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THE LAST TESTAMENTS OF JACOB AND MOSES

A Thesis Presented to the Faculty
of Concordia Seminary, St. Louis,
Department of Exegetical Theology
in partial fulfillment of the
requirements for the degree of
Doctor of Theology

by

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(iii) HEBREW TRANSLITERATIONS

Dagesh forte is shown by doubling the consonant. The hyphen is used for *maqeph*.

aleph	ʾ	ṭeth	ṭ	ayin	ʿ
beth	b, bh	yod	y	pe	p, ph
gimel	g, gh	kaph	k, kh	ṣade	ṣ
daleth	d, dh	lamed	l	qoph	q
he	h	mem	m	resh	r
waw	w	nun	n	sin	ś
zayin	z	samek	s	shin	š
ḥeth	ḥ				
qameṣ	ā	furtive pathaḥ	ˆ	ḥolem with <i>mater lectionis</i>	ô
pathaḥ	a	hateph pathaḥ	ˆ	qibbuṣ with <i>mater lectionis</i>	û
ṣere	ē	ṣere yod	ê		
segol	e	segol yod	e (y)		
shewa	ˆ	hateph segol	ˆ		
hireq	i	hireq yod	î		
holem	ō	qameṣ hatuph	ˆ		
qibbuṣ	u	hateph qameṣ	ˆ		

(iv) GREEK TRANSLITERATIONS

The iota subscript is normally omitted; those who know the language will be able to supply it, where needed. Rough breathing is h, and u is used for upsilon when part of a diphthong.

alpha	a	nu	n
beta	b	xi	x
gamma	g	omicron	o
delta	d	pi	p
epsilon	e	rho	r
zeta	z	sigma	s
eta	ē	tau	t
theta	th	upsilon	y
iota	i	phi	phi
kappa	k	chi	ch
lambda	l	psi	ps
mu	m	omega	ō

CHAPTER I

A HISTORY OF THE INTERPRETATION OF GENESIS 49 AND DEUTERONOMY 33

Most of the history of the interpretation of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 is confined to the last century. Prior to that time, the two chapters were understood as the words of Jacob and Moses, respectively. Today that is the case only among conservative scholars.¹ The rise of critical scholarship in the nineteenth century led to a reinterpretation, based in part on the Documentary Hypothesis, that is for the most part still accepted today by the liberal scholar.²

The first doubt that Genesis 49 was written by Jacob was raised by Johann Gottfried Hasse in 1788.³ Two years later Johann Heinrich published the first thorough investigation of this subject.⁴

During the nineteenth century unanimity was achieved within critical scholarship that both chapters were to be viewed as *vaticinia ex eventu*, mainly through the work of Karl Heinrich Graf and Kaufmann Kohler, Graf published his study of Deuteronomy 33 in 1857,⁵ and Kohler's study came ten years later on the subject of Genesis 49.⁶

Around the beginning of the twentieth century, the chapters came to be considered collections of oracles that had circulated independently before being gathered into their present arrangements.

Two early voices signaled this development. Ernest Renan mentioned in passing the idea that Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 were not unified passages. In a work published in 1855, Renan said,

Such are, above all, in spite of a few more modern interpolations, the two blessings of Jacob and Moses, where the intention of gathering satirical and laudatory sayings which were then in use in each tribe becomes known.⁷

J. P. N. Land supported that point of view for Genesis 49, taking the chapter as a collection of oracles.⁸

Hugo Gressmann convincingly (for critics) demonstrated this perception after the turn of the century in a work first published in 1914. Part of the result of his assertions was that each passage in the two chapters had to be interpreted individually.⁹

Among the first attempts to treat the sayings individually were those of Albrecht Alt, Eugen Israel Täubler, and Johannes Lindblom. Alt dealt with the saying in Gen. 49:14-15.¹⁰ Täubler wrote in regard to Gen. 49:13 and

¹ In this thesis, the words "conservative" and "liberal" will be used for the sake of conciseness. "Liberal" here means those scholars who make use of the historical critical method, while "conservative" refers to those who do not.

² For the history of interpretation up until 1965, I am largely indebted to Hans-Jürgen Zobel, *Stammesspruch und Geschichte: Die Angaben der Stammessprüche von Gen 49, Dtn 33 und Jdc 5 über die politischen und kultischen Zustände im damaligen "Israel,"* in *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, no. 95 (Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1965), pp. 1-3.

³ Johann Gottfried Hasse, "Neue Uebersetzung des Abschiedsgesangs Jakobs, 1 Mos. XLIX," *Magazin für die biblischorientalische Litteratur und gesammte Philologie* (1788):5-16.

⁴ Johann Heinrich Heinrichs, *De auctore atque aetate capituli Geneseos XLIX commentatio* (Göttingen: I.D.G. Brose, 1790).

⁵ Karl Heinrich Graf, *Der Segen Mose's (Deuteronomium c. XXXIII) erklärt* (Leipzig: Dyk, 1857).

⁶ Kaufmann Kohler, *Der Segen Jakob's mit besonderer Berücksichtigung der alten Versionen und des Midrasch historisch-kritisch untersucht und erklärt: Ein Beitrag zur Geschichte des hebräisch Alterthums wie zur Geschichte der Exegese* (Berlin: J. Benzian, 1867).

⁷ My English translation of Ernest Renan, *Histoire generale et Systeme compare des Langues Semitiques* (Paris: Imprimerie impériale, 1855), p. 112: "Telles sont surtout, malgré quelques interpolations plus modernes, les deux bénédictions de Jacob et de Moïse, où perce l'intention de recueillir des dictons satiriques ou laudatifs qui avaient cours sur chaque tribu." All translations of French and German quotations in this thesis are the author's.

⁸ J. P. N. Land, *Disputatio de carmine Jacobi Gen. XLIX* (Leiden: J. Hazenberg, 1858).

⁹ Hugo Gressmann, *Die Anfänge Israels (Von 2. Mose bis Richter und Ruth) übersetzt, erklärt und mit Einleitung versehen*, in *Die Schriften des Alten Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1914).

¹⁰ Albrecht Alt, "Neues über Palästina aus dem Archiv Amenophis IV," *Palästinajahrbuch*, Berlin 20 (1924):34-41.

Deut. 33:18-19, Gen. 49:16-20, 27 and Deut. 33:22.¹¹ Lindblom directed his attention to the Judah oracle in Gen. 49:8-12.¹²

One of the results of the work of Hans-Joachim Kittel was to show that the texts might have circulated individually at first, before being gathered into collections. He also demonstrated that there was a genre that could be called “tribal sayings.”¹³

J. P. N. Land supported that point of view for Genesis 49, taking the chapter as a collection of oracles.¹⁴

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Beginning in 1922, notice was taken of the apparent fact that some of the sayings were different from the others, a thought that eventually led to their exclusion from the genre of “tribal sayings.” Otto Eissfeldt commented about the sayings on Reuben (Gen. 49:3-4) and on Simeon and Levi (Gen. 49:5-7), stating that they were not actually tribal sayings.²⁰ Josef Scharbert was another influential voice, arguing that certain sayings were not actually tribal sayings.²¹ Like Eissfeldt, Gerhard von Rad recognized the difference between some of the verses.²²

Kittel completed his dissertation in 1959, a history of traditions study, showing that the form of certain verses in Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 did not fit the genre “tribal sayings.” They were rather to be characterized as “prophetic oracles.”²³ As a result, Gen. 49:3-4, 5-7, 8, and 25-26 are not to be counted among the “tribal sayings,” nor are most of the verses in Deuteronomy 33.

In the meantime, Oskar Grether published a study, which claimed that a few verses of the Song of Deborah (Judg. 5:14-18) belonged to the genre of “tribal sayings.” This study opened the door to a consideration of all three chapters together.²⁴

¹¹ Eugen Israel Täubler, “Die Spruch-Verse über Sebulon,” *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 83 (1939):9-46.

¹² Johannes Lindblom, “The Political Background of the Shiloh Oracle,” *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 3 (1953):78-87.

¹³ Hans-Joachim Kittel, “Die Stammessprüche Israels, Genesis 49 und Deuteronomium 33, traditionsgeschichtlich untersucht,” (Berlin: Diss. theol. Kirchl. Hochschule Berlin, 1959).

¹⁴ J. P. N. Land, *Disputatio de carmine Jacobi Gen. XLIX* (Leiden: J. Hazenberg, 1858).

¹⁵ Hugo Gressmann, *Die Anfänge Israels (Von 2, Mose bis Richter und Ruth)* übersetzt, erklärt und mit Einleitung versehen, in *Die Schriften des Alten Testaments* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1914).

¹⁶ Albrecht Alt, “Neues über Palästina aus dem Archiv Amenophis IV,” *Palästinajahrbuch*, Berlin 20 (1924):34-41.

¹⁷ Eugen Israel Täubler, “Die Spruch-Verse über Sebulon,” *Monatschrift für Geschichte und Wissenschaft des Judentums* 83 (1939):9-46.

¹⁸ Johannes Lindblom, “The Political Background of the Shiloh Oracle,” *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 3 (1953):78-87.

¹⁹ Hans-Joachim Kittel, “Die Stammessprüche Israels, Genesis 49 und Deuteronomium 33, traditionsgeschichtlich untersucht,” (Berlin: Diss. theol. Kirchl. Hochschule Berlin, 1959).

²⁰ Otto Eissfeldt, *Hexateuch-Synopse* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1922), pp. 22-30.

²¹ Josef Scharbert, *Solidarität in Segen und Fluch im Alten Testament und in seiner Umwelt*, Vol. 1: *Väterfluch und Väterseggen* (Bonner Biblische Beiträge, Bonn 14), (Bonn: P. Hanstein, 1958).

²² Gerhard von Rad, *Das erste Buch Mose: Genesis*, 5th ed., in *Das Alte Testament Deutsche*, vol. 1 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1958), p. 421.

²³ Kittel, “Die Stammessprüche Israels,” pp. 91-95.

²⁴ Oskar Grether, *Das Deboralied: Eine metrische Rekonstruktion*, in *Beiträge zur Förderung christlicher Theologie*

In 1965, Hans-Jürgen Zobel built upon the work of Grether by investigating Genesis 49, Deuteronomy 33, and Judges 5 together, in order to determine what they say about the historical circumstances of the time. The work of Kittel had distinguished between “typical speech patterns” and “descriptions tied to a situation.” Zobel used this distinction in order to attempt to glean from the three chapters what historical information was available. He concluded that the traditional ideas of the Exodus-Sinai-Conquest are unhistorical and that there were various peaceful immigrations of individual tribes. He dated the collection of the sayings in the time of the Judges, ca. 1400-1000 B.C. Zobel was the first to study all three chapters together in this manner.²⁵

The discovery of Ugarit in 1928 and the subsequent deciphering of the language laid the foundation for studies that would take a new look at the Hebrew language and the poetry of the Old Testament.

In 1950, Frank Moore Cross and David Noel Freedman published their joint doctoral dissertation under the title, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry*. The work was a study of Genesis 49, Deuteronomy 33, and Judges 5, with special consideration of the early stages of Hebrew orthography and meter. Their study reflected some acquaintance with Ugaritic.²⁶

During this time and in the years thereafter, scholars who noted additional parallels with Ugaritic literature in the chapters at hand began to publish their findings. The monumental figure of Mitchell Dahood made his impact felt in the study of these chapters in Genesis and Deuteronomy, beginning in 1953.²⁷ A major study by Bruce Vawter appeared in article form in 1955,²⁸ and another major study by J. Coppens appeared in the following year.²⁹

Recently the writings of P. C. Craigie have begun to make an impact in this area, particularly in the study of Deuteronomy 33.³⁰ The commentary of Derek Kidner on the book of Genesis is a somewhat earlier counterpart to Craigie’s study of Deuteronomy.³¹

The parallels in Ugaritic literature have pushed the origins of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 back at least to the period of the Judges. The numerous parallels between the Old Testament and Ugaritic literature have been drawn together in the volumes edited by Loren R. Fisher.³²

Voices have been raised, pointing out the danger of an over-indulgent acceptance of such parallels,³³ but there can be no doubt that archaeology has been a friend to the traditional view of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 and that the Mosaic authorship of both chapters is still defensible.

The joint dissertation of Cross and Freedman is a watershed in the study of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 for another reason. Their study built upon the earlier study of William F. Albright on the date of the Oracles of Balaam in which Albright drew conclusions regarding the date on the basis of orthographic and linguistic criteria.³⁴ Cross and Freedman concluded that both Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 were

approximately the same age. In each are preserved materials which antedate the eleventh century in all probability, and may be considerably older. But the Blessings as a whole reached completed form toward the end of the period of the Judges.³⁵

In a book published in 1968, Albright proposed a scheme for dating fourteen ancient Hebrew poems in the Old Testament.³⁶ The poems were dated in order, or sequence, so this approach is called sequence dating. Using certain stylistic phenomena as criteria and basing the chronology on Ugaritic poetry, Albright proposed a

²⁵ Zobel, *Stammesspruch und Geschichte*.

²⁶ F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry*, in *Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series*, vol. 21 (Missoula, Montana: Scholars Press, 1950).

²⁷ M. Dahood, “The Divine Name ‘Eli in the Psalms,” *Theological Studies* 14 (1953):452-57.

²⁸ B. Vawter, “The Canaanite Background of Gen. 49,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 17 (1955):1-18.

²⁹ J. Coppens, “La bénédiction de Jacob,” *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 6 (1956):97-115.

³⁰ P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976).

³¹ Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, in *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, vol. 1 (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967).

³² Loren R. Fisher, ed., *Ras Shamra Parallels: The Texts From Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible*, 3 vols. to date, in *Analecta Orientalia*, vol. 49-51 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1972-81).

³³ J. C. de Moor and P. van der Lugt, “The Spectre of Pan-Ugaritism,” *Bibliotheca Orientalis* 31 (1974):3-26.

³⁴ William F. Albright, “The Oracles of Balaam,” *JBL* 63 (1944):207-33.

³⁵ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, pp. 6-7.

³⁶ William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1968), pp. 1-28, 42-54.

chronology that placed the Song of Miriam (Exodus 15) in the early thirteenth century and Psalm 29 in the fifth century as the earliest and latest of the poems.

In this scheme, Genesis 49 was dated in the late eleventh century, and Deuteronomy 33 was dated in the mid-eleventh century.³⁷

D. N. Freedman then built upon Albright's sequence dating by using the criterion of divine names and epithets. Freedman generally confirmed the results of Albright's study with some adjustments.³⁸ Like Albright, he placed Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 in the eleventh century. Unlike Albright, Freedman considered Deuteronomy 33 to be the later poem.³⁹

A fuller explanation of the sequence dating system appears in the fourth chapter of this thesis. As a relative chronology, the system is a helpful addition to the study of these chapters. Divested of critical presuppositions, the sequence dating system provides some support for the traditional dating scheme. However, the most that can be said for it is that it provides a relative chronology and a *terminus ad quem* for the dating of the chapters. It does not provide a *terminus a quo*. One may agree with the sequence in which Albright and Freedman place the poems without agreeing with the precise dates.

In the light of current critical positions regarding Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33, the purpose of this thesis is to defend the antiquity and unity of both chapters. The defense of the authorship of Jacob and Moses serves to buttress both the antiquity and the unity of these last testaments. Recent findings in the field of Ugaritic studies have shed new light upon the proper exegesis of the individual verses. After a careful exegesis is given of both chapters, information based upon that exegesis will be pulled together to show that both chapters are of great age and to show that each chapter has been written by a single author. The individual oracles did not circulate independently of one another before being gathered together by some collector. They arose simultaneously from the mouth of one author.

³⁷ Ibid., cited in David Noel Freedman, "Divine Names and Titles in Early Poetry," in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God*, edited by Frank Moore Cross, Werner E. Lemke, and Patrick D. Miller, Jr. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1976), pp. 55-56.

³⁸ Freedman, "Divine Names," pp. 56-57.

³⁹ Ibid., p. 96.

CHAPTER II

GENESIS 49

Introduction

Both Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 are thought by critics to be composed of individual sayings that originally circulated in oral form as folk literature, only later to be gathered together into collections. "We may assume," write Cross and Freedman, "that groups of blessings, ascribed to Jacob and Moses, and perhaps others, circulated orally in the period of the Judges."⁴⁰ Some of the sayings are thought to be composite units, while other sayings, namely the shorter ones, are thought to be complete units. The Judah blessing (Gen. 49:8-12) and the Levi blessing (Deut. 33:8-11) are considered to be composite blessings, while the Naphtali blessing (Gen. 49:21) and the Dan Blessing (Deut. 33:22) are considered complete units. Eissfeldt thinks that, "It must have been a favourite device for the individual tribes to characterise one another with short sayings, normally linked with their names; and they may well also have described themselves in a similar manner."⁴¹ The oral tradition stage allows critics to accept the many instances of archaic language and orthography in the chapters without accepting the antiquity of the entire chapter in its present form.

Critical scholars generally claim that there is no literary unity in the chapters, nor is there any certain historical occasion when the chapter was composed. The individual sayings supposedly belong to different times and various authors, gathered together at one point in time and inserted into the narratives of Genesis and Deuteronomy at some late date. R. H. Pfeiffer suggests that Genesis 49 was inserted into Genesis by a redactor in the sixth or fifth century, a decision apparently based on the supposedly late phrase in verse 1, "in days to come."⁴² Martin Noth writes that ". . . the Blessing of Jacob and the Blessing of Moses probably are not part of the Pentateuchal narrative but are special pieces which were inserted quite late."⁴³ How late, Noth feels, it is impossible to know.⁴⁴

Some of the sayings in their original form are thought by some to be from the early period of the Judges, while others may be as late as the time of David or Solomon or later, but all of them are considered by critics to be *vaticinia ex eventu*. None of the sayings are assigned to any of the major literary sources of the Pentateuch, although the entire chapter used to be assigned to J because of its obvious antiquity. Noth comments, "To attribute it to J, as is usually done, cannot be proven literarily any better than the assignment of the 'blessing of Moses' to E. It survives as special material . . ."⁴⁵

J is usually considered to be the collector of the sayings in Genesis 49, perhaps the one who wrote verse 2.⁴⁶ Holzinger was the first to reject the identification of the collector with one of the familiar literary sources.⁴⁷ Verses 1b, 2, and 28a are generally considered to be editorial. If J supposedly wrote verse 2, then the Yahwistic redactor wrote verses 1b and 28a,⁴⁸ when he incorporated the entire chapter into the narrative of P. P ends at verse 1a and begins at "and this is what," or at "blessing each one," or, according to Noth, at verse 29.⁴⁹ Kittel thinks that the collector is unknown, apparently since the order of the tribes appears to be much older than J, and he thinks that

⁴⁰ F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry*, in *Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series*, vol. 21 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1950), p. 77, n. 1.

⁴¹ Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P.R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 67.

⁴² R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1941), p. 277.

⁴³ Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, trans. Bernhard W. Anderson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 185, p. 518.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18, n. 54.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ Hans-Joachim Kittel, "Die Stammessprüche Israels, Genesis 49 und Deuteronomium 33, traditionsgeschichtlich" (Berlin: Diss. theol. Kirchl. Hochschule Berlin, 1959), pp. 1, 39.

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁴⁸ Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, 5th ed. in *Handkommentar zum Alten Testament*, 25 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1922), p. 478.

⁴⁹ Noth, *A History*, p. 14.

J only inserted the chapter into its present place.⁵⁰ Von Rad also thinks that the order in which the tribes are listed suggests a much earlier collection than the date normally attributed to the activity of J.⁵¹

Speiser thinks of J as the collector and inserter.⁵² We see that a brief survey of scholarly opinion produces no unanimity. However, since the collecting of the sayings is usually attributed to J, the chapter is generally considered to have taken final shape at the time of David or Solomon.

Kittel feels that Genesis 49 serves the purpose of bridging the gap between the twelve sons and the twelve tribes. The chapter answers the question, "How did the tribes come from the sons?"⁵³ It legitimizes Israel as a nation. Kittel is working with the assumption that much of the Pentateuch is unhistorical, that the patriarchs were not real persons, that the twelve sons are mere eponyms, that the Exodus is a pious legend, and that therefore there was no originally unified nation of Israel.

Many have claimed that the chapter has no relation to its context. Brueggemann thinks there is no evident connection with the context of 48:1-50:14, the collection of materials dealing with the death of Jacob. It was simply customary to insert a blessing in the narrative at the death of a great leader.⁵⁴ Noth states bluntly, "The Blessing of Jacob in Genesis 49 does not belong to the Joseph story and in all probability does not belong originally to the old Pentateuchal narrative at all."⁵⁵ While there may not be the precise literary connections that are expected of all good modern literature, the connection of the chapter to the divine promises given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob can hardly be missed.

Westermann thinks that the purpose of its placement in the narrative is a political one. The sayings are attributed to the patriarch Jacob and thereby given a high position, and they serve to clamp the time of the patriarchs with the time of the tribes. These various tribes are therefore viewed as a unity from ancient times, not some loosely connected amphictyony. This point is emphasized in verses 1a, 2, and 28.⁵⁶ The sayings were inserted into the narrative at the time when the tribes were organizing themselves into a united nation, and the chapter was collected in order to substantiate that organization. In that sense, Westermann views the chapter as aetiological.

The setting, or *Sitz im Leben*, in which the sayings arose has been a matter of much debate by those who reject the authorship of Jacob. Alfred Jeremias was the first to suggest an original association with the signs of the zodiac.⁵⁷ This viewpoint was followed by some, but most notably championed by Zimmern. The many symbols from animal life were thought to be evidence of this point of view. Zimmern connected Simeon and Levi with Gemini, Judah with Leo, Joseph with Taurus, Issachar with Cancer, Dan with Libra, Benjamin with Scorpio, Naphtali with Aries, Reuben with Aquarius, and Dinah (!) with Virgo.⁵⁸ The incisive critique of Cross and Freedman eliminates this theory from consideration:

Zimmern's speculations about the different tribes and their zodiacal associations are ingenious but entirely unacceptable. It is quite certain that the zodiac did not appear in developed form until the Persian period. Even if a few of the elements which were later incorporated into the zodiacal system were known in earlier times, none of the parallels between the signs of the zodiac and the designations of the tribes is at all convincing.⁵⁹

The thesis of J. Lindblom is that Gen. 49:8-12 is the center of the collection and explains the *Sitz im Leben* of all the sayings. The *Sitz im Leben* is the time when David lived in Hebron, king of Judah but not over all Israel.⁶⁰

⁵⁰ Kittel, p. 133.

⁵¹ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, trans. John H. Marks (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), p. 421.

⁵² E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, in *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1964), p. 371.

⁵³ Kittel, p. 125.

⁵⁴ Walter Brueggemann, *Genesis*, in *Interpretation: A Bible Commentary for Teaching and Preaching*, vol. 1 (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1982), p. 365.

⁵⁵ Noth, *A History*, p. 209, n. 564.

⁵⁶ Claus Westermann, *Genesis* (3 vols.), in *Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament*, vol. 1, part 3 (21 vols. to date) (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchen Verlag, 1974-82), pp. 277-78.

⁵⁷ Alfred Jeremias, *Das Alte Testament im Lichte des Alten Orients*, 2d ed. (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1906), pp. 395-400.

⁵⁸ H. Zimmern, "Der Jakobssegel und der Tierkreis," *Zeitschrift für Assyriologie* 7 (1892):161-72.

⁵⁹ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, pp. 81-82, n. 26.

⁶⁰ Johannes Lindblom, "The Political Background of the Shiloh Oracle," *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 3 (1953):78-87.

Kittel rejects this viewpoint, because verses 8-12 are not easily thought of as the center of the chapter.⁶¹ While Kittel's objection is inconsequential, Lindblom's thesis may be rejected on the basis of the authorship of Jacob, the archaic language of the chapter, and other reasons.

Kittel thinks that the comparisons in Genesis 49 are born in battle. Verses 17 and 19 in particular illustrate this for him. Tribes are praised or rebuked on the basis of their participation with the other tribes in battle. He relies on the Song of Deborah in Judges 5 for this interpretation, since that chapter clearly has a battle as its *Sitz im Leben*.⁶²

Gunneweg claims that word plays and animal comparisons underlie all the tribal sayings of Genesis 49, except for Simeon and Levi, and many of the sayings in Deuteronomy 33.⁶³ In addition, there is some material added to the two chapters which can be described as blessing, with some geographical or historical amplification.⁶⁴ He concludes that the *Sitz im Leben* of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 is the celebration of the theophany of Yahweh by the amphictyony. He notes Deut. 33:2-5, 26-29, verses clearly descriptive of the theophany of Yahweh at Sinai, and claims that the tribes describe themselves just as Yahweh did at Sinai. The chapters are human reflections of the God who revealed Himself at Sinai.⁶⁵

Many others would also find the *Sitz im Leben* in some event associated with the supposed confederacy of the tribes.⁶⁶ Westermann writes in this manner, rejecting Kittel's thesis as too situation-bound. He thinks that the sayings arose on many occasions, when the representatives of the tribes came together (see Joshua 24, Judg. 20:1) for a variety of purposes. The sayings arose individually or in groups of sayings and served the purpose of praising or blaming the various tribes. He considers the number twelve to be an independent element that arose during the time that Israel was becoming unified. The number was intended to be a testimony to that unity.⁶⁷ This view, as well as that of Gunneweg, Kittel, and others, is based in part on the unproven assumption that there ever was an amphictyony.

In the preceding paragraphs, we have already alluded to the common critical views of the purpose of this chapter. Since the chapter contains both praise and blame, and since Genesis 49 differs from Deuteronomy 33 as to who is praised and blamed, both chapters are thought of as being politically motivated. Brueggemann writes of Genesis 49, "Probably, it intends to be political propaganda to advance some tribal claims at the expense of others."⁶⁸ It is generally assumed that Genesis 49 seeks to advance Judah, while Deuteronomy 33 seeks to advance the Joseph tribes. Consequently, the two purposes that the chapter claims for itself are generally discarded. These are prophecy and blessing.

The opening verse tells us that Jacob himself expressed his purpose: ". . . so that I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come." Westermann claims that this statement refers only to verses 10-12 and possibly verse 26b. He feels that this proves verse 1b to be a later addition, reflecting the understanding of the editor at some later time.⁶⁹ Kittel mistakenly claims that the rest of the sayings, other than verses 10-12, refer to events of the present or the past and that the sayings are therefore *vaticinia ex eventu*, not prophecy.⁷⁰

Those who reject the possibility of predictive prophecy naturally assume these verses to have been written after the fact. This forces them to conclude that the sayings arose independently, since the sayings refer to events that are widely separated in time. However, if the chapter is viewed as the prediction of Jacob, the variable range presents no problem.

Harold G. Stigers calls the chapter a treatise on the future lives of the tribes as an outgrowth of the present character of each son.⁷¹ The animal comparisons are well-suited as a predictive device, based on the character of the individual sons. Jacob knew each of his sons well and predicted how things would turn out for them and their descendants, should they continue to display the character they had displayed thus far. Therefore, H. C. Leupold is correct in stating that the chapter is "not the prediction of particular historical events," but a "purely ideal portraiture

⁶¹ Kittel, p. 111.

⁶² Kittel, pp. 76-77.

⁶³ A. H. J. Gunneweg, "Über den *Sitz im Leben* der sog. Stammessprüche," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 76 (1964):250.

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 26?.

⁶⁶ E.g., Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 69.

⁶⁷ Westermann, pp. 251-52.

⁶⁸ Brueggemann, p. 365.

⁶⁹ Westermann, p. 278.

⁷⁰ Kittel, p. 115.

⁷¹ Harold G. Stigers, *A Commentary on Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1976), p. 325.

of the peculiarities of the different tribes.”⁷² In addition, however, the sayings carry an added dimension in that they predict various aspects of the occupation of Canaan in general terms. C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch speak of these two factors, the character of the sons and the land of Canaan, tying the latter to the divine promise to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.⁷³

The element of blessing is noted in the closing verse, where Moses writes, “. . . this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, blessing each one with the blessing appropriate to him.” The major objection to this characterization of the chapter is that supposedly part of the chapter was mild rebuke (verses 14-15) and part of it severe rebuke (verses 3-4, 5-7). This objection leads many to prefer another title for the chapter, such as “The Testament of Jacob.”⁷⁴ Westermann thinks that the rebukes are the result of the later interpretation and editing of the chapter, which resulted in prophetic language of judgment being incorporated into verses 3-4 and 5-7, as well as pious marginal additions at verses 6ab and 18. This language would reject the warlike dependence upon man’s strength and recognize that help comes from Yahweh alone.⁷⁵ Kittel sees the chapter as a section that fits the priestly theology of salvation. The chapter was incorporated into P, because it suited the theology of P, namely, to show that the history of Yahweh with His people is the history of the salvation of Israel.⁷⁶

There is much to speak in favor of viewing the chapter as blessing. There are other blessings, spoken by aged patriarchal figures near death, such as Gen. 27:27-29, 39-40 (Isaac), Gen. 48:15-20 (Jacob), Deuteronomy 33 (Moses), and there are speeches of a similar nature by Joshua (Joshua 24) and Samuel (1 Samuel 12). Leupold is correct in stating that the criticisms of Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Issachar are blessings in disguise (although we will argue that Issachar was not criticized), because they show the weakness which that tribe should especially guard against.⁷⁷ It should not surprise us that this deathbed blessing should have remained in the memory of the tribes of Israel, particularly in view of the high esteem with which such utterances were held.

While the chapter itself does not speak of the sojourn in Egypt, it is likely that its placement at this point in the story of Israel has a significant purpose. Kittel calls the Joseph history the connecting link between two themes, the promise to the patriarchs and the Exodus from Egypt.⁷⁸ In view of the presence of Jacob and the many references in Genesis 49 to the land of Canaan, this chapter may be seen as both prophecy and blessing in that it sustained Israel’s faith during the years in Egypt.

Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 have been called “folk poetry,” because they lack the varied meter and complex rhetorical style of victory odes, such as the Song of Deborah and the Song of Miriam.⁷⁹ Kittel calls the chapters popular poetry, considering only Gen. 49:8-12, 22-26 to be literary poetry.⁸⁰ The genre is the tribal saying, in which category Cross and Freedman include also Judg. 5:14-18 and Ps. 68:28. They also note characteristics in common with the Oracles of Balaam (Numbers 23-24), but there are too many contrasts to allow the Oracles of Balaam to be included in this genre.⁸¹

Kittel agrees, calling the tribal saying the basic element, or genre, in the two chapters. Tribal sayings are short and precise statements with no traces of editorial reworking. They require no framework for their understanding and exhibit “typical modes of speech” with a certain timelessness. They consist of pure animal comparisons (Gen. 49:9, 21, 27, Deut. 33:22), extended animal comparisons (Gen. 49:14-15, 17), and animal comparisons that are part of a fuller saying (Gen. 49:22, Deut. 33:17a, 20). They also include typical descriptions (Gen. 49:13, 20, Deut. 33:6, 23), situation-bound descriptions (Gen. 49:19), and descriptions that are part of a fuller saying (Gen. 49:3, 5, 23, Deut. 33:17b).⁸²

Kittel’s form critical investigation of the tribal sayings has led him to conclude that there are various stages in the transmission of the sayings, each of which is reflected in various forms which the sayings take. The first forms are the comparisons and descriptions spoken of above. The next form is reflected in sayings consisting of several

⁷² H. C. Leupold, *Exposition of Genesis*, 2 vols. (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1942), 2:1164.

⁷³ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, in *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes*, vol. 1, part 1 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.), p. 389.

⁷⁴ Robert Davidson, *Genesis 12-50*, in *The Cambridge Bible Commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1979), p. 301.

⁷⁵ Westermann, p. 278.

⁷⁶ Kittel, p. 115.

⁷⁷ Leupold, p. 1162.

⁷⁸ Kittel, p. 120.

⁷⁹ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 69.

⁸⁰ Kittel, p. 65: “. . . Volkspoesie . . . Kunstpoesie.”

⁸¹ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 69.

⁸² Kittel, pp. 66-75.

elements. The sayings lack unity, since the individual parts stand out from one another (Gen. 49:22-26, Deut. 33:8-11, 13-17, 18-19, 20-21, 24-25). The third form is the formed saying, where the parts of the saying form a unity. The parts appear to be composed together from the start. Some sayings reflect a later stage in the development of an original description (Gen. 49:19), and all of these formed sayings use the word play (Gen. 49:3cd-4a, 8, 16, 19) or the structure of the prophetic saying that is found in the prophetic books (Gen. 49:3-4, 5-7, 10-12). These sayings are supposedly closely related to the typical manner of speaking in the oldest layer of tradition, but they are longer and later. The final form is the editorially revised saying. This is the last stage in the transmission history of the tribal sayings. These sayings fit into four categories. They are sayings placed together (Gen. 49:8+9+10-12, 16+17) with the name of the tribe as the key, sayings bound to a framework (Gen. 49:3-4, 5-7, 8, which are connected to verse 1), sayings that have been deuteronomistically revised (Deut. 33:7, 8-11, 12, 18+19, 20+21, 23, because the name Yahweh occurs in them, because of concerns such as “right offerings” in verse 19, prayer to Yahweh, keeping the Torah in verses 10 and 21, and the blessing and pleasure of God in verses 1 and 23), and glosses (Gen. 49:6ab, 13b, 18; Deut. 33:8cd, 21c, 23c).⁸³

It is quite clear that the animal comparison and the word play are key ingredients in Genesis 49, whereas Deuteronomy 33 displays no word plays (unless some doubtful conjectures are accepted) and only three animal comparisons. If we grant that word plays and animal comparisons are evidence of antiquity,⁸⁴ then the priority of Genesis 49 is assured.

In Genesis 49, there are word plays in verses 3cd-5a (pre-eminent, not be pre-eminent), 8 (Judah, praise, hand), 13 (probable play on root meaning of “Zebulun”), 14-15 (Issachar, man who works), 16 (Dan, judge), 19 (raiders, raid, “the Raider,” raid), 20 (probable: Asher, “the Happy One”), 21 (very unlikely: Akkadian *šaparru*, “goat”), 22 (unlikely: Ephrath, *pōrāth*, “fruit-tree”). Gunneweg suggests some unlikely word plays in Deuteronomy 33 at verse 7 (Judah, hand), 12 (Benjamin, between), 18 (Zebulun, tents, houses; based on an emendation), and 24 (Asher, “the Happy One,” only possible word play).⁸⁵

In Genesis 49, there are animal comparisons in verses 9 (lion), 14-15 (donkey), 17 (snake), 21 (doe), 22 (young calf), and 27 (wolf). In Deuteronomy 33, there are animal comparisons in verses 17 (bull), 20 (lion), and 22 (lion’s cub). All word plays convey positive ideas.

Westermann thinks that Genesis 49 is profane, whereas Deuteronomy 33 is strongly theologized, a fact which allegedly points to a conversion of the chapter into a cultic function.⁸⁶ However, the difference between the two chapters ought not to be attributed to a great amount of editorial reworking of Deuteronomy 33, but to different authors, purposes, dates, and settings.

Whereas Deuteronomy 33 is entirely positive in tone, Genesis 49 contains two strong rebukes in verses 3-4 and 5-7. Most think that verses 14-15 are a mild rebuke, but that point of view is not accepted here. Gunkel writes of the mysterious manner of expression in Genesis 49, in that some names are not mentioned, some facts are left out, and some phrases are general. He thinks that this is a characteristic of the oldest prophetic style.⁸⁷ He is correct, although he does not properly identify that prophetic speech as coming from the mouth of Jacob.

We may also note that there is a great deal of military imagery in both Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33. In Genesis 49, this imagery is expressed in verses 5-7, 8-10, 16-17, 19, 22-24, and 27. In Deuteronomy 33, verses 6, 7, 11, 12, 17, 20-21, 22, 25, and 26-29 contain military imagery.

All of the geographical allusions in both chapters are general. The historical references in both chapters are also quite general, except in two instances. In Gen. 49:3-4 and 5-7, the only two certain historical references are to events of the past.

⁸³ Kittel, pp. 79-105.

⁸⁴ Westermann, p. 276.

⁸⁵ Gunneweg, “Über den Sitz,” pp. 249-50.

⁸⁶ Westermann, pp. 250-51.

⁸⁷ Gunkel, p. 476.

Translation of Genesis 49

- 1 Then Jacob called for his sons and said, “Gather yourselves together so that I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come.
- 2 “Assemble and listen, you sons of Jacob; listen to Israel, your father.
- 3 “Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the firstfruits of my strength, pre-eminent in dignity, pre-eminent in power.
- 4 Unrestrained as water, may you not be pre-eminent, for you mounted the bed of your father, then you defiled the couch of my concubine.
- 5 “Simeon and Levi are two of a kind, instruments of violence are their swords.
- 6 Let me not enter their council, let me not be joined with their assembly, for in their anger they killed men, and at their pleasure they destroyed leading citizens.
- 7 Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.
- 8 “Judah, your brothers will praise you; (your hand will be on the neck of your enemies) your father’s sons will bow down to you.
- 9 (Judah is a lion’s cub, from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouched, he lay down like a lion, and like a lion—who dares to rouse him?)
- 10 The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs, and to him belongs the obedience of the nations.
- 11 He ties his ass to a vine, his colt to a choice vine; He washes his garments of wine, his robes of the blood of grapes.
- 12 His eyes are darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk.
- 13 “Zebulun will live near the shore of the sea, (then he will live at ease by the coast;) and his border will be toward Sidon.

- (p. 26) 14 “Issachar is a sturdy donkey
lying down between two saddlebags.
- 15 When he sees how good is a resting-place
and how pleasant the land,
he will bend his shoulder to bear,
and he will become a body of workers that tills.
- 16 “Dan will provide justice for his people
as any other of the tribes of Israel.
- 17 Dan will be a serpent along the roadside,
a viper along the path,
that bites the horse’s heels,
so that its rider falls backward.
- 18 “I wait for your deliverance, O Lord.
- 19 “Raiders will raid Gad,
but he will raid at their heels.
- 20 “Asher’s food will be rich,
and he will provide royal delicacies.
- 21 “Naphtali is a doe set free
that bears beautiful fawns.
- 22 “Joseph is a young calf,
a young calf near a spring,
the offspring that walks at the side of the bull.
- 23 Archers will bitterly attack him,
bowmen will assail him,
- 24 but his bow will remain steady,
and his strong hands will be agile;
by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob,
by the name of the Shepherd of the sons of Israel,
- 25 by the God of your father, who will help you,
with the blessings of heaven above,
the blessings of the deep that lies below,
the blessings of breast and womb.
- 26 (The blessings of your father are mightier
than the blessings of the eternal mountains,
than the bounty of the everlasting hills.)
They will rest on the head of Joseph,
and on the pate of the one separate from his brothers.
- 27 “Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;
from morning he will devour the prey,
and till evening he will divide the spoil.”
- 28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, blessing each one with the blessing appropriate to him.

Exegesis

Gen. 49:1

Then Jacob called for his sons and said, “Gather yourselves together so that I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come.

A threefold framework for the sayings in Genesis 49 is generally upheld with literary differences signaling the three sources. J is usually thought of as the collector, but not author, of the sayings, who wrote verse 2 in poetic fashion as an introduction to the entire collection. Verse 1b,⁸⁸ “Gather yourselves . . .,” and verse 28a, “All these are the twelve tribes of Israel,” are a prose introduction and conclusion assigned to the Yahwistic redactor, the editor who incorporated the collection into its content. The phrase “in days to come” reflects the understanding of the redactor. Then, verse 1a and verses 28b-33 are from P, the third framework for the tribal sayings.⁸⁹ The mention of the patriarch Jacob in verse 1a supposedly reflects the narrative interests of the priestly writer at the end of the Joseph history.⁹⁰ According to Martin Noth, it is impossible to know when this editorial work took place.⁹¹

The supposedly contradictory references to sons in verses 1a, 28bcd and to tribes in verse 28a are the reason for the division of verses 1 and 28-33 into two different sources. Hans-Joachim Kittel sees it as a problem, when tribal sayings are combined with the idea of a father speaking to his sons. Therefore, the identification of the sons with the tribes of Israel betrays the hand of an editor, who wished to reconcile the dual subject matter of sons and tribes.⁹² The traditional approach sees Moses as the editor of Jacob’s words.⁹³

The words of Jacob to his sons in verse 1 express the intent of the chapter. The patriarch is giving them his blessing, couched in terms of his expectations for the future.

Some critics present the idea of prophecy and the idea of blessing as contradictory or as mutually exclusive. John Skinner calls the chapter a prophecy and not a blessing.⁹⁴ Walter Brueggemann calls the chapter a “testimony,” political propaganda, not a blessing.⁹⁵ Kittel states that there is one theme for the sayings: prophecy for the future.⁹⁶ However, the ideas of prophecy and blessing need not be thought of as irreconcilable. There can be no doubt that the two concepts of prophecy and blessing are thought of by some critics as evidence of two sources, hence the separation of verses 1b, 28a from verses 28b-33.

A single section of Scripture can be both prophecy and blessing. Writing about Gen. 49:1, Derek Kidner states, “This verse, speaking of prediction, and verse 28 with its term ‘blessing,’ sum up the nature of the oracle, which is potent as well as informative.”⁹⁷ Perhaps H. C. Leupold best combines the two concepts in his commentary, when he writes that there is

a definite consciousness on the old Father’s part that he like other old men of God is being granted special insight in reference to his sons’ lives, the knowledge of which can be a substantial blessing to them.⁹⁸

The prophetic character of the chapter ought not to be thought of as a detailed description of specific future historical events. We will see in the coming pages that such references are lacking, except when sayings refer to past

⁸⁸ Eissfeldt’s L source, along with vv. 2-7.

⁸⁹ Kittel, p. 39.

⁹⁰ John Skinner, *Genesis* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910), p. 364.

⁹¹ Noth, *A History*, p. 18, n. 54.

⁹² Kittel, p. 40.

⁹³ G.Ch. Aalders, *Genesis: Volume II*, in *The Bible Student’s Commentary*, trans. William Heynen (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1981), p. 269.

⁹⁴ Skinner, p. 513.

⁹⁵ Brueggemann, *Genesis*, p. 365.

⁹⁶ Kittel, p. 40.

⁹⁷ Derek Kidner, *Genesis*, in *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries* (Downers Grove, IL: Inter-Varsity Press, 1967), p. 215.

⁹⁸ Leupold, p. 1166.

events. The chapter contains only general outlines of a prophetic character, information that will indicate in broad strokes how a particular tribe will develop.

Important for the understanding of the verse is a proper explanation of the concluding phrase *b^e'ah^arîth hayyāmîm*, "in days to come." Opinions vary on the meaning of the phrase, either because of preconceived notions about the lateness of the chapter or because of preconceived notions about the nature of Messianic prophecy. A middle ground between these two extremes needs to be charted.

Most scholars have seen the phrase as an expression of prophetic eschatology, referring either to the last days or to the Messianic age. Gerhard von Rad notes that the phrase is used in prophetic literature as a term for the last days (see Isa. 2:2, Ezek. 38:16).⁹⁹ Gunkel, Procksch, Baentsch, Gressmann, and others understand the phrase in this sense. The King James Version (KJV) reflects this viewpoint with its translation, "in the last days." Other scholars refer the phrase to the Messianic age, agreeing that the phrase is an expression of prophetic eschatology. Among those of this opinion are Aalders, Armerding, Gesenius, Keil and Delitzsch, Leupold, Bennetch, and others.

Von Rad has pointed out that sometimes the phrase occurs in a more general sense, that is, "in latter days," (compare Deut. 4:20, 31:29, or the RSV translation of 49:1, "in days to come").¹⁰⁰ Koenig, Luther, Speiser, and Skinner agree. Harry Orlinsky's comments are noteworthy, in that in the fourteen Biblical occurrences of the phrase it always

denotes the *closing period* of the future, so far as it falls within the range of view of the writer using it. The sense expressed by it is thus relative, not absolute, varying with the context. Thus in Nu. xxiv.14 it is used of the period of Israel's future conquest of Moab and Edom (see vv. 17, 18) . . . Here it is evidently used of the period of Israel's occupation of Canaan,—in particular of the period of the Judges and early years of the monarchy.¹⁰¹

In his book, *Toward an Exegetical Theology*, Walter Kaiser introduces the concept of "The Analogy of Antecedent Scripture." He suggests that words, phrases, and sentences need to be interpreted in the light of God's previous revelation on that subject. The interpreter should avoid reading all of the theology of later centuries back into a particular phrase. The interpreter should recognize the principle of progressive revelation in Scripture.¹⁰² Many scholars have failed to do this with *b^e'ah^arîth hayyāmîm*. Since Gen. 49:1 is the first occurrence of the phrase in the Old Testament, it is better to understand the phrase more generally with Kidner, Orlinsky, and others. Furthermore, a general interpretation of the phrase fits better with the variety of times in which the various sayings on the tribes were "fulfilled."

Gen. 49:2

"Assemble and listen, you sons of Jacob;
listen to Israel, your father.

From this point on, in addition to providing a translation of each verse, the poetic structure and meter of that verse will also be given and referred to from time to time. The author is well aware of the uncertainty in scholarly circles today with regard to the nature of Hebrew poetry and its meter. Nevertheless, it will be assumed throughout this thesis that Hebrew poetry generally does have a structure and a meter. The poetic structure of this verse is a b c//[a'] b' d. The meter is 3:3.

Most critical scholars see this verse as the work of the collector. It is viewed as a preamble to the actual collection of tribal sayings.¹⁰³ The apparent redundancy between verse 1b and verse 2 is the reason why the two are assigned to different sources. Therefore, verse 2 is frequently viewed as the work of J, the collector of the sayings, while verse 1b and verse 28a are assigned to the redactor of J. According to Kittel, verse 2 could have been the original introduction for the collection.¹⁰⁴

⁹⁹ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 422.

¹⁰⁰ Ibid.

¹⁰¹ Harry M. Orlinsky, ed., *Notes on the New Translation of the Torah* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1969), p. 141.

¹⁰² Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), pp. 134-40.

¹⁰³ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 422; Skinner, p. 512.

¹⁰⁴ Kittel, p. 39.

A problem with seeing verse 2 as a poetic introduction to the collection is that only the sayings about Reuben (verses 3, 4), Judah (verse 8 only), and Simeon and Levi (verses 5-7, in a restricted sense) actually assume the situation reported in verse 2. Therefore, Kittel sees the verse as an introduction only to verses 3-8.¹⁰⁵ Here we come to understand the reason why Otto Eissfeldt assigns verses 2-7 to his Lay source.¹⁰⁶

In reality, verse 2 serves as a perfect introduction to the entire collection, from the mouth of Jacob. The poetic parallelism evident in “Jacob-Israel” and in the double summons to listen help form a metrically balanced 3:3 distich. The concluding prepositional phrase provides a climax that is closely connected to the first stich by the parallelism of “Jacob-Israel.” Kittel feels that the father in the verse is advanced as “Jacob-Israel” in order to provide a superficial connection with the Joseph history.¹⁰⁷

While Hermann Gunkel considers this first *šim’û* an addition, as do Frank Moore Cross and David Noel Freedman,¹⁰⁸ he notes that such a summons occurs in Isa. 1:10, 28:14, 32:9, 34:1, Jer. 7:2, Deut. 32:1, and elsewhere.¹⁰⁹ The double summons, however, may be considered genuine in view of the importance attached in the ancient Near East to oral wills and other oral pronouncements.

Kidner points out that the names Jacob and Israel are frequently used in poetic parallelism (see verses 7, 24). When this happens, their different nuances are seldom stressed, so an assignment of the verse to different sources would look artificial.¹¹⁰ Realizing this, critics assign the verse to one author.

Leupold underestimates the poetic parallelism of the names of the patriarch, when he attaches a special significance to the names. Jacob is the name of the man naturally clever and ambitious, according to Leupold, while Israel is the name of the new man who submitted to God’s leading.¹¹¹

Gen. 49:3

“Reuben, you are my firstborn,	a	b	c	3
my might, the firstfruits of my strength,	[a’]	b’	b” bv ¹¹²	3
pre-eminent in dignity, pre-eminent in power.	d	e	d e	4

Once we begin to look at the tribal sayings themselves, the concerns about the source documents fade into nothingness. The sayings are considered to have arisen orally, to have circulated orally, and after some years, perhaps decades or centuries, to have been written down. This early oral history of the sayings antedates the major documents of the Pentateuch, JED and P.¹¹³

Eissfeldt considers Gen. 49:3-7 to be part of his older L source, originally followed by Deut. 33:7. The purpose of the verses is to explain the birthright being given to Joseph.¹¹⁴ Later it will be shown that Deuteronomy 33 originated in a much later setting than Genesis 49, a viewpoint that makes extremely unlikely the possibility of sayings in the two chapters having originally existed side by side. Kittel follows Eissfeldt and Gunkel in understanding the oracle as a possible aetiology for the loss of Reuben’s birthright, drawing a parallel to Gen. 9:25-27.¹¹⁵

¹⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹⁰⁶ Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament*, p. 195.

¹⁰⁷ Kittel, p. 39.

¹⁰⁸ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 77, n. 1.

¹⁰⁹ Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 479.

¹¹⁰ Kidner, p. 215.

¹¹¹ Leupold, p. 1169.

¹¹² A bracketed letter (such as [a’] indicates that an element is to be understood, though it is not expressed.

Frequently in such lines of poetry a ballast variant, abbreviated here and throughout the thesis as bv, appears in order to compensate for the omission of the grammatical unit (i.e., [a’] by lengthening that line.

¹¹³ Viewed metrically, v. 3 is probably best taken with Zobel, as a verse of three stichs, 3:3:4. The suggestion of Cross and Freedman involves a regrouping of the text to take *’attāh kōhî* as the second stich and requires other textual changes to produce 2:2.2:2, each colon ending with the first person singular suffix. The final line would have to be compressed to read “*re’šîth ’ūzzî* or *yether ’ūzzî*.” Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 77, n. 4. Zobel’s suggestion fits best with the following verse and its 4:4:4 meter.

¹¹⁴ Eissfeldt, pp. 196-97.

¹¹⁵ Kittel, p. 10.

The historical background to this saying is Gen. 35:22, where we read, “While Israel (that is, Jacob) was living in that region, Reuben went in and slept with his father’s concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard of it.”¹¹⁶ Those scholars who reject the supposition that the chapters of Genesis record actual, accurate history and that the twelve sons of Jacob were historical figures would reject this identification, preferring instead to take Gen. 35:22 as an allusion to some tribal incident.

Skinner cites three such possibilities. The first is from C. Steuernagel, H. Holzinger, and W. Robertson Smith, who think that Reuben had misused its power as the leading tribe to assail the independence of a weaker tribe in the confederation, perhaps one of the Bilhah tribes. The second is from Dillmann and B. Stade, who think of the persistence in Reuben of an old Semitic custom of marriage with wives or concubines of a deceased father, which the general moral sense of Israel had outgrown. The third is that the form of the legend has been partly determined by a mythological motive parallel to that in the story of Phoenix and Amyntor in Homer’s *Iliad*.¹¹⁷

Von Rad writes, “If what is said in verse 4 about the ancestor contains some recollection of a severe crime committed by the tribe of Reuben, it is completely incomprehensible to us”¹¹⁸ Von Rad and others create more problems for the understanding of this verse than they solve by their skepticism of Reuben’s personal existence. As Kidner has noted, “. . . the oracle makes good sense in its own terms, but becomes very hard to explain as a veiled allusion to a tribal incident.”¹¹⁹

In view of the background in Gen. 35:22 and in view of the later history of the tribe of Reuben, this tribal saying may be seen as a contrast between the high hopes of a father for his firstborn son and the reality of that son’s character.¹²⁰ Reuben had his good moments, for example, Gen. 37:21-22, but overall these moments were few. Kidner writes,

The heaping of phrase on majestic phrase in verse 3, building up to an ignominious collapse, reflects the exalted hopes that were shattered at Reuben’s fall (reported at 35:22). It would be hard to find a more withering contrast between a man and his calling, or a less flattering account of a ‘*grand passion*.’¹²¹

Hans-Jürgen Zobel notes that verse 3 marks the exalted position of Reuben as firstborn in two ways: he is firstborn in might and strength, and he excels in dignity and power.¹²²

The opening phrase contains the second person singular pronoun; the entire oracle is stated as a direct address. In the chapter, only these verses, verse 8 of the Judah oracle, and verses 25-26 of the Joseph oracle are cast in the second person. Later it will be suggested that the sparing use of the second person singular in the chapter is one of the unifying factors of the chapter and an indication of a single author with his special emphasis upon three of his sons.

Gen. 49:3ab refers to the fact that Reuben was Jacob’s firstborn son, therefore, entitled to first rank among his brothers, the leadership of the tribes, and a double share of the inheritance (Gen. 27:29, Deut. 21:17).¹²³ The concluding line of the verse elaborates further on the virtues accompanying his rank. The phrase *w^erē ’šîth ’ônî*, “the first fruits of my strength,” is found elsewhere with reference to the firstborn, in Deut. 21:17, Ps. 78:51, and Ps. 105:36, the latter two passages being references to the slaying of the firstborn during the tenth plague at the time of the Exodus. The noun *’ôn*, “manly vigor, strength,”¹²⁴ here designates the reproductive power of the father as evidenced in the firstborn son.

¹¹⁶ The New International Version will be cited throughout, except where noted. The translations of the verses of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 are the author’s.

¹¹⁷ *The Iliad* ix.449-51 in Skinner, p. 515.

¹¹⁸ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 423.

¹¹⁹ Kidner, p. 216.

¹²⁰ Stigers, p. 326.

¹²¹ Kidner, pp. 215-16.

¹²² Hans- Jürgen Zobel, *Die Stammesspruch und Geschichte: Die Angaben der Stammessprüche von Gen 49, Dtn 33 und Jdc 5 über die politischen und kultischen Zustände im damaligen “Israel,” in Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, no. 95 (Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1965), pp. 1-3.

¹²³ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 389.

¹²⁴ G. Herbert Livingston, “49a און (’on) vigor, wealth,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., eds. R. Laird Harris; Gleason L. Archer, Jr.; and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:24. Hereafter cited as *TWOT*.

The sense of the first two phrases is that Reuben was begotten by the full strength of his father, when his father was still in the prime of life. Gunkel goes too far in asserting that therefore Reuben was the strongest of the sons, and, according to the ancient Hebrew view, also the wildest.¹²⁵

One of the major differences of interpretation on this tribal saying is whether verse 3c is a continuation of the commendation of Reuben in verse 3ab, or the beginning of an indictment that is concluded in verse 4a. Kittel finds a threefold structure in the sayings:

- a) Address (verse 3ab): Reuben the firstborn, repetition with poetic expressions
- b) Charge and Curse (verses 3c, 4a): embodiment of protest, common like water, have no pre-eminence
- c) Proof (verse 4bc): the deed and the result¹²⁶

He translates verse 3c, “an embodiment of protest and an embodiment of defiance,” a translation based on a questionable emendation of *śe’ēth* to *śe’ōth*, from “dignity” to “protest,” following the earlier suggestion of Gunkel. Both claim that the meaning of “nobility” given by Ludwig Köhler and Walter Baumgartner (KB) is nowhere certainly attested, although Kittel discounts occurrences of the word with that meaning in Ps. 62:4 and Hab. 1:7.¹²⁷

J. P. Peters points *śe’ēth* as *śē’t*h and translates, “Remnant of destruction, and remnant of violence.”¹²⁸ Skinner calls Gunkel’s emendation unnecessary and says Peters’ emendation gives a wrong turn to the thought. He agrees that verse 3c is to be thought of as a censure of Reuben, but prefers the translation “pride” for *śe’ēth*.¹²⁹

On the other hand, C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch refer *śe’ēth* to the dignity of the chieftainship held by Reuben and translate “dignity.”¹³⁰ Orlinsky translates “rank.”¹³¹ Both BDB¹³² and KB translate the word in a positive sense as “dignity” and “nobility” respectively. The most natural way to interpret the word is in harmony with the preceding portion of the verse, although the word could be translated “pride” with a double meaning intended. Kittel’s viewpoint is undoubtedly motivated by a desire to find the prophetic style of indictment in the Reuben saying. This would support his assumption that we have a late editorial reworking of verses 3-4, or an interpolation.

The translation and understanding of *’oz* will depend upon the position taken with respect to *śe’ēth*. Those that take verse 3c in a negative sense translate “fury” (Skinner), “violence” (Peters), “defiance” (Kittel), or “ferocity, wildness, passion” (Gunkel). Those that take verse 3c in a positive sense translate “honor” (Orlinsky), “power” (Keil-Delitzsch, Leupold), “strength” (KB, Cross and Freedman), or “might” (Zobel).

The view of Peters that the double occurrence of *yether* suggests the double portion of the inheritance to be received by the firstborn, has some merit. However, it cannot be determined with certainty, even with some support from the Syriac and Septuagint (LXX).¹³³ The possible translation of the word as “pre-eminence” or “superiority, excellence” lends some additional support.

Gen. 49:4

“Unrestrained as water, may you not be pre-eminent,	a	b	c	3
for you mounted the bed of your father,	d	e	f	3
then you defiled the couch of my concubine.	d’	e’	f’	3

¹²⁵ Gunkel, p. 479.

¹²⁶ Kittel, pp. 9-10.

¹²⁷ Kittel, p. 8; Gunkel, p. 479, citing Ludwig Hugo Koehler and Walter Baumgartner, *Lexicon in Veteris Testamenti*, 2d ed. (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1953).

¹²⁸ J. P. Peters, “Jacob’s Blessing,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 6 (1886):100-01.

¹²⁹ Skinner, p. 514.

¹³⁰ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 389.

¹³¹ Orlinsky, p. 141.

¹³² Francis Brown, S. R. Driver, and Charles Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907).

¹³³ Peters, pp. 100-01.

Verses 3c and 4a together form an ingenious word play. Gunkel brings out that word play by translating, “First in ‘raging,’ first in ferocity, shameless as . . . you shall not be the first!”¹³⁴ Taking verse 3c as an expression of positive values, one may translate, “pre-eminent in dignity, pre-eminent in power. Unrestrained as water, you will not be pre-eminent.” It is only here that the verb *yāthar* appears with the meaning “to have pre-eminence,” and it is only here that the verb form appears together with the noun form, *yether*. Kittel suggests translating, “you shall not have pre-eminence.”¹³⁵

This is the first of eight such word plays in Genesis 49. The others occur in verse 8 (Judah), verse 13 (Zebulun), verses 14-15 (Issachar), verse 16 (Dan), verse 19 (Gad), verse 20 (Asher), and verse 22 (Joseph). Deuteronomy 33 contains only one possible word play, that in verse 24 (Asher).

Both E. A. Speiser and Stigers reject the repointing of the verb to the Niphal with the LXX in order to yield “you shall remain, survive,” claiming that this would destroy the subtle literary effect and contradict history, since Reuben did survive. The verb is correctly pointed in the Masoretic text (MT) as a Hiphil, an “elative” Hiphil with intransitive sense.¹³⁶

The phrase *paḥaz kammaim*, “unrestrained as water,” provides the reason for the action recorded in verse 4bc. Much has been written about the precise meaning of *paḥaz*. The common denominator of the word seems to be that of uncontrollableness, or lack of restraint. KB lists as the meaning of the verb *pāḥaz* in the Qal, “to be bold, undisciplined.” Leupold translates the verb “to be reckless,” in the Old Testament sense of being lascivious.¹³⁷ BDB translates the noun with “wantonness, recklessness, unbridled license.” James Barr’s suggestion of translating “scattered” (that is, of the nomadic life) receives no notice in the commentaries.¹³⁸ We adopt Stigers’ suggestion of “unrestrained,” based both on the evidence surveyed above and on his thought that in view of the incest, the word “unrestrained” is more suitable than “unstable” or an equivalent.¹³⁹

The picture is that of a river going over its banks, overstepping its conventional bounds.¹⁴⁰ We see in the reference to water a picture of the excitement of lust easily aroused.¹⁴¹ Skinner calls the wild rushing torrent “a fit emblem of the unbridled passion” of Reuben.¹⁴² The Targum of Onkelos translates, “You followed your own direction just like water.”

Kidner summarizes the meaning of the entire phrase:

Unstable (*paḥaz*) is from the root which describes the lawless mob of Judges 9:4 and the wanton prophets of Zephaniah 3:4: it suggests wildness as much as weakness (cf. Speiser, ‘unruly’). It is this aspect of *water*, so quickly becoming an undisciplined torrent, as in Proverbs 17:14, which is the point of comparison. Reuben was a man of ungoverned impulse.¹⁴³

In noting that a similar root in Arabic means “to be boastful” and a similar root in Aramaic means “to be lascivious,” Kidner concludes that lack of restraint is the common element.¹⁴⁴

Many think of a textual corruption here, but they have nothing better to offer.¹⁴⁵ The opening phrase of this verse well suits the context as well as the metrical arrangement of this tribal saying.

The reason for not being pre-eminent follows. Skinner states that the outrage referred to in this verse “must denote some attack on the unity of Israel which the collective conscience of the nation condemned,” a view reflected in our earlier discussion of verse 3. He claims that the recollection of this event has already assumed legendary form, so that event itself must be considerably earlier than the poem.¹⁴⁶ However, as noted above, the historical background to this verse is Gen. 35:22, where Reuben lay with Bilhah, the concubine of his father Jacob.

¹³⁴ Gunkel, p. 479, “*Erster an ‘Tosen,’ Erster an Wildheit, schamlos wie . . . , sollst der Erste nicht sein!*”

¹³⁵ Kittel, p. 8.

¹³⁶ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 364; Stigers, p. 326; cf. E. A. Speiser, “The ‘Elative’ in West Semitic and Akkadian,” *Journal of Cuneiform Studies* 6 (1952):81-92.

¹³⁷ Leupold, p. 1170.

¹³⁸ James Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 333.

¹³⁹ Stigers, p. 326.

¹⁴⁰ Zobel, p. 6.

¹⁴¹ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 389; Aalders, p. 270.

¹⁴² Skinner, p. 514.

¹⁴³ Kidner, p. 216.

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ E.g., Kittel, p. 9.

¹⁴⁶ Skinner, p. 514.

One of the textual problems in this verse is the apparent construct plural of *miškebê*, “bed,” and the apparent singular with first person singular suffix, *yēšû ‘î*, “couch.” A perfect poetic parallelism exists between 49:4b and 49:4c, if one recognizes the consonantal text as correct, but the vocalization as incorrect in two places.

Gesenius (124a-b)¹⁴⁷ notes that the plural may collectively denote a combination of various external constituent parts. While Cross and Freedman prefer to read *miškābhî*, “my bed,” since the plural with this meaning is always elsewhere *miškābhōth*,¹⁴⁸ it is better to see in this word an archaism, in the light of the parallelism. Leupold thought that the form was a dual.¹⁴⁹ He was on the right track, but he failed to note the poetic parallelism in phrases b and c.

Cross and Freedman suggest reading *yēšû ‘î* either as a construct plural or a construct singular with the old genitive case ending.¹⁵⁰ To read a construct plural in the light of GK 124a-b produces a perfect parallelism, allowing the translator to translate both words in the singular, “bed” and “couch.” The LXX is rather literal at this point and translates *yēšû ‘î* with the singular and without the first person singular suffix, “Then you defiled the bed, which you ascended.” Note further the parallel passage in 1 Chron. 5:1, where *yēšû ‘ê ‘ābhîw* is the construct plural in reference to Reuben’s defilement of his father’s bed.

Cross and Freedman want to supply *‘alê*, a form of the preposition *‘al*, “upon,” in verse 4b, since the verb *‘ālāh*, “he went up,” usually occurs with the preposition (see Ps. 132:3).¹⁵¹ “Usually” does not mean “always.”

The final major change in the pointing of the verse takes place at the final word, *‘ālāh*. Barr, following Joseph Reider, lists *‘allāh* with the meaning “co-wife” for this verse.¹⁵² Reider notes that the concluding phrase of the verse makes no sense,¹⁵³ although various commentators have explained the concluding word in different ways. Cross and Freedman think the word is the misplaced preposition *‘al*, which should follow *kî ‘ālithā*, “for you mounted.”¹⁵⁴

E. W. Bullinger calls it heterosis, a figure of speech that involves the exchange of one voice, mood, tense, person, number, degree, or gender for another.¹⁵⁵ Kidner, Keil-Delitzsch, and Leupold explain the word by saying that Jacob at this point turns away from Reuben as a gesture of revulsion and speaks to his brothers in the third person.¹⁵⁶ Speiser emends the word to *‘ly* for an adverbial phrase, “to my sorrow.”¹⁵⁷ E. E. Kellett’s novel suggestion that the text should be emended to *selah* and be read as a musical note ignores the extremely rare occurrence of *selah* outside the Psalter.¹⁵⁸

While the explanation of Kidner and others makes sense, the suggestion of Reider results in perfect parallelism. Reider notes the parallel in Arabic, *‘alla*, “fellow-wife.”¹⁵⁹ Hans Wehr’s dictionary of modern written Arabic lists “concubine” as the meaning of *‘alla*.¹⁶⁰ Reider notes that Lane’s Arabic lexicon lists the word with the meanings “a woman’s fellow-wife, her husband’s wife.”¹⁶¹ Both Loren R. Fisher and Mitchell Dahood think of “concubine,” and rewrite *ya ‘ālāh*, apparently taking the final *yod* of preceding word as the first letter of *ya ‘ālāh*.¹⁶²

¹⁴⁷ E. Kautzsch, *Gesenius’ Hebrew Grammar*, 2nd English ed., trans. A.E. Cowley (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1910), hereafter referred to as GK.

¹⁴⁸ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 78, n. 9.

¹⁴⁹ Leupold, p. 1171.

¹⁵⁰ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 78, n. 10.

¹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, n. 8.

¹⁵² Barr, p. 333.

¹⁵³ Joseph Reider, “Etymological Studies in Biblical Hebrew 1. Gen xlix 4,” *Vetus Testamentum* 4 (1954):276.

¹⁵⁴ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 78, n. 8.

¹⁵⁵ E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (London: Messrs. Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1898; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), p. 510.

¹⁵⁶ Kidner, p. 216; Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 390; Leupold, p. 1171.

¹⁵⁷ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 364.

¹⁵⁸ E. E. Kellett, “Some Old Testament Notes and Queries,” *The Expository Times* 33 (1921-22):426.

¹⁵⁹ Reider, p. 276.

¹⁶⁰ Hans Wehr, *A Dictionary of Modern Written Arabic*, 3d ed., ed. J. Milton Cowan (Ithaca, NY: Spoken Language Services, 1971), p. 633.

¹⁶¹ Reider, p. 276.

¹⁶² Loren R. Fisher, *Ras Shamra Parallels: The Texts from Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible*, 3 vols. to date, *Analecta orientalis* 49-51 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1972-1981), 2:421. On this page Fisher comments approvingly on Dahood’s position.

The suggestion is plausible, but it involves a scribal mistake in word division and does not result in a neat parallelism between “bed” and “couch.”

It remains to be shown how the prophecy of Jacob was realized in the later history of the tribe of Reuben. Reuben never really took a leading position and never produced a prominent leader. While Reuben is listed first in eleven of the sixteen early lists of the twelve tribes, Reuben is first in only three of the eight lists after the conquest. His only time of partial initiative was in reaction to evil in the rebellion of Korah, Numbers 16. He failed to come to the aid of the other tribes in Judg. 5:15. Later he seems to have been overshadowed by another Transjordanian tribe, Gad.¹⁶³ He was exhausted by struggles like those with the Hagarenes, 1 Chron. 5:10, 18-22, and the Moabites, who eventually occupied most of the territory of Reuben, Num. 32:37, Jos. 13:16-21 with Isaiah 15, Jeremiah 48 *passim* and the Moabite Stone.¹⁶⁴ His territory is under the domination of Syria in 2 Kings 10:32-33. The tribe persisted until the Assyrian captivity, since it is mentioned with Gad and the half-tribe of Manasseh in the deportation of Tiglath-Pileser, 1 Chron. 5:26.¹⁶⁵

Gen. 49:5

“Simeon and Levi are two of a kind,	a	a'	3
instruments of violence are their swords.	b	b'	3

Kittel explains the structure of this oracle in the following way. Verse 5 is the address and charge: Simeon and Levi are fine brothers, they have committed a deed of violence. This is followed by a parenthesis in verse 6ab. Then follows the explanation of the deed of violence in verse 6cd, which is the basis of the curse in verse 7ab. Verse 7cd further develops the curse. Kittel calls this structure (Address and Charge, Curse) the basic structure of the prophetic sayings.¹⁶⁶

His intention is to find evidence of the reworking of this saying during the prophetic period, but it would suit the facts of the case just as well to see this oracle as part of the background to the prophets. Gunneweg sees verse 7ab as the climax of the saying, with verse 7cd as the exegesis of verse 7ab, in that the curse manifests itself in the dissolution and dispersal of Simeon and Levi.¹⁶⁷ The analysis of both Kittel and Gunneweg, divested of the presuppositions of both, helps the reader to see the structure and unity of verses 5-7 more clearly.¹⁶⁸

The historical background to this oracle is Genesis 34, the account of the rape of Dinah, the circumcision of the Shechemites, and the slaughter of the Shechemites by Simeon and Levi. That this chapter is the historical background is obvious to everyone who accepts the book of Genesis as historical. Those who believe that the names of the twelve sons of Jacob are mere eponyms and not historical personages have difficulty with the identification of the relationship of Genesis 34 and Gen. 49:5-7.

The critical reconstruction of the events leading up to this oracle begins with some deed of violence being done by the tribe of Simeon, a deed in which some feel that the Levites were involved,¹⁶⁹ while others feel that they were not.¹⁷⁰ The present oracle is evidence of some such deed, the particulars of which we supposedly do not know. Von Rad writes, “Whether the tribe of Simeon suffered a ‘catastrophe’ in the vicinity of Shechem, as is often assumed, is beyond our knowledge.”¹⁷¹ Gunneweg thinks it possible that the original positive value of a common action was reinterpreted as the opposite by the author of Gen. 49:5-7.¹⁷² What in Deut. 33:8-11 and Exod. 32:25-29

¹⁶³ Kidner, p. 216.

¹⁶⁴ Skinner, p. 515.

¹⁶⁵ M. C. Tenney, “Reuben,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 5 vols., ed. M. C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 5:86.

¹⁶⁶ Kittel, pp. 12-13.

¹⁶⁷ A. H. J. Gunneweg, *Leviten und Priester* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), p. 45.

¹⁶⁸ Also helpful is the repetitive poetic structure of the oracle: v. 5, a a'/b b'; v. 6, a b c/a' b' c'/d e f g/d' e' f' g'; v. 7, a b c/[a'] b' c'/d e f/d' e' f'.

¹⁶⁹ Gunneweg, *Leviten*, p. 50.

¹⁷⁰ Gunneweg names E. Nielsen as an example, *Leviten*, p. 48; Eduard Nielsen, *Shechem: A traditio-historical investigation* (Copenhagen: G.E.C. Gad, 1959), p. 283.

¹⁷¹ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 424.

¹⁷² Gunneweg, *Leviten*, p. 50.

is explained as devotion to Yahweh is explained in Gen. 49:5-7, according to some, in a negative sense as *hāmās*, “lawlessness,” by a later writer who resented the special status of the Levites.¹⁷³

Sometime after this event, both the tribe of Simon and the tribe of Levi had the experience of the dispersal of its tribal members among the other tribes. Whether this dispersal was accompanied by a military and political decline is supposedly uncertain.¹⁷⁴ However, this dispersal eventually came to be viewed as a curse upon Simeon and Levi for their participation in that deed of violence. Von Rad states that the purpose of Gen. 49:5-7 is to establish aetiologically “the dispersion of the two tribes which apparently really did occur.”¹⁷⁵ The dispersal, therefore, is accepted as a fact of history, and the event that is thought of as having precipitated it was historical. That event, however, may or may not have been a deed of violence. It might only have been some action that was perceived by others as being immoral.

As a result of the dispersal, which followed the deed of violence, these texts were written. Levi and Simeon were placed together in Genesis 49. Levi and Simeon were included in Genesis 34. Either both placements come from a common foundation, or one preceded the other. Most writers think of Genesis 34 as later.¹⁷⁶ Some feel that only Simeon originally appeared in Genesis 34 with Levi being added as a result of the occurrence of his name in Genesis 49. Some feel that the name Levi in Genesis 34 and Genesis 49 refers to a secular tribe with the same name as the Levites, but different from the Levites, a tribe which declined earlier and was not known during later years.¹⁷⁷ As Kidner noted earlier, critics create more problems with this viewpoint than they solve. In any case, critical scholars feel that the names Simeon and Levi are eponyms, that is, names used to designate some imaginary ancestor of the tribe.

It is certain that we cannot base an exegesis of Gen. 49:5-7 on conjecture. Perhaps the frank admission of Gunneweg best illustrates the futility of following the critical view of this oracle:

Neither a literary critical analysis nor the attempt to trace the development of Gen. 34 in a history of traditions way leads to such certain results that a productive basis for the discussion of the problems at interest here would be found in them.¹⁷⁸

“Simeon and Levi are two of a kind.” The usual interpretations of this phrase emphasize either the genetic relationship between Simeon and Levi (the word is *’ahīm*, “brothers”) or a similarity of nature. Cross and Freedman suggest a third interpretation: there was a close association between the two tribes historically, and in this blessing they are regarded as having a common origin and a common fate.¹⁷⁹ Skinner thinks that the reference to “brothers” is a survival of an old tradition in which Simeon and Levi were the only sons of Leah (see Gen. 34:1, 25).¹⁸⁰ The list of the sons of Leah in Genesis 35 is considered unhistorical. Skinner’s viewpoint is echoed again and again in critical scholarship.¹⁸¹

The logical choice is between the first two possibilities. A combination of the two is also possible. Most conservative commentators feel that both the idea of the same parentage and the same disposition is the correct view.¹⁸² The idea of similar disposition is a meaning sometimes attached to “brother” in the Old Testament (see Job 30:29, Prov. 18:9). Orlinsky’s comment is well-taken—the traditional “brothers” is hardly meaningful here, since all of them were brothers. He suggests translating “a pair,” citing the Targum of Jonathan, which translated “twins.”¹⁸³ Kidner suggests “two of a pair”;¹⁸⁴ “two of a kind” would be more colloquial on the North American continent.

¹⁷³ Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁷⁴ Ibid., p. 51.

¹⁷⁵ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 423.

¹⁷⁶ Zobel, p. 10; and others.

¹⁷⁷ Gunneweg, p. 52; and others.

¹⁷⁸ Gunneweg, p. 51: “*Weder eine literarkritische Analyse noch der Versuch, auf überlieferungsgeschichtlichem Wege den Werdegang von Gen 34 nachzuzeichnen, führen zu so sicheren Ergebnissen, dass in ihnen eine tragfähige Basis zur Diskussion der hier interessierenden Sachprobleme zu finden wäre.*”

¹⁷⁹ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 78, n. 12.

¹⁸⁰ Skinner, p. 516.

¹⁸¹ E.g., Kittel, p. 11.

¹⁸² Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 390.

¹⁸³ Orlinsky, p. 142.

¹⁸⁴ Kidner, pp. 216.-17.

“Instruments of violence are their swords.” The reference to the events of Genesis 34 begins here and is further explained in verses 6-7. Speiser translates “lawlessness,” because he notes the legal nature of the term and suggests that the traditional “violence” fails to show that nature adequately.¹⁸⁵ However, that suggestion is probably based on the view that the text is late. Gunkel’s emendation of *kʾlê* to *kʾlai*, “cunning,” is unlikely and unnecessary,¹⁸⁶ an emendation which no one has followed. The LXX, Symmachus, and the Targum of Onkelos understand *killû*, “they accomplished,” but Aquila, the Vulgate, the Syriac, the Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan have *kʾlê*, the reading which suits the context best.

The final word of the verse has not been so congenial to interpretative attempts. The versions reflect guesswork, and the etymology of the word is uncertain. KB calls the word *ungedeutet*, “unexplained.”

Some derive the word from *kārāh*, “to dig,” think *mikhrāh*, and translate “pit.” Gunkel translates “cunning and violence are their pits,” a phrase inappropriate for the killing of men.¹⁸⁷ Others prefer the root *kûr*, “to dig, dig through, pierce.”¹⁸⁸ Speiser mentions the Syriac translation “origins,” a translation that reflects the consonantly identical noun that is found in Ezek. 16:3, 21:35, and 29:14, in 16:3 as *mʿkhôrôthaikh*, “your ancestry,” from the noun *mʿkhôrāh* and the root *kûr*, “to dig, bore.”¹⁸⁹ Translations such as “spades” (NEB) or “swords” (RSV, NIV) are based on an assumed root meaning “to dig.” Dahood thinks of the familiar root *kārath*, “to cut,” with the preformative *ma/mi*, and translates “a cutting instrument,” possibly a blade or knife for circumcision.¹⁹⁰ Both the LXX and Aquila assume this root.

Bruce Vawter’s suggestion is rightly considered by Kittel as too far-fetched. It is a conjecture based on an emendation of the *kaph* to *shin*, so that the root is *šārāh* with the meaning “to originate.” He translates with the Jerusalem Targum, “from their very birth.”¹⁹¹ G. R. Driver suggests an Akkadian derivation in *makaru* or *makkaru*, “staff,”¹⁹² but we need to think of some kind of a sharp weapon. Kidner and some before him suggest that the Hebrew *mʿkhērāh* and the Greek *machaira*, “sword,” could have a common ancestry, or that one could be borrowed from the other, since there were contacts between Semitic and Indo-European peoples during this period.¹⁹³ Skinner admits: “How far the exegesis has been influenced by the resemblance to the Gr. μάχαιρα . . . we cannot tell.”¹⁹⁴

Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia (BHS) proposes translating “their nets,” that is, fishing nets, in a footnote, but the emendation is a guess. Speiser prefers a derivation from *mākhar*, “to sell, trade,” and translates “their wares.”¹⁹⁵ This translation is based on a supposed parallel in the Ethiopic and Arabic, *makara*, “to advise, counsel, deceive by guile.” Most scholars who mention this possibility would translate “Weapons of violence are their counsels.”¹⁹⁶ However, Dahood notes that both Arabic and Ethiopic are South Semitic and not Northwest Semitic.¹⁹⁷ Speiser says the parallel is based on “flimsy linguistic grounds.”¹⁹⁸ The comment of Keil and Delitzsch is well taken that “plans, counsels” do not accord with “instruments of.”¹⁹⁹ Cross and Freedman think of a possible connection with the Hebrew *mkr*, “merchandise,” noting also the Hebrew *makkar*, “broker,” and the Ugaritic *mkr* with the same meaning. They translate “implements of violence are their stock in trade.”²⁰⁰ The Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan thinks of the root *nkr*, in later Hebrew the equivalent of *yādha*, “to know.”

In view of the context (verses 6-7) and the events recorded in Genesis 34, Skinner’s conclusion is still the most reasonable: “Of the many Heb. etymologies proposed . . . , the most plausible are those which derive from ✓

¹⁸⁵ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 117.

¹⁸⁶ Gunkel, p. 480.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸⁸ Leupold, p. 1172, the old grammarians.

¹⁸⁹ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 365.

¹⁹⁰ M. Dahood, “MKRTYHM in Genesis 49, 5,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 23 (1961):55.

¹⁹¹ B. Vawter, “The Canaanite Background of Gen. 49,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 17 (1955):3-4.

¹⁹² G. R. Driver, “Some Hebrew Roots and their Meanings,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 23 (1922):70.

¹⁹³ Kidner, p. 217. Cf. Cyrus H. Gordon, “The Role of the Philistines,” *Antiquity* 30 (1956):23.

¹⁹⁴ Skinner, p. 516.

¹⁹⁵ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 365.

¹⁹⁶ Edw. Ullendorff, “The Contribution of South Semitics to Hebrew Lexicography,” *Vetus Testamentum* 6 (1956):194; Barr, pp. 57, 270, 330; Dillmann, Ludolf; D. Winton Thomas, “The Root מַכַּר in Hebrew,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 37 (1936):388-89.

¹⁹⁷ Dahood, “MKRTYHM,” p. 55.

¹⁹⁸ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 365.

¹⁹⁹ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 390.

²⁰⁰ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, pp. 78-79, n. 13.

כרר or (reading) from מִכַּר ·, ‘to dig.’²⁰¹ He notes that there has not actually been found a root *kārar* ‘dig,’ but it may be a by-form of *kārāh*. Some type of lethal weapon suits the context best. Zobel also prefers a derivation from *kārar* and translates “their swords.”²⁰²

Gen. 49:6

“Let me not enter their council,	a	b	c	3	
let me not be joined with their assembly,	a’	b’	c’	3	
for in their anger they killed men,	d	e	f	g	3
and at their pleasure they destroyed leading citizens.	d’	e’	f’	g’	3

In this verse, the noun *sōdh*, “council,” occurs for the first time in the Bible and *qāhāl*, “assembly,” for only the third time (after 28:3, 48:4), according to those who understand the Pentateuch as a piece of Mosaic history. The first two occurrences of *qāhāl* appear in the phrase *liqhāl ‘ammīm*, “a community of peoples.” In each context it is a reference to the blessing that God promised Jacob in the form of many descendants. In Gen. 49:6 Jacob is saying, “God promised as a ‘community of peoples.’ I will not, however, be a part of a community of peoples which rejects the blessing of God by such crude disobedience. As a matter of fact, God will prevent that type of activity from having a chance to grow and influence the other families by scattering them (verse 7), much like God scattered the people at Babel.” The same root, *pūs*, “to scatter,” used in verse 7 also appears in Gen. 11:8-9 in the Babel story.

It is better to take the two nouns and the phrase in which they occur in a general sense, rather than to find a reference to some tribal gathering.²⁰³ The analogy of antecedent Scripture (see above on verse 1) requires that we not read all of the theology of later passages back into the early sections of Scripture.

Leonhard Rost suggests that *qāhāl* might here mean a “call to arms” in the military sense, but that suggestion is unlikely, even if the verse is considered to be written during the time of the Judges.²⁰⁴ Others think of the amphictyonic assembly at which a decision was made to exclude the tribes of Simeon and Levi from the assembly.²⁰⁵

There is not a great deal of difference in the choice between *k^ebhōdhî*, literally “my glory,” and *k^ebhēdhî*, literally “my liver.” It is a matter of the vowel pointing only. Various scholars line up on either side of the debate. The versions are likewise divided. For example, the LXX translates “my liver,” while the Vulgate has “my glory.”

Von Rad prefers *k^ebhēdhî*, a term used here to express something of the individuality of a person. He cites Ps. 7:5, 16:9, 30:12, 57:8, and 108:1 as additional possibilities for repointing the noun to read “liver.”²⁰⁶ In Ps. 7:5 *k^ebhōdhî* occurs in parallelism to *naphsî*, as in our text. Gunkel suggests “my liver,” on the basis of the Psalms, citing also Lam. 2:11, where the pointing is *k^ebhēdhî*.²⁰⁷ Kittel translates “*mein Herz*” without comment.²⁰⁸ Cross and Freedman read *k^ebhēdhî*, following the LXX while acknowledging that the MT may be correct. They state, however, that Ugaritic usage points to the reading of *k^ebhēdhî*, since *kbd*, “liver,” occurs in parallelism with *lb*, “heart,” and *irt*, “chest, lungs.”²⁰⁹ While stating that the traditional text is defensible as “my being,” Robert Davidson reminds us that the liver was closely associated with strong emotions in the Hebrew psalms. He suggests “heart” as a good translation.²¹⁰ Dahood notes that the lack of gender agreement is easier, if *k^ebhēdhî* is read with the LXX.²¹¹ BDB lists *kābhēdh* as feminine, while it lists *kābhōdh* as masculine, but feminine only in Gen. 49:6. Dahood notes, however, that *tēhadh* may be feminine by attraction from *tābhō*, “enter.”²¹²

²⁰¹ Skinner, p. 516.

²⁰² Zobel, p. 7.

²⁰³ Zobel (p. 7, n. 11) and many others think of some tribal gathering.

²⁰⁴ For this insight, I am indebted to Zobel, p. 9, where he cites Leonhard Rost, *Die Vorstufen von Kirche und Synagoge im Alten Testament: eine wortgeschichtliche Untersuchung*, 2nd ed., in *Beiträge zur Wissenschaft vom Alten und Neuen Testament*, vol. 24 (Darmstadt: Wissenschaftliche Buchgesellschaft, 1967), p. 9.

²⁰⁵ Gunneweg, *Leviten*, p. 47.

²⁰⁶ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 424.

²⁰⁷ Gunkel, p. 480.

²⁰⁸ Kittel, p. 11.

²⁰⁹ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 79, n. 16.

²¹⁰ Davidson, p. 303.

²¹¹ M. Dahood, “A New Translation of Gen. 49,6a,” *Biblica* 36 (1955):229.

²¹² *Ibid.*

Speiser states that *kābhōdh* usually means “essence, being, presence,” even when applied to the deity. According to Speiser, the LXX reading is not a logical parallel to “self, soul.”²¹³ Kidner notes that “my glory” (if not re-pointed to “liver”) is used in some of the psalms in parallelism with “my soul.” The root idea is that of something weighty. In contrast to Cross and Freedman, Kidner adopts the MT, acknowledging that the LXX could be right, since vital organs are used figuratively of the life or emotions in many languages.²¹⁴ Leupold, Keil and Delitzsch, and Aalders support “my glory” in the sense of the personal pronoun “I.” Orlinsky draws a parallel to the Arabic *dhati*, “my being, self, essence,” considering “glory” in the sense of “self, being,” a good parallel to “my person.”²¹⁵ Zobel advocates the MT on the grounds that a change from *kābhēdh* to *kābhōdh* by the Masoretes is not understandable. Outside of this passage *kābhōdh* is never found in the mouth of Jacob nor used with reference to him, although Isa. 17:4 uses *k^ebhōdh ya^aqōbh* to designate the people of Israel.²¹⁶

While no conclusion can be reached with certainty, the reading *k^ebhēdhî* is to be preferred for several reasons. The lack of agreement in gender between noun and verb suggests a feminine subject. The archaic nature of the chapter suggests that later scribes could easily have misunderstood the MT, as von Rad suggests has happened in some of the psalms. The LXX may well be following a more reliable Hebrew *Vorlage*. Finally, the emotional nature of this oracle, a curse upon Simeon and Levi by their father, is better suited to the use of a term that is associated with the emotions in Hebrew thought.

The difficult verb form, *tēhadh*, “join,” is usually understood as a form of the root *yāhadh*, “to be united.” The difficulty is complicated by the rarity of the root in the Old Testament. According to Gerhard Lisowsky and Rost, *yāhadh* appears three times in the Old Testament, twice in the Qal, Isa. 14:20 and our text, and once in the Piel, Ps. 86:11.²¹⁷

Wilfred Watson thinks he recognizes a Hebrew idiom that occurs here and in Ps. 86:11, based on the root *hādihāh*, “to rejoice.” He translates, “I shall not be happy in their company.”²¹⁸ However, the versions do not support this translation, and the parallelism with *tābhō*’ requires some word that expresses movement on the part of the speaker. Dahood claims that “to be united” lacks a genuine poetic ring. Instead he suggests a derivation from the Ugaritic root *haday(ah)* (see *hāzāh*), which in Arabic means “to fix, settle,” hence “to fix one’s gaze.” He claims that the Ugaritic *’ahd* and *wyhd* could mean “I gaze” and, therefore, vocalizes *tēhadh* as *tehādih*, a Niphal jussive, and translates, “let not my liver be seen in their assembly.”²¹⁹

Barr thinks that there may have been a time when *daleth* and *resh* were written as the same grapheme. Therefore, *tēhadh* should be read as *tēhar*, based on the root *hārāh*, “to view, contend, compete.” The existence of that root with that meaning is questionable, however. Barr cites only the Hithpael forms of *hārāh*. He claims that Rahlfs overlooked the LXX variant *erisai*, from the root *erizō*, “to vie, contend, dispute.” *Erisai* is a direct translation of *tēhar*, he contends, and it has strong manuscript support. He notes further than the Samaritan text has *yhr*.²²⁰

Barr’s suggestion that there may have been a time when *daleth* and *resh* were indicated by the same grapheme is conjecture. It is just as likely that we have an error in the scribal transmission, one that has been demonstrated elsewhere among the various manuscripts. A comparison of the MT of Isaiah with 1QIsaa, for example, shows this confusion at Isa. 9:8, 14:4, 33:8, and 47:10. Both the Samaritan text and the LXX may have followed the same scribal mistake in their translation, although that is not certain for the LXX. The LXX reading *ereisai* may be translated “to lean on, support.” This verb may have been used in the sense of “and their gathering may my heart not support,” because to unite with a group is to support it.

We return to the usual understanding of *tēhadh*. Cross and Freedman translate, “Into their council enter not, O my soul! In their assembly, do not join, O my heart!”²²¹ Speiser calls “be joined with” a suitable parallel to

²¹³ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 365.

²¹⁴ Kidner, p. 217.

²¹⁵ Orlinsky, p. 142.

²¹⁶ Zobel, p. 9.

²¹⁷ Gerhard Lisowsky and Leonhard Rost, *Konkordanz zum Hebräischen Alten Testament*, 2d ed. (Stuttgart: Württembergische Bibelanstalt, 1958), p. 598; hereafter cited as Lisowsky.

²¹⁸ Wilfred G.E. Watson, “Hebrew ‘to be happy’: an idiom identified [Gen 49:6; Ps. 86:11],” *Vetus Testamentum* 31 (January 1981):92.

²¹⁹ Dahood, “A New Translation,” p. 229.

²²⁰ James Barr, “Επίζω and Ερείδω in the Septuagint: A Note Principally on Gen 49:6 [Jer 12:5, 22:15, Sirach 8:2, 11:9, et al],” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 19 (Autumn 1974):198-215.

²²¹ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 79, n. 15.

“enter.”²²² Kidner thinks that the name Levi, “joined” in 29:34, may have suggested the unholy alliance from which Jacob recoils with the words “be not united, joined,” even though a different root is involved.²²³ All of the major English translations translate “join.” In view of the archaic nature of both *tēhadh* and *k^ebhōdhī*, it is extremely unlikely that verse 6ab is a late editorial gloss, reflecting the nature of classical prophetism.

In the second half of the verse we meet two parallel terms, *ʾīs* and *šōr*, literally “man” and “ox.” Most have translated like the NIV, “for they have killed men in their anger and hamstrung oxen as they pleased.” Both nouns have long been recognized as collectives. The question arises in regard to the nature of the parallelism. Leupold takes the mention of the hamstringing of oxen as supplementary information not given in Genesis.²²⁴ Aalders says that perhaps Simeon and Levi hamstringed only some of the oxen. There is no contradiction to Genesis 34, he asserts.²²⁵ Keil and Delitzsch are more careful. They note that Genesis 34 does not mention hamstringing, but that it doesn’t exclude it either. They suggest that Jacob mentions it, because it most strikingly displays the criminal wantonness of the two brothers.²²⁶ Von Rad takes the reference as historical.²²⁷

In the light of the many parallels to Ugaritic literature in the rest of Genesis 49, it is better to take Vawter’s suggestion. Noting that Genesis 34 says nothing about hamstringing and that Gen. 49:6 is a rather curious parallel between “man” and “ox,” he offers another translation. In Ugaritic, “bull” frequently means “male.” Vawter cites 128:IV:6-7, 17-19 and 51:VI:44-54, translating *ʾāqar* in its basic meaning, “to upturn, destroy, render useless.”²²⁸ Kidner cites this translation as a possibility.²²⁹

The comments of Cross and Freedman on the poetic nature of these verses are relevant. They feel that there is no need to look for historical or mythological reflections here. This kind of non-exact, highly figurative language is common to early Canaanite and Hebrew poetry and is used to create a striking and dramatic picture.²³⁰ They state,

This is impressionistic poetry at its best. What is involved here is not a reference to the particular slaying of men or the maiming of beasts, but a general though sharp impression of the lawlessness and violence of the two tribes.²³¹

Without adopting Cross and Freedman’s assumptions about both the non-historical nature of the verse and the verse as a witness to the early history of the tribes, we can accept their description of the poetic language. “Ox” may indeed be a poetic term for “male” or “leading citizen.” Such an understanding avoids the mild discrepancy between this verse and Genesis 34, while providing us with a closer parallel between verse 6c and verse 6d.

C. M. Carmichael’s suggestion that *ʾīš* refers to Hamor, who represents the Hivites slaughtered by Simeon and Levi, and that the ox is Jacob, weakened or hamstrung by the action of Simeon and Levi, is too wild to merit any further attention.²³² Walter Krebs’ idea that we have a reference to certain ideas of the afterlife in the expression “to hough an ox” deserves the same response.²³³

Gen. 49:7

“Cursed be their anger, so fierce,	a	b	c’	3
and their fury, so cruel!	[a’]	b’	c’	3
I will divide them in Jacob	d	e	f	2
and scatter them in Israel.	d’	e’	f’	2

²²² Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 365.

²²³ Kidner, p. 217.

²²⁴ Leupold, p. 1174.

²²⁵ Aalders, p. 272.

²²⁶ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 391.

²²⁷ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 423.

²²⁸ Vawter, “Canaanite Background,” p. 4.

²²⁹ Kidner, p. 217.

²³⁰ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 79, n. 19.

²³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 79-80, n. 19.

²³² C. M. Carmichael, “Some Sayings in Genesis 49,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 88 (December 1969):435.

²³³ Walter Krebs, “. . . sie haben Stiere gelähmt,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* (New Series) 78 (1966):361.

Little needs to be said about the first two stichs of the verse, other than an insight from Ugaritic that the parallel *kī* is used in the sense of “indeed,” (see Gen. 18:20, Ps. 18:28-29).²³⁴ Jacob is speaking a curse upon Simeon and Levi, following the address and charge.

It is of the second half of the verse that questions are raised. Gunneweg says that verse 7cd may be regarded as the exegesis of the saying and not an original part of it. In this he follows Sigo Lehming.²³⁵ However, the neat poetic structure of the oracle, pointed out above, speaks against the later addition of verse 7cd. Part of the problem is in the occurrence of the names “Jacob” and “Israel” in parallelism. The words are obviously a reference to the nation as a whole, as Zobel notes.²³⁶ The question arises as to how Jacob could speak of the nation Israel before there really was one. The answer is to be found in verse 1, where the patriarch tells his sons to gather together so that he may tell them what will happen to them “in days to come.” Here that prophetic cast to the oracles is most evident. Zobel notes that Jacob occurs with this meaning only in poetic literature, especially in the prophets (see 2 Sam. 23:1[3], Isa. 14:1, 40:27, 41:8, 14), and he suggests that in 49:5-7 we have a prophetic curse, thoughts similar to those expressed by Kittel above.²³⁷ He is correct, although he places the statement later in history than conservatives would.

It should be noted that there is nothing of the priesthood in this verse or anywhere in the oracle. That fact places this oracle in history prior to the establishment of the tribe of the Levites as the priestly tribe (see Exod. 28:1). Not only is the priesthood not mentioned, but the person of Levi is treated as a secular person with no associations with divine service.

The use of the first person is the other factor, in addition to the mention of Jacob and Israel as though the nation already existed, that leads many to reject this part of the verse as a later addition to the text. Von Rad states that the “I” rules out Jacob as the author. It is God Himself who speaks.²³⁸ Leupold solves the difficulty by a reference back to verse 1. This is also a word of prophecy. Jacob spoke what was God’s will, as though Jacob in his authority as head of the family determined what would happen and by his speaking actually assured that it would be carried out.²³⁹ We ought not to overlook the ancient custom regarding the binding nature of the oral will, blessing, or curse. Cross and Freedman mention Gunkel approvingly, when Gunkel says, “Jacob himself scatters them, even through this curse.”²⁴⁰ The manner of speaking, as though the speaker were God doing the scattering, creates no difficulty.

The later history of these two tribes demonstrates the two responses of people to the law: hardness of heart and repentance. Levi’s curse remained in its external form, but it was changed into a blessing, perhaps through the obedience of the tribe in Exod. 32:25-29, where they stood by Moses after the golden calf incident. Kidner comments that Scripture contains nothing of the fixity of fate in such decrees and refers us to Jer. 18:7-8.²⁴¹

One problem with this view of Exodus 32 is that it follows Exod. 28:1, where Moses set aside Aaron and his four sons for the priesthood. However, it is likely that the attitude of repentance among the Levites was present long before both passages, an attitude which caused them to side with Moses at a later time.

The external form of the curse remains for Levi, in that they do not receive an inheritance of land in Canaan. Instead, they receive forty-eight Levitical cities, six of them also cities of refuge (see Josh. 20-21). This kind of an oracle is its own proof of its genuineness and its ancient date. Keil and Delitzsch comment, “After this honourable change had taken place under Moses, it would never have occurred to anyone to cast such a reproach upon the forefather of the Levites.”²⁴²

The story of the Simeonites is different. Not only is the tribe scattered in Israel; it suffers as a result of this scattering. Actually the first evidence of the curse is that after 40 years of wandering, Simeon is the smallest of the twelve tribes, according to Num. 26:14. There are just 22,200 males twenty years old and older. After the census in Numbers 1 and 2, however, Simeon had had 59,300 men of that age. At that time Simeon was listed in its normal place in the second group of the tribes with Reuben and Gad. We may surmise that many of the Simeonites, because of their rebellious nature, perished in the wilderness as punishment for their sins, more so than any other tribe.

²³⁴ Fisher, 3:195.

²³⁵ Gunneweg, *Leviten*, p. 46, n. 1, citing Sigo Lehming, “Zur überlieferungsgeschichte von Gen 34,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* (New Series) 29 (1958):245, n. 81.

²³⁶ Zobel, p. 9.

²³⁷ Ibid.

²³⁸ Von Rad, *Genesis*, pp. 423-24.

²³⁹ Leupold, p. 1174.

²⁴⁰ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 80, n. 20, citing Gunkel, *Genesis*, p. 480.

²⁴¹ Kidner, p. 217.

²⁴² Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 391.

When Moses blesses the twelve tribes in Deuteronomy 33, Simeon is omitted. This may be a further impact of the curse of Genesis 49. Furthermore, when the Promised Land is divided up among the tribes, Simeon is allotted only a number of cities, seventeen according to Josh. 19:1-9, within the territory of Judah. Many of these cities were either never conquered by the Simeonites or were later abandoned or taken over by Judah. At least three of these cities belong to Judah, not Simeon, during the time of David. Beersheba is a city of Judah (2 Sam. 24:7, 1 Kings 19:3). Hormah belongs to Judah (1 Sam. 30:30). Ziklag is a Philistine city that is given to David (1 Sam. 27:6).²⁴³

Later, 1 Chron. 4:24-31 recognizes the limited growth of the tribe, especially in verse 27. Verse 31 makes the strange comment that thirteen of the original seventeen cities were Simeonite cities “until David reigned.” Some early Jewish scholars believed that when David became king, Judah drove the Simeonites out of the cities of Judah.²⁴⁴

In 1 Chron. 4:34-41, we read that a settlement of Simeonites in the reign of Hezekiah settled in Gedor, a territory of uncertain location inhabited by the Meunites, whom the Simeonites exterminated. This may reflect a settlement outside of the land of Judah. Verses 42 and 43 of that chapter indicate that some of the Simeonites moved to Edom and settled there. A later reference in 2 Chron. 34:6 finds the Simeonites partly scattered among the northern tribes. The lack of an inheritance of land for the Simeonites indeed proved to be a curse.

Gen. 49:8-12

Some think that the arrangement of the first four tribes was intended to express the dominion of Judah. After Reuben, Simeon, and Levi have been rebuked, Judah is the first tribe that can be unreservedly praised.²⁴⁵ In the total context of Messianic prophecy, we see here the narrowing of the Messianic promise to Judah, after the promise of blessing has been passed from Shem to Abraham to Isaac to Jacob.²⁴⁶

Those who reject the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch find here a reference to the superiority of the tribe of Judah after the fact. Davidson notes regarding this oracle, “It presupposes the establishment of the Davidic monarchy and the state of Judah.”²⁴⁷ Von Rad calls these verses a series of statements that are in part extravagantly laudatory.²⁴⁸ Gunkel thinks this oracle may have been recited at a Jewish national celebration, after the establishment of the Davidic kingdom.²⁴⁹ Many other authors likewise think of the saying as a *vaticinium ex eventu*.

J. Blenkinsopp draws our attention to the many allusions in the Old Testament to Gen. 49:8-12, especially to verse 10. He cites Num. 24:17, Num. 23:24 and 24:9, Isa. 11:10 (LXX), Isa. 42:1-4 (LXX), Ps. 108:8, Ps. 2:7-9, Micah 5:8-9 in that this name is *šālôm*, Zech. 9:9-10 in that “your king comes to you” reflects “until Shiloh comes.” He also suggests that there is an allusion to the Judah oracle in Mark 11:1-6, the account of the triumphal entry of Jesus into Jerusalem, in the riding and untying of the ass. The other Gospels reflect Gen. 49:10 in their use of *ho erchomenos* in reference to the bringer of Messianic fulfillment and the setting up of the Messianic kingdom in Zion.²⁵⁰

Blenkinsopp also cites the usage of Gen. 49:8-12 in later Christian and even pre-Christian writings, for example, Origen, Irenaeus, Cyprian of Carthage, the Pseudo-Clementine collection, and Josephus.²⁵¹ However, the history of the interpretation of this oracle is outside the scope of this study.

Gunkel expresses the commonly held viewpoint of the history of traditions school. This oracle consists of three originally independent sayings: verse 8, verse 9, and verses 10-12.²⁵² Kittel adopts the same point of view and gives reasons. First, he notes the threefold naming of Judah (verses 8, 9, 10), supposedly a signal of three original oracles. In verses 16-17, Dan is named twice, a fact which leads most exegetes to judge that oracle as two originally independent sayings. Secondly, he mentions the change of person from second person to third person, a fact which

²⁴³ Skinner, p. 518.

²⁴⁴ Aalders, p. 275.

²⁴⁵ For example, Gunkel, p. 480.

²⁴⁶ K. Smyth, “The Prophecy concerning Juda, Gen 49:8-12,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 7 (1945):290.

²⁴⁷ Davidson, p. 304.

²⁴⁸ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 424.

²⁴⁹ Gunkel, p. 481.

²⁵⁰ J. Blenkinsopp, “The Oracle of Judah and the Messianic Entry,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 80 (1961):56-59.

²⁵¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 60-61.

²⁵² Gunkel, p. 477.

led Gressmann to divide the oracle into two parts: verses 8-9 and verses 10-12. Thirdly, he points to the content. In verses 8-9, Judah is addressed as a son. In verses 10-12, Judah is thought of as a tribe. Furthermore, he states that there are no transitions from verse 8 to verse 9 and from verse 9 to verse 10. The content does not reflect the clearly recognizable structure of verses 3-4 and verses 5-7.²⁵³

Verses 10-12 are generally considered by critics to be a unified section. Zobel claims that the third person in those verses stands out in comparison to verse 8, the name of the tribe separates verses 10-12 from verse 9, and Judah is spoken of in these verses in a different way. He feels that one could call verses 10-12 a subsequent continuation or later interpretation of verse 9, since the tribal name is not at the head of verse 10 and since verse 10 contains pure imperfects (that is, translated as future) in contradistinction to verse 9 and other verses of the same kind.²⁵⁴

Kittel divides verses 10-12 into two sections. First is the address and announcement, dealing with Judah's power that will come to fulfillment, verse 10abc. Then there is the development of that announcement in the words about ruling over nations, verse 10d, the fruitfulness of the land, verse 11, and the beauty of the ruler, verse 12. He comments that that is also the basic structure of the prophetic saying.²⁵⁵

Edwin Good divides the oracle into four parts. Verse 8 with its pun on the name of Judah is one. Verse 9 and its lion metaphor of power with royal overtones is another. Verse 10 and the subject of eschatological kingship is a third. Verses 11-12 with the paradisiac imagery is a fourth.²⁵⁶ Skinner likewise divides the verses, preferring to follow Gunkel and others in the claim that verses 10-12 are a unified *dekastich*, thereby dividing the oracle into three original sayings.²⁵⁷

Primarily because of its animal imagery, critics commonly consider verse 9 to be the oldest saying. Such animal imagery is supposed to be reflective of earlier, more primitive forms of writing.²⁵⁸ This verse or its older kernel was then attached to verses 10-12. Finally, verse 8 was placed at the beginning as a heading summarizing the statements of the saying.²⁵⁹ Kittel comments that verse 8 belongs to a relatively late stage of development, because of its address form in a narration context.²⁶⁰

Sellin, on the other hand, opts for an interpretation that sees verses 8-12 as one unified saying, although he finds the origin of the saying in the time of David. According to Sellin, verse 8 is the introductory verse of the saying, anticipating the fact that Judah will overcome all enemies and that his history will end with the throne over all Israel. Verse 9ab belongs to the time of the Conquest, verses 9cd-10ab to the time of the Judges, and verses 10c-12 to the time of David where the goal of rulership over all Israel is attained.²⁶¹ While most critics disagree with Sellin, his position illustrates the fact that the saying can be viewed as unified.

Some of the literary characteristics seen by critics as evidence of independent sayings need not be so viewed. The threefold naming of Judah and the use of the second person may simply serve to provide emphasis. The literary precision of the transitions between verses or phrases that is expected of ancient authors by contemporary Western writers is often artificial.

The problem of the transitions between verses 8 and 9 and between verses 9 and 10 need not point to originally separate oracles. Rather, verse 9 may be viewed as a parenthetical remark, which illustrates the meaning of verse 8. Then verses 10-12 will be seen to follow smoothly from the meaning of verse 8; verses 10-12 show more specifically how it is that Judah's brothers will bow down to him.

There is a unified parallelism in the meter of the oracle with a climax in the middle and most important verse, a parallelism that may be diagrammed as follows:

v. 8	4:3:4
v. 9	3:3:3:3
v. 10	4:3:3:3

²⁵³ Kittel, pp. 14-15.

²⁵⁴ Zobel, p. 14.

²⁵⁵ Kittel, p. 22.

²⁵⁶ Edwin M. Good, "The 'Blessing' on Judah, Gen 49:8-12," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 82 (1963):427-28.

²⁵⁷ Skinner, p. 525.

²⁵⁸ So Kittel, p. 22; Zobel, p. 15.

²⁵⁹ Zobel, p. 15.

²⁶⁰ Kittel, p. 22.

²⁶¹ So the comments of Kittel, p. 16, on E. Sellin, "Zu dem Judaspruch im Jaqobsegen Gen 49, 8-12 und im Mosesegen Deut 33,7," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 60 (1944):57-67.

v. 11 3:3.3:3
v. 12 3:3

Note that the meter of verses 9 and 11 is identical. Note further than the meter of verse 10, the central verse of the saying and the most important, is the longest in metrical feet, although some judge the middle verse as 3:3.3:3. In the above metrical scheme, we are for the most part following Zobel.²⁶²

Kidner notes that up to verse 10c the theme is the fierce dominance of Judah among the twelve. Then with the coming of the promised one, the scene becomes an earthly paradise such as the prophets foretell. He writes, “It is a miniature of the biblical scheme of history.”²⁶³ The progression of thought from the beginning to the end of the oracle is a natural one, even if the transitions are not as smooth as some think they should be.

The outline suggested by Skinner, although not so intended by him, illustrates that progression of thought. He describes the saying as one demonstrating four aspects of the glories of Judah. Verse 8 describes Judah as the premier tribe of Israel; verse 9 as the strong and victorious lion-tribe; verse 10 as the bearer of the Messianic hope; verses 11-12 as lavishly endowed with the blessings of nature.²⁶⁴

In a manner quite similar to Skinner’s, we note that verse 8 is the introduction to the saying and a prediction of strength and dominion. Verse 9 contains a description of that strength. Verse 10 gives the result of that strength, that is, dominion and ultimate dominion of the Messiah. In verses 11-12 we read about the result of that dominion—peace and abundance. The verses are unified, although not according to the canons of critical scholarship.

Gen. 49:8

“Judah, your brothers will praise you;	a	b	c	d	4
(your hand will be on the neck of your enemies)	[a’]	e	f	g	3
your father’s sons will bow down to you.	[a’']	c’	b’	d’	4

Judah is the first to receive a full blessing, the blessing of supremacy and power.²⁶⁵ 1 Chron. 5:1-2 shows that Judah and Joseph receive the blessing of the firstborn, forfeited by Reuben. Joseph receives the birthright, and Judah receives the promise of a line of descendants from which is to come a ruler.²⁶⁶ Kittel comments, as did Gunkel above, that this saying contrasts with the curse of Reuben and of Simeon and Levi, apparently for the purpose of teaching that Judah has been promoted to the place of the firstborn. As a result, he thinks that the first three sayings (verses 3-12) should be taken together. The collector purposely placed them in that order so as to show the supremacy of Judah.²⁶⁷

The structure of the verse, according to Kittel, is as follows:

- a) Address with summons to praise, word play
- b) Reason: victory over enemy
- c) Result: downfall of brothers²⁶⁸

This verse is the first of three sayings that are found in this oracle, according to critical scholarship. The verse certainly could stand alone, but it serves an appropriate function as the heading to the entire saying. There is a similarity to the Reuben saying because of the address in the second person.

Gressmann takes verses 8-9 as one saying by striking verse 9a, “Judah is a lion’s cub,” viewing it as an ugly repetition and an unusual change in person. Kittel objects, saying that one cannot strike “Judah” in verse 9a just because it occurs again in verse 10. The elimination of the third person in verse 9a does not remove the difficulty of the change to the third person in verse 9cd.²⁶⁹ Indeed there is no inconsistency in the address in the second person,

²⁶² Zobel, pp. 4-5.

²⁶³ Kidner, pp. 217-18.

²⁶⁴ Skinner, p. 519.

²⁶⁵ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 392.

²⁶⁶ Leupold, p. 1176.

²⁶⁷ Kittel, p. 17.

²⁶⁸ Ibid.

²⁶⁹ Kittel, p. 16.

since the three sons that are addressed in the second person—Reuben, Judah, and Joseph—are addressed intentionally for the sake of emphasis.

W. F. Albright calls *y^ehûdhāh* a hypocoristic of *y^ehûdh^e'ēl*, which means “God is praised,” or more probably “Let God be praised.” He considers the form *y^ehûdhāh* a Hophal jussive of *hōdhāh*, “to praise.”²⁷⁰ Here Judah is addressed as an individual, not as a tribe, and one can easily imagine Jacob as the speaker.²⁷¹

The presence of *'attāh*, “you,” is difficult. Zobel thinks it accents the object of the sentence.²⁷² Cross and Freedman insist, however, that *'attāh* cannot be construed in the accusative case, in apposition with the verbal suffix, *-kā*. They write, “Examples in GK 135e of this construction are unsatisfactory, being either the result of textual corruption or not strictly applicable to the present case.” They translate, “Judah (art) thou; thy brothers praise thee!”²⁷³ Kittel wants to strike the pronoun with the LXX,²⁷⁴ but the LXX is more supportive of its presence than its absence: *Iouda, se ainesaisan hoi adelphoi sou*. Kittel suggests that either a predicate dropped out,²⁷⁵ or *'attāh* should be read as a vocative, and not an accusative.²⁷⁶

Another possible explanation is that we have here an archaic usage of the personal pronoun, a usage that would have been consistent with the patterns of speech at the time this oracle was spoken, but a usage that changed during the subsequent centuries. GK 135e would then be viewed as a correct explanation, but one that fails to take into consideration the development of language. We must also remember that we have here poetic language, language that sometimes suspends the normal conventions of language for literary effect.

Scholarly opinion almost universally favors some kind of a pun between *y^ehûdhāh* and *yôdhûkhā*. Skinner questions the etymological connection between the two words, but the opinion of Albright cited above suggests the same root for the two words.²⁷⁷ Kittel and Albright follow Gunkel²⁷⁸ in including the *yādhhkhā*, “your hand,” in this word play, obviously because of a similar sound only, with no etymological connection. Kidner notes the same word play,²⁷⁹ while Keil and Delitzsch, Leupold (apparently following Keil and Delitzsch), and Aalders note the original connection of “Judah” and “praise” in Gen. 29:35.²⁸⁰ Keil and Delitzsch comment that the speaker is saying that Judah should be everything that his name implied, namely he for whom Yahweh is praised.²⁸¹

Zobel writes that the only difficulty of the verse is whether to translate *yôdhûkhā* and *yīstah^awû* as jussives, present tenses, or optatives.²⁸² Drawing a parallel to Gen. 27:29, he translates “may your brothers praise you . . . may the sons of your father bow down before you,”²⁸³ obviously preferring the jussive. Kittel concurs, citing the sequence of the sentence.²⁸⁴ The difficulty is minor. Whatever the translation, the thought of the reader is directed to the future. Cross and Freedman also note the parallel to Isaac’s blessing of Jacob in Gen. 27:29.²⁸⁵ Smyth comments that with similar words Jacob had received the Messianic blessing in Gen. 27:29 which he now passes on to Judah.²⁸⁶ Some verbal parallels exist between the two verses. The word *l^e'aḥe(y)khā*, “over your brothers,” occurs in Genesis 27, the same word as in Gen. 49:8. Most noteworthy is the fourth phrase of Gen. 27:29, *w^eyīstah^awû l^ekhā b^enê 'immekhā*, “and may the sons of your mother bow down to you.” That phrase is identical to the final phrase of Gen. 49:8, except that in Genesis 49 *'abhikhā*, “your father,” occurs instead of *'immekhā*, “your mother.” The verbal parallels suggest that Jacob was conscious of that blessing which he had received from his father, when he blessed Judah. Furthermore, the parallels suggest that both verses should translate the verbs similarly.

²⁷⁰ William Foxwell Albright, “The Names ‘Israel’ and ‘Judah’ with an Excursus on the Etymology of Tôdâh and Tôrâh,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 46 (1927):173-74.

²⁷¹ Zobel, p. 8.

²⁷² Ibid.

²⁷³ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 81, n. 23.

²⁷⁴ Kittel, p. 14.

²⁷⁵ Cross and Freedman suggest *hodî*, “my majesty,” *Studies*, p. 81, n. 22.

²⁷⁶ Kittel, p. 17.

²⁷⁷ Skinner, p. 519.

²⁷⁸ Kittel, p. 17; Albright, p. 169; Gunkel, p. 481.

²⁷⁹ Kidner, p. 218.

²⁸⁰ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 392; Leupold, p. 1176; Aalders, p. 276.

²⁸¹ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 392.

²⁸² Zobel, p. 10.

²⁸³ Zobel, p. 4.

²⁸⁴ Kittel, p. 17.

²⁸⁵ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 81, n. 25a.

²⁸⁶ Smyth, p. 292.

The second clause presents no difficulties. Skinner sees it as the image of a defeated enemy, caught by the back of the neck in his flight and crushed. He cites parallels in Exod. 23:27, Ps. 18:40, and Job 16:12.²⁸⁷ Leupold concurs, citing especially 2 Sam. 5:1-3 as the historical fulfillment of this prediction.²⁸⁸ There all the tribes of Israel came to David at Hebron and pledged their allegiance to him as king. Cross and Freedman cite 2 Sam. 22:41, a parallel to Ps. 18:40, in reference to this phrase.²⁸⁹

The enemies to be thought of include the Philistines, Edomites, Ammonites, and Arameans. Aalders comments that some read “your hand will seize your enemies by the throat.” It is a stronger image, one Aalders considers more correct, referring to victory in actual combat.²⁹⁰ However, the one parallel verse cited in support, Job 16:12, need not be interpreted in that way. The other verses cited by other commentators above contain the word ‘*ōreph*, “neck, back of neck,” in an idiom that refers to the enemy in flight. Therefore, we ought to think of the enemy grasped at the back of the neck by Judah.

The middle phrase has been placed in a parenthesis in the translation given at the start of this discussion. There are several reasons for this. First of all, the first and third lines form an almost perfect parallelism: a b c d/[a'] c' b' d'. The b c/c' b' are a chiasm within the two lines. The second line, however, does not fit into the parallelism at all. It may be considered the reason Judah's brothers will praise him.

Secondly, the meter of the first and third lines is the same, while the meter of the second line is shorter. The verse is considered by Zobel to be a 4:3:4 meter.²⁹¹ The shorter metrical length of the second colon supports the view that it is parenthetical. In addition, if one looks once again at the metrical parallelism of the entire oracle, 49:8-12, one notes that the first and last verses would then consist of two cola, while the second, third, and fourth verses consist of three, with the middle verse of the five verses being the longest. This structure is reminiscent of the literary structure discovered by Kenneth E. Bailey in many Old and New Testament passages, particularly Form II with its inverted parallelism.²⁹²

Leupold comments in regard to the concluding colon that the phrase “sons of your father” includes also Judah's half-brothers.

Therefore, we have here a reference to the eventual superiority of Judah over all the tribes of Israel.²⁹³

Gen. 49:9

“(Judah is a lion's cub,	a	b	c	3
from the prey, my son, you have gone up.	d	c'	e	3
He crouched, he lay down like a lion,	f	f'	g	3
and like a lion—who dares to rouse him?)	g'	h	i	3

Kittel calls this verse the first genuine individual saying, because of the animal comparison and the concise wording.²⁹⁴ Critical scholarship traditionally prefers the shorter, more concise wording as the more ancient, assuming that longer sayings can be explained as embellishments of older, shorter sayings. Kittel is correct in thinking of the animal comparison as an indication of antiquity. It may even be older than the other verses in this oracle. It may have been incorporated by Jacob into this oracle, since it illustrated quite well the predicted pre-eminence of Judah that is spoken of in verse 8. Earlier it was stated that verse 9 may be seen as a parenthetical remark, since the transition from verse 8 to verse 10 is a smooth one.

There are six animal comparisons in Genesis 49, while there are only three in Deuteronomy 33, probably an indication of the relatively greater age of the former chapter and an indication of the greater emphasis on the individual than on the tribe. In Genesis 49 we find such animal comparisons in reference to Judah, Issachar, Dan, Naphtali, Joseph, and Benjamin in verses 9, 14-15, 17, 21, 22 (?), and 27 respectively. In Deuteronomy 33, animal comparisons are made in connection with Joseph, Gad, and Dan in verses 17, 20, and 22 respectively. The Cross and

²⁸⁷ Skinner, p. 519.

²⁸⁸ Leupold, p. 1177.

²⁸⁹ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 81, n. 24.

²⁹⁰ Aalders, p. 276.

²⁹¹ Zobel, p. 4.

²⁹² Kenneth E. Bailey, *Poet and Peasant: A Literary-Cultural Approach to the Parables in Luke* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), pp. 60-63.

²⁹³ Leupold, p. 1177.

²⁹⁴ Kittel, p. 18.

Freedman admit the uncertainty of the full meaning of the verse, but they accept the usual explanation as the best, namely that the lion rises from his prey and ascends to his mountain lair.²⁹⁵

The lion is a picture of strength and ferocity in the Old Testament. Numerous passages may be cited to demonstrate this fact, among them Amos 1:2, Joel 1:6, and Nahum 2:11-13. Aalders thinks that military prowess is particularly in view here, and he mentions Deut. 33:20, 22 (Gad and Dan), Num. 23:24 and 24:9 (Israel), Jer. 4:7, 5:6, and 25:38 (the Chaldeans), and Nahum 2:11-12 (Nineveh) in that respect. He suggests that the comparison to a lion was a universal proverbial statement, applicable to many tribes and nations (see Num. 23:24 and 24:9).²⁹⁶

Some commentators think that Rev. 5:5, with its description of Christ as “the Lion of the tribe of Judah,” is based on this verse.²⁹⁷ Kidner quotes Swete’s commentary on Rev. 5:5, “. . . the noblest son of the tribe of Judah is fitly styled the Lion of that tribe,” and himself comments that the New Testament sees Christ displaying a finer strength than the lion’s, since that lion, also a lamb, died and rose again (see Rev. 5:6).²⁹⁸

Vawter’s suggestion that a parallel with Ugaritic literature is to be found here is highly questionable. He would see Judah as conqueror of the southern shrine of the lion-goddess of a Canaanite cult, with Judah now assuming the place of that goddess.²⁹⁹ While the existence of a lioness-goddess in Canaanite worship has been verified, there is no clue in the text that the author had this goddess in mind.

The phrase *gûr ’aryēh*, “lion’s cub,” appears at the head of the sentence as predicate nominative for the sake of emphasis. It dominates the entire passage.³⁰⁰ A *gûr* is a young animal under the protection of its mother, therefore, Judah during her early years. The word *’aryēh* is one of seven words translated as “lion” in the Old Testament, a synonym of the shorter *’arî*. The parallelism of *aḥ* and *ary*, “brother” and “lion,” has been attested in Ugaritic. That would suggest a connection between verses 8 and 9.³⁰¹

The second clause of the verse has been variously understood. Most follow the Masoretic text and translate, “from the prey, my son, you have gone up,” understanding it in the sense of a lion ascending to its mountain lair after a kill.³⁰² Some take the verb in the sense of “to grow up,” on the basis of the LXX and Syriac. Gunkel translates, “On prey, my son, thou hast grown up,” and refers to Ezek. 19:3.³⁰³ While the translation “grow up” fits the picture of a lion growing from cub to adult, it is better to take the verb in its natural sense. Leupold cites Cant. 4:8 in reference to the existence of the lion’s mountain den in poetic literature.³⁰⁴ Kittel translates, “who tears to pieces the young animals,” repointing with KB, *m^etārēph b^enai ’alōth*, taking *m^etārēph* as a Piel participle. Zobel comments that after a nominal clause one might expect to find a participial clause, as in other similar passages (verses 14, 17, 20, 21), a comment that commends the suggestion of Kittel.³⁰⁵ However, passages like Gen. 49:5 begin with a nominal clause with no participial clause following. While no change in the consonantal text is required for this conjecture, there is no other occurrence of the Piel of *tārāph* in the Old Testament.³⁰⁶ Zobel’s translation, “that ascended from the prey in the pasture,” involves an emendation of the consonantal text and does not commend itself.³⁰⁷ Good’s theory that we have a reference to Gen. 37:18-35, the selling of Joseph into slavery, with Judah as a central actor and Joseph as the “prey,” is pure conjecture.³⁰⁸ Von Rad correctly observes that *tereph* occurs with reference only to the prey of animals.³⁰⁹

Zobel writes that “my son” is the only connection with verse 8 that is found in Gen. 49:9.³¹⁰ However, verse 9 continues the thought of verse 8c in that it explains how it is that Judah came to receive the obeisance of his brothers. The puzzling *b^enî*, “my son,” has been attested in Ugaritic literature in parallelism with “lion,” *bn . . . ary*.

²⁹⁵ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 82, n. 27; and many others.

²⁹⁶ Aalders, pp. 276-77.

²⁹⁷ Davidson, p. 304.

²⁹⁸ Kidner, p. 218.

²⁹⁹ Vawter, “Canaanite Background,” pp. 5-6.

³⁰⁰ Zobel, p. 11.

³⁰¹ Fisher, 3:15.

³⁰² For example, Skinner, p. 519.

³⁰³ Gunkel, p. 481: “*vom Raub, mein Sohn, wardst du gross.*”

³⁰⁴ Leupold, p. 1177.

³⁰⁵ Zobel, p. 11.

³⁰⁶ Kittel, p. 14.

³⁰⁷ Zobel, p. 11: “*das vom Raubzug in der Aue hinaufgestiegen.*”

³⁰⁸ Good, p. 429.

³⁰⁹ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 424.

³¹⁰ Zobel, p. 11.

While the precise significance of the parallelism escapes us, the Ugaritic suggests that we may have an archaism in the language.³¹¹

Many writers have noted the nearly identical citation of Gen. 49:9cd in Num. 24:9ab and the similarity in thought and in some of the language between Num. 23:24 and Gen. 49:9. Cross and Freedman call verse 9c an old poetic phrase that is applied to the entire nation in Num. 24:9,³¹² apparently indicating the proverbial nature of the phrase. The latter half of the verse further details the lion of verse 9ab, describing the lion as lying down at rest, so dangerous and powerful that no one dare disturb him. While Kittel states that there is no historical allusion to the growing strength of Judah,³¹³ Zobel notes that the lying down and resting can refer to people as well as animals,³¹⁴ thereby highlighting the application of the verse to the tribe.

Some translate *lābhi* as “lioness.” That, however, is the translation of the word pointed *lʿbhīyyā*, which appears only in Ezek. 19:2. Kidner claims that the word is simply a variant Hebrew term for lion.³¹⁵ Davidson writes that the word is probably a reference to a different species or breed of lion, citing Job 4:10-11, where five different words for “lion” occur.³¹⁶ Speiser thinks that the several Biblical words for “lion” designate either various breeds or various stages of growth.³¹⁷

This third occurrence of a word for lion further emphasizes the description of the power of Judah. The final phrase is usually thought of as a rhetorical question, “Who shall rouse him up?”, as a reference to the inviolable strength of Judah.³¹⁸ The same phrase appears in Num. 24:9.

³¹¹ Fisher, 3:42.

³¹² Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 82, n. 28.

³¹³ Kittel, p. 18.

³¹⁴ Zobel, p. 12.

³¹⁵ Kidner, p. 218.

³¹⁶ Davidson, p. 304.

³¹⁷ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 365.

³¹⁸ Zobel, p. 12.

Gen. 49:10

“The scepter will not depart from Judah,	a	b	c	4
nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,	[a’]	b’	c’ (bv)	3
until he comes to whom it belongs,	d	e	f	3
and to him belongs the obedience of the nations.	g	h	i	3

This verse has attracted more attention than any other verse in the chapter. It would be foolhardy to attempt an exhaustive study of this verse or of the various interpretations of the puzzling word *šilōh*. Instead, a summary of the major interpretations of *šilōh* will be given along with the names of scholars who hold those views, so that the exegesis of the text can proceed without allowing the discussion to become ponderous. The five major views that receive the most support in the literature will be given, followed by a brief mention of various other interpretations that are held. The five views are given in random order.

The first major view is that *šilōh* is a proper noun, the place name Shiloh. This view is held by Herder, Delitzsch, Ewald, Dillmann hesitatingly, Bennett, Hofmann, Eichhorn, Teller, Tuch, Lindblom, Eissfeldt, Albricht, Wordsworth, Jacob, Diestel, Strack, and Hitzig.

The second view takes *šilōh* as a proper noun referring to the Messiah. The Jewish Talmud (Sanhedrin 98b), the Targums of Jerusalem, Onkelos, and Pseudo-Jonathan, 4QPatrBl, Leupold, Aalders, Luther, Schröder, Armerding, Keil, early Jewish exegetes, and some of the early English translations such as the KJV support this view.

The third major position emends the text slightly to *šellōh*, “which is to him,” a contraction from “*‘ašer lō*, or “*‘ašer lōh*, and translates, “until he comes to whom it belongs.” Support is found in nearly all the ancient versions. The Syriac, the Targums of Onkelos and Jerusalem, the LXX, Aquila, Symmachus, Theodotion, some manuscripts of the Samaritan Pentateuch, some Hebrew manuscripts with *šlh*, the Old Latin, the Greek Fathers, and the Latin Fathers who used the Old Latin all suggest this reading, but the Vulgate does not.³¹⁹ Ezek. 21:26-27 (MT, verses 31-32) has also been cited in support. Kidner calls this passages the “best support” for this third position.³²⁰ Holzinger, Junker, Procksch, Chaine, Clamer, Smyth, Vaccari, von Rad, Orelli, Stigers, de Vaux, Kidner, and English translations such as the RSV and NIV also adopt this reading. It is the reading adopted in this paper.

The fourth major position divides the word into two words and reads *šay lōh*, “tribute to him.” Among the supporters are E. A. Speiser, W. L. Moran, Cross and Freedman, a Jewish midrash, some medieval Jewish writers, the Jewish Publication Society of America, and the NEB.

The fifth major position is held by G. R. Driver, Eisler, Halevy, the later Sellin, Nötscher, Meek, Coppens, Böhl, Barr, and Mowinckel. This view attributes the word to the Akkadian word *šelu*, meaning “prince.”

Among the less accepted suggestions is the view that the verse is an interpolation, since it supposedly breaks up the context. This is held by Wellhausen, Stade, Holzinger, Kautzsch, Dillmann, and Driver. However, Gunkel writes that the context is fine.³²¹ Some of those who hold this view also hold another view of the meaning of *šilōh* as interpolated into the text.

Some suggest reading *mašlōh*, “his (Judah’s) ruler.” Supporting this view are Marti, the early Sellin, Ball, and Gressmann. Hummelauer has conjectured *šē’ilōh*, or *šē’ilō*, “the one he has requested,” from the root *šā’al*, “to ask.” Gunkel and König think *šālēw*, “the one of peace,” “the Calm One,” from *šālāh*, a view not far from the second major view.

Bennett, Ehrlich, Schröder, and Good have hypothesized the proper noun *šelāh*, “Shelah,” with reference to the son of Tamar and Judah in Genesis 38, a view Gunkel called “foolish sophistry.”³²² Margulis thinks that a haplography occurred, and the words were wrongly divided. He reads *bē’išai lihyōth*, “. . . (son) of Jesse, to become . . .” A few in the distant past thought of *šillō*, “his newborn son,” or *šilyāh*, “afterbirth.” Some old Jewish interpreters held this view, as did Calvin and Luther.³²³ The Vulgate translates *qui mittendus est*, “who must be sent,” presupposing *šalū‘ah*. All of these views have serious flaws.

The five major views have fewer flaws, but each presents its own difficulty. The idea of the place name Shiloh makes no sense in the context and is elsewhere in the Old Testament always spelled differently than in Gen.

³¹⁹ Smyth, pp. 296-97.

³²⁰ Kidner, p. 218.

³²¹ Gunkel, p. 482.

³²² Ibid., p. 481.

³²³ Leupold, p. 1183.

49:10. Gunkel has correctly noted that a person is to be thought of in 49:10, since the phrase in verse 10d refers to him.³²⁴ Kittel notes that there would be no subject for verses 11-12, if Shiloh were a city, or if verse 10 were considered an interpolation. The existence of the Akkadian word *šelu* with the meaning “prince” has been strongly challenged. That leaves two possible interpretations, with the weight of the ancient versions resting upon the viewpoint adopted here.

Gunkel finds the obscure nature of the verse natural, because the Messiah is always spoken of in this oracular style as though his coming were a great divine secret.³²⁵ Most of those who differ on the exact meaning of *šilōh* agree that some Messianic meaning is to be attached to the verse and the word *šilōh*. That this person comes riding on a donkey (verse 11) is further evidence of its Messianic intent. The testimony of the ancient versions and various Jewish sources in this direction, among them 4QPatrBl, is strong.³²⁶

“The scepter will not depart from Judah.” Zobel calls *yāsūr*, “will depart,” a pure imperfect, referring to an event expected in the future, which is desired as the fulfillment of the statement in verse 10a.³²⁷ Therefore, the translation is “will not depart.” Leupold thinks we should have expected a passive verb form with the idea that no one will remove Judah’s scepter until a certain climax is achieved, that is, until Shiloh comes and obedience becomes his.³²⁸

“Scepter,” *šēbhet*, commonly denotes a rod, used as a tool, weapon, or object of protection or punishment. The word also denotes a scepter, the mark of authority, because of the association of smiting and ruling, as in the Akkadian cognate. The prophets predicted that the scepter of Israel’s enemies would be removed (Amos 1:5, Zech. 10:11), but Jacob says here that rulership will not depart from Judah until Shiloh comes. The word also denotes “tribe,” a meaning probably derived by association with its use to express rulership. It is never used of the tribes of non-Israelite nations.³²⁹ The word appears in the sense of “tribe” in verses 16 and 28.

Keil and Delitzsch comment that here the figure of verse 9 is carried out in literal terms. The scepter “in its earliest form . . . was a long staff, which the king held in his hand when speaking in public assemblies . . . and when he sat upon his throne he rested it between his feet, inclining towards himself.”³³⁰ The scepter symbolizes rule and dominion, or capacity for rule. Therefore, the verse teaches that rule over the tribes of Israel will sooner or later be conceded to Judah.³³¹

Skinner raises the question whether the emblems of scepter and staff denote kingly authority (this would presuppose the Davidic monarchy, according to Skinner), military leadership over the other tribes (doubtful, says Skinner), or the tribal autonomy of Judah.³³² Von Rad is correct when he states that these emblems do not necessarily have to be understood as attributes of a king, since they are also honorary symbols of tribal princes (see Mic. 7:14, Num. 21:18). However, von Rad continues, this assumption breaks down, because of the understanding of the passage (verses 10-12) as a whole.³³³ While von Rad thinks of this verse as being written around the time of David and the pre-eminence of Judah and referring to some event after David with the words “until he comes,” his argument that “scepter” and “ruler’s staff” refer to kingship holds true. The passage as a whole favors this view, whether one thinks of the verse as being written in the time of Jacob, the time of David, or any other time.

Smyth comments that there is nothing said here of an unbroken line of kings actually reigning until Christ, nor that the luster of the “scepter” will never grow dim.³³⁴ History, of course, bears that out. The emendation from *šēbhet* to *šōphēt*, “judge, charismatic leader,” suggested by Cross and Freedman on the basis of the similarity of the early script *pe* and *beth* in both form and sound, has no textual support in the MT or the versions.³³⁵ T. H. Gaster’s

³²⁴ Gunkel, p. 481.

³²⁵ Ibid.

³²⁶ J. M. Allegro, “Further Messianic References in Qumran Literature,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 75 (1956):175.

³²⁷ Zobel, p. 13.

³²⁸ Leupold, p. 1178.

³²⁹ Bruce K. Waltke, “שבט (*shbt*),” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., ed. R. Laird Harris (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 2:897.

³³⁰ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 393.

³³¹ Leupold, p. 1178.

³³² Skinner, pp. 519-20.

³³³ Von Rad, *Genesis*, pp. 424-25.

³³⁴ Smyth, p. 294.

³³⁵ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 82, n. 31.

suggestion of *mīyyādhōh*, “from his hand,” for *mīhūdāh*, “from Judah,” is similarly pure conjecture and entirely unnecessary.³³⁶

“Nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet.” The two words *šēbheṭ* and *m^ehōqēq*, “ruler’s staff,” are synonyms, as the poetic parallelism shows. We have diagrammed the first two cola in this way: a b c/[a’] b’ c’(bv). The term *m^ehōqēq* can mean “prescriber of laws,” or “commander,” as Deut. 33:21, Judg. 5:14 (where the term is used in parallelism to *šēbheṭ*), and Isa. 33:22 show. It can also mean “ruler’s staff,” as is seen from Num. 21:18, Ps. 60:7, 108:8.³³⁷ Morphologically, the word should mean “one who issues a *hōq*,” that is, a commander.³³⁸ In regard to etymology, Speiser thinks of something pertaining to a legislator or one in authority.³³⁹

In this context, it must mean a staff, because of the parallelism to “scepter” and because of the phrase “from between his feet.”³⁴⁰ When the commander is seated, this staff would rest between his feet.³⁴¹

Davidson summarizes well the two possible interpretations of *mibbēn raghlāyw*, literally “from between his feet.” “Feet” could be taken as a euphemism for procreation and be translated “from his descendants” with the NEB. The translation “from between his feet” is also defensible as a picture of a chief or king seated with the symbols of his authority lying at his feet.³⁴² Leupold comments, “the long ruler’s staff would be placed between the feet as the ruler sat on his throne and would then either rest against his shoulder or be held in the hand. Commentators here usually refer to monumental carvings of old Persian kings.”³⁴³ Most commentators adopt this literal rendering. It must be noted, however, that the LXX and Vulgate translate the phrase “from his thighs,” as a reference to the offspring of Judah. The Targums of Onkelos, Jerusalem, and Pseudo-Jonathan concur. Cross and Freedman offer an emendation, reading with the Samaritan Pentateuch *d^egālīw*, “his standards,” “his battle flags,” a good parallel to *mīhūdāh*.³⁴⁴

In connection with this phrase, Zobel properly notes that the tribe of Judah is personified in its representatives, because “feet” (verse 10a), “eyes,” and “teeth” (verse 12) are spoken of, and because his acts in verse 11 are described.³⁴⁵

“Until he comes to whom it belongs.” Does *’adh kī* mean “until” in the sense of “up to that point, but not beyond,” or does it mean “up to that point and beyond”? Kittel writes that it is a misunderstanding to take *’adh kī* as denoting a new beginning. He cites Gunkel, Procksch, Lindblom, and Eissfeldt, who take it as “not the end, but the climax.”³⁴⁶ The combination occurs three other times in the Old Testament, in Gen. 26:13, 41:19, and 2 Sam. 23:10. In Gen. 26:13, we read of Isaac, “The man became rich, and his wealth continued to grow until (*’adh kī*) he became very wealthy.” “Until” does not there mean that once he became very wealthy, he stopped being wealthy. It means “up to that point and beyond.” This is the widely accepted viewpoint among scholars today. Kidner summarizes, “49:10 predicts leadership for Judah . . . up to the time denoted by the ‘until’ clause, and (to judge by the buoyant tone of the oracle) still more from that time onwards.”³⁴⁷ Zobel calls the phrase inclusive, rather than exclusive.³⁴⁸ He notes, however, that Lindblom, Eissfeldt, and von Rad all consider the phrase to be late.³⁴⁹

Some early Christian writers believed that, according to this verse, the scepter was to recede from Judah before the Messiah came. Smyth comments that the “until” is against that, when properly understood. Most of those early writers thought of the kingship of Herod the Idumean as the departure of the scepter from Judah.³⁵⁰ Gunkel writes that an eternity is in view here,³⁵¹ and the Christian would agree that there has been an unbroken line of rule, primarily to be understood as a spiritual rule, from the time of the promise until today and continuing on into

³³⁶ Theodore H. Gaster, “Short Notes (zu Gen 49, 10),” *Vetus Testamentum* 4 (1954):73.

³³⁷ Leupold, p. 1178.

³³⁸ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 82, n. 32.

³³⁹ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 365.

³⁴⁰ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 393.

³⁴¹ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 365.

³⁴² Davidson, p. 304.

³⁴³ Leupold, p. 1178.

³⁴⁴ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, pp. 82-83, n. 33.

³⁴⁵ Zobel, p. 12.

³⁴⁶ Kittel, p. 19, n. 1.

³⁴⁷ Kidner, p. 218.

³⁴⁸ Zobel, p. 13.

³⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁵⁰ Smyth, pp. 295-96.

³⁵¹ Gunkel, p. 481.

eternity. John H. Bennetch connects verse 10c to verse 10d, when he writes that the word “until” “. . . denotes the turning-point to which the superiority of Judah will continue,—not then to cease, but at that time to be enlarged so as to embrace all the nations.”³⁵²

“And to him belongs the obedience of the nations.” “And to him” refers back to *šīlōh*, the person spoken of in verse 10c. Gunkel says that to call *w^elō* a gloss, as did Wellhausen, is an offense against the verse structure.³⁵³

The thought of this phrase is similar to the downfall of enemies mentioned in verse 8. In both places, foreign people are to be thought of, Kittel writes. He mentions Gressmann’s reference to Num. 24:15-19, where rule over the nations is prophesied through a mysteriously named ruler.³⁵⁴ Some of those who do not admit a Messianic sense to verse 10 take ‘*ammîm*’ to refer to the tribes of Israel.³⁵⁵ Rost says ‘*ām*’ can even designate the militia of a land.³⁵⁶ Von Rad writes that the obedience of related tribes could be in view here, but since that obedience is already the case (verse 8c), one has to think of the nations.³⁵⁷ Gunkel clinches the argument by writing,

The hope of world dominion belongs to the picture of the Messiah, Mic. 5:3, Zech. 9:10, Isa. 11:10, Pss. 2, 72ff., 110, and fits the context: just because the nations obey him, the Messiah lives in undisturbed happiness.³⁵⁸

That Gunkel thinks of this verse as from the time of David need not blind us to the truth of what he says.

In regard to the word *yiqq^ehath*, “obedience,” Leupold calls the word an attractive description of the conquests of the Gospel.³⁵⁹ Keil and Delitzsch see in the word the idea of the willing obedience of a son.³⁶⁰ The derivation of *yiqq^ehath* is difficult. All the versions translate with the idea of “expectation,” “awaiting,” or “gathering together,”³⁶¹ apparently presupposing some derivative of the verb *qāwāh*, “to wait for.” However, the root *qāwāh* would demand a *waw* instead of a *he* as the third letter of the noun. Smyth suggests going with the versions and making that change in the MT.³⁶²

Although challenged by Margulis,³⁶³ Barr defends the traditional view that the verbal root of the noun is *yāqāh*. The Arabic cognate, *waqiha*, “to be obedient,” is cited in BDB. Barr writes,

The rare word *yqhh* ‘obedience’ occurs only at Gen. 49:10, Prov. 30:17. The identification of this word is well established from comparative sources, e.g. both North and South Arabic. Late Hebrew and Jewish Aramaic on the other hand seem to show no trace of continued use. Translations such as LXX προσδοκία, Vulgate *expectatio*, probably derive from the likeness to the common *qwh* ‘hope’ (Lam. 2.16 προσδοκᾶν). The only faint association in late Hebrew is with *qhh* ‘faint, long for’ (Jastrow, p. 1322a). Yet the Targum with its וליה ישמעון עממיא [author’s note: translate, “the people will obey,” Onkelos] seems to indicate that the right sense was known. The complete disuse of a word, perhaps over many centuries, does not seem to have damaged the preservation of its form and sense; even the vocalization is in a credible form, and Rashi pointed out that the formation is the same as in *simhat*. The absence of any other obvious word with which confusion might have arisen may have assisted its preservation.³⁶⁴

Gesenius explains the *dagesh* and the *shewa* as a *shewa* strengthened by *dagesh forte dirimens* in order to make the *shewa* more audible, GK 20h.

³⁵² John H. Bennetch, “The Prophecy of Jacob,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 95 (1938):424.

³⁵³ Gunkel, p. 482.

³⁵⁴ Kittel, p. 20.

³⁵⁵ Smyth, p. 298.

³⁵⁶ Cited in Zobel, p. 13.

³⁵⁷ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 425.

³⁵⁸ Gunkel, p. 482.

³⁵⁹ Leupold, p. 1180.

³⁶⁰ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 398.

³⁶¹ For example, LXX, *prosdokia*, “expectation”; Vulgate, *expectatio*; Aquila, *systema*, “assembly.”

³⁶² Smyth, p. 298.

³⁶³ B. Margulis, “Gen. XLIX 10/Deut. XXXIII 2-3: A New Look at Old Problems,” *Vetus Testamentum* 19 (1969):203.

³⁶⁴ Barr, *Comparative Philology*, pp. 234-35.

The verse predicts the pre-eminence of Judah, primarily spiritual pre-eminence, but a spiritual pre-eminence that was also reflected at times in military and governmental success. This pre-eminence will last up to the time when the person comes to whom this pre-eminence truly belongs. Then this pre-eminence will continue in that person, the Messiah, and will be visibly demonstrated by the obedience of faith from people all over the world.

Gen. 49:11

“He ties his ass to a vine,	a	b	c	3
his colt to a choice vine;	[a’]	b’	c’	3
He washes his garments of wine,	d	e	f	3
his robes of the blood of grapes.	[d’]	e’	f’	3

Does the writer speak of the tribe of Judah or the Messiah? Leupold feels that if verses 11-12 refer to the Messiah, a rather fantastic and fanciful meaning is extracted. Perhaps he considers the language unworthy as a description of the work of the Messiah. If it refers to Judah, says Leupold, the verses describe the exuberant fertility that will prevail in his land, should Judah remain faithful to God.³⁶⁵ Smyth thinks that the context suggests that the tribe of Judah is the subject of these two verses and that the fertility of the tribe in Canaan is being described in hyperbolic language. He admits that grammatically the verses could refer to the Messiah.³⁶⁶

The close structure of verses 10-12 has led critics to consider the verses as a separate oracle. It ought to lead us to consider them as a reference to the same subject, the Messiah. Von Rad claims that verse 11 refers to the person who comes in verse 10. It is unlikely to refer to Judah. Verse 11 portrays a paradise-like abundance at the time of this one’s coming.³⁶⁷ Kidner writes that every line speaks of exuberant, intoxicating abundance during the coming age of the Messiah, whose universal rule was seen in verse 10. The language is deliberately the language of excess. This verse talks about using vines as hitching-posts and wine as washing-water, so abundance are they in the land. It says goodbye to the thorns and sweat that accompanied the Fall into sin. The Messiah has arrived. Writes Kidner, “Jesus announced the age to come in just this imagery in His first ‘sign’ at Cana of Galilee.”³⁶⁸

These verses supplied the imagery for the picture of the Messianic king in Zech. 9:9, writes Skinner. Gressmann sees verses 11-12 as a prediction of the ideal happiness introduced by the ruler of verse 10.³⁶⁹ Von Rad notes that Israel associated the expectation of a paradisiacal fertility of the land with the enthronement of a king (see Isa. 11:1-9, Ezek. 34:23-31, Amos 9:11-15, Ps. 72:16). He writes that the “saying goes farthest in presenting the one to come as himself enjoying that superabundance. He is almost a Dionysiac figure.”³⁷⁰ The figures are symbolic of the spiritual blessings that come with the Messiah,³⁷¹ numerous examples of which occur in both the Old and New Testaments (see John 2:1-11, Joel 3:18, Amos 9:13).³⁷²

The presence of a participle rather than a finite verb continues the thought of verse 10 by applying a description of the Messiah.³⁷³ Leupold thinks that the participle shows that Judah habitually ties a donkey to a vine, since they grow in such profusion in the land. However, that is because he does not consider the subject to be the Messiah.³⁷⁴

The thought that the final *hireq* is an old genitive makes no sense here, since the participle cannot be construed as a genitive. GK 90a calls it the *hireq compaginis*, “the *hireq* of joining together,” attached only to the construct state and to participial forms, “evidently with the object of giving them more dignity.” A stronger case can be made for the obsolete genitive case ending in verse 11b, *b^eni*, “son of,” see GK 90l.³⁷⁵

³⁶⁵ Leupold, p. 1184.

³⁶⁶ Smyth, p. 300.

³⁶⁷ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 425.

³⁶⁸ Kidner, p. 219.

³⁶⁹ Skinner, p. 524.

³⁷⁰ Von Rad, *Genesis*, pp. 425-26.

³⁷¹ Aalders, p. 280.

³⁷² Blenkinsopp sees these verses as a part of the background to the account of the triumphal entry in Mark 11:1-6. He notes that Justin quoted 49:8-12 as a Messianic proof text and saw its fulfillment in Mark 11, since “the foal of the ass was bound to a vine at the entrance of the village.”

³⁷³ Gunkel, p. 482; Zobel, p. 13.

³⁷⁴ Leupold, p. 1184.

³⁷⁵ So Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 84, n. 40.

Vines are so common that asses are tethered to them. Wine is so abundant that people wash their clothes in it.³⁷⁶ The picture is one of exceptional fruitfulness. The first part of that description is sensible, but the latter part, namely that one will wash his clothes in wine, is anomalous. The washing of verse 11cd is hardly that of dyeing a garment in wine, as Zobel suggests.³⁷⁷ The verb *kibbēs* is nowhere else used in that sense in the Old Testament.

Leupold offers a better explanation, when he writes that the picture of treading grapes at the harvest is in view. The presses will be so full that the grapes at the harvest is in view. The presses will be so full that the workers will stain their garments a great deal. It will look as though they washed them in wine.³⁷⁸ And yet, the text doesn't say that. We think that Dahood has scored again, when he translates on the basis of the Ugaritic preposition *b*, "Of wine he washes his garments, his robes of the blood of grapes." According to Dahood, the author "poetically states that the grape harvest is so abundant that Judah must wash his clothes of the juice and wine with which they are soaked."³⁷⁹ That explanation fits the grammar of the passage and is more suitable to the picture of abundance.³⁸⁰

According to some writers, the ass is a symbol of peace in contrast with the horse, a symbol of war. Down to David's time, riding on an ass was a distinction of nobility or superior rank (see Judg. 1:4, 10:4, 12:14, 2 Sam. 19:27).³⁸¹ Gunkel refers the reader to Zech. 9:9, where the ass is the riding-beast of the king. The horse first came to Israel under David and Solomon and was always the riding-beast of war, so the contrast mentioned above did not appear until then.³⁸²

Vawter has produced an example from Ugaritic literature, where *'ir*, "he-ass," appears in parallelism with *atnt*, "she-ass" (51:IV:5-7, 9-12).³⁸³ Cross and Freedman state that the preservation of the *he* for the third person singular suffix reflects ninth to sixth century B.C. spelling,³⁸⁴ a spelling change that may have taken place in order to make the verse intelligible to the readers of the day. GK 7c speaks of an original *-hu* as the suffix, which was contracted to *-oh* with the *he* retained as a vowel letter, as in the Mesha inscription.

The branch, *sōrēqāh*, is the stem or branch of the vine. It is translated as "choice vine," or "choice branch." It carries on the figure of abundance that is suggested by the vine. The word is a *hapax*, but that is not sufficient reason for taking the suggestion of Cross and Freedman, namely that the final *he* is the third person singular suffix at the end of a masculine noun in the ninth to sixth century B.C. spelling.³⁸⁵

We have already noted the parallels to Zech. 9:9 in some respects. Compare Matt. 21:5, for example, in the phrase "behold your king comes to you," with Gen. 49:10c. A further parallel to the Judah oracle is found in Zech. 9:9, "humble and riding upon an ass, and upon a donkey, the colt of a she-ass," *w^eal 'air ben 'athōnōth*. Speiser notes regarding *'athōnōth* that the same phrase is found at Mari with the meaning "the young of a purebred, or she-ass."³⁸⁶

Both *l^ebhušō*, "his garments," and *sūthōh*, "his robes," are collective singulars. The latter noun has attracted some attention because of its archaic suffix, identical to that in verse 11a. Keil and Delitzsch write that the form is contracted from *s^ewuthōh*, which comes from the root *sāwāh*, "to envelope," and is a synonym with *sasweh*, a veil (see Exod. 34:33).³⁸⁷ Paul Joüon writes that the Phoenician inscription of *klmw* and the Punic inscription of Carthage suggest that the vocalization should be *s^ewith*, taking the middle *waw* as a consonant and not a vowel letter. The Masoretes, he claims, were influenced by the vocalization of *l^ebhušō* in the preceding colon.³⁸⁸ If Joüon is correct, this word and perhaps its context must be seen as more ancient than previously thought.

³⁷⁶ Davidson, p. 305; Skinner, p. 524.

³⁷⁷ Zobel, p. 14.

³⁷⁸ Leupold, p. 1184.

³⁷⁹ M. Dahood, *Psalms II:51-100*, in *The Anchor Bible* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1968), p. 63.

³⁸⁰ Cross and Freedman read *l^egapno*, "to its harness," since the suffix would not have shown in the early orthography, *Studies*, p. 83, n. 36.

³⁸¹ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 401.

³⁸² Gunkel, p. 483.

³⁸³ Vawter, "Canaanite Background," p. 2.

³⁸⁴ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 83, n. 37.

³⁸⁵ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 84, n. 39.

³⁸⁶ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 366; cf. *Ancient Near Eastern Texts Relating to the Old Testament*, 3rd ed., ed. James B. Pritchard (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 482, n. 6.

³⁸⁷ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 402.

³⁸⁸ Paul Joüon, "Genese 49, 11 חס *," *Biblica* 21 (1940):58.

The blood of grapes is a figure for the results of harvesting dark grapes, namely dark bloodlike wine.³⁸⁹ Vawter adduces a parallel from Ugaritic literature, where *dham-^anābhîm* is parallel to *yayin* in the phrase *dm 'sm//yn*, 51:IV:38.³⁹⁰

While the spiritual import of these verses must not be set aside, many material blessings came to Judah as a result of this promise and the faithfulness of the tribe to God. Aalders has noted seven:

- 1) in the two censuses (Num. 2:4, 26:22), Judah is the largest tribe
- 2) Judah is the predominant tribe in the wilderness (Num. 2:3, 10:13)
- 3) after the dedication of the tabernacle (Num. 7:12), Judah is in first position
- 4) Judah is the first tribe assigned an inheritance (Josh. 15:1) west of the Jordan
- 5) Judah is the first to attack the Canaanites (Judg. 1:1-2)
- 6) Judah is the first to launch an attack against Benjamin (Judg. 20:18)
- 7) Judah is especially prominent after David; Judah becomes the name of the Southern Kingdom and then the name of Israel up to the time of Christ.³⁹¹

Fruitfulness is the characteristic of blessing, writes Kittel. It is the second sign of the three indications of Judah's pre-eminence.³⁹² The first was Judah's rule over the nations, and the third is the beauty of the ruler.

Gen. 49:12

"His eyes are darker than wine,	a	b	c	3
his teeth whiter than milk.	a'	b'	c'	3

Three questions need to be answered here, all three of which are closely interrelated. Of whom is the author writing, the Messiah or the tribe of Judah? Is the preposition *min* causal or comparative? What is the meaning that is applied to the person or tribe?

Smyth writes that the ancient versions and early Christian writers prefer the comparative sense of *min*, while the context seems to favor the causal meaning. He states that if verses 11-12 refer to the Messiah, then the comparative sense is best. If verses 11-12 refer to Judah, then the causal sense is best.³⁹³

The LXX contains both senses within the verse, translating, "His eyes will be glad-eyed from wine (*apoinou*), and his teeth whiter than milk (*ē gala*)." The Vulgate has the comparative sense, "His eyes are more beautiful than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk."

Zobel thinks of the comparative sense as an expression of the obvious beauty of favored colors, shining white and sparkling dark red. He cites examples from Cant. 4:2, 5:10, 6:6, and Lam. 4:7.³⁹⁴ Davidson thinks that the comparative sense speaks of vigorous vitality and health, continuing the picture of bounty from verse 11.³⁹⁵ The close connection of verses 10-12, noted earlier, urges the reader to take verse 12 in the context of verses 10-11. Arvid Kapelrud agrees with the argument from context, but he states that verse 12 stresses the impressive personality of the coming king, continuing the theme of verse 10 and not the theme of the abundance of wine in verse 11.³⁹⁶ Kapelrud is correct. Orlinsky follows other Jewish commentators in assuming a comparative, although he notes that Rashi, Luzzatto, and others have differed.³⁹⁷ The Jewish Publication Society of America translates, "His eyes are darker than wine; His teeth are whiter than milk." Cross and Freedman take *min* as a comparative, following Jastrow and others.³⁹⁸

Among the authors consulted, Keil and Delitzsch, Bennetch, Leupold, Gunkel, Kidner, Stigers, and Armerding take the *min* in a causal sense and translate "dark from wine," "white from milk." The first three—Keil

³⁸⁹ Leupold, p. 1185.

³⁹⁰ Vawter, "Canaanite Background," p. 2.

³⁹¹ Aalders, p. 281.

³⁹² Kittel, p. 21.

³⁹³ Smyth, p. 301.

³⁹⁴ Zobel, p. 14.

³⁹⁵ Davidson, pp. 305-06.

³⁹⁶ A.S. Kapelrud, "Gen 49,12," *Vetus Testamentum* 4 (1954):427.

³⁹⁷ Orlinsky, p. 142.

³⁹⁸ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 84, n. 45.

and Delitzsch, Bennetch, and Leupold—think that the verse speaks of Judah. Keil and Delitzsch comment that Judah produced the best wine in Canaan, near Hebron and Engedi.³⁹⁹

Bennetch thinks of Judah's eyes being dim with wine, though not drunk with it, instead of flashing with eagerness for battle. The mouth is full of milk, a childlike and rural nourishment.⁴⁰⁰ Leupold insists that no censure is intended. The verse talks of healthy color in the eyes, the eyes having a ruddy darkness from the wine. There is no thought of the bloodshot eye of the drunkard. The teeth are healthy because of the milk.⁴⁰¹ Gunkel speaks of an old Israelite ideal of beauty in the dark eyes and white teeth, the result of drinking wine and milk. He refers the reader to Prov. 23:29, where *ḥakhlilûth* is used of eyes glistening or bloodshot because of drinking wine. Gunkel thinks that the abundance of wine and milk is a characteristic of the end-time (see Isa. 7:15).⁴⁰² Kidner comments,

The blear-eyed [sic] drinker in Proverbs makes the translation 'darker than wine . . . whiter than milk' rather unlikely. It would in any case be a digression from the theme of plenty.⁴⁰³

However, he fails to see that verse 12 is to be connected primarily with the theme of verse 10 rather than the theme of verse 11.

Stigers and Armerding try to solve the problem by referring to the coming of the Messiah as a judge. The eyes clouded with anger and the white teeth are symbolic of judgment (see Dan. 7:9, Rev. 19:11, 14, 20:11-15).⁴⁰⁴ Armerding quotes Gesenius, who said that "his eyes shall be red with wine" means "his eyes darkly flashing" and refers the reader to Rev. 1:14. He further notes, "The showing of His teeth in all their whiteness is in keeping with this because teeth are mentioned more often in the Bible in connection with that which threatens than otherwise."⁴⁰⁵

The passages quoted by both writers certainly speak of the color white (not white teeth) in the context of a judgment scene and speak of fire in a similar context. Rev. 1:14 even speaks of blazing eyes. However, the verse ought not to be interpreted on the basis of later symbolism. Instead it ought to be interpreted in the context of the language and customs of the day. The Semitic background of the language suggests the picture of the beauty of this coming one.

The word *ḥakhlîlî*, "darker," is a hapax. The related word, *ḥakhlilûth*, from Prov. 23:29, used also in the context of wine, has been mentioned earlier. The word *ḥakhlîlî* is in a construct chain, possibly carrying the obsolete genitive ending, as noted in connection with verse 11.⁴⁰⁶ Gunkel and Gressmann derive the word from the root *ḥkl*, "to paint the eyes," whereby they become fiery and brilliant.⁴⁰⁷ BDB lists the word under the root *ḥkl*, based on Arabic and Akkadian cognates. The Arabic cognate is *hakala*, "to be confused, vague." Speiser notes the Akkadian *ekelu*, "to be dark," as a cognate verb,⁴⁰⁸ as do Cross and Freedman⁴⁰⁹ and BDB, all of whom follow Friedrich Delitzsch. BDB gives as a meaning "(dark) dull." Gunkel rejects the idea of "gloomy, muddy," as KB has it, since that would reflect a beauty flaw. He translates *funkeln*, "dark."⁴¹⁰

Whether the *min* is causal or comparative, the result is the same, namely that the writer is here speaking of the beauty of the Messiah. The Hebrew appreciation for dark eyes and white teeth and the preference of the ancient versions for the comparative cast more weight in favor of that understanding. Furthermore, to think of the Messiah as "blear-eyed" is to connect verse 12 with verse 11 on the basis of the similarity of the one word "wine," rather than with verse 10.

³⁹⁹ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 402.

⁴⁰⁰ Bennetch, p. 426.

⁴⁰¹ Leupold, p. 1185.

⁴⁰² Gunkel, pp. 482-83.

⁴⁰³ Kidner, p. 219.

⁴⁰⁴ Stigers, p. 328.

⁴⁰⁵ Carl Armerding, "The Last Words of Jacob: Genesis 49," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 112 (1955):326-27.

⁴⁰⁶ So Leupold, p. 1185.

⁴⁰⁷ Gunkel, p. 483.

⁴⁰⁸ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 366.

⁴⁰⁹ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 84, n. 43.

⁴¹⁰ Gunkel, p. 483.

Gen. 49:13

“Zebulun will live near the shore of the sea,	a	b	c	4
(then he will live at ease by the coast;)	a’	b’	d	3
and his border will be toward Sidon.	a”	b” (bv)		3

One of the first questions that arises about this verse is its relationship to Judg. 5:17. That verse reads:

Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan
And Dan, why did he linger by the ships?
Asher remained on the seacoast
And stayed in his coves.

Some of the same words and phrases are used in both verses. Where Genesis says that Zebulun will live “by the seashore,” *l^ehōph yammîm*, Judges says that Asher remained “on the seacoast,” *l^ehōph yammîm*, the identical phrase. Where Genesis says that Zebulun will be a haven “for ships,” *’oñîyyôth*, Judges says that Dan lingered “by the ships,” *’oñîyyôth*, the same word. Another parallel is in the use of the verb *šākhēn*, “to live, dwell, abide.” Genesis writes that Zebulun “will live,” *yiškôn*, while Judges writes that Gilead “stayed,” *šākhēn*. A possible parallel is the use of the preposition ‘*al* in the final colon of each verse, translated “toward” in Genesis and “in” in Judges.⁴¹¹

Some think that the Danites never resided by the sea nor engaged in maritime activities. However, at the time of the deliverance by Deborah, Dan was situated on the seacoast (Josh. 19:40-48). Dan did not migrate north until Judges 18. P. C. Craigie mentions John Gray’s suggestion that the Hebrew *’oñîyyôth* is an adverbial accusative, to be translated “at ease,” on the basis of a Ugaritic verb *’ān*, “to be at ease.” He cites the Arabic verb *’ana* as a further cognate. He writes that the word *’oñîyyôth* is grammatically awkward, since a preposition is expected before the noun. The interrogative *lammāh*, “why,” could then be dropped with several Hebrew manuscripts and versions (although this is not necessary), and Judg. 5:17b would read, “And Dan abode at ease.”⁴¹² The Ugaritic evidence is tenuous at best, and the reading is not needed in Judges, if one accepts an early seacoast location of the tribe of Dan. The translation holds some possibility for the Genesis passage, however, since there is no knowledge of Zebulun dwelling along the coast. If one should translate *’oñîyyôth* as an adverbial accusative, the preposition *l^e* could be translated “near,” or “toward.”⁴¹³ Leupold comments that the verse doesn’t say “at” or “on” the seashore.⁴¹⁴ Zobel writes that the combination *šākhēn l^e* is a rare one in the Old Testament, occurring only in Ps. 7:5, 37:27, 68:16, and 120:6. Since “to dwell alongside” or “at” is expressed by *šākhēn* with ‘*al* or *b^e*, he suggests translating “settle in the direction of.”⁴¹⁵ While the versions are unanimous in thinking “ships” for *’oñîyyôth*, we may have here an archaism that none of them understood. This proposal must remain quite tentative, particularly in the light of a reading in Ugaritic literature, which shows *anyt* and *ym*, “ship(s)” and “sea” in parallelism. It is stated that the composite phrase, “ships of the sea” has been broken up into two parallel cola in reverse order.⁴¹⁶

In the light of the above discussion, the following translation is proposed:

“Zebulun will live near the shore of the sea,	a	b	c	3
(then he will live at ease by the coast;)	a’	b’	d	3
and his border will be toward Sidon.	a”	b” (bv)		2

⁴¹¹ Cross and Freedman think of a corrupt text in Genesis 49, correctly preserved in Judg. 5:17, *Studies*, p. 85, n. 47. Vawter, on the basis of Ugaritic parallels, calls Judg. 5:17 a later recension of this poem, “The Canaanite Background,” p. 7.

⁴¹² P. C. Craigie, “Three Ugaritic Notes on the Song of Deborah,” *Journal for the Study of the Old Testament* 2 (1976):38-39.

⁴¹³ Kidner, p. 219.

⁴¹⁴ Leupold, p. 1185.

⁴¹⁵ Zobel, p. 15.

⁴¹⁶ Fisher, 2:118.

The sense of the passage, then, would be to give some geographical information about the future location of Zebulun.⁴¹⁷ Zebulun was indeed near the sea, that is, the Mediterranean Sea,⁴¹⁸ but not actually on the shore, as far as we know (see Josh. 19:10-16).⁴¹⁹ Zebulun's western border would have been less than ten miles from the Mediterranean. Zebulun's northern boundary was also "toward Sidon," although not actually bordering on Phoenician lands. The verse may then be referring to the tribe's strategic location for engaging in trade by way of the sea or by way of Sidon.⁴²⁰ The result of this location would be that Zebulun would live "at ease" (see Deut. 33:19). One of the major trade routes through Canaan went through the territory of Zebulun by way of the Plain of Jezreel.⁴²¹ Kittel thinks it unlikely that an important trade with profit-sharing is involved here because of Judg. 5:17, but that verse does not rule out the possibility.⁴²² Certainty on this subject cannot be achieved, however. Kittel's comment is accurate for the most part,

Gen 49:13 . . . is an individual saying, whose intent is no longer directly recognizable. It contains a characteristic of the living conditions of Zebulun."⁴²³

The unusual meter of this verse, 4:3:3, is explained by Cross and Freedman. An extra-metrical heading at the beginning of a line of poetry is a common device in Ugaritic epics. The name of Zebulun is that extra-metrical heading.⁴²⁴

Some commentators, think, and BHS suggests, with no manuscript support, that the verb *yīškôn* was originally *yizbôl*. This would produce a word play on the name of Zebulun and would translate as "Zebulun will rule (or dwell by) the seashore."⁴²⁵ The suggestion is based on analogy with other word plays on tribal names in the chapter. Leupold and Peters are more believable in their suggestion that the text, as it stands, is a pun on the root meaning of Zebulun.⁴²⁶ The conjecture is unnecessary.

Kittel takes verse 13c as an interpretative gloss.⁴²⁷ Skinner likewise considers it a gloss.⁴²⁸ Gunkel, following Ball and Sievers, wants to omit verse 13c, because it is not in rhythm or style.⁴²⁹ Cross and Freedman feel that the phrase makes no sense as it is. There is no parallelism, they say, and the geographical reference is wrong, since Zebulun didn't extend to Sidon. They suggest emendations for both verse 13b and c, neither of which have support from Hebrew manuscripts or the versions.⁴³⁰ However, the geographical reference has been explained above, and there is, in fact, a parallelism between the first and third lines.

Some authors merely think of verse 13bc as corrupt.⁴³¹ Gunkel calls the second occurrence of *l'ḥôph* an error against Hebrew poetic style. He notes Ball's emendation to *wayhi ḥôbhêl*, "and he was acting corruptly," which understands the phrase as a rebuke.⁴³² Cross and Freedman say that *l'ḥôph* doesn't belong in this context, since it is always coupled with the word "sea," as in verse 13a. It is here because of dittography. They prefer Albright's suggestion of *lôphêph*, translating "and he indeed doth fare on ships."⁴³³

The word *hoph* does occur with the word "sea" in every instance of the word in the Old Testament, but we are talking about only seven total occurrences. The problem of the double occurrence of the word in this verse may be alleviated, if we view the second colon as a parenthetical remark, given to explain the significance of living near the seashore. That suits the verse particularly well, if we adopt the rendering of *'nîyyôth* given above. Furthermore, the word *yammîm* may be understood, though not written, after *l'ḥôph* in clause b. The parallelism lends support to this view, especially if *'nîyyôth* is in parallelism to *yīškôn* and from the root *'an*.

⁴¹⁷ Von Rad thinks of a migration to the sea by the tribe of Zebulun, because of this saying, *Genesis*, p. 426.

⁴¹⁸ Zobel comments that *ḥôph* is never used of inland waters, but exclusively of the Mediterranean Sea, p. 15.

⁴¹⁹ Aalders, p. 282.

⁴²⁰ Kidner, p. 219; Leupold, p. 1186.

⁴²¹ Bennetch, p. 427.

⁴²² Kittel, p. 23, n. 3.

⁴²³ Ibid., p. 24.

⁴²⁴ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 84, n. 46.

⁴²⁵ Vawter, "Canaanite Background," p. 6; Gunkel, p. 483.

⁴²⁶ Leupold, p. 1186; Peters, p. 107.

⁴²⁷ Kittel, p. 23.

⁴²⁸ Skinner, p. 525.

⁴²⁹ Gunkel, p. 483.

⁴³⁰ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, pp. 85-86, n. 49.

⁴³¹ Skinner, p. 525.

⁴³² Gunkel, p. 483.

⁴³³ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 85, n. 48.

The picture in the final colon has been described as that of a person with his face to the tribes and his back to Sidon.⁴³⁴ The word *yarkhāh* is translated “flank,” “side,” or “extreme parts,” “hinder part.” BDB suggests “further side” for this verse in Genesis. Skinner comments that it pictures a recumbent animal with its hind-parts towards Sidon, as Dillmann, Gunkel, and others picture it. He calls this picture unsatisfying and almost grotesque.⁴³⁵ Why an animal must be in view here rather than a person is not explained. Perhaps the many animal comparisons in the chapter are the reason, but there is no animal imagery in the verse at all. In view of the possible translation of “flank,” the picture may be that of a person (Zebulun, of course) facing the south with his flank toward Sidon.⁴³⁶ As has been mentioned above, the idea that verse 13c states that the outer borders of the territory of Zebulun border Phoenicia, as Zobel suggests,⁴³⁷ does not necessarily follow. A general proximity is all that is in view here.

The mention of Sidon in this location is significant. The city of Tyre is not mentioned, because it did not become prominent until the ninth and tenth centuries. Only Sidon was prominent prior to that time.⁴³⁸ This would place the *terminus ad quem* for this verse no later than the time of Solomon. The witness of the Old Testament confirms this. Tyre is mentioned forty-seven times in the Old Testament, only once in the first seven books of the Bible, at Josh. 19:29. Sidon and the Sidonians, mentioned thirty-eight times in the Old Testament, appear fifteen times in those same books.

Scholars have long noticed the similarity of thought between Gen. 49:13 and Deut. 33:19.⁴³⁹ In the saying about Zebulun and Issachar in Deut. 33:19, we read,

They will summon peoples to the mountain
and there offer sacrifices of righteousness;
they will feast on the abundance of the seas,
on the treasures hidden in the sand.

Skinner comments that Deut. 33:19 shows that it is the advantageousness of Zebulun’s geographical position that is being celebrated in Gen. 49:13.⁴⁴⁰ His assessment is correct. Kidner refers specifically to the phrase, “they will feast on the abundance of the seas” for evidence to that effect.⁴⁴¹

Gen. 49:14

“Issachar is a sturdy donkey	a	b	c	3
lying down between two saddlebags.	d	e	f	3

Immediately apparent in this verse is the animal comparison. While all other animal comparisons are given in a praiseworthy sense, for example, Judah in verse 9, most commentators believe that here Issachar is rebuked for behaving in a manner unworthy of a strong ass.⁴⁴² Gunkel calls this verse “a sharp rebuke.”⁴⁴³ Issachar is supposedly castigated for exchanging independence for the self-satisfied serfdom of Canaanite domination. The picture is that of a powerful, yet docile, beast of burden.⁴⁴⁴ We think that the positive nature of all the other animal comparisons suggests a positive thought here. William White notes that *rābhaṣ*, “to lie down,” means to “rest from exertion.”⁴⁴⁵ If “saddlebags” is the correct translation, then verse 15 is the picture of a strong donkey which has been working. The donkey has been carrying two saddlebags, but it has paused to “rest from exertion.” Both noun derivatives mean “resting place.”

⁴³⁴ Aalders, p. 282.

⁴³⁵ Skinner, p. 525.

⁴³⁶ Leupold, p. 1186.

⁴³⁷ Zobel, p. 16.

⁴³⁸ Aalders, p. 282.

⁴³⁹ J. Coppens effectively refuses the idea that Gen. 49:13 is mythological and dependent on Deut. 33:19, “La bénédiction de Jacob,” *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 6 (1956):102.

⁴⁴⁰ Skinner, p. 525.

⁴⁴¹ Kidner, p. 219; also Aalders, p. 282; Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 402.

⁴⁴² Kittel, p. 25.

⁴⁴³ Gunkel, p. 483.

⁴⁴⁴ Davidson, p. 306.

⁴⁴⁵ William White, “רַבַּחַשׁ (*rābhaṣ*) lie down,” in *TWOT*, 2:830.

Keil and Delitzsch feel that there is nothing contemptible in the figure, but nothing glorifying either. They interpret that oracle as a description of Issachar's contentment with material goods, devotion to labor and agriculture, and lack of interest in political power and rule. Issachar would become a robust, powerful race of men and receive in inheritance that which would invite comfortable repose. The bravery of Issachar and Zebulun in Judg. 5:14, 15, 18 must not be overlooked.⁴⁴⁶

Aalders thinks of a strong, powerfully built donkey, but he also sees nothing derogatory in the oracle. He thinks of a powerful people with a sheltered, relaxed life, willing to carry the burdens of others. Slavery or forced labor are not necessarily in the picture here. Perhaps Issachar settled in the valley of Jezreel and supplied labor and provisions for through traffic.⁴⁴⁷ This view has a great deal of merit.

Von Rad claims that Issachar originally lived inland in the mountains and later pushed into the western plain, thereby losing political independence. That move caused Issachar to become a vassal of the Canaanites.⁴⁴⁸ There were a large number of Canaanite city-states in the plains at this time.⁴⁴⁹

The oracle is generally considered one of derision of the freemen who had let themselves be enticed by the fertile plain and had thereby become humiliated as beasts of burden.⁴⁵⁰ Kittel comments that the oracle is not one of derision, but one of rebuke.⁴⁵¹ Von Rad calls verse 14 a sadly comical picture of an ass which has knelt with its heavy saddle baskets and can no longer stand up.⁴⁵²

Some writers have pointed out the word play that is in the background. The name Issachar has been variously explained as a combination of *yīśšā' śākhār*, "he takes wages,"⁴⁵³ or *'iš śākhār*, "man of wages."⁴⁵⁴ BDB lists the name under *yēš*, suggesting the derivation from *yēš śākhār*, "there is recompense." The allusion is to a day-laborer, a worker, *śākhār*, an allusion indicating the character of the tribe, not necessarily in a derogatory sense.

The phrase *h'mōr gārem* has caused considerable stir, particularly on the meaning of *gārem*, translated here as "sturdy." The word is listed in BDB as *gerem*, a segholate noun in pausal form in the text, with the meanings "bone, strength, self." The second meaning is generally upheld for this verse, although the description of the donkey as a bony ass could also convey the idea of strength.

Stigers thinks of a rawboned donkey (so NIV), not well fed and therefore weakened. This is supposedly symbolic of the spiritual weakness of the tribe, because of its failure to depend fully upon God.⁴⁵⁵ However, most authors consulted prefer some sense of strength in the expression. The JPSA translation has "Issachar is a strong-boned ass." Skinner thinks of a bony, that is, strong-limbed donkey, indicating that Issachar had strength enough to remain independent, but preferred ease to exertion.⁴⁵⁶ Leupold thinks of sturdy physical strength.⁴⁵⁷ The preference of Aalders and Kittel for a picture of strength has been mentioned above. Zobel mentions parallels in Job 40:18 and Prov. 25:15, where *gerem* is a symbol of strength.⁴⁵⁸ Others who see a picture of strength are Driver, Bennett, Meek, the KJV, RS, and ASV.⁴⁵⁹

The LXX reading, *Issachar to kalon epethumesen*, "Issachar desired that which is good," is to be rejected, because it is the easier reading.⁴⁶⁰ It likely reflects an original *hemed gāras*, according to C. D. Ginsburg.⁴⁶¹ Samuel

⁴⁴⁶ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 403.

⁴⁴⁷ Aalders, pp. 282-83.

⁴⁴⁸ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 426.

⁴⁴⁹ Kittel, p. 25.

⁴⁵⁰ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 426.

⁴⁵¹ Kittel, p. 25.

⁴⁵² Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 426.

⁴⁵³ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 403.

⁴⁵⁴ Gunkel, p. 484.

⁴⁵⁵ Stigers, p. 328.

⁴⁵⁶ Skinner, pp. 525-26; so also Gunkel, p. 483.

⁴⁵⁷ Leupold, p. 1187.

⁴⁵⁸ Zobel, p. 16.

⁴⁵⁹ Samuel I. Feigin, "Ḥamor Garim, 'Castrated Ass'," *Journal of Near Eastern Studies* 5 (1946):230-31.

⁴⁶⁰ Kittel, p. 24.

⁴⁶¹ C.D. Ginsburg, *Introduction to the Massoretico-Critical Edition of the Hebrew Bible*, reprint of 1897 ed. (New York: Ktav, 1966), p. 254.

Feigin feels that the LXX was simply an intelligent guess.⁴⁶² Other versions, such as the Syriac, the Vulgate, and the Targum of Jerusalem, think of the idea of strength.⁴⁶³

Feigin offers another translation of *gārem*. He writes that the simile is inappropriate to the conduct of the tribe, if the translation “bony, strong ass” is retained. A “bony” or “strong” ass crouching between sheepfolds is not fitting. It does not make sense for a strong tribe to come to an inglorious end, he says. If the tribe is strong, then why such an end?

This particular objection falls by the wayside, if one sees a contrast being presented here, similar to that spoken of Reuben in verses 3-4, between the strength and potential of Issachar and the eventual servitude of that tribe. Feigin’s question points us to another interpretation, which depicts a hard-working, sturdy donkey. The donkey is temporarily resting from its hard work, and it will continue that hard work in Canaan (verse 15).

Noting the Samaritan Pentateuch’s reading, “ass of strangers,” *ḥ^amōr gērīm*, Feigin thinks that the original read *gārim*, not *gērim*. Drawing a parallel from the Arabic verb *garama*, “to cut, shear,” he would translate here “castrated ass.” A castrated ass humbly takes the yoke, Feigin comments, crouching between sheepfolds. The meaning has been forgotten, because the practice of castration fell into disuse due to legal prohibition.⁴⁶⁴

Furthermore, Feigin objects that if the author meant “a sturdy donkey,” why did he not use the Hebrew word for “strong,” or the Hebrew word *‘ešem*, “bone,” instead of *gerem*? And why not *ḥ^amōr gerāmīm* instead of the singular?⁴⁶⁵ The use of *gerem* as a picture of strength has already been mentioned above, answering most of these questions raised in protest. The idea of “strength” is not listed by BDB as a meaning for *‘ešem*.

Feigin has aroused some support. The NEB translates “a gelded ass,” and Cross and Freedman concur.⁴⁶⁶ However, the evidence is much too slight, and all of the objections raised by Feigin can be satisfactorily answered.

The word *hammišp^ethāim*, “saddlebags,” appears only here, in Judg. 5:16, and in Ps. 68:14 (without *mem* preformative). One major viewpoint takes the word to mean “sheepfolds.”⁴⁶⁷ Orlinsky writes that the picture of ease and comfort represented by the translation “sheepfolds” seems preferable to that of “saddlebags,” particularly on the basis of Judg. 5:16.⁴⁶⁸ Cassuto claims on the basis of the three occurrences of the word that to dwell “among the sheepfolds” is a traditional expression for one who refrains from participating in battle.⁴⁶⁹ That explanation labors under the misconception that the verse is a rebuke.

A. D. Crown thinks that the dual form and the root *šāphath* lend themselves better to the idea of a donkey squatting on its haunches. He thinks either of the dual of *šāphāh*, “lip,” or of a derivation from *šāphath*, “to set,” or perhaps *šābhath*, “to rest, cease.”⁴⁷⁰ The preposition *bēn* rules out that possibility.

Albright suggested “hearths,” or “fireplaces.”⁴⁷¹ In this, Albright was followed by Cross and Freedman, who translate, “He couches among the rubbish piles,” seeing a connection with *‘aspōth*, “rubbish heap.”⁴⁷² Gray took Eissfeldt’s suggestion and translated as a dual, “(between) the converging fold-walls,” a reference to part of the structure of a sheepfold, which helped to corral the flocks.⁴⁷³ Many ancient versions translate “boundaries,” or something similar.

The most likely translation is that of the NIV, “two saddlebags.”⁴⁷⁴ The JPSA translation, the Good News Bible, and the KJV translate this way. The idea of “sheepfolds” in a verse that speaks about a donkey seems

⁴⁶² Feigin, pp. 230-31.

⁴⁶³ Ibid.

⁴⁶⁴ Ibid., p. 233.

⁴⁶⁵ Ibid., p. 232.

⁴⁶⁶ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 86, n. 50.

⁴⁶⁷ JB, RSV, NEB “cattle-pens,” Kimchi; Zobel, p. 16; Kittel, p. 25; Gunkel “pens,” p. 484; Leupold, p. 1187.

⁴⁶⁸ Orlinsky, p. 142.

⁴⁶⁹ U. Cassuto, “Psalm LXVIII,” in *Biblical and Oriental Studies I* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, 1973), p. 262.

⁴⁷⁰ A. D. Crown, “Judges 5.15b-16,” *Vetus Testamentum* 17 (1967):240-42.

⁴⁷¹ William Foxwell Albright, “The Earliest Forms of Hebrew Verse,” *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 2 (1922):78, n. 2.

⁴⁷² Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 86, n. 52.

⁴⁷³ Craigie, “Three Ugaritic Notes,” pp. 41-42. The reference is to J. Gray, *Joshua, Judges and Ruth*, p. 287, and to O. Eissfeldt, “Gabelhürden im Ostjordanland” and “Noch einmal: Gabelhürden im Ostjordanland,” *Kleine Schriften III* (Tübingen: Mohr, 1966), pp. 61-70.

⁴⁷⁴ A. Saarisalo, *The Boundary Between Issachar and Naphtali* (Helsinki: Suomalaisen Tiedeakatemia Toimituksis, 1927), p. 92. A long influential treatment of “saddlebags,” unavailable to the author.

inappropriate. Speiser translates “saddlebags,” taking the phrase in a caustic rather than a complimentary sense.⁴⁷⁵ Skinner comments that the dual form makes one think of the double baskets carried by an ass, a picture suitable to the mention of the ass.⁴⁷⁶ Aalders thinks of “saddlebags,” but he considers that translation a reference to the open, protected areas in the mountainous regions. A “saddle” is an area between two elevations that provides shelter in bad weather.⁴⁷⁷ In this way he avoids the implication that there is a rebuke of Issachar in the verse.

Kidner admits that “sheepfolds” would seem easier in Judg. 5:16, but that verse may owe something to Gen. 49:14 and may actually depict a beast refusing to move with its load.⁴⁷⁸ He favors the AV’s “two burdens,” that is, saddlebags or large baskets, since it is favored by modern commentators and suits the picture of a tribe too willing to trade its liberty for the material things of life.⁴⁷⁹

After a careful study of the versions, English translations, and lexicons, J. E. Hogg concluded that “sheepfolds” is the translation in some English versions and some lexicons, but in no ancient versions. Furthermore, he stated that the force of the dual is brought out in some of the versions, that is, in those versions that truly understood the meaning of the word. Finally, there is a connecting link in the B-text of the LXX in Judges, the Venetus manuscript in Genesis, and the Latin Tremellius and Junius manuscript in Genesis and Judges. They translate “double load,” “half-burden,” and *sarcinas*, (“burdens,” “ash-heaps”) respectively. Therefore, he suggests that the evidence is best suited to the translation, “between the two loads.” The word then refers to an ass laden with a burden on each side of his back.⁴⁸⁰ The translation “saddlebags” suits this word of praise quite well.

Gen. 49:15

“When he sees how good is a resting-place	a	b	c	3
and how pleasant the land,	[a’]	b’	c’	3
he will bend his shoulder to bear,	d	e	f	3
and he will become a body of workers that tills.	[d’]	[e’]	f	3

This verse continues the thought of the previous verse, explaining what Issachar, the “sturdy donkey,” will do when he arrives in Canaan. Some think that the verse speaks of a tribe strong enough to conquer the Canaanites in its area, but willing to forego political power and military victory in favor of enjoying the good land, even at the cost of their liberty. The people of Issachar are willing to work for others, just as long as a measure of creature comforts can be enjoyed. It is hard to see how subjugation would be preferable to liberty, particularly when the history of Israel is replete with rebellions against various overlords. It is better to take the verse as a description of the willingness of Issachar to work, once his inheritance in Canaan is received.

Kittel introduces an interesting historical note from archaeology. A letter from the royal archives of Amenhotep III and his son Akhenaton appears in *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*,⁴⁸¹ showing that Shunem, a city within the territory allotted to Issachar, is being worked by forced labor around the fourteenth century B.C. The letter is from a prince of Megiddo named Biridiya. Kittel calls this Amarna letter the oldest evidence for the existence of an Israelite tribe on Palestinian soil,⁴⁸² although our interpretation suggests that this parallel is irrelevant to this verse. Amenhotep, or Amenophis III, ruled Egypt in the years 1408-1372, and his son Amenophis IV (Akhenaton) ruled from 1372-1354.⁴⁸³ The existence of forced labor and consequently the strength of some Canaanite city-states in this part of Canaan at this particular time in history is thereby proven,⁴⁸⁴ but its application to Issachar is not.

⁴⁷⁵ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 367.

⁴⁷⁶ Skinner, p. 526.

⁴⁷⁷ Aalders, pp. 282-83.

⁴⁷⁸ Kidner, p. 219, n. 4.

⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁴⁸⁰ James Edward Hogg, “The Meaning of המשפחה in Gen. 49:14 and Judg. 5:16,” *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 43 (1926-27):299-300.

⁴⁸¹ James B. Pritchard, ed., *Ancient Near Eastern Texts*, 3d ed. (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1969), p. 485 (RA XIX, p. 977).

⁴⁸² Kittel, pp. 25-26.

⁴⁸³ K.A. Kitchen, “Land of Egypt,” in *The Zondervan Pictorial Encyclopedia of the Bible*, 5 vols., ed. Merrill C. Tenney (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1975), 2:231.

⁴⁸⁴ Kittel, p. 26.

Kidner quotes Noth approvingly in saying that it is possible in the early days that Zebulun, Dan, and Asher (see Judg. 5:17) paid for their settlement on territory controlled by Sidon by providing forced labor in the Sidonian ports, while Issachar did the same for Deborah to the south.⁴⁸⁵

The first two cola demonstrate a close parallelism. In verse 15ab, Issachar sees a beautiful, pleasant land. Part of Issachar's inheritance included the fertile plain of Jezreel. Zobel, Skinner, and Gunkel, see in *m^enuḥāh*, "resting place," a term for the settled life in contrast to the nomadic life (see Deut. 12:9, Ps. 95:1).⁴⁸⁶ The word, however, is feminine in gender, and the masculine adjective does not agree with the noun it modifies. The Samaritan Pentateuch reads *twbh*, the feminine adjective, and the Septuagint and Vulgate translate the adjective as a feminine. Therefore, Kittel suggests reading *ṭōbhāh*, as does Gunkel.⁴⁸⁷ Zobel's suggestion that the final *he* on *ṭōbh* was mistakenly taken as the sign of the direct object for *hā'āreš*, "the land," would solve two problems: the lack of agreement in gender between noun and adjective, and the unusual occurrence of the sign of the direct object.⁴⁸⁸ We think that the sign of the direct object is not necessarily a late feature. Furthermore, it is possible that an older orthography is reflected here, where the final vowel is to be pronounced, even though there is no *mater lectionis*. That would point up another archaic form in this verse. The parallelism of *ṭōbh* and *nā'ēm* is attested in Ugaritic as *n'm . . . ṭb*, suggesting that the parallelism is very ancient.⁴⁸⁹

The parallelism of the particle *kī* is self-evident. Orlinsky suggests taking it as an emphatic adverb, translating "how."⁴⁹⁰ That suggestion has been followed by us and by the NIV.

On the appearance of the sign of the direct object, GK 117b explains that it is a rare occurrence in poetic style, since poetry represents a somewhat more archaic stage of the language than prose. After case endings had become extinct, some external means of indicating the accusative was needed. The *m^enuḥāh* is obviously a direct object, but *hā'āreš* is not so obvious. Therefore, rather than being an indication of a later reworking of the text,⁴⁹¹ the sign of the direct object may actually be an archaism, introduced here for clarity.

"He will bend his shoulder to bear" may be a reference to the burden mentioned in verse 14, "two saddlebags." The saddlebags are the burden he will bear, saddlebags perhaps containing grain from his fields.

The final phrase of the verse is a construct chain, and it is the key to the interpretation of the saying. I. Mendelsohn reflects the majority viewpoint, taking *l^emas-ōbhēdh* to mean "a slave at forced labor." He writes,

It refers to a variety of state slavery in which the corvée workers were reduced to the status of slaves. This was not practiced in Israel until the time of David and Solomon, and then only upon subjugated non-Israelites. The instance here must refer to the subjection of Issachar to the Canaanites at an early period of the occupation, or perhaps to the Philistines toward the end of the period of the Judges. Conceivably this may reflect the situation of certain Hebrew groups in Palestine before the conquest.⁴⁹²

There are several things about the customary interpretation that are unsettling. First, all of the blessings that surround verses 14-15 are positive. The only two clear rebukes are in verses 3-4 and 5-7, and they obviously refer to historical events of the past. We would expect another rebuke to do the same, but there is no record of any shameful deed done by Issachar. Verses 3-7 may be listed first in order to cover all negative sayings first, so that Jacob can continue with the rest of the sayings, all of which were to be positive. We have noted earlier that all other animal comparisons are positive.

Secondly, the phrase *l^emas-ōbhēdh* appears in the Old Testament for the first time in verse 15. If the chapter is truly archaic, it may be that the phrase should be taken in an elementary sense, to refer to "a body of workers that tills." The meaning, "a slave at forced labor," would then be a later development of the phrase, perhaps occasioned by the entrance into Canaan and the use of that phrase there in a somewhat technical sense. Then scholars are found guilty of reading later meanings back into the phrase here. The LXX supports the elementary meaning of the phrase, translating, *kai egenēthē anēr geōrgos*, "and he became a farmer," or "tiller." Kaiser notes

⁴⁸⁵ Kidner, p. 219.

⁴⁸⁶ Zobel, p. 16; Skinner, p. 526; Gunkel, p. 484.

⁴⁸⁷ Kittel, p. 24; Gunkel, p. 484.

⁴⁸⁸ Zobel, p. 17.

⁴⁸⁹ Fisher, 2:277.

⁴⁹⁰ Orlinsky, p. 142.

⁴⁹¹ So Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 86, n. 55.

⁴⁹² I. Mendelsohn, "State Slavery in Ancient Palestine," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 85 (February 1942):14-17.

that the verb *‘ābhadh* often means “to till,” when used in reference to the land (as here), hence the LXX translation.⁴⁹³

The attractive feature of this interpretation is that it yields a consistent picture of Issachar, viewing Issachar in a positive sense, thereby allowing verses 14-15 to mesh well with the context. The two verses say that Issachar is a sturdy, hard-working donkey, who at the present time is resting from his labors. When Issachar sees how good his inheritance is and how productive the land may become, he will continue his hard-working efforts (note the participial form to denote ongoing labor).

The traditional interpretation has been upheld for centuries, receiving support from the Vulgate (*factusque est tributis serviens*, “and he has been made a slave by taxes”) and many commentators, both conservative and critical. However, here the LXX, in our judgment, is the correct interpretation.

It is in the final phrase *l’mas-‘ōbhēdh*, “a body of workers that tills,” that the word play, pointed to in the connection with the preceding verse, is also evident. The name Issachar need not be taken to mean “hireling.” If it means something like “man of wages, worker,” then the word play is still evident. The word play is complete with this phrase in verse 15d,⁴⁹⁴ unifying the two verses by surrounding the contents of the verses with the two parts of the pun.

Gen. 49:16

“Dan will provide justice for his people	a	b	c	3
as any other of the tribes of Israel.	[a’]	b’	c’	3

This oracle is commonly considered by critics to have been two originally independent sayings.⁴⁹⁵ The two primary reasons for this conclusion are the appearance of the name of Dan at the head of each verse and the difference in subject matter, an animal comparison beside a word play.⁴⁹⁶ Zobel thinks that verse 16 describes a person personifying the tribe, while verse 17 describes the tribe itself.⁴⁹⁷ The connection of the two verses together was the result of an editorial process.

The first of these two criteria is artificial. There is no reason why a particular tribe could not be mentioned twice or more in the same saying, particularly if the saying carries for more than one verse. The author may have intended to show that the verses go together, in order that there might be no confusion by the reader. In regard to the second reason, we have just finished looking at a saying that combined an animal comparison and a word play, but no voices have been raised to say that that fact suggests two original sayings. The function of the animal comparison here is to provide an explanation for the verse immediately preceding (see 49:8, 9). That fact will assist us in the exegesis of verse 17.

Peters comments that this oracle seems to point to a time when the tribe of Dan was small in strength and numbers, a time when it lay on the road by which invasions threatened Israel, that is, after the move north to Laish and before the first Assyrian deportation, even before the Syrian conquests in the time of Jehu. He cites the mention of Bashan in Deut. 33:22 as further evidence.⁴⁹⁸ It must not be forgotten, however, that Dan’s strength was small in comparison to its Philistine neighbors, and its land was threatened by those same neighbors during the early years in the land. The reference may just as easily be to the time when Dan would be situated in the back yard of the Philistines. In any case, if the saying is predictive, it may refer to either location.

In what sense should the word *yādhîn*, “judge,” be understood? There can be no doubt that there is a play on words here between *dān* and *yādhîn*.

Zobel translates *yādhîn*, “to procure justice for someone.” The word has to do with helping people in some distress or difficulty.⁴⁹⁹ Zobel comments that *ke’ahadh* with a following *min* or a following genitive always expresses a comparison with a category to which the thing compared does not belong. Therefore, the thought is that Dan can bring his tribe out of trouble and distress so that it can now be viewed as the equal of the other Israelite

⁴⁹³ Walter C. Kaiser, “עָבַד (*‘abad*) work, serve,” in *TWOT*, 2:639.

⁴⁹⁴ Leupold, p. 1188.

⁴⁹⁵ Gunkel, p. 477; Von Rad, *Genesis*, pp. 426-27.

⁴⁹⁶ Kittel, p. 26.

⁴⁹⁷ Zobel, p. 18.

⁴⁹⁸ Peters, p. 108.

⁴⁹⁹ Zobel, p. 17, and others.

tribes.⁵⁰⁰ The thought is acceptable, although without the presuppositions of the gradually developing amphictyonic arrangement.

Stigers thinks similarly, when he writes about “judge” in the sense of “deliver.” He would apply this deliverance to the migration north in Judges 18, which would be seen as providing justice that was not to be had in the more difficult tribal territory on the Mediterranean Sea.⁵⁰¹

The original meaning of Dan in Gen. 30:6 supports this view. After Leah had given birth to four sons, Rachel gave her maidservant Bilhah to Jacob. When Bilhah became pregnant, Rachel said, “God has vindicated me (*dānannī*); he has listened to my plea and given me a son.” The verse concludes with this comment, “Because of this she named him Dan.” Rachel was delivered from the misery she was experiencing as a result of being childless. In Gen. 49:16, the author is saying, “Dan will live up to his name.” Scholars disagree on whether or not the word play has any value etymologically, but it is likely that it does.

Davidson thinks of the word “judge” in the sense of “plead for,” that is, to plead for status as part of the tribal federation.⁵⁰² That sense of the word is not far from what is outlined above.⁵⁰³

Many disclaimers for predicting the judgeship of Samson have arisen,⁵⁰⁴ although some will say that the character of the tribe, as seen in Samson and the Judges 18 incident, is a part of the picture.⁵⁰⁵ Nor is the intent of the verse that Dan will champion the national cause, as others have suggested.⁵⁰⁶

The point is “that he will successfully assert an equal status with the other tribes.” Skinner comments that in Judg. 18:2, 11, 19, the Danites were called a “clan,” an indication of an inferior rank.⁵⁰⁷ Leupold spells out the thought in more detail. Dan will always be able to provide rulers to administer justice within his own tribe. He states that he doesn’t know why this is emphasized, although some have suggested that the smallness of the tribe, alluded to in verse 17, is the reason.⁵⁰⁸ Gunkel has stated thoughts similar to those of Leupold and has given a reason. The poet wishes for Dan that he preserve his independence, his own jurisdiction, since the tribe has only a few men, according to Judg. 18:11.⁵⁰⁹ Keil and Delitzsch write that Dan will procure justice for his people, the nation of Israel, as much as any other of the tribes.⁵¹⁰ Bennetch thinks the same, also referring *‘ammô*, “his people,” to the nations.⁵¹¹

Von Rad thinks that 2 Sam. 20:18 (LXX) contains a recollection of a widely known legal tradition about the city of Dan in the north and praises that city as famous in Israel. The point is that as in Dan, so shall it happen generally in Israel. Or, as in Israel, so it is judged in Dan.⁵¹²

It is difficult to choose between the two interpretations: one, that Dan will procure justice for its tribe by taking care of them in the face of oppression, or two, that Dan will preserve its independence and equal status with the other tribes in spite of its smallness. Verse 17 lends support to both of these views, although the warlike imagery of the verse lends greater support to the former view. Therefore, we follow Zobel, not only in the light of verse 17, but also in the light of the similar meaning given in Gen. 30:6.

The difference of opinion on the meaning of the word *‘ammô* has been mentioned above. Zobel rightly notes the parallelism between *k’ aḥadh šibḥtē yisra’el* and *‘ammô*, a parallelism that suggests that *‘ammô* refers to the tribal people of Dan rather than to the whole nation.⁵¹³ In his study of the words *ām* and *gôy*, “people” and “nation,” Speiser concludes that *ām* is “a term denoting close family connections, and hence, secondarily the extended family, that is, people in the sense of a larger, but fundamentally consanguineous, body.” The emphasis is on the individual, whereas there is no hint of personal ties in the word *gôy*. The word *gôy* is very close to the modern

⁵⁰⁰ Ibid., p. 18.

⁵⁰¹ Stigers, p. 329.

⁵⁰² Davidson, p. 307.

⁵⁰³ E. Dhorme, “Charles Virolleaud—La légende phénicienne de Danel,” *Syria* 18 (1937):105-06, has suggested the influence of the legendary hero Danil, the judge [2 Aqht V:6-8=1Aqht 21-25], who may be the figure in Ezek. 28:3, upon Dan judging his people.

⁵⁰⁴ Skinner, p. 527; Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 404; Bennetch, p. 429.

⁵⁰⁵ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 404; Aalders, p. 284; Bennetch, p. 429.

⁵⁰⁶ Skinner, p. 527.

⁵⁰⁷ Ibid.

⁵⁰⁸ Leupold, p. 1188.

⁵⁰⁹ Gunkel, p. 484.

⁵¹⁰ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 404.

⁵¹¹ Bennetch, p. 429.

⁵¹² Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 426.

⁵¹³ Zobel, p. 18.

definition of “nation.”⁵¹⁴ Therefore, the word ‘*ām*’ would more likely refer to the tribe than the nation in this context.⁵¹⁵

In this verse Kittel finds two indications of a late date. No ancient tribal saying has the subject and object referring to the same thing, he writes. Furthermore, the phrase “tribes of Israel” presupposes a community of tribes already in existence.⁵¹⁶ Neither of these points carry much weight, particularly if the chapter is seen as predictive.

Gen. 49:17

“Dan will be a serpent along the roadside,	a	b	c	d	3
a viper along the path,	[a’]	[b’]	c’	d’	3
that bites the horse’s heels,	e	f	g		3
so that its rider falls backward.	h	i	j		3

In this animal comparison, there is the reason that Dan procured justice for his tribal people: his smallness. Though he is small, he will succeed.⁵¹⁷ His smallness is to be viewed opposite powerful enemies, as the comparison between a snake and a horse suggests.⁵¹⁸ Although he is small, Dan is not weak, as Stigers suggests.⁵¹⁹ There is nothing in the verse to suggest that the tribe is weak. Rather, the verse teaches us that although Dan will be a small tribe, he will be deadly.⁵²⁰ The rider will fall backward off his horse, when Dan strikes. Rather than allowing its smallness to result in being pushed around, Dan will strike for justice for its people.⁵²¹

Kidner thinks the verse expresses the same gulf between one’s calling and one’s accomplishments that was Reuben’s disgrace. Dan’s calling and its name were to judge, to vindicate the disconsolate, but its choice was violence and treachery, as in Judges 18. Consequently, Dan is not listed among the tribes in Rev. 7:5-8.⁵²² For once, Kidner has missed the point of the saying. The picture of a viper need not connote treachery, particularly in the context of verse 16. Von Rad insists that there is no accusation of furtiveness here.⁵²³ As for the omission of Dan in Revelation 7, seven of the twelve tribes are omitted at least once in one of the twenty-eight lists in Scripture. If Dan is being censured for its actions, why is Reuben never omitted from a tribal list?

Kittel’s explanation is more consistent with the entire oracle. In the Old Testament, the serpent bite is dangerous, but not necessarily treacherous (see Num. 21:6, Amos 5:19). Dan is not charged with maliciousness, but is praised for its victorious struggle against mighty and more numerous enemies. The same picture appears in verse 19, as Gad fights against superior enemies. Kittel calls Judg. 1:34 proof for the historical correctness of the saying, where it states that Amorites confined Dan to the hill country. Dan chose to migrate, rather than be made subject to stronger neighboring nations.⁵²⁴

Critics think of the introductory *y^ehî*, “will be,” or “may he be,” as evidence of the beginning of a separate blessing. Cross and Freedman comment that the word disturbs the meter and the meaning.⁵²⁵ Zobel agrees that *y^ehî* is an addition, connecting two originally independent units. However, he admits that other possibilities exist, that the word is a poetic abbreviation of *wayhî*,⁵²⁶ that it is a continuous imperfect or an optative.⁵²⁷ Kittel calls it a wish in the jussive form.⁵²⁸ Leupold agrees, referring to the jussive as an indication that the verse is to be understood in a complimentary sense.⁵²⁹

⁵¹⁴ E. A. Speiser, “‘People’ and ‘Nation’ of Israel,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 79 (1960):159-60.

⁵¹⁵ So Gunkel, p. 484; Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 426; Leupold, p. 1188.

⁵¹⁶ Kittel, p. 27.

⁵¹⁷ Stigers, p. 329.

⁵¹⁸ Aalders, p. 284.

⁵¹⁹ Stigers, p. 329.

⁵²⁰ Davidson, p. 306.

⁵²¹ Aalders, p. 283.

⁵²² Kidner, pp. 219-20.

⁵²³ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 427.

⁵²⁴ Kittel, pp. 28-29.

⁵²⁵ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 76, n. 60.

⁵²⁶ So GK 109k, shortened for rhythmical reasons.

⁵²⁷ Zobel, p. 18.

⁵²⁸ Kittel, p. 28.

⁵²⁹ Leupold, p. 1188.

The *š'phîphôn*, “viper, horned snake,” is the *cerastes cornutus*, “the very poisonous horned serpent, which is the colour of the sand, and as it lies upon the ground, merely stretching out its feelers, inflicts a fatal wound upon any who may tread upon it unawares.”⁵³⁰

Zobel thinks that *'ōrah*, “path,” determines the general *dherekh*, “roadside,” as a caravan route and highway (see Judg. 5:6, Isa. 41:3, Joel 2:7).⁵³¹ Probably no such significance is to be attached to the word. It is merely a poetic variation on the parallel term in the first colon.

There is a literary tradition behind the use of *nāsakh*, “bite.” The verb occurs with the mention of a serpent in ten of its twelve occurrences. To bite like a snake is a customary simile in Hebrew and Ugaritic.⁵³² The two terms, *nāhāš*, “serpent,” and *nāsakh*, “to bite,” occur in parallelism in Ugaritic literature.⁵³³

The snake bites “the horse’s heels,” *'iqq'bhê-sûs*. Judg. 5:22 shows that it means the heels of the horse. Zobel claims that Judg. 5:28 shows that the heels of the horse of the war chariot are meant.⁵³⁴ The LXX and Syriac translate “heel,” singular, perhaps an older spelling practice without the final vowel letter, or a corruption on the basis of a literal interpretation of the passage, that is, the snake bites only one heel.⁵³⁵

The word *rōkh'bhô*, “its rider,” may refer either to an individual horse rider, or to the rider of a chariot. The verb *rākhabh* can be translated either “ride” or “drive a war chariot.” Both meanings appear in the Old Testament. Zobel writes that if a chariot is meant, then the soldier falls out the back of the vehicle when the horse rears up.⁵³⁶ Kittel comments that the chariot was introduced by the Hyksos in the eighteenth century B.C. It was the weapon of the Canaanites, which assured their superiority over the Israelites (see Judg. 1:19, 4:3, 13, Josh. 17:16). Since Israel thought itself powerless against such weapons, until after Deborah’s victory, the saying must be dated after that event, writes Kittel.⁵³⁷ However, it must also be pointed out that the rider would not necessarily fall backwards out of a chariot when a horse reared up. Therefore, the idea of a horseman riding on the back of a horse is retained here.

Gen. 49:18

“I wait for your deliverance, O Lord.”

This verse has been a puzzle to most scholars. It appears without any poetic structure or rhythmical meter. Its purpose has been variously explained.

The thought of the verse is that of deliverance. Aalders thinks of deliverance in all areas of life, both spiritual and physical; Jacob’s faith that God would sustain Dan has a wider application.⁵³⁸ Leupold feels that Jacob is saying, “In many instances of the past have I waited or trusted and do I trust still.”⁵³⁹

Davidson calls the verse an insertion by a pious scribe.⁵⁴⁰ Kellett thinks it suggests the tune to which this part of the song is to be sung.⁵⁴¹ Speiser, Cross and Freedman think of some sort of a liturgical rubric, perhaps a misplaced general invocation.⁵⁴²

Most critics think the verse to be a marginal gloss or interpolation.⁵⁴³ Among those who view the verse in this way, some relate the verse to the entire chapter, while others think it relates to the saying on Dan just concluded. Skinner thinks that the verse is an interpolation marking the middle of the poem. He writes about inept attempts to defend the genuineness as a sigh of exhaustion on Jacob’s part or an utterance of the nation’s dependence on

⁵³⁰ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 404. So also Skinner, Leupold, Gunkel.

⁵³¹ Zobel, p. 18.

⁵³² Cassuto, 2:39.

⁵³³ Fisher, 2:283.

⁵³⁴ Zobel, p. 18.

⁵³⁵ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 87, n. 61.

⁵³⁶ Zobel, pp. 18-19.

⁵³⁷ Kittel, p. 28.

⁵³⁸ Aalders, p. 284.

⁵³⁹ Leupold, p. 1190.

⁵⁴⁰ Davidson, p. 307.

⁵⁴¹ E. E. Kellett, p. 426.

⁵⁴² Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 367; Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 88, n. 65.

⁵⁴³ E.g., Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 367.

Yahweh's help in such unequal conflicts predicted for Dan.⁵⁴⁴ Kittel calls it a gloss, not to the Dan oracle, but to the entire collection. In the style of the Psalms, the verse is an acknowledgement of trust. He cites Ps. 38:15, 39:7, and particularly 55:23c.⁵⁴⁵

Some critics think that the verse relates to verses 16-17. Von Rad thinks that perhaps it is a marginal gloss from a later reader or copyist, who was reminded of the saying about the serpent in 3:14.⁵⁴⁶ Zobel thinks it a conscious theological correction to verse 16, since the rights that Dan will procure can be granted only by Yahweh.⁵⁴⁷ Gunkel calls the verse a gloss or annotation. He thinks it better suited to follow verse 16 than verse 17, something that Zobel commented on above. According to Gunkel, the verse was written before the monarchy, expressing the well-wishes of all Israel for Dan, since Dan fights completely by itself.⁵⁴⁸

Among those who defend a more traditional understanding of the verse, Stigers thinks that it must be connected with the preceding verses. It is spoken as a prophetic word of hope for the deliverance of Dan, who will be hard pressed by stronger enemies,⁵⁴⁹ but the lack of meter and poetic structure speak against this. Kidner calls the verse enigmatic. He writes, ". . . it could arise from a father's prayers, like Abraham's for Ishmael (17:18), or possibly from the sudden memory of his own treachery, long renounced, called up by the acts and words (heel[s], 17, 19) associated with his own name."⁵⁵⁰

Both Leupold and Keil and Delitzsch think of the total context of the chapter. Leupold comments that the verse plainly interrupts the thought sequence, but with good reason. Jacob has repeatedly spoken of self-help in the oracles about Judah, Issachar, and Dan. Jacob wants to say that true salvation comes only from God.⁵⁵¹ Keil and Delitzsch write in a similar fashion.⁵⁵² The verse projects into the future.

The lack of poetic structure or meter leads the reader to conclude that the verse is not to be taken as closely connected with the preceding or following verses. Its location at the approximate middle of the chapter lends further support. Certainly the verse is an expression of trust in God's power to deliver. While the arguments for viewing the verse as a gloss have some merit, the verse is better attributed to Moses, the man who incorporated the words of Jacob into Genesis. However, it must be admitted that the verse can be defended as the words of Jacob.

Gen. 49:19

"Raiders will raid Gad,	a	b	c	3
but he will raid at their heels.	a'	c'	b'	3

The verse speaks about the problem Gad will have from roaming bands of nomads of the desert as a result of its Transjordan location. Commentators are unanimously agreed on that fact. Though Gad cannot prevent the raids, it can by constant watchfulness repel them.⁵⁵³ Examples of these attacks are to be found in Judg. 10:7-9, Judg. 11:1, 1 Chron. 5:18-22, and Jer. 49:1. The ninth-century Moabite Stone gives further testimony to this problem.⁵⁵⁴ Gunkel names especially the Ammonites, Moabites, and Aramaeans.⁵⁵⁵ Gad will not be slow to defend himself and strike back.⁵⁵⁶ There may actually be a message in the poetic structure that further emphasizes that fact. The chiasmic b c/c' b' structure suggests that Gad literally will turn the tables on the enemy, as the poetic structure itself does.

There is another word play in the verse. The word play has been reflected in the translation above. Four of the six words in the verse are involved in the pun. The word translated "raiders," *g^edhûdh*, is probably derived from a different root than the verb *gûdh*, "to invade, attack." However, puns in the Hebrew can go by sound as well as sense.

⁵⁴⁴ Skinner, p. 527.

⁵⁴⁵ Kittel, pp. 29-30.

⁵⁴⁶ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 427.

⁵⁴⁷ Zobel, p. 19.

⁵⁴⁸ Gunkel, p. 484.

⁵⁴⁹ Stigers, p. 329.

⁵⁵⁰ Kidner, p. 220.

⁵⁵¹ Leupold, pp. 1189-90.

⁵⁵² Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 404.

⁵⁵³ Zobel, p. 19.

⁵⁵⁴ Kidner, p. 220.

⁵⁵⁵ Gunkel, p. 484.

⁵⁵⁶ Leupold, pp. 1190-91.

There is some question about the subject of the first colon. Is Gad the subject, or is the band of raiders the subject? The verb is in the third singular and could be construed in either way. Cross and Freedman think that Gad is the subject, not its enemies.⁵⁵⁷ However, the more common viewpoint is the correct one. Zobel translates literally, “Gad, a robber band robs him, but he robs ‘their’ rearguard.”⁵⁵⁸ “Gad” appears at the head of the sentence for the sake of the parallelism with the second colon. Therefore, it is the only word that is out of place, and that for poetic reasons. It would normally follow the verb.

But he,” *w^ehû’*, connects verse 19a and verse 19b in much the same way that it does in verses 13 and 20. Verse 19b gives details about verse 19a. In each clause where *w^ehû’* is the opening word, the purpose is to give more detail. The emphasis here is on Gad’s brave defense and success, not on the pursuit of lost plunder.⁵⁵⁹

In the final word of this verse and the first word of the next verse, it is quite clear that we have the displacement of one letter, a *mem*. Read “*qēbhām*, “their heels,” and “*ʿāšer*, “Asher . . .,” rather than “*āqēbh*, “heel,” and *mēʿāšer*, “From Asher . . .” The LXX, Vulgate, Old Latin, and Syriac reflect this. Commentators overwhelmingly adopt the reading “*qēbhām*. Speiser notes that with the exception of Joseph, all other names head their respective passages, and even in the case of Joseph they are without a preposition.⁵⁶⁰

Cross and Freedman think of an adverbial formation and translate, “from the rear,” or “at the rear.” Since the Syriac omits the *mem* altogether, they think that it may be enclitic.⁵⁶¹ The LXX translates the word as though the *mem* were the third person plural suffix, while the Vulgate probably reflects “*qēbhām* as an adverb with the translation, *retorsum*, “behind,” or “backwards.”

The meaning adopted here is the suffix, although the difference in meaning between suffix and adverb is slight. Some of the translations, such as the JPSA, RSV, NIV, also prefer the suffix as the natural reading. Keil and Delitzsch comment that “*āqēbh* never means a rearguard. The phrase means to press after the enemy, with the result that they are put to flight.⁵⁶²

Gen. 49:20

“Asher’s food will be rich,	a	b	c	3
and he will provide royal delicacies.	a’	d	c’ (bv)	3

Opinion is divided as to whether praise or scorn is the intended message of this verse. Asher settled in the fertile coastal area, north of Carmel and just south of Phoenicia. The name may occur in Egyptian inscriptions in the time of Seti and Rameses II, 1312-1289 and 1290-1224,⁵⁶³ as a designation of Western Galilee, “*asaru*.”⁵⁶⁴ Today the area exports much olive oil and is known as one of the more fertile areas of Palestine.⁵⁶⁵ Davidson thinks that the richness of Asher is due to the proximity of the Phoenician merchant cities.⁵⁶⁶

Emery Barnes and Kittel feel that this verse rebukes Asher, both of them thinking of a Canaanite king as the recipient of Asher’s provisions.⁵⁶⁷ In that case, the *waw* must be considered adversative. The rebuke would censure Asher, who could have driven out the Canaanites, but preferred the richness of the plain to the harshness of warfare, even at the expense of some freedom.⁵⁶⁸ Barnes sees the verse in connection with verse 21. There Naphtali is praised at the expense of Asher—Asher may have abundance, but at the expense of freedom, whereas

⁵⁵⁷ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 88, n. 66.

⁵⁵⁸ Zobel, p. 5.

⁵⁵⁹ Zobel thinks of the pursuit of lost plunder, p. 19.

⁵⁶⁰ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 367.

⁵⁶¹ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, pp. 88-89, n. 68.

⁵⁶² Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 405.

⁵⁶³ Kitchen, p. 231.

⁵⁶⁴ Skinner, p. 528.

⁵⁶⁵ Aalders, p. 285.

⁵⁶⁶ Davidson, p. 307.

⁵⁶⁷ W. Emery Barnes, “A Taunt-Song in Gen. xlix:20,21,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 33 (1932):355; Kittel, p. 31.

⁵⁶⁸ Kittel, p. 31.

“Naphtali is a hind let loose, giving forth sweet songs (of freedom).” Judg. 5:17-18 is a reproach against Asher that forms part of the background to Gen. 49:20-21. Barnes attributes the two verses to the period of the rising of Deborah and Barak against the Canaanites.⁵⁶⁹

On the other hand, Zobel and von Rad are among the larger number of writers who consider the verse to be words of praise. Zobel calls the verse praise of the skillful and effective activity of Asher, which makes it possible to supply food above and beyond its own needs.⁵⁷⁰ Von Rad thinks Asher is extolled because of its rich produce. He relates the verse to similar thoughts in Deut. 33:24.⁵⁷¹

The parallel thought expressed in Deut. 33:24 suggests that the idea of praise is in view here.⁵⁷² There Asher is called “most blessed of sons,” one who will “bathe his feet in oil,” so rich will be its produce. Furthermore, it is likely that there is a word play on the name Asher in this verse. Asher means “happiness, blessedness,” so Asher receives an inheritance that confirms its name.⁵⁷³

The king that is supplied provisions is not mentioned. As stated above, some think of Canaanite kings. Zobel also prefers a reference to Canaanite kings rather than Israelite kings beginning with David, since the passage deals with the tribal lands of Asher.⁵⁷⁴ Gunkel suggests Phoenician kings, noting the mention of trade between Israel and Tyre in Ezek. 27:18.⁵⁷⁵ Von Rad thinks of the court in Jerusalem or Samaria and the annual quota that twelve administrative districts provided, each of which provided supplies for the king for one month of the year (see 1 Kgs. 4:7, 27).⁵⁷⁶ Kittel wonders why those verses can be cited, since all of the tribes took turns.⁵⁷⁷

The sense of the verse is to be taken more generally, without reference to any historical period. The NIV translates “delicacies fit for a king.” That does not necessarily mean that a royal court was provided, just that the delicacies were of such high quality that a king would be pleased with them. In the light of the poetic structure of the verse and the parallelism between the two members, verse 20b is better understood as an explanation of verse 20a, detailing the richness of Asher’s produce.

Keil and Delitzsch translate *šēmēnāh* as a noun, “fat,”⁵⁷⁸ although BDB lists it as the feminine singular adjective of *šāmēn*, “fat, robust, rich.” Dahood connects the Hebrew *šēmēnāh*, “fatness,” to the Ugaritic *šmt*, a word derived from *šmnt*.⁵⁷⁹ Based on that Ugaritic parallel, Zobel calls the word a substantive neuter and translates “fat, fatness.”⁵⁸⁰ The translation “rich” is a free translation of the literal “fatness.”

“His food,” *lahmô*, is the predicate noun, as in verses 9, 14, 17, 21, 22, and 27, although Keil and Delitzsch think it is in apposition to *šēmēnāh*.⁵⁸¹ The word is to be taken in the basic sense of “food,”⁵⁸² after the parallel meaning in Ugaritic.⁵⁸³ Vawter has produced a parallelism in Ugaritic literature, where *lhm* parallels *mgd*, Ugaritic cognates to *lehem* and *ma^adannim*, in Krt 83-84, 174-75.⁵⁸⁴ As a result of Ugaritic studies, the meaning of *ma^adannim* is no longer in doubt.⁵⁸⁵

Gen. 49:21

“Naphtali is a doe set free	a	b	c	3
that bears beautiful fawns.	[a’]	c’	b’ (bv)	3

⁵⁶⁹ Barnes, p. 355.

⁵⁷⁰ Zobel, p. 20.

⁵⁷¹ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 427.

⁵⁷² Gunkel, p. 484; Leupold, p. 1191.

⁵⁷³ Ibid.

⁵⁷⁴ Zobel, p. 20.

⁵⁷⁵ Gunkel, p. 484.

⁵⁷⁶ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 427.

⁵⁷⁷ Kittel, p. 31.

⁵⁷⁸ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 405.

⁵⁷⁹ Fisher, 2:448.

⁵⁸⁰ Zobel, p. 20.

⁵⁸¹ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 405.

⁵⁸² So Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 89, n. 70, and others.

⁵⁸³ Zobel, p. 20.

⁵⁸⁴ Vawter, “Canaanite Background,” p. 2. So Zobel, p. 20.

⁵⁸⁵ Coppens, p. 99.

The translation suggested here is the same as that of the NIV. It hinges upon a proper understanding of two nouns, one in each phrase. To translate the text as it stands would yield the following: “Naphtali is a doe set free that gives beautiful words.” The inappropriateness of the meaning of the second phrase to that of the first is self-evident.

In order to remedy the problem, various emendations have been offered on the word *'ayyālāh*, “hind, doe.” The LXX translates *stelechos*, “stump, log,” leading some to suggest an original *'elāh*, “terebinth, tree.” The Targum of Onkelos seems to read “terebinth,” and BHS suggests this reading in a footnote. The NEB has adopted this reading, translating, “Naphtali is a spreading terebinth putting forth lovely boughs.”⁵⁸⁶ That rendering requires a change from *'imrê*, “words,” to *'amirê*, plural construct of *'āmîr*, a noun listed in BDB as “top, summit,” and variously translated, “boughs, shoots, crowns, crests, tops,” in reference to the branches of the tree. It has doubtful support in Isa. 17:6.⁵⁸⁷ Neither emendation requires a change in the consonantal text, but neither emendation has strong support.

Zobel has pointed out the picture of a freely roving deer in 2 Sam. 22:34, Ps. 18:34, and Hab. 3:19, where the idea is applied to a victorious soldier upon the mountain heights. As a result, he sees verse 21a in praise of Naphtali as a freely roving deer, because it proudly triumphs over its foes.⁵⁸⁸ Westermann thinks that an animal comparison is to be thought of here, since only animal comparisons have been met up until now. In the light of the parallel thought in 2 Sam. 2:18, “Asahel was as fleet-footed as a wild gazelle,” Job 39:5, “Who let (*šillah*) the wild donkey go free?” and the description of Naphtali in Judg. 5:18, “Naphtali on the heights of the field,” Westermann translates, “Naphtali—a fleeting doe, that bears lovely lambs.”⁵⁸⁹

Many other commentators see an allusion to success in battle. Leupold speaks of the swift strength of warrior’s feet (see 2 Sam. 22:34).⁵⁹⁰ Kidner thinks of the name won for Naphtali under Barak in Judg. 4-5.⁵⁹¹ Aalders speaks of swiftness and great skill in self-defense, citing the same passages as others.⁵⁹² Many others write similarly.

The passive participle, *šlūhāh*, “set free,” is the point of comparison. As a result of its willingness to fight and its success in battle, the tribe is “set free.” Naphtali is let loose, running freely about (see Job 39:5), not hunted or oppressed.⁵⁹³

Gunkel has written that whether *'ayyālāh* is translated “terebinth,” or “hind,” the feminine participle is better,⁵⁹⁴ but the participle is undoubtedly masculine because of “Naphtali,” a masculine proper noun. It has been called a determinative participle, since it speaks directly about the subject of the first colon (see GK 126b).⁵⁹⁵ It may indicate that which is habitually done.⁵⁹⁶ Dahood defends the presence of the article with the participle, since usage of the article in poetry is generally considered late. He thinks that where the article functions as the relative pronoun, it is genuine and early.⁵⁹⁷

The second noun that requires attention is the word *'imrê*, “words,” translated here as “fawns.” Some scholars have noted that a translation such as “who produces pleasing speeches” is too far distant from verse 21a,⁵⁹⁸ but von Rad states that the abandoning of the imagery of verse 21a is not disturbing, according to the laws of poetry at that time. Wisdom teachers were preoccupied with producing “beautiful words.” The problem is that Naphtali was not known for that.⁵⁹⁹ Leupold and others point to the Song of Deborah and Barak in Judges 5, claiming that “these may not be the most notable of achievements, but they will be the distinguishing marks of this tribe.”⁶⁰⁰ Barak was from Naphtali, and Deborah may have been.

⁵⁸⁶ Davidson, pp. 306-07.

⁵⁸⁷ Skinner, p. 528.

⁵⁸⁸ Zobel, p. 20.

⁵⁸⁹ “*Naphtali—eine flüchtige Hindin, die liebliche Lämmer bringt*,” Westermann, pp. 247, 269.

⁵⁹⁰ Leupold, p. 1192.

⁵⁹¹ Kidner, p. 220.

⁵⁹² Aalders, p. 285.

⁵⁹³ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 405.

⁵⁹⁴ Gunkel, p. 485; others.

⁵⁹⁵ Zobel, p. 20.

⁵⁹⁶ Leupold, p. 1192.

⁵⁹⁷ M. Dahood, Psalms III: 101-150, in *The Anchor Bible*, vol 17a (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1970).

⁵⁹⁸ E.g., Gunkel, p. 485; Kidner, pp. 220-21.

⁵⁹⁹ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 427.

⁶⁰⁰ Leupold, p. 1192.

Eissfeldt thinks that such a translation suggests the figure of outward and inward harmony,⁶⁰¹ and Barnes thinks that it refers to the song of victory that is sung by the triumphant warriors of Naphtali.⁶⁰² Zobel translates similarly, “Naphtali is a free-wandering hind; he proclaims words of victory.”⁶⁰³ He cites Sigmund Mowinckel, who claimed that *'imrāh* or *'ōmēr* can mean the victory message that is sent out by Yahweh after a victory. The word *'emer* in the text could correspond to that, if *šepher* could be explained in this way. The Amarna Letters and a Mari letter have the word *šipru* with the meaning “message,” or “victorious message.” If this explanation is correct, then verse 21b assumes the announcement of a message of peace or victory and is closely connected with verse 21a (see Syriac, Test. XII Patr., Test. Naft. 2).⁶⁰⁴ Vawter’s Ugaritic parallel, *tn ql* (51:V:70) = *hannōthēn 'imrê*, with *ql* in the sense of “thunder,” is based on the same translation.⁶⁰⁵

However, it is better to keep the same consonants and punctuate *'imm^erê*, or *'immārê*, “lambs,”⁶⁰⁶ and then translate “fawns.” The Arabic and Aramaic *immar*, “lamb,” is *immiru* in Akkadian.⁶⁰⁷ Many others agree (see Ezra 6:9, 17, 7:17). This repunctuation provides an excellent parallel to “hind” in the first phrase. Further evidence for this understanding has been noted in *Ras Shamra Parallels*. There it has been noted that *ayl* and *imr*, “deer” and “fawn,” occur in parallelism (62:24 + 28[CTA 6 I:24 + 28]).⁶⁰⁸ There is also a proposed restoration of a Ugaritic text of *imr špr*, “beautiful lambs,” in 602 obv:10.⁶⁰⁹ The additional parallel of *ytn*, “to give,” and *šlh*, “to send,” suggests the existence of a chiasm in this verse.⁶¹⁰

The verse would then teach that “this free, mountain people . . . will breed true, and keep its character.”⁶¹¹ Westermann describes verse 21 as a saying of praise for the agility and/or love of freedom of the tribe of Naphtali, who develops young talent in the freedom of the mountains.⁶¹² While this reading is preferred, the cogency of the arguments of Zobel, Mowinckel, and others is reflected in the footnote to this verse in the RSV and the NIV.

⁶⁰¹ Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament*, p. 633.

⁶⁰² Barnes, p. 359.

⁶⁰³ “*Naphtali ist eine freischweifende Hinde; er verkündet Worte der Siegesbotschaft*,” Zobel, p. 5.

⁶⁰⁴ Zobel, pp. 20-21, citing Sigmund Mowinckel, *Der achtundsechzigste Psalm* (Oslo: Avhandlingar utgitt av Det Norske Videnskaps-Akademi i Oslo, II. Hist.-Filos. Klasse, 1953, No. 1, 1953), p. 77.

⁶⁰⁵ Vawter, “Canaanite Background,” p. 2.

⁶⁰⁶ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 367; Kittel comments that Köhler’s translation of *'imrê-šepher* as “branched out horns” is not possible for the female of a buck, p. 32.

⁶⁰⁷ Fritz Hommel, “Genesis xlix.21,” *The Expository Times* 12 (1900-01):46.

⁶⁰⁸ Fisher, 3:17.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 3:114, 200.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁶¹¹ Kidner, pp. 220-21.

⁶¹² Westermann, p. 269.

Gen. 49:22-26

The Joseph saying is a perplexing one, leading many exegetes to conclude that the text is in bad condition. Kittel says the saying was two originally independent pieces that have grown together, but that it is impossible to pick out the individual parts.⁶¹³ Gunkel, however, calls it a unified passage without the interpolations suggested by Edgar Fripp (verses 24b-26), Sievers (verses 24b-26a), or Meyer (verses 24b-25a).⁶¹⁴ Some have stated that the supposedly corrupt condition of the text is actually evidence of the great age of the passage.⁶¹⁵

The thought progression of the saying is from the present time back to the stresses of the past, behind both present and past to God, and then ahead into the future.⁶¹⁶

The saying is generally considered by critics to have been written from the Judean point of view. The praise of a northern tribe in a southern document is variously explained. Skinner comments that this is unusual, but such praise was needed in the time of David, when the unity of the empire had to be maintained by a friendly attitude towards the prominent central tribes.⁶¹⁷ He thinks that some of the verses may be of northern origin, but that “the whole belongs to the earliest literary recension of the Song to which we have access.”⁶¹⁸

As to date, Davidson thinks it to be a very early piece of poetry, even earlier than verses 8-12, since it presupposes Joseph’s preeminence among the tribes.⁶¹⁹ Skinner’s preference, the time of David, is stated above. Westermann thinks it comes from the time of Judah’s preeminence and would therefore think of the time of David or later.⁶²⁰ The dating of this oracle in the time of Jacob is dependent upon arguments to be developed later, such as that of the unity of the chapter, its many archaic forms, and its priority in time to Deuteronomy 33.

As to its relationship to the context, Brueggemann thinks the saying more closely connected to the preceding narratives than any of the other tribal sayings. He suggests some cautious links also to Genesis 1-2 and the blessings of creation.⁶²¹ Westermann comments on the emphasis that is placed upon the Judah and Joseph sayings as a result of their length. He ascribes this emphasis to the collector of chapter 49.⁶²² It will be argued later that the metrical similarity of the Judah and Joseph sayings suggests that they came from the same pen. Far too many editorial adjustments are called for by critics to explain the thoughts of the verses as well as their position in the chapter.

Much depends on whether one thinks of the verses as a description of Joseph, the young calf, Joseph, the wild ass, or Joseph, the fruitful vine. Verse 22 contains the comparison of Joseph to a calf, an ass, or a fruitful vine or tree. Verses 23-24b speak in praise of Joseph’s battle against archers. Then in verses 24c-25b is the fourfold invocation of God. Verses 25c-26 are the blessing. The last two sections may be thought of together as a reference to the help and blessings of God.

Gen. 49:22

“Joseph is a young calf,	a	b	c	3
a young calf near a spring,	a’	b’	d	3
the offspring that walks at the side of the bull.	a”	e	f	3

The difficulties begin with the opening phrase, *bēn pōrāth*, “a young calf,” translated in the NIV as “a fruitful vine.”

⁶¹³ Kittel, p. 37.

⁶¹⁴ Edgar Fripp, “Note on Gen. XLIX, 24b-26,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 11 (1891):263; Eduard Sievers, *Metrische Studien*, vol 2 (1904-05); *Die Hebräische Genesis* (7 vols.) (Leipzig: B.G. Teubner, 1901-19), p. 362; and Eduard Meyer, *Die Israeliten und ihre Nachbarstämme* (Halle a. S.: Max Niemeyer, 1906), p. 283, cited in Gunkel, p. 487.

⁶¹⁵ E.g., Vello Salo, “Joseph, Sohn der Färse,” *Biblische Zeitschrift* (New Series) 12 (1968):95.

⁶¹⁶ Kidner, p. 221.

⁶¹⁷ Skinner, p. 529.

⁶¹⁸ Ibid.

⁶¹⁹ Davidson, p. 308.

⁶²⁰ Westermann, p. 269.

⁶²¹ Brueggemann, pp. 366-67.

⁶²² Westermann, p. 269.

Those that translate “a fruitful vine,” or similarly, see an etymological allusion to Ephraim, the more prominent of the two Joseph tribes, in *pōrāth* (see *’ephraim, ’ephraim*).⁶²³ They derive the word from *pārāh*, “to bear fruit, be fruitful,” parsing the word as the feminine singular participle. GK 80g calls *-āth* a rare feminine ending, possibly a survival from a period when final vowels were not supported by a vowel-letter. The word would be the equivalent of *pōrīyyath*, from *pōrīyyāh*.⁶²⁴ If this etymology of *pōrāth* is correct, then there is undoubtedly a reference to Ephraim, because after the naming of his son Ephraim, Joseph said, “It is because God has made me fruitful (*hiphranī*) in the land of my suffering” (41:52).

Kittel thinks that one *bēn pōrāth* should be eliminated as dittography,⁶²⁵ but Westermann calls this repetition an obvious emphasis. “Joseph” stands in second place because of that emphasis, an emphasis which is intended to underscore the allusion to Ephraim.⁶²⁶ The meter would be seriously disrupted, were one *bēn pōrāth* eliminated. Zobel thinks that “Ephraim” should replace “Joseph,” but there is no evidence for this, other than the possible etymological connection and the word plays in other verses.⁶²⁷ However, Westermann thinks Zobel correct in his conclusion that the saying originally concerned the tribe of Ephraim.⁶²⁸

Kittel admits that it is unusual to have a plant comparison following an animal comparison, but he thinks that the tree at the spring clarifies the greatness and power of Joseph.⁶²⁹ J. M. Allegro comments that the LXX reads verse 21 as having to do with a tree, and it is not surprising if our text offers a reasonable solution by carrying on the same comparison.⁶³⁰

Translating literally “the son of a fruitful tree,” “a fruitful vine,” or “a young fruitful vine,” commentators refer to passages such as Ps. 1:3, 80:15, and Jer. 17:8. Kidner writes, “The well-watered, far-spreading fruit tree delightfully pictures Joseph’s depth of character and width of influence.”⁶³¹ Von Rad comments, “Trees beside perennial water are rather rare on the Palestinian landscape. They are conspicuous at a great distance and were therefore a subject often used in poetry.”⁶³² Davidson takes *bēn* literally as a reference to a “ben-tree,” a species of moringa, a tall and erect tree with very green leaves.⁶³³ Allegro thinks that *bēn* refers to another tree, the *Populus euphratica* or Euphratean poplar.⁶³⁴

After stating his preference for “a fruitful tree,” Kidner goes on to admit that a case can be made for seeing metaphors from the animal world.⁶³⁵ One such view would derive *pōrāth* from *pārāh*, “cow,” the feminine form of *par*, “bull.”⁶³⁶ The parallel term in Ugaritic, *pṛt*, has been noted by many scholars.⁶³⁷

Vawter writes that the traditional interpretation depends on “a wholly gratuitous rendering of *pōrāth* and *bānōth* found in the Targums.” He thinks that *pṛt* is the primitive spelling of *prh*. His interpretation suits the following context and is further suggested by the parallel in Deut. 33:17, where Joseph is called *b^ekhôr šôr* and *r^e’ēm*, “firstborn bull” and “wild ox.” If this interpretation is accepted, then *šūr* could be corrected to *šôr*, a change of punctuation only.⁶³⁸ Not every scholar who accepts this interpretation of *pōrāth*, however, would change *šūr* to *šôr*.

Speiser, Orlinsky, and Stigers think that *pōrāth* is from the noun *pere*, “wild ass.” Orlinsky calls *pōrāth* a poetic feminine form of *pere*,⁶³⁹ with elision of the *aleph*. BDB hesitatingly lists *pereh* as an alternate spelling. Speiser notes the other metaphors from the animal world, the parallel with Deut. 33:17, and the fact that this would

⁶²³ E.g., Zobel, p. 21, and many others.

⁶²⁴ So Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 406.

⁶²⁵ Kittel, p. 33.

⁶²⁶ Westermann, p. 270.

⁶²⁷ Zobel, pp. 5, 22.

⁶²⁸ Westermann, p. 270.

⁶²⁹ Kittel, p. 34.

⁶³⁰ J. M. Allegro, “A Possible Mesopotamian Background to the Joseph Blessing of Gen. XLIX,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 64 (1953):249.

⁶³¹ Kidner, p. 221.

⁶³² Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 427.

⁶³³ Davidson, p. 308.

⁶³⁴ Allegro, “Background,” pp. 249-50.

⁶³⁵ Kidner, p. 221.

⁶³⁶ Peters, p. 111

⁶³⁷ E.g., Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 90, n. 74.

⁶³⁸ Vawter, “Canaanite Background,” p. 7.

⁶³⁹ Orlinsky, p. 143.

be the only plant comparison in the chapter. Against the “fruitful tree” translation, he comments that *pōrāth* is still “a long way from an unspecified fruitful tree.”⁶⁴⁰

The arguments in favor of an animal comparison are convincing, but a meaning based on the Ugaritic parallel *pṛt* is better than one based on the word *pere*. Other archaic forms, some of the explainable from Ugaritic parallels, have already been noted.

“Near a spring.” Coppens has suggested that this second colon be taken as a parenthesis describing the countryside.⁶⁴¹ Experience with a word repeated in the second colon (verse 13) led to that conclusion earlier. In this verse, however, the double use of *bēn pōrāth* occurs for emphasis. The second clause would make little sense as a parenthesis.

Most writers translate “*alê-‘āyin* with “near a spring,” whether they take *bēn pōrāth* as a reference to a vine, tree, cow, or wild ass. The form of the preposition is its poetic form, “*alê*. If a vine is thought of, its proximity to a spring would emphasize fruitfulness and would be the cause for its branches extending over the wall.⁶⁴² Leupold wants to translate the preposition “over,” because a sturdy vine stands higher than the spring.⁶⁴³ Either translation is possible, but “near” is more natural.⁶⁴⁴ If a cow or ass is thought of, the picture may be that of freedom and/or the abundance of food and drink.

“Creature that walks at the side of the bull.” Most take *bānōth* literally as “daughters of,” translating freely as “shoots” or “branches.” However, this meaning of *bānōth* is found nowhere else in the Old Testament,⁶⁴⁵ in itself a not insurmountable objection in such an ancient poem. The verb would then be translated “to climb up or over,” but the word actually means “to move along, step, march.” Another problem exists in the plural subject and singular verb, but that has been explained grammatically as a distributive. The distributive singular supposedly concentrates on an individual shoot (see GK 145k). Some have thought that the *he* ending might be the old feminine plural ending of the verb.⁶⁴⁶ Allegro suggests repointing the MT as *b’nōth še ‘ādāh*, “daughters of sighing,” a phrase that he calls an apt and beautiful equivalent for *bēn pōrāth*, the “Euphratean poplar.”⁶⁴⁷

If the phrase is taken as a reference to the branches of the vine climbing over a wall, then the point of the verse is to praise the fruitfulness of the thriving vine of Joseph overrunning its fixed boundaries.⁶⁴⁸ With an ample water supply and the support and protection of the wall, this tribe will continue to prosper.⁶⁴⁹

Rather than throw up one’s hands in disgust, or suggest a rearrangement of the consonants of the words, as do Cross and Freedman,⁶⁵⁰ another solution may be offered.

Vello Salo writes that *bnt* meant “offspring, creator, creature,” around 1400 B.C., according to the Baal-Myth, 49:III:5, 11; 51:II:11, III:32; 2 Aqht:I:25, cited by Vrolleaud and Driver.⁶⁵¹ He would therefore translate, “Creature of him, who walks at the side of the bull.”⁶⁵² The *šā ‘dhāh* is repointed as a participle. Salo concludes that the LXX translators did not understand the verse, because of the great age of the chapter. The Masoretes, however, were faithful in preserving what they had received.⁶⁵³ Then we have the picture of a calf walking alongside its parent.

⁶⁴⁰ Speiser, *Genesis*, pp. 367-68.

⁶⁴¹ Coppens, p. 101, n. 2.

⁶⁴² Aalders, p. 286.

⁶⁴³ Leupold, p. 1194.

⁶⁴⁴ Stanley Gevirtz, “Of Patriarchs and Puns: Joseph at the Foundation, Jacob at the Ford,” *Hebrew Union College Annual* 46 (1975):33-54, cited in Westermann, p. 270, thinks he sees in the parallelism of ‘*ayin* and *swr* an allusion to the area mentioned in Gen. 16:7, 14, “at the spring of water on the way to Sur.”

⁶⁴⁵ Gunkel, p. 485.

⁶⁴⁶ Allegro, “Background,” p. 249.

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 250.

⁶⁴⁸ Zobel, p. 21. Armerding’s supposition that the branches running over the wall symbolize the blessing of the Messiah reaching out to the Gentiles is hardly correct, Armerding, “Jacob,” p. 327.

⁶⁴⁹ Von Rad notes that it is a mistake to refer the branches of the vine allegorically to Ephraim and Manasseh, *Genesis*, p. 427.

⁶⁵⁰ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 90, n. 74, take the tau with the following word and read as a Qal imperfect, “thou dost mark,” or an emphatic imperative, “march.”

⁶⁵¹ Salo, p. 94, citing C. Vrolleaud, “Un Nouveau Chant du Poème D’Alein-Baal,” *Syria* 13 (1932):113-63; and G. R. Driver, *Canaanite Myths and Legends* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1956), pp. 93-94, who translate *tr ‘el . . . bny bnwt* as “the bull El . . . the creator of creatures.”

⁶⁵² “*Geschöpf derer, die schreitet an der Seite des Stieres*,” Salo, p. 94.

⁶⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 94-95.

Vawter thinks that perhaps *ša'îr*, “small, young,” which was obviously the LXX and Samaritan Pentateuch *Vorlage*, is correct.⁶⁵⁴ Speiser refers to the Arabic, which has *bānat sa'dat*, the exact phonologic counterpart of the Hebrew phrase before us, with the meaning of “wild ass(es).”⁶⁵⁵

The final prepositional phrase has been variously interpreted, depending upon the position taken in regard to the first part of the line. “Over a wall” is the translation of those who find a fruitful vine in this verse. “On a hillside” is the translation of Speiser, who defends this as a poetic meaning for “wall, terrace” (see 2 Sam. 22:30, Ps. 18:30). He sees here a picture of spirited young animals poised on some nearby elevation.⁶⁵⁶ Allegro translates “in a garden,” in an article where he tries to connect Joseph to Tammuz, the Babylonian deity.⁶⁵⁷ Coppens translates “my son is a bull,” repointing *šûr* to *šôr* and citing the Ugaritic *'l* with the meaning, “child, progenitor.”⁶⁵⁸ We translate with Salo, repointing *šûr* to *šôr* for the sake of continuing the animal comparison.

Gen. 49:23

“Archers will bitterly attack him,	a	b	2
bowmen will assail him,	a'	b'	3 (2?)

Critics have noted the abrupt change from verses 22 to verse 23. A change occurs both in meter and in form. The verbs with the *waw* consecutives are an attempt to continue the thought of verse 22, but critics write that the attempt does not succeed.⁶⁵⁹ GK 112rr writes that the *waws* are unexplainable, perhaps corrupt. Westermann calls verses 23-24a a second saying. From him, 49:22-26 is to be divided into three segments. Verse 22 is a tribal saying about Joseph, and verses 23-24a are another tribal saying about Joseph. Verses 25-26 do not fit into the same genre, but they are a promise of blessing about Joseph.⁶⁶⁰ There is no additional mention of the name of Joseph, a criterion applied by critics to verses 8-12 and 16-17 in order to find evidence of originally independent sayings, but Westermann thinks he detects an omission at the start of verse 23. This omission occurred in order to connect verse 23 more easily with verse 22. He thinks that it may have had the name of Joseph and an animal comparison.⁶⁶¹

Peters thinks that verses 23-26 are conceived from the standpoint of Ephraim and argues for a north-Israelite origin,⁶⁶² the same thought expressed by Fripp for verses 24b-26. While there is certainly a change from verse 22 to verse 23, that change may have been intended by the author to signal a different subject, namely the hostility of those who have seen the peace and prosperity of Joseph (verse 22), compare Deut. 33:24-25.

Just what event, if any, verse 23 has in mind has occupied the minds of scholars for a long time. Their suggestions are legion. Von Rad soberly reminds us that there can be no dating of the saying from the mention of this attack. While he thinks it possible that the Midianite attack of Judges 6-8 is in view, he admits that there are other possibilities also.⁶⁶³ Von Rad's preconception about the date of the saying determines his opinion about a possible historical referent.

Peters thinks verses 23-26 refer to the story of Joseph in Genesis and the oppression of Ephraim under Solomon, leading to Jeroboam's revolt,⁶⁶⁴ an opinion based on his preconception of a north-Israelite origin of the verses. Zobel thinks of the war between Benjamin and Israel, ca. 1120 B.C., in Judges 19-20.⁶⁶⁵ He thinks verse 23 to be a description of a battle, speaking directly about Ephraim.⁶⁶⁶

Aalders thinks of events in Joseph's personal past, particularly the hostility that his brothers showed him.⁶⁶⁷ However, the retaliation suggested by verse 24 would rule out this possibility. Joseph did not retaliate against his

⁶⁵⁴ Vawter, “Canaanite Background,” p. 7.

⁶⁵⁵ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 368.

⁶⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

⁶⁵⁷ Allegro, “Background,” p. 251.

⁶⁵⁸ Coppens, p. 101.

⁶⁵⁹ Zobel, p. 22; Westermann, p. 271.

⁶⁶⁰ Westermann, p. 276.

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 271.

⁶⁶² Peters, p. 112.

⁶⁶³ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 427.

⁶⁶⁴ Peters, p. 112.

⁶⁶⁵ Zobel, pp. 110, 118.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁶⁶⁷ Aalders, pp. 286-87.

brothers. Keil and Delitzsch are correct, when they refer this verse not to the personal history of Joseph, but to the conflicts that wait his descendants.⁶⁶⁸ That suits especially the context of verse 1, a fact overlooked by most critics.

Little more can be said about the general thrust of the verse. Some kind of opposition is in view here, although the exact kind of opposition and the source of that opposition cannot be determined. If all three verbs are to be retained, Westermann is no doubt correct in writing that the three verbs emphasize the affliction of Joseph.⁶⁶⁹ The successful resistance of Joseph is detailed in verse 24, for which resistance Joseph is praised.

The translation, “they bitterly attacked him,” gives the sense of the verb, whose root means “to show bitterness.” The suffix on the verb refers to Joseph in verse 22a.

The second verb in the sentence has attracted a great deal of attention. Most take the verb from the root *rābhabh*, “to shoot,” a by-form of *rābhāh*. In view of the two imperfect tenses surrounding this word, most want to emend the text to some form of the imperfect. BHS, therefore, proposes *wāyyōrōbbû*, a reading Gunkel and Kittel adopt.⁶⁷⁰ The LXX, Samaritan Pentateuch, and Vulgate reflect the root *rībh*, “to strive, contend,” and so Cross and Freedman and Speiser want to translate.⁶⁷¹ GK 67m comments that verbs with the *holem* in the first syllable customarily reflect a trilateral stem with a middle *holem*, like *yākhōl*, “to be able.” In that case, the verb should reflect a root *rābhōbh*, but this is very doubtful.

Another possibility exists. The original text may have read, “Archers will bitterly attack him, and bowmen will assail him.” The form *wārōbbû* may an ancient plural form of the noun *rabh*, “archer,” a masculine noun listed in BDB under the root *rābhabh*, “to shoot.” That noun occurs only three times in the Old Testament, at Prov. 26:10, Job 16:13, and Jer. 50:29. Several things in the text suggest this as a possibility.

First, the parallelism is a perfect one with clause b, if the word is translated “archers.” Secondly, there is no suffix, something one would expect it to have in common with the verbs in the verse, if it were also a verb form. Thirdly, we have a *hapax*, which may suggest its archaic nature. Unfortunately, there is no help from the versions, but its form may have been unintelligible to later scribes. Fourthly, the unusual nature of the form has caused many commentators to suggest an emendation. Others have noted the problems in the verse. Fifthly, there is some evidence from other Semitic languages of the plural noun ending, *-û* (see BDB, p. 913).

This plural ending is familiar in Arabic. The singular *malikun* becomes the sound masculine plural *malikâna*, “kings.” Our proposed noun form is masculine. The sound masculine plural loses its final *nun* in some cases, when followed by a genitive. This formation would be true only for the nominative masculine sound plural in Arabic, and the form in this verse could be a nominative masculine plural. In the Ugaritic language, a Northwest Semitic language like Hebrew, the nominative ending *-um* is preserved, for example, *rpum*, “demigods, shades of the dead.” Moreover, Moscati writes, “A comparative examination of the Semitic languages suggests the following Proto-Semitic morphemes for the external masculine plural: nominative *-u* (compare also Egyptian *-w*: for example, *ntr* ‘god,’ pl. *ntr.w*), genitive/accusative *-i*.”⁶⁷² The external masculine plural is a plural formed by the change of an ending, while the internal masculine plural would be a plural formed by some internal change of the consonants and vowels within the word, like that of the broken plurals in Arabic.

The noun would be repointed *rabbû*, “archers.”* The initial *waw* may easily be explained as being present by attraction from the other two verbs, or less likely by dittography from the preceding *waw*. The *dagesh* would be retained as genuine, but the *holem* would be replaced with a *pathah*.

If this reading is accepted, we have further testimony to the extremely ancient character of this verse and therefore the entire chapter. This word would have retained its ancient spelling, because it was mistaken for a verb form, while other masculine plurals ending in *-u* were edited to *-îm*.

The phrase *ba^alê hişîm*, literally “lords of arrows,” then “archers, bowmen,” occurs only here in the Old Testament. Its uniqueness may reflect the ancient character of this verse and would mean that both subjects are ancient forms. Some think of the Midianites, since archery was characteristic of them.⁶⁷³ Others think that the Arameans are thought of here in their struggle against the Northern Kingdom. However, arrow shooting was not characteristic of the Arameans, but it was characteristic of nomads. Therefore, Gunkel suggests that nomads, in the

⁶⁶⁸ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 406.

⁶⁶⁹ Westermann, p. 271.

⁶⁷⁰ Gunkel, p. 485; Kittel, p. 34.

⁶⁷¹ Cross and Freedman, Studies, p. 90, n. 75; Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 368.

⁶⁷² Sabatino Moscati, ed., *An Introduction to the Comparative Grammar of Semitic Languages: Phonology and Morphology* (Wiesbaden: Otto Harrassowitz, 1969), p. 87.

* Joel Heck: see BDB 913 for *rabbû*, i.e. רבּוּ.

⁶⁷³ Kittel, p. 34.

period prior to the monarchy, must be thought of.⁶⁷⁴ Some think the term reminiscent of the sojourn in Egypt, a symbolic term for Joseph's enemies.⁶⁷⁵ Kittel notes that bombardment with arrows is a typical expression for affliction (see Ps. 11:2, 37:14, 57:4).⁶⁷⁶ Whether or not the phrase is to be taken literally cannot be determined with certainty. It is most likely, in view of verse 1, that this verse is to be taken as a general reference to the future. As prominent and powerful tribes, Ephraim and Manasseh will be in the vanguard of many a war. Certainly Armerding is mistaken, when he says that this verse is typical of the Messiah, who was grieved and hated but withstood every attack. For Armerding, the bow of verse 24 may be a metaphorical reference to the Messiah (compare Zech. 10:4).⁶⁷⁷

Gen. 49:24

“but his bow will remain steady,	a	b	c	3	
and his strong hands will be agile;	a'	b'	c'	3	
by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob,	d	e	f	3	
by the name of the Shepherd of the sons of Israel,	d'	e'	e'	f'	4

For obvious reasons, many have suggested viewing verse 23 and verse 24b as a unit. Westermann, for example, thinks of verses 23-24b as a separate tribal saying, as noted above. Likewise, verse 24cd and verse 25ab can also be seen as a unit. Certainly the verse divisions cannot be considered a part of the inspired text. If the assumption about an archaic form of the word *wārōbbū* in verse 23 is correct, then verses 23-24b form a near perfect parallelism of two lines. Nevertheless, most commentators look upon verse 24cd as the original continuation of verse 24ab.

A major question of interpretation in verse 24ab is the identification of the owner of the bow and the agile hands. Is the third person singular suffix a collective, referring to the enemy of Joseph,⁶⁷⁸ or is Joseph himself (or the tribe, if collective) thought of as retaliating against the archers that attack him?⁶⁷⁹ In the latter case, the *waw* at the head of the verse will be taken as adversative.

Most commentators adopt the latter point of view, and that understanding is adopted here. The suffixes, then, are taken in their most natural sense. We find a description of the firm, but flexible resistance of Joseph. Both the verbs, “remained steady,” and “were agile,” as well as the nouns, “his bow,” and “his strong hands,” form an excellent parallelism, as the poetic structure diagrammed above has shown. Joseph holds the bow steadily in position, and his hands discharge the arrows in quick succession with great agility. If verse 24cd is to be taken with verse 24ab, then the line must be understood as expressing the source of Joseph's strength and agility.

Cross and Freedman comment that verse 24ab has defied the best efforts of scholars for many years,⁶⁸⁰ and the problems begin with the first words. The words *wattēšebh b'êthān* are translated here “remained steady,” from the root *yāšabh*, “to remain, sit, stay, abide,” and from the adjective *'êthān*, “steady, constant, firm.” The verb *yāšabh* is normally used of God or of people and does not usually refer to an inanimate object. The LXX reflects *wattīšābhēr*, reading the final radical as a *resh*, from the root *šābhar*, “to break.” The Syriac and Vulgate, however, reflect the MT. The LXX reading, while different from that of the other versions and the MT itself, can be read as a witness to the interpretation which understands verse 24ab of Joseph's defense and victory over hostile archers. Dahood offers an attractive suggestion in the root *šābhabh*, “to smash, shiver,” based on the Ugaritic parallel *tbb* with the same meaning. He notes Hos. 8:6, Lam. 1:7d, and Ps. 89:44.⁶⁸¹ The suggestion would explain both the MT and the LXX.

The word *b'êthān*, literally, “in the firm,” is strange, because an adjective is the object of a preposition. The NEB thinks of a textual corruption and translates it as a reference to the deity, “the Eternal.” Speiser translates

⁶⁷⁴ Gunkel, pp. 485-86.

⁶⁷⁵ Kittel, p. 34.

⁶⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁶⁷⁷ Armerding, “Jacob,” p. 328.

⁶⁷⁸ So Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 368.

⁶⁷⁹ E.g., Zobel, p. 51.

⁶⁸⁰ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 90, n. 76.

⁶⁸¹ M. Dahood, “Is ‘Eben Yisrā’el a Divine Title? (General 49,24),” *Theological Studies* 14 (1953):1003.

“rigid, inflexible,” in reference to the bows of Joseph’s enemies; the bows did not shoot.⁶⁸² Leupold translates the adjective as a substantive, “as a strong one,”⁶⁸³ while Skinner translates “unmoved, constant.”⁶⁸⁴ Keil and Delitzsch offer the best suggestion, literally “in a strong, unyielding position,” that is, “in strength.”⁶⁸⁵ We can only surmise that this is another archaism.

“And his strong hands were agile.” The verb is based on the root *pāzaz*, “to be supple, agile.” Most translate the verb in reference to the agility of Joseph’s hands and arms. However, the verb occurs elsewhere only at 2 Sam. 6:16 with the meaning “to leap.” Speiser wants to support his viewpoint by suggesting a parallel to the Arabic cognate *fzz*, “to tremble, shake,” and translating, “their arms were unsteady.”⁶⁸⁶ Many have proposed *yippaz^erū*, “they were scattered,” and the LXX and Syriac seem to support that.

The phrase “the arms of his hands” is likewise difficult. It is taken here as an idiomatic phrase in reference to the strong hands of Joseph. The variant words of the footnote in BHS, *g̃dhē z^erō^e āyw*, “the sinews of his arms,” are supported in the LXX, Syriac, and Vulgate. However, they assume the transposition of two words in the MT as well as an emendation. The parallelism of “hand” and “bow” has been noted in Ugaritic literature, *yd* and *qšt*, and some passages in the Old Testament have been similarly noted.⁶⁸⁷ The third plural suffix in the first two clauses in the LXX may simply reflect the understanding of a collective sense of the MT third singular suffix.

Gunkel, Keil and Delitzsch, all the early commentators, even H. J. Kittel and H. J. Zobel recently, take verse 24cd as the continuation of verse 24ab. In that view, verse 24cd continues the thought of verse 24ab by mentioning the divine help through which Joseph’s opponents are defeated.⁶⁸⁸ Speiser is correct in saying that the word *mīdhē*, “by the hands of,” carries the thought of the preceding over into the next phrase.⁶⁸⁹ However, it is not incorrect to note the parallelism of verses 23-24ab and verses 24cd-25ab and suggest a redivision of the verses, thereby eliminating a single line verse in verse 23. One might further note the parallelism of verse 25cde and verse 26abc and suggest that they be considered two additional verses, with verse 26de viewed as a concluding thought.

We have noted above Fripp’s assumption that beginning with the word *mīdhē* to the end of verse 26 there is an interpolation into the text. The author of this section is supposedly an Ephraimite, the Yahwistic compiler of the prose narratives in chapters 48 and 50, who introduces divine names that are neither present elsewhere in the poem nor consistent with the theme of Judah’s supremacy in verses 8-12. Since he considers Deuteronomy 33 an Ephraimite piece from the time after 931 B.C., Fripp thinks that verses 25cde-26 show dependence on that chapter.⁶⁹⁰ Westermann thinks of verses 24cd-25ab as the work of the collector. It was intended to provide a transition from the tribal saying of verses 23-24ab to the promise of blessing in verses 25c-26.⁶⁹¹ Like Fripp, Westermann calls the names of the patriarchal gods foreign to the tribal sayings. The identification of Jacob and Israel supposedly points to a later time, a thought similar to the critical view of verses 2 and 7.⁶⁹²

The title *’abhîr ya’aqōbh*, “the Mighty One of Jacob,” appears only in poetic passages, a fact that suggests its appropriateness to this context. It appears also in Isa. 1:24, 49:26, 60:16, Ps. 132:2, 5. Kidner comments that *’abhîr* is used of God as the champion of His cause, and he notes that there is a special link with Jacob.⁶⁹³ That link can be seen in the fact that the title appears as “the Mighty One of Jacob” in five of the six occurrences of *’abhîr*. It appears as “the Mighty One of Israel” in Isa. 1:24.

Critical scholars see here a reminiscence of the bull symbol, thinking that the Masoretes changed the punctuation in order to avoid association with the idea of *’abbîr*, “bull,” the idolatrous symbol of Yahweh in northern Israel. Coppens states that *’abhîr* evokes the figure of the bull-god. The bull-god is attested in Canaan and in Israel, particularly among the Israelite tribes in the North.⁶⁹⁴ Eissfeldt thinks of the Canaanite divinity El.⁶⁹⁵ That

⁶⁸² Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 368; also Stigers, p. 330.

⁶⁸³ Leupold, p. 1195.

⁶⁸⁴ Skinner, p. 530.

⁶⁸⁵ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, pp. 406-07.

⁶⁸⁶ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 369.

⁶⁸⁷ Fisher, 3:74, Cross and Freedman. 2 Sam. 22:35, Ps. 18:35, 141:9, 2 Kings 9:24, 13:16.

⁶⁸⁸ E.g., Gunkel, p. 486; Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 407.

⁶⁸⁹ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 369.

⁶⁹⁰ Edgar I. Fripp, “Note on Gen. XLIX, 24b-26,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 11 (1891):262-65.

⁶⁹¹ Westermann, pp. 271-72.

⁶⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 272.

⁶⁹³ Kidner, p. 221.

⁶⁹⁴ Coppens, p. 102.

⁶⁹⁵ Cited in Zobel, p. 22.

the parallelism with “Stone of Israel” in the next line favors the idea of its derivation from the cult of the bull at Bethel can only be based on a critical redating of this chapter in the time after the division of the kingdom.⁶⁹⁶ Zobel thinks of a patriarchal deity of the people that derived from the eponym Jacob.⁶⁹⁷

Decades ago, Harry Torczyner argued convincingly that *'abhîr* does not designate a bull-image. In some instances it refers to the domestic cow, and in four passages it means “noble, exalted, lord, overseer, tyrant, officer.” Occasionally it designates a special, large breed of beef that is called “the special, the noble.” As a divine name, for example in Gen. 49:24, it means “noble, lord,” but there is no proof that *'abhîr* could mean “bull.”⁶⁹⁸ These arguments are sufficient to refute the critical theories mentioned in the above paragraph, but it will also be shown later that a dating of the chapter in the time of the monarchy or later cannot be sustained. Fisher has further shown that *ibr* was common as a personal name in the Ugaritic literature.⁶⁹⁹ Even if the reference to some “bull-god” were provable, the title could have been used in this passage in a demythologized sense.

The word *miššām*, “from there,” is almost certainly to be repointed as *miššēm*, “by the name of,” a perfect parallelism to *mîdhê*. The Syriac and the Targum of Onkelos lend their support to this viewpoint, although the LXX and the Vulgate do not. No change in the consonantal text is necessary. Other confusions of the punctuation of the MT suggest that the same may have happened here.⁷⁰⁰ Kittel’s suggestion that the word be left untranslated does not help.⁷⁰¹ Zobel thinks that *šām*, “there,” indicates that the “Lord of the Stone of Israel” was a local divinity.⁷⁰²

“The Shepherd of the sons of Israel.” Every scholar has noted the extra metrical foot in this line, creating a four-beat line in an otherwise perfect 3:3.3:3 distich. Many critical scholars suggest a conflated reading of “Rock of Israel” and “Shepherd/Keeper of Israel.”⁷⁰³ Cross and Freedman comment that *'ebhen*, “stone,” is impossible in this context. They would read *miššōmēr*, or *m^erō'eh b^enê*, thinking that one or two letters dropped by haplography and that the extra *aleph* in *'ebhen* is from the influence of *'abhîr*. They translate, “From the Keeper (or, From the Shepherd) of the sons of Israel.”⁷⁰⁴ The suggestion is too far-fetched, requiring too much change in the consonantal text. In contradiction to Cross and Freedman, Coppens has noted that *Abn* occurs as a divine name in Ugaritic literature.⁷⁰⁵ The word is not impossible in this context.

Westermann claims that either *'ebhen* or *rō'eh* must be explained as a marginal note. The latter is better understood, says he, as the marginal note to explain the otherwise scarce title “stone, rock” as a designation of God.⁷⁰⁶ Critical scholars are too anxious to eliminate *'ebhen* from this context. The occurrence of *Abn* as a divine name in Ugaritic literature suggests that we may have here an archaic title for the divinity. The extra-metrical foot may be intentional and for the sake of emphasis upon the source of Joseph’s strength. The extra beat was considered normal by Cross and Freedman in verse 13.

Freedman has suggested a likely solution. The word *'ebhen* may be a byform of *bn*, “son.” The same word occurs in Phoenician with a prosthetic *aleph*. The final *yod* may be missing because of the early consonantal spelling or haplography. Read as a plural, **'ibnē*, “sons.”⁷⁰⁷

Critics commonly think of the evolution of the Israelite religion in this passage. Skinner calls “the Shepherd of the Israel-Stone” a reference to the sacred stone of Bethel or Shechem (Jos 24:26-27), which was the religious rendezvous of the tribes in early times.⁷⁰⁸ Zobel thinks that the reference to a stone is a sign of a cult connected to a particular locality. This sign is supposedly connected to a locality in all the religions of the Near East. Bethel then becomes the location of a pre-Israelite sanctuary, where the names of Jacob and Israel are identified and where the “Mighty One of Jacob” is identified and connected with “Lord of the Stone of Israel.” At Bethel, both titles are identified with Yahweh, since in early times Bethel was the site of the cult of the Ark of the Covenant.⁷⁰⁹

⁶⁹⁶ Skinner, p. 531.

⁶⁹⁷ Zobel, p. 22.

⁶⁹⁸ Harry Torczyner, “אביר kein Stierbild,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 39 (1921):296-300.

⁶⁹⁹ Fisher, 2:389.

⁷⁰⁰ E.g., verses 4, 21.

⁷⁰¹ Kittel, p. 33.

⁷⁰² Zobel, p. 23.

⁷⁰³ E.g., Gunkel, p. 486; Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 90, n. 77; Westermann, p. 272.

⁷⁰⁴ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, pp. 90-91, n. 77 and p. 75.

⁷⁰⁵ Coppens, p. 103.

⁷⁰⁶ Westermann, p. 272.

⁷⁰⁷ D. N. Freedman, “Divine Names and Titles in Early Poetry,” in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God*, ed. Frank M. Cross et al (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Co., 1976), p. 65.

⁷⁰⁸ Skinner, p. 531.

⁷⁰⁹ Zobel, p. 23.

Some have noted the use of the title “Rock,” *šûr*, for God, as in Isa. 30:29 or 2 Sam. 23:3.⁷¹⁰ While this is more common as a designation of God, it is more correct to see *'ebhen* in a Messianic sense if Freedman’s suggestion is not accepted, as does Armerding, and therefore suitable in this context.⁷¹¹ Kapelrud’s article on *'ebhen*, “stone,” notes that the title occurs of Yahweh in Isa. 8:14, 28:16, and Ps. 118:22, all of which are taken in a Messianic sense in the New Testament (see 1 Peter 2:6-8). He explains the rarity of this title as a result of the conflict of the prophets with the gods of Canaan and the gods of neighboring peoples, which led the prophets to condemn the worship of wood and stone (compare Jer. 2:27, 3:9, Ezek. 20:32, Dan. 5:4, 23, Isa. 37:19 with Lev. 26:1).⁷¹²

Gen. 49:25

“by the God of your father, who will help you,	a	b	c	3
and (by) the Almighty, who will bless you,	a’	b’	c’	3
with the blessings of heaven above,	d	e	f	3
the blessings of the deep that lies below,	d’	e’	f’ (bv)	4
the blessings of breast and womb.	d”	e”	f”	3

This verse continues the thought of the preceding verse, explaining the source of Joseph’s strength against hostile assailants. In the second and third lines of the verse, the message of help against foes merges with that of the blessings of fertility. The magnitude of these blessings produces a person who is able to ward off his enemies.

Some think of verses 25-26 as a self-contained unity, in part because a different theme—blessing on Joseph—begins here.⁷¹³ While it is true that verse 25a begins with an address in the second person, it is also true that various themes overlap one another from verses 23-26. The theme of the enemies of Joseph links verse 23 and verse 24ab. The theme of the Joseph’s source of strength links verses 23-24ab to verses 24cd-25ab. The names of God link verse 24cd and verse 25ab. The theme of blessing links verses 25-26. These themes begin, rise, and fall like so many themes in an orchestral piece, binding all of the parts together.

The blessings of verse 25 are accusatives, dependent on the *wîbhâr^ekhekhâ* of verse 25b, rather than the subject of *tîhyenâ* in verse 26d.⁷¹⁴ These blessings are arranged in two pairs, followed by a parenthetical remark in verse 26abc, accentuating the value of this blessing.⁷¹⁵

The first pair of blessings, that of the heaven above and the deep below, poetically describes the abundance of water, a Hebrew wish characteristic of the climate.⁷¹⁶ The second pair of blessings, that of breast and womb, describes the blessing of posterity, a blessing fulfilled in the existence of the two Joseph tribes. Another way of describing these blessings is that they depict the fertility of the land and the fertility of the tribe. One may safely overlook Armerding’s view that verses 25-26 describe the blessings that will flow from Christ’s millennial reign.⁷¹⁷

The similarity of Gen. 49:25-26 to Deut. 33:13-16 has been noted by a legion of scholars. Isaiah Sonne calls the two sections variations on the theme expressed in Isaac’s blessing in Gen. 27:28, “May God give you of heaven’s dew and of earth’s richness—an abundance of grain and new wine.” He concludes, therefore, that only blessings referring to the fertility of the soil are to be expected. As a result, he emends the text in various places, for example, in verse 25e to read, “Blessings (products) of the sun and (yield) of moons.”⁷¹⁸ He is hardly correct.

A diagram of the comparable phrases in Genesis and Deuteronomy may prove helpful at this point.

Genesis

Deuteronomy

⁷¹⁰ Orlinsky, p. 143.

⁷¹¹ Armerding, p. 328.

⁷¹² Arvid S. Kapelrud, “*’ebhen*,” in *Theological Dictionary of the Old Testament*, 4 vols., ed. G. J. Botterweck and Helmer Ringgren; trans. John T. Willis (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1974-80), 1:50-51.

⁷¹³ Zobel, p. 24; Westermann, p. 276.

⁷¹⁴ Skinner, p. 531, adopts the latter view.

⁷¹⁵ Westermann, p. 273, suggests the parenthesis.

⁷¹⁶ Gunkel, p. 486.

⁷¹⁷ Armerding, p. 328.

⁷¹⁸ Isaiah Sonne, “Genesis 49:25-26,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 65 (1946):304-06.

25 with blessings of the heavens above,

בְּרִכַּת שָׁמַיִם מֵעַל

blessings of the deep that lies below,

בְּרִכַּת תְּהוֹם רִבְצָת תַּחַת

blessings of the breast and womb,

בְּרִכַּת שְׁדַיִם וְרֵחַם:

26 Your father's blessings are greater

בְּרִכַּת אָבִיךָ גְּבוּרָה

than the blessings of the ancient mountains,

עַל-בְּרִכַּת הַהַרִי

than the bounty of the age-old hills.

עַד-תְּאֵנוֹת גְּבֻעַת עוֹלָם

Let all these rest on the head of Joseph,

תְּהַיִּינן לְרֹאשׁ יוֹסֵף

on the brow of the prince among his brothers. (NIV)

וְלִקְדָּקֹד גְּזִיר אֶחָיו:

13 with the precious dew from heaven above

מִמְּגֵד שָׁמַיִם מְטֹל

and with the deep waters that lie below;

וּמִתְהוֹם רִבְצָת תַּחַת:

14 with the best the sun brings forth

וּמִמְּגֵד תְּבוֹאֹת שֶׁשֶׁשׁ

and the finest the moon can yield;

וּמִמְּגֵד גְּרֵשׁ יְרֵחִים:

15 with the choicest gifts of the ancient mountains

וּמִרְאֵשׁ הַרְרֵי-קָדָם

And the fruitfulness of the everlasting hills;

וּמִמְּגֵד גְּבֻעוֹת עוֹלָם:

16 with the best gifts of the earth and its fullness

וּמִמְּגֵד אֲרֶץ וּמְלֹאָהּ

and the favor of him who dwelt in the burning bush.

וּרְצוֹן שְׁכֵנִי סִגְהָ

Let all these rest on the head of Joseph,

תְּבוֹאֲתָה לְרֹאשׁ יוֹסֵף

on the brow of the prince among his brothers. (NIV)

וְלִקְדָּקֹד גְּזִיר אֶחָיו:

Von Rad calls verses 25c-26 “the very ancient form of a blessing of fertility, characterized by the stereotyped new beginning with formula of blessing.” He cites Deut. 28:3-6 as another example.⁷¹⁹ Westermann notes the similarity to Num. 6:24-26 in the introductory *y^ebhārekh^ekhā* (compare Deut. 7:13, Gen. 27:28).⁷²⁰ Fisher includes the parallel of *brk* and *brk* in Ugaritic literature, citing Gen. 49:25-26, 28 among the several Biblical examples.⁷²¹ No doubt there were certain words and phrases that were commonly used in blessing formulas. This would explain the similarity in terminology between many of the passages.

The close similarity of Gen. 49:25-26 and Deut. 33:13-16, however, can hardly be explained in this fashion. The exact verbal correspondence at several points and the clear differences at other points suggest that one section was used by the author of the other.⁷²² Arguments later in this thesis will favor the priority of the Genesis passage, leading to the conclusion that the author of Deuteronomy had Genesis 49 before him.⁷²³ The addition in Deuteronomy 33 of verse 16ab, “with the best gifts of the earth and its fullness and the favor of him who dwelt in

⁷¹⁹ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 428.

⁷²⁰ Westermann, pp. 273-74.

⁷²¹ Fisher, 2:149.

⁷²² Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 91, n. 80, think of a common original in oral form from the time of circulation.

⁷²³ Westermann, p. 274, thinks Deut. 33:13-16 is older.

the burning bush,” suggests a later expansion of Genesis 49. In addition to the clear parallel between *birkhōth* and *meghedh*, there are eleven verbal parallels between the two passages, the most notable being the last two phrases. The major difference is in the mention of breast, womb, and father in Genesis 49, compared to the mention of sun and moon in Deuteronomy 33. This difference can be easily explained. By the time of the events of Deuteronomy, the promise of many descendants had already been fulfilled and did not need repetition, except in the case of Reuben (see Deut. 33:6). However, since the children of Israel were on the threshold of Canaan and not yet occupants of the land or farmers in its fields, they needed the assurance of the regular produce of the land. If Genesis 49 is viewed as the work of Jacob, there is a natural and expected accent on the patriarchal blessing from Jacob. The parallelism of *šd* and *rhmy*, “breast” and “womb,” is attested in Ugaritic literature and elsewhere in the Old Testament.⁷²⁴

“By the God of your father, who will help you.” The *min*, omitted in the Syriac and Vulgate but present in the LXX, connects verse 25 to verse 24 and forms one of the links in verses 23-26. Westermann thinks that this parallelism originates with the collector. He feels that verse 25ab can be connected to verse 24, but not to verse 25c-26, a section he calls a self-contained unit. For him, verses 24cd-25ab are a transition formed by the collector, which belongs originally neither to the tribal saying of 23-24ab nor the blessing-wish of 25-26. The existence of the names of God is not possible in a tribal saying, he says; they belong to the late formulation of the patriarchal histories.⁷²⁵ There are no compelling reasons for adopting Westermann’s point of view, other than the presuppositions of critical scholarship.

Julian Morgenstern offers the suggestion that in 49:25ab there are two of the three members of the ancient North-Semitic pantheon, *’El* and *Shaddai*.⁷²⁶ The term *El Shaddai* is used to designate the universal God in the Old Testament. It seems to combine the roles and functions of all three members of the divine triad.⁷²⁷ If this means that the author of Genesis 49 is applying pagan terms for gods to the one true God so as to teach His universal power and sole existence, then there is value in these insights.

Kidner comments that the title, “the God of your father,” simply acknowledges the call god gave to the family of Jacob. The term *El Shaddai*, “God Almighty,” has been traditionally understood as the “God,” *’ēl*, “who,” *ša-*, “is sufficient,” *day*. More recently *Shaddai* has been equated with “mountain,” according to W. F. Albright, but there is no universal agreement. In the title, Kidner finds an emphasis on the might of God over against the frailty of man, an understanding suitably matched to Genesis, where God’s servants are hard-pressed and in need of reassurance.⁷²⁸

Rather than read the verb *w^eya’z^erekhā* as a prayer for Joseph,⁷²⁹ it is better to translate it as a relative clause, “who will help you” (GK 155f-n).

The *w^e’ēth* that follows has been thoroughly discussed. Many would simply emend the text to *w^e’ēl*, “and God,” in parallelism with the first line. This has the support of three Hebrew manuscripts, the Samaritan text, LXX, and Syriac. However, the text is to be retained as the more difficult reading. Morgenstern calls the emendation quite impossible. The title for deity is unlikely to be repeated so soon.⁷³⁰ Keil and Delitzsch and Leupold suggest translating “and with,”⁷³¹ rather than taking the particle as the sign of the direct object. N. Walker thinks he has found evidence for taking *’ēth* as a particle of emphasis upon the following noun,⁷³² but Josua Blau strongly challenges Walker’s assumption due to the paucity of the evidence.⁷³³ Rather, Blau suggests reading the *’eth* with Ibn Ezra as a continued effect of the *min* in *mē’ēl*.⁷³⁴ The existence of the double duty preposition in Ugaritic lends further support to this position. The *’eth* may further be needed here to show that *šaddai* is not in the nominative case. The text can stand as it reads.

⁷²⁴ Fisher, 3:156.

⁷²⁵ Westermann, pp. 272-73.

⁷²⁶ Julian Morgenstern, “Divine Triad in Biblical Mythology,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 64 (1945):26.

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 19, 24.

⁷²⁸ Kidner, pp. 128-29; cf. W. F. Albright, “The Names *Shaddai* and *Abram*,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 54 (1935):180-93.

⁷²⁹ So Leupold, p. 1196.

⁷³⁰ Morgenstern, pp. 25-26, n. 27.

⁷³¹ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 407; Leupold, p. 1196.

⁷³² Norman Walker, “Concerning the Function of ‘*Ēth*,” *Vetus Testamentum* 5 (1955):314-15.

⁷³³ Josua Blau, “Gibt es ein emphatisches ‘*et* im Bibelhebräisch?” *Vetus Testamentum* 6 (1956):211-12.

⁷³⁴ Blau, p. 212.

“The blessings of heaven above.” The parallel in Deut. 33:13 has *miṭṭāl*, “from the dew,” a parallel that has led many to change Deut. 33:13 to coincide with Gen. 49:25, *mē’āl*, “above.” Some think that the word *mē’āl* contains the divine title *’Eli*, a title certainly attested in Deut. 33:12, but probably not here.

“Blessings of the deep that lies below.” Gunkel hears echoes of *ṯehôm* as a one-time enormous beast.⁷³⁵ Davidson likewise thinks we have here an echo of the chaos goddess of the dark waters, tamed and at the disposal of the God of Joseph.⁷³⁶ If such could be substantiated, it would not be inconsistent with the Old Testament. God could be described as one who replaces and overpowers all of the mythological beasts, gods, and goddesses.

Vawter writes that the Old Testament mind associated Sheol with the primordial underground sea. That Sheol lies under this sea was the common view in later Judaism, so *ṯehôm* may be here considered as a surrogate for Sheol. He does not admit to any real use of the mythology of the gods of Enuma Elish in the Old Testament.⁷³⁷ Stigers writes most correctly that the parallelism of the phrase with “heaven above” suggests a reference to the knowable depths of the sea lying below the heavens. The two phrases then signify limitlessness by naming two extremes.⁷³⁸

The four beats of this clause have led various scholars to suppose that one word should be dropped. Sievers calls *rōbheṣeth* an interpolation from Deut. 33:13.⁷³⁹ Morgenstern calls *ṯehôm* a marginal gloss, defining the much more poetic term, *rōbheṣeth tāḥath*.⁷⁴⁰ While the four-beat clause is longer than most in this blessing, we have already met the same in verse 24d and possibly in verse 22b. Furthermore, the metrical precision required by some is by no means firmly established as a canon of Hebrew poetry.

The concluding phrase may suggest the baptism of Canaanite theology with the proper dogma of Yahwism, a possibility also for other phrases. Coppens has written about Asherah, the goddess of rich breasts with the role of wetnurse, thinking that the reference to “breast and womb” is an allusion to two Canaanite divinities who conferred such blessings.⁷⁴¹ It is probably best, however, to take the phrase in its natural sense, without a reference to Asherah or any other Canaanite goddess.

Gen. 49:26

(The blessings of your father are mightier	a	b	c	3
than the blessings of the eternal mountains,	a'	d	e	3
than the bounty of the everlasting hills.)	a''	d'	e'	3
They will rest on the head of Joseph,	f	g	h	3
and on the pate of the one separate from his brothers.	[f']	g'	h' (bv)	3

Speiser calls the MT in verse 26 hopeless for seven reasons. 1) The poetic meter is suddenly abandoned. 2) The prosaic content is disturbing. 3) The emphasis shifts abruptly from boons to beneficiaries. 4) The term for “progenitors” is without parallel in Biblical Hebrew. 5) The attested term for “parents” is *'ābhōth*. 6) The connection with the next clause is disrupted. 7) The term *h(w)ry 'd* is a misreading that throws the rest of the verse out of balance.⁷⁴²

Kittel and others are not quite so disapproving. Kittel sees two ideas flowing together in verses 22-26, that of victory over enemies and fruitfulness. He thinks he sees a chiasm in verses 22 and 26de and the intervening verses. Joseph the Blessed One is the subject of verse 22 and verses 25-26c, while Joseph the Sacred One is the subject of verses 23-24ab and verse 26de, with the two ideas being woven together by the divine names in verse 24cd.⁷⁴³ It would be better to speak of an alternation of themes than a chiasm, since a chiasm is an abba scheme, not an abab scheme. The suggestion is attractive, since it is actually an argument for the unity of this saying. However, it is based on the “fruitful vine” translation in verse 22.

⁷³⁵ Gunkel, p. 486.

⁷³⁶ Davidson, p. 309.

⁷³⁷ B. Vawter, “A Note on ‘The Waters Beneath the Earth’,” *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 22 (1960):71-72.

⁷³⁸ Stigers, pp. 330-31.

⁷³⁹ Cited in Gunkel, p. 486.

⁷⁴⁰ Morgenstern, p. 26, n. 27.

⁷⁴¹ Coppens, p. 103.

⁷⁴² Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 369.

⁷⁴³ Kittel, p. 37.

Westermann has suggested that the first three phrases are a parenthetical remark that is intended to emphasize the value of this blessing.⁷⁴⁴ That suggestion is adopted here. With the adoption of Westermann's suggestion, it is possible to see an almost identical meter between verses 8-12 and verses 22-26, a fact which will lead some to attribute this to an editor and others to a common author. The similarity may be diagrammed thus:

Gen. 49:8-12: 3:4:3/3:3:3/3:3:3/3:3:3/3:3:3/ . /3:3
 Gen. 49:33-36: 3:3:3/2:3:3:3/3:4:3:3/3:4:3/(3:3:3)/3:3

Kidner comments that a foretaste of this blessing is to be found in the award to Ephraim and Manasseh of the pick of all Canaan. They received the fertile middle ground. That the enjoyment of these blessings was brief was due to Ephraim's pride (compare Judg. 8:1, 12:1) and her suicidal apostasy (compare Hos. 4:17, 5:3-14).⁷⁴⁵

"The blessings of your father are mightier." Some have noted the shift from God as bestower in verse 25 to Jacob in verse 26 and have consequently suggested emendations. In parallelism to Deut. 33:13, Sonne and Stigers have suggested reading *birkōth 'ābhībh w^egibh'ōl*, "blessings of ear and bloom."⁷⁴⁶ Cross and Freedman call that suggestion unacceptable, in part on the basis of the versions. They think Gunkel's suggestion best, that is, *birkōth 'ābh 'ākh gebher wā'ūl*, "blessings of father, man, and babe,"⁷⁴⁷ but Sonne rules this out, because it has nothing to do with the soil.⁷⁴⁸ Neither emendation is necessary, particularly if verse 26abc is viewed as a parenthesis. Freedman offers an attractive suggestion, based on the redivision of one word. He would read *gibbōr w^e 'ēl*, "Warrior and Exalted One," or "Exalted Warrior."⁷⁴⁹ These words would then be read in apposition to *'ābhikā* and eliminate the shift from boons to beneficiaries. In that case a parenthesis would be unnecessary. However, it would create poorer meter, since a perfect 3:3:3:3:3 would become 4:3:3:3:3.

The noun *hōray*, rendered "my progenitors" by the Vulgate, Syriac, and the Targums of Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan, has attracted much attention. It is most certainly to be translated "mountains," in view of the parallelism with the next phrase and with Deut. 33:15. Many would emend to *har^erê* with Deut. 33:15, Hab. 3:6, and Num. 23:7. Kidner thinks the problem is to be found in the similarity of the Hebrew *waw* and *resh*.⁷⁵⁰ Kittel thinks of haplography or dittography.⁷⁵¹ Westermann thinks it may be a Canaanite by-form.⁷⁵² Some simply call this an ancient form. Gary Rendsburg calls the word an example of Janus parallelism. He writes,

The subtleties of parallel structure in ancient Near East literature are many, so many that centuries of intensive analysis of the Old Testament have not yet uncovered all of them in the Bible. One kind of parallelism is quite ingenious, for it hinges on the use of a single word with two entirely different meanings: one meaning paralleling what precedes, and the other meaning, what follows.⁷⁵³

In this instance, *hōray 'ad*, "my progenitors of old," would resume the thought of "your father," while *hawrê 'ad*, "mountains of old," anticipates the "hills" of the next phrase. He sees a combination of the two connotations in the Targum of Jerusalem.⁷⁵⁴ The suggestion is attractive.

Coppens has commented that the mountains and hills in Ugaritic literature are frequently mentioned as the residence of the gods.⁷⁵⁵ We may have here another place where pagan mythology is replaced by the power and blessing of the true God. Vawter has noted the common parallel of *hārīm*, "mountains," and *gibh^e'ōth*, "hills," in both Ugaritic and Hebrew.⁷⁵⁶

⁷⁴⁴ Westermann, p. 273.

⁷⁴⁵ Kidner, p. 222.

⁷⁴⁶ Sonne, p. 304; Stigers, p. 331.

⁷⁴⁷ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 92, n. 81.

⁷⁴⁸ Sonne, p. 304.

⁷⁴⁹ Freedman, "Divine Names," p. 65.

⁷⁵⁰ Kidner, p. 222.

⁷⁵¹ Kittel, p. 33.

⁷⁵² Westermann, p. 274.

⁷⁵³ Gary Rendsburg, "Janus parallelism in Gen 49:26," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 99 (1980):291.

⁷⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁵ Coppens, p. 104.

⁷⁵⁶ Vawter, "Canaanite Background," p. 2.

Opinions vary on the noun *ta'awath*, translated here as “bounty,” but a consensus is developing among scholars. Gunkel has suggested *ʿbhû’ôth* on the strength of the parallel in Deut. 33:14.⁷⁵⁷ Cross and Freedman suggest the reading *birkhōth* on the strength of the LXX and the preceding five phrases.⁷⁵⁸ That change is unnecessary, since the change of terminology is no doubt intended to mark the end of the series of six phrases.

Joseph Reider suggests a derivation from the Hithpael of *’āwāh*, “to lodge, take shelter in,” noting parallels in Num. 34:7, 10, and in Arabic. The noun *ta'awath* would then be translated “abode.”⁷⁵⁹ Barr lists that as the appropriate meaning as well.⁷⁶⁰

Many of the older commentators translate “border, boundary,” taking the noun from the root *thā’āh*, or *thāwāh* (see BDB).⁷⁶¹ Leupold reasons,

The land seems to be thought of as encircled by mountains. The blessings are thought of as growing in rich profusion up to the very borderland of the mountains, thus filling the whole land.⁷⁶²

Skinner writes, however, that this view has no real philological or traditional justification.⁷⁶³

Many ancient versions derive the noun from *’āwāh*, “to desire,” and translate the noun “desirable thing(s).”⁷⁶⁴ Stigers comments that there is a good parallelism, if the root meaning is “desirable things,” but not if the root meaning is “boundary.”⁷⁶⁵ Kidner translates similarly, “bounties.”⁷⁶⁶ Westermann notes the suitability of “desirable thing” to the parallel in Deut. 33:15,⁷⁶⁷ and de Fraine explains that the word cannot have the active sense. “The everlasting hills” are the thing desired, not the thing that desires.⁷⁶⁸

De Fraine has offered the clearest explanation of the reference to mountains and hills. He writes that a mountain was probably an object of horror to many Israelites, because it was a symbol of the Canaanite religion (their gods lived in the mountains). The victory of Yahweh over the Canaanite gods results in the replacement of the Canaanite mountain with the true mountain of God, Sinai or Zion. In addition to this, these hills are a souvenir of antique splendor, a symbol of paradise-like abundance. Therefore, Jacob is also promising the abundance of the land. There is no Messianic interpretation to be found in these verses, as the Vulgate suggested.⁷⁶⁹ As long as both the victory of Yahweh and the picture of abundance are understood as predictive (see Gen. 49:1), de Fraine’s thoughts are acceptable. However, Coppens may be correct, when he suggests on the basis of some Ugaritic parallels that divine names may be hiding behind the words *’ad* and *’ôlām*,⁷⁷⁰ a thought expressed also by Freedman.⁷⁷¹

The opening word of the last line is unusual, but probably it is only an archaic form of the verb. Take the suggestion of BHS and read *tiyhenā*. The form would then reflect a time when vowel letters were not yet in frequent use. Cross and Freedman want to read *tiyhan(na)*, a jussive, third feminine singular, with a collective subject.⁷⁷² The jussive sense is natural here, but there is no clear evidence of an energetic form of the jussive in ancient Hebrew, similar to that of Arabic. We read the imperfect, connecting the blessing to verse 1. Gaster’s suggestion of reading *t-h-w-y-n*, from the root *hāwāh*, “to fall,” is based on the parallel *tābhō’thāh* in Deut. 33:16.⁷⁷³ It is pure conjecture and entirely unnecessary.

The parallel terms *rō’s* and *qodhqōdh* appear in parallelism also in Ps. 7:16 and 68:21, in addition to the exact parallel in verse 26de in Deut. 33:16. The relatively rare word *qodhqōdh*, “head, crown of head,” appears only

⁷⁵⁷ Gunkel, p. 487.

⁷⁵⁸ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 92, n. 83.

⁷⁵⁹ Joseph Reider, “Etymological Studies in Biblical Hebrew,” *Vetus Testamentum* 2 (1952):113-14.

⁷⁶⁰ Barr, *Philology*, p. 321.

⁷⁶¹ E.g., Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 408.

⁷⁶² Leupold, p. 1198.

⁷⁶³ Skinner, p. 532.

⁷⁶⁴ LXX^{cursive}, Old Latin, Vulgate, Targums of Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan.

⁷⁶⁵ Stigers, p. 331.

⁷⁶⁶ Kidner, p. 222.

⁷⁶⁷ Westermann, p. 274.

⁷⁶⁸ J. de Fraine, “Desiderium collium aeternorum (Gen 49,26),” *Bijdragen* 12 (1951):152.

⁷⁶⁹ de Fraine, pp. 152-53.

⁷⁷⁰ Coppens, p. 104.

⁷⁷¹ Freedman, “Divine Names,” pp. 65-66.

⁷⁷² Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 93, n. 84.

⁷⁷³ Gaster, “Short Notes,” p. 73.

eleven times in the Old Testament. The similar parallel of the Ugaritic terms *riš* and *qdqd* was noted first by Cassuto and later by Vawter.⁷⁷⁴

The word *nāzîr*, which appears here in the construct, means “one consecrated, devoted, set apart.” The verbal root means “to dedicate, consecrate.” BDB lists a second verbal root, which occurs only in the Hiphil with the meaning “to be a Nazirite.” The versions translate variously: the LXX and Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan as “prince” or “ruler”; the Targum of Onkelos as “the separated one”; the Vulgate and the Arabic version of Saadia Gaon as “the Nazirite”; the Syriac mistakenly reads the MT as *nēzer*, “the crown.” Gen. 49:26 is the first of sixteen occurrences of the word in the Old Testament.

The various interpretations of this word are a classic example of reading later theology back into earlier Scripture, a problem that critical scholarship necessarily creates with the documentary hypothesis. For example, Zobel connects the word to a cultic area, thinking that it possibly referred to the protection of the traditions of the God of Sinai.⁷⁷⁵ Gunkel thinks of a champion and partisan of Israel, who wages the wars of Yahweh with his own hand (compare Samson). Therefore, the verse speaks of the wars the tribe of Joseph warred against the common enemies of Israel in the time of the judges.⁷⁷⁶ Kittel’s thoughts are quite similar, only applied to the time of the kings.⁷⁷⁷ Skinner calls this view plausible, but he writes that *qodhqōdh* is never used in connection with a Nazirite. He suggests a reference to a “prince,” explaining the term of the northern monarchy, of which the Joseph tribes were the chief part, or simply explaining the term of the position of princely superiority to his brothers.⁷⁷⁸ Armerding refers the word *nāzîr* to the true Nazirite, Jesus Christ.⁷⁷⁹

Some want to eliminate these words without sufficient reason. Coppens speaks of a royal dignity, although nowhere in the Old Testament does *nāzîr* designate a king. Therefore, he thinks that the poet is referring back to historical patriarchal facts, that is, Joseph at the court of Pharaoh.⁷⁸⁰ We think Coppens is correct in seeing an allusion to the individual Joseph rather than the tribe of Joseph. The common critical viewpoint of seeing these sayings as arising from the time of the judges, the monarchy, or the divided monarchy, has blinded most people to seeing their patriarchal roots.

On the basis of the analogy of antecedent Scripture (there being no prior use of the word *nāzîr*), it is best to take the word in its basic meaning. The word designates one “separate, set apart,” that is, singled out from his brothers for a special purpose.⁷⁸¹ The reference is to Joseph’s standing in Egypt and the rescue of his father and brothers from famine.

A final note on the blessing as a whole is in order. Cross and Freedman have pointed out the fact that the blessing is heavily weighted with Canaanite imagery. The blessings of fertility, the terminology used, the personifying of natural forces (they think especially of *ʾhôm*), the repetitive style, and the metrical parallels in Ugaritic literature are all examples of this. They have no doubt overestimated the Canaanite imagery, but there is certainly a great deal nevertheless. While the evidence leads them to place a *terminus ad quem* in the reign of Saul, a time when Joseph dominated the confederacy,⁷⁸² that dating loses sight of the fact that the chapter can be seen as predictive (see 49:1). Even apart from that, it is not at all out of the question to find a great deal of influence on Jacob, his customs and language, by the civilization represented at Ugarit, a civilization which flourished during the years 1500-1200 B.C., but also a city of some significance during the Middle Bronze Age, 2100-1500 B.C.

Gen. 49:27

“Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;	a	b	c	3
from morning he will devour the prey,	d	e	f	3
and till evening he will divide the spoil.”	d’	e’	f’	3

⁷⁷⁴ U. Cassuto, “Biblical and Canaanite Literature,” in *Biblical and Oriental Studies II* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1973), p. 48; Vawter, “Canaanite Background,” p. 2.

⁷⁷⁵ Zobel, pp. 24-25.

⁷⁷⁶ Gunkel, p. 487.

⁷⁷⁷ Kittel, p. 36.

⁷⁷⁸ Skinner, pp. 532-33.

⁷⁷⁹ Armerding, p. 328.

⁷⁸⁰ Coppens, pp. 110-11.

⁷⁸¹ So Westermann, p. 275; Kidner, p. 222.

⁷⁸² F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, “The Blessing of Moses,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 67 (1948):205, n. 41.

This final tribal saying begins with a noun clause that is an animal comparison, followed by a relative clause without a relative particle. “This is a common construction in early Hebrew poetry,” write Cross and Freedman.⁷⁸³ For the lack of a relative particle see GK 155f. Literally, one could translate, “Benjamin is a wolf that tears.” The second and third clauses go on to explain what is meant in verse 27a.

Kittel writes that this tribal saying does not fit the characters of the Joseph history and therefore must be dated later. He assigns verse 27 to the time of the judges.⁷⁸⁴ Von Rad thinks that the standards of value from the period of the desert are in view here.⁷⁸⁵ Skinner refers to the time of Saul (see 2 Sam. 1:24),⁷⁸⁶ but Gunkel⁷⁸⁷ and Kittel⁷⁸⁸ say that there is no such reference here. Westermann thinks of the early formation of the saying in the time of the judges, since the wolf is spoken of positively here. Later in the Old Testament, the wolf is never spoken of in a positive manner.⁷⁸⁹

The wolf is a dangerous and feared animal in the Old Testament. Greedy princes (Ezek. 22:27), avaricious judges (Zeph. 3:3), and Chaldean riders, feared because of their swiftness (Hab. 1:8), are all compared to the wolf in the prophetic announcements of judgments. A clearly negative tone is found in these comparisons. The Testimony of the Twelve Patriarchs speaks similarly of Benjamin, “he will no longer be called a rapacious wolf because of the pillage of his sons, but a worker of the Lord.”⁷⁹⁰

Since the verse is clearly a word of praise, scholars have pointed in various directions in order to explain the negative view of the wolf everywhere else in the Old Testament. Zobel writes that in Arabic literature the wolf expressed the proud boldness and insatiable rapacity of a king waging a successful battle in war.⁷⁹¹ Gunkel felt that highway robbery was a heroic profession in ancient Israel, a profession praised here.⁷⁹² It is simplest to invoke the analogy of antecedent Scripture, since this is the first of eight occurrences of the noun *zē'ēbh*, “wolf.” Surely the poetic nature of the verse and the distinctiveness of the chapter in the Old Testament are additional reasons for taking the word in a positive sense.

The application of the verse to Benjamin is usually made in the context of the courage and fierce vitality of the tribe in battle.⁷⁹³ The picture of the verse is that of constant aggressiveness from morning until evening. Gunkel comments that Benjamin has done so much plundering that he is still eating at the end of the day.⁷⁹⁴ Benjamin will not need to fear his enemies, so skillful and aggressive will he be. Armerding again misses the mark in referring this verse to Christ, reigning in absolute righteousness in His millennial reign.⁷⁹⁵

The fame of the Benjamites as archers and sling-shot artists is mentioned in Judg. 20:16, 1 Chron. 8:40, 12:2, 2 Chron. 14:8, and 17:17. Benjamin’s skill in battle is complimented in Judg. 5:14 (compare Judg. 3:15, 1 Sam. 9:1, and so forth).

The incessant and untiring efforts of Benjamin against his foes is depicted in the second and third clauses. Similar statements can be made about the first clause. GK 107b on *yitrāph* speaks of the imperfect used to express action that is customarily repeated on a given occasion. Leupold comments that the two limits, morning and evening, cover the entire intervening area, teaching that he is always successful in despoiling his foes.⁷⁹⁶ Westermann notes the progression of tearing, devouring, and dividing the spoils, a progression that emphasizes this continuing action.⁷⁹⁷

⁷⁸³ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 93, n. 87.

⁷⁸⁴ Kittel, p. 38.

⁷⁸⁵ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 428.

⁷⁸⁶ Skinner, p. 534.

⁷⁸⁷ Gunkel, p. 487.

⁷⁸⁸ Kittel, p. 38.

⁷⁸⁹ Westermann, p. 275.

⁷⁹⁰ Cited in Zobel, p. 25.

⁷⁹¹ Zobel, p. 25.

⁷⁹² Gunkel, p. 487.

⁷⁹³ E.g., Davidson, p. 310.

⁷⁹⁴ Gunkel, p. 487.

⁷⁹⁵ Armerding, p. 328.

⁷⁹⁶ Leupold, p. 1199; cf. also Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 408; Westermann, p. 275.

⁷⁹⁷ Westermann, p. 275.

This understanding of the verse has been strengthened by the insights of Dahood. Dahood translates the prepositions *b^e* and *l^e* on the basis of the Ugaritic prepositions as “from” and “to,” leading us to the translation given above.⁷⁹⁸

The “spoil,” *šālāl*, would refer to the spoils of war. Zobel comments in a footnote that *šālāl* consistently indicates the booty won during a successful martial event.⁷⁹⁹ Gen. 49:27 is the only place in Scripture where the term is used in the sense of “prey.” Zobel is stretching the point to say that Benjamin by his division of the booty wished to be recognized as a martial leader of the tribes and perhaps as Prince.⁸⁰⁰

The contrast between this verse and Deut. 33:12 has been considered striking by most scholars. Kidner writes without further comment, “It is striking that Moses was given the tender oracle to pronounce on Benjamin (Dt. 33:12), and doting Jacob the fierce one.”⁸⁰¹ Westermann explains the difference as two stages of the settlement of the tribes: verse 27 showing the earlier stage, in which robbery and war make possible the existence of the tribe, and Deut. 33:12 showing a later stage.⁸⁰²

If both verses may be seen as predictive of the same general time period, perhaps it can be said that they are illustrations of the familiar dictum, “Work as if everything depended on you, and pray as if everything depended on God.” Gen. 49:27 describes the hard work and warfare of Benjamin, while Deut. 33:12 describes the protection of Benjamin during that work and warfare. The discussion of Deut. 33:12 will support the idea that Moses writes there of God’s protection during battle.

Gen. 49:28

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

There is no poetic structure or meter to this concluding comment on the tribal sayings, a verse that is clearly not a part of the sayings themselves. Aalders calls this verse the postlude of the editor of the Pentateuch,⁸⁰³ and we may accept that designation, if it is applied to Moses. It summarizes what has gone before.

Eduard König and some later critical scholars have thought that the blessing here mentioned has nothing to do with verses 2-27 and that Jacob now proceeds to add a blessing which is not recorded.⁸⁰⁴ This, of course, suits the critical assumption that the P document makes sense in and of itself, apart from insertions such as verses 2-27. They see P in verse 1a and verse 28b, with verses 1b and 28a as editorial transitions. The *waw* consecutive, *waybhārekh*, speaks against that, but critics connect that word with verse 1a.

Gunkel and Skinner consider the words up to *’ābhîhem*, “their father,” the work of the redactor of J, to be the subscription to the poem, with the rest of the verse belonging to P and following verse 1a.⁸⁰⁵ Westermann is more consistent in assigning the first clause to the collector, “All these are the twelve tribes of Israel,” while the second part of the verse binds the tribal sayings with the framework. He makes the division according to subject matter: in the first clause the subject is the twelve tribes, whereas in the second and third clauses the subject is the twelve sons of Jacob.⁸⁰⁶

Skinner calls the phrase *’iš ’āšer*, literally “each one which,” impossible. He wants either to omit the relative with some versions,⁸⁰⁷ or read *’iš ’iš* with several others.⁸⁰⁸ The phrase is difficult, but not beyond explanation, as Leupold points out. He calls *’āšer* the cognate or factitive object, to be translated “with which.”⁸⁰⁹

⁷⁹⁸ M. Dahood, *Ugaritic-Hebrew Philology* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), p. 26.

⁷⁹⁹ Zobel, p. 25, n. 132.

⁸⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁸⁰¹ Kidner, p. 222.

⁸⁰² Westermann, p. 275.

⁸⁰³ Aalders, p. 288.

⁸⁰⁴ Eduard König, *Die Genesis* (Gütersloh: C. Bertelsmann, 1919), pp. 750-51, cited in Leupold, p. 1200.

⁸⁰⁵ Gunkel, p. 487; Skinner, p. 534.

⁸⁰⁶ Westermann, p. 275.

⁸⁰⁷ Some Hebrew manuscripts, LXX, Syriac.

⁸⁰⁸ Skinner, p. 534.

⁸⁰⁹ Leupold, p. 1200.

Keil and Delitzsch take the relative as an accusative dependent upon *bērahk*, which is construed with a double accusative.⁸¹⁰

⁸¹⁰ Keil and Delitzsch, part 1, p. 409.

CHAPTER III

DEUTERONOMY 33

Introduction

Much of the introduction to this chapter has already been included in the introduction to Genesis 49, but some special features of this chapter will be examined here.

Whereas Genesis 49 is commonly considered to have been written from a southern point of view, Deuteronomy 33 is considered to have come from a northern point of view.⁸¹¹ In Deuteronomy 33, Ephraim supposedly passes as the royal tribe, and in verse 7 the return of Judah is allegedly wished for,⁸¹² although both of these conclusions are highly questionable.

The more religious tone of Deuteronomy 33 is reflected in the prayer language and the use of the name of Yahweh.⁸¹³ All of the blessings in this chapter are positive, since none of the rebukes present in Genesis 49 have a counterpart in Deuteronomy 33. The absence of any mention of Simeon is considered by some to be a rebuke, but we do not agree.

The nature, origin, composition, collecting, and insertion of this chapter are described by critics in a manner similar to Genesis 49. Early scholars assigned the chapter to E, but current critical scholarship assigns the chapter to none of the Pentateuchal sources. Kittel thinks that the Deuteronomist may have written verse 1 and the superscriptions, revising many of the texts in order to express his theology.⁸¹⁴

Eissfeldt writes that the chapter clearly divides into two parts: the psalm-like hymn in verses 2-5, 26-29 and the collection of sayings in verses 1, 6-25.⁸¹⁵ More recent critical research considers the psalm-like framework to be of independent origin,⁸¹⁶ although some voices have been raised in protest⁸¹⁷ and other voices have expressed caution.⁸¹⁸

Some have characterized the chapter as a poem, rather than a collection of tribal sayings,⁸¹⁹ comparing it with a hymn of war such as Judges 5, Psalm 68, and Habakkuk 3.⁸²⁰ Most admit that there are many archaic grammatical and vocabulary usages, giving the impression of a great age.

As is the case with Genesis 49, Deuteronomy 33 is generally considered by critical scholarship to be unrelated to the surrounding chapters, a factor that allegedly speaks for its later insertion into the text. However, Labuschagne writes forcefully for taking Deut. 31:1-33:29 as "one coherent composition on the themes: the final arrangements made by Moses before his death." While he does not accept the Mosaic authorship of the chapter or the book, he considers Deuteronomy 33 an integral part of the concluding addresses of Moses, not late appendices.⁸²¹ He thinks that Deuteronomy 33 cannot be lifted from its context, but forms a part of a section that deals with three themes: the death of Moses and his succession by Joshua, the law as Moses' legacy, and Deuteronomy 33 as Moses' final charge.⁸²²

⁸¹¹ C.J. Labuschagne, "The Tribes in the Blessing of Moses," *Oudtestamentische Studien* 19 (1974):98.

⁸¹² Carl Steuernagel, *Deuteronomium und Josua*, in *Handkommentar zum Alten Testament*, vol. 3 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1900), p. 123.

⁸¹³ Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, trans. Dorothea Barton, in *The Old Testament Library*, vol. 8 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966).

⁸¹⁴ Hans-Joachim Kittel. "Die Stammessprüche Israels, Genesis 49 und Deuteronomium 33, traditionsgeschichtlich untersucht," (Berlin: Diss. theol. Kirchl. Hochschule Berlin, 1959), p. 132.

⁸¹⁵ Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P.R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row Publishers, 1965).

⁸¹⁶ Kittel, p. 1.

⁸¹⁷ Labuschagne, "The Tribes," p. 98.

⁸¹⁸ Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, p. 208.

⁸¹⁹ Labuschagne, "The Tribes," p. 98.

⁸²⁰ J.A. Thompson, *Deuteronomy*, in *Tyndale Old Testament Commentaries*, vol. 5 (London: Inter-Varsity Press, 1974), p. 305.

⁸²¹ Labuschagne, "The Tribes," p. 97.

⁸²² C.J. Labuschagne, "The Song of Moses: its Framework and Structure," in *De Fructu Oris Sui*, ed. I. H. Eybers, et al (Leiden: E. J. Brill, 1971), pp. 91-92.

The chapter is cast in a style reminiscent of the final words of Jacob, since Moses is now the leader of Israel and a patriarchal kind of figure. Keil and Delitzsch think that Moses spoke the words of the chapter, but he didn't write it. They think of the phrase "the man of God" in verse 1 as the editor's reference and include the superscriptions and the arrangement of the sayings among the editor's work.⁸²³ They may well be correct. This editor may also be the author of chapter 34.

The *Sitz im Leben* of the original tribal sayings has been discussed in the introduction to Genesis 49. The time when the chapter was allegedly inserted into the book of Deuteronomy is assumed by critics to be some time in the seventh century, even though many of the verses carry evidence of great age.⁸²⁴

P. C. Craigie proposes a setting for the chapter that is in harmony with its content. He writes,

It may well have been recited or sung at some special ceremony bringing to a close the renewal of the covenant in Moab; the tribes, gathered together for the solemn renewal of the covenant, each in turn received their blessing.⁸²⁵

The strong militaristic thread throughout the chapter, pointed out in the introduction to Genesis 49, suggests the time prior to the entry into Canaan. Craigie thinks that the chapter may have been used later in the worship life of Israel, causing some scholars to posit a *Sitz im Leben* in Israel's cultic life. He calls that viewpoint a failure to distinguish between an original and a secondary *Sitz im Leben*.⁸²⁶ It may even be true that the chapter served a cultic function from the start.

After the introductory verses in 2-5, every following verse contains a reference to the prosperity of the land or warfare, with the understandable exception of verses 8-10 (Levi). The military imagery is present in verses 6, 7, 11, 12, 17, 20-21, 22, 25, and 26-29. The references to the prosperity of the land are present in verses 13-16, 18-19, 23, 24, and 28. The exegesis will show that these two themes join the theme of Yahweh's protective care to form the main thrust of the chapter, reaching a climax in verses 26-29. Therefore, the most likely setting of the chapter is the nation Israel, poised on the brink of Canaan with its armies ready for war and the covenant of Sinai foremost in the minds of the people. The promise of God to Moses in Exod. 3:8, that He would bring the nation to a land "flowing with milk and honey," is about to be fulfilled.

The purpose of the chapter has been well expressed by S. R. Driver, although with critical presuppositions as to date and circumstances.

. . . the aim . . . was to rally the nation anew around the banner of the Mosaic institutions, and to awaken in it a fresh and vivid consciousness of the happiness implied in its being Jehovah's people.⁸²⁷

Labuschagne calls the chapter a hymn celebrating God's guidance and a collection of sayings about the tribes, stating the position of the tribes in the land Yahweh gave them.⁸²⁸ The guidance of God in the past (verses 2-5) and his kingship in the present (verses 5, 26-29) are certainly celebrated in this chapter, a fact which speaks for a cultic use.

Kittel thinks that the chapter functions as a clamp between Deuteronomy and Joshua, because the book of Joshua tells the story of the conquest of the twelve tribes. Deuteronomy 33 connects the law of Moses with the conquest and the unity of Israel with its "twelveness." It pictures Israel as the "ideal" Israel, according to which the Deuteronomist interprets future history.⁸²⁹ We may accept most of Kittel's comments, but deny that anyone is interpreting future history in the chapter.

⁸²³ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, in *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans Publishing Co., n.d.), vol. 1, part 3, p. 493.

⁸²⁴ Kittel, p. 133.

⁸²⁵ P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament*, vol. 5 (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 391.

⁸²⁶ P. C. Craigie, "The Conquest and Early Hebrew Poetry," *Tyndale Bulletin* 20 (1969):82.

⁸²⁷ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, in *The International Critical Commentary*, 3rd ed. (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), pp. 388-89.

⁸²⁸ Labuschagne, "The Tribes," p. 98.

⁸²⁹ Kittel, pp. 131-33.

Driver's comments, quoted above, are quite well suited to the circumstances just before Moses' death. Deuteronomy 33 is a final, individualized attempt to impress upon Israel the importance of seeking Yahweh's guidance and depending upon His strength, as Israel prepares to conquer the Promised Land. The chapter is deliberately cast like Genesis 49 in order to connect the present circumstances with the promise to Jacob of a land, thereby reminding them that God has kept His promise.

Deuteronomy is entirely a blessing, an expressed wish for success and prosperity, with a possible predictive element only in verse 19, a verse that is textually problematic. Some of the verbs normally translated as pure imperfects may also be translated as jussives. The animal comparisons (verses 17, 20, 22) express the character of three tribes very positively, suggesting that the tribe continue to develop the characteristics described by reference to those animals.

The silence of the chapter regarding the Exodus has been explained by Craigie as a question of perspective and relative importance. The political and social significance of the Exodus was obvious to Israel at the time, but the theophany at Sinai was theologically more relevant to Israel at the start. Therefore, in Deuteronomy 33 and Judges 3, the Sinai event has an important place above the Exodus, but later both events were accorded their due significance when mature thought regained its perspective.⁸³⁰

Translation of Deuteronomy 33

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

2 "The Lord came from Sinai
and dawned upon them from Seir,
He shone forth from Mount Paran,
and with Him were multitudes of holy ones
at His right hand streaming toward them.

3 Indeed He loves His people,
and His holy ones in your hand.
They bow down at your feet,
they receive your instruction,

4 (the law that Moses commanded us,
the possession of the assembly of Jacob.)

5 He became king in Jeshurun
when the leaders of the people assembled,
together with the tribes of Israel.

6 "May Reuben live and not die,
and may his men be beyond number."

7 And this he said about Judah,
"Hear, O Lord, the voice of Judah
and bring him to his people
increase his forces for him,
and be a help against his foes."

8 And about Levi he said,
"Your Thummim and Your Urim belong
to the man, Your pious one,
whom You tested at Massah
with whom You contended at the waters of Meribah.

9 He said of his father and mother,
'I have no regard for them.'
He did not recognize his brothers

⁸³⁰ Craigie, "The Conquest," pp. 84-85.

- or acknowledge his own children,
(for they kept Your word,
and guarded Your covenant.
- 10 They teach Your precepts to Jacob
and Your instruction to Israel.
They offer incense before You
and whole burnt offerings on Your altar.)
- 11 Bless, O Lord, his skills,
and be pleased with the work of his hands.
Smite the loins of those who rise up against him
and those who hate him, who attack him.”
- 12 About Benjamin he said,
“The beloved of the Lord will dwell securely,
(while the Exalted One surrounds him all day long,
and between His shoulders he dwells.”
- 13 About Joseph he said,
“May the Lord bless his land
with the choice fruits of heaven above
and with the deep that crouches below,
14 and with the best yield of the sun
and the finest produce of the moon,
15 and with the best of the ancient mountains
and the abundance of the everlasting hills,
16 with the best gifts of the earth and its fullness
and the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush.
May they rest on the head of Joseph,
and on the pate of the one separate from his brothers.
- 17 His firstborn bull has majesty,
his horns are the horns of the wild ox;
with them may he gore the peoples,
together at the ends of the earth.
Such are the ten thousands of Ephraim,
and such are the thousands of Manasseh.”
- 18 About Zebulun he said,
“Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out,
and Issachar, in your tents.
- 19 People will be summoned to the mountain,
where they will offer right sacrifices;
for they will suck the abundance of the seas,
and the hidden treasures of the sand.”
- 20 And about Gad he said,
“Blessed be the broad lands of Gad;
he lies down like a lion
and tears arm and head.
- 21 He chose the best part for himself,
yea behold, the commander’s portion.
(The heads of the people assembled.)
He carried out the righteous will of the Lord
and His judgments concerning Israel.”
- 22 About Dan he said,
“Dan is a lion’s cub,

that shies away from the viper.”

23 About Naphtali he said,
“Naphtali is abounding with favor
and full of the blessing of the Lord.
May he inherit toward the west and the south.”

24 About Asher he said,
“Most blessed of sons is Asher.
May he be favored among his brothers,
and may he dip his foot in oil.

25 May your bolts be iron and bronze,
and your strength equal your days.”

26 “There is no one like the God of Jeshurun,
who rides on the heavens to help you
and on the clouds in His majesty.

27 The ancient God is a refuge,
and underneath are the everlasting arms.
He will drive out the enemy before you,
and say, ‘Destroy!’

28 So Israel will dwell securely,
alone Jacob will dwell,
in a land of grain and wine,
yea, the heavens will drip dew.

29 Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you,
a people saved by the Lord,
your shield and helper
and your glorious sword.
Your enemies will come cringing to you,
and you will tread upon their backs.”

Exegesis

Deut. 33:1

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

According to critical scholarship, a redactor is responsible for the present state of this chapter. Hans-Joachim Kittel feels that verse 1 and the superscriptions for each saying originate from the same hand. This redactor placed all the sayings under the one inscription of verse 1 and dealt with them all as blessings of the dying man of God, Moses. A clear parallelism to Genesis 49 was intended by this action, since that chapter is also the words of a dying man of God.⁸³¹ It will be argued herein that a redactor was not involved in the writing of the chapter, since the contents of Deuteronomy 33 may be safely ascribed to Moses.

Whether the chapter is viewed as Mosaic or not, the ascription of the words to Moses gives the chapter the highest importance.⁸³² The title “man of God,” *’îs hā’elōhîm*, further enhances the importance of the chapter and the authority of Moses. It has been called a redactional note, but C. J. Labuschagne thinks this may be incorrect. The term does not occur elsewhere in the Pentateuch, but it occurs six times outside of the Pentateuch in reference to Moses. Labuschagne concludes that the term was not invented by the Deuteronomist and that it was part of an existing superscription belonging to the poem and taken over by the Deuteronomist, when he made his collection of

⁸³¹ Kittel, pp. 42-43.

⁸³² Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 391. See also Kittel, p. 116.

Moses' concluding speeches.⁸³³ We may accept his defense of the genuineness of the term without adopting his view of the compilation of Deuteronomy.

The title "man of God" is the designation in the Old Testament for a prophet.⁸³⁴ It is also used more generally in Judg. 13:6, 8 of a messenger of God.⁸³⁵ Kittel thinks that the term is used of Moses in order to say that he is a prophet and that the sayings are prophetic speech, carrying the promise of fulfillment.⁸³⁶ However, while Genesis 49 is described as the predictive words of Jacob, Deuteronomy 33 is not described in this way. The chapter contains the blessings of Moses, which are not predictive in the same sense.

J. A. Thompson comments that the phrase "the children of Israel" is more common elsewhere in the Old Testament than in Deuteronomy, where the regular term for God's people is "all Israel."⁸³⁷ While that may be true, the phrase "the children of Israel" is by no means rare in Deuteronomy and therefore certainly not to be thought of as unusual or as an editorial addition. The phrase appears twenty-one times in the book.

There are no rebukes or curses in the chapter. All of the verses are words of blessing,⁸³⁸ a fact which corresponds closely with this opening verse. Henry Hayman comments that the form of the chapter, particularly as it is introduced in this verse, corresponds with the form that is found earlier in Deuteronomy. The words, "And this is the blessing" compare with 1:1, "These are the words . . .," with 4:44, "And this is the law . . .," and with 29:1, "These are the words of . . ."⁸³⁹

In short, there is nothing in the opening verse that cannot safely be ascribed to Moses, although the verse could be attributed to an editor who attached this chapter and the next to Deuteronomy.

Deut. 33:2-5, 26-29

Did the psalm-like introduction and conclusion originally exist independent of the chapter? Most scholars who believe that most of the Old Testament went through various stages of editorial reworking think so.

Kittel thinks that the supposedly rough transitions from the opening verses to the sayings and back to the closing verses are an indication of its independent existence.⁸⁴⁰ The psalm would have been connected to verses 6-25 in the last stage of redaction, possibly in the time of Jeroboam II. Kittel writes that further evidence of the psalm's separate existence is the lack of influence on the interpretation of the sayings. Neither do we know the reason for the connection of the psalm to the sayings.⁸⁴¹ Steuernagel had earlier voiced the same criticisms—abrupt transitions and no relationship to verses 6-25. Carl Steuernagel also noted that verses 26-29 connect rather well with verse 5.⁸⁴² Hayman writes that the forty-one words in verses 2-5 and the forty-two words in verses 26-29 would have filled two sides of a tablet of moderate size.⁸⁴³ Mayes is more cautious, however, for he calls these verses a psalm of praise that "may well have existed independently of the tribal sayings now incorporated in it."⁸⁴⁴ This thesis will show that there are connections between the psalm-like framework and the blessings themselves.⁸⁴⁵

Other writers of a less critical persuasion think otherwise. Eduard König had thought verses 2-5 and 26-29 unlikely to have been an originally unified piece.⁸⁴⁶ Thompson writes that it is difficult to prove that verses 6-25 were inserted into an earlier psalm of praise. Certainly there is no textual evidence for this. He thinks it not at all unlikely for an ancient writer to begin with praise of Yahweh, switch to blessings on men, and return to the praise of

⁸³³ Labuschagne, "The Tribes," p. 101.

⁸³⁴ Cf. 1 Sam. 2:27, 9:6, 10; 1 Kings 13:1, 8; 17:18, etc.

⁸³⁵ A. D. H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy in New Century Bible* (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1979), p. 397.

⁸³⁶ Kittel, p. 43.

⁸³⁷ Thompson, p. 306.

⁸³⁸ Kittel, p. 116.

⁸³⁹ Henry Hayman, "The Blessing of Moses: Its Genesis and Structure," *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 17 (1900-01):96.

⁸⁴⁰ Kittel, p. 45.

⁸⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 116.

⁸⁴² Steuernagel, p. 123.

⁸⁴³ Hayman, p. 97.

⁸⁴⁴ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 396.

⁸⁴⁵ According to Kittel, the author of the psalm was someone other than the author of verse 1 and the various introductory formulas, p. 42.

⁸⁴⁶ Eduard König, *Das Deuteronomium in Kommentar zum Alten Testament* (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1917), p. 236. Cited in Kittel, p. 45.

Yahweh.⁸⁴⁷ Umberto Cassuto thinks there is a smooth progression of thought from verses 2-5 to verses 6-25 to verses 26-29. In verses 2-5, the benefits of the Lord for Israel are extolled. In verses 6-25, those benefits are spelled out. In verses 26-29, the majesty of the Lord and the happy destiny of Israel are praised. There is no compelling evidence to believe that there was a separate psalm.⁸⁴⁸

The first half of the psalm is usually interpreted as a reference to the enthronement of Yahweh in language reminiscent of the theophany of Sinai. A festival procession is indicated in verses 2-5 that moved toward the sanctuary, perhaps with the king being enthroned as the representative of Yahweh. This supposedly places the verses sometime during the monarchy. Since Yahweh is pictured as arising from several places, the introduction describes Him as the Supreme God over all gods and nations.⁸⁴⁹ The verses celebrate Yahweh's original triumph over the primeval forces of chaos and look forward to eventual victory over all gods and nations.⁸⁵⁰

Labuschagne disputes the usual interpretation of the verses as a theophany. He thinks that the terms and motifs are given a new function of describing God's acts of salvation. The verses are a victory psalm proclaiming the kingship of Yahweh over his people and the destruction of their enemies.⁸⁵¹

Kittel admits that the interpretation of the psalm is uncertain.⁸⁵² Martin Noth reflects that uncertainty, when he states that

Deut. 33:2ff. is a passage which originated independently of the Pentateuchal tradition."⁸⁵³

P. C. Craigie is among the more traditional commentators; he sees here a recollection of the theophany at Sinai. Moses was assuming the role of a father, because he had acted as a father to Israel. Sinai appears at the start, because the position of Moses within the covenant family of Yahweh was established at Sinai. Because of his position, Moses was able to bless his "children" before he died. Craigie suggests that verses 3b-5 may be the response that was made by Israel to Moses' initial words.⁸⁵⁴ He cites Judg. 5:4-5, Ps. 68:7-8, and Hab. 3:3-4 as passages with similar theophanic language. I. L. Seeligmann does not accept this view *in toto*, but he admits that "to later Israelite-Jewish thought these verses could only suggest the Theophany at Sinai . . ."⁸⁵⁵ This is the most natural reading of these verses.

Most critical scholars admit the theophanic nature of the verses, but they think that the verses originate much later than the time of Moses and only recall the events of Sinai from the distant past.⁸⁵⁶

Deut. 33:2

The Lord came from Sinai	a	b	c	3
and dawned upon them from Seir,	[a']	c'	b' (bv)	3
He shone forth from Mount Paran,	[a'']	c''	b'' (bv)	3
and with Him were multitudes of holy ones	d	e	f	3
at His right hand streaming toward them.	d'	e'	g	3

Verse two refers to the activity of Yahweh, as He led His people from Sinai.⁸⁵⁷ Craigie thinks this verse can be compared to a historical prelude, as in ancient treaty patterns, and can serve as a religious basis for what follows.⁸⁵⁸ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch think that the three clauses, referring to Sinai, Seir, and Paran, all refer to the

⁸⁴⁷ Thompson, p. 307.

⁸⁴⁸ U. Cassuto, "Deuteronomy Chapter XXXIII and the New Year in Ancient Israel," in *Biblical and Oriental Studies I* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1973), p. 47.

⁸⁴⁹ I. L. Seeligmann, "A Psalm from Pre-regal Times," *Vetus Testamentum* 14 (1964):79-80.

⁸⁵⁰ Anthony Phillips, *Deuteronomy*, in *The Cambridge Bible Commentary* (London: Cambridge University Press, 1973), p. 227.

⁸⁵¹ Labuschagne, "The Tribes," pp. 99-100.

⁸⁵² Kittel, p. 45.

⁸⁵³ Martin Noth, *A History of Pentateuchal Traditions*, trans. Bernhard W. Anderson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1972), p. 60, n. 186.

⁸⁵⁴ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 392-93.

⁸⁵⁵ Seeligmann, p. 78.

⁸⁵⁶ E.g., Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament*, p. 228.

⁸⁵⁷ Thompson, p. 307.

⁸⁵⁸ Craigie, "The Conquest," p. 85.

one appearance of God at Sinai.⁸⁵⁹ However, since the three locations are all different, they more likely refer to the movement of Yahweh with Israel from Sinai, where the covenant was established, through the wilderness towards the Promised Land. They indicate that Yahweh was with His people throughout this time, leading them. The “multitude of holy ones” may indicate that Yahweh came not only from Sinai, but also from heaven in the midst of the angels around His throne.⁸⁶⁰

Nelson Glueck thinks that this theophany can be understood only in the light of the late exilic and post-exilic attitude toward the surrounding nations. The verse reflects a universalistic conception of God. Therefore, like the similar passage in Judg. 5:3-5, it is a late exilic addition.⁸⁶¹

Labuschagne thinks the verse a description of the journey of Yahweh with his people from Sinai along Paran and Kadesh to the slopes of Pisgah at the gateway to Canaan. It is not a theophany, but it uses terms and motifs from the theophany. He feels that the verse could be giving a new meaning to an original theophany. Here Yahweh doesn't shine forth at Sinai, as in the original theophany; He departs from Sinai. Here Yahweh isn't accompanied by angels, as in the original theophany; He is accompanied by His people, “his holy ones.”⁸⁶² This interpretation depends in part on the meaning of “his holy ones.” It is possible, but unlikely, that the phrase refers to God's people.

“The Lord came from Sinai.” The reference to Sinai is somewhat puzzling, since it is the only place in Deuteronomy where Sinai is used in place of Horeb. Craigie thinks that this may be due to poetic considerations, or that Horeb refers to the general vicinity and Sinai the particular mountain.⁸⁶³ A. D. H. Mayes claims that Horeb is the name used by E and D, while Sinai is the name used by J and P. However, he thinks that Horeb was originally the designation of a region in which Sinai lay, since the name literally means “desolate place.” Gradually the term came to be understood as synonymous with Sinai.⁸⁶⁴

S. R. Driver comments that the phrase speaks of Yahweh coming *from* Sinai, not *to* it. Therefore, it describes how Yahweh had gloriously shown Himself by assisting and guiding Israel on the way to Canaan. The point is well taken.⁸⁶⁵ However, he presses the point too far when he says that the verse cannot relate to the delivery of the law, when Yahweh came down upon Sinai. That Yahweh came from Sinai can hardly be dissociated from the events that occurred there.

The association of Yahweh with mountains is a frequent theme of the poetry of this period. As evidence for this assertion, F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman cite Judg. 5:4-5, Ps. 68:6-8, 15-17, Hab. 3:3-15, and Ps. 18:7-15.⁸⁶⁶ While only the Judges passage certainly comes from the same period of history, the other passages undoubtedly show the influence of the earlier poetry.

“And dawned upon them from Seir.” Glueck thinks that the mention of Seir is a late exilic or post-exilic addition. He thinks that the term is used here synonymously with Sinai, Meribath-Kadesh, and Mount Paran. However, he discounts Deut. 1:2, 44 and Gen. 32:3 as late glosses, thereby disqualifying the evidence that speaks against him.⁸⁶⁷ Steuernagel soberly comments that there is no proof that Sinai lay in the mountains of Seir. Therefore, the two are not synonyms. The point is that Yahweh comes from the south.⁸⁶⁸ Most refer the area of Seir to the mountainous region east of the Arabah. J. R. Bartlett thinks it refers to the area west of the Arabah and south of Beersheba. The application of the word to the area east of the Arabah is a later development.⁸⁶⁹ No close connection with the religion of the Edomites is to be seen here, as Driver wonders.⁸⁷⁰ Seir is simply a point south of Mount Nebo, in the general direction from which Israel came under Yahweh's guidance.

The unusual particle *lāmō*, “upon them,” appears in clauses b and e. Some have proposed reading *l'ammō*, “unto His people.” Seeligmann argues that the Isaiah scroll from Qumran skipped an *ayin* in quite a number of

⁸⁵⁹ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 497.

⁸⁶⁰ Ibid.

⁸⁶¹ Nelson Glueck, “The Theophany of the God of Sinai,” *Journal of the American Oriental Society* 56 (1936):469-70.

⁸⁶² Labuschagne, “The Tribes,” pp. 99-100.

⁸⁶³ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 393.

⁸⁶⁴ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 115.

⁸⁶⁵ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 390.

⁸⁶⁶ F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, “The Blessing of Moses,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 67 (1948):198, n. 6.

⁸⁶⁷ Glueck, pp. 464, 466.

⁸⁶⁸ Steuernagel, p. 123.

⁸⁶⁹ J. R. Bartlett, “The Land of Seir and the Brotherhood of Edom,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 20 (1969):1-3. Cited in Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 115.

⁸⁷⁰ Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 391.

places, so the same thing may have happened here.⁸⁷¹ Mayes, however, writes that this emendation is “without any convincing argument.”⁸⁷² Cassuto preferred to read *lānū* with the LXX, Syriac, Vulgate, and the Targums of Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan.⁸⁷³ Cross and Freedman note that the meter requires a word here, so the word cannot be dropped. They concede, “At present, no solution recommends itself.”⁸⁷⁴ G. R. Driver thinks of the ethical dative and translates “for themselves,”⁸⁷⁵ while Steuernagel comments that an ethical dative makes no sense.⁸⁷⁶ The simplest and most obvious meaning is to take the word as the prepositional phrase, “unto them,” that is, unto the people of Israel.⁸⁷⁷ The poetic form for the preposition *l*^e may have been used here for the sake of meter, in order to lengthen the line by one syllable.

“He shone forth from Mount Paran.” Mount Paran is of unknown location. The maps locate the wilderness of Paran south of Palestine, so Mount Paran must also be in that vicinity. The verb *hōphî^a*, “He shone forth,” is used in Ugaritic texts in descriptions of battles. It denotes the appearance of the gods in battle.⁸⁷⁸ This sense is suitable here, particularly in the context of Israel’s struggles during the wilderness wanderings and in the land of Canaan. The phrase states that Yahweh has been triumphantly fighting Israel’s battles for her and with her.

“And with His multitudes of holy ones.” S. R. Driver argues that *’āthāh* is the Aramaic synonym of *bā’*, “he came,” sometimes found in Hebrew poetry (compare verse 21, Isa. 21:12, Jer. 3:22). The verb is used to avoid the repetition of *bā’* from clause a.⁸⁷⁹ Seeligmann thinks that a chiasmic arrangement of the verbs *bā’*, *zārah*, *hōphî^a*, and *’āthāh* puts the verbal understanding of *’āthāh* beyond dispute.⁸⁸⁰ However, while the chiasm between the first two verbs is clear, it is not so clear that the chiasm is to be extended to the next two clauses. The Samaritan Pentateuch, LXX, Syriac, Vulgate, and the Targums read *w^e’ittōh*, “and with him.” Cross and Freedman suggest read *’ittōh-m*,⁸⁸¹ taking the *mem* as the enclitic *mem* instead of the preposition. Horace Hummel comments that the enclitic *mem* after a pronominal suffix is common in Ugaritic literature and the Amarna letters.⁸⁸² It is more common in Hebrew than many have thought. The parallelism with the final phrase, “at his right hand,” further suggests this meaning.

Some read *mēribh^ebhōth qōdheš* as a corrupted form of Meribath-Kadesh, a name used of Kadesh-barnea in Deut. 32:51.⁸⁸³ Some emend to *mē’arbhōth qādhēš*.⁸⁸⁴ All of these readings depend upon the parallelism of clauses c and d, whereas we feel that clauses d and e are parallel. Furthermore, the proper understanding of the enclitic *mem* rules out the possibility of a reference to ‘Meribath’ or ‘the steppes of Kadesh.’

S. R. Driver is correct, when he states that the geography of Kadesh does not lend itself to the idea of a theophany *from* it. A theophany usually comes from great mountainous regions. Therefore, he thinks Wellhausen’s translation, “and came to Meribath-Kadesh” has some merit.⁸⁸⁵ However, it is still unlikely that Meribath-Kadesh would be named alongside Sinai, Seir, and Mount Paran as the source of God’s theophany. Meribath-Kadesh, or Kadesh-barnea, is an oasis area north of Sinai, not at all a suitable parallel to three mountains. This has led some commentators to prefer the emendation to “steppes of Kadesh,” “desert of Kadesh.”

We translate according to the Masoretic punctuation. Mayes notes that *qds* occurs as a designation of divine beings in both Biblical and non-Biblical texts. Furthermore, the idea of holiness, *qōdheš*, agrees with a theophanic

⁸⁷¹ Seeligmann, p. 76.

⁸⁷² Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 398.

⁸⁷³ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 50.

⁸⁷⁴ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 198, n. 5.

⁸⁷⁵ G. R. Driver, “Hebrew Homonyms,” in *Hebräische Wortforschung, Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 16 (1967):51.

⁸⁷⁶ Steuernagel, p. 123.

⁸⁷⁷ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 391; Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 498.

⁸⁷⁸ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 398.

⁸⁷⁹ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 391.

⁸⁸⁰ Seeligman, p. 76.

⁸⁸¹ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” pp. 198-99, n. 8.

⁸⁸² Horace D. Hummel, “Enclitic *Mem* in Early Northwest Semitic, Especially Hebrew,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76 (1957):92.

⁸⁸³ Kittel, pp. 43-44; Steuernagel, p. 123; Labuschagne, “The Tribes,” p. 99; B. Margulis, “Gen. XLIX 10/Deut. XXXIII 2-3: A New Look at Old Problems,” *Vetus Testamentum* 19 (1969):206; and others.

⁸⁸⁴ Seeligmann, p. 76; Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 50; and others.

⁸⁸⁵ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 392.

description.⁸⁸⁶ Daniel 7:10 speaks of “thousands upon thousands” attending the Ancient of Days on His throne. Ps. 68:17 suggests the same. Ps. 89:7 speaks of a council of holy ones, *q^edhōšīm*, surrounding the throne of God.

Some of the objections to this reading are removed, when the *mem* is understood as enclitic. For example, Mayes⁸⁸⁷ and S. R. Driver⁸⁸⁸ do not like the idea of the angels being left behind, but that understanding is based on seeing the *mem* as the preposition *min*. Then the translation would be, “He came *from* myriads of holy ones.”

Cross and Freedman’s view that a final *mem* after *qōdheš* has been lost by haplography is supported by the Targum of Onkelos, the Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan, and the Vulgate.⁸⁸⁹ The related phrase, “all the holy ones,” in verse 3 adds further support. Both S. R. Driver and Craigie think that this verse, particularly clauses d and e, is responsible for the view that the law of Moses was mediated through angels (see Acts 7:53, Gal. 3:19, Heb. 2:2).⁸⁹⁰ The view is plausible, and, in the light of the inspiration of the New Testament, lends weight to the interpretation defended here.

“At His right hand streaming toward them.” This is the most problematic phrase of the verse and the entire chapter. B. Margulis and Seeligmann think of a large-scale haplography here.⁸⁹¹ Almost every interpretation requires an emendation or a repunctuation of the middle word.

The word *mîmînô*, “at His right hand,” begins with the preposition *min*. S. R. Driver writes that *min* may express “out of, from,” or “off, on the side of” = “at.”⁸⁹² While he prefers the former, his comments substantiate our translation here. Cross and Freedman say that the word frequently means “at his right (side)” (see 1 Kings 22:19).⁸⁹³ Thompson concurs.⁸⁹⁴

The unusual word *’ēšdāth* can hardly mean “fiery law,” literally “law of fire,” as the Bomberg edition, most Samaritan Pentateuch manuscripts, the Targum of Onkelos, and the Vulgate interpret. Furthermore, the word *dāth* is a late Persian loan word, highly unlikely in this context.

The Qere reading of the word is explained in the marginal masora as one of fifteen times where two words are written as one, but to be read as two. That note is indicative of the Masoretic confusion over this word, a sign that we should look for another explanation for the pointing of the word. The number of such explanations reflects the obvious need for some kind of an emendation. Only A. F. L. Beeston, followed by James Barr, tries to explain the text as it stands. He takes the word in the sense of the Sabaean *’sd*, which frequently means “warriors,” and the etymologically related Arabic *’asad*. The Arabic meaning, “lion,” is regarded by Beeston as a later specialized development of the meaning. He thinks that the primitive Semitic meaning probably was something like “strong one.” The word is then correctly translated by the LXX as “angels.”⁸⁹⁵ As pointed out by G. R. Driver, the objection to this reading is the presence of *lāmō*, a word that becomes useless, if “warriors” is the meaning of *’ēšdāth*.⁸⁹⁶

Labuschagne proposes *’ašdōth l^mō’ābh*, “the slopes of Moab,” in order to complete the parallelism of the previous four clauses.⁸⁹⁷ A. Dillmann’s emendation is considered most plausible by S. R. Driver, *yōqedheth* for *dāth*, “a burning fire,” an emendation based in part on a parallel thought in Hab. 3:4⁸⁹⁸ and suitable to the theophanic language. The Revised Standard Version (RSV) reads *’ēš lappidhōth*, “fire of flames,” a reading that assumes a considerable interference in the text. Naphtali Tur-Sinai proposed *’iš tār*, “a man (to) guide (them) (that is, Moses).” Karl Graf suggested *’ašedheth*, “support,” from the Aramaic *’ašdāthā*. Friedrich Delitzsch wanted *’ašādōth*, “standing-places,” from the Akkadian. H. Ewald and August Knobel preferred *’ašādōth*, “lightning-flashes,” from the Aramaic *’āšadh*, “to pour forth.” Kuenen thought of *’iššedheth*, “fire shot forth,” from *’eš* and the Aramaic

⁸⁸⁶ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 399.

⁸⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 398.

⁸⁸⁸ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 392.

⁸⁸⁹ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 199, n. 9.

⁸⁹⁰ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 392-93; Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 393.

⁸⁹¹ B. Margulis, “Gen. XLIX,” p. 207; Seeligmann, pp. 81-82.

⁸⁹² S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 390.

⁸⁹³ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 199, n. 10.

⁸⁹⁴ Thompson, p. 307.

⁸⁹⁵ A. F. L. Beeston, “Angels in Deuteronomy 33:2,” *Journal of Theological Studies* 2 (1951); James Barr, *Comparative Philology and the Text of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1968), p. 322.

⁸⁹⁶ G. R. Driver, “Hebrew Homonyms,” p. 50.

⁸⁹⁷ Labuschagne, “The Tribes,” p. 99.

⁸⁹⁸ August Dillmann, *Numeri, Deuteronomium und Josua*, vol. 13, 2d ed., in *Kurzgefasstes Exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1886), p. 418.

šāday or Hebrew *šādheh*, “to throw.”⁸⁹⁹ Keil and Delitzsch agree, but this translation requires the existence in Hebrew of a hypothetical root *šādhāh*, “to throw, to shoot arrows,” a figurative description of lightning. The root is supposedly established in Hebrew by the name *šēdē’ūr* (see Num. 1:5, 2:10).⁹⁰⁰ Dahood reads a denominative *’ōšēdhōth* from the Ugaritic noun *išd*, “leg,” translating the text, “*marching space* at his right side.”⁹⁰¹ Thompson follows Cross and Freedman, as he usually does, in reading *’āšērū ’ēlīm*, “... proceeded the mighty ones,” based on a corruption in the text.⁹⁰²

The most plausible emendation is one that works with the consonantal text as it stands, taking the word from the root *’āšādh*, “to pour out,” a derivation suggested by Ewald and Knobel above. The Syriac *’ešād*, the Aramaic *’āšād*, “poured out, shed,” and the Arabic *’asada*, “poured out, sowed,” are all Semitic parallels.⁹⁰³ The Hebrew root itself is not recorded in the Old Testament. Some have proposed this derivation, reading an Aramaism, *’āšēdhōth*, “rays, beams of light.”⁹⁰⁴ This is followed by Seeligmann.⁹⁰⁵ The parallel thought in Heb. 3:4 also supports this reading. If we repunctuate as *’āšūdhōth*, a passive plural participle, we may translate “poured out, streaming.”⁹⁰⁶ Then the word agrees in number and gender with *ribh^ebhōth* in the preceding clause, a clause already considered in parallelism because of the initial word in each phrase.

We turn to the final word of the verse, a word met earlier in clause b. The LXX reflects an original *’immō*, translating “with him.” However, it has been argued that *lāmō* is never singular. It is also claimed that *l^e* plus the pronoun must be possessive and that it immediately follows the word on which it depends. The translation then would be “angels belonging to ...”⁹⁰⁷ The simplest interpretation is to take the word in the same sense as it was taken in clause b, “upon them, toward them,” with the *mem* not only poetic, but also plural.

Deut. 33:3

Indeed He loves His people,	a	b	c	2
and His holy ones in your hand.	c’ (bv)	d		2
They bow down at your feet,	e	f		2
they receive your instruction,	e’	g		2

Cassuto wrote that the change from the third person to the second person in this verse is entirely justified, because the God who was previously at a distance is now described as having arrived.⁹⁰⁸ Craigie makes the suggestion that verses 3b-5 may be the response of the people to the words of Moses in verses 2-3a,⁹⁰⁹ but all of verses 2-5 (except verse 4) may be explained as coming from the mouth of Moses. We think that the change to the second person is a signal that Moses is referring to the people of Israel, drawing them into the conversation to the point that they respond with words of verse 4 in an almost liturgical response.

“Indeed He loves His people.” Various unnecessary emendations have been suggested for *’aph*, “indeed.” Labuschagne changes to *’ābh*, “father.”⁹¹⁰ Cross and Freedman propose *’appū*, “surround, encompass, gather round,” and translate, “Gathered round (Him) the guardians of the peoples.”⁹¹¹ Seeligmann reads *l^e’appāyw*, “before

⁸⁹⁹ Naphtali H. Tur-Sinai, *Peshuto shel Mikra* (Jerusalem, 1962-); Karl H. Graf, *Der Segen Mose’s* (Deuteronomium c. XXXIII) erklärt (Leipzig: Dyk, 1857); Friedrich Delitzsch, *Zeitschrift für Kirchliche Wissenschaft und Kirchlichen Leben* 3 (1882):342; H. Ewald, *Lehrbuch der Hebräischen Sprache*, 8th ed., 1870; August Knobel, *Numeri, Deuteronomium und Josua*, in *Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch zum Alten Testament* (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1861); Abraham Kuenen, *An Historical-Critical Inquiry into the Origin and Composition of the Hexateuch*, trans. By Philip H. Wickstead (London: Macmillan).

⁹⁰⁰ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, pp. 497-98.

⁹⁰¹ M. Dahood, *Ugaritic-Hebrew Philology* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), p. 52.

⁹⁰² Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 199, n. 11; Thompson, p. 307.

⁹⁰³ G. R. Driver, “Hebrew Homonyms,” p. 50.

⁹⁰⁴ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 50.

⁹⁰⁵ Seeligmann, p. 77.

⁹⁰⁶ G. R. Driver, “Hebrew Homonyms,” p. 51.

⁹⁰⁷ Beeston, p. 31.

⁹⁰⁸ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 51.

⁹⁰⁹ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 392.

⁹¹⁰ Labuschagne, “The Tribes,” p. 99.

⁹¹¹ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 199, n. 12.

him,” to match the description of God in the third person, and *b^eyādhô*, “at his side,” for the same reason.⁹¹² Cassuto thinks it serves as a simple *waw* conjunctive,⁹¹³ and T. H. Gaster translates “even.”⁹¹⁴ The conjunction is used to denote the addition of something greater and should be translated “yea, even, indeed.” The coming of Yahweh on behalf of His people in verse 2 is based on His great love for them, verse 3.

The verb *hōbhēbh* is not to be translated “pure ones” from the Akkadian *ebēbum*,⁹¹⁵ nor vocalized *hōbhēbhê*, “the ones who care for,”⁹¹⁶ or *h^ebhīb^h*, “most favored.”⁹¹⁷ It is the verb “to love, cherish,” common in Aramaic and Arabic, but present only here in Biblical Hebrew. While the participle without a subject is defensible, it is better to take the word as a Polel perfect with the LXX, Syriac, Targums, Vulgate, and many commentators.⁹¹⁸

Many exegetes follow the LXX and read ‘*ammô*, “his people,” for ‘*ammîm*, “people.” Hummel has suggested that we have another example of the enclitic *mem* and that perhaps “his people” is correct.⁹¹⁹ The people are either the tribes of Israel or, less likely, the heavenly host. If it is the latter, then verse 3a continues the description of these hosts from verse 2.⁹²⁰ Medieval Jewish commentators, followed by some modern commentators, think of Israel on the basis of passages like Gen. 28:3, 48:4, Judg. 5:14, Deut. 33:19, and Hos. 10:14. The Targum of Onkelos adopts this viewpoint. This is probably correct, particularly in the light of the message of the rest of the verse and that of verses 4-5.

“All His holy ones in your hand.” Who are the *q^edhōšāy^w*, “His holy ones”? This decision must be made in conjunction with the decision regarding the identity of ‘*ammîm*. Cassuto translates, “his sanctities,” a reference to the law, a meaning no one else has adopted.⁹²¹ Margulis thinks of Israel, although with the idea of an enthronement festival in the background.⁹²² Mayes considers that a possibility, because of the parallel with “his people” in clause a.⁹²³ However, if ‘*ammîm* refers to Israel, then *q^edhōšāy^w* probably does not. He also admits the possibility of a reference to the “holy ones” of verse 2. Here most commentators agree. Craigie thinks of God’s holy ones, a reference to the assistance given to Moses by members of the divine council when Moses mediated the law of God to Israel at Sinai.⁹²⁴ Keil and Delitzsch think that the previous reference to angels in verse 2 makes this the most natural interpretation.⁹²⁵ Gaster thinks similarly, but he takes “his holy ones” as a reference to the gods of the nations, an indication of the leadership Israel will display among the nations.⁹²⁶ Cross and Freedman think of an assembly of gods, apparently angels, with parallels in Akkadian, Canaanite, and Hittite literature. They repudiate any connection of this poem to an enthronement festival, however, stating that the writer is influenced by poetic motifs and imagery and modes of expression in the Semitic world.⁹²⁷

The preponderance of scholarly opinion is supported by the repetition of the root *qdš*, which one would expect to refer to the same object as *qdš* does in the preceding verse. The sense of the verse, then, is that God loves His people Israel and shows that love by placing “His holy ones, the myriads of angels,” in your (Israel’s) hands. These angels bow before you, Israel, and receive your instruction. Verse 4 must then be understood parenthetically, perhaps words spoken by the people of Israel, as an explanation of this instruction. We are adopting Craigie’s viewpoint here, when he sees this verse as a reference to the assistance given Moses, and, by extension, the people of Israel, in the deliverance of the law to both Moses and Israel (compare Acts 7:53, Gal. 3:19, Heb. 2:2).

⁹¹² Seeligmann, p. 77.

⁹¹³ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 51.

⁹¹⁴ Theodore H. Gaster, “An Ancient Eulogy on Israel: Deuteronomy 33:3-5, 26-29,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 66 (1947):57.

⁹¹⁵ Patrick D. Miller, Jr., “A Critical Note on Deut. 33:2b-3a,” *Harvard Theological Review* 57 (1964):241-43. Cited in Barr, *Comparative Philology*, p. 326.

⁹¹⁶ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 200, n. 13.

⁹¹⁷ Gaster, “Eulogy,” p. 57.

⁹¹⁸ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 399.

⁹¹⁹ Hummel, p. 99.

⁹²⁰ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 200, n. 13.

⁹²¹ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 51.

⁹²² Margulis, “Gen. XLIX,” p. 209.

⁹²³ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 399.

⁹²⁴ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 393.

⁹²⁵ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 498.

⁹²⁶ Gaster, “Eulogy,” p. 57.

⁹²⁷ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” pp. 201-02, n. 19.

There is some support for reading *b^eyādhō* instead of *b^eyādhekhā*. Theodotion, Lucian, some LXX minuscule, and the Vulgate have the third singular suffix. However, the suffixes may be seen as the clue to the proper interpretation of verses 2-5, the interpretation given in the preceding paragraph.

“They bow down at your feet.” These angels serve the people of Israel through the giving of the law. The versions and Jewish commentators usually only guess at the meaning of the first two words. Some modern commentators emend the text, while others find Aramaic or Arabic parallels. By far the best suggestion is to read the two words as one, *w^ehimtakkū*, “and they prostrate themselves,” the Hithpael with the reflexive t-infix formation, from the root *mākhakh*, or *mūkh*, “to be low, be humiliated.” Cross and Freedman first suggested this derivation, citing passages in Eccl. 10:18 and Job 24:24 as evidence. They note that a reflexive form with this meaning is expected in this context.⁹²⁸ Margulis challenges this interpretation, but he suggests nothing better.⁹²⁹ With this interpretation, the final word presents no problem. The plural suffix, “your feet” instead of “your foot,” has much manuscript support, and in the light of the parallel in the next clause should be adopted. It is also possible, however, that the word “foot” is to be taken in the collective sense,⁹³⁰ or that early Hebrew orthography did not distinguish between the singular and the plural.

“They receive your instruction.” The final clause contains an enclitic *mem*, commonly accepted in scholarly circles.⁹³¹ The angels received from God the instruction that is now Israel’s. Various other meanings of *yīššā’* have been proposed. Mayes translates, “your direction lifts them up.”⁹³² Arnold B. Ehrlich claimed the sense “to place into action,”⁹³³ while Seeligmann translates “to stride, move.”⁹³⁴ We follow S. R. Driver, Cassuto, and others in translating “receive.”⁹³⁵ The plural translation is defensible, because of the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Vulgate. The vowel letter *aleph* may have concealed the plural ending within itself in the ancient orthography, so that an archaic form is present here.

The noun, *middabb^erōthekhā*, “your instruction,” has been emended by Margulis to read “your chariots,”⁹³⁶ but that sense is obviously strained. The absolute singular form proposed by Keil and Delitzsch and others, *dabb^erāh* does not occur elsewhere, a form which Driver says “excites suspicion.”⁹³⁷ F. Brown, S. R. Driver, and C. Briggs (BDB) list the noun form as *dabbereth*, “word.”⁹³⁸ The reference is to the words or instructions of God, now considered Israel’s (yours) because of the gift from God to Israel.

Gaster views the entire verse as part of an ancient eulogy on the virtues and prowess of Israel. The verse supposedly says that Israel ranks as the eldest brother in the family of nations and that all nations turn to Israel for guidance and acknowledge Israel’s authority.⁹³⁹ However, he overplays the meanings of several words (for example, *q^edhōšāy^w* as gods) and misses the significance of the suffixes. Furthermore, his interpretation is tenable, only if the psalm originated independently of the blessings. S. R. Driver is correct in stating that the verse speaks of Yahweh’s loving guidance of Israel and the instruction He was to give Israel.⁹⁴⁰ However, Craigie is correct in stating that this guidance and instruction were given through the help of angels at Sinai.

Deut. 33:4

(the law that Moses commanded us,	a	b	c	d	3
the possession of the assembly of Jacob.)	a’	c’	[b’]	[d’]	3

⁹²⁸ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 200, n. 16.

⁹²⁹ Margulis, “Gen. XLIX,” p. 206.

⁹³⁰ Gerleman unconvincingly proposes an idiom meaning “on the spot, instantly, where he stands,” in Gillis Gerleman, “ברגליו as an Idiomatic Phrase,” *Journal of Semitic Studies* 4 (1959):59.

⁹³¹ Hummel, p. 92, and others.

⁹³² Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 400.

⁹³³ Arnold B. Ehrlich, *Randglossen zur Hebräischen Bibel* (7 vols.) (Leipzig: J. C. Hinrichs, 1908-18), 1:52, cited in Seeligmann, p. 80, n. 2.

⁹³⁴ Seeligmann, p. 77.

⁹³⁵ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 390; Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 51.

⁹³⁶ Margulis, “Gen. XLIX,” p. 209.

⁹³⁷ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 394.

⁹³⁸ F. Brown, S. R. Driver, C. Briggs, *A Hebrew and English Lexicon of the Old Testament* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1907).

⁹³⁹ Gaster, “Eulogy,” pp. 53, 59.

⁹⁴⁰ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 393.

Seeligmann calls the entire verse an interpolation that betrays a midrashic exegesis. He wants to delete the entire verse.⁹⁴¹ Those that think of a gloss usually refer either to the first clause only or to the word “Moses” only.⁹⁴² Mayes calls verse 4a a late addition, intended to explain what this “direction” was in terms of the deuteronomic law. He is correct in stating that the relation of the verse to the context is a problem, but he is incorrect in suggesting a late addition.⁹⁴³ Kittel also thinks that verse 4a is an annotation to verse 3b.⁹⁴⁴ Some connect verses 4-5 to verse 21b and verses 26-29, thus considering them a later addition.

The difficulty of the verse in this context is removed when the verse is considered to be the response of the people who are listening to what is said. Although Gaster thinks of Israel as the speaker and the nations as the respondent, he correctly sees the verse as a response to previously spoken words.⁹⁴⁵ Craigie correctly sees this verse as a further response of the people, in addition to verse 3bcd.⁹⁴⁶ Our interpretation would set this verse off from the preceding verses and the following verse, understanding only verse 4 as the response of the people. Keil and Delitzsch think of the verse separately, but they consider Moses to be speaking for the listening nation.⁹⁴⁷ This is a possible interpretation, but the presence of the name of Moses speaks against it.

Craigie is correct in interpreting the verse as a further testimony to the giving of the law to the nation Israel at Sinai.⁹⁴⁸ This law was to be the constitution of the new nation, about to be established in a new land.⁹⁴⁹ Thompson agrees that the reference is to the organization of Israel in the wilderness, when Moses gave the law of God to Israel and when Yahweh became king (verse 5) in Israel.⁹⁵⁰ The two events complement each other and occur simultaneously.

Labuschagne’s suggestion that *lānû* be emended to *lāmô* is tempting, but pure conjecture.⁹⁵¹ The term *môrāšāh*, “possession,” is ordinarily a reference to land.⁹⁵² However, in this context, the possession can only be the law, because of the parallelism of the verse. The “assembly,” *q^ehillath*, is used only here and in Neh. 5:7. The normal word is *qāhāl*, but *q^ehillath* is a poetic variation (see Isa. 28:6, 48:14).⁹⁵³ The absolute form of “possession” is explained by the double duty use of the preposition *l^e* from the first clause (see GK 119hh), to be understood before *q^ehillath*.

Deut. 33:5

He became king in Jeshurun	a	b	c	3
when the leaders of the people assembled,	d	e	f	3
together with the tribes of Israel.	[d’]	e’	f’	3

Cross and Freedman hypothesize that the introduction to the blessings suffered badly in the process of transmission. They think that verses 4-5, together with verse 21b, *sāphûn wayyēthē’ rā’šē ‘ām*, “he came to the heads of the people,” or “the heads of the people assembled,” formed part of the original introduction to the collection. They also think that the concluding phrases of verse 21 may have belonged to this introduction. The omission of the rubric before the blessing of Reuben suggests to them that additional material fell out between verses 5 and 6.⁹⁵⁴ There is no doubt a similarity of language between verses 5 and 21, but this can be explained in other ways than by making a change that requires a radical rearrangement of the text without any manuscript support.

⁹⁴¹ Seeligmann, p. 79.

⁹⁴² E.g., Gaster, “Eulogy,” p. 58.

⁹⁴³ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 400.

⁹⁴⁴ Kittel, p. 43.

⁹⁴⁵ Gaster, “Eulogy,” p. 58.

⁹⁴⁶ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 393.

⁹⁴⁷ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 499.

⁹⁴⁸ Craigie, “The Conquest,” p. 92.

⁹⁴⁹ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 393.

⁹⁵⁰ Thompson, p. 308.

⁹⁵¹ Labuschagne, “The Tribes,” p. 99.

⁹⁵² Ibid.

⁹⁵³ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 394.

⁹⁵⁴ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” pp. 202-03, n. 20.

The subject of the sentence is Yahweh, a viewpoint accepted by conservative and liberal alike. Thompson notes that the name of Yahweh does not occur in verse 5, but it does occur in verse 2.⁹⁵⁵ Some would translate, “And there arose/was a king in Jeshurun,” taking the phrase as a reference to the leadership of Moses or Saul.⁹⁵⁶ Driver feels that this doesn’t seem to lie in the poet’s thought. Clause c leads on to the notices of the separate tribes with no thought of their unity under Saul.⁹⁵⁷

Jeshurun is clearly a reference to Israel. It appears four times in the Old Testament: verse 5, verse 26, Deut. 32:15, and Isa. 44:2. S. R. Driver thinks that it represents Israel in its ideal character.⁹⁵⁸ Wiseman admits that possibility, but he states that it is more probable that the sense reflects a people that upholds justice or keeps the law. The old etymology as a diminutive of *yāšûr* is quite unlikely.⁹⁵⁹

The idea of God as king appears in passages such as Num. 23:2, Judg. 8:23, and Isa. 33:22. The assembly at which Yahweh became king is Sinai. The explicit reference to Sinai in verse 2, along with the theophanic language and the reference to the giving of the law, all point in this direction. Cassuto thinks of a New Year’s festival during which Yahweh was proclaimed king of Israel.⁹⁶⁰ Many critical scholars think of another gathering of the tribes and an acclamation of Yahweh as king of Israel some time during the monarchy, perhaps during the reign of Saul.

God is to be the head of the new state of Israel. He who gave Israel the law (verse 4) will rule over Jeshurun by means of that law (verse 5).⁹⁶¹ The death of Moses does not leave Israel leaderless.

The adverb *yahadh*, “together with,” is a poetic synonym of *kullām*. The thought expressed in the clause is that the tribes of Israel gathered at Sinai along with the leaders; the leaders did not gather alone. The adverb is placed at the beginning of the clause for emphasis.

Deut. 33:6-25

Here begins the collection of sayings about the tribes. Each saying begins with a superscription, except for the first, a fact certainly not necessarily indicative of an omission in the text.⁹⁶² All of the superscriptions are identical, except that of Judah in verse 7. Both Zebulun and Issachar are introduced under the name Zebulun. Steuernagel suggests that first the tribes in distress are introduced, verses 6-7, then the one in close relation to Yahweh, verses 8-12, then the royal tribe, verses 13-17, and finally the rest in no discernible order.⁹⁶³ That view is rejected here. No tribe is in distress, and the Joseph tribes are not considered royal.

The order and circumstances of the tribes have suggested a date to some. Hayman thinks that the order of the tribes points to King Hezekiah.⁹⁶⁴ Thompson thinks that four facts point to a period of time after the settlement, when Dan had migrated north: Simeon is not mentioned, Reuben is in peril, Dan is in the area of Bashan, and Ephraim and Manasseh are pre-eminent.⁹⁶⁵ We shall see that three of those four points are invalid. Helga Weippert is probably correct in stating that this chapter is an example of the geographical system of enumerating the tribes, beginning in the southeast and moving gradually northward in a reverse S-shape.⁹⁶⁶ These and other similar hypotheses will be addressed during the exegesis and during the section on the order of the tribes.

The sayings picture the tribes passing before the departing lawgiver in order to receive a last word from him.

Deut. 33:6

⁹⁵⁵ Thompson, p. 308.

⁹⁵⁶ Steuernagel, p. 124; Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 400; others.

⁹⁵⁷ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 394.

⁹⁵⁸ Ibid.

⁹⁵⁹ Donald J. Wiseman, “יָשָׁר (yāšhar) be level, straight, (up) right, just, lawful,” in *Theological Wordbook of the Old Testament*, 2 vols., ed. R. Laird Harris, Gleason L. Archer, Jr., and Bruce K. Waltke (Chicago: Moody Press, 1980), 1:418. Hereafter cited as *TWOT*.

⁹⁶⁰ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” pp. 48-49.

⁹⁶¹ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 393-94.

⁹⁶² Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” pp. 202-03, n. 20.

⁹⁶³ Steuernagel, p. 124.

⁹⁶⁴ Hayman, p. 97.

⁹⁶⁵ Thompson, p. 305.

⁹⁶⁶ Helga Weippert, “Das geographische System der Stämme Israels,” *Vetus Testamentum* 23 (1973):78.

“May Reuben live and not die,	a	b	a’	[b’]	3
and may his men be beyond number.”	a”	b”			3

Codex Alexandrinus of the LXX reads “Simeon” in verse 6b, no doubt out of concern for Simeon’s omission from the chapter. The reading is most certainly not original. Critical scholars such as S. R. Driver think that Simeon is passed by, because by this time Simeon had been virtually absorbed by Judah,⁹⁶⁷ but in the exegesis of Gen. 49:5-7 we noted that Simeon is mentioned in the Old Testament as late as the time of Josiah, although the tribe was but a shadow of its original self. Keil and Delitzsch may be correct in stating that the Simeonites are omitted because of the curse of Genesis 49. Unlike the Levites, the Simeonites perhaps had not repented of their sin and produced fruits of righteousness. They had only added to their crime (see Numbers 25). We think it much more likely that Simeon is included in the blessing of Judah, since Simeon’s inheritance was within the territory of Judah.⁹⁶⁸

The predominant opinion of critical scholarship is that a wish is here expressed that Reuben’s numbers be few. They translate verse 6b almost universally (with many conservatives), “and may his men be few,” or “that his men may be few.” However, that understanding of the verse is not certain, particularly in the light of the overwhelmingly positive words about the tribes throughout the chapter. Furthermore, there is much doubt about the precise relationship of clause a to clause b.

This verse is the only tribal saying without a superscription. Cross and Freedman thought that fact indicative of an omission in the text.⁹⁶⁹ Kittel feels that there are two reasons for the lack of a superscription. The phrase “and he said” in verse 2 flows easily into verse 6, suggesting that the sayings were only later connected with the psalm-like framework, verses 2-5, 26-29. Secondly, verse 6 is the first saying from Moses.⁹⁷⁰ The second reason is correct. The remaining superscriptions serve to link the tribal sayings together, with the psalm-like framework serving as the superscription, introduction, and conclusion of the entire collection. In one sense verse 6 can be said to follow upon the “and he said” of verse 2a, since verses 2-5 are the superscription of the entire chapter and therefore also of verse 6. In several cases the tribe is not mentioned by name in the saying (verses 8-11, 12), or not at the beginning of the saying (verses 13-17), so the superscriptions within the collection itself serve to separate the blessing about one tribe from that of another, in addition to providing a link between all the blessings.

The common critical assumption is that these words betray a time in Reuben’s history, when Reuben was near extinction. Therefore, the wish is expressed that he may live and not die. And yet, because of Reuben’s indifference to Deborah’s call, resulting in the rebuke of Judg. 5:15-16, the wish is expressed that Reuben not particularly thrive, that is, may his tribe be small. Many of the cities assigned to Reuben in the tableland north of the Arnon River (Jos. 13:13-23) later appear in the possession of Moab (compare the Mesha Stone, Isa. 15-16, Jeremiah 48).⁹⁷¹ However, although little is heard of the tribe after the eleventh century (see 1 Chron. 5:18-22), the tribe continued to exist (see 1 Chron. 5:23-26). Furthermore, this viewpoint reflects a failure to reckon with the authorship of Moses, since at the time of the crossing of the Jordan Reuben was nowhere near extinction. The census of Numbers 26 showed a decline from that of Numbers 1, from 46,500 to 43,730, but that hardly gives cause for alarm. In 1 Chron. 5:23 the tribe of Reuben is called “very numerous.”

We ought not to fail to consider the prophetic character of this verse,⁹⁷² for it may be intended to look ahead to a time when Reuben was near extinction, because of the incessant raids of the Ammonites. However, the chapter is styled as a blessing from the mouth of Moses, and a wish for Reuben to remain alive, but small, can hardly be considered a blessing.

A discussion of the grammar of the verse, with the help of Ugaritic parallels, will shed additional light on the meaning of the verse. “Let Reuben live and not die.” There is no real disagreement on this translation, although there is some disagreement on its meaning. Hans-Jürgen Zobel is correct in stating that the verse is not a prayer to Yahweh, but he is incorrect in calling it a secular wish. He would understand the verse as a reference to a cultic

⁹⁶⁷ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 395.

⁹⁶⁸ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 500.

⁹⁶⁹ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” pp. 202-03, n. 20.

⁹⁷⁰ Kittel, p. 46.

⁹⁷¹ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 395.

⁹⁷² Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 394.

tribal gathering, where the decision regarding Reuben's life or death is placed into the hands of a member of the circle of tribes.⁹⁷³ We must remember that verse one calls these sayings "blessings," not hopeful wishes.

Kittel is closer to the truth when he writes that the wish "May he live" is like the call at a coronation of a new king, as in 1 Sam. 10:24, 2 Sam. 16:16, 1 Kings 1:31.⁹⁷⁴ Although Kittel does not so state, his comment leads us to think of a positive, confident blessing, rather than a hopeful wish to avoid extinction. The phrase "let the king live," cited in the marginal masora, does not mean, "we hope that the king will manage to live for a while against insurmountable odds." It means, "May the king have a long and prosperous rule." E. W. Bullinger calls verse 6a a pleonasm, where more words are used than grammar requires. The purpose of the pleonasm is to enhance or intensify what has already been said.⁹⁷⁵

Loren R. Fisher cites a Ugaritic parallel, where the ideas of "life," "immortality," and "to cause to count," (the precise thoughts of our verse) appear.⁹⁷⁶ This parallel suggests that we are dealing with a relatively common literary form, whose purpose is entirely positive.⁹⁷⁷ The place of honor at the head of the tribes in this chapter may also be further evidence for the positive interpretation of the verse, in spite of the sentiments expressed earlier by the author of Gen. 49:3-4.

Long ago J. Meinhold, wrote that verse 6b should say that Reuben's men may not decrease. He cited Gressmann's translation, "may his men not be few."⁹⁷⁸ However, the text says the opposite, and almost all commentators have come out here. It is correct that the negative particle cannot govern the second part of the verse, since the particle appears in a subordinate clause,⁹⁷⁹ although Keil and Delitzsch object.⁹⁸⁰

A grammatical problem is the *wîhî* in clause b. There is much debate over the relationship of the two clauses. Kittel comments that one would expect a *waw* consecutive and consecutive perfect here. Labuschagne writes that in no place in the Old Testament does *wîhî* express the result of an action indicated by a jussive preceding it. After a jussive, *wîhî* always expresses an additional wish. Therefore, we cannot translate, "Let him not die with the result that his men become few." There are two independent wishes, or blessings, expressed here that are related but not dependent on one another. The translation of verse 6b as a concessive clause ignores this.⁹⁸¹ Zobel's translation, "yet may he be small in number relative to his men,"⁹⁸² and even the common "that his men may be few"⁹⁸³ or the adversative translation of S. R. Driver and others reflect a dependence of verse 6b on verse 6a.⁹⁸⁴

The translation of von Rad and the New International Version (NIV), "nor (let) his men be few," recognizes the fact that we ought to expect verse 6b to be another positive blessing, but fails to avoid the close connection of the two clauses, when they use the connecting "nor." This translation also carries the negative particle of clause a over into clause b. This is not sound grammatically.

The solution is to be found in the concluding word of the verse, *mispār*, "few." The word is not part of a construct chain, as some have thought. Rather, the word is the predicate of the sentence, and *m^ethāyw*, "his men," is the subject. The two words appear in a construct chain five times in the Old Testament, but this is not a construct chain here. In those instances,⁹⁸⁵ "men" appears as *m^ethê*, an obvious construct.

The LXX gives us a clue to the meaning of the phrase when it translates, *kai estō polys en arithmō*, "and let him be many in number." Fisher writes of a new pointing of the consonants *mspr* as *missappēr*, which reflects *min*

⁹⁷³ Hans- Jürgen Zobel, *Stammesspruch und Geschichte: Die Angaben der Stammessprüche von Gen 49, Dtn 33 und Jdc 5 über die politischen und kultischen Zustände im damaligen "Israel,"* in *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, no. 95 (Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1965), p. 28.

⁹⁷⁴ Kittel, p. 46.

⁹⁷⁵ E. W. Bullinger, *Figures of Speech Used in the Bible* (London: Messrs. Eyre and Spottiswoode, 1898; reprint ed., Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1968), p. 405.

⁹⁷⁶ Loren R. Fisher, ed., *Ras Shamra Parallels: The Texts From Ugarit and the Hebrew Bible*, 3 vols. to date, in *Analecta Orientalia*, vol. 49-51 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1972-81), 3:65.

⁹⁷⁷ cf. Ps. 118:17, where the psalmist writes, "I will not die but live, and will proclaim what the Lord has done."

⁹⁷⁸ J. Meinhold, "Textkonjekturen," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 38 (1920):171.

⁹⁷⁹ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 400-01.

⁹⁸⁰ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 500.

⁹⁸¹ E.g., Hayman, p. 104; Cassuto, "Deuteronomy," p. 55; and others.

⁹⁸² Zobel, p. 26: "... doch sei er bezüglich seiner Männer gering an Zahl."

⁹⁸³ E.g., Steuernagel, p. 124. S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 395, says that this kind of translation destroys the rhythm and symmetry of the verse.

⁹⁸⁴ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 394.

⁹⁸⁵ Gen. 34:30, Deut. 4:27, Jer. 44:28, Ps. 105:12, and 1 Chron. 16:19.

plus the infinite construct, “beyond number, beyond counting.”⁹⁸⁶ BDB lists this meaning of *min* for comparisons, “beyond, above.”

The lack of agreement between the plural subject and the singular verb in clause b has been explained by Cross and Freedman. They believe that the Masoretic Text (MT) preserves tenth century orthography without the *mater lectionis* for the final vowel and would read *w^eyihû*, third person plural.⁹⁸⁷ The proposal in the footnote b-b is therefore unnecessary.

The common critical viewpoint for the dating of this verse in the eleventh century now goes by the wayside, for we have no reference to the near extinction of the tribe or to the wish that the tribe be small. Moses blesses Reuben, “Let his men be beyond number,” that is, so that he can resist the attacks of the desert raiders.

Deut. 33:7

And this he said about Judah,

“Hear, O Lord, the voice of Judah	a	b	c (bv)		3
and bring him to his people	d	[b’]	a’	c’	3 (2)
increase his forces for him,	c’’	[b’’]	a’’	d’	3
and be a help against his foes.”	E	[b’’’]	f	a’’’	3

Some feel that verse 7ab originally referred to Simeon, and verse 7cd and verse 11 referred to Judah. The appearance of the name Simeon in verse 6b in some LXX manuscripts, the lack of any mention of Simeon in Deuteronomy 33, and the extra-metrical “Judah” in verse 7a are cited by Cassuto as evidence.⁹⁸⁸ He would assign all of verse 7 to Simeon and verse 11 to Judah.⁹⁸⁹ Some say that the word *š^ema’*, “hear,” indicates that Simeon is meant in verse 7ab and that verse 11 refers to Judah, but without proper support from the text.⁹⁹⁰ Heinrich H. Grätz followed Rabbi Eliezer, a Talmudic author of the second century A.D., and read Simeon in verse 7a for Judah. S. R. Driver calls the ideas of Grätz, Michael Heilprin and others ingenious, but too violent.⁹⁹¹ All of these suggestions point to another conclusion. There is a likely possibility that Simeon is understood, when Judah is named, since their inheritance was one (Josh. 19:1, Judg. 1:3). One clear example of this is found in 2 Chron. 15:2, 9. Since one of the unifying themes of the chapter is the land, we should not be surprised if Simeon is not mentioned by name. He is addressed, when Judah is addressed. The mention of one tribe, when two are intended, also occurs at verse 18.

Kittel writes that this verse is not a tribal saying. He should be more precise by saying that this tribal saying does not correspond to the more common features of other tribal sayings. His only evidence is that the name of Yahweh is improbable in an ancient tribal saying, a prayer is not possible in a tribal saying, and this verse appears as a speech of Moses to Yahweh for Judah. He views verse 7 as the work of the author of the prose introductions and superscriptions, the author of the deuteronomistic work.⁹⁹²

Many commentators assume that the phrase “bring him to his people” means that Judah was separated from the rest of the tribes. S. R. Driver is somewhat cautious, however, stating that the phrase “may imply” separation from Israel.⁹⁹³ Cassuto thinks that there are no political allusions, but that the verse simply means, “Let Judah’s men, who are now in the battlefield facing the enemy, return to their homes in peace.”⁹⁹⁴ Keil and Delitzsch join Craigie in referring the phrase to Judah’s place at the head of the army (Num. 2:9), a very dangerous place in battle.⁹⁹⁵ The Targum of Onkelos interprets the verse in a military sense, translating, “Hear, Lord, the prayer of Judah when he goes into battle, and bring him back in peace.” This is probably the source of Cassuto’s interpretation.

⁹⁸⁶ Fisher, 3:65.

⁹⁸⁷ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 203, n. 22.

⁹⁸⁸ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 55.

⁹⁸⁹ Ibid., p. 56.

⁹⁹⁰ Steuernagel, pp. 124-25, cites Michael Heilprin, *The Historical Poetry of the Ancient Hebrews* (2 vols.) (New York: D. Appleton, 1879-80), 1:113-16, who holds this view.

⁹⁹¹ Heinrich H. Grätz, *Geschichte der Juden von den ältesten Zeiten bis auf die Gegenwart* (11 vols.) (Leipzig: O. Leiner, 1866-88), 1:486-87; S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 397-98.

⁹⁹² Kittel, p. 48.

⁹⁹³ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 396.

⁹⁹⁴ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 56.

⁹⁹⁵ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 501; Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 394-95.

Craigie offers a threefold interpretation. It is a prayer that God may hear Judah's call for help in battle (clause a). It is a prayer that Judah might be brought back safely from the danger of its position in the vanguard (clause b). It asks God to bless Judah with the help of His presence, even though the tribe would fight with its own hands (clauses c and d).⁹⁹⁶ That the verse is a prayer to Yahweh cannot be disputed and is almost universally recognized.

The precise occasion for this prayer is variously explained. The general nature of the verse and the wide divergence of opinion on this subject speak strongly for not finding a specific historical occasion in this verse. Zobel writes that Judah wished to be permitted to come where the other tribes worshipped Yahweh. Since Judah previously stood up for this community (clause c), he has earned a certain claim to membership. His date is the time of the judges.⁹⁹⁷ Cross and Freedman refer to the "serious difficulties" of Judah, thinking that the situation may be that of the Philistine encroachments of the twelfth-eleventh centuries.⁹⁹⁸ Thompson agrees, convinced that there is no reference to the monarchy and that this requires a pre-monarchical date.⁹⁹⁹ Hugo Gressmann likewise thought of a pre-monarchical time,¹⁰⁰⁰ as did Anthony Phillips. Phillips aligns himself with Zobel's view that Judah was previously unable to attend the central sanctuary of the tribal confederacy, but Phillips feels it was because of enemy attack.¹⁰⁰¹ Hayman thinks of the time of Hezekiah (2 Kings 14:13-14) after Judah had been plundered by Israel.¹⁰⁰² Labuschagne thinks of the time when David was king over Judah in Hebron, isolated from the northern tribes because of the Philistines.¹⁰⁰³ Knobel has seen here the desire that David, who had fled from Saul, might return, become king, and make Judah the royal tribe. Graf thought of the time of the divided kingdom. Steuernagel also thinks of that time, a time when Judah was separated from the rest of the tribes.¹⁰⁰⁴ Hofmann and Maurer saw an allusion to the inhabitants of Judah in captivity with Jehoiachin.¹⁰⁰⁵ Others thought of the rivalry between David and Ishbosheth or some other period after the division of the kingdom.¹⁰⁰⁶

S. R. Driver thinks of a historical allusion to the victorious wars of David, but he also cautions that "our ignorance of the *exact* circumstances under which the Blessing was composed, naturally precludes us from being confident that it is the correct one."¹⁰⁰⁷ The fact is that there are no clear historical allusions in this verse. The wide variety of conjectures on this subject is ample proof of this. It is highly likely, however, that some time prior to the establishment of the monarchy is in order, since there is no reference to the kingship, a reference that we should ordinarily expect in a blessing about the tribe that produced these kings.

Zobel wants to translate *qôl* as "request." He would then refer the verse to Judah's request to be received into the tribal fellowship to which he belonged by blood, since the tribes were "his people."¹⁰⁰⁸ This view is based on the preconceptions of Zobel regarding the amphictyony and is to be rejected. Translate "cry, voice." Labuschagne calls *š'ma' qôl* a *terminus technicus* used in prayer, in which *qôl* always connotes the cry for help addressed to God (compare Ps. 27:7, 28:2, 64:1, 119:149).¹⁰⁰⁹

"His people" undoubtedly refers to all of Israel, but not necessarily only the northern tribes. If, as the final two clauses and the Targum of Onkelos suggest, the verse has military overtones, "his people" probably means that part of Israel which is not in battle. That could mean the tribes that did not go to war, or that portion of the nation that is not a part of the military force. Steuernagel is wrong in calling "his people" a north Israelite perception.¹⁰¹⁰

⁹⁹⁶ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 394.

⁹⁹⁷ Zobel, p. 29.

⁹⁹⁸ Cross and Freedman, "The Blessing," p. 203, n. 27.

⁹⁹⁹ Thompson, p. 309.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Hugo Gressmann, *Die Anfänge Israels*, vol. 1, part 2, 2d ed., in *Die Schriften des Alten Testaments* (7 vols. in 3) (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1922), p. 177. Cited in Kittel, p. 49, n. 1.

¹⁰⁰¹ Phillips, *Deuteronomy*, p. 228.

¹⁰⁰² Hayman, p. 103.

¹⁰⁰³ Labuschagne, "The Tribes," p. 110.

¹⁰⁰⁴ Steuernagel, p. 124.

¹⁰⁰⁵ Cited in Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, pp. 495-96.

¹⁰⁰⁶ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 396.

¹⁰⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 397.

¹⁰⁰⁸ Zobel, p. 28.

¹⁰⁰⁹ Labuschagne, "The Tribes," p. 109.

¹⁰¹⁰ Steuernagel, p. 124.

“Bring him to his people.” In connection with this clause, von Rad writes that the omission of any mention of the monarchy is striking.¹⁰¹¹ Cross and Freedman’s suggestion that we have an energetic form of the verb is possible, but unlikely.¹⁰¹²

“Increase his forces for him, and be a help against his foes.” The usual translation runs like this: “With his own hands he defends his cause. Oh, be his help against his foes!” This translation fails to appreciate the archaic nature of this chapter. The lack of a vowel letter has already been demonstrated in verse 6, and the parallelism of the four clauses suggests the same here. Cassuto long ago noted that the parallelism suggested an imperative.¹⁰¹³ The suggested emendations in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, while offering nothing better, indicate the difficulty scholars have had with clause c.

Mayes calls Dahood’s suggestion of an emendation from *rābh*, “he contended,” to *rabbe(h)*, “increase!” plausible. He comments that it suits the context admirably.¹⁰¹⁴ The word *rabbeh* is used as an imperative in Judg. 9:29 in a military context, “Call out (*rabbeh*) your whole army.” This suggestion would provide a fourfold request of Yahweh, each clause containing an imperative or jussive. Driver,¹⁰¹⁵ Steuernagel,¹⁰¹⁶ and Labuschagne¹⁰¹⁷ have wanted to emend the text to *yādhe(y)khā rībh lô*, “with your hands fight for him,” in order to provide an imperative. Cassuto adopts this suggestion,¹⁰¹⁸ as do Cross and Freedman.¹⁰¹⁹ Cassuto read the verb as *rabh*, an apocopated form after the analogy of *šaw*, but Cross and Freedman prefer the longer form for metrical reasons, *rabbe(h)*.

Dahood has written that the noun *‘ezer*, “help,” with the preposition *min*, may mean, “And be the liberation from his adversaries.” The Ugaritic verb *‘dr* denotes “to rescue, liberate from” when used with the preposition *b*, “from,” in Ugaritic or *min* in Hebrew.¹⁰²⁰ The suggestion is almost a distinction without a difference. However, the proximity of *‘dr* and *yd*, “to liberate” and “hand,” has also been attested in Ugaritic, suggesting “forces” as the meaning for *yādhāyw*.

Deut. 33:8-11

According to most exegetes, this saying has to do with the priestly tribe of Levi. It deals with the investiture by Yahweh of Levi and the Levites with the Urim and Thummim. Von Rad calls this saying our most important source for the pre-exilic priesthood,¹⁰²¹ whereas Kittel thinks that we can conclude nothing from this saying about the meaning and the problem of the Levitical priesthood.¹⁰²²

Kittel insists that the covenant concerns the whole nation and that law and ordinance were for the whole nation. This much is correct, but he goes on to claim that the Urim and Thummim are not verified in the Old Testament as marks of the Levites (that is, the descendants of Aaron) and that sacrifice became a priestly privilege only after the time of King Josiah. Thus he can write, “That means that not a single sentence of the saying in Deut. 33:8-11 requires a ‘Levitical priesthood’ as addressee.”¹⁰²³ These verses are not a tribal saying, according to Kittel, but the Deuteronomist’s conception of the Levites as the only legitimate priesthood. The verses were perhaps written at a time when that priesthood was being disputed.¹⁰²⁴ While it is true that God intended the entire nation to be a kingdom of priests (Exod. 19:3-6), He nevertheless chose the Levites to be the priestly representatives of the people.

The views of Kittel introduce the reader to some of the problems raised concerning these verses, most of them the result of critical preconceptions about the history of Israel and the reliability of the Pentateuch narratives.

¹⁰¹¹ Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, p. 206.

¹⁰¹² Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 203, n. 25.

¹⁰¹³ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 56.

¹⁰¹⁴ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 401.

¹⁰¹⁵ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 397.

¹⁰¹⁶ Steuernagel, p. 124.

¹⁰¹⁷ Labuschagne, “The Tribes,” p. 108.

¹⁰¹⁸ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 56.

¹⁰¹⁹ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 203, n. 26.

¹⁰²⁰ M. Dahood, *Psalms III: 101-150*, in *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 17A (Garden City, NY: Doubleday and Co., 1970), p. 95.

¹⁰²¹ Gerhard von Rad, *Theologie des Alten Testaments*, 2 vols., vol. 1: *Die Theologie der geschichtlichen Überlieferungen Israels* (Munich: Chr. Kaiser Verlag, 1957), p. 243. Cited in Kittel, p. 50.

¹⁰²² Kittel, p. 51.

¹⁰²³ Kittel, p. 50: “Das heist, dass nicht ein einziger Satz des Spruches Dt 33,8-11 notwendig als Adressaten ein ‘levitisches Priestertum’ verlangt.”

¹⁰²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 51; also Zobel, p. 30.

What is the relation of these verses to Exod. 32:25-29, where the Levites fought for Moses? What is the relation to Exod. 17:1-7, where Moses smote the rock at Rephidim, calling the place Massah and Meribah? What is the relation to Num. 20:1-13, where Moses smote the rock at Kadesh (Meribah)? What is the relation to Numbers 16, the story of the rebellion of Korah against the Aaronic priesthood?

Why is the singular number in verses 8-9b and 11, but the plural in verses 9e-10? Does the saying refer to an individual (Levi), a group (the Levites), or both? Does the change in number reflect a stage in the history of transmission? Are verses 8-10 a later addition? Cross and Freedman have claimed that there is evidence of later writing in those verses in the appearance of *'ašer*, *'eth*, and the article.¹⁰²⁵ However, their conclusions are probably overstated. Dahood has noted, for example, an instance of the article which he considers to be legitimately early. The use of the article in Gen. 49:21 as the relative pronoun is not later, he claims.¹⁰²⁶ What is the meaning of and relationship between Massah and Meribah? Who is the *'iš ḥ^asîdhekhā* in verse 8—Moses, Aaron, or Levi? Why does verse 11 associate some unfamiliar characteristics with Levi?¹⁰²⁷

A. H. J. Gunneweg answers these questions by claiming a long and complicated history of transmission for this saying, the text as we have it being the final stage of that transmission.¹⁰²⁸ However, we will see that the text makes good sense as it stands.

The saying is a prayer to Yahweh, connected to the words of verse 1 as a speech of Moses. The saying moves from a look at the past (verses 8-9), a historical prologue, to a look at the present (verse 10), to a look to the future (verse 11).

The duties of the Levites are three: to be responsible for the Urim and Thummim, by which the Lord's will is to be made known (verse 8); to teach Israel the law of God (verse 10ab); and to be responsible for Israel's formal system of worship (verse 10cd). The saying asks God to give Levi strength for these tasks and protection from enemies (verse 11).¹⁰²⁹ Craigie correctly notes that

... the Blessing of Levi marks the transition period between the tribe's early warlike character (Gen. 49:5-7) and its later more specialized priestly function, which is again in harmony with the setting which has been posited for the Blessing of Moses.¹⁰³⁰

The messianic interpretation of this blessing in 4QTestimonia may be safely set aside as unsupported and unsupportable.

Deut. 33:8

And about Levi he said,

Your Thummim and Your Urim belong	a	b	2
to the man, Your pious one,	c	d	2
whom You tested at Massah	e	f	3
with whom You contended at the waters of Meribah.	e'	f'	3

In the light of the LXX, *Dote Leui*, and 4QTestimonia, Plate 4, verse 14, "Give to Levi," some have suggested that *nāthattā l'lēwî*, "you gave to Levi," should be supplied at the start of the verse. Zobel likes the smooth meter and the good parallelism which that addition provides.¹⁰³¹ Gunneweg thinks that *l'lēwî* could have dropped out as dittography.¹⁰³² The RSV follows the LXX, translating, "Give to Levi thy Thummim." Mayes adopts the LXX for better balance.¹⁰³³

¹⁰²⁵ Cross and Freedman, "The Blessing," pp. 203-04, n. 28.

¹⁰²⁶ Dahood, *Psalms III: 101-150*, p. 205.

¹⁰²⁷ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 402.

¹⁰²⁸ A. H. J. Gunneweg, *Leviten und Priester*, in *Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments*, vol. 89 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), p. 40.

¹⁰²⁹ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 396.

¹⁰³⁰ Craigie, "The Conquest," p. 88.

¹⁰³¹ Zobel, p. 30.

¹⁰³² Gunneweg, *Leviten*, p. 38.

¹⁰³³ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 402.

Gunneweg is correct in thinking that the mention of Levi in the superscription means the Levites as a whole, not Levi the individual. One reason for this is that Levi is not mentioned anywhere else in the blessing, but another reason is the plural number that appears later. He calls this superscription a secondary addition.¹⁰³⁴ Kittel thinks that the author of the introductory phrase is also the author of the whole saying, since the repetition of the name “Levi” is avoided.¹⁰³⁵

Cross and Freedman call verses 8-10 a complete break in style, meter, and content with the rest of the poem. The presence of the relative pronoun, the sign of the direct object, and the article, all suspicious in ancient poetry, suggest to them a late addition. The poetic structure seems dubious to them, particularly verse 9, which they call largely prose. There are no archaic forms or tenth century spellings in these verses, while such forms and spellings appear frequently in the surrounding verses.¹⁰³⁶ Labuschagne thinks that verses 8-10 were inserted by a levitical redactor, who missed any reference to Levi. He thinks that verse 11 refers to Judah and should be taken with verse 7. The reference to Levi was originally omitted by the composer because the Levites had no territory of their own, he writes.¹⁰³⁷ Mayes, too, regards verse 11 as the original conclusion of the Judah blessing. Since verses 8-9d make more archaic claims, he suggests them as the first stage of the editing process. Then verses 9e-10 were added later, since, according to him, the giving of the Torah by the priests, in the sense suggested by verse 10, belongs to the end of the ninth and the eighth centuries. He thinks that the blessing as a whole is probably not earlier than 722 B.C., since verses 8-11 reflect the close association between the Levites and Judah that existed after the fall of Samaria.¹⁰³⁸ A. Cody sees the change from singular in verses 8-9d, 11, to plural in verses 9e-10 as another signal of a later addition. For Cody, there is a difference in the historical levels of the two sections,¹⁰³⁹ as Mayes has also written.

To whom are the second singular suffixes referring, to Yahweh or Levi? Since Moses is speaking to Yahweh about Levi, the most natural interpretation is that the suffixes refer to Yahweh. Then the entire blessing is an address to Yahweh in prayer form, and Yahweh is the subject of verse 8cd. This becomes quite clear in verse 11, where Yahweh is explicitly called upon.

The Thummim and Urim, usually given in reverse order, were probably two almost identical stones, perhaps gems. They were kept in a pouch on the ephod for the purpose of determining God’s will. One was called Urim, perhaps from *’ārār*, “to curse,” apparently a “no” answer. The other was called Thummim, presumably from *thāmam*, “to be perfect,” apparently a “yes” answer. One may have been drawn from the pouch, or both may have been tossed out in order to learn God’s answer. The general opinion is that the Urim and Thummim fell out of use after the time of David, when prophecy began to emerge.¹⁰⁴⁰ Some think that the MT presents a request that the use of Urim and Thummim be granted to Levi, thereby confirming the Levitical claim to the office of priest.¹⁰⁴¹ However, this viewpoint depends upon the addition of the words “Give to Levi,” or an implicit “may they be.” It is wiser to take verses 8-10 as the historical prologue to the blessing of verse 11, thereby explaining much of the difference between verses 8-10 and verse 11. In the light of what Levi has done (verses 8-9) and is doing (verse 10), bless him, Lord (verse 11).

Is the *’iš ḥ^asîdhekhā*, “the man, Your pious one,” Moses, Aaron, Levi, or even Christ?¹⁰⁴² The most natural conclusion is Levi, but Levi is not mentioned in the Massah-Meribah incident at Rephidim in Exod. 17:1-7 nor in the Meribah incident at Kadesh in Num. 20:1-17. There Moses is the key figure; he is the one whom Yahweh tests. On the other hand, Levi is mentioned in the golden calf incident in Exod. 32:25-29 and is tested, but Massah and Meribah are unmentioned there. However, how can Moses be spoken of in a saying which Moses himself speaks? Many commentators think of Moses nevertheless.¹⁰⁴³ It would seem that if verse 8cd is not considered secondary to verse 8ab, then Moses must be meant, since Levi was never connected to Massah and Meribah.¹⁰⁴⁴

¹⁰³⁴ Gunneweg, *Leviten*, p. 38.

¹⁰³⁵ Kittel, p. 50.

¹⁰³⁶ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” pp. 203-04, n. 28.

¹⁰³⁷ Labuschagne, “The Tribes,” p. 111.

¹⁰³⁸ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 402.

¹⁰³⁹ A. Cody, *A History of Old Testament Priesthood*, in *Analecta Biblica*, vol. 35 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1969), p. 115.

¹⁰⁴⁰ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 403; Cody, p. 115.

¹⁰⁴¹ Thompson, p. 310; S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 398.

¹⁰⁴² This latter view is held by Carl Armerding, “The Last Words of Moses: Deuteronomy 33,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 114 (1957):229.

¹⁰⁴³ E.g. Max L. Margolis, “*L^e’iš ḥ^asîdhekhā*, Deut. 33:8,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 38 (1919):37.

¹⁰⁴⁴ Gunneweg, *Leviten*, p. 43.

Grammatically, most take “Your pious one” in apposition to “the man” (see GK 131). The definite article is not needed with *’iš* because of the poetical nature of the verse (see GK 126p).¹⁰⁴⁵ A minority takes *h^ašidhekhā* as a genitive after a construct, referring *’iš* to Levi and *h^ašidhekhā* to Moses, or to the deity. In that case *’ašer* could refer to Moses, but then verse 9 would also refer to Moses.¹⁰⁴⁶ If the second word is in apposition to the first, then only one person is mentioned here.

Keil and Delitzsch are correct in thinking of Levi, the tribe-father, who represents the whole tribe to which the blessing applies. S. R. Driver also thinks of Levi, conceived collectively and personified as an individual.¹⁰⁴⁷ Steuernagel likewise adopts a collective sense for *’iš h^ašidhekhā*, referring the phrase to the whole tribe of Levi.¹⁰⁴⁸

Next we must turn to the vexing problem of verse 8cd. If Levi is the pious man spoken of in verse 8b, then why is it said that Yahweh tested him at Massah and Meribah? Levi is not even mentioned in that incident in Exod. 17:1-7. We need not find the solution in a variety of traditions about Moses, Levi, and Massah-Meribah, some of the unknown to us, that were later conflated to form our text.¹⁰⁴⁹ It is only the story recorded at Exod. 17:1-7 that mentions the names Massah and Meribah, which mean “place of testing” and “place of contention.” Those were the names Moses gave to Rephidim, because of the murmuring of the people against him and against the testing of God. In response to the command of God, Moses struck the rock at Rephidim with the result that water came out from it for the people to drink. Aaron, Levi, and the Levites are unmentioned in this story. This incident is to be distinguished from that which happened at Kadesh, Num. 20:1-13, where Moses struck the rock, when the Lord had told him to speak to it. Moses called the water that came forth “the waters of Meribah,” *mê m^erîbhāh*. This incident is to be distinguished from that of Exodus 17, but it has significance for the interpretation of Deut. 33:8. Numbers 20 contains no mention of Levi or the Levites, although it does mention both Moses and Aaron as the ones the people opposed.

Thompson offers a solution when he suggests that in Moses and Aaron, leaders of the tribe of Levi, the whole tribe was on trial, even though the name Levi or the Levites are not mentioned.¹⁰⁵⁰ The person and tribe of Levi are represented in the person of Moses and perhaps Aaron, whom the Lord tested at Rephidim and Kadesh.¹⁰⁵¹ When the people strove with Moses and Aaron, God was using these incidents to test their leadership. In Moses and Aaron, the heads of the tribe of Levi, the whole tribe of Levi was proved.¹⁰⁵² In the light of the Old Testament concept of the corporate nature of the Israelites, this viewpoint is quite plausible. For example, when Achan wrongly took some of the plunder from Jericho, the whole nation was punished in the defeat suffered at the hands of the inhabitants of Ai (Joshua 7).

Sigo Lehming thinks that we have a word play here and that Massah and Meribah do not refer to place names, as at Exod. 17:7. He thinks there is no historical connection between Deut. 33:8 and Exod. 17:7. He translates, “Your Thummim and your Urim (you give) to your pious man, whom you have tested in the test, whom you strove with in the strife (on the day of the strife?).”¹⁰⁵³ Gunneweg, however, insists that the word *’al-mê*, “at the waters of,” require a place name. Furthermore, he thinks that the nearness of both verbs to one another must suggest a place.¹⁰⁵⁴

The words *mê m^erîbhāh* in Deut. 33:8 are precisely the same as those used in Num. 20:13. This leads us to conclude that Lehming is wrong, that place names are intended here. However, “the waters of Meribah” are mentioned only in Numbers 20, and Massah and Meribah are placed together only in Exodus 17, Ps. 95:8, and Deut. 33:8. Does this suggest a conflation of two traditions in this verse?

A comment of Gunneweg, combined with the thoughts of Lehming, leads to a solution. He thinks that Massah and Meribah could have referred to ancient places of judgment, no longer visited and whose traditions were

¹⁰⁴⁵ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 57; Margolis, p. 35.

¹⁰⁴⁶ Steuernagel, p. 125.

¹⁰⁴⁷ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 399.

¹⁰⁴⁸ Steuernagel, p. 125.

¹⁰⁴⁹ E.g., Noth, *A History*, p. 31, n. 111; Zobel, p. 32.

¹⁰⁵⁰ Thompson, p. 310.

¹⁰⁵¹ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 396.

¹⁰⁵² Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 502.

¹⁰⁵³ Sigo Lehming, “Massa und Meriba,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 73 (1961):76-77: “Deine Thummim und deine Urim (gibst du) deinem frommen Manne, den du in Versuchung versucht hast, den du lässt straiten im Streit (am Tage des Streits?), (v. 9) der spricht”

¹⁰⁵⁴ Gunneweg, *Leviten*, p. 42.

no longer understood.¹⁰⁵⁵ Massah and Meribah could have become catchwords, whether attached to ancient places of judgment or not, for the kind of quarreling that frequently took place. Therefore, Massah and Meribah, either one or both, were applied to any place where a testing of one's patience or quarreling occurred. At Rephidim, Moses chose both names perhaps to illustrate the intensity of the opposition. At Kadesh, Moses chose only one name. In using "Massah" and "the waters of Meribah" in 33:8, Moses combines both incidents and the events in between to illustrate the severity of the test and the rebelliousness of the people. Exodus 17 records the events at Rephidim that took place less than two months after they had left Egypt, while Numbers 20 records events that took place at Kadesh-barnea nearly thirty-nine years later. The two words in 33:8 refer not only to those two events, but they are also catchwords for the rebelliousness and quarreling of the Israelites during the wilderness period.

Zobel has unconvincingly argued for the correctness of Eissfeldt's thesis, that *nāsāh* and *rībh*, "test" and "contend," were military terms. Eissfeldt thinks they should be translated "make someone able, drill" and "teach someone to fight." They become references to a localized military guild in or near Kadesh.¹⁰⁵⁶ The suggested emendation of *'al-mê* to *l'yôm*, "in the day of," or the like, is unnecessary and without textual support.¹⁰⁵⁷

Deut. 33:9

He said of his father and mother,	a	b		3
'I have no regard for them.'			c	2
He did not recognize his brothers	b'	c'		3
or acknowledge his own children,	b''	c''		3
for they kept Your word,	d	e	f	3
and guarded Your covenant.	[d']	f'	e'	d

Cross and Freedman express doubts about the poetic structure of this verse. The verse seems to them to be largely prose, a concern that is grounded.¹⁰⁵⁸ The prose nature of this verse may be attributed to the clear reference to the events recorded in Exod. 32:25-29 or the existence of an explanatory parenthesis in clauses e and f. While some do not recognize an original literary connection between Exodus 32 and Deut. 33:9, that can hardly be disputed.¹⁰⁵⁹

Following the destruction of the golden calf, Moses called out for those who were on the Lord's side. The Levites responded and were told to draw their swords and slay those who were in rebellion. They slew 3,000 people that day. Then Moses said to the Levites, "You have been set apart to the Lord today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day." (verse 29) The RSV translates, "Today you have ordained yourselves for the service of the Lord"

The Levites disregarded even the closest of worldly ties, their own flesh and blood, in order to obey God. They did this, "because they kept your word, and guarded your covenant." Continuing the thoughts of the exegesis of verse 8, we are reading in verse 9 of Levi, characterized in a collective sense as a tribe.¹⁰⁶⁰ Keil and Delitzsch refer us also to Num. 25:8, where Phinehas, a Levite, used a spear against the immorality of a Midianite woman and a Simeonite man.¹⁰⁶¹ Mayes comments that formal legal language is in use here by which family relationships are formally and legally severed.¹⁰⁶²

"He said of his father and mother." The subject is the tribe generally, conceived collectively as the "man" in verse 8. That explains the singular form of the participle as well as the alternation between singular and plural in the entire blessing, as is often the case in Hebrew poetry, when a group of persons is spoken of.¹⁰⁶³ The preposition *l'* means "about," as in Gen. 20:13.

¹⁰⁵⁵ Ibid., p. 39.

¹⁰⁵⁶ Zobel, p. 30.

¹⁰⁵⁷ Lehming, p. 76.

¹⁰⁵⁸ Cross and Freedman, "The Blessing," p. 204, n. 28.

¹⁰⁵⁹ E.g., Otto Eissfeldt denies such a connection in *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, p. 229.

¹⁰⁶⁰ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 396.

¹⁰⁶¹ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 502.

¹⁰⁶² Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 403.

¹⁰⁶³ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 400.

Because of the imperfect rhythm in the first line (3:2), some have suggested eliminating *ûl'immô* as a gloss. Cassuto and Mayes both mention that the masculine singular suffix on *r'îthîw* also argues for the word being an addition.¹⁰⁶⁴ However, the suffix is masculine, because it agrees with *l'âbhîw* as the principal antecedent (compare GK 146ef).

"I have no regard for them." S. R. Driver calls this a hyperbolic expression of repudiation, citing Job 8:18 as another example of the same.¹⁰⁶⁵ The idea expressed here is that looking at his relatives did not restrain him from his duty.¹⁰⁶⁶

"He did not recognize his brothers or acknowledge his own children." These two clauses echo the thought of Exod. 32:29 in the references to "brothers" and "children, sons." Mayes writes that the verb *yādha'* is used in the sense of legal recognition, as found also in treaty texts, where it is applied to the overlord's recognition of his vassal and vice versa.¹⁰⁶⁷ This understanding heightens the meaning of the statement.

We believe that verses 9e-10 form an explanatory parenthesis, deliberately set off from the rest of the blessing by the use of the plural verb forms. Other explanatory parentheses will be discussed in this chapter, such as that in verse 12. The result is that we are left with three four-clause verses as the major part of the saying, with six clauses serving as the explanatory parenthesis.

"For they kept Your words, and guarded Your covenant." The plural forms of the verbs here and in verse 10 have already been explained by Driver above. Steuernagel thinks the plural form may be evidence of a later addition,¹⁰⁶⁸ a thought echoed by many other scholars. Cody thinks that here and in verse 10 there are introduced certain functions that were performed by priests only in later times.¹⁰⁶⁹ This will be discussed more fully in connection with the meaning of *tôrāh* in verse 10.

The covenant is the covenant between Yahweh and Israel, established at Sinai. It is not the covenant by which the priesthood was granted to the Levites.¹⁰⁷⁰ The mention of the covenant connects this verse and blessing with the prologue of verses 2-5, arguing for the unity of the entire chapter.

Both verses 2-5 and verses 8-9 have been described earlier as a historical prologue, reminiscent of ancient treaty formulas. This fact speaks further for the unity of the chapter.

The final word is in the imperfect in order to denote habitual action (see GK 106kl).¹⁰⁷¹

Deut. 33:10

They teach Your precepts to Jacob	a	b	c	3
and Your instruction to Israel.	[a']	b'	c'	3
They offer incense before You	a''	d	e	3
and whole burnt offerings on Your altar.)	[a''']	d'	e'	2

The verse describes the tasks carried out by the Levites at the time of the origin of the passage. For the critical scholar, the passage is quite late, perhaps as late as 622 B.C., but for the conservative scholar, the passage is Mosaic. In the discussion on Genesis 49, the use of "Jacob" and "Israel" in parallelism has been considered late by some, early by others. Cody writes that the days of sacrifice by heads of families, clans, tribes, and kings were drawing to a close. The Levites were beginning to assert their exclusive claim to the performance of sacrifice. The burning of incense on an altar was being reserved for priests (compare Exod. 30:7-8, Num. 17:5, 1 Chron. 23:13).¹⁰⁷²

The duties of the Levites are two: to guard and teach the law of God, and to handle the responsibilities associated with the offering of sacrifice.¹⁰⁷³ "They teach," *yôru*, is a Hiphil imperfect of *yārāh*, "to throw," to be

¹⁰⁶⁴ Cassuto, "Deuteronomy," p. 58; Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 403.

¹⁰⁶⁵ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 401.

¹⁰⁶⁶ Steuernagel, p. 125.

¹⁰⁶⁷ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 202.

¹⁰⁶⁸ Steuernagel, p. 125.

¹⁰⁶⁹ Cody, p. 116.

¹⁰⁷⁰ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 403.

¹⁰⁷¹ Steuernagel, p. 125.

¹⁰⁷² Cody, p. 119.

¹⁰⁷³ Thompson, p. 311.

translated in the present, since that is the present practice of the Levites.¹⁰⁷⁴ The Qumran scroll 4QTestimonia has “they made clear,” *wayya’irû*, for “they teach,” a reading Gaster calls a piece of Hellenistic exegesis, motivated by a perceived connection to the mystery cults. The MT is to be preferred, because it has the right term for the priestly exposition of the law.¹⁰⁷⁵

The *mišpāfīm*, “precepts, ordinances,” are norms or judicial decisions. When used with *hōq*, “ordinance,” or *tôrāh*, “law,” it designates the Pentateuchal ordinances, the individual ordinances of Mosaic law.¹⁰⁷⁶ The *tôrāh* is “teaching, instruction.” Here it refers to the law given by Moses, that set of regulations that priests are to teach.¹⁰⁷⁷ S. R. Driver comments that the two terms regularly denote the priestly duty of giving direction on points of ceremonial observance.¹⁰⁷⁸

Cody has stated that the giving of *tôrāh* by priests does not appear in any texts earlier than the eighth or early ninth centuries.¹⁰⁷⁹ Mayes writes of *tôrāh* that

The parallel with *ordinances* here suggests that the particular Levitical function being described is not simply the giving of detailed direction on individual queries concerning ritual and worship (which may be seen as an original priestly function), but rather the more comprehensive teaching for which they were responsible in later times, as presupposed in Ho. 4:6; Mic. 3:11.¹⁰⁸⁰

Critical scholarship reasons in a circle, first assigning all texts that refer to the giving of *tôrāh* by priests to a late date, and then by seeing any such references as evidence of editing or as indications that the passages were composed at that late date. If taken as Mosaic along with the rest of the Pentateuch, this verse presents no problem

The idea of offering incense, *q’ôrāh*, is likewise confined to a late date and therefore considered by some to be a late insertion.¹⁰⁸¹ The prepositional phrase *b’e’appekhā*, literally “in your nostril,” is translated freely “in front of you, before you.”¹⁰⁸²

Zobel continues the mention of only the burnt offering to be strange,¹⁰⁸³ whereas Keil and Delitzsch see here a figure of speech. By metonymy the “whole burnt offering” is mentioned for all of the sacrifices, since it is the leading sacrifice.¹⁰⁸⁴ Driver describes the significance of the term as that of a sacrifice consumed wholly on the altar.¹⁰⁸⁵

Deut. 33:11

Bless, O Lord, his skills,	a	b	c	3
and be pleased with the work of his hands.	c’ (bv)	[b’]	a’	3
Smite the loins of those who rise up against him	d	e	f	3
and those who hate him, who attack him.”	[d’] [e’]	f’	f’	3

The final verse of this blessing swarms with archaisms, according to Cross and Freedman, with the result that they think this verse alone may have been the original blessing of Levi.¹⁰⁸⁶ They are correct in the first point only.

The verse is a prayer for blessing on Levi, accompanied by a prayer for the overthrow of his foes. Some think that the rebellion of Korah against Moses and Aaron (Numbers 16) is the historical background to verse

¹⁰⁷⁴ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 403.

¹⁰⁷⁵ Theodore H. Gaster, “A Qumran Reading of Deut. 33:10,” *Vetus Testamentum* 8 (1958):217-18.

¹⁰⁷⁶ Robert D. Culver, “שֹׁפֵט (*shāpat*) judge, govern,” in *TWOT*, 2:949.

¹⁰⁷⁷ John E. Hartley, “יָרָה (*yārā*) throw, cast, shoot (Qal); teach (Hiphil), in *TWOT*, 1:403-404.

¹⁰⁷⁸ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 401.

¹⁰⁷⁹ Cody, p. 116.

¹⁰⁸⁰ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 403-04.

¹⁰⁸¹ Steuernagel, p. 125.

¹⁰⁸² Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 395.

¹⁰⁸³ Zobel, p. 31.

¹⁰⁸⁴ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 503.

¹⁰⁸⁵ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 402.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 204, n. 29.

11cd.¹⁰⁸⁷ The concluding lines may well express some challenge to the right to exercise the priesthood, but the line is too general to say with certainty. Cassuto thinks that the enemies of verse 11cd cannot be the Levites.¹⁰⁸⁸ The final line may simply be an intensification of the thoughts of the first line by expressing similar thoughts in a negative way. That literary device is known from the Psalms and sometimes called antithetical parallelism (compare Ps. 1:6, 27:11-12).

Steuernagel comments that without sufficient cause some say that verse 11 has to do with Judah.¹⁰⁸⁹ We have met that claim before, and the reasons for that claim now appear. Cassuto gives four reasons, all of them quite weak, that this verse cannot be attributed to the tribe outside Levi:

- 1) The references to material possessions and the work of the hands in the first line are inconsistent with the picture in vv. 8-10; it is improbable that *ûphô'al yâdhâyw* can refer to cultic ministrations, although this is the traditional Jewish interpretation.
- 2) The enemies of v. 11b cannot be internal foes.
- 3) Stylistic considerations suggest v. 11 is the beginning of a blessing, e.g. beginning the verse with *barêkh*, cf. vv. 13, 20, 24.
- 4) The possible phonetic allusion to the tribe of Judah in the name YHWH.¹⁰⁹⁰

Mayes writes that the theme of opposition in verse 11 cd is nowhere else found in the chapter except in verse 7. Therefore, he concludes that verse 11 is the original conclusion of the blessing on Judah.¹⁰⁹¹ The views of Cassuto and Mayes have not been widely accepted, nor are they accepted here.

“Bless, O Lord, his skills.” This flexible word, *hêlô*, can mean “strength, efficiency, wealth, army.” It is understood here in the sense of “efficiency, skill.” The LXX and Vulgate translations of “strength” emphasize the ability of Levi to discharge his sacred trust efficiently.¹⁰⁹² Wealth and army certainly have no significance for the early history of the tribe of Levi. Kittel thinks of Levi’s ability to accomplish or produce something.¹⁰⁹³ The phrase could refer to Levi’s priestly ministrations.

“Be pleased with the work of his hands.” The phrase *phô'al yâdhâyw*, “the work of his hands,” has been called an inappropriate phrase, if applied to the cultic service of the tribe of Levi. Thompson, therefore, thinks of some undertakings on a specific occasion, perhaps the events of Numbers 16.¹⁰⁹⁴ However, Driver explains that the phrase refers to the service of the Levites in connection with the altar, which must have Yahweh’s favor to be efficacious.¹⁰⁹⁵ Zobel comments further that *pô'al* never indicates a warlike act,¹⁰⁹⁶ a fact which would disqualify a reference to Numbers 16, Exod. 32:25-29, and similar passages. The noun *pô'al* appears here for only the second time in the Pentateuch, the first time being just a chapter earlier in Deut. 32:4. Development of the use and meaning of this word may have resulted in its application to other activities, but there can be no firm objection to its use in regard to the service of the Levites.

“Smite the loins of those who rise up against him.” Cassuto comments that the verb *mêhas*, “smite,” is commonly used in Ugaritic poetry to denote the shattering blows inflicted by Baal and his allies upon their foes. Of the fifteen occurrences of the word in the Old Testament, twelve of them appear in connection with the destruction of the foes of the Lord.¹⁰⁹⁷ The term, therefore, reflects archaic usage.¹⁰⁹⁸

The lions are named as the center of strength.¹⁰⁹⁹ The form is undoubtedly a construct of the dual, followed by the enclitic *mem*. The Samaritan text lacks the final *mem*, indicating its omission in at least one early

¹⁰⁸⁷ Thompson, p. 311; Steuernagel, p. 126.

¹⁰⁸⁸ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 58.

¹⁰⁸⁹ Steuernagel, p. 126.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 58.

¹⁰⁹¹ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 404.

¹⁰⁹² S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 402.

¹⁰⁹³ Kittel, p. 51.

¹⁰⁹⁴ Thompson, p. 311.

¹⁰⁹⁵ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 402.

¹⁰⁹⁶ Zobel, p. 32, n. 19.

¹⁰⁹⁷ U. Cassuto, “Biblical and Canaanite Literature,” in *Biblical and Oriental Studies II* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1973), p. 41.

¹⁰⁹⁸ It appears fourteen times, also in Num. 24:8, 17; Hab. 3:13; Ps. 18:39; 2 Sam. 22:39; Ps. 68:22, 24; Ps. 110:5, 6; Judg. 5:26; Deut. 32:39; and Job 5:18, 26:12.

¹⁰⁹⁹ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 403.

recension.¹¹⁰⁰ Vocalize the word *mothnê-m(i)*. The participle with suffix *qāmāyw*, “who rise up against him,” is poetic for *haqqōmîm ‘ālāyw*, according to Driver (compare Exod. 15:7, Ps. 18:39).¹¹⁰¹

“And those who hate him, who attack him.” The final two words have been interpreted as a poetic form of *miqqûm*, “from rising.”¹¹⁰² Several writers want to read *min* as the relative pronoun *man*, “who,” and translate *man yêqîmmenû*, “whoever attacks him.” The final *nun* would be considered the third singular suffix. They state that the preposition is syntactically anomalous in the context. They note the parallel passages with the interrogative *mî*, “who,” in Gen. 49:9 and Num. 24:9.¹¹⁰³ On the other hand, Cassuto admits that the phrase is a difficult expression, but he feels that there is no certain need to emend.¹¹⁰⁴ In view of the archaic nature of the verse and of this phrase, we adopt this reading (compare GK 165b). It is easier to understand with Cross and Freedman as “who attack him,” and it provides a closer parallelism with the preceding word and the third clause of the verse in the light of the understanding of the final *nun* as a suffix. The change is only a matter of the punctuation.

Deut. 33:12

About Benjamin he said,

“The beloved of the Lord will dwell securely,	a	b	c	4
(while the Exalted One surrounds him all day long,)	b’	d	e	4
and between His shoulders he dwells.”	[a’]	c’	b’	3

This verse has long been an enigma to scholars, regardless of their theological orientation. The RSV translates,

The beloved of the Lord, he dwells in safety by him; (clause a)
 he encompasses him all day long, (clause b)
 and makes his dwelling between his shoulders. (clause c)

Problems begin with the phrase “the beloved of the Lord.” W. J. Phythian-Adams saw the phrase as a reference to a sanctuary, probably either at Mizpah or at Bethel, possibly even a reference to Levi, or the mountainous tribal territory of Benjamin.¹¹⁰⁵ Maimonides called *yêdhîdh* a descriptive noun referring to God.¹¹⁰⁶ Most scholars, however, understand the phrase as a description of the tribe of Benjamin, with a reference to the son particularly loved by Jacob (Gen. 44:20).

Another problem is the existence of a double ‘*ālāyw*, “by him,” in clauses a and b. the first ‘*ālāyw* creates metrical problems for the verse, if it is included in the first clause; the *athnah* and the spacing of the text indicate that the Masoretes understood it so. Driver suggests that the first ‘*ālāyw* be omitted, since, in his opinion, *hōphēph ‘ālāyw* and ‘*ālāyw hōphēph*, “he surrounds him,” are probably alternate readings.¹¹⁰⁷

The change of subject from a reference to Benjamin in clause a, to a reference to Yahweh in clause b, and then back to Benjamin in clause c has raised a few eyebrows. Some say that the subject of clause c is Yahweh, but the problem of the change in subject is not solved in this way. Still unexplained would be the change from Benjamin in clause a to Yahweh in clauses b and c.

A third problem in this verse is the meaning of the phrase *ûbhên kêthēphāyw*. Some would translate “between his shoulders,”¹¹⁰⁸ while others translate “between the slopes.”¹¹⁰⁹ Still others would suggest “between his

¹¹⁰⁰ Hummel, p. 93.

¹¹⁰¹ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 403.

¹¹⁰² Ibid.

¹¹⁰³ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 395; Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 204, n. 35.

¹¹⁰⁴ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 59.

¹¹⁰⁵ W. J. Phythian-Adams, “On the Date of the ‘Blessing of Moses’,” *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 3 (1923):165.

¹¹⁰⁶ Charles B. Chavel, translator and annotator, *Ramban: Commentary on the Torah*, 5 vols. (New York: Shilo Publishing House, 1976) 5:392.

¹¹⁰⁷ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 403-404.

¹¹⁰⁸ RSV; NIV; S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 403; von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, p. 203; many others.

¹¹⁰⁹ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 60; Steuernagel, p. 126.

weapons,” based on a Ugaritic analogy,¹¹¹⁰ while at least one scholar offers an emendation to *k^enāphāyw*, “between his wings.”¹¹¹¹

A final problem to be dealt with is the disparity between the peaceful picture of Benjamin in Deut. 33:12 and the warlike picture of the tribe in Gen. 49:27, where Benjamin is described as a ravenous wolf.

The key to the solution to the problems of the verse is the proper explanation of the first occurrence of *‘ālāyw*. The LXX translates the first two clauses: *ēgapēmenos hypo kyriou kataskēnōsei pepoithōs, kai ho theos skiazei ep autō pasas tas hēmeras*, “The beloved of the Lord will dwell confidently, and God covers him all the days.” Here *theos* apparently translates *‘ālāyw*, suggesting, as Henrik S. Nyberg first point out, that we have the divine name, perhaps corrupted from an original *‘Elī* or *‘Elyôn*. Some conscientious scribe thought he saw the error of an earlier scribe, noting the parallelism to the second *‘ālāyw*. An unpointed consonantal text would make this well-intended mistake easier to make. Probably the original text was *‘Elī*, and the scribe simply added a final *waw*. An original *‘Elyôn* would simply have lost its final *nun*, a less likely possibility, as the next few paragraphs will show.

Dahood notes that in 1935 H. S. Nyberg proved the existence of the god and the divine name *‘Al* in his *Studien zum Hoseabuche*. Nyberg concluded that *‘Al* was the god of the universal heavens.¹¹¹² Dahood has established the existence of this divine name as a name for the Hebrew God that occurs in the Psalms,¹¹¹³ and he has adduced an instance in 1 Samuel where *Yahweh* is parallel to *‘Elī*,¹¹¹⁴ just as is the case in Deut. 33:12. One can understand how a divine name, frequently applied to pagan gods, was eventually avoided by the Israelites as a divine name for Yahweh. Later generations consequently failed to understand the name properly, taking it instead as a prepositional phrase in the verse at hand.

Various scholars have noted this possibility and have translated accordingly. In his doctoral dissertation on the tribal sayings, H. J. Kittel emended *‘ālāyw* to *‘Elyôn* and translated “*der Höchste*,” “the Most High.”¹¹¹⁵ H. Seebass translates in precisely the same way.¹¹¹⁶ Zobel simply offered a transliteration, *‘Eljon*.¹¹¹⁷ As noted earlier, Driver thought of *‘ālāyw ḥōphēph* and *ḥōphēph ‘ālāyw* as alternate readings, probably on the basis of the Samaritan text and the Syriac, which omit the first *‘ālāyw*, and the Vulgate and several Hebrew manuscripts, which omit the second *‘ālāyw*. However, it is interesting to note that he came to this conclusion only after noting that the LXX *theos* might be a paraphrase of *‘Elyôn*. Commenting that the LXX regularly translates *‘Elyôn* as *hypistos*, he rejected this as a possibility.¹¹¹⁸ This LXX translation is one reason why an original *‘Elī* is more likely than an original *‘Elyôn*. Had Driver known of the existence of *‘Elī* as a divine name, he would surely have adopted it as the proper reading.

Years ago Cross and Freedman suggested the translation, “*‘Elī* hovers over him,” following in part the LXX and Nyberg’s suggestion. For the proper noun *‘Elī* they suggested translating “Exalted One.”¹¹¹⁹ More recently, J. A. Thompson comments favorably on the translation of Cross and Freedman.¹¹²⁰ P. C. Craigie also takes *‘ālāyw* as the divine name *‘Elī*, noting Cyrus Gordon’s support of Dahood’s suggestion.¹¹²¹ He translates “Most High.”¹¹²² Various scholars from Driver to Mayes have noted that the preposition *‘al* is never otherwise found in the sense of “beside” with the verb *šākhēn*.¹¹²³ We are driven to the conclusion that the first *‘ālāyw* is actually the divine name *‘Elī*, the final *waw* being added by some conscientious scribe who thought he was adding something that another scribe had accidentally omitted. We are also led to conclude that *‘Elī* is to be taken with the second clause of

¹¹¹⁰ Barr, *Comparative Philology*, p. 329; Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 396.

¹¹¹¹ Paul Joüon, “Genèse 49,11 *sûth* *,” *Biblica* 21 (1940), cited in Theodore H. Gaster, “Deuteronomy xxxiii.12,” *The Expository Times* 46 (April 1935):334.

¹¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹¹³ Ps. 7:6, 10; 46:4, 6; 57:2; 91:1; Dahood, “‘Eli,” pp. 455-57.

¹¹¹⁴ 1 Sam. 2:10, Dahood, “‘Eli,” p. 454.

¹¹¹⁵ Kittel, p. 52.

¹¹¹⁶ H. Seebass, “Die Stämmeliste von Dtn XXXIII,” *Vetus Testamentum* 27 (1977):162.

¹¹¹⁷ Zobel, pp. 109-10.

¹¹¹⁸ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 403.

¹¹¹⁹ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” pp. 204-05, n. 38.

¹¹²⁰ Thompson, pp. 311-12.

¹¹²¹ Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Textbook*, in *Analecta Orientalia*, vol. 38 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1965), p. 456.

¹¹²² Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 396, n. 20.

¹¹²³ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 404.

the verse, thereby providing a subject for a clause which has none. Furthermore, we note that the meter is greatly improved by this change from 5:3:3 to 4:4:3.

Most of the remaining problems are solved when one understands the second clause as a parenthetical remark, perhaps a circumstantial clause, which illuminates the word *lābheṭaḥ* (compare GK 156d). The prepositional phrase *lābheṭaḥ*, “securely,” literally “in security,” is a frequent phrase to denote undisturbed security.¹¹²⁴ The second clause explains how it is that “the beloved of the Lord” can dwell securely, that is, because the Exalted One surrounds him all day long. The verb *ḥōphēph*, “surround,” appears only here. The meaning “to surround” is supported by the Arabic *ḥaffa*. It pictures God encircling Benjamin with His protection (compare Isa. 31:5).¹¹²⁵

Clause c is then seen as parallel to clause a, producing a chiasmatic arrangement between the words of the two clauses. The chiasm is as follows: *yīškōn / lābheṭaḥ // ūbhēn kēthēphāyw / šākhēn*, “will dwell”/“securely”/“between His shoulders”/“dwells.” The concept of “dwelling” is clearly a parallelism, for the same root is used. Kittel called the doubled occurrence of “dwell” ugly,¹¹²⁶ but Cross and Freedman have noted that it is a word which occurs quite commonly in ancient poems.¹¹²⁷ The two middle elements in the chiasm both refer to the security of dwelling in the presence of God. The subject of both occurrences of the root *šākhēn* is the same. Clause a provides the subject for clause c, and the two clauses could be diagrammed in this way: a b c/[a'] c' b'. Therefore, the following translation is proposed:

The beloved of the Lord will dwell securely,
(while the Exalted One surrounds him all day long)
and between His shoulders he dwells.

Now we see that the change of subject from clause a to clause b to clause c causes no difficulty. Cassuto has already insisted that there is no difficulty in this change of subjects, although without discerning either the parenthesis or the chiasm.¹¹²⁸ Some have suggested that clause c has Yahweh as its subject, in part because *šākhēn* is the usual expression for Yahweh’s dwelling among His people.¹¹²⁹ However, there was another reason for this view: an assumption that there is in this phrase a reference to a temple.

There is a long tradition of finding a reference to a temple in this verse, a tradition that probably began with the Targums of Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan, both of which provide a subject for the verb of the final clause, *šēkhintā*, “the divine presence.” Medieval Jewish scholars adopted this interpretation. Maimonides saw in Deut. 33:12 allusions to the three temples, one in each clause.¹¹³⁰ Ibn Ezra is one of many others who thought that the final clause contained a reference to a temple, the Jerusalem temple.¹¹³¹ J. H. Hertz and Cassuto are among Jewish scholars in this century who have seen a reference to a temple in the final clause.¹¹³² Modern critical scholarship almost universally accepts clause c of the verse as an allusion to a temple, but they disagree as to which temple. If there is a reference to a temple in Deut. 33:12, this fact would require the verse and probably the chapter to be from the time of the judges, or, if the temple is the Jerusalem temple, from the time after David. If, however, Benjamin is the subject of the final clause, then there is no reference to a sanctuary.

Years ago, Knobel saw this final clause as a reference to Gibeon, where the tabernacle stood after the destruction of Nob by Saul.¹¹³³ According to Cassuto, the last line refers to a sanctuary at Bethel.¹¹³⁴ Zobel thinks of Bethel, which could originally have been part of the territory of Benjamin.¹¹³⁵ König in *Das Deuteronomium* and

¹¹²⁴ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 403.

¹¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 404.

¹¹²⁶ Kittel, p. 52.

¹¹²⁷ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 204, n. 37.

¹¹²⁸ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 59.

¹¹²⁹ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 404.

¹¹³⁰ Chavel, pp. 392-93.

¹¹³¹ A. Cohlen, ed., *The Soncino Chumash: The Five Books of Moses with Haphtaroth* (Hindhead, Surrey: The Soncino Press, 1947), p.1178.

¹¹³² J. H. Hertz, ed., *The Pentateuch and Haftorahs*, 5 vols. (London: Oxford University Press, 1936), 5:426; Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 59.

¹¹³³ Cited in Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 504.

¹¹³⁴ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 59.

¹¹³⁵ Zobel, pp. 109-10.

Steuernagel agree with this view, while H. W. Hertzberg takes the same position as Knobel.¹¹³⁶ Seebass finds here a recollection of Samuel's visits to Bethel, Mizpah, and Gilgal. The clause would then describe Yahweh's protection in mountainous lands.¹¹³⁷

Driver thought of the clause as a reference to the temple in Jerusalem, since Jerusalem was actually located within the borders of Benjamin, according to Josh. 15:8, 18:16.¹¹³⁸ Mayes' view is the same as that of Driver's.¹¹³⁹

The idea which all of these scholars have in common is that the clause has Yahweh as its subject and is speaking about the mountain slopes of the territory of Benjamin. The last clause would be understood in this way: "He (Yahweh) dwells (in His temple, which is located) between the slopes."

If it is granted that we have a chiasm in this verse, then Benjamin is the subject of both clauses a and c, as noted above. Then, also, the meaning of the phrase *ûbhên kêthêphâyw* is clarified. The phrase must have some abstract meaning, similar to the abstract *lābheṭaḥ*, "securely." Driver insisted that the idea of Benjamin dwelling between Yahweh's shoulders, that is, on His back, introduced an unsuitable idea, as well as one incongruous with the preceding clause.¹¹⁴⁰ That is why he took Yahweh as the subject of the last line. However, we have already shown by the introduction of a parenthesis, that is, a circumstantial clause, that there is no incongruity between clauses b and c.

As to the appropriateness of the idea, several scholars have suggested that the picture of Benjamin dwelling "between His shoulders" or "upon the back" is indeed an appropriate one.* Certainly, if the word "beloved" is understood as a reference to Jacob's special love for Benjamin (Gen. 44:20), his youngest son, the idea is even more appropriate.¹¹⁴¹ Furthermore, Zobel notes that "Beloved of the Lord" is similar to a personal name in Ugaritic, *ydd 'el*, "Beloved of 'El," expressing the protection and blessing of the divinity for that person.¹¹⁴² The additional parallelism of *bn* and *ydd*, "son" and "beloved" in Ugaritic literature may have suggested the title *yêdhîdh* for Benjamin, "son of the south."¹¹⁴³

Acknowledging his debt to Calvin, Delitzsch long ago suggested that the phrase is an expression founded upon the figure of a father carrying his son.¹¹⁴⁴ Von Rad mentions this interpretation as a possibility,¹¹⁴⁵ and Thompson also sees it as a picture of a child sitting on the shoulders of its parent.¹¹⁴⁶ Cross and Freedman admit,

It is perhaps best to treat the passage as portraying the protective care of Yahweh for Benjamin, in close parallelism with the first colon, rather than regard it as an historical allusion to Yahweh's dwelling in a Benjamite sanctuary (i.e. the sanctuary at Nob during the reign of Saul).¹¹⁴⁷

The suggestion of Craigie, "And between his weapons he dwells," hardly requires any comment, even with the support of James Barr.¹¹⁴⁸ It is based on a supposed parallel with the Ugaritic *ktp*, "weapon." The requirement of a parallelism with *lābheṭaḥ* rules out Craigie's suggestion and several others. Joüon proposed *kêṇāphâyw*, "his wings," but no emendation is needed.¹¹⁴⁹ Von Rad and Cassuto both note that *kāthêph* can mean the slope of a mountain or hill,¹¹⁵⁰ and this is, of course, true. However, we need not and indeed ought not to see any geographical reference. Gaster draws an interesting parallel to the Arabic *baina aḥhorihim*, "between the back," a proverbial expression used to describe the condition of a tribe which is under the protection of another. Here he suggests that

¹¹³⁶ H. W. Hertzberg, "Mizpa," *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 47 (1929):176-77. Cited in Kittel, p. 52.

¹¹³⁷ Seebass, pp. 164-65.

¹¹³⁸ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 404.

¹¹³⁹ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 405.

¹¹⁴⁰ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 404.

* Joel Heck: Note the Hebrew of Jer. 23:6.

¹¹⁴¹ Cassuto, "Deuteronomy," p. 59; Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 404; Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 397.

¹¹⁴² Zobel, p. 34.

¹¹⁴³ Fisher, 3:11.

¹¹⁴⁴ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 503.

¹¹⁴⁵ Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, p. 307.

¹¹⁴⁶ Thompson, p. 312.

¹¹⁴⁷ Cross and Freedman, "The Blessing," p. 205, n. 40.

¹¹⁴⁸ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 396, n. 21.

¹¹⁴⁹ Cited in Gaster, "Deut. xxxiii," p. 334.

¹¹⁵⁰ Cassuto, "Deuteronomy," p. 60; von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, p. 207.

the meaning is that Benjamin could not be reached by an enemy, except over the bodies of its supporters.¹¹⁵¹ If the supporter is thought of as Yahweh, the suggestion is identical to the meaning suggested above.

Thompson sums it up well,

If the reference is to Benjamin resting between Yahweh's shoulders ... there is no suggestion here that the central sanctuary where Yahweh dwells is situated in the Benjamin area, either at Nob (during the reign of Saul) or at Jerusalem (the tabernacle of David or the temple of Solomon) There is nothing that requires a date even as late as Saul, so that the passage could go back to some original utterance of Moses.¹¹⁵²

G. Ernest Wright comments similarly, ... the pronouns of the third colon may be interpreted in another way: "Between his [the Lord] shoulders he [Benjamin] tents," i.e., Benjamin enjoys the loving protection of Yahweh. If so, the verse contains no reference to God's "tenting" within the confines of the tribe.¹¹⁵³

There is no sanctuary mentioned in Deut. 33:12 or even alluded to in any way. With this realization, one of the major linchpins for seeing the entire chapter as originating in the monarchical period is removed. The sanctuary of Deut. 33:12 is a missing sanctuary and indeed no sanctuary at all, unless we think of Yahweh Himself as a "sanctuary."

The final problem of this verse is the disparity between the peaceful picture of Benjamin here and the warlike picture of Gen. 49:27. Perhaps it is the smallness of the tribe that evokes this particular blessing. Benjamin was eleventh in size among the twelve tribes following the census of Numbers 1, and seventh among the twelve following the census of Numbers 26. Perhaps it is only a general statement of the author's wish for Benjamin's blessing.

Craigie thinks that there is in Deut. 33:12 an emphasis in dramatic form upon the security that the tribe will experience, not as a refusal to fight, but as a result of the presence of God, which would be perceived most clearly in battle.¹¹⁵⁴ Zobel states that the general thought of the verse is security from enemies, as Jer. 49:31 indirectly shows.¹¹⁵⁵ In the context of a chapter full of military imagery, we would be wiser to see a description of a Benjamin whose security from his enemies is safeguarded by the God who protects him on all sides and surrounds him all day long. In the absence of a reference to a sanctuary, we may place the verse in the time prior to the building of the Jerusalem temple, a time of much warfare and strife. If the explanations of Craigie and Zobel are accepted, the disparity between Deut. 33:12 and Gen. 49:27 disappears.

Deut. 33:13-17

The similarities of this blessing with Gen. 49:22-26 have already been discussed in connection with the exegesis of Genesis 49. They will be discussed further here and in connection with the chapter on the dating of the two chapters. Some preliminary remarks are in order here.

Cassuto thinks that the resemblance to Gen. 49:25-26 is due to the existence of traditional formulas for such blessings. In other words, the blessings on Joseph in Genesis and Deuteronomy come from a common third source.¹¹⁵⁶ In our opinion, however, the precise verbal parallel in Gen. 49:26de and Deut. 33:16cd demands that one chapter borrowed from the other. Cassuto is probably correct in saying that there were traditional formulas for such blessings. However, if both blessings borrowed from such formulas, we would expect either more close verbal parallels or none at all.

Zobel is one of those who thinks that Deuteronomy 33 is the older blessing. The clear structure, the unified meter, the third person throughout, the blessing of Yahweh all point to this, in his opinion. Genesis 49 displays certain uneven parts, and the blessing is a paternal one.¹¹⁵⁷ However, the unevenness in Genesis 49 and the paternal

¹¹⁵¹ Gaster, "Deut. xxxiii," p. 334.

¹¹⁵² Thompson, p. 312.

¹¹⁵³ G. Ernest Wright, "Introduction and Exegesis" on "The Book of Deuteronomy" in *The Interpreter's Bible*, 12 vols. (Nashville: Abingdon-Cokesbury Press, 1953), 2:531.

¹¹⁵⁴ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 397.

¹¹⁵⁵ Zobel, p. 34.

¹¹⁵⁶ Cassuto, "Deuteronomy," p. 60.

¹¹⁵⁷ Zobel, p. 37.

form of blessing may more easily point to the greater age of Genesis 49. Zobel's argumentation on the basis of various verbal changes may just as easily be reversed in favor of the greater age of Genesis 49. These comparisons will be covered more thoroughly in the next chapter.

Kittel writes that these verses are not well unified, but that no parts can be separated into individual sayings,¹¹⁵⁸ the exact opposite viewpoint of Zobel, who speaks of the clear structure of Deuteronomy 33. Zobel is closer to the truth.

Keil and Delitzsch write that the major difference between this blessing and Gen. 49:22-26 is that in Genesis 49 the main point is the growth of Joseph into a powerful tribe, whereas Deuteronomy 33 speaks of the development of Joseph's already existing power. While Genesis 49 focuses on the growth of the branch of a fruit-tree, Deuteronomy 33 looks at the land and its products.¹¹⁵⁹ These insights are based on the interpretation of Gen. 49:22 as a reference to a fruit-tree, an interpretation that is not certain. However, even if our suggestion of a young calf is accepted, Keil and Delitzsch's insights remain valid.

Zobel outlines the blessing in four parts. The theme appears in verse 13a. In verses 13b-15 the theme is explained. In verse 16ab the theme is summarized and completed by reference to the favor of Yahweh. The close of the blessing is verse 16cd.¹¹⁶⁰ Zobel considers verse 17 a later addition, not a part of the original blessing. Craigie organizes the blessing under two headings: material prosperity from the produce of the land (verses 13-16) and military might against foreign nations (verse 17).¹¹⁶¹ These two headings are eminently suited to the traditional view of the origin of the chapter in the time just before the crossing of the Jordan River.

The "best of the heavens above" is the rain and dew, which grow the crops; the "deep lying beneath" is the subterranean water believed to be the source of springs and rivers, which water the land; the "produce of the sun" and "yield of the moon" are the crops nurtured by the sun that come to harvest at different seasons; the wealth of the "ancient mountains" and the "everlasting hills" are the forests. The climax appears in the phrase "the earth and its fullness," and the source of the wealth is "the one who dwells in the bush."¹¹⁶²

Von Rad and Cassuto speak of an elevated style, due to the part these verses allegedly played in a ritual at a sanctuary perhaps at Shiloh.¹¹⁶³ The comprehensive nature of the blessing supposedly stems from the fact that Deuteronomy 33 was composed when the tribes of Joseph were the most powerful; this also suggests to some that the chapter emanates from those tribes.¹¹⁶⁴ These assumptions will be challenged.

Deut. 33:13

About Joseph he said,

"May the Lord bless his land	a	b	c	3
with the choice fruits of heaven above	d	e	f	3
and with the deep that crouches below,	e'	g	f'	3

This verse contains all of the examples of Canaanite imagery that are claimed for this blessing: the emphasis upon blessings of fertility, the peculiar terminology (for example, *meghedh*, literally "excellence," here translated "choice fruits"), the tendency to personify natural forces (for example, "the deep that crouches below"), and the repetitive style (for example, the preposition *min* appears twice here and five more times in the next three verses).¹¹⁶⁵

"May the Lord bless his land." Zobel's translation is more literal, "Yahweh-blessed is his land,"¹¹⁶⁶ but our free rendering gives the sense. The third singular suffix refers to the introductory formula, according to Kittel, leading him to suggest that both have the same author.¹¹⁶⁷ Unfortunately, Kittel thinks that that person is only the

¹¹⁵⁸ Kittel, p. 56.

¹¹⁵⁹ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, pp. 504-05.

¹¹⁶⁰ Zobel, p. 36.

¹¹⁶¹ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 398.

¹¹⁶² Ibid.

¹¹⁶³ Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, p. 207; Cassuto, "Deuteronomy," p. 60.

¹¹⁶⁴ Cassuto, "Deuteronomy," p. 60.

¹¹⁶⁵ Cross and Freedman, "The Blessing," p. 205, n. 41.

¹¹⁶⁶ Zobel, p. 27, "Yahwe-gesegnet sein Land."

¹¹⁶⁷ Kittel, p. 53.

last of several editors, not Moses or a contemporary of Moses. Nevertheless, his comments highlight evidence that the superscriptions were originally connected to the sayings and not added later.

“With the choice fruits of heaven above.” The preposition *min* is to be translated in our English idiom as “with,” (GK 1161) giving the reason that the land is called blessed. The “choice fruits,” *meghedh*, are the parallel to *birkhōth* in Gen. 49:25-26. Cross and Freedman comment, “These ancient variants apparently arose during the period of oral transmission of the original blessing.”¹¹⁶⁸ However, there is a better reason for the difference than a hypothetical period of oral transmission. The word *meghedh* always refers to gifts of nature,¹¹⁶⁹ and that is the subject here. The word appears in Cant. 4:13, 16, 7:14 in reference to precious fruit, the only occurrences outside of this blessing. The Arabic cognate means “honor, dignity, majesty,” the Syriac “fruit,” and the Targums read “choice fruit.” Driver thinks that rain and dew are here poetically pictured as the fruit of heaven.¹¹⁷⁰

The primary requisite of a productive soil is an abundant supply of rain and dew, something much more obvious in the dry climate of Palestine. The parallelism of “heaven” and “deep” is known from Ugaritic texts as well as other Old Testament passages.¹¹⁷¹ We adopt here the proposed emendation of *miṭṭāl* to *mē’āl*, “with dew” to “above,” for three reasons. The first is the obvious parallelism with the following phrase, which has “below.” The second is the parallel passage in Gen. 49:25, which has *mē’āl*. The third is the support of two Hebrew manuscripts, the Syriac, and the Targum of Onkelos. Cross and Freedman comment that the *ṭeth* and *ayin* are easily confused in the early script. They think that Gen. 27:39 may be the source of the confusion, *ūmiṭṭāl haššāmāim mē’āl*.

However, Mayes thinks that a reference to dew would be a good parallel to “the deep,”¹¹⁷² and the combination of “dew” and “heaven” appears in Ugaritic literature, as does the parallelism of “dew and earth,” *ṭly* and *aršy*.¹¹⁷³ The reference to dew is also the more difficult reading and should not lightly be discarded. However, the metrical (3:3:3) and poetical (d e f/e’ g f’) parallelism suggest *mē’āl*.

“With the deep that crouches below.” The deep is the subterranean waters, the source of springs and rivers that water the land. The thought is probably personified here, although it has lost any mythological significance.¹¹⁷⁴ Cassuto thinks that the word *meghedh* is implied, so that the phrase means, “and with (the choice fruits of) the deep that crouches below.”¹¹⁷⁵ In this he is correct.¹¹⁷⁶ The same verbal root, “to crouch,” appears in Gen. 49:9, 14, and 25.

Deut. 33:14

and with the best yield of the sun	a	b	c	3
and the finest produce of the moon,	a’	b’	c’	3

This short verse contains two perfect three-stress cola, speaking of the abundance of the harvests that grow under the light of the sun (day by day) and the crops that ripen at different seasons (month by month) of the year.¹¹⁷⁷

The plural noun *ṭ’bhū’ōth*, literally “in-comes,” hence “increase, product, yield,” is used of the crops of successive years.¹¹⁷⁸ The noun *gereš*, “yield, produce,” is a *hapax*. Based on the verbal root *gāraš*, the word means something like “thrust forth,”¹¹⁷⁹ or something that the seasons cause to grow.

Many read *yārē’ḥ*, “moon,” because of the parallel with “sun.” Driver and Craigie think that “months” is the correct translation, but they suggest a word play on the similarly sounding “moon.”¹¹⁸⁰ The difference in the two viewpoints is negligible, since either translation yields a reference to different seasons of the year. Since *yārē’ḥ*

¹¹⁶⁸ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 206, n. 42.

¹¹⁶⁹ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 405.

¹¹⁷⁰ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 405-06.

¹¹⁷¹ Fisher, 2:358-59.

¹¹⁷² Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 405.

¹¹⁷³ Fisher, 3:71.

¹¹⁷⁴ Thompson, p. 312.

¹¹⁷⁵ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 61.

¹¹⁷⁶ See Stephen A. Geller, *Parallelism in Early Biblical Poetry*, in *Harvard Semitic Monographs*, no. 20. Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979, p. 23.

¹¹⁷⁷ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 406; Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 398.

¹¹⁷⁸ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 406.

¹¹⁷⁹ Ibid.

¹¹⁸⁰ Ibid.; Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 397, n. 24.

appears only in the singular, others favor the translation “months.” However, it is possible that we have here another example of the enclitic *mem* (compare verses 2, 3, 11). Then the parallelism between the two phrases would be even more precise, since the nouns would both be singular and both nouns would designate heavenly bodies. Both the LXX and the Vulgate translate “moon.”

Deut. 33:15

and with the best of the ancient mountains	a	b	c	3
and the abundance of the everlasting hills,	a'	b'	c'	3

The perfect three-stress cola in this verse and the precise verbal parallel in “mountains/hills” add further support to the translation of “moon” in the preceding verse. Steuernagel is probably correct in stating that *ûmērō’š* is short for *ûmimmeghedh* “*ašer mērō’š*.”¹¹⁸¹ Cross and Freedman think they see a conflate text in the verse. The original text supposedly had *mimmeghedh* in both cola, and an early variant had *mērō’š* in both cola, as the LXX suggests.¹¹⁸² However, Steuernagel’s comment, echoing a similar suggestion by Cassuto regarding verse 13, renders this conjecture unlikely.

The parallelism of “ancient mountains” and “everlasting hills” is also a Canaanite expression.¹¹⁸³ Driver explains the thought of the verse: the writer wishes that the mountainsides may be fertile, providing produce for the support of man or beast.¹¹⁸⁴ Zobel sees here a reference to Canaanite fertility gods that were worshipped on the hills.¹¹⁸⁵ However, the total picture presented by the blessing suggests that this verse deals with the produce of the land.

N. A. van Uchelen writes about the imaginative comparison of the Targums in this verse. The Targums of Onkelos, Pseudo-Jonathan, Jerusalem II, and Neofiti compare the mountains with the fathers of Israel and the hills with the mothers of Israel. The latter two Targums identify the fathers and mothers by name: Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, Sarah, Rebecca, Rachel, and Leah. He thinks that Isa. 51:1-2 is the probable starting point for this view. The interpretation adds no support to the view of Zobel.¹¹⁸⁶

Deut. 33:16

With the best gifts of the earth and its fullness	a	b	c	3
and the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush.	d	e	f	3
May they rest on the head of Joseph,	g	h	i	3
and on the pate of the one separate from his brothers.	[g’]	h’	i’ (bv)	3

In this verse the first theme of the blessing reaches its climax and conclusion. May the blessings of nature abound for Joseph, and may Joseph secure the favor of Yahweh Himself. Many commentators think that the thoughts of this verse and this blessing can come only from the time when Joseph was the dominant figure in the tribal confederacy, in the years prior to the rise of Judah. Thompson notes, however, that Manasseh and Ephraim were dominant “very early in Israel’s history following the conquest.”¹¹⁸⁷ The combined census figure for the two tribes was 72,700 in Numbers 1, second only to Judah’s 74,600, while the total increased to 85,200 in Numbers 26, ahead of second-place Judah’s 76,500. This places the dominance of these tribes much earlier than commonly admitted. The familiarity of Moses with the blessing of Jacob and the obvious results of that blessing in the size of Manasseh and Ephraim and the leadership produced by those tribes (for example, Joshua) led him to confirm and expand upon Gen. 49:22-26.

¹¹⁸¹ Steuernagel, p. 126.

¹¹⁸² Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 206, n. 50.

¹¹⁸³ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 405.

¹¹⁸⁴ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 406.

¹¹⁸⁵ Zobel, p. 36.

¹¹⁸⁶ N. A. van Uchelen, “The Targumic Versions of Deuteronomy 33:15: Some remarks on the origin of a traditional exegesis,” *Journal of Jewish Studies* 31 (Autumn 1980):199.

¹¹⁸⁷ Thompson, p. 313.

“With the best gifts of the earth and its fullness.” Here Moses sums up, in words found also at Ps. 24:1, Mic. 1:2, and others. The idea is that all of the yield of the earth in every possible way would be promised Joseph in abundance by Yahweh.¹¹⁸⁸ The “favor,” *ûr^lšôn*, of Yahweh is a theme found elsewhere in the chapter at verses 11, 23, and 24.

“And the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush.” Cross and Freedman follow Driver in seeing the *yod* in *šōkh^enî* as an old genitive case ending, retained as a binding vowel connecting a word in the construct state with its genitive, especially in a participle before a noun with a preposition (GK 90).¹¹⁸⁹ Driver adds emphatically, “The facts of the usage have but to be stated for it to become at once apparent that it is no ‘archaism,’ upon which an argument can be founded for the Mosaic authorship of the Pentateuch.”¹¹⁹⁰ While one archaism certainly is not sufficient to establish such a conclusion, a large number of archaisms can at least point in that direction.

Kittel writes that the “bush-dweller” appears to be the designation of a fertility deity, who was worshipped in the produce of the land.¹¹⁹¹ It is difficult to see how one can avoid the conclusion of Driver, however, who saw in this phrase a reference to the God of the Mosaic covenant, a phrase that is an advance beyond Gen. 49:24-26. The verses in Exod. 3:2-4 are obviously in view here, the only other Old Testament reference to the bush. Driver thinks that the use of the word “dwell” suggests a more permanent occupancy than implied in Exod. 3:2-4.¹¹⁹²

Some have suggested emending “bush,” *s^eneh*, to *sinai*, since tenth century orthography would have provided only the consonants *sn*.¹¹⁹³ The emendation has no good textual support, although Cross and Freedman cite some Samaritan manuscripts. Mayes thinks that there may be a deliberate contrast between the fruits of the fertile land and the desert dwelling of the donor, and so an implicit claim that the fertility comes from Yahweh, not the nature gods of the Canaanites.¹¹⁹⁴ Keil and Delitzsch add appropriately that “the spiritual blessing of the covenant of grace is very suitably added to the blessings of nature.”¹¹⁹⁵ Although the emendation should not be adopted, either reading would connect this verse with the prologue in verses 2-5.

The first word of the second line is difficult. Some have suggested that the text is corrupt and have offered various emendations. Steuernagel says the word is written incorrectly from *tābhō'nāh*, “come.”¹¹⁹⁶ Driver suggests either that reading, or *tābhō'āh*, the third singular cohortative.¹¹⁹⁷ Keil and Delitzsch call the form a lengthened poetical feminine form, used in a neutral sense, an interpretation that seems both strained and strange.¹¹⁹⁸ Cross and Freedman see a conflate reading: *tābhō'* followed by *t^hhî*, both third feminine singular jussives with a collective subject. They would understand *t^hhî*, “may they be,” as the original reading, on the basis of the parallel in Gen. 49:26, *tihyenā*.¹¹⁹⁹ Mayes and Zobel follow Cassuto's conjecture.¹²⁰⁰ Cassuto suggested an original *ye^etheh* that was combined with a later variant reading recorded between the lines, *tābhō'nāh*.¹²⁰¹ The word *ye^etheh* is from the Aramaic verb *^athāh*, “to come.” Kittel sees evidence of the **hiqtatal* conjugation in tenth-century Hebrew, a conjugation that used an inserted *tau*. GK 48d calls the word doubly irregular, explained by some as a scribal error, due to a confusion with *t^hbhū'ôth* in verse 14. Read instead *tābhō'nāh*. No suggestion stands out among those given above. In any case, the meaning of the word is clear from the context.

The parallelism of *rō'š* and *qodhqōdh* is attested in Ugaritic literature and elsewhere in the Old Testament.¹²⁰² The appearance together of “horn” and “head” is also attested in Ugaritic literature, the two words appearing in verses 16 and 17.¹²⁰³ We have here more evidence of archaic forms.

¹¹⁸⁸ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 61.

¹¹⁸⁹ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 206, n. 53.

¹¹⁹⁰ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 405.

¹¹⁹¹ Kittel, p. 54.

¹¹⁹² S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 406.

¹¹⁹³ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 206, n. 54; many others.

¹¹⁹⁴ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 406.

¹¹⁹⁵ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 505.

¹¹⁹⁶ Steuernagel, p. 126.

¹¹⁹⁷ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 405.

¹¹⁹⁸ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 506.

¹¹⁹⁹ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” pp. 296-07, n. 55.

¹²⁰⁰ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 406; Zobel, p. 36.

¹²⁰¹ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 61.

¹²⁰² Fisher, 2:335.

¹²⁰³ *Ibid.*, 2:331.

“On the pate of the prince among his brothers.” The meaning of *nāzîr* is not easily settled. It may mean “the separate one,” or “the crowned one,” that is, either the one distinguished from the others in influence, wealth, and so forth, or the one who is prince among his brothers.¹²⁰⁴

Driver writes,

In either case, a title of distinction, implying superiority to the other tribes, and reflecting the affluence, dignity, and power which, in its flourishing days, belonged to a pre-eminent degree to the double tribe of Joseph.¹²⁰⁵

Gaster’s suggestion that *nāzîr* means “he that was accursed, rejected,” is based on an Akkadian cognate.¹²⁰⁶ None of the versions followed that way of thinking. One scholar found an intended play on the word *rō’s*, which can mean “summit of a hill,” and *nāzîr*. The long hair characteristic of consecration would refer to the lush growth on the hills of Joseph’s land.¹²⁰⁷ The interpretation is obviously forced and highly unlikely.

In the exegesis of Genesis 49, we argued for the basic meaning of *nāzîr*, one “separate, set apart,” that is, singled out from his brothers for a special purpose. In this context, the word refers first to Joseph’s standing in Egypt that resulted in the rescue of his father and brothers from famine, but also to the special position of pre-eminence and power that the Joseph tribes enjoyed during the wilderness period, the time of the judges, and thereafter.

The last line of this verse is exactly the same as in Gen. 49:26, with the exception of the first word. Since the line concludes the blessing of Joseph in Genesis 49, it may be viewed as a summation of that which precedes. Certainly the theme of the blessing changes at this point, causing some to view verse 17 as a later addition. The similarity of this line in the two chapters suggests that one writer had the other chapter before him. The addition of verse 17 in this context suggests that the writer of Deuteronomy added the idea of military strength to that of verses 13-16, since those ideas had been expressed in Gen. 49:23-24.

Deut. 33:17

His firstborn bull has majesty,	a	b	c	3
his horns are the horns of the wild ox;	d	a'	d	3
with them may he gore the peoples,	e	f	g	3
together at the ends of the earth.	[e']	h	f'	3 (2)
Such are the ten thousands of Ephraim,	i	j	k	3
and such are the thousands of Manasseh.”	i'	j'	k'	3

It is almost universally held that this verse contains military imagery. The picture of a powerful bull, goring its enemies, and the mention of thousands and ten thousands are the most obvious references to that military strength.* The extent of Joseph’s influence is to “the ends of the earth.” It is probable that the phrase “the ends of the earth” led Armerding to conclude that the verse speaks of the ultimate triumph of the Messiah, whose rule alone can be said to apply throughout the world.¹²⁰⁸ However, Armerding does not reckon with the metaphorical language used in this verse, reminiscent of other early Hebrew poetry (compare Num. 23:22, 24:8) and of Ugaritic poetry (compare CTA 6.VI.16- 18=UT 49.VI.16-18).¹²⁰⁹

Kittel compares the verse to Gen. 49:10, seeing both verses as announcements of dominion over the earth, but failing to note here the heightened symbolism. He describes the verse as an animal comparison linked with a promise, although some do not see a promise here.¹²¹⁰ The word “promise” is not correct. “Blessing” would be more consistent with the chapter, as the translation “may he gore” suggests.

Zobel and Kittel have been among those who think of this verse as a later addition to the Joseph blessing. We have commented on the concluding line in verse 16, which is the final line of the Joseph blessing in Genesis 49.

¹²⁰⁴ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 407.

¹²⁰⁵ Ibid.

¹²⁰⁶ Theodore H. Gaster, “Short Notes (zu Gen 49,10),” *Vetus Testamentum* 4 (1954):73.

¹²⁰⁷ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 406.

* Joel Heck: Recall the mention of Saul slaying his thousands, but David his ten thousands.

¹²⁰⁸ Armerding, “Deuteronomy 33,” p. 231.

¹²⁰⁹ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 397; S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 407.

¹²¹⁰ Kittel, p. 55.

While it may be assumed that the extra verse is a conscious expansion of the blessing on the part of the author, Kittel thinks that the verse was originally an individual saying, perhaps a war-cry, later added to the blessing. He thinks that the reason for the addition was the need of the author to complete the number twelve.¹²¹¹ The third singular suffixes, according to Kittel, are the attempt to connect this verse with the rest of the saying, the suffixes referring to Joseph.¹²¹²

Zobel correctly notes that the verse stands out from verses 13-16. He calls verse 17ef an explanatory gloss, introduced in order to have Manasseh mentioned beside Ephraim in a blessing originally spoken only of Ephraim. The final two clauses concede Ephraim the military pre-eminence. The entire verse is considered a later addition, older than verses 13-16, added to include the military-political achievements of Joseph.¹²¹³

Von Rad is correct in noting a connection of the verse with the preceding. Joseph, “the consecrated one,” *nāzîr*, is singled out from among his brothers by being placed in a superior political position.¹²¹⁴ As stated earlier, this verse also shows the blessing to be later than Genesis 49, because of the lines in verse 17, added to the “nazirite” phrase which concluded the Joseph blessing in Genesis 49.

Steuernagel writes that the passage assumes Ephraim is the royal tribe and has unimpaired power. Therefore, he assigns the verse to the time of Jeroboam II, the only possible time, in his opinion.¹²¹⁵

“His firstborn bull has majesty,” literally “The firstborn of his bull, majesty is to him.” Zobel wonders if the suffix refers to Yahweh,¹²¹⁶ but it is clear that Joseph is meant. His firstborn is Ephraim. Ephraim received the blessing of the firstborn from Jacob, even though Manasseh was older (Gen. 48:14). Zobel writes that the “firstborn” means the mightiest of the mighty, one with courage and domineering might.¹²¹⁷ “Firstborn” means a particularly powerful bull, since the firstborn belonged to Yahweh as the best animal (Lev. 27:26).¹²¹⁸ This firstborn is not Joshua, nor Joseph, nor Jeroboam II, as some have thought, write Keil and Delitzsch.¹²¹⁹

Mayes thinks that the suffix on *šôr*, “bull,” is obscure.¹²²⁰ Some refer the suffix to Joseph and the firstling bull to Jeroboam II. H. Motzki saw a reference to the bull cult practiced at Bethel, a sanctuary of the tribe of Joseph.¹²²¹ This does not suit the content of the verse, which refers to tribal expansion. Many think the firstborn is Ephraim, and this is the most probable view.¹²²² Mayes recommends omitting the suffix with Qumran, the Samaritan Pentateuch, the LXX, Syriac, and Vulgate. He would translate like the New English Bible (NEB), “a firstling bull, he has majesty,” so that Joseph is addressed, not Ephraim.¹²²³

While “firstborn” stresses courage and might, the “bull” adds to that imagery, so that Ephraim is described as the most powerful of the powerful. The word “bull” is used here in a collective sense. The bull is a well-known epithet of El in the Ugaritic texts and appears in parallelism with *r'ēm*, *rum ... tr*, “wild ox ... bull.”¹²²⁴ The verb *nāghah*, “to gore,” appears in this sense in both Hebrew and Ugaritic (I.AB vi:17-18).¹²²⁵ The majesty described here may assume military success and suggest the idea of being chosen, as in verse 16 of Joseph.¹²²⁶

“His horns are the horns of the wild ox.” The horns are a sign of strength (compare Num. 23:22,24:8, Ps. 22:21, 92:10, Job 39:9).¹²²⁷ They show the extraordinary military strength of Ephraim and his claim to dominion over all the peoples of the earth.¹²²⁸ The word *r'ēm*, “wild ox,” (Akk. *rimu*) appears seven times in the Old Testament. It was a fierce, fleet animal, incapable of being

¹²¹¹ Ibid.

¹²¹² Ibid.

¹²¹³ Zobel, pp. 37-38.

¹²¹⁴ Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, p. 207.

¹²¹⁵ Steuernagel, p. 127.

¹²¹⁶ Zobel, p. 38.

¹²¹⁷ Ibid.

¹²¹⁸ Kittel, p. 55.

¹²¹⁹ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 506.

¹²²⁰ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 406.

¹²²¹ H. Motzki, “Ein Beitrag zum Problem des Stierkultes in der Religionsgeschichte Israels,” *Vetus Testamentum* 25 (1975):484, cited in Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 406.

¹²²² Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 406.

¹²²³ Ibid.; Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 61.

¹²²⁴ Fisher, 2:334.

¹²²⁵ Cassuto, “Literature,” p. 40.

¹²²⁶ Zobel, p. 38.

¹²²⁷ Kittel, p. 55.

¹²²⁸ Zobel, p. 38.

domesticated. It was the *bos primigenius*, the largest and most formidable wild ox that ever existed. The last one died in 1627. It is pictured in Assyrian and Babylonian bas reliefs.¹²²⁹ Driver summarizes for us, Ephraim is figured as a young and nobly-built bullock, possessing horns of immense size and strength, with which it pushes, or butts (1 K. 22:11, Dan. 8:4), with such effect that even remotest nations are powerless before it.¹²³⁰

“With them may he gore the peoples, together at the ends of the earth.” We translate *y^enaggah* as a jussive, because the jussive reflects the nature of the chapter as a blessing better than the imperfect. The adverb *yahdāw*, “together,” appears first in clause d for emphasis. It is apparently used in the sense of “all at once” and continues the hyperbolic language. Cross and Freedman think that a metathesis may have occurred and that *yidhê*, “he will push violently, thrust,” should be read. This would provide a closer parallelism to *y^enaggah* and a chiasmic arrangement between clauses c and d. The parallelism would be e f g/[e’] g’ f’ instead of e f g/[e’] h f’. C. J. Ball reads *wayyaddah*, from *ndh*, but Cross and Freedman prefer the root *dhy* on the basis of recorded usage.¹²³¹ The suggestion ought not to be discarded lightly, but it is not adopted here. The “ends of the earth” is in parallelism to “peoples,” as in Ps. 2:8, 22:27, Isa. 52:10.

“Such are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and such are the thousands of Manasseh.” The parallelism of “thousands” and “ten thousands” is well attested in the Old Testament, as well as more than a dozen times in Ugaritic literature (for example, Gen. 24:60).¹²³² Driver, Cross, and Freedman would omit the initial *waw* in the line, with the Samaritan text, the LXX, Syriac, and Vulgate.¹²³³ Cross and Freedman think that *hem* may be the Ugaritic particle *hm*, “lo, behold,”¹²³⁴ but this seems unlikely in view of the context. The word refers to those just described, not the horns of the wild ox.¹²³⁵ It shows *šôr*, “bull,” to be collective. Mayes considers this line an addition from the hand of the compiler of the collection for the purpose of ensuring that verses 13-17 refer to both Ephraim and Manasseh, or to ensure that the number of tribes in the chapter stays at twelve.¹²³⁶ Von Rad also thought of a later amplification,¹²³⁷ but the phrase can easily have been an integral part of the thought of the verse from the start. The idea of “thousands” and “ten thousands” is a normal poetic usage in the Old Testament, although here reversed.¹²³⁸

A traditional reading of the history of the Old Testament suggests that the tribe of Joseph is now being viewed as two, particularly with the settlement in the near future. The pre-eminence is given to Ephraim by the words “ten thousands.”¹²³⁹ Thompson thinks that *’alphê* refers to a military unit, as is frequently the case in the Old Testament,¹²⁴⁰ and that may indeed be a part of the meaning of the word here, particularly in the light of the general thrust of the verse.

Deut. 33:18

About Zebulun he said,

“Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out,	a	b	c	3
and Issachar, in your tents.	[a’]	b’	c’	3

The invitation is given to rejoice, while verse 19cd gives the reason for this invitation, according to Zobel.¹²⁴¹ That view depends on the interpretation of verse 18.

¹²²⁹ John W. Klotz, “Notes on the Unicorn,” *Concordia Theological Monthly* 32 (1961):286.

¹²³⁰ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 407.

¹²³¹ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 207, n. 60, who cite C. J. Ball, “The Blessing of Moses,” *Proceedings of the Society of Biblical Archaeology* 28 (1896).

¹²³² Fisher, 2:114.

¹²³³ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 408; Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 207, n. 62.

¹²³⁴ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 207, n. 62.

¹²³⁵ E.g., S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 408.

¹²³⁶ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 407.

¹²³⁷ Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, p. 207.

¹²³⁸ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 398.

¹²³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴⁰ Thompson, p. 314.

¹²⁴¹ Zobel, p. 38.

The superscription speaks only of Zebulun, whereas the blessing has to do with Zebulun and Issachar. This fact leads many to conclude that the superscription was added later by the compiler of the sayings.¹²⁴² Basing his remarks on the birth account of Gen. 30:17-20, Cassuto thinks that Zebulun and Issachar almost formed a single tribe, that they took their stand before the Ark of the Covenant, and that they received this blessing together.¹²⁴³ Issachar and Zebulun were the last two sons born to Leah. Phillips thinks that the two tribes are responsible for a mountain sanctuary, located at Mount Tabor on the common border of the two tribes, where foreigners whom they met in their trade would come and worship.¹²⁴⁴ Craigie offers the best explanation, when he writes that the two tribes are grouped together elsewhere (Gen. 49:13-15 and Judg. 5:14-15). The mention of Zebulun is intended to include Issachar, something that becomes obvious to the reader as he continues reading verse 18. Another example of the mention of Zebulun for Zebulun and Issachar occurs in 2 Chron. 30:10, 11, 18. Craigie further thinks that the association of Zebulun with the sea in Gen. 49:13-15 and the emphasis on the sea in verse 19cd may explain why only Zebulun is mentioned in the superscription.¹²⁴⁵ We have already seen that Judah is mentioned for Judah and Simeon in an earlier blessing in the chapter, so this superscription should not surprise us. The two may be connected because of the proximity of their inheritance in the land of Canaan, a fact possibly related to their order of birth as the fifth and sixth sons of Leah. The second person address connects us with verse 1 of the chapter,¹²⁴⁶ a fact which should lead us to see the unity of the entire chapter.

The two words “going out” and “tents” are a poetic variation of the frequent Hebrew idiom, “going out” and “coming in” (compare 28:6, 31:2, Ps. 121:8). They designate the whole activity of man’s daily life.¹²⁴⁷ While Mayes admits that possibility, he notes that the phrase is found in texts of cultic, judicial, and military-political content. He thinks the words may also describe a contrast between Zebulun’s connections with the sea and Issachar’s sedentary life.¹²⁴⁸ He may be correct, especially in the light of Gen. 49:14-15. Cassuto notes that the verb *yāšā’*, “to go out,” can refer to sea voyages (compare Ezek. 27:33).¹²⁴⁹ We think that this connection is valid. Aberbach and Grossfeld note that the Targum of Onkelos takes the phrase “Rejoice, Zebulun, in your going out” in a narrower sense, but in reference to waging war against enemies. The verb *yāšā’* is also used in the sense of going out to battle (compare 1 Sam. 18:13, 16, 30; 2 Sam. 5:2).¹²⁵⁰

Deut. 33:19

“People will be summoned to the mountain,	a	b	c	3
where they will offer right sacrifices;	b’	d	e	3
for they will suck the abundance of the seas,	f	g	h	3
and the hidden treasures of the sand.”	f’ (bv)	g’	[h’]	3

The second person of verse 18 becomes the third person in this verse. Cassuto reminds us,

As regards the changes of person, or the inconsistencies found here and there, or certain shortcomings in the logical order of the ideas and the connection between the different verses, wherein many commentators discover exegetical stumbling-blocks and reasons for declaring that the Masoretic text is spurious or erroneous, we must remember that in Semitic art we shall seek in vain the descriptive clarity and precision that is more or less patterned on classic models.¹²⁵¹

¹²⁴² E.g., Steuernagel, p. 127; Kittel, pp. 42-43.

¹²⁴³ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 61.

¹²⁴⁴ Phillips, p. 228.

¹²⁴⁵ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 399.

¹²⁴⁶ Kittel, p. 57.

¹²⁴⁷ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 399; many others.

¹²⁴⁸ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 407; others.

¹²⁴⁹ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 62.

¹²⁵⁰ Moses Aberbach and Bernard Grossfeld, *Targum Onkelos on Genesis 49*, in *Society of Biblical Literature: Aramaic Studies*, no. 1 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1976), p. 29.

¹²⁵¹ U. Cassuto, “The Prophecies of Jeremiah Concerning the Gentiles,” in *Biblical and Oriental Studies I* (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1973), p. 207.

Kittel comments that verse 19 may explain the reason for the common joy of Zebulun and Issachar, but that verse 19ab has no meaningful connection.¹²⁵² He thinks that perhaps the Deuteronomist put down this tribal saying on the basis of his knowledge of Gen. 49:13-14, whereby he understood Zebulun's dwelling on the coast as an allusion to the commercial inclination of Zebulun and changed the rebuke for Issachar into an appeal for joy in his tents.¹²⁵³ That there is a connection to Genesis 49 is probable, although not in the manner Kittel suggests.

Keil and Delitzsch offer a Messianic interpretation of this verse, thinking of the worship of the Lord with the fellowship of people from other nations. They find no reference to trade on the Mediterranean Sea.¹²⁵⁴ While there is some connection in thought with Isa. 66:11-12, it is wiser to assume a later Messianic appropriation of the themes of this verse by Isaiah than to read such a meaning back into the verse. It would be very strange for a Messianic meaning to be found in regard to Zebulun and Issachar.

At the same time, Ze'eb Weisman's conjecture about a connecting link between verses 2-5 and 26-29 is hardly founded. He would see verse 19ab and verse 21cde as that link. Verse 5 would provide the occasion for an assembly, while verse 19ab would speak of that assembly at a cultic ceremony on the mountain to which the people are summoned to offer sacrifices in praise of God for His acts of deliverance on behalf of Israel.¹²⁵⁵

Many have interpreted verse 19ab as a reference to some North Israelite cult, but Cross and Freedman have called Eissfeldt's interpretation about a Tabor cult difficult to accept.¹²⁵⁶ Thompson comments that verse 19ab seems to suggest some kind of cultic observance; that conclusion can hardly be disputed. His interpretation that the "sacrifices of righteousness" mean "right sacrifices," that is, sacrifices offered in a right attitude of mind, suggests the proper line of reasoning.¹²⁵⁷ The appearance of the word *šedeq* in this line may inform the reader that these sacrifices are not in competition with or in contradiction to the true worship of Yahweh, particularly that which was required to take place at the central sanctuary. The prosperity of the two tribes in their trading relations with other tribes and nations allowed them the opportunity to share some of their wealth for the sake of good will and continued trading relations.

The "peoples" of this verse are variously interpreted as the nations generally, or more likely other tribes. The mountain is not Tabor, a view based on the questionable interpretation of Judg. 4:6, 12 and Hos. 5:1, nor Carmel, nor Zion (too distant from these tribes). Keil and Delitzsch think of Zion, although they agree that there is no direct allusion to Zion here. Their Messianic interpretation of the verses is the reason for finding a reference to Zion.¹²⁵⁸ Driver thinks that there may be a reference to several mountain sanctuaries in Zebulun and Issachar, since the wording is quite indeterminate.¹²⁵⁹ Craigie takes this interpretation a bit farther. There is no particular place intended here, because of the general expressions in verse 18.¹²⁶⁰ He would understand a *he* directive attached to "mountain," agreeing with Cross and Freedman that the final *he* would not appear in tenth century orthography.¹²⁶¹

The views of Driver and Craigie suggest another alternative. The first two phrases may be referring to sacrifices offered by the Levites at the Levitical cities. Jokneam was a Levitical city in Zebulun, located at the base of Mount Carmel, while En-gannim (Jenin or Ibleam) was a Levitical city in Issachar, located near Mount Gilboa. Judges 17 and 1 Samuel 9 indicate that the Levites performed certain rituals outside of the central sanctuary. The word "mountain" may be a collective, referring to both Mount Carmel and Mount Gilboa.

The "summons" is an invitation to a feast (compare 1 Sam. 9:13, 24), as indicated above, but not to some sacrificial feast of a Tabor cult. The passive form of the verb, *yiqq'rā'û*, may be a Masoretic attempt to absolve the two tribes of involvement in what they perceived as a pagan feast. The verb may be punctuated as an active verb without changing the consonantal text.

While the phrase "right sacrifices" is interpreted by some as a reference to sacrifices offered to Yahweh,¹²⁶² it may be interpreted more generally, as suggested above.

¹²⁵² Kittel, p. 57.

¹²⁵³ Ibid., p. 58.

¹²⁵⁴ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, pp. 507-08.

¹²⁵⁵ Ze'eb Weisman, "Connecting Link In An Old Hymn: Deuteronomy 33:19a, 21b," *Vetus Testamentum* 28 (1978):365-67.

¹²⁵⁶ Otto Eissfeldt, "Der Gott des Tabor und seine Verbreitung," in *Kleine Schriften II*, eds. Rudolf Sellheim and Fritz Maas (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1963), pp. 29-54, cited in Cross and Freedman, "The Blessing," p. 208, n. 65.

¹²⁵⁷ Thompson, p. 409; and others.

¹²⁵⁸ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 507.

¹²⁵⁹ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 409.

¹²⁶⁰ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 399, n. 33.

¹²⁶¹ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 399; Cross and Freedman, "The Blessing," p. 208, n. 65.

¹²⁶² E.g., Zobel, p. 39.

The connection of verse 19cd with verse 19ab is uncertain. Craigie offers the interpretation that the prosperity of the tribes would be so great that they would occasionally hold festivals to which fellow Israelites would be invited. There they would thank God for their prosperity.¹²⁶³ Thompson reminds us that Zebulun did not touch the sea, but he thinks that Gen. 49:13 indicates that at one time the tribe had access to the sea. Howe and Zebulun and Issachar found the trade route that led through the Plain of Jezreel in their backyard.¹²⁶⁴

“For they will suck the abundance of the seas.” “To suck” seems to be figurative for drawing sustenance from the sea (compare Isa. 60:16, 66:11-12).¹²⁶⁵ “The abundance of the seas” undoubtedly refers to the Mediterranean Sea.¹²⁶⁶ Some take this phrase in reference to Zebulun, while the concluding phrase refers to Issachar.¹²⁶⁷ However, since both phrases have to do with the seashore, it is better to take the final line as a reference to both tribes.¹²⁶⁸

The word *šep̄haʿ* is a *hapax*. It appears five times in the feminine form *šiphʿāh* (see Job 22:11, 38:34, 2 Kings 9:17, Isa. 60:6, Ezek. 26:10). The phrase apparently means the wealth accruing from fishing and maritime commerce.¹²⁶⁹ The “hidden treasures of the sand” may refer to glass manufactured from the sand, the dye of shellfish, the shellfish themselves,¹²⁷⁰ or the lucrative caravan trade. Zobel thinks that the sand is the sand of the prairie or wilderness (compare Exod. 2:12), so he adopts the caravan trade interpretation.¹²⁷¹ The Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan paraphrases,

For they will settle on the shore of the Great Sea, and delight themselves with tritons, and catch mussels, and dye purple with their blood the cords of their mantle, and from the sand they will produce mirrors and vessels of glass; for the treasures of the deep are revealed to them.¹²⁷²

“The hidden treasures of the sand” is literally “the things hidden of the sand.” In GK 130f we read that the *nomen regens*, *ûš^éphûnê*, probably governs the following construct state, so that no word is missing. On the final two words we read in GK 133h that some adjectives acquire the sense of a superlative, when followed by a partitive genitive. In that case, we should translate, “the most hidden treasures of the sand.”

Cassuto wants to follow Karl Budde’s ingenious, but unsupported, conjecture,¹²⁷³ reading *ûšep̄haʿ* for *ûš^éphûnê* in parallelism with the first half of the line.¹²⁷⁴ Mayes looks for a parallel to *yînāqû* by emending to *w^éyîšphûn*, “and they draw out (the treasures of the sand).”¹²⁷⁵ The root *šāphan* is merely another orthography of *sāphan*. The verb *tāman* means “to hide,” especially in the earth,¹²⁷⁶ a meaning that leads Zobel to think of treasures hidden in the sand in order to keep them from robbers (compare Josh. 7:21).¹²⁷⁷

¹²⁶³ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 399.

¹²⁶⁴ Thompson, pp. 314-15.

¹²⁶⁵ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 409.

¹²⁶⁶ Zobel, p. 38.

¹²⁶⁷ Ibid.

¹²⁶⁸ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 62.

¹²⁶⁹ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 399; and many others.

¹²⁷⁰ Ibid.

¹²⁷¹ Zobel, p. 39.

¹²⁷² S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 410.

¹²⁷³ Karl Budde, see footnote d in *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*, p. 351.

¹²⁷⁴ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 62.

¹²⁷⁵ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 407.

¹²⁷⁶ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 409.

¹²⁷⁷ Zobel, p. 38.

Deut. 33:20

And about Gad he said,

“Blessed be the broad lands of Gad;	a	b	c	3
he lies down like a lion	[c’]	d	e	2
and tears arm and head.	[c’]’	[d’]	e’ (bv)	3

The blessing of Gad “is of a particular warlike character, which is quite in harmony with the setting of the Blessing at the beginning of the Conquest and with the concluding verses of the Blessing”¹²⁷⁸ Von Rad thinks that it refers to the expansion of Gad by violence in the area east of the Jordan,¹²⁷⁹ a thought compatible with that quoted above.

Cross and Freedman call the MT “suspicious,” since it is the only instance in which the blessing is applied to Yahweh instead of the tribe. They suggest reading *merhābh* or *merh^abhê*, “the broad land(s) of Gad,” noting that Gad was the strongest tribe on the tableland east of the Jordan.¹²⁸⁰ The second suggestion is better, since it involves a simple metathesis. The testimony of the Vulgate lends some support to this suggestion. Since the remainder of the verse refers to the tribe, we adopt this reading.

Some suggest instead the omission of the first two words. Cassuto mentions that suggestion, but he comments that *bārūkh* is a fitting word, one that appears elsewhere at the head of the blessing (compare verse 24).¹²⁸¹ If the text is retained in its present form, the verse would begin with praise of Yahweh, who enlarges Gad.

The animal comparison, common in Genesis 49, leads Kittel to suggest that there may be some ancient traditional material in this verse. He writes of a divine name, “*der Raummacher Gads*,” and the animal comparison as basic elements of an old tribal saying. There is an allusion to Num. 24:8-9, which shows that the animal comparison could be referred to the one who enlarges Gad, but all the other animal comparisons refer to the tribes. Therefore, it is best to take the animal comparison to refer to Gad, who has lain in ambush in order to throw himself down on his prey.¹²⁸² The less frequent use of the animal comparison in this chapter may be a signal that the author of Deuteronomy 33 had Genesis 49 before him, borrowed the concept, but to a lesser extent. That may be the result of the more settled way of life that was in view, due to the coming Conquest.

Cassuto rejects the emendation of *šākhēn* to *šākhabh*. The latter verb denotes the lying down of the lion to rest after it has eaten its prey (compare Num. 23:24), whereas the verse clearly speaks of a lion as it attacks, or as it lies in ambush.¹²⁸³ The conjunction *’aph* is a little stronger than *waw*.¹²⁸⁴ In poetry it introduces a climax or a synonym (see 1 Sam. 2:7, Ps. 65:13, 74:16).¹²⁸⁵ Here it introduces a climax.

Deut. 33:21

“He chose the best part for himself,	a	b	c	3
yea behold, the commander’s portion.	[a’]	b’	e	3
(The heads of the people assembled.)	(f	g	h)	(3)
He carried out the righteous will of the Lord	i	j	k	3
and His judgments concerning Israel.”	i’	h’	[k’]	2

Kittel judges verse 21cd to be similar to that of verses 9cd and 10ab, suggesting a deuteronomic origin. The occurrence of Yahweh in the verses causes him some concern,¹²⁸⁶ but Yahweh occurs in several of the verses of the chapter (verses 2, 7, 11, 12, 13, 23, 29).

¹²⁷⁸ Craigie, “The Conquest,” p. 88.

¹²⁷⁹ Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, p. 207.

¹²⁸⁰ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 208, n. 66.

¹²⁸¹ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 63.

¹²⁸² Kittel, pp. 59-60.

¹²⁸³ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 63.

¹²⁸⁴ Ibid.

¹²⁸⁵ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 410.

¹²⁸⁶ Kittel, p. 59.

Driver sees here an allusion to Numbers 32, where Gad secured an allotment in the rich pasture-country east of the Jordan, on condition of assisting afterwards in the conquest of Canaan.¹²⁸⁷ Craigie concurs, noting that Josh. 22:1-6 records the fulfillment of this responsibility.¹²⁸⁸ This verse teaches that Gad played an important role in that conquest.

“He chose the best part for himself.” “To see for oneself” is “to provide,” or “to choose.”¹²⁸⁹ Zobel calls this a domineering decision, and this could be the intent of the phrase,¹²⁹⁰ but probably it is not. The “best part” is not the portion of the firstborn (Gad was not the firstborn), but a choice part fitting a leader of the tribes.¹²⁹¹ A land is meant, as the adverb *šām*, “there,” shows.¹²⁹² Probably the meaning of “firstfruits” is in view here, since Gad received one of the first portions of land to be assigned. In Num. 32:2, 6, 25-27, the Gadites are at the head of the tribes, who asked for the land east of the Jordan. Because of that leadership position, Gad could choose the best as that which is due the leader. Driver explains *rē’šīth*, “best part,” as both a best part and the firstfruits of the newly “conquered land.”¹²⁹³ The use of the word here and in Gen. 49:3 is not a hint at God’s absorption of Reuben,¹²⁹⁴ although Josh. 13:15-23 with Num. 32:34-38 shows some Reubenite towns as Gadite territory.

“Yea behold, the commander’s portion.” There are three main views of this phrase and the phrase that follows it.

- 1) “For there was hidden the portion of the Lawgiver (Moses), and the heads of the people came.” The Vulgate, Targum of Onkelos, Syriac, and several commentators adopt this view. However, R. Gordis claims that *šāphûn* really means “paneled,” not “hidden,” and that Moses’ grave was in Reuben and not Gad.¹²⁹⁵ He is correct in the latter point; furthermore, the word *helqath* is never used in reference to Moses’ grave. However, the word *šāphûn* can indeed mean “hidden.”
- 2) Most take *m^ehōqēq* in a general sense as “commander, military chief.” The version of the Jewish Publication Society translates in this way.¹²⁹⁶ Most commentators adopt this view, translating “For there a portion (worthy) of a ruler was reserved, and the heads of the people came.” This is the best of the three major views.
- 3) Some read “he came with the heads of the people,” emending *wayyēthē’* to *w^e’eth* or *wayyēthē’ ’eth*. This avoids the harshness of the accusative after the verb *’āthāh*, whose translators did not know the meaning of the verse.¹²⁹⁷

Cross and Freedman read *kīššōm*, a contraction for *kī yiššōm*, “for he pants after,” from the root *nšm*. The *yod* would have been lost by haplography. They feel that the contraction is indicated by metrical considerations (the second clause would otherwise be the only four-beat clause).¹²⁹⁸ The reading would also provide a closer parallelism to the first clause, but it is based on slim evidence, none of it from the versions. Moreover, the four beats in the clause will be solved in a different way below. Dahood offers a better explanation, when he writes of two Ugaritic particles, *kī* and *šām*, which mean “indeed” and “behold.” Both of these are emphatic particles, and they would fit the requirements of the parallelism quite well, without necessitating a change in the consonantal text.¹²⁹⁹ The noun *helqath*, “portion,” usually means a particular piece of ground with fixed boundaries (compare Gen. 33:19, Josh. 24:32), a single field.¹³⁰⁰ The phrase *helqath m^ehōqēq* is not the territory assigned by the Lawgiver, that is, Moses, but the territory falling to the lot of the leader, the tribe of Gad.¹³⁰¹ (See exegesis of Gen. 49:10 on *m^ehōqēq*)

¹²⁸⁷ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 411.

¹²⁸⁸ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 400.

¹²⁸⁹ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 411.

¹²⁹⁰ Zobel, p. 40.

¹²⁹¹ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 509.

¹²⁹² Zobel, p. 40.

¹²⁹³ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 411.

¹²⁹⁴ Mayes thinks it is, *Deuteronomy*, p. 408.

¹²⁹⁵ R. Gordis, “Critical Notes on the Blessing of Moses (Deut. xxxiii),” *Journal of Theological Studies* 34 (1933): 390.

¹²⁹⁶ Harry M. Orlinsky, ed., *The Torah: The Five Books of Moses* (Philadelphia: Jewish Publication Society of America, 1962), p. 392.

¹²⁹⁷ Gordis, “Critical Notes,” p. 390.

¹²⁹⁸ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 208, n. 71.

¹²⁹⁹ Dahood, *Psalms III*, pp. 402-10.

¹³⁰⁰ Zobel, p. 40.

¹³⁰¹ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 509.

The noun *m^ehōqēq* is to be translated more generally as “commander,” not as “lawgiver, prescribe,” although the latter is possible in other contexts.

The final word of the line, *sāphûn*, “reserved,” creates a four-beat phrase, while the other four phrases are two or three beats. This has led many scholars to adopt the reading *wayyith’assēphûn*, first suggested by F. Giesebrecht.¹³⁰² Gordis notes the similarity of thought and expression in verse 5, *b^ehith’assēph rā’sē ‘ām*, and translates in verse 21, “And the heads of the people gathered.” He thinks that *sāphûn* may have been written above the line, since it was earlier omitted by error, so the next copyist took it as two words.¹³⁰³ Many others have adopted this reading, and it seems to be the likely reading. The conclusion that verse 5 is related also seems likely, but not with the assumptions of most. Rather than see the phrase as an explanatory gloss from verse 5,¹³⁰⁴ it should be seen as a phrase that connects the tribal sayings themselves very closely with the psalm-like framework. This argues for the original unity of the entire chapter. Seeligmann, one who viewed verse 21c as a continuation of verse 5, confessed, “I am aware of a certain foolhardiness in the view set forth above.”¹³⁰⁵

Zobel is incorrect in relating the phrase to the alleged Tabor-community,¹³⁰⁶ and in thinking that Gad hoped to obtain a leading role among the tribes by gaining possession of the “firstborn land” of Reuben.¹³⁰⁷ The suggestion of many that the phrase is a gloss is a signal that we have another parenthesis in the text. No element in phrase c is in parallelism with any other phrase of the verse. Taking the phrase as a parenthesis, we are left with four closely parallel phrases. The LXX reading, *synēgmenōn*, “being gathered together,” supports this interpretation. The purpose of the parenthetical remark is to relate the verse to the request in Num. 32:2, 6, 25-27.

Other interpretations limp. Cassuto thought *sāphûn* a variant reading of *ûsēphûnê* in verse 19, later interpolated here.¹³⁰⁸ Driver thought the word should be translated “covered in,” figurative for “laid up, reserved,”¹³⁰⁹ a parallel to *wayyar’ ... lo*. Steuernagel thought *wayyēthē’* might be contracted from *wayye’ethē’*, from the root *’āthā’* or *’āthāh*. However, he preferred reading *wē’eth*, since “with” is necessary before *rā’sē ‘ām*.¹³¹⁰ Then Driver read *wayyēthē’* as a shortened form of *wayye’ethēh*, “and he came.”¹³¹¹ Some leave the text as it is, translating “came at the heads of the people,” that is, Gad fought at their head in the conquest. Others read *wayya’t’h eth-*, “and he came with,” since the verb *’āthāh* is not normally construed with the accusative of the person except in the sense of “to come upon, to come against.”¹³¹² Keil and Delitzsch ignore this grammatical fact, translating, “he came to the heads of the people.” This means that Gad joined the heads of the people to go at the head of the tribes to conquer Canaan. Moses regards it as already performed, because of their pledge of continued support.¹³¹³ Cassuto and Craigie simply translate, “and he came to the heads of the people,” a translation that reflects the military role of Gad. The heads would mean “chiefs,” and “people” would mean “army.”¹³¹⁴

“He carried out the righteous will of the Lord and His judgments concerning Israel.” What these phrases mean is unclear. Mayes thinks of the ruler’s function of executing justice.¹³¹⁵ Driver takes it of the command from Yahweh to make no truce with the Canaanites (Exod. 23:31-33).¹³¹⁶ Steuernagel writes similarly, thinking that the conquest of West Jordan is proof of the righteousness and judgment of Yahweh over the Canaanites (compare Gen. 15:16, Isa. 5:16).¹³¹⁷ The military interpretation is most probable.

The prepositional phrase “concerning Israel” is translated by Keil and Delitzsch, “in fellowship with (the rest of) Israel,” by Craigie “along with Israel.” The meaning is that Gad would cooperate faithfully in the

¹³⁰² F. Giesebrecht, “Zwei cruces interpretum Ps 45,7 und Dt 33,21,” *Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft* 7 (1887):290-93.

¹³⁰³ Gordis, “Critical Notes,” p. 391.

¹³⁰⁴ Zobel, p. 40; cf. footnote b of *Biblia Hebraica Stuttgartensia*.

¹³⁰⁵ Seeligmann, p. 86.

¹³⁰⁶ Zobel, p. 41.

¹³⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 41, n. 68.

¹³⁰⁸ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 63.

¹³⁰⁹ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 411.

¹³¹⁰ Steuernagel, p. 128.

¹³¹¹ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 411.

¹³¹² *Ibid.*, p. 412.

¹³¹³ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 510.

¹³¹⁴ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 400; Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” pp. 63-64.

¹³¹⁵ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 408.

¹³¹⁶ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 412.

¹³¹⁷ Steuernagel, p. 128.

conquest.¹³¹⁸ Zobel's translation, "For the benefit of Israel," is based upon his interpretation of the passage as evidence of Gad's selfish interference with the territory of Reuben for what Gad thought was the benefit of all and in response to the command of Yahweh.¹³¹⁹

Deut. 33:22

About Dan he said,

"Dan is a lion's cub,	a	b	3
that shies away from the viper."	c	d	3

Kittel calls this verse the only genuine tribal saying in the chapter, because of the animal comparison and because of the brevity of the saying.¹³²⁰ Both Kittel and Zobel have noted the similarity of this saying to Genesis 49.¹³²¹ Zobel thinks that the verse circulated in northern Palestine with other sayings and was there included in this chapter, independent of Genesis 49. He attributes the similarity of the verse to Genesis 49 to the proximity of Dan to Judah early in history. That would have made the language of Gen. 49:9 familiar to the Danites, who then borrowed part of that language for this saying.¹³²²

The similarity of verse 22 to Genesis 49, particularly the use of the same phrase *gûr 'aryēh* from Gen. 49:9, ought rather to be seen as evidence for the dependence of one chapter on the other. We agree with Zobel in thinking Gen. 49:9 the older verse, but for different reasons. We think that Moses, fully aware of the picture of Dan in Gen. 49:16-17 as a dangerous viper, strengthened the picture by appropriating the phrase "lion's cub" from Gen. 49:9, a phrase that was probably common in poetic language (compare Nahum 2:12). The lion's cub is a step up from a viper.

The "lion's cub" implies timidity and youthfulness, but also great strength in the future when the tribe has grown to full strength.¹³²³ The tribe is not yet strong enough to resist dangerous enemies, so it does not set out on its own raids. Dan can only achieve success in a sudden surprise attack (*zānaq*).¹³²⁴ Kittel notes the passages in Ps. 10:9 and 17:12, which speak of the lion lying in ambush, although the lion there is not a cub.¹³²⁵

The second clause is a relative clause (so GK 155f), which explains the first clause. The verb is a *hapax*. This may be evidence of the great age of the passage. The Aramaic root means "to squirt, spout out."

The real crux of the verse is the word "Bashan." Does the word refer to the region known as Bashan, east of the Sea of Galilee, to a particular breed of cattle,¹³²⁶ or to a serpent?¹³²⁷ If the word refers to the region of Bashan, then some would take the verse as evidence that Dan had migrated north by this time (compare Josh. 19:40-48, Judges 18).¹³²⁸ The problem with this view is that Dan never dwelt in Bashan although his land bordered Bashan. Cassuto thinks that Dan may have conquered part of Bashan at some time, but this is unknown to us.¹³²⁹ If Weippert is correct that Deuteronomy 33 is organized around a geographical system for arranging the tribes,¹³³⁰ the list moving from south to north in a reverse S-shape, then a northern location of Dan is much more likely in view here. Thompson has noted that verses 22-25 seem to link Dan, Naphtali, and Asher together in the Galilee area.¹³³¹ Some original association of Dan with Bashan would solve the problem, but there is no evidence for this. Another solution, proposed by Driver, is that the relative clause characterizes the lion, not Dan. He thinks that the mountain ranges and

¹³¹⁸ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 510; Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 400.

¹³¹⁹ Zobel, p. 41.

¹³²⁰ Kittel, p. 60.

¹³²¹ Ibid.; Zobel, pp. 41-42.

¹³²² Zobel, p. 42, n. 70.

¹³²³ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 401.

¹³²⁴ Zobel, p. 42; S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 412.

¹³²⁵ Kittel, p. 60.

¹³²⁶ Ibid., p. 60, n. 3.

¹³²⁷ Ugaritic *bn*, "serpent."

¹³²⁸ E.g., Phillips, p. 229.

¹³²⁹ Cassuto, "Deuteronomy," p. 64.

¹³³⁰ Weippert, p. 78.

¹³³¹ Thompson, p. 316.

oak forests of the area would form a natural ambush for them, and Cant. 4:8 refers to lions near Mount Hermon.¹³³² Keil and Delitzsch seem to adopt this view.¹³³³

Since no one gives serious consideration to the possible reference to a breed of cattle, and rightly so, there remains the association with the Ugaritic and Arabic words for “serpent, viper.”¹³³⁴ The verse would then be translated, “Dan is a lion’s cub, that leaps forth (that is, shies away) from a viper.” The significance of this translation is uncertain. Craigie thinks there may be a play on the saying addressed to Dan in Gen. 49:17, where Dan is described as a viper.¹³³⁵ We have already defended the author’s familiarity with Genesis 49 on the basis of the phrase *gûr ’aryēh*, so this connection has merit. Craigie explains, “Dan now has the potential for greater strength, but is still a little nervous in the presence of a viper.”¹³³⁶ Because of the consistency that this interpretation gives to the two clauses and because of the double connection with Genesis 49, we adopt this view here. A twofold borrowing from Genesis 49 argues further for the dependence of Deuteronomy 33 on Genesis 49.

Deut. 33:23

About Naphtali he said,

“Naphtali is abounding with favor	a	b	c	3
and full of the blessing of the Lord.	[a’]	b’	c’ (bv)	3
May he inherit toward the west and the south.”	d	e	f	3

Because of the favor of Yahweh, Naphtali will not be limited to the highland plateau of Upper Galilee. He will also possess the more fertile and beautiful region to the west. The blessing of the verse is an inheritance that extends both to the west and the south. Don’t look to the east, the Jordan River forms that boundary (Josh. 19:34); don’t look to the north, that’s Phoenician territory.

Kittel calls the saying colorless. The name of Yahweh suggests to him that the verse is not an ancient tribal saying. He calls verse 23c an explanatory comment which interprets the blessing of Yahweh as the vast extent of the land. Kittel thinks that the parallelism of “blessing” and “favor” points to a deuteronomic understanding of the blessing. We may accept this and other similar conclusions, provided that Moses is considered to be the Deuteronomist.¹³³⁷

There does not seem to be any relationship between this verse and Gen. 49:21.¹³³⁸ Keil and Delitzsch try to show some connection, stating that Genesis 49 highlights the gracefulness of Naphtali, while Deuteronomy 33 highlights the satisfaction of Naphtali with the favor and blessing of God.¹³³⁹ Kittel compares the two verses by noting their common brevity,¹³⁴⁰ but the only other similarity is their positive tone.

The parallelism makes it clear that Naphtali is abounding with the Lord’s favor, not man’s.¹³⁴¹ The “blessing” is accusative, a word dependent on *ûmālē*, “full of” (GK 117z). The third line does not enter into the parallelism, so it is possible that there is another parenthetical remark, what critical scholars would call an explanatory gloss. However, a three-phrase verse with two of the phrases in parallelism may simply be a common poetic device. The major issue is the identification of the sea, *yām*. Many interpret the word as a reference to the Mediterranean Sea, when they take the word generally to mean the direction west. Others think that the word refers to the Sea of Galilee, as the Targum of Onkelos translates. Craigie correctly comments that the identification of the Sea of Galilee is unlikely, because of the general nature of the blessing.¹³⁴² Mayes comments insightfully that the translation “west” is more in keeping with the other geographical term that is

¹³³² S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 412-13; and others.

¹³³³ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 510.

¹³³⁴ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 208, n. 74, citing the verbal suggestion of William F. Albright; and many others.

¹³³⁵ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 401.

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¹³³⁸ So Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 401.

¹³³⁹ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 510.

¹³⁴⁰ Kittel, p. 61.

¹³⁴¹ Zobel, p. 42.

¹³⁴² Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 401.

used, *dhārôm*, “south.”¹³⁴³ The general nature of all geographical terms in this chapter lends additional weight to this interpretation. Cross and Freedman note the Samaritan text, which has a final *he*, probably the *he* directive. The final vowel letter would not have been indicated in the orthography and may also be implied for *w^edhārôm*.¹³⁴⁴ Keil and Delitzsch add appropriately that the final phrase is too general to be interpreted historically, a caution that should be exercised throughout the chapter.¹³⁴⁵

The companion word *dhārôm*, “south,” is less problematic. The word is regularly translated in the Targum of Onkelos by *hanneghebh*, “the south.” The word appears seventeen times in the Old Testament and has four meanings. It can mean “the south” in general, the part of Palestine known as the Negeb, the coastal plain as far north as Lydda, or a particular town or fortress south of Gaza. Millar Burrows concludes that the simple literal meaning, “the south” generally, continued as long as Hebrew or Aramaic was spoken in Palestine.¹³⁴⁶ That is the word’s meaning here.

Most take the final word as an emphatic Qal imperative. Cassuto explains the sense, “Enlarge your boundaries West and South from the territory where you are not hard-pressed by the enemies around you!”¹³⁴⁷ However, Driver notes that the emphatic form elsewhere is *rēš*, in pause *rāš*.¹³⁴⁸ The Samaritan text reads *yîrāš*, and it is supported by the LXX, Vulgate, Syriac, and the Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan. Cross and Freedman view the text as a conflate reading of the imperfect or jussive, *yîrāš*, and the emphatic imperative *r^ešāh*.¹³⁴⁹ The explanation of GK 69f is an imperative with a paragogic *he* in pausal form (see also GK 48i). The form is translated here as an imperfect with jussive force, an archaic form of the jussive that made use of the final *he* in the third person also.

Deut. 33:24

About Asher he said,

“Most blessed of sons is Asher.	a	b	c	3
May he be favored among his brothers,	c’	a’	b’	3
and may he dip his foot in oil.	e	f	g	3

The final tribal saying begins with an exclamation, followed by a request. It has to do with securing the extremely rich territory of Asher. Because prosperity always brings danger, the bolts of the cities of Asher will be unbreakable and Asher’s strength as lasting as his days (verse 25).¹³⁵⁰ The final verse changes into the second person, because it has to do with Asher himself.¹³⁵¹ Kittel thinks that the second person singular in verse 25 is an attempt to connect the saying with verse 1, an attempt that is supported by the proximity of the terms “sons” and “brothers,” terms reminiscent of the idea of the blessing of sons, all of whom are brothers. He thinks the parallelism of blessing and pleasure is from the Deuteronomist.¹³⁵² However, Cassuto notes similar changes of person in verses 19, 23, 27-29, suggesting that this fact is not unusual.¹³⁵³

The praising of the fertility of Asher’s land is a point of connection with Gen. 49:20.¹³⁵⁴ Cassuto thinks that the saying has the character of a summary, which recalls all the preceding blessings. The content, the initial word *bārūkh*, and the name Asher (“Happy One”) are all evidence of this.¹³⁵⁵ While it is hard to disagree with Cassuto, it is equally hard to prove his conclusion. We might recall that the geographical system of tribal enumeration, tentatively proposed by Weippert for this chapter, would require that Asher be listed last.

¹³⁴³ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, 409.

¹³⁴⁴ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 209, n. 75.

¹³⁴⁵ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 511.

¹³⁴⁶ Millar Burrows, “Daroma,” *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 12 (1932):147.

¹³⁴⁷ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 64.

¹³⁴⁸ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 413.

¹³⁴⁹ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 209, n. 76.

¹³⁵⁰ Zobel, p. 44.

¹³⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

¹³⁵² Kittel, pp. 61-62.

¹³⁵³ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 65.

¹³⁵⁴ Von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, p. 208; others.

¹³⁵⁵ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 65.

Most commentators see a word play in the phrase "... blessed ... is Asher." Craigie writes that the blessing of Asher takes the form of an exposition of the name of the tribe.¹³⁵⁶ The name "Asher" means "happy, blessed." Driver sees an allusion to Gen. 30:13, where the child Asher is named. He thinks that Asher was his brothers' favorite, where Keil and Delitzsch take *r^ešūy 'eḥāyw* to mean "favored (by the Lord) among his brothers."¹³⁵⁷ Driver is closer to the truth, but the verse is speaking about Asher's position among the tribes, not his position among his siblings.

The translation "most blessed of sons" is quite certain. The only other interpretation of the *min* would be as in verse 13. Then the phrase would mean "blessed with children."¹³⁵⁸ However, the parallelism with *r^ešūy 'eḥāyw* shows that the *mem* is comparative.¹³⁵⁹

The third phrase expresses the wish that Asher's land may produce so many olives that he could wade in the oil they would produce.¹³⁶⁰ Thompson writes that both Josephus and one of the Jewish Midrashim refer to the Galilean highlands as famous for olives.¹³⁶¹ Craigie thinks that it is more likely that the phrase is a general allusion to the fertility of the land.¹³⁶² The final word is translated in the plural by some. Cross and Freedman read *raghlāyw*, "his feet," with the Samaritan text and the Targum of Pseudo-Jonathan.¹³⁶³ It may be that early suffixes did not distinguish between the singular and plural (compare Gen. 49:17, 19, Deut. 33:3c).

Deut. 33:25

"May your bolts be iron and bronze,	a	b	3
and your strength equal your days."	a'	b'	2

Most commentators think that this verse alludes to the position of Asher in the north, a position that requires military power in order to maintain itself and defend itself against invasion.

Having said that, the exegesis of the verse is primarily the exegesis of two words: *min'āle(y)khā* and *dobh'ekhā*, two words that appear in parallelism. The LXX translates the first word as "sandal," and the Vulgate translates "shoe." However, the custom of fastening shoes with metal was unknown to the Israelites.¹³⁶⁴ The word is etymologically related to the similar *man'ûl*, "bolt," both of them from the root *nā'al*, "to bolt (a door)." Keil and Delitzsch thought of a castle, a bolt, or that which is bolted.¹³⁶⁵ Most commentators translate "bolts," that is, the bolts of city gates. Such metal door bolts will provide the security that will be needed in Asher. Thompson thinks there is a word play, connecting the "sandal" of the invaders (*na'al*) and the "bolt" of the defenses (*man'ûl*).¹³⁶⁶

The other major word means "your strength." Like *min'āle(y)khā*, *dobh'ekhā* is a *hapax*, a fact that testifies to the archaic nature of the verse. Some have translated "rest," a rendering based only on a remark in the Kamus that the Arabic *daba'a* has this meaning.¹³⁶⁷ The LXX, Syriac, Targum of Onkelos, and the Arabic version of Saadia Gaon all read "strength." The witness of the Ugaritic language has confirmed that translation. C. H. Gordon was among the first to connect the Hebrew word with the Ugaritic *db'atk* in IV AB II:21-22: *qrn .db'atk. btl't 'nt.qrn db'atk*, "the horns of thy strength, O virgin, 'Anat, the horns of thy strength."¹³⁶⁸ The wish is expressed in the phrase that Asher's strength may be maintained as time wears on, instead of being diminished by old age.¹³⁶⁹

¹³⁵⁶ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 401, citing Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 511.

¹³⁵⁷ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 414; Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 511.

¹³⁵⁸ Steuernagel, p. 128.

¹³⁵⁹ Cassuto, "Deuteronomy," p. 65.

¹³⁶⁰ Steuernagel, p. 128; many others.

¹³⁶¹ *Josephus: Complete Works*, "The Wars of the Jews" II:21.2, trans. William Whiston (Grand Rapids: Kregel Publications, 1960), p. 499 and Midrash Bereshith Rabba, 20, cited in Thompson, p. 316.

¹³⁶² Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 401.

¹³⁶³ Cross and Freedman, "The Blessing," p. 209, n. 79.

¹³⁶⁴ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, pp. 512-12.

¹³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 511.

¹³⁶⁶ Thompson, p. 316.

¹³⁶⁷ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 415.

¹³⁶⁸ Cyrus H. Gordon, *Ugaritic Handbook*, vol. 1 (3 vols.), in *Analecta Orientalia*, vol. 25 (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1947), p. 40, n. 5. Cited in F. M. Cross, "Ugaritic *db'at* and Hebrew Cognates," *Vetus Testamentum* 2 (1952):163.

¹³⁶⁹ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 415.

Deut. 33:26

“There is no one like the God of Jeshurun,	a	b	c	3
who rides on the heavens to help you	d	e	f	3
and on the clouds in His majesty.	[d’]	g	e’	2

Verses 26-29 are the second part of the psalm-like framework of the chapter. Many claim that there is no connection with verses 6-25, but that a connection with verses 2-5 is clear.¹³⁷⁰ Some feel that the two sections need a connecting link, since verse 26 cannot follow verse 5 as it stands. Therefore, Seeligmann and others connect verse 21b with the prologue.¹³⁷¹ Thompson calls that link a conjecture,¹³⁷² and we will demonstrate a connection between verses 6-25 and the psalm-like framework in the chapter on the unity of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33.

Cassuto sums up the thoughts of verses 26-29. The verses deal with the idea of the divine protection against the enemy and the picture of Yahweh’s glory as king of Israel, who leads His subjects to victory and triumph in order to grant them subsequently the fruits of peace.¹³⁷³ Seeligman calls these verses “The Ode of Praise,” where the praise of God and the account of Israel’s good fortune merge.¹³⁷⁴

The three major themes that appear in verses 6-25 reappear here: the fruitfulness of the land Israel is about to possess (compare Exod. 3:8), the necessity of military strength, and the overarching blessing of God upon Israel both in respect to the land and in respect to the upcoming battles. While Labuschagne thinks that the framework already existed at the time of the compilation of the sayings, he also states that it is not impossible to imagine verses 2-5, 26-29 as “composed at the same time as the sayings ... were arranged, adapted and recomposed or even composed”¹³⁷⁵

The connection of verses 2-5 and verses 26-29 has been expressed by Thompson. In verses 2-5, Yahweh comes to help Israel and is acknowledged as king. In verses 26-29, Yahweh drives out Israel’s enemies and enables her to occupy the land.¹³⁷⁶

The first verse of this section celebrates the power of God. There is none like Him; He is the rider upon the heavens, the lord of nature, majestic and powerful.

The MT punctuates the second word *kā’ēl*, “like God,” while the LXX, Syriac, Vulgate, and the Targums of Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan all reflect a construct state, *kē’ēl*, “like the God of.” The MT suggests a translation, “There is no one like God, O Jeshurun,” while the versions suggest, “There is no one like the God of Jeshurun.” Most commentators follow the versions.

The latter reading is the better, for, as Driver states, the point is not the uniqueness of God, but the uniqueness of the God of Israel.¹³⁷⁷ Seeligmann thinks that there is no room for an absolute use of the term *’ēl* for the supreme God in a poem where the supremacy of Yahweh, the God of Israel, over a Canaanite pantheon is strongly stressed.¹³⁷⁸ His point is well taken, if the thought of supremacy over Canaanite gods is present. However, if that thought is present at all, it is only implied and not a major point of the framework. Cassuto notes that *’ēl* with the definite article is rare, but he also thinks that the vocative is suited to the context in view of the second person address in the second clause.¹³⁷⁹ “The God of Jeshurun” is a variation on the phrase, “the God of Israel.”

The connection with verses 2-5 is primarily the word “Jeshurun.” In verse 5 the statement is made, “He became king in Jeshurun.” In verse 26 the conclusion is drawn, “There is no one like the God of Jeshurun.” There is no comparison to Israel’s king. That verses 26-29 cannot be directly attached to verses 2-5 should lead commentators to accept verses 6-25 as an original part of the chapter. The need to find some connecting link should end, not with verse 21b, but with verses 6-25.

¹³⁷⁰ E.g., Steuernagel, p. 129.

¹³⁷¹ Seeligmann, pp. 84-85.

¹³⁷² Thompson, p. 317.

¹³⁷³ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 66.

¹³⁷⁴ Seeligmann, p. 86.

¹³⁷⁵ Labuschagne, “The Tribes,” p. 100.

¹³⁷⁶ Thompson, p. 317.

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¹³⁷⁸

¹³⁷⁹

The phrase *rōkhēbh šāmāim*, “who rides on the heavens,” should be connected with *šēhāqîm*, “and ... on the clouds,” as the poetic structure above has shown. There is a clear parallel in Ugaritic literature in the epithet of Baal, “Rider of the Clouds,” *rkb ‘rpt*.¹³⁸⁰ The phrase *rōkhēbh šāmāim* appears frequently in the Old Testament, for example, at Deut. 32:13, Hab. 3:8, Ps. 68:4, 33, and elsewhere. Cassuto appropriately comments that the phrase recalls the thought of verse 2.¹³⁸¹

Because the parallelism of the last two phrases is not what is expected, and because of the shorter meter in the last phrase, Cross and Freedman offer an emendation. Attach the final *resh* and *kaph* from *bh^e‘ezrekhā*, “to help you,” to a *beth* that has been lost by haplography from the beginning of the next word, and write *rōkhēbh*. Some support is found in Ps. 68:33-34, where this language is used, although not in the same way. Then read, *rōkhēbh šāmēm b^e‘ūzzō, rōkhēbh b^ega^awāthō šēhāqîm*, “who rides the heavens mightily, who rides gloriously the clouds.”¹³⁸² There is some merit to the proposal, and it does smooth out the meter and the second person suffix. However, the text also makes sense as it stands. Mayes calls *bh^e‘ezrekhā* unobjectionable and suited to the context, but he accepts the emendation.¹³⁸³ Craigie does not follow the suggestion, because both *‘ēzer* and *ga^awāh* appear again in verse 29.¹³⁸⁴

Gaster would emend *bh^e‘ezrekhā* to *b^e‘ezrō*, because of the Ugaritic *‘zr*, “strength, valor,” and an Arabic parallel.¹³⁸⁵ Steuernagel explains the word to mean “with your help,” that is, bring help for you,¹³⁸⁶ so we translate freely “to help you.” Citing GK 119i, Driver translates “as thy help.” The *beth* is the *beth essentiae* of the earlier grammarians, translated “as, in the capacity of.”¹³⁸⁷ Either explanation may result in the free translation, “to help you.” Driver thinks that *ga^awāh*, generally used in a negative sense as “pride,” here means “dignity,” not “majesty,”¹³⁸⁸ but “majesty” suits the context better.

Deut. 33:27

“The ancient God is a refuge,	a	b		3
and underneath are the everlasting arms.	c	b’		3
He will drive out the enemy before you,	d	e	f	3
and say, ‘Destroy!’	g	d’	[f’]	2

After a verse that pictures the power of God, this verse tells about the uses to which that power will be put. God will provide security for His people, and He will fight against their enemies. Though there is danger and war ahead for Israel, as they approach Canaan, yet there is safety in God’s presence.¹³⁸⁹

The opening word, *m^e‘ōnāh*, “dwelling, refuge,” is the feminine form of *mā’ōn*. There is no need to read the word as a construct, as Gordis suggests.¹³⁹⁰ “Refuge” is better than “dwelling,” in view of the military imagery of clauses c and d. The word implies protection against troubles. The suggestion of Cross and Freedman to read *m^e‘ōnōh*, “his place of refuge,” is not impossible, in view of tenth century orthography. In that case, the antecedent would be Jeshurun in verse 26.¹³⁹¹

Following the Vulgate, Cassuto reads *mimma’al*, “above,” for the sake of the parallelism to the next clause. He considers *m^e‘ōnāh* to be an interpolation.¹³⁹² Many others concur, but unwisely.

¹³⁸⁰ Fisher, 3:458.

¹³⁸¹ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 67.

¹³⁸² F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, “A Note on Deuteronomy 33:26,” *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 108 (December 1947):6-7.

¹³⁸³ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 409-10.

¹³⁸⁴ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 402.

¹³⁸⁵ Gaster, “Eulogy,” p. 60.

¹³⁸⁶ Steuernagel, p. 129.

¹³⁸⁷ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 415.

¹³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 416.

¹³⁸⁹ Craigie, *Deuteronomy*, p. 403.

¹³⁹⁰ Gordis, “Critical Notes,” p. 392.

¹³⁹¹ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 209, n. 83.

¹³⁹² Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 67.

We may safely set aside H. L. Ginsberg's emendation of the first line to *nōṭēh 'ōhel qedhem*, "who spread out the primeval tent," based in part on the supposed dittography of the initial *mem* from verse 26. Ginsberg reads verse 27ab as a second pair of participial phrases to be read with verse 26.¹³⁹³

Gordis calls Gaster's emendation to *m'anneh*, "he humbles," an overworking of Ugaritic parallels.¹³⁹⁴ This emendation requires another similar emendation in the second phrase to *ūm'hattēth*, "he crushes," in order to produce the desired parallelism.¹³⁹⁵ The emendations are motivated by Gaster's desire to build a case for a reference to Yahweh's subjugation of the Canaanite gods in verses 2-5, 26-29. Gordis notes that the meaning "to humble" is very weak for the context and that the Piel of *ḥāthath* appears only once in the Bible at Job 7:14, where it means "to frighten."¹³⁹⁶

The noun *qedhem* is often translated "eternal," but Driver comments that the sense of the noun is to denote what is ancient rather than what is eternal.¹³⁹⁷ Therefore, we translate "the ancient God" rather than "the eternal God." Keil and Delitzsch translate "the God of old."¹³⁹⁸ L. Coppes writes that the word in poetic passages describes the created state in an idyllic sense. The frequent use of the verbal root against a martial background may have significance for our exegesis.¹³⁹⁹

The emendation suggested by Gaster and others has been discussed above. Dahood has suggested reading *ūmuttāhēth*, from the root *nāhath* in the infixed t-conjugation, "to descend." He translates, "one who lowers his arms, the Eternal."¹⁴⁰⁰ Using Dahood's suggestion as a basis, the NEB translates "one who subdues," a translation that Mayes thinks continues the thought in the context quite well.¹⁴⁰¹ Gordis vocalizes *mithhath*, from the root *mathāh*, "to stretch, extend," translating, "and the spreading of the everlasting arms."¹⁴⁰² Seeligmann wrote about this derivation, "... I cannot accept it because I do not see that the context in which is depicted a Helper in the wars of the conquest would be compatible with the picture of a God building his residence."¹⁴⁰³ Cross and Freedman call Gordis' rendition "syntactically inadmissible" and "no improvement on the Masoretic text." They say of Gaster's reconstruction that it is "ingenious, but diverges too far from Israelite religious concepts to permit ready acceptance." They add a third singular suffix and read, "under him," in parallelism with their earlier reading, "his refuge."¹⁴⁰⁴ Driver explains the clause as an expression of God's unfailing support. His almighty arms are always beneath, sustaining them in prosperity and in need.¹⁴⁰⁵

The final word of the line is elsewhere known as a divine name with the meaning, "the Eternal One." While Cross and Freedman think that a divine name is definitely expected after *z'rō'ōth*, "arms," because of the parallelism with the first clause,¹⁴⁰⁶ this is by no means assured. The text makes sense with a translation "everlasting arms."

The final line introduces two *waw* consecutives, which Driver thinks "show that when these words were written the Israelites must have been long settled in Canaan."¹⁴⁰⁷ However, the lack of a preceding verb in the perfect tense suggests that we translate both *wayghāreš* and *wayyō'mer* as futures. Driver notes that the verb *gāraš* is nowhere else used in Deuteronomy,¹⁴⁰⁸ a fact that suggests that the sentence looks to the future conquest of the land. The verb is used in Exod. 23:28-31, 33:2, and 34:11 of that future conquest, and in Josh. 24:12, 18 and Judg. 2:3, 6:9 of the past conquest. Mayes thinks the verb is a technical term for Yahweh's activity in the conquest.¹⁴⁰⁹ The verb

¹³⁹³ H. L. Ginsberg, "On Bulletin 108 (Dec. 1947):6-7," *Bulletin of the American Schools of Oriental Research* 110 (April 1948):26.

¹³⁹⁴ R. Gordis, "The Text and Meaning of Deut. 33:27," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 67 (1948):70-71.

¹³⁹⁵ Gaster, "Eulogy," p. 60.

¹³⁹⁶ Gordis, "The Text," pp. 70-71.

¹³⁹⁷ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 416.

¹³⁹⁸ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 512.

¹³⁹⁹ Leonard J. Coppes, "∗𐤒𐤕 (qādam) meet, confront, go before (Piel and Hiphil only). Denominative verb," in *TWOT*, 2:785.

¹⁴⁰⁰ M. Dahood, *Proverbs and Northwest Semitic Philology* (Rome: Pontifical Biblical Institute, 1963), pp. 45-46, cited in Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 410.

¹⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰² Gordis, "Critical Notes," p. 392.

¹⁴⁰³ Seeligmann, p. 87, n. 2.

¹⁴⁰⁴ Cross and Freedman, "The Blessing," p. 209, n. 84.

¹⁴⁰⁵ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 416.

¹⁴⁰⁶ Cross and Freedman, "The Blessing," p. 209, n. 85.

¹⁴⁰⁷ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 416.

¹⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰⁹ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 410.

gāraš occurs in parallelism with *šākhēn* in Ugaritic literature, suggesting a close connection between verses 27 and 28.¹⁴¹⁰

The verb *wayyō'mer*, “and he will say,” has been emended to “the Amorite” by some, hardly a correct reading.¹⁴¹¹ Seeligmann thinks that the reading *'amîrîm*, “the mighty ones,” is a possible reading, in parallelism with *'ōyēbh*, “enemy.” However, his suggestion is based on the hypothetical existence of a Hebrew root, *'amar*, “to be high.”¹⁴¹² Gaster’s emendation is no better, reading *wayyamrēhû*, “and expelled him, thrust him forth,” based on an assumed Ugaritic root *mry*, “to drive.” The emendation would be a *hapax*.¹⁴¹³

The final word, a Hiphil imperative of *šāmadh*, “to annihilate, destroy,” is read as an infinite by the manuscripts of the Cairo geniza and some manuscripts of the Samaritan Pentateuch. The Syriac reads “I will destroy,” *'ašmîdh*. This has led several commentators to read the Hiphil infinitive, translating, “and He commanded destruction.”¹⁴¹⁴ Either pointing, infinitive or imperative, makes ample sense in the context. The infinitive is to be preferred because of the *yod* in the consonantal text. Understand the word “enemy” as object of the infinitive, as indicated in the poetic structure at the beginning of the verse by [f']. Frequently in this chapter, a two-beat phrase after several three-beat phrases is a clue that an element from one of the previous phrases is to be understood as the third beat (for example, verse 26).

Deut. 33:28

“So Israel will dwell securely,	a	b	3
alone Jacob will dwell,	b'	a'	3
in a land of grain and wine,”	c	d	3
yea, the heavens will drip dew.	c'	d'	3

The powerful God of Jeshurun (verse 26), who protects and defends His people (verse 27), provides a secure dwelling place for Israel as a result of His action on Israel’s behalf.

The first clause is a conscious echo of a similar phrase from verse 12, where it was stated that “the Beloved of the Lord (that is, Benjamin) will dwell securely,” *yîškōn lābheṭaḥ*. The two words, *yîškōn lābheṭaḥ*, occur here in almost exactly the same form, providing another link between the blessings and the framework. In this verse the thought of dwelling securely is expanded from the tribe of Benjamin to the entire nation. The only difference here is the lack of the preposition *l'*, but the noun functions in precisely the same way nevertheless, as an adverbial accusative. The *lamed* is not lost by haplography.

The next word, *bādhādh*, “alone,” functions just like *beṭaḥ*, “securely,” as an adverbial accusative.¹⁴¹⁵ Israel will dwell “alone,” because the Canaanite inhabitants will have been expelled.

The puzzling *'ēn* is translated by some as the construct of “spring.” Driver and Steuernagel explain the “fountain of Jacob” as the constant succession of descendants, described figuratively as a stream that eternally pours forth from its source (compare Ps. 68:26, Isa. 48:1).¹⁴¹⁶ The versions offer no help. Karl Budde was the first to recognize the verbal root *'ûn*, “to dwell,” although he explained the word as a Hiphil, *he'in*, “to cause to dwell.”¹⁴¹⁷ Cassuto proposed reading *'ān*, “he dwelt.” Many commentators adopt this reading, as do we because of the parallelism.

The preposition *'el* is difficult. Keil and Delitzsch try to explain it as an idiomatic expression with *yîškōn*, meaning “to dwell in a land.” The idea was supposedly that of the people spreading out over the land.¹⁴¹⁸ Some would translate the preposition in the sense of “in” or “on.” The Samaritan Pentateuch reads the preposition as *'al*, and many modern commentators agree.¹⁴¹⁹ It seems preferable. The reading *'el* may be the result of attraction to the *aleph* in *'aph*.

¹⁴¹⁰ Fisher, 3:158.

¹⁴¹¹ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 210, n. 86.

¹⁴¹² Seeligmann, p. 77.

¹⁴¹³ Gaster, “Eulogy,” p. 61.

¹⁴¹⁴ E.g., Gordis, “The Text,” p. 72.

¹⁴¹⁵ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 416.

¹⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*; Steuernagel, p. 129.

¹⁴¹⁷ Karl F. R. Budde, *Der Segen Mose's* (Tübingen: J. C. B. Mohr, 1922), cited in Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 67.

¹⁴¹⁸ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 513.

¹⁴¹⁹ E.g., Kittel, p. 44.

Mayes writes that the references to grain, wine, and dew are traditional in blessings and descriptions of prosperity (see Gen. 27:28, Deut. 7:13).¹⁴²⁰ They are the three chief products of the soil of Palestine.¹⁴²¹ Thompson thinks that there may be here a stereotyped formula more ancient than Israel itself.¹⁴²² In seasons with little rain, the dew was very important, so it is frequently alluded to in the Old Testament as a source of fertility.¹⁴²³

The parallelism of “earth” and “heaven” and the proximity of “drip” and “dew,” as well as “dew” and “earth,” are attested in Ugaritic¹⁴²⁴ as well as elsewhere in the Old Testament. On the particle *'aph*, a stronger conjunction than *waw*, see remarks on verses 3 and 20.

Deut. 33:29

Blessed are you, O Israel! Who is like you,	a	b	c	3
a people saved by the Lord,	b'	a' (bv)		3
your shield and helper	e	f		2
and your glorious sword.	e'	f'		2
Your enemies will come cringing to you,	g	h	i	3
and you will tread upon their backs.”	i'	h'	g'	3

For the concluding verse of the chapter, Moses addresses the people directly for emphasis. You are blessed, Israel, because Yahweh subdues your foes. The verse summarizes the thoughts of the three preceding verses: the strength of Yahweh, the protection of Yahweh, and the security of the people under Yahweh's care.

In response to the question “who is like you?,” the expected answer is “none!” The next phrase goes on to emphasize the fact that this is not a matter of Israel's merit. The Niphal participle, “saved,” merges the idea of being delivered from danger and endowed with salvation (compare Zech. 9:9, Ps. 33:16, Isa. 45:17).¹⁴²⁵

The “shield” is a figurative designation of Yahweh as one who gave Israel protection in battle (compare Gen. 15:1, Exod. 15:2). The suggestion of Cross and Freedman to read the third singular suffix on *māghēn* and *herebh*, “shield” and “sword,” requires no change in the consonantal text and would provide a smoother translation,¹⁴²⁶ but the nouns may be read as appositives.

The *wa'asher* is difficult, perhaps an archaism. Many would omit it as a gloss¹⁴²⁷ or the result of vertical dittography.¹⁴²⁸ Cross and Freedman favor its omission for metrical reasons.¹⁴²⁹ Seeligmann and Mayes suggest emending to *šaddai* in order to provide a parallel to *bayhōwāh*.¹⁴³⁰ Gaster thinks the word a modernization of *wdhw*, an abbreviation for *dyhwh*, “whose is Yahweh.”¹⁴³¹ “Your glorious sword” means the sword that wins glory for you,¹⁴³² the sword of God which had fought for Israel.¹⁴³³

“Your enemies will come cringing to you, and you will tread upon their backs.” Fisher calls this a complete chiasmic parallelism, supported by the parallelism of *kht* and *drkt*, “throne” and “dominion,” in Ugaritic.¹⁴³⁴ The initial verb expresses the cringing fear and feigned obedience of the conquered.¹⁴³⁵ It is parallel to *thidhrōkh*, “you will tread.” The two words *lākh* and *w^e'attāh* are clear parallels. If the second element in each phrase is parallel, we have a complete chiasmic parallelism, or what might be called an inverted parallelism. This poetic structure facilitates the interpretation of *bāmōthēmō*, “their backs.”

¹⁴²⁰ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 410.

¹⁴²¹ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 417.

¹⁴²² Thompson, p. 318.

¹⁴²³ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 417.

¹⁴²⁴ Fisher, 2:126-27; 3:71, 131.

¹⁴²⁵ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 513.

¹⁴²⁶ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 210, n. 91.

¹⁴²⁷ Steuernagel, p. 129.

¹⁴²⁸ Cassuto, “Deuteronomy,” p. 68.

¹⁴²⁹ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 210, n. 91.

¹⁴³⁰ Seeligmann, p. 77; Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 411.

¹⁴³¹ Gaster, “Eulogy,” p. 62.

¹⁴³² Steuernagel, p. 129.

¹⁴³³ Keil and Delitzsch, part 3, p. 513.

¹⁴³⁴ Fisher, 2:17.

¹⁴³⁵ Cross and Freedman, “The Blessing,” p. 210, n. 92.

Some commentators translate *bāmôthêmô*, “upon their high places,” but most discern the parallelism and translate accordingly. The Targums of Onkelos and Pseudo-Jonathan, the Vulgate, and the Septuagint all read “neck,” or “back of the neck.” The picture is that of the conqueror placing his foot upon the back of the neck of a conquered enemy. Mayes thinks that the phrase could still be translated “tread upon the high places,” in order to indicate Israel’s ownership of the land.¹⁴³⁶

¹⁴³⁶ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, p. 411.

CHAPTER IV
DATE

The Priority of Genesis 49

An important part of the dating of the two chapters is to establish the order in which they were written. In this section, we will establish the priority of Genesis 49 in two ways: by showing that the contents of the two chapters indicate the greater age of Genesis 49 and by showing that Deuteronomy 33 is in part dependent upon Genesis 49.

E. A. Speiser writes that the titular author of each chapter is an argument in favor of the priority of Genesis 49.¹⁴³⁷ He does not accept Jacob and Moses as the authors, but he correctly recognizes that the presence of their names indicates at the very least the understanding of an editor at some point in history, probably very close to the actual writing of the chapters. While his view that an editor supplied the names need not be accepted, his point is still well-taken.

We have argued that Moses consciously patterns Deuteronomy 33 after Genesis 49 with certain adjustments, in much the same way that Genesis 49 contains reminiscences of Gen. 9:25-27 and Gen. 27:27-29. Genesis 49:9 shows clear contact with the precise wording of Gen. 27:29. Jacob offers a blessing on his deathbed in Genesis 49, much like Isaac did in Genesis 27. So also Moses offers a blessing just before his death, marking the connection with Genesis 49 by borrowing the precise wording of part of one verse, in the same way that Jacob borrowed a phrase from Isaac. L. Diestel actually thought that Genesis 49 was the outline used for writing Deuteronomy 33,¹⁴³⁸ but he undoubtedly overestimated the relationship of the two chapters.

Gunkel felt that the presence of rebukes in Genesis 49 and the lack of the same in Deuteronomy 33 speaks for the greater age of the former. He thought that a later age no longer tolerated blame and curse, because of the strong national sentiment that existed at that time.¹⁴³⁹ While the point may be somewhat overstated, we may accept that portion of Gunkel's argument which speaks in favor of a more unified nation in Deuteronomy 33 than in Genesis 49, and therefore the priority of Genesis 49.

References to the entire nation appear in Deut. 33:2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 21, 26, 28, and 29, while references to the twelve tribes or twelve brothers appear only in verses 5, 9, 16, and 24 (verse 16 is a quotation from Genesis 49). Reference to the entire nation appears only in Gen. 49:7, while references to the twelve tribes or twelve brothers appear in verses 1, 2, 3, 8 (twice), 16, 26, and 28. This evidence speaks in favor of the greater national unity at the time of Deuteronomy 33, something that most likely occurred after Genesis 49.

The introduction to each chapter in this thesis contains information about the *Sitz im Leben* and purpose. There we argued in favor of a *Sitz im Leben* for Deuteronomy 33 at the time just prior to the entrance into the land of Canaan. The military imagery, the emphasis on the fertility of the land, and the theme of God's guidance and blessing merge to direct us to that conclusion. However, in Genesis 49, there was a greater emphasis upon descendants (see verses 10, "between his feet" and Messiah; 21; 25), suggesting that the promise of many descendants had not yet been fully realized. There is none of this in Deuteronomy 33. As a matter of fact, the Joseph blessing changes the references to "breast and womb" (Gen. 49:25) into references to "sun and moon" (Deut. 33:14). This change signals a concern for the fruitfulness of the land, whereas the number of descendants is no longer in doubt. This would connect Genesis 49 more closely to the promises of God to the patriarchs that they would have many descendants.

This is not to say that Genesis 49 was unconcerned about the Promised Land. That was also a part of the promise. Concerns about the land are expressed in Gen. 49:11, 13, 15, 20, 25, and 26. The related concern of military prowess, a prowess enabling a tribe to control its own land, appears in Gen. 49:8-10, 16-17, 19, 23-24, and 27. However, in contrast, Deuteronomy 33 contains a reference to the prosperity of the land or the military might necessary to sustain the land or the security which that military might provides in every verse after the introduction, except (understandably) for verses 8-10. Verses 6-29, minus 8-10, refer to one or the other theme and verse 28 refers to both. The prosperity of the land is mentioned in verses 13-16, 18-19, 23, 24, and 28. The military strength of the

¹⁴³⁷ E. A. Speiser, *Genesis*, in *The Anchor Bible*, vol. 1 (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1964), p. 371.

¹⁴³⁸ L. Diestel, *Der Segen Jakobs in Genesis 49* (Braunschweig: C.A. Schwetschke, 1853), p. 127. Cited in Hans-Joachim Kittel, "Die Stammessprüche Israels, Genesis 49 und Deuteronomium 33, traditionsgeschichtlich" (Berlin: Diss. theol. Kirchl. Hochschule Berlin, 1959), p. 4.

¹⁴³⁹ Hermann Gunkel, *Genesis*, 5th ed., in *Handkommentar zum Alten Testament*, 25 vols. (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1922), p. 476.

tribe or nation appears in verses 6, 7, 11, 12, 17, 18 (?), 20-21, 22, 25, and 26-29. There is a greater emphasis upon those themes in Deuteronomy 33, because Israel was on the threshold of achieving that land. Furthermore, Israel had already fought several battles that had resulted in the occupation of the land east of Jordan. The lesser emphasis in Genesis 49 may be attributed to the distance in time from the fulfillment of the promise and perhaps even the distance in space from the Promised Land. Jacob and family were in Egypt.

Another argument for the priority of Genesis 49 is the greater number of animal comparisons and word plays in that chapter. Many have argued that both features are signs of antiquity.¹⁴⁴⁰ Therefore, the greater the number of animal comparisons and word plays, the greater the age of the chapter. Genesis 49 contains seven word plays that are generally accepted as such, while Deuteronomy 33 contains only one. Genesis 49 contains six animal comparisons (if verse 22 refers to a young calf), while Deuteronomy 33 has only three.

More evidence arises from the individual sayings, beginning with the saying on Reuben in Genesis 49. Speiser writes that the memory of Reuben's offense is still fresh in Gen. 49:3-4.¹⁴⁴¹ He could have added the same about Simeon and Levi. The argument may be extended further. It will be argued later that the only certain historical references in Genesis 49 are in verses 3-4, 5-7, and 8. There the sins of Reuben (Gen. 35:22) and Simeon and Levi (Genesis 34) are in mind, as well as the blessing of Isaac (Gen. 27:29). The only certain historical references in Deuteronomy 33 are the testings of Moses and the Levites (Exod. 17:1-7, Exod. 32:25-29, and Num. 20:1-13) alluded to in verses 8-9, and the leadership of Gad that is reflected in Num. 32:2, 6, 25-27, alluded to in verse 21. The freshness of the memory of these incidents suggests that the historical events may be those which have occurred within the lifetime of the author. If this is the case, then Genesis 49 is clearly older. Furthermore, then Jacob and Moses are the authors. If this is not the case, then it may still be noted that the historical events alluded to in Genesis 49 antedate by centuries those alluded to in Deuteronomy 33.

Eissfeldt argues for the priority of Genesis 49, because Gen. 49:5-7 refers to the secular tribe of Levi, while Deut. 33:8-11 refers to the priestly tribe of Levi.¹⁴⁴² This one example can be applied to the chapters as a whole. The general tone of Genesis 49 is somewhat secular, while the general tone of Deuteronomy 33 is strongly religious. The name of God appears much more frequently in Deuteronomy 33, and some of the verses and phrases are actually prayers to Yahweh. Genesis 49 contains no prayers. Labuschagne notes that an element not found in Genesis 49, but present in Deuteronomy 33, is the acknowledgment of God's guidance.¹⁴⁴³ The possible liturgical use of Deuteronomy 33, noted in the exegesis of verses 2-5, also highlights the more religious tone of the chapter. The phrase "Him who dwelt in the bush" in Deut. 33:16 is an advance upon the names of God in Gen. 49:25-26, since the God of the Mosaic covenant is designated.¹⁴⁴⁴ The praise of Levi in Deuteronomy 33, compared to the censure in Genesis 49, may also argue for the priority of Genesis 49, since it is another piece of the more religious tone of Deuteronomy 33. After the consecration of the Levites by Moses and the unsuccessful challenges in the wilderness, additional challenges or rebukes would be unlikely.

The Joseph saying is the only place where the exact wording from Genesis 49 appears in Deuteronomy 33. In addition to that phrase, there are several other echoes between Gen. 49:25-26 and Deut. 33:13-16, most of which have been discussed in the exegesis.

We begin with the phrase, "May they rest on the head of Joseph, and on the brow of the one separate from his brothers." The phrase is identical in Gen. 49:26 and Deut. 33:16, except for the first word, *tihye(y)n* in Genesis and *tābhō'thāh* in Deuteronomy. This similarity suggests that one chapter borrowed from the other. The weight of the evidence adduced in this section of the chapter argues that Moses borrowed from Jacob. The line has the nature of a concluding summary statement, which is exactly what it is in Genesis 49. In Deuteronomy 33, the line concludes the portion of the blessing which has to do with the fertility of the land. The presence of verse 17 suggests that the author of that chapter consciously added to the concluding statement of Gen. 49:26, perhaps in order to provide the emphasis upon military might that he had seen in Gen. 49:23-24. He preferred to divide the subject matter more distinctly than to mesh the two subjects together, a fact which is a testimony to a clearer literary mind.

The change from *birkhōth* in Genesis 49 to *meghedh* in Deuteronomy 33 has been explained in the exegesis. The word *meghedh* has to do only with the fruits of the earth, and that meaning suits the chapter.

¹⁴⁴⁰ For example, Claus Westermann, *Genesis* (3 parts), in *Biblischer Kommentar: Altes Testament*, 21 vols. to date (Neukirchen-Vluyn: Neukirchener Verlag, 1982), vol. 1, part 3, p. 2766.

¹⁴⁴¹ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 371.

¹⁴⁴² Otto Eissfeldt, *The Old Testament: An Introduction*, trans. P.R. Ackroyd (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), p. 229.

¹⁴⁴³ C.J. Labuschagne, "The Tribes in the Blessing of Moses," *Oudtestamentische Studien* 19 (1974):98.

¹⁴⁴⁴ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, 3d ed., in *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1902), p. 406.

“Blessings” in Genesis 49 refer both to the fertility of the land and to the fertility of the people. The word *birkhōth* is a broader term and is therefore more appropriate at Genesis 49. Except for the context, it would not be clear which term, on its own merits, would have replaced the other.

The word *tihye(y)n* is apparently to be vocalized *tihye(y)na*, reflecting a vowel that was not indicated by the orthography. This form would indicate an older orthography than that found at Deut. 33:16.

The “blessings of breast and womb” in Gen. 49:25 are replaced in Deut. 33:14 by “the best yield of the sun and the finest produce of the moon.” This has been noted above and explained by the different *Sitze im Leben* of the two chapters. The promise of descendants has been largely fulfilled and needs no repetition in Deuteronomy 33. Deuteronomy 33 shows the people of Israel on the brink of inheriting the land “flowing with milk and honey.”

Deuteronomy 33:16ab adds two phrases that are not reflected anywhere in the Joseph blessing in Genesis. Critics generally consider the shorter statement to be older, and in this case we agree. The words in Deut. 33:16ab seem to have the flavor of a concluding statement, “the best gifts of the earth and its fullness and the favor of Him who dwelt in the bush.”

P. C. Craigie thinks that the mention of Ephraim and Manasseh in Deuteronomy 33 is an advance on Genesis 49:

The passage in Dt. 33 begins by referring to Joseph but ends with a reference to both Ephraim and Manasseh. The implication of this is that the Joseph tribe was at a stage in its growth where the tribal name (Joseph) was still applicable, and yet the growth in numbers was such that the Ephraim-Manasseh factions were clearly evident. . . . As might be expected, Gen. 49 refers only to Joseph, whereas Ephraim and Manasseh (i.e. Machir) only are referred to in Judg. 5, showing the two extremes of the growth process.¹⁴⁴⁵

Zobel has argued that Deut. 33:13-16 is older than Gen. 49:25-26.¹⁴⁴⁶ Much of his argumentation has been rejected in the exegesis, but some of that needs to be repeated here. Zobel argues that the unevenness of Genesis 49 and the clear structure and unified meter of Deuteronomy 33 show that Deuteronomy 33 is older. The blessing of Yahweh in Deuteronomy 33 is supposedly older than the paternal blessing in Genesis 49.¹⁴⁴⁷ However, it is likely that Moses had much more literary training in the court of pharaoh and was therefore able to produce a clearer, more unified blessing in Deuteronomy 33. The uneven nature of Genesis 49 reflects its greater age and the lesser interest of Jacob in literary pursuits. The paternal blessing reflects the patriarchal age, while the blessing of Yahweh reflects the age of the Sinai covenant.

Some have suggested that the blessing on Zebulun and Issachar in Deut. 33:18-19 is based on the author’s knowledge of Gen. 49:13-15. The writer understood Zebulun’s dwelling on the coast (Gen. 49:13) as an allusion to his commercial maritime success.¹⁴⁴⁸ Some think that the mention of the “tents” of Issachar refers to his inland trade or his sedentary pursuits (see exegesis).¹⁴⁴⁹ The suggestion is precarious, and, in many cases, based on the presuppositions of critical dogma, but the possibility exists.

In the exegesis of Deut. 33:22, we favored the twofold borrowing of the author from Genesis 49. The phrase *gûr ’aryēh*, “lion’s cub,” appears in Gen. 49:9, and the mention of a snake may reflect the author’s awareness of the saying about Dan in Gen. 49:16-17. The two concepts were combined in the blessing of Dan in Deut. 33:22. Furthermore, the change from a “snake” in Gen. 49:17 to a “lion’s cub” in Deut. 33:22 suggests the growth of the tribe into a more powerful tribe with much greater potential.

We also note that this animal comparison is the only one of the three in the chapter that continues the Genesis formula for an animal comparison: individual or tribe compared, primary word of comparison, and modifying word (see Chapter V). The different style of animal comparison in verses 17 and 20 indicates a conscious and later change from the usual formula.

¹⁴⁴⁵ P. C. Craigie, “The Conquest and Early Hebrew Poetry,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 20 (1969):87 and 87, n. 46.

¹⁴⁴⁶ Zobel, Hans-Jürgen. *Stammesspruch und Geschichte: Die Angaben der Stammessprüche von Gen 49, Dtn 33 und Jdc 5 über die politischen und kultischen Zustände im damaligen “Israel,”* in *Beihefte zur Zeitschrift für die alttestamentliche Wissenschaft*, no. 95 (Berlin: A. Töpelmann, 1965), p. 37.

¹⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁴⁸ E.g., Kittel, p. 58.

¹⁴⁴⁹ A. D.H. Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, in *New Century Bible* (Greenwood, SC: Attic Press, 1979), p. 407; and others.

The similarity of Gen. 49:20 and Deut. 33:24, both passages about Asher, has been noted by many.¹⁴⁵⁰ If length is a consideration, the verse in Genesis is shorter, and therefore, older. While this is generally true for the chapters as a whole, there are three instances where the Deuteronomy passage is shorter (Reuben, Judah, and Dan). The evidence for the priority of Genesis 49 is strong.

Archaisms

The archaisms that are found in Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 are here divided into two categories: those that are attested in Ugaritic literature and those that are known to be archaic from our knowledge of Hebrew. There is, of course, some overlapping of the two categories.

William F. Albright has written that Hebrew poetry literally swarms with close parallels to Canaanite sources. This is partly because of the slight dialectic differences between Hebrew and Ugaritic.¹⁴⁵¹ This is also due to the fact that the Hebrews conquered the Canaanites and therefore lived in the same area, often with Canaanites as near neighbors. F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman comment,

The same fundamental principles governed Ugaritic and early Hebrew prosody, the reasons being that the early Hebrew poets accepted the poetic canons of their more cultured neighbors. They adopted, with some modifications, the metrical patterns, characteristic imagery, and many motifs from their Canaanite models. They borrowed striking expressions, words and phrases, complete strophes and even entire poems, and adapted them, sometimes with very little change, for Israel's use.¹⁴⁵²

B. Vawter cautions against an overreaction. The sameness of language and the tendency to think in similar patterns does not necessarily reflect a literary dependence. He thinks that such influence on the Pentateuch generally is slight. Most deliberate borrowing from Canaanite material occurred late in Israel's literary history, he writes, but those responsible for Genesis 49 were dependent on a young literary tradition that leaned heavily on Canaanite models. "Coincidences that transcend the purely grammatical can, in part, be attributed to this fact."¹⁴⁵³

The writers of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 need not have borrowed the terminology of Ugaritic literature, in order for us to gain the clear impression of the antiquity of these chapters. A great number of similarities is all that is necessary. Any direct borrowings simply confirm our conclusions.

Coppens also feels that there are many parallels to Ugaritic literature in Genesis 49. He states that better than fifty percent of the words in Genesis 49 also appear in Ugaritic. He thinks that any names of Canaanite deities have been demythologized, but they have been used.¹⁴⁵⁴ While he feels that most of the contacts with Ugaritic literature occur in post-exilic books (books that many would date much earlier than he: Job, Esther, Song of Solomon, Proverbs), there is also contact with Ugaritic literature in pre-exilic books.¹⁴⁵⁵

Walter C. Kaiser tells us that there are certain grammatical features that Hebrew poetry generally avoids. The definite article, the sign of the accusative case, the conjunction *waw*, the relative pronoun *'ašer*, and consecutive or conversive forms of the verb.¹⁴⁵⁶ Whether their presence in Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 should be eliminated, or whether they are signs of archaisms, is not easy to tell. The word "generally" alerts us to the fact that these features are not always absent. For example, we mentioned an appearance of the article in Gen. 49:21 which Dahood considers to be genuine and early, since the article functions as a relative pronoun. Gen. 49:17 contains another instance of the same. GK 117b speaks of rare occurrences of the sign of the direct object in poetic style. These have as their purpose to designate an object that is not so obviously the object. GK 117b cites Gen. 49:15, where the appearance of the sign of the direct object is a possible archaism.

¹⁴⁵⁰ Gerhard von Rad, *Deuteronomy*, trans. Dorothea Barton, in *The Old Testament Library*, vol. 8 (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1966), p. 208; and many others.

¹⁴⁵¹ William F. Albright, "The Old Testament and Canaanite Language," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 7 (January 1945):28.

¹⁴⁵² F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, *Studies in Ancient Yahwistic Poetry*, in Society of Biblical Literature Dissertation Series, vol. 21 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1950), p. 8.

¹⁴⁵³ B. Vawter, "The Canaanite Background of Gen. 49," *Catholic Biblical Quarterly* 17 (1955):2.

¹⁴⁵⁴ J. Coppens, "La bénédiction de Jacob," *Vetus Testamentum Supplements* 6 (1956):104.

¹⁴⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 107-08.

¹⁴⁵⁶ Walter C. Kaiser, Jr., *Toward an Exegetical Theology* (Grand Rapids: Baker Book House, 1981), p. 213.

Craigie lists certain archaisms that can be found in Hebrew poetry. The energetic *nun* (especially in imperfect forms¹⁴⁵⁷), the suffix *-mô*, the old form of the third singular suffix with *he*, the enclitic *mem*, old case endings (accusative and genitive), and the relative pronoun *z* (Gen. 49:10 *šîlôh?*) are all archaic features.¹⁴⁵⁸

Albright feels that some case endings survived for the sake of meter.¹⁴⁵⁹ The *matres lectionis* were not written in the older poems, either in medial or final position, so the absence of them is a sign of great age.¹⁴⁶⁰ Various words are common in ancient Israelite poetry and in Ugaritic poetry, but they tend to fall out of use, except as conscious archaisms.¹⁴⁶¹ These words are marked by an asterisk (*) in the chart of archaisms. Some other words are frequent in early Hebrew poetry, but not in Ugaritic literature.¹⁴⁶² These words are marked by a double asterisk (**) in the chart of archaisms.

The terminations *-ēmô*, *-āmô*, and *-mô* appear in later poetry, but GK 911 comments that “there can be no doubt that these are revivals of really old forms.” There is evidence of conscious and artificial use, when there is an evidently intentional accumulation of them. The sparing use in Deut. 33:2 and 29 argues for their genuineness and their antiquity.

Cross and Freedman write that the syntax of the verb in Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 is probably closer to Ugaritic poetry than Hebrew prose or late poetry. The *yqtl* form is vari-temporal in usage, expressing past time as well as future time. They claim that *yqtl* often appears with a past meaning in consecutive sequence with *qtl* forms, but without the *waw*.¹⁴⁶³ That conclusion will be challenged later, particularly in regard to Genesis 49. Here it will suffice to remind ourselves, as Kaiser noted above, that consecutive or conversive forms of the verb are generally absent in Hebrew poetry.

The enclitic *mem* is clearly an archaism. It appears in Ugaritic as conjunctive, asyndetic (that is, with no meaning in itself), or for the purpose of strengthening the meaning. However, some have contended that the enclitic *mem* has no translatable force at all, or that it was used only for emphasis or stylistic variation. Hummel notes that it was often added to prepositions in Hebrew poetry, perhaps as a ballast variant or for emphasis.¹⁴⁶⁴

The infixed-t form of the verb is another archaic form. It is probably present in Deut. 33:3 at *himtakkû*.¹⁴⁶⁵ Caution must be expressed regarding orthographical archaisms. Cross and Freedman offer that caution:

The present Massoretic text of the early Yahwistic poems is the final stage in a history of scribal transmission that covers 2000 years. During this period many changes occurred in the spelling practices of Israel. At regular intervals the biblical texts were revised in accordance with the then-current orthographic principles. In spite of the most persistent efforts of scribes and grammarians, the orthography of the Old Testament was never completely standardized; and clear evidence of each of the earlier stages in the development of Hebrew spelling has been preserved in the received text. Thus the Hebrew Bible which tradition has delivered to us is in reality a palimpsest: underlying the visible text, the various spelling customs of older ages have been recorded.¹⁴⁶⁶

They explain further, In difficult and corrupt passages, the tendency would be for the scribe simply to copy the text as it stood. If he did not understand the meaning of the passage, he would be unable to revise the orthography in accordance with the practice current in his own day. The great bulk of archaic spellings inevitably crop up in such passages.¹⁴⁶⁷

While orthographical archaisms can fix a *terminus ad quem* for the writing down of the material, they are of less value in dating the *terminus a quo*. Cross and Freeman think that orthographical archaisms are of practically no value in dating easily understood passages. They further state that subjective considerations come into play,

¹⁴⁵⁷ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 27.

¹⁴⁵⁸ Craigie, “The Conquest,” pp. 80-82.

¹⁴⁵⁹ William F. Albright, “The Oracles of Balaam,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 63 (1944):232.

¹⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

¹⁴⁶¹ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 29.

¹⁴⁶² *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹⁴⁶⁴ Horace D. Hummel, “Enclitic *Mem* in Early Northwest Semitic, Especially Hebrew,” *Journal of Biblical Literature* 76 (1957):89-90.

¹⁴⁶⁵ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 27.

¹⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

¹⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 30, n. 78.

where orthographic analysis may be applied. They feel that a policy of caution must be followed in using orthographic analysis. Instances must be sufficiently concentrated in order to outweigh the possibility of error, coincidence, and artificial reconstruction as an explanation of the present text.¹⁴⁶⁸ The sheer weight of orthographic and linguistic archaisms in Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 provides that concentration.

A brief glance at Tables 1 and 2¹⁴⁶⁹ shows the overwhelming evidence for the antiquity of both chapters. Likewise, it should not escape the reader that the list of archaisms in Genesis 49 is longer than that in Deuteronomy 33, even though the chapter is shorter. Gen. 49:2-27 has 251 words, while Deut. 33:2-29 has 304 words, excluding superscriptions, twenty-one percent longer than Gen. 49:2-27. This suggests that the former chapter is older.

Certain verses are full of archaisms, such as Gen. 49:9, 11, Deut. 33:2, 3, 12, 13. It may only be that our lack of knowledge about ancient Hebrew, early orthographic practices, and the Ugaritic language prevents us from discerning other archaic features in other verses. Almost no verse is lacking one or more archaisms, and some of those verses are clearly editorial (for example, Gen. 49:18 and Deut. 33:1). Others have no discernible archaism because of their brevity (for example, Deut. 33:18). The relatively even distribution of archaisms speaks for the unity and the antiquity of each chapter.

Many more words could be listed that have parallels in the Ugaritic language. However, we have confined our list or archaisms to phrases that are known in Ugaritic, to words that are clearly attested in many circles as archaisms, and to certain *hapax legomena*. A single word is not listed simply because it has a cognate in Ugaritic. Some archaisms have been listed which the author rejects, but they have some merit and are therefore possible. Much depends, in those instances, on the exegesis of the text. They are noted in the table by a question mark.

Cross and Freedman have noted some other archaic features that are not easily reproduced in a table. They claim that the emphasis upon blessings of fertility, the peculiar terminology, the tendency to personify natural forces, and the repetitive style are all examples of Canaanite imagery that is borrowed in Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33.¹⁴⁷⁰ Precisely where these criteria are to be applied in the text is somewhat subjective. It has yet to be demonstrated the extent to which the last testaments of Jacob and Moses make use of Canaanite fertility language. If it is utilized, it is in a demythologized sense.

Geographical References and Historical Allusions

If both Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 are from the time of the monarchy, or at least from the time after the conquest and settlement, then we ought to find quite a number of references to historical events and geographical locations. The strong emphasis upon the fertility of the land should produce many geographical references, and the many allusions to events in the history of the tribes ought to be identifiable. Indeed, critical scholars have unearthed a large number of such references and allusions, but a closer look at the chapters shows otherwise.

First, we look at the supposed historical allusions in Genesis 49. The most obvious reference is in verses 3-4 to Gen. 35:22. There we learn that Reuben slept with the concubine Bilhah, during the absence of his father. Critics take verses 3-4 as a reference to some unknown tribal incident, as our exegesis has indicated, but there is no agreement on what that incident was. As a matter of fact, critics think that we will never be able to know what historical incident is in mind. Earlier we quoted von Rad, who wrote, "If what is said in verse 4 about the ancestor contains some recollection of a severe crime committed by the tribe of Reuben, it is completely incomprehensible to us"¹⁴⁷¹ A straightforward reading of Genesis provides us with a clear historical allusion in Gen. 49:3-4 to Gen. 35:22.

Verses 5-7 are a reference to Genesis 34, where the rape of Dinah and the slaughtering of the inhabitants of Shechem are recorded. Again, von Rad reflects the critical position, "Whether the tribe of Simeon suffered a 'catastrophe' in the vicinity of Shechem, as is often assumed, is beyond our knowledge."¹⁴⁷² However, these verses make sense as a reference to the life of Levi, son of Jacob and ancestor of the tribe of Levi. The fact that there is no

¹⁴⁶⁸ Ibid., p. 34.

¹⁴⁶⁹ Infra, pp. 389-94.

¹⁴⁷⁰ F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, "The Blessing of Moses," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 67 (1948):205, n. 41.

¹⁴⁷¹ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, 2d ed., trans. John H. Marks, in *The Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), p. 423.

¹⁴⁷² Ibid., p. 424.

mention of the priesthood supports this view. Keil and Delitzsch have noted that no one would dare to curse Levi after Moses had honored them, so we must place Genesis 49:5-7 long before the priesthood.¹⁴⁷³

Verse 8 seems to be a reference to the blessing of Isaac upon Jacob in Gen. 27:29. Verse 8c is almost identical to 27:29d:

49:8: *yistah^awû l^ekhā b^enê 'ābhīkhā*

“may your father’s sons bow down to you.”

27:29: *w^eyistah^awû l^ekhā b^enê 'immekhā*

“and may your mother’s sons bow down to you.”

Rather than suggest some complicated series of editorial arrangements to account for this similarity, we propose that Jacob deliberately recalled this blessing that his father had given him and included it in verse 8. Part of the significance of Isaac’s blessing was that the Messiah would come through Jacob’s descendants, not Esau’s. Part of the significance of Jacob’s blessing in 49:8 is that the Messiah would come through Judah’s descendants.

The remainder of the Judah blessing is directed to the future, especially to the coming Messiah. The interpretation of verses 10-12 in reference to the future Messiah is confirmed by the reference back to Gen. 27:29. This future reference, however, is general, applied to no historical period.

The only historical information that is found in verse 13 is the mention of Sidon. Since Tyre is not mentioned, we must date the verse prior to the tenth century. Tyre was not mentioned with Sidon until that date, since Sidon greatly overshadowed her neighbor to the south before that time.

The blessing of Issachar is just that, a blessing. There is no reference to forced labor in verses 14-15, as our exegesis has shown, nor is there a rebuke of Issachar for preferring ease to exertion, slavery to battle.

The Dan blessing does not refer to Samson, as most commentators agree, and there is not a reference to the chariots of the Canaanites in the word *rōkh^ebhō*, “rider,” in verse 17. Verse 19 on Gad contains only a general historical allusion to Gad’s future fortunes on the eastern perimeter of the nation. Likewise, our exegesis argues that no specific king is in view in verse 20. The “royal delicacies” are “delicacies fit for a king,” not “delicacies that were brought to a certain king.” Efforts to identify a king from among the Canaanites or Israelites are doomed to failure and dependent upon the whims of the exegete.

No one suggests any historical allusions in verse 21. The Joseph oracle likewise contains no clear historical allusions. Some have suggested various references in verse 23, even to the time Joseph spent in Egypt. While that is the most likely reference, in view of the patriarchal source of the chapter, it remains true that no certainty can be achieved in regard to this verse or any part of verses 22-26.

The Benjamin blessing points us to an early date, when the wolf was spoken of in a positive light. All other Biblical passages uniformly speak of the wolf in a negative sense and must be dated much later.

In summary, the only clear historical allusions in Genesis 49 are to the past. The first three oracles refer to Gen. 35:22, Genesis 34, and Gen. 27:29 respectively. None of the other verses require or even suggest a specific historical fulfillment. Westermann comments regarding the tribal sayings that “in them the enemies are not named with names.”¹⁴⁷⁴ He is correct and his comment may be seen as indicative of the general character of the chapter. It is most noteworthy that all three clear references in this chapter relate to events in the past, to events in the lifetime of Jacob, and therefore to events within the memory of Jacob. This speaks strongly in favor of the authorship of the chapter by Jacob.

Secondly, we look at the supposed historical allusions in Deuteronomy 33. Many think that verse 6 refers to a time when Reuben was near extinction, but we think that the generally positive nature of the chapter precludes that interpretation. The verse is as general as it can be, in its contents and in its historical references. It expresses thoughts similar to those of Ps. 127:3-5,

Sons are a heritage from the Lord,
children a reward from him,
Like arrows in the hands of a warrior

¹⁴⁷³ C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch, *The Pentateuch*, in *Commentary on the Old Testament in Ten Volumes* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, n.d.) vol. 1, part 1, p. 391.

¹⁴⁷⁴ Westermann, p. 251: “. . . die Feinde in ihnen nicht mit Namen genannt werden.”

are sons born in one's youth.
Blessed is the man
whose quiver is full of them.

We noted in the exegesis the wide divergence of opinion on verse 7, a fact which in itself speaks against taking the verse as a specific reference to some historical event. We cited Driver, who wrote, "Our ignorance of the exact circumstances under which the Blessing was composed, naturally precludes us from being confident that it is the correct one."¹⁴⁷⁵ The lack of a reference to the monarchy suggests a pre-monarchical time. Craigie's view that the verse is a prayer that Judah might be brought back safely from the danger of its position in the vanguard of the army is most likely.¹⁴⁷⁶

The first two verses of the Levi blessing (verses 8-9) are a clear reference to a historical event of the past, probably two events, and perhaps three, those recorded in Exod. 17:1-7 and Exod. 32:25-29, and perhaps also Num. 20:1-13. Exodus 32:29 contains the phrase, *kî 'iš bibhnô ūbh'e 'āhîw*, "for you were against your own sons and brothers." Deut. 33:9 says, *w'e'eth-'ehāyw lō' hikkîr w'e'eth-bānāw lō' yādhā'*, "he did not recognize his brothers or acknowledge his own children (sons)." Deut. 33:8 uses the phrase *mê m'erîbhāh*, "the waters of Meribah," the exact same phrase as in Num. 20:13. Exod. 17:7 contains the names "Massah and Meribah," as in Deut. 33:8cd.

Critics argue that verses 8-10 contain phraseology from a much later time, but those arguments are not incontrovertible. It is possible that those verses were subject to a greater amount of updating than the rest of the chapter, in view of the sacred duties of the Levites. The final verse of the blessing, verse 11, contains no clear historical allusion. It is too general to be connected with any historical event.

We have shown that verse 12 contains no reference to a temple, either that of Solomon or even some sanctuary in the time of the Judges. Critics think that verse 16 refers to a time when Joseph was dominant in the confederacy, before the rise of Judah. However, the Joseph tribes were influential quite early in history and generally throughout the history of Israel, so that the entire blessing cannot be assigned with certainty to any historical period. The final verse likewise contains no clear allusion to any event of history. The mention of Ephraim and Manasseh reflects a time when the Joseph tribes were more clearly distinguished, but this can mean any time from the Exodus down to the time of the fall of Samaria. The mention of Joseph along with Ephraim and Manasseh suggests an early date, as noted earlier in this chapter.

The Zebulun and Issachar blessing is quite general. No application can be made to any historical event or period with certainty.

The blessing of Gad may contain in verse 21 a reference to Num. 32:2, 5-6, 25-27, when Gad came at the head of the East Jordanian tribes to ask for an inheritance east of the Jordan River. The only possible verbal correspondence is the particle or adverb *šam* in Num. 32:26, "there" or "indeed." The reference to the leaders of the Israelites in Num. 32:2 adds additional support. Furthermore, all other interpretations contain serious deficiencies. The general nature of this blessing may be argued, and the lack of verbal correspondences may point to the fact that this saying was predictive, or at least future-oriented.

The Dan saying is quite general and contains no reference to Bashan or the later northern location of the tribe. The Naphtali saying has no historical reference. The blessing of Asher likewise contains no historical allusions.

In summary, the only clear historical reference is in verses 8-9, where the events of Exod. 17:1-7, Exod. 32:25-29, and probably Num. 20:1-13 are in view. It is also possible that Num. 32:2, 5-6, 25-27 is the background to Deut. 33:21. Again, the only historical allusions are to events of the past, events within the memory of the titular author, and even within his lifetime. This speaks strongly in favor of the authorship of the chapter by Moses. It also speaks against seeing any of the other verses, in Genesis 49 or Deuteronomy 33, as *vaticinia ex eventu*. Prophecies after the fact would be more specific. Their vagueness is compatible with a more general blessing directed to the future.

Cross and Freedman sum up well,

In both collections the blessings reflect the typical characteristics and representative experiences of the tribes, not particular historical events. The search for specific allusions has been largely fruitless,

¹⁴⁷⁵ Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 396.

¹⁴⁷⁶ P. C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, in *The New International Commentary on the Old Testament* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1976), p. 394.

resulting in confusion and misunderstanding rather than in clarifying the text. General historical references without exception fit into the pre-monarchical phase of Israelite history.¹⁴⁷⁷

The geographical references are fewer than the historical allusions. The only clear geographical reference in Genesis 49 is verse 13. There a position near the seacoast and toward Sidon is mentioned, but even this is general. Verse 15 may contain an allusion to the Plain of Jezreel, but the verse is probably more general than that.

We have noted that Deut. 33:12 does not refer to the slopes of Benjamin in verse 12c, but to the shoulders of Yahweh. Verses 13-16 refer only generally to the fertility of Joseph. Verse 19 refers to a mountain, perhaps two mountains, but that mountain is unnamed. "The abundance of the seas" does not necessarily reflect a seacoast location.

The Gad blessing probably contains a reference to the tableland east of the Jordan, but generally so. Verse 22 does not refer to Bashan. Verse 23 refers to the inheritance of Naphtali in a general way. Verse 25 may contain a reference to a northern location, but this is not specifically stated. Every tribe needed to have bolts of iron and bronze for protection against the invasions of enemies.

There is only one geographical reference, and that is in Gen. 49:13. No locations are mentioned by name. Generalities are the order of the day, all of which point to a time prior to the habitation of the land of Canaan by the Israelites. The Gad blessing may indicate the fact that Gad, Reuben, and the half-tribe of Manasseh had received their inheritance east of the Jordan River by the time Moses spoke Deuteronomy 33.

The Order of the Twelve Tribes

Some general conclusions can be drawn in regard to the date of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 from the order in which the tribes are listed. Some have proposed various explanations for the consistent appearance of the number twelve in the tribal lists. We noted earlier the theory of Jeremias, who thought that the number twelve originated with the zodiac. Some have suggested that the number twelve is an independent element of tradition, or an element related to the development of the amphictyony,¹⁴⁷⁸ but it is certain that the number twelve simply reflects the actual number of sons born to Jacob. Efforts were apparently made at times to keep the number at twelve, for example, listing Ephraim and Manasseh when Levi was omitted, but this does not necessarily mean that the number was unhistorical at any point in time. Kittel thinks that no conclusions are possible in regard to the order of the sayings,¹⁴⁷⁹ but it is hard to escape drawing some general conclusions, especially in the light of the research of Helga Weippert.

Weippert gives the twenty-eight lists of the tribes that occur in the Old Testament. One additional list occurs in the New Testament at Rev. 7:5-8, and other lists appear in the writings of Philo, Josephus, and in Jubilees 8:5-7, 34:20. The lists follow in the order in which Weippert gives them, although the verse numberings are ours:

1. Gen. 29:31-30:24 and 35:16-18 (order of birth)
2. Gen. 35:23-26 (at the death of Isaac)
3. Gen. 46:8-23 (when Jacob went to Egypt)
4. Gen. 49:2-27
5. Exod. 1:2-5 (those who moved to Egypt)
6. Num. 1:5-15 (selection of census takers)
7. Num. 1:20-47 (census of fighting men)
8. Num. 2:3-33 (camps around the tabernacle)
9. Num. 7:12-78 (offerings for the tabernacle = Num. 2:3-33)
10. Num. 19:14-28 (camps around the tabernacle = Num. 2:3-33)
11. Num. 13:4-15 (the twelve spies)
12. Num. 26:5-48 (census of fighting men = Num. 1:20-47)
13. Num. 34:14-28 (assignment of land in Canaan)
14. Deut. 27:12-13 (blessings and curses at Mts. Gerizim and Ebal)
15. Deut. 33:6-24
16. Josh. 13:15-19:48 (division of the land by lots)

¹⁴⁷⁷ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 7.

¹⁴⁷⁸ Kittel, pp. 112-13.

¹⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 114.

17. Josh. 21:4-7 (Levitical cities)
18. Josh. 21:9-38 (Levitical cities, almost equal to Josh. 21:4-7)
19. Judg. 1:17-34 (attack on the Canaanites)
20. Judg. 5:14-18 (Song of Deborah)
21. Ezek. 48:1-29 (division of the land in a vision)
22. Ezek. 48:30-35 (gates of the city in a vision)
23. 1 Chron. 2:1-2 (descendants of Jacob to David)
24. 1 Chron. 4-8 (descendants of Jacob to David)
25. 1 Chron. 6:55-63 (Levitical cities)
26. 1 Chron. 6:65-80 (Levitical cities, almost equal to 6:55-63)
27. 1 Chron. 12:24-37 (David's troops)
28. 1 Chron. 27:16-22 (officers over the tribes in David's day)¹⁴⁸⁰

Long ago G. Buchanan Gray gave up on many of the lists, discerning only two influential factors in the arrangements: the order of birth and the theory of the "mothers" of the various tribes,¹⁴⁸¹ both genealogical factors. We think that current research, supplemented as it is by Weippert's article, is correct in identifying three key factors in the lists at hand. Twenty-three of the twenty-eight lists can fit into one of these three organizing principles, with the remaining five to be considered special cases. The genealogical principle is the basis of lists 1-5, 23, and 28.¹⁴⁸² The system of the Book of Numbers, focusing especially upon the census of fighting men and the arrangement of tribal camps around the tabernacle, is the basis of the lists 6-12.¹⁴⁸³ The geographical system is the basis of lists 13, 15, 17-19, and 25-27.¹⁴⁸⁴ Although Weippert did not include number 16 in that category, it is clear that it too belongs there.

A straightforward reading of the Pentateuch will argue for the antiquity of the genealogical principle, the origin of the Book of Numbers system during the wilderness wanderings, and the origin of the geographical system towards the end of that wilderness wandering period. Therefore, those that have the genealogical principle as their basis are either older than the others, or are based on a much older list. Lists 23 and 28 clearly show their dependence upon the genealogical principle. They intend to give a genealogy. We conclude that Genesis 49 is older than Deuteronomy 33, since Genesis 49 is based on the genealogical principle and Deuteronomy 33 is based on the geographical principle. We conclude further that Deuteronomy 33 has its origins in the years just prior to the conquest, and Genesis 49 has its origin in the days when Jacob was still living, a conclusion that is harmonious with the *Sitz im Leben* of each chapter.

There are many factors in some of the twenty-eight lists that suggest the genealogical system: the grouping of the four sons of the concubines, the placement of Reuben first, the mention of Joseph (particularly when mentioned with Ephraim and Manasseh), the placement of Joseph and Benjamin last, the listing of sons in three groups without intermingling (Leah sons, Rachel sons, concubine sons), the placement of Judah in third or fourth position, and the placement of Dan at the head of the sons of the concubines. Every one of these facts appears in Genesis 49, while only four of these nine appear in Deuteronomy 33.

The geographical order of the tribes in Deuteronomy 33 is well established. Weippert had claimed that Deuteronomy 33 reflected the genealogical scheme and the geographical scheme, perhaps with some influence from the scheme in the Book of Numbers. She concluded that nothing can be said about the date of Deuteronomy 33.¹⁴⁸⁵ Mayes writes that the list seems to have a geographical basis, beginning with Reuben east of the Jordan, then Judah and Levi in the west, north to Benjamin and Joseph, finally the rest in a roughly counter-clockwise order.¹⁴⁸⁶ Labuschagne connects the order with verses 2-5, where Yahweh moves with Israel from the south to the north. The route from Sinai is now being continued through the territory of the tribes. It begins with Reuben east of the Jordan, moves west to include Judah, then north to Benjamin and Joseph. The rest are listed in a counter-clockwise order beginning with Zebulun. Therefore, Labuschagne concludes, and rightly so, the stress is on the occupation of the land and the unity of the tribes in Canaan.¹⁴⁸⁷

¹⁴⁸⁰ Helga Weippert, "Das geographische System der Stämme Israels," *Vetus Testamentum* 28 (1978):76, n. 1.

¹⁴⁸¹ G. Buchanan Gray, "The Lists of the Twelve Tribes," *The Expositor* 5 (1902):227.

¹⁴⁸² Weippert, p. 76.

¹⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹⁴⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

¹⁴⁸⁶ Mayes, *Deuteronomy*, pp. 396-97.

¹⁴⁸⁷ Labuschagne, "The Tribes," pp. 103-04.

Weippert wrote of the south-to-north sequence, with the list proceeding in a wavy line from west to east or from east to west.¹⁴⁸⁸ The result is a reverse S-shape, when a line is drawn from tribe to tribe in the land of Canaan according to the list in Deuteronomy 33. Levi's position perhaps reflects a later association with the temple, which was located on the border of Judah and Benjamin. Dan's position may reflect an early rearrangement of the list in order to show the final position of the tribes in the land, or it may reflect the influence of the genealogical system, grouping the four sons of the concubines together and the eight sons of Leah and Rachel together. We have argued in the exegesis of Deuteronomy 33 that Simeon is included in the mention of Judah.

Our purpose here is not to prove the date of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 by reference to the order of the tribes. We simply wish to show that the order of the tribes in these chapters is compatible with conclusions expressed elsewhere in this thesis.

Sequence Dating

With the arrival and general acceptance of sequence dating, views preferring a date of Genesis 49 or Deuteronomy 33 in the time of the monarchy or later have become increasingly difficult to sustain. Cross and Freedman's study in 1950 built upon the earlier study of Albright on the date of the Oracles of Balaam.¹⁴⁸⁹ These studies were based on linguistic and orthographic criteria. Cross and Freedman concluded that both Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 were

approximately the same age. In each are preserved materials which antedate the eleventh century in all probability, and may be considerably older. But the Blessings as a whole reached completed form toward the end of the period of the Judges.¹⁴⁹⁰

Then Albright proposed a basic sequence dating of fourteen ancient Hebrew poems.¹⁴⁹¹ He used certain stylistic phenomena as criteria for establishing the relative date of each poem. Repetitive parallelism and word plays were two of the criteria, the former supposedly an indication of an early date and the latter supposedly an indication of a later date. Ugaritic poetry was the basis of this relative chronology, where repetitive parallelism is frequent (thus an indication of early date) and the word play is not (thus an indication of late date). On the basis of a gradual decline of repetitive parallelism and a corresponding increase of the word play, Albright proposed a chronology that placed the Song of Miriam (Exodus 15) as the oldest poem (early thirteenth century) and Psalm 29 as the latest (fifth century). In this scheme, Genesis 49 was dated in the late eleventh century, and Deuteronomy 33 was dated in the mid-eleventh century.¹⁴⁹²

D. N. Freedman then built upon Albright's sequence dating by focusing on the use of divine names and epithets. Many of his criteria reflect the bias of critical scholarship. He identifies three phases in the development of Hebrew poetry: the time of Militant Mosaic Yahwism (twelfth century) when the name of Yahweh was used exclusively or predominantly; the time of the Patriarchal Revival (eleventh century), when Yahweh and El were used in parallelism, opening the way for the use of epithets associated with the patriarchal deity in the Genesis traditions, especially *šadday*, *'Elyôn*, and *'ôlām*; and the time of Monarchic Syncretism (tenth century or later), when a new set of titles emerged. Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 are placed by Freedman in the second period.¹⁴⁹³ The difference for our study between Albright and Freedman is slight. Freedman generally confirms the results of Albright's study, but he makes some adjustments. Both Albright and Freedman place Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 in the eleventh century. Albright prefers the mid-eleventh century for Deuteronomy 33, while Freedman prefers the late eleventh century. One positive result is that while Albright thought of Genesis 49 as slightly later than

¹⁴⁸⁸ Weippert, p. 80.

¹⁴⁸⁹ Albright, "The Oracles," pp. 207-33.

¹⁴⁹⁰ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, pp. 6-7.

¹⁴⁹¹ William F. Albright, *Yahweh and the Gods of Canaan* (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1968), pp. 1-28, 42-52.

¹⁴⁹² David Noel Freedman, "Divine Names and Titles in Early Poetry," in *Magnalia Dei: The Mighty Acts of God*, eds. Frank Moore Cross, Werner E. Lemke, and Patrick D. Miller, Jr. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday & Company, 1976), pp. 55-56.

¹⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 56-57.

Deuteronomy 33, Freedman reverses the order. Arguments earlier in this thesis have supported the priority of Genesis 49, confirming the conclusion of Freedman as to relative chronology.¹⁴⁹⁴

There is considerable room for subjectivity in such dating schemes, as well as considerable room for error. Freedman seems anxious to date each of the fourteen Hebrew poems long enough after the time of Moses to preclude his authorship (even if a thirteenth-century date for the Exodus should be adopted), but not too long after Moses so as to deny their antiquity. There is no reason why Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33, if it be admitted that they are pre-monarchical, cannot be attributed to the time of Moses on the basis of orthographic and linguistic criteria, on the basis of stylistic criteria, and on the basis of divine names and epithets.

Earlier we mentioned that orthographic and linguistic criteria are only certain in indicating a *terminus ad quem*, not a *terminus a quo*. Stylistic criteria and the criterion of divine names and epithets also do not provide the kind of precision that some might think.

The Date of Genesis 49

The antiquity of this chapter has been consistently defended by most scholars, with the date being pushed back farther and farther into Israel's history, ever since the dogma of critical scholarship proclaimed the JEDP hypothesis. Years ago Skinner called Genesis 49 "one of the oldest pieces of Hebrew poetry we possess."¹⁴⁹⁵ At the same time, however, he called it "incredible" that Jacob could have written the chapter, thinking it to come from the time of David or Solomon.¹⁴⁹⁶ Since the study of Cross and Freedman appeared in 1950, scholars have been generally quite congenial to a pre-monarchical date.

Speiser writes, "In no instance is there the slightest indication of a setting later than the end of the second millennium."¹⁴⁹⁷ Cross and Freedman comment, "No serious question has been raised by scholars as to the pre-monarchic date of the majority of the individual blessings in Gen. 49."¹⁴⁹⁸ They even admit that certain blessings (for example, Reuben, Simeon and Levi) may go back to patriarchal traditions. They date the collection in substantially its present form in the late period of the Judges, stating that orthographic and linguistic criteria support such a date.¹⁴⁹⁹ At the same time critical assumptions leave room for editorial work that might have incorporated certain blessings into the whole, especially the Judah blessing. Furthermore, critics are quick to add that in Genesis 49 there is no reference to the circumstances of the Mosaic age.

Aalders writes that it would be difficult to preserve such detailed information as we have in this chapter by oral tradition. Therefore, he thinks it likely that the chapter was written down before Moses.¹⁵⁰⁰ There can be no doubt that the theory of a long period of oral tradition is a major cog in the critical wheel which dates this chapter.

One major method for dating this chapter and Deuteronomy 33 is the sequence dating system, spoken of earlier. That system may be generally accepted, with reservations attached to the certainty of the dating. As a *relative* chronology, much of the system is valid. The archaisms that have been explained in the exegesis and listed in the tables are a part of the sequence dating system. The other major method for dating the chapter is on the basis of internal evidence.

Our exegesis has already shown the folly of many critical conclusions regarding the date of specific oracles. For example, Skinner's claim that the Judah oracle "clearly presupposes the existence of the Davidic kingdom" cannot be proven.¹⁵⁰¹ These and similar conclusions are the result of eisegesis. W. J. Phythian-Adams, writing on the date of Deuteronomy 33, said of Genesis 49,

¹⁴⁹⁴ Ibid., p. 96.

¹⁴⁹⁵ John Skinner, *Genesis*, in *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910), p. 507.

¹⁴⁹⁶ Ibid., p. 508.

¹⁴⁹⁷ Speiser, *Genesis*, p. 371.

¹⁴⁹⁸ Cross and Freedman, *Studies*, p. 69.

¹⁴⁹⁹ Ibid.

¹⁵⁰⁰ G.Ch. Aalders, *Genesis: Volume II* (2 vols.), trans. William Heynen, in *The Bible Student's Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), p. 268.

¹⁵⁰¹ Skinner, p. 510.

... apart from the possible interpolations in the Blessing of Judah, there is not a word which might not reasonably have been uttered by Jacob himself, while it is difficult to conceive why anyone writing at a much later date should have confined himself to enigmatic and empty generalities.¹⁵⁰²

Another part of the internal evidence is the nature of the religion that is expressed in Genesis 49. Both Gunkel and von Rad wrote that the ancient ideals of Israel are maintained in this chapter. While not all of the evidence for this need be accepted (for example, that the chapter glorifies the murder and robbery of Benjamin), the general principle is valid.¹⁵⁰³

The discussions on the purpose of the chapter and its *Sitz im Leben* point to the time of Jacob for the writing of Genesis 49. The order of the tribes and the kind of historical allusions and geographical references have been discussed, again pointing to a pre-Mosaic date.

The evidence for the priority of Genesis 49 over Deuteronomy 33 is strong, and the evidence can be read to indicate a significant distance in time between the two. On the basis of the dating of Deuteronomy 33 at the time just before the crossing of the Jordan River, it is safe to ascribe Genesis 49 to Jacob and the inclusion of the chapter in Genesis to Moses.

The Date of Deuteronomy 33

The results of sequence dating in regard to this chapter have already been discussed in connection with the preceding sections. Those results are compatible with a Mosaic date for the writing of Deuteronomy 33.

Many of the assumptions usually made for dating purposes have been challenged in the exegesis. Simeon has not been absorbed by Judah; Simeon is included in the blessing on Judah. Reuben is not disappearing. Judah is not separated from the rest of the tribes. There is no reference to a temple in Benjamin. The leadership of Ephraim and Manasseh is strong from the time of Moses until the fall of Samaria, so the mention of their prominence does not reflect a time prior to Genesis 49 or a time before the rise of Judah to prominence.¹⁵⁰⁴ As a matter of fact, the mention of Ephraim and Manasseh with Joseph suggests an early date.

There is much in this chapter that points to the time of Moses. We have already looked at the archaisms in the chapter, at the historical and geographical references, the *Sitz im Leben* of the chapter, the purpose, and the order in which the tribes are listed. We have seen the references to the Sinai event and the covenant established there. The reference to Jeshurun in verse 5 seems to exclude the idea of royalty from Israel, so that the chapter must be dated in the period before the monarchy.¹⁵⁰⁵ This conclusion is becoming widely accepted on orthographic, linguistic, and other grounds. We have also noted that Israel is referred to as a unified nation, not a loose confederation of tribes. The objection that past tenses of verbs prove that Moses could not have written the chapter (for example, verses 27 and 28) fails to understand the significance of the tenses and the lack of the *waw* conversive in poetic language.¹⁵⁰⁶ The presence of the divine name 'Eli in verse 12 suggests a time very early in Israel's contact with the Canaanites, at a time when the concern over pagan overtones in that divine name would be slight, if not non-existent. It was only after the nation became familiar with the paganism of the Canaanites and the names of their gods that they began to avoid the use of certain divine names (compare Baal).

The comments of Craigie, relating to the general nature of the chapter, are an appropriate summary statement for the dating of the chapter on the basis of all the evidence:

It cannot be denied, however, that many of the Blessings have a very general character and are of no obvious significance as historical evidence. Again, others may be taken with some plausibility to refer to a period after the Conquest. It may be argued, for example, that the Blessing of Zebulun refers to a period when the tribe was already settled in the north of Palestine. But once again, the difficulty in establishing such a view would be in disproving that the Blessing was not of a general and proleptic nature, in which future events were looked forward to. The weight of the evidence

¹⁵⁰² W.J. Phythian-Adams, "On the Date of the 'Blessing of Moses'," *Journal of the Palestine Oriental Society* 3 (1923):160.

¹⁵⁰³ Gunkel, pp. 476-78; von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 428.

¹⁵⁰⁴ R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1941), p. 278.

¹⁵⁰⁵ Henry Hayman, "The Blessing of Moses: Its Genesis and Structure," *American Journal of Semitic Languages and Literatures* 17 (1900-01):105.

¹⁵⁰⁶ S. R. Driver, *Deuteronomy*, p. 386.

suggests that the Blessing of Moses as a whole dates from the earliest period of the Conquest. It pictures a group of ten tribes, all of whom may be assumed to have experienced the Sinai Theophany, who were now poised in Transjordan ready for the critical onslaught of Canaan.¹⁵⁰⁷

¹⁵⁰⁷ Craigie, "The Conquest," p. 88.

CHAPTER V

THE UNITY OF THE CHAPTERS

The common critical viewpoint is that the diverse character of the individual sayings reflects their diverse origin and authorship. There are praise and rebuke, prediction and reflections on the past, *vaticinia ex eventu*, and even possible ingredients of some cult celebration.¹⁵⁰⁸ Gerhard von Rad argues in regard to Genesis 49 that “the aphorisms have no generally common feature at all.” He says that some are prophecies of the future, some contain censure or curse, and some describe current affairs. He thinks that there is no general uniformity and that the picture of verses 1-2 is not consistently followed.¹⁵⁰⁹ His thoughts are almost identical for Deuteronomy 33.

A. H. Gunneweg notes that it is now common to view the tribal sayings as independent unities, but he says that it is still a question whether these sayings ever existed independently of one another. He goes on to say that he will not address that question, but his admission is noteworthy.¹⁵¹⁰

It is certainly possible that a single author could write sayings about twelve individuals or tribes without arriving at a consistency of content. The uniqueness of individuals would make such a consistency unlikely. It seems that critics expect unity of authorship to be reflected by a word play in each saying, or an animal comparison in each saying, or a common historical event or historical period being reflected in each saying, before they will admit to a common author. This is beyond the expectation of any author writing about any group of individuals, even today. No contemporary writer, writing about the strengths and weaknesses of twelve corporations or twelve businessmen, would write in the same way about each one.

Another fallacy of the view of multiple authorship is that it is based in part on the supposedly specific historical and geographical allusions in the sayings. As has been pointed out and will be pointed out again, the specific nature of past references and the general future references of all other allusions point to a common frame of reference on the part of the author and a single date of authorship.

Many have defended the unity of both chapters through the years. The zodiacal hypothesis of Jeremias, though now universally discarded, is a testimony to the possibility of seeing Genesis 49 as a unity. Kittel cites A. Dillmann and H. L. Strack as commentators who thought that Genesis 49 was from one author.¹⁵¹¹ R. H. Pfeiffer argues for the unity of Genesis 49, although he sees it as the work of a poet living around 960 B.C.¹⁵¹² U. Cassuto has argued for the unity of Deuteronomy 33,¹⁵¹³ and P. C. Craigie is a contemporary proponent of the unity of that chapter. Craigie writes, “I take the Blessing to be a unity, and would classify it as a combination of a dying man’s blessing and a pre-battle blessing”¹⁵¹⁴

We will argue for the unity of each chapter, primarily on the basis of two factors: the frame of reference of each author from his *Sitz im Leben* and the intent of each author. The intent of Jacob is to provide information about the future of each tribe (verse 1), and the intent of Moses is to bless the tribes (verse 1). We will argue that the content of each chapter is consistently supportive of the intent that is set forth for each chapter in its opening verse. Other arguments from the structure, content, and language of each chapter will supplement these two primary factors.

Genesis 49

¹⁵⁰⁸ Hans-Joachim Kittel, “*Die Stammessprüche Israels, Genesis 49 und Deuteronomium 33, traditionsgeschichtlich untersucht*,” (Berlin: Diss. theol. Kirchl. Hochschule Berlin, 1959), pp. 2-3.

¹⁵⁰⁹ Gerhard von Rad, *Genesis*, 2d ed., trans. John H. Marks, in *The Old Testament Library* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1973), p. 421.

¹⁵¹⁰ A. H. J. Gunneweg, *Leviten und Priester*, in *Forschungen zur Religion und Literatur des Alten und Neuen Testaments*, vol. 89 (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 1965), p. 37.

¹⁵¹¹ August Dillmann, *Die Genesis*, in *Kurzgefasstes exegetisches Handbuch*, 4th ed. (Leipzig: S. Hirzel, 1882), p. 434. H. L. Strack, *Die Bücher Genesis, Exodus, Leviticus und Numeri, in Kurzgefasstes zu Heiligen Schriften* (München: C. H. Bock, 1894), p. 157. Cited in Kittel, p. 2.

¹⁵¹² R. H. Pfeiffer, *Introduction to the Old Testament* (New York: Harper & Row, 1941), p. 276.

¹⁵¹³ U. Cassuto, “Deuteronomy Chapter XXXIII and the New Year in Ancient Israel,” in *Biblical and Oriental Studies I*, trans. Israel Abrahams (Jerusalem: Magnes Press, Hebrew University, 1973), p. 69.

¹⁵¹⁴ P. C. Craigie, “The Conquest and Early Hebrew Poetry,” *Tyndale Bulletin* 20 (1969):82.

The structure of the chapter points to its unity. Skinner argues that there is “a central point of view,”¹⁵¹⁵ and we agree. We think that the prophetic purpose of the chapter, stated in the opening verse, is that central point of view. We will argue later that each saying refers to the future and that the tenses of the verbs may be so translated. The future orientation of the oracle begins with the first oracle and continues to the end of the chapter. The references to past events in the rebukes of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi are all related to future consequences. Having set aside these rebukes, Jacob proceeds to look positively to the future, beginning with the most important future event that will take place—the advent of the Messiah. All other sayings about the tribes are positive, future-oriented, and secondarily (after their primary prophetic nature) blessings. We have argued that the Issachar saying is not a rebuke. Were it truly a rebuke, the argument in favor of the original independence of each oracle would be strengthened. Some collector might be thought of, who randomly placed these sayings together, or who happened to choose the genealogical principle for their organization. However, the chapter shows clear signs of intentional organization in dealing with rebukes (verses 3-7) and then predictions (verses 8-27). Some will no doubt attribute this factor to an editor, but we think that it may be more easily attributed to an author. This fact supports the statement of G. Aalders, “It cannot be denied, however, that this entire collection of pronouncements displays an obvious stamp of unity and coherence.”¹⁵¹⁶

An additional observation about the structure of the chapter may be made in regard to the length of the blessings. There are two that stand out because of their great length, the blessings of Judah and Joseph. The chapter seems to be built around these two individuals, the two who replaced Reuben as the pre-eminent tribe by becoming the bearer of the Messiah (Judah) and the recipient of the birthright (Joseph). 1 Chronicles 5:1-2 testifies to this fact and may be viewed as a later exegesis of Gen. 49:3-4, since the phrase *y ‘šûê ’abhîw*, “his father’s marriage bed,” is a verbal reminiscence of Gen. 49:4bc. The placement of the Judah oracle ahead of the Joseph oracle is a testimony to the importance of the coming of the Messiah in the eyes of Jacob over against the importance of the rights of the firstborn. The two oracles are roughly the same length and very similar in meter, particularly if verse 26abc is viewed as a parenthesis, as suggested in the exegesis.

The other sayings are brief. They are gathered around the Judah and Joseph oracles. Skinner has commented that they are too slight in content to have any significance except in relation to the whole.¹⁵¹⁷ We think that he is correct and that his observance speaks for the unity of the chapter around the prophetic words of Jacob, especially those that speak of Judah and Joseph.

Finally, it must be stated in regard to the structure of the chapter that the order of the tribes is a unifying element. The sequence is clearly genealogical, with tribes gathered together into three groups: the sons of Leah, the sons of the concubines, and the sons of Rachel. The genealogical principle is found in those lists of tribes that reflect the influence of Jacob.

The content of the chapter points to its unity. First, we note that every saying but one, the saying on Simeon and Levi, contains either a word play or an animal comparison. Pfeiffer correctly considered the word plays and the animal comparisons to be evidence for his view that the chapter was the unified work of a tenth century poet.¹⁵¹⁸ He also thought that the geographical arrangement was deliberate (four southern tribes, five northern tribes, then two central tribes), but we think that this is accidental.

Von Rad does not admit to the original unity of the chapter, but he confesses that there is a theological unity. He correctly notes that “the entire document is dominated by the conviction that all the various destinies of the tribes are to be understood only as the outcome of the prophetic statements of the ancestor.”¹⁵¹⁹ If the *Sitz im Leben* proposed in the introduction to the chapter and suggested by Gen. 49:1 is accepted, then we can agree with von Rad that the future of the tribes is a unifying factor in the chapter. The dying patriarch is naturally concerned about what will happen after his death, and he has apparently been granted by God some indications about the future. We already know that the promise of a Messiah had been given to Jacob. Therefore, we are not surprised when Jacob passes that on to Judah. All the other oracles relate to the future of the tribes in Canaan, either in respect to the fruitfulness of the land or in respect to their defense of the land.

It may also be that some of the sayings, perhaps all of them, are connected to one another by a common theme or a common vocable. For example, the Reuben oracle and the Simeon and Levi oracle are united by the

¹⁵¹⁵ John Skinner, *Genesis*, in *The International Critical Commentary* (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1910), p. 511.

¹⁵¹⁶ G.Ch. Aalders, *Genesis: Volume II* (2 vols.), trans. William Heynen, in *The Bible Student’s Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan Publishing House, 1981), p. 268.

¹⁵¹⁷ Skinner, p. 511.

¹⁵¹⁸ Pfeiffer, pp. 276-77.

¹⁵¹⁹ Von Rad, *Genesis*, p. 422.

rebukes. A disjunction may be intended between the Simeon and Levi oracle and the Judah oracle. In the opening line of each, the word “brothers” appears. For Simeon and Levi, brother results in treachery, but for Judah brotherhood results in praise. Prosperity is the common theme of the conclusion of the Judah oracle in verses 11-12, the Zebulun oracle in verse 13, and the Issachar oracle in verses 14-15. The common theme of hard work may unite the Issachar saying with the Dan saying. The Dan saying and the Gad saying are united not only by the common theme of victory over superior foes, but also by the common use of the word *’āqēbh*, “heel.” The common word *w^ehū*’ may unite verses 19 and 20, while the common word *nāthan* may unite verses 20 and 21. The common theme of fertility may unite the Naphtali saying with the Joseph saying. The common theme of abundance may unite the Joseph saying and the Benjamin saying. This proposal must be regarded as tentative, since some of the connections are forced.

The language of the chapter points to its unity. We have already introduced the fact that the tenses of the verses may all be translated as futures. The only sayings that are commonly translated as past tenses are the Issachar saying (RSV, NEB, on verse 15) and the Joseph saying (RSV, NEB, NIV, others on verses 23-24). Some other verses are translated as present tenses: verse 13 by NEB, verse 19 by NEB, verse 25 by NIV (RSV translates as future), and verse 27 (RSV, NEB, NIV, others). In each case, the verbs that are translated in the past or present tense are imperfects. In some instances (verses 15, 23, 24) it is the *waw* plus the imperfects, but in no case does this form follow a perfect, indicating a *waw* consecutive. In each case they follow a participle (verses 14 and 22). We noted earlier that consecutive or conative forms of the verb are generally absent in poetry. The imperfect plus the *waw* is translated as future or with future intent in other verses (verses 7, 17). Therefore, all of the verses may be translated as futures, except for the perfect tenses in verses 4, 6, and 9. Even some past tenses are generally translated in the present tense (verses 11, 17, and 26), and it may be that verse 9 should be translated in the present tense, particularly because of the proverbial nature of the animal comparison. If our translation of the tenses is adopted, then all of the sayings uniformly relate to the opening verse of the chapter.

We have already spoken of the prominence of Reuben, Judah, and Joseph. Reuben is prominent because of his location in first place, and Judah and Joseph are prominent because of the length of the sayings and because of the Messianic promise and the birthright. This prominence is enhanced by the use of the second person singular in reference to these three sons, and only these three. Rather than being evidence of editorial reworking of the text, the suffixes appear for the sake of emphasis. These are the times, in a third person singular style of narration, that Jacob turns and speaks directly to his three sons. The only verses where this happens are verses 3-4, 8, and 25-26. Particularly in the light of 1 Chron. 5:1-2, this form of address speaks for the unified structure of the entire chapter.

Some have argued that two oracles betray their composite nature and give evidence of an editorial hand in the multiple appearance in them of the name of the tribe. Judah appears three times in the Judah oracle (verses 8-12), and Dan appears twice in the Dan oracle (verses 16-17). Our exegesis has argued that this is not necessarily indicative of the fact that originally independent sayings were combined into one. Here we advance the additional argument that it is only when a word and an animal comparison appear in the same saying that the tribe is mentioned more than once. The word play alleged for Issachar is not certain, so the Issachar saying is not necessarily a contradiction to this point. The nature of the animal comparison requires the naming of the tribe at that point, since the formula for the animal comparison is, “X is a lion’s cub.” Each animal comparison includes three elements: the tribe or individual compared, the primary word of comparison, and a modifying word or words that modify the comparison. “Judah (individual compared) is a cub (primary word of comparison) of a lion (modifying word).” “Issachar (individual compared) is a donkey (primary word of comparison) that is sturdy (modifying word).” “Dan (individual compared) is a serpent (primary word of comparison) along the roadside (modifying words).”

Therefore, if the animal comparison does not begin the saying, the person must be named again. The multiple appearance of the name of the tribe is not evidence of multiple authorship. It is a stylistic device attributable to a common author, which requires the renaming of the tribe when the animal comparison does not begin the saying. The two times that the animal comparison does not begin the saying are instances (perhaps the only instances) when a word play also appears in the oracle. In those instances, the word play takes precedence.

Finally, we note the uniformity of language in Genesis 49. A number of words are used repeatedly, for example, *rābhaṣ*, *bārakh*, *b^erākhāh*, *’ābh*, and *ṭārāph*. The style is also uniform, as the repeated use of animal comparisons and word plays shows. Though these facts are not proof of unity of authorship, they are compatible with that unity. Earlier in this chapter we also argued that the even distribution of archaisms is compatible with the unity of the chapters. While this fact must not be viewed as proof of the unity of either Genesis 49 or Deuteronomy 33, it may be noted that it is compatible with that unity.

Deuteronomy 33

The structure of the chapter points to its unity. First, we look at the order of the tribes. Earlier we noted the geographical arrangement of Deuteronomy 33. We noted further Labuschagne's observation that the journey of Yahweh from Sinai (verse 2) continues into the land of Canaan with the tribes listed in a geographical order, beginning with Reuben and continuing in a reverse S-shaped curve. The geographical principle for the arrangement of the tribes may be attributed to the *Sitz im Leben* of the chapter, a time when Israel was poised with her armies on the brink of the Promised Land, ready to conquer that land under the Lord's blessing and guidance.

In the exegesis of the chapter, we noted the similarity of verses 2-5 and verses 8-10 to the historical prologues of ancient treaties. By themselves they would suggest nothing in regard to the unity of the chapter. Together they suggest that the psalm-like framework is closely connected with the blessings in verses 6-25, since one historical prologue occurs in the framework and one in the blessings. We have noted the common critical viewpoint that the framework was not originally attached to the blessings, but this fact and others to follow suggest an original connection.

The exegesis has drawn attention to several verbal connections of the framework to the blessings. The word *b^ehith'assēph* in verse 5 is recalled in verse 21 in the word *wayyith'ass^ephūn*, if our exegesis is correct. Rather than see this connection as an indication of the connecting link that is needed to bind verses 2-5 to verses 26-29, we see it as a unifying factor in the structure of the chapter. Critics have correctly noted that verses 26-29 cannot follow directly on verses 2-5, hence they search for a connecting link. The connecting link is verses 6-25, as we will show later.

The covenant, *b^erīth*, in verse 9 and the mention of Sinai in verse 26 are also to be connected with the framework, namely that of verses 2-5, where the giving of the law and the establishment of the covenant are clearly alluded to.

We also note the connection of verse 28 with verse 12 in the words "will dwell securely." Our exegesis suggested that the security promised to Benjamin in verse 12 is expanded in the conclusion to include all of the tribes.

The blessings of the land, noted in verses 13-16, are mentioned again in verse 28. The "ancient" mountains and "everlasting" hills of verse 15 are guaranteed by the "ancient" God and His "everlasting" arms in verse 27. The "brothers" and "sons" of verse 24 are connected to the "sons" of verse 1.

The content of the chapter points to its unity. While verses 6-25 have been thought by critics to be unrelated to verses 2-5 and 26-29, there is a clear connection in the progression of thought. Cassuto has noted that connection. In verses 2-5, Yahweh comes from His dwelling place at Sinai to be proclaimed king of Israel. We might rather say that Yahweh is proclaimed king of Israel at Sinai. In verses 6-25, Yahweh is presented in this character of king as the one who leads Israel to victory. In verses 26-29, Yahweh is praised for this relationship to Israel.¹⁵²⁰

The animal comparisons in Genesis 49 were set forth as evidence for the unity of that chapter, and they are set forth here as evidence for the unity of Deuteronomy 33. Just as Moses patterned his blessings after the deathbed blessings of Jacob, borrowing one line to show his dependence upon Genesis 49, so also he uses several animal comparisons, one of them borrowed from Gen. 49:9, in order to show his dependence upon Genesis 49. The only one of the three comparisons that shows the same structure as in Genesis 49 (individual compared, primary word of comparison, modifying word) is Deut. 33:22. The other two animal comparisons are a departure from the usual structure, perhaps a later development in style. While there are not as many comparisons, they still serve to indicate the unity that exists between the blessings themselves (verses 17, 20, 22).

The three themes that are found in both verses 6-25 and verses 26-29 are another strong indication of the unity of the chapter. The prosperity of the land and the need for military strength are mentioned in every blessing, and in every verse in verses 6-25 except for the historical prologue of verses 8-10 (where we would not expect such themes, any more than we would expect them in verses 2-5). The theme of the blessing of Yahweh also appears in the tribal blessings. The prosperity of the land, the need for military strength, and the blessings of Yahweh all reappear in the concluding four verses.

Next to the thematic and theological unity discussed above, the most telling argument for the unity of Deuteronomy 33 is the consistently positive nature of each blessing. This is based on the positive nature of verses 6 and 7, two blessings that are normally interpreted in a negative sense. It is also based on the assumption that Simeon is to be included in the mention of Judah, since Simeon's territory lay within that of Judah, an interpretation compatible with the emphasis of the chapter on the land, or at least that Simeon's omission is not intended as a

¹⁵²⁰ Cassuto, "Deuteronomy," p. 69.

rebuke. If there were both blessings and rebukes in the chapter, that fact would support the atomistic theory of critics (who actually find fourteen authors in the chapter). The consistent presence of blessings supports the unity of authorship.

The prayers that are spoken to Yahweh throughout the chapter are closely related to this positive nature of the blessings. Yahweh is clearly addressed in verses 6, 7, 8-11, 13-17, 20, 23, and 24-25, particularly if some of the verbs usually translated as imperfects are translated as jussives (verses 12a, 17c, 23c). The blessing of Yahweh is spoken of in verse 12, and there may be a blessing implied in verses 18-19 and 22.

The language of the chapter points to its unity. As stated in conjunction with the arguments for the unity of Genesis 49, the even distribution of archaisms in this chapter is compatible with the unity of the chapter. Again, while this is not proof of unity, it does not controvert that unity and even underscores that unity.

In the previous chapter, we noted the many references in Deuteronomy 33 to the entire nation of Israel. References to the entire nation appear in verses 2, 3, 4, 5, 7, 10, 21, 26, 28, and 29, while references to the twelve tribes or twelve brothers appear only in verses 5, 9, 16, and 24 (verse 16 is a quotation from Genesis 49). These references are concentrated in the framework of the saying, but they also appear in the tribal blessings. This consistency of reference to the nation suggests a single author.

There are more examples in this chapter of the uniformity of language than there were for Genesis 49. Perhaps this, like the blessing of Joseph, speaks for the greater amount of literary training that Moses had (would Jacob have had *any?*). The superscriptions are evidence of this uniformity, although they might be the work of an editor. Words such as *šākhen*, *meghedh*, *rāṣah*, *Yahweh*, *'ereṣ*, *'aph*, and others add additional support.

F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman think that verses 2-3 and 26-29 were composed at the same time that the blessings were collected. They write, "Orthographic indications point to the same general period for both."¹⁵²¹ If our arguments for the unity of Deuteronomy 33 are correct, then their comment supports the unity of blessings and framework and the composition of both by the same author.

There is a literary convention, or figure of speech, that appears twice in this chapter, a fact that may be attributed to a single author. In verses 7 and 18, one tribe is named for two. In verse 7, Judah is named for Judah and Simeon, since Simeon received its inheritance within the territory of Judah. In verse 18, Zebulun is named in the superscription for Zebulun and Issachar, since their inheritances were contiguous. In view of the emphasis in this chapter upon the land Israel was about to receive and in view of the common boundaries of these tribes, this literary convention is understandable. Furthermore, we have shown in the exegesis that there are examples elsewhere in the Old Testament where this same thing happens.

¹⁵²¹ F. M. Cross and D. N. Freedman, "The Blessing of Moses," *Journal of Biblical Literature* 67 (1948):202.

CHAPTER VI

CONCLUSION

If the unity and antiquity of the chapters can be granted, then it is possible to hold that Jacob spoke the words of Genesis 49, and then someone present at that time wrote them down for posterity. These words were retained in the family and eventually incorporated by Moses into the Book of Genesis. Moses was the editor, who wrote verses 1 and 28 and perhaps verse 18.

It is also possible, then, to maintain that Moses spoke the words of Deuteronomy 33, and either he or someone present at the time (possibly Joshua) wrote them down for inclusion in the Book of Deuteronomy. The superscriptions of the chapter may be Mosaic, but they may also be the work of the individual who collected the sermons of Moses into the Book of Deuteronomy and included the account of Moses' death in chapter 34.

Arguments for the authorship of Jacob and Moses and for the traditional dating have been based, first of all, on the priority of Genesis 49. While many scholars dispute this fact, there are many strands of evidence that favor such authorship and dating.

The names Jacob and Moses are attached to Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33 respectively. Even if the chapters are not considered to be authored by those two men, a view rejected here, the assignment of these two names to the chapters reflects an early understanding of some collector or editor for the priority of Genesis 49.

Some linguistic borrowings were alleged in this thesis, specifically related to the Joseph blessing, to suggest that Deuteronomy 33 appeared later and in conscious imitation of Genesis 49. The greater national interest in Israel and the more religious tone in Deuteronomy 33 suggest a time much later than that of Genesis 49, after the Sinai covenant and after the time when the tribe of Levi became the priestly tribe.

The *Sitz im Leben* of each chapter is suitable to the authorship of Jacob and Moses. Deuteronomy 33 contains much military imagery, an emphasis on the fertility of the land, and the theme of God's guidance and blessing. These themes suggest a time just prior to the entry of the nation into Canaan. Genesis 49 has a much greater emphasis upon the descendants that would come from Jacob and his sons and a lesser emphasis upon the fruitfulness of the land, a difference that links Genesis 49 much more closely to the promises of God to the patriarchs that they would have many descendants. This suggests the accuracy of a deathbed prophecy and blessing for the *Sitz im Leben* of Genesis 49. The purpose of each chapter has been closely related to the *Sitz im Leben*. The purpose of Genesis 49 is spelled out in verses 1 and 28, namely to tell the sons of Jacob what will happen in the future and to bless them. The purpose of Deuteronomy 33 is to encourage the nation to seek Yahweh's guidance and depend on His strength, as Israel prepares to conquer the Promised Land.

The greater number of animal comparisons and word plays in Genesis 49 is a sign of the greater antiquity of the chapter. The historical allusions of Genesis 49 antedate by centuries those found in Deuteronomy 33. The general nature of the geographical references in both chapters suggests a date prior to the entry into Canaan.

The high number of archaisms and their even distribution throughout argue for the antiquity of the chapters. The larger number of archaisms in Genesis 49 suggests the greater age of that chapter.

The order of the tribes follows a genealogical scheme in Genesis 49, while the order in Deuteronomy 33 is a geographical one. This suggests the origin of Genesis 49 at a time close to the birth of the sons and an origin of Deuteronomy 33 at a time close to the settlement of the tribes in Canaan.

The sequence dating of Freedman supports the priority of Genesis 49, even if he does not hold to the traditional views concerning date and authorship.

All of these pieces of evidence support not only the priority of Genesis 49 in time, but they also support the antiquity of each chapter, their authorship by Jacob and Moses, and their unity.

Arguments in favor of the authorship of Jacob and Moses are at the same time arguments for the unity of each chapter. A separate chapter is devoted to additional argumentation for the unity of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33.

The structure of Genesis 49 argues for its unity. All of the oracles are related to the prophetic intent that is stated in verse 1. This prophetic intent is borne out by the future tenses of the verbs. The chapter begins with rebukes (verses 3-7) and concludes with the positive oracles (verses 8-27). The length of the Judah and Joseph blessings and their replacement of the tribe of Reuben as the pre-eminent tribe show that the chapter is organized structurally around these three sons. The order of the tribes unifies the chapter in its genealogical sequence, particularly by the grouping together of the sons of Leah, then the sons of the concubines, and finally the sons of Rachel.

The content of Genesis 49 argues for its unity. Every saying but one contains either a word play or an animal comparison. The relation of each blessing to the future of the sons after Jacob's death also unifies the chapter. Some of the oracles are connected to one another by a common theme or a common vocable.

The language of Genesis 49 points to its unity. The future tenses of the verbs has already been mentioned. The prominence of Reuben, Judah, and Joseph, referred to above, is enhanced by the use of the second person singular in reference to these three sons, and only these three. The alleged composite nature of the Judah and Joseph oracles has been challenged in the same chapter, as well as in the exegesis. The repeated use of a number of words in the chapter and the even distribution of archaisms are also additional evidence for the unity of the chapter.

The structure of Deuteronomy 33 argues for its unity. The geographical sequence of the tribes speaks for a possible unity. Verbal and thematic connections have been shown between the framework of the blessings and the blessings themselves.

The content of Deuteronomy 33 points to its unity. There is a clear and understandable sequence of thought from verses 2-5 to verses 6-25 and verses 26-29. The animal comparisons are fewer in number than in Genesis 49, but they still suggest a unity of thought in the chapter. The themes of land, military strength, and the blessing of Yahweh appear consistently throughout the chapter. The consistently positive nature of the chapter is another piece of the evidence for its unity.

The language of Deuteronomy 33 points to its unity. The distribution of archaisms is even in this chapter also. The references to the entire nation are many and evenly distributed. The repeated use of certain words in the chapter adds additional support to the argument for its unity. The literary convention in which one tribe is named for two appears twice in this chapter, a fact that can be explained by a common author.

All of the arguments for the antiquity of each chapter, the authorship of Jacob and Moses, and the unity of each chapter are based upon an exegesis of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33. While some of these arguments may speak equally well for the single viewpoint of an editor, collectively they argue much more for a common author.

A few things remain to be more thoroughly examined. The lack of archaisms in Deut. 33:8-10 may be evidence of the use of some accepted formula or proverbial statements there, rather than for a historical prologue, as argued by the author. The puzzling blessing of Zebulun and Issachar in Deut. 33:18-19 may actually have nothing to do with the commercial enterprises of the tribes. The exegesis is uncertain. The animal comparison in Gen. 49:22, where Joseph is compared to a young calf, is debatable and not fully assured. The meaning of the Dan blessing in Deut. 33:22, particularly the translation of the word *bāšān*, “Bashan” or “viper,” and the relationship of the blessing to the context could be clarified. The apparently editorial verse in Gen. 49:18 remains a puzzle.

Further research may shed light on these problems, but such research should relate each of the sayings to the stated purpose of each chapter, as spelled out in the opening verse. The continued study of Ugaritic literature may show additional parallels between Ugaritic and Hebrew, perhaps substantiating the proposed plural noun *rabbû*, “bowmen,” in Gen. 49:23b. It may also show to what extent the chapters use Canaanite divine names and Canaanite fertility language in a demythologized sense. There are possibilities for demonstrating some cultic use of Deuteronomy 33, particularly in view of the comment of verse 4, which was apparently spoken by the people of Israel. The poetic structure of the verses, the poetic imagery, and metrical considerations may assist the exegete in the future, particularly if a greater unanimity in the explanation of these features is achieved. Studies such as Stephen Geller’s monograph suggest room for additional work in this area.¹⁵²²

¹⁵²² Stephen A. Geller, *Parallelism in Early Biblical Poetry*, in *Harvard Semitic Monographs*, no. 20 (Missoula, MT: Scholars Press, 1979).

TABLE I

Archaisms in Genesis 49

Verse	Corrected Form	Translation	Explanation	Archaism/ Ugaritic Parallel
1.	<i>b^e 'aḥ^erîth hayyāmîm</i>	“in days to come”	basic meaning	A*
2.				
3.				
4.	<i>yether, tôthar mišk^ebhê, y^ešû 'ê 'allāh</i>	“pre-eminant” “bed” “couch of my concubine”	word play (3-4) construct plural mispunctuation	A A A, UP*
5.	<i>m^ekhērōthēhem</i>	“instruments of violence”	unexplained	A, UP?
6.	<i>tēhad, k^ebhēdî šôr</i>	“be joined” “my liver” “leading citizen”		A A, UP UP
7.	<i>kî . . . kî</i>	“so . . . so”	emphatic particle	UP
8.	<i>'attāh y^ehūdhāh, yôdhūkā, yādhhkā 'ahe(y)kā, 'aryēh gûr 'aryēh</i>	“you” “Judah, praise, your hand” “your brothers, lion” (8-9) “lion’s cub”	as object word play parallelism animal comparison,	A A UP A
9.	<i>'aryēh, b^enî kāra 'rābhaš k^e'aryēh *rabhaš mî y^eqimennû **m^ehōqēq šîlōh yiqq^ehath</i>	“lion, my son” “he crouched, he lay down like a lion” “he crouched” “who dares to rouse him?” “ruler’s staff” “to whom it belongs” “obedience”	parallelism proverbial statement proverbial statement basic meaning <i>hapax</i> <i>hapax</i>	A, UP A A A A A
10.	<i>'ōs^erî 'îrōh 'îrōh, 'athōnô b^enî 'athōnô ba . . . b^e yayin, dham "nābîm sūthōh sewithōh?</i>	“he ties” “his ass” “his ass, she-ass” “son of” “she-ass” “of . . . of” “wine, blood of grapes” “his robes” “his robes”	final <i>hireq</i> <i>he</i> suffix parallelism old genitive case ending known from Mari Ugaritic meaning parallelism he suffix consonantal <i>waw</i>	A A, UP UP A A, UP UP UP A A
11.	<i>bakhlîlî</i>	“darker”	old genitive	A
12.	<i>zebhûlûn</i>	“Zebulun”	word play	A
13.	<i>zebhûlûn yammîm, 'niyyôth? 'niyyôth *yiškôn šîdhôn</i>	“Zebulun” “seas, ships” “at ease” “will live” “Sidon”	extra-metrical foot parallelism adverbial accusative Tyre unnamed	UP UP A, UP A A
14.	<i>yîssākār ḥ^amōr gārem *rōbhēš</i>	“Issachar” “sturdy donkey” “lying down”	word play animal comparison	A A A

* 58 archaisms in all.

* 38 Ugaritic parallels in all.

15.	<i>hammišp^ethāim</i>	“two saddlebags”	hapax	A
	<i>kī . . . kī</i>	“how . . . how”	parallelism	UP
	<i>ṭōbh(ā)</i>	“good”	missing vowel letter	A
	<i>w^e’eth</i>	sign of D.O.	GK 117b	A
	<i>ṭōbh(ā), nā’ēmāh</i>	“good, pleasant”	parallelism	UP
	<i>l^emas-’ōbhēd</i>	“a body of workers that tills”	basic meaning	A
16.	<i>dān yādhîn</i>	“Dan will judge”	word play	A
	<i>dān?</i>	“Dan”	Danil from Aqhat	UP
17.	<i>nāhāš</i>	“serpent”	animal comparison	A
	<i>nāhāš, hannōšēk</i>	“serpent, that bites”	parallelism, article as relative	UP
19.	<i>gādh . . .</i>	“Gad . . .”	word play	A
	<i>’āqēbh-mi?</i>	“heel”	enclitic <i>mem</i>	A
20.	<i>’āšēr</i>	“Asher”	word play	A
	<i>š^emēnāh</i>	“fatness, rich”	<i>smt, smt</i>	UP
	<i>lahmō, ma^adhanhē</i>	“food, delicacies”	parallelism	UP
21.	<i>’ayyālāh</i>	“doe”	animal comparison	A
	<i>’ayyālāh, ’immārē</i>	“doe, fawns”	parallelism	UP
	<i>š^eluḥāh hannōthēn</i>	“set free, that bears”	parallelism, article as relative	UP
	<i>hannōthēn ’imrē?</i>	“that gives words”	<i>tn ql</i>	UP
	<i>’immārē šāpher</i>	“beautiful fawns”		UP
22.	<i>bēn pōrāth</i>	“young calf”	literally “son of a cow”	A, UP
61)	<i>bēn pōrāth</i>	“young calf”	animal comparison	A
	<i>bānōth</i>	“offspring”	<i>bnt</i>	UP
	<i>**šō^adheh</i>	“that walks”	mispunctuation	A
	<i>šōr</i>	“bull”	mispunctuation	UP
23.	<i>rabbû</i>	“archers”	mispunctuation, hapax	A
	<i>ba^ale ḥiṣṣîm</i>	“bowmen”	hapax	A
24.	<i>b^e’ēthān</i>	“steady”	adjective as object	A
	<i>qaštō, yādhāyw</i>	“his bow, his hands”	parallelism	UP
	<i>’abhîr</i>	“the Mighty One”	personal name and divine name	UP
	<i>’ibhnē</i>	“sons of”	prosthetic <i>aleph</i>	A, UP
	<i>miššēm</i>	“by the name of”	mispunctuation	A
25.	<i>birkhōth, birkhōth, etc.</i>	“blessings”	parallelism	UP
	<i>t^ehôm</i>	“deep”	personification	UP
	<i>*rōbheṣeth</i>	“lies”		A
	<i>sd, rhmy</i>	“breast and womb”	word pair	UP
26.	<i>hōrai</i>	“mountains”	unusual form, Janus parallelism?	A
	<i>hōrai, gibh^e’ōth</i>	“mountains, hills”	parallelism	A, UP
	<i>’adh, ’ōlām?</i>	“eternal, everlasting”	Canaanite gods	UP
	<i>tihye(y)n(na)</i>	“may they rest”	missing vowel letter	A
	<i>rō’s, qodhqōdh</i>	“head, brow”	parallelism	A, UP
	<i>n^ezîr</i>	“the one separate”	basic meaning	A
27.	<i>z^e’ēbh</i>	“wolf”	animal comparison	A
	<i>z^e’ēbh</i>	“wolf”	positive sense	A
	<i>z^e’ēbh yiṭrāph</i>	“a wolf that tears”	relative clause without relative particle	A
	<i>ba . . . lā</i>	“from . . . until”	Ugaritic meaning	UP

* Common in ancient Israelite and Ugaritic poetry, but fallen out of use, except as conscious archaisms (Cross and Freedman)

** Common in early Hebrew poetry, but not in Ugaritic literature

TABLE II

Archaisms in Deuteronomy 33

<u>Verse</u>	<u>Corrected Form</u>	<u>Translation</u>	<u>Explanation</u>	<u>Archaism/ Ugaritic Parallel</u>
1.				
2.	<i>lāmô</i>	“upon them”	poetic	A
	<i>hōphî^a</i>	“shone forth”	of Canaanite gods	UP
	<i>w^eittōh</i>	“and with Him”	mispunctuation	A
	<i>w^eittōh-mi</i>	“and with Him”	enclitic <i>mem</i>	A
	<i>q^edhōs(îm)</i>	“holy ones”	haplography of <i>mem</i>	UP
	<i>^asûdhōth</i>	“streaming”	mispunctuation, <i>hapax</i>	A
	<i>lāmô</i>	“toward them”	poetic	A
	historical prologue of ancient treaties			
3.	<i>hōbhēbh</i>	“He loves”	<i>hapax</i>	A
	<i>‘ammô-mi</i>	“His people”	enclitic <i>mem</i>	A
	<i>q^edhōsāyw</i>	“His holy ones”	Canaanite gods	UP
	<i>w^ehîmtakkû</i>	“they bow down”	divided word, <i>hapax</i>	A
	<i>l^eraghlekhâ</i>	“at your feet”	singular or plural	A
	<i>yîs^{s^e}(û)-mi</i>	“they receive”	missing vowel letter	A
4.	<i>(li)qhillath</i>	“for a possession”	double duty preposition	A
	<i>q^ehillath</i>	“possession”	rare word	A
5.	<i>b^ehîth ‘assēph</i>	“when they assembled”	<i>hapax</i>	A
	<i>bîšûrân</i>	“in Jeshurun”	rare word	A
6.	<i>w^eyîhy(u)</i>	“may they be”	missing vowel letter	A
	<i>y^ehî, yāmōth,</i>	“live, die, beyond	parallelism	UP
	<i>missappēr</i>	number”		
	<i>missappēr</i>	“beyond number”	mispunctuation	A, UP
7.	<i>yādhāyw, w^e ‘ēzer</i>	“his forces, help”	parallelism	UP
	<i>rabb(eh)</i>	“increase”	missing vowel letter	A
	<i>‘ēzer min ?</i>	“liberation from”	Ugaritic idiom	UP
8.	Historical prologue of ancient treaties			
9.	Historical prologue of ancient treaties			
10.	Historical prologue of ancient treaties			
	<i>q^etôrāh</i>	“incense”	<i>hapax</i>	A
11.	<i>ûphō ‘al</i>	“work”	early meaning	A
	<i>m^eḥas</i>	“smite”	battles of Baal	UP
	<i>mothnê-mi</i>	“loins”	dual, enclitic <i>mem</i>	A
	<i>man-y^eqîmen(nu)</i>	“who attack him”	mispunctuation	A
12.	<i>binyāmin, y^edhîdh</i>	“Benjamin (son of the	parallelism	UP
		south), “beloved”		
	<i>y^edhîdh yahweh</i>	“beloved of Yahweh”	personal name	UP
	<i>*yîškōn</i>	“will dwell”		A
	<i>‘Elî</i>	“the Exalted One”	divine name	UP
	8. historical prologue of ancient treaties			
9.	historical prologue of ancient treaties			
10.	historical prologue of ancient treaties			
	<i>q^etôrāh</i>	“incense”	<i>hapax</i>	A
11.	<i>ûphō ‘al</i>	“and work”	early meaning	A
	<i>m^eḥas</i>	“smite”	battles of Baal	UP
	<i>mothnê-mi</i>	“loins”	dual, enclitic <i>mem</i>	A
	<i>man-y^eqîmen(nu)</i>	“who attack him”	mispunctuation	A
12.	<i>binyamîn, y^edhîdh</i>	“Benjamin (son of the	parallelism	UP

		south), “beloved”		
	<i>y^edhîdh yahweh</i>	“beloved of Yahweh”	personal name	UP
	* <i>yiškôn</i>	“will dwell”		A
	<i>‘Elî</i>	“the Exalted One”	divine name	UP
	<i>hōphēph</i>	“surrounds”	<i>hapax</i>	A
	<i>‘ālāyw, ben?</i>	“will dwell, dwells”	parallelism	UP
	<i>yiškôn, šākhēn</i>			
	* <i>šākhēn</i>	“dwells”		A
13.	<i>‘aršô, miṭṭal meghedh</i>	“choice fruits”	rare term, repetition	UP
	<i>šāmaim miṭṭal?</i>	“dew of heaven”	proximity	UP
	<i>šāmaim, l^ehôm</i>	“heaven, deep”	parallelism	UP
	<i>l^ehôm</i>	“deep”	personification of natural forces	UP
	* <i>rōbheṣeth</i>	“crouches”		A
14.	<i>gereš</i>	“finest produce”	<i>hapax</i>	A
	<i>yāre^aḥ-mi</i>	“moon”	enclitic <i>mem</i>	A
15.	<i>har^erê-qedhem</i>	“ancient mountains,	parallelism	UP
	<i>gibh^e ‘ōth ‘ōlām</i>	everlasting hills”		
16.	* <i>šōkh^enî</i>	“Him who dwelt”	old genitive, source of fertility not Canaanite gods	A
	<i>tābhô ‘thāh</i>	“may they rest”	unexplained	A
	<i>l^erô ‘š, qodhqodh</i>	“head, pate”	parallelism	A, UP
	<i>n^ezîr</i>	“the one separate”	basic meaning	A
	<i>rô ‘š, qarnê</i>	“head, horns”	proximity	UP
17.	<i>šôr</i>	“bull”	animal comparison	A
	<i>šôr, l^e ‘ēm</i>	“bull, wild ox”	parallelism	A, UP
	* <i>l^e ‘ēm</i>	“wild ox”		A
	<i>y^enaggah</i>	“gore”	used of a bull	UP
	<i>hēm ?</i>	“lo, behold”	emphatic particle	UP
18.	<i>ribh^ebhōth, ‘alphê</i>	“thousands, ten thousands”	parallelism	UP
19.	<i>šepha‘</i>	“abundance”	<i>hapax</i>	A
	<i>ûs^ephûnê</i>	“hidden”	<i>hapax</i>	A
20.	<i>k^elābhî‘</i>	“like a lion”	animal comparison	A
	* <i>šākhēn</i>	“lies down”		A
21.	<i>kî šām</i>	“yea behold”	emphatic particles	UP
	** <i>m^eḥōqēq</i>	“commander”		A
	<i>wayyith ‘ass^ephûn</i>	“assembled”	divided word	A
22.	<i>gûr ‘aryēh</i>	“lion’s cub”	animal comparison, proverbial statement	A
	<i>y^ezannēq</i>	“shies away”	<i>hapax</i>	A
	<i>habbāšān</i>	“viper”	<i>bt_n</i>	UP
23.	<i>y^erāšāh</i>	“may he inherit”	<i>hapax</i> , imperfect and jussive	A
24.	<i>‘āšēr</i>	“Asher”	word play	A
	<i>min ‘āle(y)khā</i>	“your bolts”	<i>hapax</i>	A
	<i>dobh ‘ekhā</i>	“your strength”	<i>hapax</i>	A, UP
26.	<i>y^ešurûn</i>	“Jeshurun”	rare word	A
	<i>rōkhēbh šāmaim</i>	“rides on the heavens”	Ugaritic “rider of the clouds”	UP
27.	<i>waygāreš, wayyiškôn</i>	“He will drive out, will dwell” (27-28)	parallelism	UP
28.	* <i>wayyiškôn</i>	“will dwell”		A
	<i>‘ên</i>	“will dwell”		A

29.	<i>'eres, šāmāyw</i>	“earth, heaven”	parallelism	UP
	<i>ya‘arphû, tāl</i>	“will drip, dew”	proximity	UP
	<i>'eres, tāl</i>	“earth, dew”	proximity	UP
	<i>wa‘ašer</i>	“and who”	extra-metrical	A
	<i>w^eyikkah^ašû</i>	“will come cringing,	parallelism	UP
	<i>thidhrōkh</i>	you will tread”		
	** <i>kāḥaš</i>	“to cringe”		A
	* <i>bāmāh</i>	“back”		A
	<i>bāmôthêhô</i>	“their backs”	archaic spelling	A

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