

## ON THE HORNS OF REDEMPTION

### A Devotional Meditation on V'zot Habrachah (This Is the Blessing)

Deuteronomy 33:1-34:12; Joshua 1:1-18, 19:1-9;  
1 Samuel 23:1-29; 2 Samuel 19:25-31; 1 Kings 22:10-17; Isaiah 11:6; Ezekiel 47-48;  
Luke 2:29-32; Romans 11:11-15; Philippians 3:1-11; Revelation 5:11-14, 21:9-27

Albert J. McCarn  
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Should we be curious about the reason significant portions of the Bible conclude with reference to Israel's Twelve Tribes? Not merely reference, but literary assemblies of the Tribes. These are more than genealogical and census records, such as those in Exodus, Numbers, and 1 Chronicles – although those also have prophetic significance. These specific portions concerning certain last words spoken over the tribes. There are four of them:

- Jacob's prophetic blessings over his twelve sons in Genesis 49.
- Moses' prophetic blessings over the tribes in Deuteronomy 33.
- The prophecy of the twelve tribal land allotments in Messiah's Kingdom in Ezekiel 47-48.
- John's description in Revelation 21 of the New Jerusalem, with twelve gates named for each of the tribes, and twelve foundations named for each of the apostles.



*Gaur bull night portrait, Pangsida National Park, Thailand. Photo by tontantravel, December 27, 2014, via Flickr.*

Jacob and Moses spoke their blessings over the tribes as their last public words before their deaths. Ezekiel's prophecy is the last word of the Major Prophets (Isaiah, Jeremiah, Ezekiel) who spoke of judgment and redemption during the two centuries covering the decline, destruction, and exile of Israel's two kingdoms. John's prophecy comes at the end of the Bible, linking redeemed and restored Israel to the New Heavens and New Earth established at the end of Messiah's Millennial Kingdom and extending into eternity.

Now that we are near the end of this story, or at least several thousand years closer to the end, we can look back over the expanse of history to see how Israel's journey of restoration has unfolded, and how all the nations of the earth have become wrapped up in it. Moses' last words are very helpful for this purpose.

The first question is how Moses could know about the future division of Israel, and which tribes would align with which kingdom. Considering the nature of prophecy, he probably didn't know, but it's there in the order he lists the tribes. He begins by honoring Reuben, Jacob's biological firstborn, whose unwise actions prompted his father to divide the firstborn leadership duties and blessing to Judah and Joseph, respectively. That may be why Moses' blessing includes a prayer for Reuben to live and not die out.

The next three tribes Moses mentions are Judah, Levi, and Benjamin, the three tribes that comprised Israel's southern kingdom of Judah. Those three remained loyal to the House of David when the nation split apart. Moses says a lot about the priestly role of

Levi – a role that continued in both kingdoms, although with an increasing degree of apostasy in each. As for Judah and Benjamin, Moses speaks of their future relationship:

Now this is for Judah. He said, “Hear, *ADONAI*, the voice of Judah! Bring him to his people. His hands contended for him, so You will be a help against his foes.”

For Benjamin he said, “The beloved of *ADONAI* rests securely beside Him. He shields him all day long. Between His shoulders he rests.”

Deuteronomy 33:7, 12 TLV

These are the two royal tribes. From them came the two ruling houses of the united Kingdom of Israel chosen and anointed by Israel’s God. Saul of Benjamin proved an unworthy king, and the LORD transferred to the kingdom to David of Judah. Even so, there is something special about Benjamin as a gatherer of the people, and a loyal ally of the King. That’s why Saul’s grandson, Mephibosheth, remained loyal to David, even to his own hurt, and why the Benjamite apostle Paul proclaimed the gospel of Messiah Yeshua of Judah to the whole world. But there’s something more: the close association of Judah and Benjamin speaks to a prophecy of Isaiah about Messiah’s Kingdom:

The wolf will dwell with the lamb,  
the leopard will lie down with the kid,  
the calf and the young lion and the yearling together,  
and a little child will lead them.

Isaiah 11:6 TLV

The wolf is Benjamin, so named by Jacob in the last word he proclaimed over his sons. The Lamb is Messiah Yeshua, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah Who takes away the sins of the world. Now we see how a Lion can be a Lamb: as an innocent Lamb, He went willingly to the slaughter, conquering sin and death far more effectively than He could have done with violent combat. Now He reigns with the true authority of a Lion. This Messianic Age was inaugurated at the Cross, and its chief emissary to the nations was called and commissioned on the Damascus Road. Ever since then, the Wolf has dwelt with the Lamb.

Moses moves from there to bless the tribe of Joseph, including Joseph’s sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. As heir of the firstborn blessing, Joseph received two portions in Israel, which is why his sons became fathers of tribes alongside their uncles. In the division of the nation, Ephraim became chief among the rebellious tribes, and laid claim to the name of Israel based on that firstborn blessing. The rest of the tribes in Moses’ blessing are those who followed Ephraim: Zebulun, Issachar, Gad, Dan, Naphtali, and Asher. Simeon is missing from the list, probably because they had just suffered tremendous loss after leading the idolatrous rebellion at Baal Peor and were too small to take a territorial allotment of their own. Simeon’s towns came out of Judah’s allotment, but the fact that Simeonites betrayed David as he was on the run from Saul speaks to the loyalties of the tribe. Later still, Luke’s gospel tells of a righteous man named Simeon accepting the redemption price for the infant Son of David, Messiah Yeshua, and blessing Him as God’s salvation and as a light for revelation to the nations and the glory of Israel. Could it be that this righteous man brought Simeon’s prophetic redemption by ending the longstanding feud with Judah?

As we ponder that, we also consider the role of Joseph in bringing the Good News to the nations. Moses says of him:

The firstborn ox—majesty is his. His horns are the horns of the wild ox. With them he gores [pushes] peoples, all at once, to the ends of the earth. They are the myriads of Ephraim, they are the thousands of Manasseh.

Deuteronomy 33:13-17 TLV

The prophets who declared to Ahab that he would defeat his enemies used this image of Joseph's all-powerful horns. That is a lesson in the wrong application of prophetic words; those prophets and their king appropriated Moses' blessing to justify the prideful desires of the northern kingdom's apostate ruler. A better way to apply this word is to see how Joseph himself lived it out: he was exiled from Israel's family and sent to a foreign land, where he became the channel of blessing and salvation for the Gentiles of Egypt and the Hebrews of Israel. That's how the mixed multitude were prepared to attach themselves to Israel's God when judgment came on Egypt in the days of Moses. If the stumbling and separation of Israel's brothers meant salvation to the Gentiles, what did their reconciliation mean but life from the dead?

In the same way, Joseph's descendants – the Hebrews who followed Ephraim and Manasseh into rebellion – were exiled from Israel and scattered to the nations. Their mission was not to conquer and lord it over other peoples, goring them into submission. Their work was to push the peoples into our Redeemer's loving, encircling arms. These are the horns of Joseph, moving the peoples toward the Redeemer as the revelation of Him dawns over the nations. This is how the mixed multitude of Gentiles have attached themselves to the Lion/Lamb Messiah in preparation for the day our Creator makes everything right at last.

It's still a mystery how all this works out in the end. What we do know is that it does work out to our Creator's everlasting glory. The Wolf, with the message of the Lamb, has proclaimed the word to the Ox and the peoples he has gathered with his horns. Even now, the myriads of Ephraim and the thousands of Manasseh echo the myriads and thousands of angels singing the praises of the Lamb as He opens the sealed scroll of our collective redemption.