Kgs 9:10-14). Given these historical accounts, Jacob's saying about Asher apparently contains a shrouded allusion (in the final form) to the undesirable fate of the Asherites, who failed to implement divine retribution during Joshua's conquest (Judg 1:31-32). In the case of Asher, the tribe will be demoted to serving its Canaanite overlords, whom it could have displaced. Just as Issachar's fate contrasts with the meaning of his name, Asher, whose tribal eponym means "happy" or "blessed," will be relegated to catering to its Canaanite rulers by yielding abundant tributes. This interpretation brings to the fore Jacob's saying about Issachar, which explicitly refers to servitude—thereby indirectly highlighting the absence of Issachar in Judges 1.

2.3. Zebulun (Gen 49:13) and Naphtali (Gen 49:21)

Jacob's terse yet vivid comments on Zebulun and Naphtali draw a striking contrast, as the action verbs describing their fates are diametrically opposed: Zebulun will "dwell" (יָשָׁב, v. 13), whereas Naphtali will be "sent away" (שָׁלַחָה, v. 21). The

24) Westermann, *Genesis 37-50*, 269; Sarna, *Genesis*, 341-2; Hamilton, *Genesis*, 674.

double occurrence of the noun construct חוף (“shore,” v. 13), coupled with the mention of Zebulun’s border with Sidon, indicates that Zebulun assimilated into the littoral Canaanite culture for trade and maritime activities (cf. Deut 33:19).²⁵⁾

Jacob’s saying for Naphtali in Genesis 49:21 is riddled with textual difficulties, leading to varied translations of the Hebrew text (MT).²⁶⁾ Most versions compare Naphtali to a “doe” or “hind” set free, producing beautiful or goodly “words” (cf. NASB, JPS, KJV/NKJV) or bearing comely “fawns” (cf. NIV, RSV/NRSV, ESV). Commentators have observed the distinctively feminine animal metaphor, as all other animals in Jacob’s last words are in masculine form. The imagery of “a hind/doe let loose” combined with a fertile motif (“bearing beautiful fawns”) is compelling, especially when considering the parallelism within

25) Exegetes have questioned the depiction of Zebulun as a coastal region, since Joshua 19:10-16 describes it as landlocked, with Asher to the northeast and no direct contact with Sidon. Zebulun eventually gained control of the northwestern tip of the Jezreel Valley, securing access to the Via Maris—a significant trade route connecting the Levant with Egypt and Mesopotamia—where it curves southward along the Mediterranean coast. Yet, this does not sufficiently explain the explicit references to Zebulun’s seafaring activities and trade engagements, as if it bordered the Mediterranean directly. A recent paleo-geographical survey reveals the existence of an ancient delta that extended Asher’s shoreline as far as present-day Yagur, abutting Zebulun’s allotted area to the east. Micha Klein’s stratigraphic and archaeological research identifies a large-scale port site about 1.5 kilometers inland from the present shoreline, near the Kishon delta by the Carmel range (cf. Jer 46:18). Still, the preposition in וַיִּרְכְּתוּ עַל-צִידֹן (“and its flank toward Sidon,” Gen 49:13) may suggest Zebulun’s proximity to the Sidonian realm rather than direct adjacency to the Phoenician city-state. Wright, “Zebulun,” 912; M. Klein, “Coastal Paleogeography as a Means for Understanding the Bible’s Pshat,” *Horizons in Geography / בנאוגרפיה אופקים* (in Hebrew) 85 (2014), 29-36; M. Klein and A. Frank, “The Paleogeographic Research as an Aid to Understanding the Boundaries of the Territory of the Tribe of Zebulun,” *Megadim / מגדים* (in Hebrew) 55 (2014), 145-157; Klein and Frank, “Paleogeographic Research,” 157; Wenham, *Genesis*, 479.

26) Hamilton, *Genesis*, 676-77.

the bicola. A key interpretive question is whether the verse simply implies Naphtali's access to the rich resources of its allotted region. This interpretation, nonetheless, is problematic because the noun construct אִמְרֵי (Gen 49:21) consistently means "words" in Hebrew, and its Semitic cognate אִמְרֵי (אִמְרִין, Ezra 6:9, 17; 7:17) refers to "lambs," not "fawns." To resolve the seemingly incongruous association between a doe (or hind) and "lambs," some scholars opt to smooth out the translation by substituting אִמְרֵי with "fawns" (cf. Akk. immeru) or by revocalizing the Masoretic text, replacing אִלָּה with אֵילָה to read it as "a mountain ewe."²⁷ Based on this harmonized reading, some suggest that the tribe of Naphtali may have been a willing subject, offering the "tribute of sheep" to the ruling Canaanite class.²⁸ If אִמְרֵי is taken literally, Jacob's statement about Naphtali may even evoke the tribe's role in swiftly heralding the news of Israel's victory under Deborah's leadership.²⁹ These interpretive possibilities are not entirely inconceivable, but they do not persuade because such inferences lack firm support from other biblical accounts of Naphtali.

When considered alongside its literary counterpart, Zebulun, in Genesis 49, the reading, "Naphtali is a hind/doe let loose, He gives beautiful/goodly words"—without additional textual emendation—presents a more convincing case than other alternative interpretations. The pairing of Zebulun and Naphtali in Genesis 49 is not an anomaly, though Zebulun unexpectedly precedes Issachar in birth order in this case. For example, in Judges 1, both Zebulun and Naphtali are mentioned in nearly identical formulaic expressions, indicating that they failed to drive out the Canaanites from their allotted regions and instead subjected them to forced labor (vv. 30, 33). This parallel literary arrangement

27) De Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 176; S. Gevirtz, "Naphtali in the 'Blessing of Jacob'," *JBL* 103 (1984), 513-21.

28) Sarna, *Genesis*, 342.

29) Sarna, *Genesis*, 342.

is remarkable because the formulaic expression explicitly referencing Canaanite subjugation does not precisely apply to Manasseh, Ephraim, or Asher. Their co-existence with the enslaved Canaanites would later lead to calamitous outcomes in Israel's history. Yet, in the immediate context of Deborah's Song, Zebulun and Naphtali are praised for their audacious military participation in Israel's warfare against the Canaanite coalition.

In fact, the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali were the only Israelite tribes explicitly mentioned in Barak's military summons (Judg 4:6, 10) when Deborah commanded him to confront the Canaanite coalition. Barak, a member of the tribe of Naphtali (4:6), responded to Deborah's call to war with hesitation (4:8) and was chastised by her. She prophesied that the LORD would deliver Israel from its enemies through a woman (4:9). The prominence of female characters, Deborah, the judge and prophetess, and Yael, the heroine, casts Barak in a feminized role. He submits to Deborah's authority and relies on her guidance, standing in contrast to the courageous actions of the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali.³⁰⁾ Against this backdrop, Jacob's saying about Naphtali evokes the image of a swift-footed doe uttering soft bleats to assure other deer that the ground is safe from predators.³¹⁾ The metaphor of a female animal, which appears uniquely in Jacob's words for the twelve tribes, overlaps to some extent with the account of Barak, from the tribe of Naphtali, in his reversed gender role. The characterization of the tribe of Naphtali as a female doe does not undermine its remarkable fortitude, an attribute it shares with the tribe

30) Elizabeth H. P. Backfish, "Blessed Destroyer: The Characterization of Jael as a Warrior in Command and an Instrument of YHWH," in *Characters and Characterization in the Book of Judges* (ed. Keith Bodner and Benjamin J.M. Johnson; New York: T&T Clark, 2024), 59.

31) Travis Smola, "What Is a Doe Bleat?" n.p. [cited 13 Feb 2024]. Online: <https://www.wideopenspaces.com/doe-bleats-what-female-deer-are-saying-to-others-in-the-woods/>.

of Zebulun, as both played a decisive role in establishing Israel's control in the Galilee and the Jezreel Valley at least by the time of the Davidic dynasty.³²⁾ Moreover, the fact that Jacob's sayings for Naphtali and Zebulun serve as literary counterparts within the structure of Genesis 49 (vv. 1-28) indicates that his statement about Naphtali holds broader implications beyond Barak's historical role.

To illustrate the point, the mention of the tribe of Zebulun in Deborah's songs deserves closer attention. What initially appears to be a blissful affirmation of Jacob's saying for Zebulun reveals intriguing lexical connections to Deborah's rebuke of other tribes for their reluctance to join the battle in Judges 5:17. For example, the words used to condemn Dan and Asher, "stay" (וַיִּשְׁכְּנוּ), "ships" (אֶפְסוֹת), and "the coast of the sea" (לְחֹף הַיָּם), all appear in Genesis 49:13. In Judges 5, Dan and Asher are rebuked for their vested self-interests in their maritime pursuit, exhibiting cowardly hesitation in fighting against their Canaanite adversaries, who were also potential clients for their livelihood. Some scholars, based on linguistic associations, suggest that Jacob's saying about Zebulun contains a covert criticism of the tribe's nautical aspirations.³³⁾ The problem with this interpretation is that immediately after the verse condemning Dan and Asher's noncooperation, Deborah commends the undaunting military involvement of Zebulun and Naphtali (Judg 5:18; cf. 4:6, 10; 6:35), both of which were deeply engaged in the Mediterranean commercial network dominated by the Phoenician city-states. This raises the question of why Jacob's words for Zebulun would implicate only a censure rather than also recognizing their valorous military feats for Israel. To be sure, the Zebulunites are later described not only as prosperous mariners and sea traders (Deut 33:19) but also as zealous support-

32) Miller and Hayes, *A History of Ancient Israel and Judah*, 98.

33) See, for example, in Y. Aharoni, *The Land of the Bible: A Historical Geography* (ed. and trans. A. F. Rainey; rev. and enl. ed.; Philadelphia, PA: Westminster Press, 1979), 18.

ers of David at Hebron, contributing a sizeable army (1 Chron 12:33, 38).³⁴⁾ With its logistical and commercial advantage, Zebulun played a critical role in securing sizeable parts of Lower Galilee under Israel's check.³⁵⁾ Yet, it was also one of the tribes that experienced early devastation and deportation during the Neo-Assyrian conquest of Israel's north-central regions in the latter part of the eighth century B.C. (cf. 2 Kgs 15:29).³⁶⁾

2.4. Judah (Gen 49:8-12) and Joseph (Gen 49:22-26)

Jacob's sayings for Judah (vv. 8-12) and for Joseph (vv. 22-26) are the longest among those addressed to his sons. In

34) Jacob's words, which at first appear to be a neutral description of Zebulun's geographical extent, seem to encompass an "all-time" framework, dynamically connecting past (or imminent future) and distant future within the biblical narrative. In other words, a synchronic reading of Genesis 49:13, Judges 1:30, and 5:18 reveals a complex picture of Zebulun's destiny in Israel's history.

35) Wright, "Zebulun," 912; Zvi Gal, *Lower Galilee During the Iron Age*, trans. M. R. Josephy (Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 1992), 106.

36) The areas originally allotted to the tribes of Zebulun and Naphtali became part of the Neo-Assyrian province of Galilee. Thus, the tribes' fate is overshadowed by their failure to destroy the pagan presence during Joshua's conquest of the Promised Land. Before the influx of exiled Jews after the Hasmonean conquest, the Galilean region was sparsely occupied by a mix of ethnic groups, earning the pejorative designation "Galilee of the Gentiles" in Isaiah (9:1-6). The "deep darkness" (Isa 9:2) that characterized "the land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali" would ultimately be dispelled by the advent of the Messiah, the Son of God, described as "Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace" (9:6). Uzi Leibner, *Settlement and History in Hellenistic, Roman, and Byzantine Galilee: An Archaeological Survey of the Eastern Galilee* (TSAJ 127; Tübingen: Mohr Siebeck, 2009), 321-324, 362-371, 396-400, 414-416; M. A. Chancy, *The Myth of a Gentile Galilee: The Population of Galilee and New Testament Studies* (SNTSMS; Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 33-34.

this chapter, Judah—not Joseph—is uniquely entitled “my son” (v. 9, בְּנִי), a term Jacob had previously reserved only for Rachel's sons, namely, Joseph (Gen 37:33, 35; 45:28; 28:19) and Benjamin (Gen 42:38). The significance of this address is reinforced by both explicit and implicit expressions that ascribe to Judah supreme ascendancy among Jacob's sons, even surpassing Joseph, with messianic implications.

First, it is remarkable that Jacob's words burst forth with a wordplay on Judah's name, in which Judah becomes the object of praise and reverence by his brothers. This acclamation stands in contrast to the fate of his older brothers, including Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, who were castigated (or cursed) for their moral failures (Gen 49:3-7). The expression “they will praise you” (יִירְדּוּךָ) is noteworthy because, elsewhere in the biblical text, the verb “praise” generally takes God as its object, with only a few exceptions (Job 40:14; Pss 45:18 MT; 49:19 MT).³⁷

Even more outstanding is the declaration that Jacob's sons “shall bow down” (Gen 49:8, יִשְׁתַּחֲוּוּ לְךָ בְּנֵי אָבִיךָ) before Judah. This stands in stark contrast to Joseph's dream, in which all of Jacob's sons, including Judah, were to bow down before Joseph (Gen 37:7, 9, 10; cf. Gen 42:6; 43:26, 28). The subversion of prostration imagery underscores Judah's ascendancy not only over his other older brothers, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, but also over Joseph. The reference to Judah's hand on the neck of his enemies (יָדְךָ בְּעֶרְףְּ אֹיְבֶיךָ) bring to mind the image of a powerful lion subduing its prey by severing the spinal cord at the back of the neck, effectively immobilizing it.³⁸ Earlier, Jacob had believed Joseph had been torn to pieces by a wild beast (Gen 37:33, 44:28), but in his last words, the same root טָרַף is used to describe Judah as the one who tears his prey (Gen 49:9)—a syntagmatic

37) Wenham, *Genesis*, 476.

38) George B. Schaller, *The Serengeti Lion: A Study of Predator-Prey Relations* (Chicago: The University of Chicago, 1972), 256.

juxtaposition of the two figures that underscores Judah's preeminence. The description of enemies turning their backs in flight is explicitly rendered in David's victory song (2 Sam 22:41, וַיִּאַיְבֵי חֲתָהּ לִי עֶרְךָ; cf. Ps 18:40), as David recounts how God empowered him to utterly defeat his enemies. This triumph fulfills God's promise of Canaanite conquest given to Israel in the wilderness of Sinai (Exod 23:27, וְנָתַתִּי אֶת-כָּל-אֹיְבֶיךָ אֵלֶיךָ עֶרְךָ). Hence, the approval and obeisance of Judah's brothers in Jacob's words are set against the backdrop of the reign of Judah's descendant as a sovereign monarch after having overpowered his enemies in the Promised Land.³⁹⁾

Following this, Judah is fittingly depicted as a lion's cub (גִּיּוֹר אַרְיָה), a lion (בְּאַרְיָה), and a lioness (וּבְלֵבִיָּא) all within a single verse (Gen 49:9), attributing to him the noble traits of prowess, majesty and invincibility. The young lion's "going up" (מִשְׁרָף בְּנֵי עֲלִית) (Gen 49:9) after devouring its prey stands in contrast to Jacob's rebuke of Reuben, who "went up" (אָבִיךָ בִּי) (עֲלִית מִשְׁכְּבִי, Gen 49:4) to his father's bed and defiled it.⁴⁰⁾ The phrase "going up" carries military connotations regardless of geographic location and is echoed at both the beginning and end of Judges, where the tribe of Judah takes military initiative in Israelite warfare: "Who will go up...? ... Judah will go up first; behold, I have given the land into his hand" (Judg 1:1; cf. 20:18).⁴¹⁾ Jacob's disapproval of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi is underlined by the term "strong, fierce" (עָז), signifying their disqualification from the primogenital status due to their mis-

39) Cf. "Lion of Judah" in Rev 5:5.

40) Cf. Judges 1:1; 20:18; The imagery of Judah "going up" evokes the military initiative the tribe displayed at the beginning of the Conquest of Canaan. Moreover, the repeated question-and-answer sequence found in Judges 1:1 and Judges 20:18 (Judges 17-21) functions as a rhetorical "signpost" that frames the opening and the closing of the book of Judges. Nelson, *Judges*, 18.

41) Nelson, *Judges*, 18.

directed anger or lust (Gen 49:3, 7).

The threefold description of an unassailable beast in verse 9 corresponds to the three elements that signify the supreme power and authority associated with the tribal eponym in verse 10: the scepter (שֶׁבֶט), the ruler's staff (וּמַחֲקֶק), and the obedience of the peoples (וְלֹא יִקְרָה עַמִּים). The most celebrated *crux interpretum* is עַד כִּי־בֹא (שִׁילָה) [שִׁילֹן], which qualifies the phrase “the ruler's staff in between his feet” (וּמַחֲקֶק מִבֵּין רַגְלָיו).⁴² Among the numerous interpretations, three have emerged as viable readings of the Hebrew text (Gen 49:10c), as reflected in major Bible translations:

- #1. until he to whom it belongs shall come (NIV); until he comes to whom it belongs (RSV) = שִׁלֹן
- #2. until tribute comes to him (ESV); until tribute comes to him (NRSV) = שִׁי לָהּ
- #3. until Shiloh come (KJV); Until Shiloh comes (NKJV); Until Shiloh comes (NASB) = שִׁילָה

All three types of interpretations carry messianic overtones, as the obscure phrase modifies Judah's royal staff between his feet, underscoring the security of his long-lasting rule, implied by his enthroned posture. The imagery of a seated ruler or deity holding a symbol of authority while receiving the homage of a vassal subject is well attested in ancient Near Eastern iconography.⁴³

42) See the possible reading of “feet” as a euphemism in K. A. Matthews, *NIV The New American Commentary: Genesis 11:27-50:26: An Exegetical and Theological Exposition of Holy Scripture* (Nashville, TN: Broadman & Holman, 2005), 893.

43) Especially note the relief carving of Darius the Great of Persia, enthroned and holding a long scepter in his left hand. Pierre Briant, *From Cyrus to Alexander: A History of the Persian Empire* (trans. L. A. Fayard; Winona Lake, IN: Eisenbrauns, 2002), 217-18; Beatrice Teissler, *Ancient Near Eastern Cylinder Seals from the Marcopoli Collection* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 1984).

The first interpretation reflects the reading of שָׁלוֹ (cf. *qere* שָׁלוֹ), which involves altering both the vowel and the consonant in the first syllable and the mater of the pronominal suffix. Literally, it means “(until he) to whom it (i.e., the scepter) belongs (comes).”⁴⁴⁾ This reading emphasizes the messianic ruler from the tribe of Judah and is supported by some ancient witnesses.⁴⁵⁾ A slightly more elaborate version appears in the Septuagint (LXX), “until there come the things stored up for him” (ἕως ἃν ἔλθῃ τὰ ἀποκεῖμενα αὐτῷ). This interpretation poses a challenge, as it requires emending the consonant and vowel from the MT. What’s more, the proposed formulation is a rare linguistic feature in Genesis (the only comparable instance being Gen 6:3), whereas the commonly used pattern is אָשַׁר לוֹ (Gen 12:20; 13:1; 24:36, etc.).

The second rendering preserves the consonants but modifies the vowel in the first syllable, splitting the word into two units to form שָׁי לָהּ meaning “(until) tribute (comes) to him.”⁴⁶⁾ This reading highlights the eschatological dimension of Judah’s future leadership, as “tribute” forms a poetic parallel with “peoples” (עַמִּים), which likely refers to non-Israelites.⁴⁷⁾ Though favored by many exegetes, including Rashi, this reading is not without its difficulties. Apart from the proposed emendation, all comparable biblical instances employ an active or passive causative verb (יָבִיל) to indicate that tribute is “brought” or “carried” to someone (ל) in a formal procession. The expression “tribute

44) See also Hamilton, *Genesis*, 661.

45) For example, Onkelos supports this reading in a midrashic expansion of Gen 49:10, namely, until “the Messiah, whose is the kingdom, comes” (עַד דִּיִּתִּי עַד מְלִכּוּתָא הִיא דְּרִילִיָּהּ הִיא מְלִכּוּתָא) or, in Syriac, “he, to whom it belongs, comes” (עַד־מָא דְנִאֲתָא מִן דְּרִילָהּ הִי). Abraham Tal, ed. *Biblia Hebraica Quinta*, Fascicle 1: Genesis, *BHQ* 1 (Stuttgart: Deutsche Bibelgesellschaft, 2015), 198.

46) See detailed discussion in de Hoop, *Genesis* 49, 129.

47) Wenham, *Genesis*, 478.

(שׁי) coming (יָבֵא, Gen 49:10) to someone (+לֵ)” is thus an anomaly, given the few but consistent occurrences of the expression in biblical text. Recognizing this lexical constraint, some commentators recommend reading the hophal imperfect form of the verb “come” (יָבֵא = יָבֵא) with a revocalization (cf. Lev 6:23, 11:32; 2 Kgs 12:5, 12:17; Jer 10:9, 27:22),⁴⁸ but the problem remains that the passive causative form of the verb with lamed is unattested (cf. Lev 6:23, אָל; 2 Kgs 12:5, 7, omitted). Furthermore, the proposed independent לֵה as a pronominal suffix (3ms) attached to the preposition *lamed* is never found in biblical texts, even though *holem hey* (3ms) frequently appears as a suffix to nouns (e.g., Gen 49:11).⁴⁹

Lastly, commentators who support the reading of “Shiloh” (שִׁילֹה) claim that Genesis 49:10 envisions the regathering of Israel’s ten tribes, which separated from the united monarchy under Solomon, as prophesied by Ahijah the Shilonite (1 Kgs 11:31-39). This view holds that Judah’s supremacy will reach its fulfillment when all Israelites reunite under a Davidic ruler from Judah (1 Kgs 11:38, “I will give Israel to you.”). However, the precise meaning of Shiloh’s “coming” (יָבֵא) remains debated. If Shiloh refers to a city in the Ephraimite region, it is unclear how restoring the northern tribe’s pre-monarchic cultic center would enhance Judah’s rule, especially since the messianic reign is to be centered in Jerusalem. And identifying שִׁילֹה with Judah’s third son, Shelah (Gen 38:11, שֵׁלָה), contradicts the narrative climax of Genesis 38 and the Davidic lineage, which traces through Tamar’s son Perez (Ruth 4:12, 18-22). Another issue is the unusual orthography of Shiloh, as no other biblical occurrences of the name contain a plene *yod* (cf. שָׁלוֹ, שָׁלוּ, שָׁלוּ). More significantly, a grammatical problem arises because שִׁילֹה is a feminine noun, whereas the verb יָבֵא is in the masculine singular form.

48) Hamilton, *Genesis*, 661.

49) Frolov, “Judah Comes to Shiloh,” 418 fn5.

In response to the interpretive challenges surrounding the crux, an alternative reading—“until he (i.e., the Davidic ruler) comes to Shiloh” (עַד כִּי־בֹא שִׁילֹה)—has been convincingly suggested.⁵⁰⁾ The primary advantage of this reading is that it preserves the consonants and vocalization of the MT without requiring emendation, while also aligning with Jacob’s pronouncements, not only for Judah but for his other sons in Genesis 49. A pertinent biblical counterpart to Jacob’s statement in verse 10 is 1 Kings 11:31-39, but an even more relevant parallel is found Joshua 18, particularly verse 1, where “Shiloh” is first mentioned in the Hebrew Bible/Old Testament. This passage describes Joshua’s conquest of the Canaanites in the Promised Land, reporting that “the land lay subdued before them” (v. 1). The language of complete territorial subjugation here closely corresponds with the imagery of a valiant lion (Gen 49:9) and parallels the Davidic conquest of Israel’s enemies (2 Sam 22:41), fulfilling the Mosaic promise of Israel’s domination over the Canaanites and other pagan nations (Exod 23:27-31). The phrase “obedience of the peoples” (Gen 49:10) naturally follows, as the messianic sovereignty is prophesied to extend “from the Red Sea to the Sea of the Philistines, and from the wilderness to the Euphrates” (Exod 23:31). In this context, the Davidic ruler from the tribe of Judah assumes the ultimate role of leading Israel into the Promised Land and subjugating its inhabitants, mirroring Joshua—the prototype of the Davidic king—who accomplished Israel’s conquest of Canaan, culminating at Shiloh (Josh 18).⁵¹⁾ Jacob’s blessing upon Judah, employing metaphorical imagery of wine and milk (Gen 49:11-12), underscores the agricultural prosperity that Israel will enjoy during the

50) Frolov, “Judah Comes to Shiloh,” 417-22.

51) See related discussions in Zev Farber, *Images of Joshua in the Bible and Their Reception* (BZAW 457; Berlin: De Gruyter, 2016), esp. 109-122; Alison L. Joseph, “Moses like David: Prototypes in the Deuteronomistic History,” *HUCA* 90 (2019), 141-62; R. D. Nelson, “Josiah in the Book of Joshua,” *JBL* 100/4 (1981), 532.

messianic era. The messianic significance of Jacob's testament to Judah is further intensified through gematria (numerical values assigned to the Hebrew letters), as noted by ancient sages. The expression יבֵּא שִׁלָּה ($[(10+2+1)]+[300+10+30+5] = 358$) corresponds precisely to the numerical value of the Messiah ($\text{מָשִׁיחַ} = 40+300+10+8 = 358$). If the yod in שִׁלָּה is an anomalous orthographic feature in Genesis 49:10, this numerical correlation could explain the motivation for its inclusion.⁵²⁾ Hence, Judah stands in contrast to Jacob's other sons mentioned in his pronouncements, particularly the Galilee-Jezreel tribes—Zebulun, Issachar, Asher, and Naphtali—as his sayings implicate the failures of these tribes in fulfilling the divine mandate of utterly destroying the Canaanites. For example, the tribes of Zebulun, Asher, and Naphtali were unable to drive out the Canaanites (Judg 1:30-33). Jacob specifically described Issachar as having been enslaved by the Canaanite overlords (Gen 49:14-15), an essential detail given that Issachar's subjugation of the Canaanites is not specifically mentioned in Judges (i.e., Judg 1:27-36), apart from its commendable military support of Barak (Judg 5:15).

Jacob's testament for Joseph begins with an anaphora (the repetition of a sequence of words at the beginning of successive phrases or clauses), a rhetorical device also observed in the saying for Reuben.⁵³⁾ This figure of speech at the outset of Jacob's blessing underlines Joseph's preeminence among his brothers, albeit without the messianic references found in the Judah verses. Commentators note that the term פָּרַח (Gen 49:22) apparently involves an etymological wordplay on the name of Joseph's younger son, Ephraim (אֶפְרַיִם , Gen 41:52), from which derives the gentile designation Ephraimite (אֶפְרַתִּי , Judg 12:5).⁵⁴⁾

52) Sarna, *Genesis*, 337 fn21

53) Sarna, *Genesis*, 343; J. Goldingay, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Academic, 2020), 693.

54) J. Skinner, *Genesis*, 530; Sarna, *Genesis*, 343.

Ephraim (אֶפְרַיִם), which may be taken literally as “double fruitfulness,” is linked to the Hebrew verb “to be fruitful, bear fruit,” occurring in the *lamed hey* form (פָּרָה, cf. Deut 29:17) or *lamed aleph* form (פָּרָא, cf. Hos 13:15), with the initial *aleph* likely functioning as a prothesis or a nominal prefix.⁵⁵⁾ If this is correct, פָּרָה may be an alternative archaic form of the feminine participle of פָּרָה, contracted from פָּרִיָּה (cf. פָּרִיָּה).⁵⁶⁾ Most versional translations adopt the interpretation בֶּן פָּרָה (lit: “son of a fruitful”)⁵⁷⁾ refers to a fruitful “bough” or “vine” (e.g., ESV, NRSV, NASB, NIV). Nevertheless, several significant issues remain with this reading of Genesis 49:22.⁵⁸⁾ First, the term בֶּן is never used to refer to plants but always to animals in biblical texts. Second, the presence of animal metaphors in the description of other tribes (e.g., Judah as a lion’s cub, lion, lioness in v. 9; Issachar as a strong donkey in v. 14; Dan as a serpent in v. 17; Benjamin as a wolf in v. 27) diminishes the likelihood of plant imagery being employed for Joseph.

The phrase בֶּן פָּרָה then could refer to “a foal (בֶּן) of a she-ass (from פָּרָה)” or even “a calf (בֶּן) of a cow (from פָּרָה),” though both interpretations require some degree of conjectural emendation, as פָּרָה is a unique term in the biblical corpus.⁵⁹⁾ Akkadian (*b/purtu*, cow) and Ugaritic (*prt*, cow) cognates lend support to rendering פָּרָה in Hebrew, irrespective of its vocalization, as the archaic feminine form of פָּרָה (“cow, heifer”). The term פָּרָה could be likewise evaluated as an archaic feminine form of the masculine counterpart פָּרָא (“wild ass”), which also occurs with

55) Richard A. Spencer, “Ephraim,” in *Eerdmans Dictionary of the Bible* (ed. David Noel Freeman et al.; Grand Rapids, MI: Eerdmans, 2000), 416-17.

56) Sarna, *Genesis*, 343 (cf. GKC 80g). See also Skinner, *Genesis*, 530; S. Gevirtz, “Of Patriarchs and Puns: Joseph at the Fountain, Jacob at the Ford,” *HUCA* 46 (1975), 35.

57) So Skinner, *Genesis*, 530.

58) See de Hoop’s argument in *Genesis* 49, 184-87.

59) De Hoop, *Genesis* 49, 538.

a final *beh* in פָּרָה (Jer 2:24; cf. עֵזֶר/עֵזֶר (Gen 2:18; 1 Chron 25:4); עֵזֶרָה (Ps 46:2); עֵזֶרָה (Ps 60:13)).⁶⁰ Gevirtz further argued that the Akkadian term *b/pūru*, which denotes young quadrupeds (e.g., calf, colt, kid, foal), endorses this interpretation.⁶¹ The parallel phrase בְּנוֹת זָעֵדָה, which follows בֵּן פָּרָה, is illuminated by its “undisputed” Arabic counterpart *banāt ṣa’dat*, meaning “wild colts.”⁶² Thus, there is no need to assume a shift from a calf to a foal within the verse.⁶³

However, it is crucial to recognize the possibility of wordplay involving “fruitfulness” in association with Ephraim at the start of the Joseph verses. This appears to be a case of “ambiguous images,” stemming from a shared root (פָּרָה/פָּרָא), where the overlap between the two meanings generates a rhetorical effect, whether intentional or not.⁶⁴ This insight provides a firmer foundation for constructing a more coherent interpretation of Jacob’s message regarding Joseph—alongside Judah—especially given the presence of parallel elements

60) See Gervitz for vowel change explanations. Gevirtz, “Of Patriarchs,” 38-39.

61) Gevirtz, “Of Patriarchs,” 39-40.

62) Arnold B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur hebräischen Bibel. Erster Band: Genesis und Exodus* (Leipzig: J.C. Hinrichs’sche Buchhandlung, 1908), 250; Speiser, *Genesis*, 368; Gevirtz, “Of Patriarchs,” 38.

63) Speiser, *Genesis*, 368; Gevirtz, “Of Patriarchs,” 37-38.

64) The double connotation of the disputed root is also evident in Hosea, where the prophetic indictment against Israel, or Ephraim, employs the metaphors of a vitiated fruit tree and a recalcitrant donkey. “For they have gone up to Assyria, a wild donkey (פָּרָא) wandering alone; Ephraim (אֶפְרַיִם) has sold herself to lovers” (Hos 8:9); “Stricken is Ephraim (אֶפְרַיִם); their root is dried up; they will yield no fruit (בְּלִי-בִלְיָ) [בְּלִי-יִשְׁשׁוֹן]. Even though they give birth, I will kill their precious offspring of their womb” (Hos 9:16); “Though he (Ephraim) may flourish (יִפְרֹא) among his brothers, the east wind, the wind from the LORD, will come, rising from the wilderness, and his fountain will dry up ...” (Hos 13:15). Stuart A. Irvine, “Relating Prophets and History: An Example from Hosea 13,” in *Israel’s Prophets and Israel’s Past: Essays on the Relationship of Prophetic Texts and Israelite History in Honor of John H. Hayes*, eds. Brad E. Kelle and Megan Bishop Moore (New York: T&T Clark, 2006), 158-66.

in a specific verse that exhibit lexical linkages to earlier parts of Genesis. In particular, many scholars have argued that the correspondences between Joseph and Ishmael are not fortuitous. Through the correspondences—such as “the foal of a wild donkey” (Gen 49:22, *בֶּן פָּרָת*) // “a wild donkey of a man” (Gen 16:12, *פָּרָא אָדָם*); “at a spring” (49:22, *עַל־יַעַן*) // “by a spring of water” (16:7, *הַמַּיִם*); and “the wild colts on the ridge” (49:22, *עַל־יַעַן*) // “on the way to Shur” (16:7, *בְּדֶרֶךְ שׁוּר*)—commentators have duly noted a subtle allusion to Ishmael in Jacob’s blessing for Joseph.⁶⁵⁾ Moreover, Jacob describes Joseph as a skillful archer (Gen 49:24, *וַחֲשָׁב בְּאִתּוֹן קֶשֶׁתוֹ*), with the arms of his hands strengthened against his enemies by Jacob’s Mighty One (Gen 49:24, *אֲבִיר יַעֲקֹב וַיַּפִּזּוּ*)—whose divine hands provide Joseph with empowerment from the Shepherd and the Rock of Israel (Gen 49:24, *יִשְׂרָאֵל*, *מִנְשֵׁם רֹעֵה אֲבָן*).⁶⁶⁾ Joseph is distinguished as a princely figure among his brothers, receiving the bounties of divine blessings (Gen 49:26, *וְאֶחָיו תִּהְיוּ לְרֹאשׁ יוֹסֵף וְלִקְדָּקֶד גִּזִּיר*). Similarly, Ishmael is profusely blessed to become the father of twelve princes and a great nation (Gen 17:20, *וְנָשִׂאֵם יוֹלִיד וְנִתְּחִיו לְגוֹי גָּדוֹל שְׁנַיִם־עָשָׂר*). Just as the LORD was with Joseph (Gen 39:2, *וַיְהִי יְהוָה אִתִּי־יוֹסֵף*), so too was God with Ishmael (Gen 21:20, *וַיְהִי אֱלֹהִים אִתִּיהֶנָּעַר*).⁶⁷⁾

65) Such observation is further reinforced by additional points of congruity between the Joseph verses and earlier description of Ishmael (Gen 16, 17, 21). Jacob’s blessings for Joseph prominently feature a fivefold repetition of the root for “bless” (*בִּכְר*), paralleling how God has “very greatly” (*בְּמֵאֹד מְאֹד*) blessed (*וְהַפְרִיתִי אֹתוֹ*) Ishmael, making him fruitful (*בְּרִכְתִּי אֹתוֹ הִנֵּה*) and multiplying him in the promise to Abraham (Gen 17:20). Similarly, Ishmael is described as an expert archer (Gen 21:20, *וַיְהִי רִבֵּה קֶשֶׁת*), with his hand against everyone (Gen 16:12, *בְּכָל יוֹד כָּל בּוֹ*). Ron Pirson, *The Lord of the Dreams: Semantic and Literary Analysis of Genesis 37–50* (JSOTSup 355; New York: Sheffield, 2002), 122–135. However, Pirson’s literary analysis entirely overlooks the rhetorical significance of the Galilee-Jezreel brothers in Jacob’s final words (123).

66) The repetition of the *mem* preposition emphasizes the divine attributes that will deliver Joseph.

2.5. Reuben, Simeon and Levi (Gen 49:3-7) and Benjamin (Gen 49:27)

Reuben, the eldest son of Jacob, and Benjamin, the youngest of the twelve, are the only sons of Jacob whose name bears the word “son” (בֶּן). Reuben (Gen 29:32, רְאוּבֵן) literally means “Behold, a son!”, recalling Leah’s heartfelt confession at his birth that the LORD has looked upon her “affliction” (29:32, כִּי־רָאָה בְּעֵינַי יְהוָה בְּעֵינַי), a reference to her sorrow over Jacob’s love for Rachel (29:32). Benjamin, meaning “Son of the right hand” (בְּנֵימִין), was named by Jacob in response to Rachel’s dying utterance, as she initially called him Ben-noi, meaning “Son of my sorrow (or trouble)” (Gen 35:18, בֶּן־אֹנִי, derived from אָנֹן cf. LXX, Tg, Vg), during her final moments in childbirth. Ironically, Jacob’s addresses of Reuben as “the beginning of my vigor” (Gen 49:3, אֹנִי derived from אָוֶן) appears in the same Hebrew form אֹנִי, possibly indicating a caustic wordplay, as Reuben, whose incestuous affair with Jacob’s concubine had troubled the patriarch, forms a structural parallel with Benjamin.⁶⁷⁾

In the end, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi share the fate of losing their primogenital honors successively to Judah because of their

67) Some hold that the Ishmaelite allusion in Jacob’s testament points to Joseph’s sale to Ishmaelite traders (mentioned three times in Gen 37) or to the politico-historical connection between the Josephites/Ephraimites to the Negev area, which was inhabited by the Ishmaelites (Gen 25:18) and the Amalekites (Judg 5:14) before the Davidic intrusion. Nonetheless, these explanations do not fully account for the rhetorical underpinning of Jacob’s final sayings, which highlight Judah’s preeminence over Joseph by alluding to Ishmael (Gen 16-21) in the Joseph verses and, by extension, to Isaac (Gen 22) in the Judah verses. Note also Pirson, *The Lord of the Dreams*, 130-133. Although Pirson correctly identifies the inner-biblical allusions between Joseph and Ishmael, his analysis falls short of recognizing the text’s pro-Judahite rhetoric, which connects Judah with Isaac on one hand, and Joseph with Ishmael on the other.

68) Pirson acknowledges two possible readings, in contrast to Speiser, who supports only the reading of “vigor.” Pirson, *The Lord of the Dreams*, 27 (fn28).

indelible transgressions, which brought infamy to Jacob's household. As noted earlier, Jacob's pronouncement regarding Reuben, Simeon, and Levi is linked with the term "strength" (Gen 49:7, **יִצְרָאֵל**), highlighting the fierceness of their uncontrolled behavior. Simeon and Levi bear the worst brunt of their patriarch's condemnation, for the brothers deployed a ruthless stratagem to avenge the injustice done to their sister Dinah, whom they declared had been violated "like a harlot" (Gen 34:31). They are literally "cursed" to be dispersed throughout the land for their uncontained violence against the compliant Shechemites, who were struck by their swords unawares in an act of brutal vengeance. Jacob's sayings are partially realized in later biblical accounts, which record the significant reduction of the Simeonite population (1 Chron 4:27) and the marked absence of the Simeonites when other northern tribes withdrew from the Judean region (1 Kings 12). The tribe of Levi also experience Jacob's anathema, as the Levites receive no tribal inheritance in the Promised Land but are instead assigned to Levitical cities scattered throughout Israel to perform their priestly duties.

Benjamin is depicted as a "rapacious wolf," devouring the prey in the morning but dividing the plunder in the evening (Gen 49:27P). The verb "devouring" (**יִטְרֹף**) in the Benjamin verse (Gen 49:27a) shares the Hebrew root **טָרַף** with "(from) the prey" (**מִטְרֹף**) in the Judah verse, where Judah's valiancy is accented (49:9). This connection apparently recalls the valor of the Benjaminite warriors, as mentioned in Judges, "Among all these were 700 chosen men who were left-handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair and not miss" (Judg 20:16). This historical reference calls to mind Ehud, the left-handed Benjaminite hero who delivered Israel by hiding a dagger on his right thigh and drawing it with his left hand to slaughter the Moabite king (Judg 3:12-30). In the third cola, however, the use of the Hebrew root for "divide" (**חָלַק**) in "at evening

diving the spoil" (Gen 49:27, **וְלַעֲרֹב יַחֲלֹק שָׁלָל**) is noteworthy, as it likewise occurs in Jacob's curse upon Simeon and Levi (49:7, **אֶחְלָקֶם בְּיַעֲקֹב**). In this literary connection, Jacob's saying for Benjamin bifurcates with the reference to time: Benjamin's heroic gallantry and adroitness are portrayed through the image of a ravenous wolf in the morning, while the evening scene, where the wolf is depleted of its spoils, figuratively hints at a decline, presaging the eventual tribal adversity of Benjamin. The tribe of Benjamin particularly suffered misfortunes similar with the tribe of Simeon as it was nearly annihilated in a civil war against the pan-Israelite forces (Judg 20:46-47). The tribe's defense of the rogue Benjaminites at Gibeah, who had committed an atrocious act of violence against a Levite's runaway concubine from Bethlehem in Judah, elicited wrath and retribution from the other Israelite tribes (Judg 19-21).

3. Synthesis and Evaluation: Jacob's Utterance in Genesis 49:18

The foregoing survey attempted to demonstrate that examining Jacob's sayings reveals literary-structural devices that forge coherent patterns along the lexical and thematic linkages between the brothers: Dan and Gad; Issachar and Asher; Zebulun and Naphtali; Judah and Joseph; and Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Benjamin. This observation leads to the conclusion that when the contents of Jacob's blessings are carefully considered, the chiasmic pattern "LEAH, Bilhah-Zilpah, Zilpah-Bilah, RACHEL" is shifted to the regrouping of the two last sons of Leah, Zebulun and Issachar, with Jacob's concubine-born sons, who are Dan, Gad, Asher, and Naphtali. With this chiasmic re-

alignment emerges the focal point, which can be placed in Jacob's famed first-person utterance, "For your salvation I wait, O LORD!" (Gen 49:18). The literary arrangement sheds new insights on the implications of Jacob's first-person pronouncement, especially because the literary unit of Jacob's testament is followed by Jacob's burial request, which alludes to the exodus event (Gen 47:29-31). The particular usage of the first-person pronoun ("I") correlates Jacob's hopeful confession with Jacob's sayings for Reuben, Simeon and Levi, and Judah. For instance, Jacob's first-person possessive adjectives attributed to Reuben, as in "You are *my* firstborn, *my* might, and the firstfruits of *my* strength," are contrasted with the emphatic "*my* couch" (49:4). In the verses pertaining to Simeon and Levi, Jacob's castigation is intensified through his first-person speech, as in "Let not *my* soul come into their council; Let not *my* glory be united to their assembly" (49:6), followed by his double usage of first person verbs, as in "*I* will divide them in Jacob, and *I* will scatter them in Israel" (49:7). The first-person address of Jacob (italics mine for emphasis) reaches new heights when he addresses Judah as "*my* son" (49:9, בְּנִי)—a remarkable point of recognition that is not conferred to any other brother, including Joseph, in Jacob's testament (Gen 49).⁶⁹ Jacob's affirmation of Judah's preponderance over his other brothers, especially over Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, is thus manifested in the strategic employment of first-person pronouns ("I") and possessives ("my").

Then, the implication of Jacob's first-person declaration—"For your salvation I wait, O LORD!"—needs to be evaluated in light of this peculiar integration of the first-person pronouns and possessives, climaxing in the Judah verse. Jacob's saying regarding the future divine deliverance makes sense when understood in conjunction with the only future time clause in his

69) In Gen 48, Jacob calls Joseph "my son," but he adopts Joseph's sons as his own, resulting in the elimination of Joseph's name in the twelve tribes.

saying, “until he comes to Shiloh; and to him shall be the obedience of the people” (Gen 49:10). As we have seen, the salvific figure who will come to Shiloh is to be associated with the figure of Joshua, the prototype of Davidic king, who will conquer the Promised Land and erect the Tabernacle of Meeting (Josh 18:1). This line of interpretation is reinforced by the placement of Jacob’s hopeful and even agonizing remark (Gen 49:18) at the pivot of the chiasmic structure, for several reasons. First, the structural formation of Jacob’s sons in the inner frame (i.e., the Galilee-Jezreel tribes, including Zebulun, Naphtali, Issachar, and Asher) casts their inability to subdue the Canaanites in stark relief against the ideal conquest of Joshua, as alluded to in the Judah verse (Gen 49:18). Jacob’s sayings for Dan and Gad, which envelope the crux of the chiasmic structure, artistically employ a pun on the word “heel/s” (עֵקֶב) and thereby capture the vicissitudes of Jacob’s own life—marked by struggle for divine blessings, which is epitomized in his dramatic encounter with God at the Jabbok River, where the name Israel is bestowed upon him. The outer framework (Reuben, Simeon and Levi, Joseph and Benjamin), which underscore Judah’s ascendancy over all his potential competitors, whether by birth order or by paternal favoritism, inversely indicates that the Davidic messiah will accomplish the ultimate dispossession of Israel’s enemies and construct the sanctuary for all of Israel to worship (cf. Josh 18:1).

Moreover, this reading comports well with the fact that the only instance of “salvation” (יְשׁוּעָה) associated with YHWH in the Pentateuch is in the context of Exodus 14–15. In these chapters, Moses assures the Israelites to stand still and behold the “salvation of the LORD” (Exod 14:13), and they burst into a song of joy after having experienced the miracle of God’s deliverance at the Red Sea, declaring, “The LORD has become my salvation!” (Exod 15:2) The imagery of the LORD drowning the horse and its riders in the depth of the Red Sea poetically

dovetails with Jacob's declaration (Gen 49:18), which is surrounded by imagery of warriors striking the horse's heels (Gen 49:17) or raiding at the enemy's heels (Gen 49:19). The Song at the Red Sea contains the messianic imagery of the Davidic figure, such as in the routing of the Philistines, Edomites, and Moabites, and in the mountain on which God's holy abode will be constructed (Exod 12:13-15, 17). Hence, Jacob's hopeful pronouncement, inserted at the fulcrum of the literary-structural scheme of Genesis 49 (vv. 3-27), undergirds the vision of eschatological fulfillment by the Davidic messiah, which has reference points to Joshua, the Davidic archetype.⁷⁰⁾

4. Conclusion

The article assesses the literary-structural features of Jacob's last words (Gen 49:3-27) synchronically, focusing on the diction and style of the poetic to better gauge its rhetorical underpinning. This exegetical undertaking likewise involves, given the oracular nature of Jacob's speech, tracing the syntagmatic counterparts across other biblical books (e.g., Exodus, Judges, etc.) without restricting the operational parameters of Jacob's sayings in the immediate textual environment (i.e., Genesis). The result is a realigned concentric chiasm, which emerges with the regrouping of the Galilee-Jezreel tribes (Zebulun with Naphtali; Issachar with Asher) along with Dan and Gad in the central section. Located at the fulcrum of this symmetric arrangement, composed of the inner frame (the concubine brothers

70) By extension, de Hoop's conclusion that Gen 49:18 is a gloss that aligns with neither the "pro-Judah" nor the "pro-Joseph" strand is untenable. De Hoop, *Genesis 49*, 557.

along with Zebulun and Issachar) and the outer frame (other sons of Leah and those of Rachel), is Jacob's hopeful declaration concerning Israel's salvation (Gen 49:18). The structural crux, which has otherwise been considered Jacob's abstruse soliloquy regarding Dan, is rhetorically charged with the emphasis on Judah's primacy over his other brothers, including Joseph, and with a veiled reference to the Davidic messiah after Joshua.

<Keywords>

Jacob's blessings, Genesis 49, Judah, Joseph, Chiasm, Jacob's sons, Rhetorical analysis

<주제어>

야곱의 축복, 창세기 49장, 유다, 요셉, 교차 대구법 야곱의 아들들, 수사학적 분석

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<Abstract>

Jacob's Testament Once Again (Gen 49:3-27): Messianic Implications in the Chiastic Rearrangement

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While studies of Jacob's last words (Gen 49:1-27) in the biblical field have proliferated, numerous works have focused on these sayings' diachronic aspects, prioritizing the historical-critical issues largely driven by the quest for the *Sitz im Leben*. The aim of this paper is to address such a scholarly deficit by evaluating the rhetorical message of Jacob's testament (Gen 49:3-27), especially attuning to the literary-structural devices under the novel supposition that there is a marked literary case for another chiasm in the final form. The rhetorical analysis of the poetic unit revealed that, upon closer scrutiny, the composition deviates from a traditional chiastic arrangement by maternal lineage, with the focal point at Jacob's first-person utterance immediately following the Dan verses (Gen 49:18). The investigation of the stylistic placements of puns, keywords, and motifs in light of the relevant biblical texts (Genesis, Judges, etc.) confirmed that Jacob's sayings for Zebulun and Issachar, Leah's sons, are grouped with other Galilee-Jezreel tribes, namely, Asher and Naphtali. From such realignment of the lesser-known sons of Leah with the concubine brothers emerges an artistic literary scheme that highlights Judah's ascendancy over Jacob's other sons, including Joseph. Most importantly, the revised chiastic scheme illuminates Jacob's yearning utterance (Gen 49:18) as

the rhetorical essence that imparts visionary hope for the Davidic messiah, along with a veiled allusion to Joshua, the Davidic archetype.

<초록>

야곱의 유언(창세기 49:3-27)에 대한 재고: 대구적 재배열에서 나타나는 메시아적 함의

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이제까지 성서 연구 분야에서 야곱의 유언(창 49:1-27)에 관한 연구가 활발히 진행됐지만, 공시적이 아닌 주로 통시적 측면에 집중하여 삶의 자리(*Sitz im Leben*)를 탐구하는 역사 비평적 문제를 개별 지파 중심으로 다루는데 치중하였다. 본 논문의 목적은 이러한 학문적 결핍을 보완하기 위해 야곱의 아들들에 대한 유언의 수사적 메시지를 문예-구조적인 요소를 고려하여 재평가하는 데 있다. 특히, 본 연구는 본문의 최종 형태(창 49:3-27)에서 다른 형태의 교차 대구법에 대한 문예적 근거가 존재한다고 보고, 해당 본문의 문예-구조적 병행을 이루는 수사적 장치에 주목한다. 이 시적 단락의 최종 형태를 수사적 분석을 통해 자세히 검토해 보면, 모계를 따라 형성된 전통적인 연차적 대구법 배열(레아-빌하/실바-실바/빌하-라헬)를 벗어나, 그 구조의 핵심적인 축이 단 지파에 대한 구절 직후에 나타나는 야곱의 일인칭 발화(창세기 49:18)에 있음을 볼 수 있다. 관련 성경 본문(창세기, 사사기 등)에 비추어 언어유희, 핵심 단어, 모티브 등의 문예적 장치를 조사한 결과 레아의 아들 스불론과 잇사갈에 대한 야곱의 유언이 다른 갈릴라-이스라엘 지파, 즉 아셀과 납달리와 함께 병행적인 구조로 재배치되어 있음을 확인할 수 있다. 이렇게 비교적 잘 알려지지 않은 레아의 아들들을 서자의 아들들과 재편성함으로써(단/갓, 이사갈/아셀, 스불론/납달리)유다가 요셉을 포함한

다른 아들들보다 더 탁월한 축복을 받는 야곱의 아들로 드러난다. 이러한 대구법 구조를 통해 야곱의 간절한 선언(창 49:18)은 다윗 왕조의 메시아에 대한 미래의 희망을 제시하는 수사학적 핵심으로 떠오른다. 아울러 야곱의 독백과 같은 발화에서(창 49:18) 다윗의 원형으로 여겨지는 여호수아에 대한 암시가 내포되어 있음을 알 수 있다.