
GENESIS 49:1 Jacob called to his sons, and said: "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which will happen to you in the days to come.

Jacob, about to die, calls his sons together that he may bless them, or give prophetic declarations concerning their posterity, Gen 49:1, Gen 49:2. Prophetic declaration concerning Reuben, Gen 49:3, Gen 49:4. Concerning Simeon and Levi, Gen 49:5-7; concerning Judah, Gen 49:8-12; concerning Zebulun, Gen 49:13; concerning Issachar, Gen 49:14, Gen 49:15; concerning Dan, Gen 49:16-18; concerning Gad, Gen 49:19; concerning Asher, Gen 49:20; concerning Naphtali, Gen 49:21; concerning Joseph, Gen 49:22-26; concerning Benjamin, Gen 49:27. Summary concerning the twelve tribes, Gen 49:28. Jacob gives directions concerning his being buried in the cave of Machpelah, Gen 49:29-32. Jacob dies, Gen 49:33.

Verse 1

That which shall befall you in the last days - It is evident from this, and indeed from the whole complexion of these important prophecies, that the twelve sons of Jacob had very little concern in them, personally considered, as they were to be fulfilled in the last days, i. e., in times remote from that period, and consequently to their posterity, and not to themselves, or to their immediate families. The whole of these prophetic declarations, from Genesis 49:2-27 inclusive, is delivered in strongly figurative language, and in the poetic form, which, in every translation, should be preserved as nearly as possible, rendering the version line for line with the original. This order I shall pursue in the succeeding notes, always proposing the verse first, in as literal a translation as possible, line for line with the Hebrew after the hemistich form, from which the sense will more readily appear; but to the Hebrew text and the common version the reader is ultimately referred.

2. Come together and hear, O sons of Jacob! And hearken unto Israel your father.

Bishop Newton has justly observed that Jacob had received a double blessing, spiritual and temporal; the promise of being progenitor of the Messiah, and the promise of the land of Canaan. The promised land he might divide among his children as he pleased, but the other must be confined to one of his sons; he therefore assigns to each son a portion in the land of Canaan, but limits the descent of the blessed seed to the tribe of Judah. Some have put themselves to a great deal of trouble and learned labor to show that it was a general opinion of the ancients that the soul, a short time previous to its departure from the body, becomes endued with a certain measure of the prophetic gift or foresight; and that this was probably the case with Jacob. But it would be derogatory to the dignity of the prophecies delivered in this chapter, to suppose that they came by any other means than direct inspiration, as to their main matter, though certain circumstances appear to be left to the patriarch himself, in which he might express his own feelings both as a father and as a judge. This is strikingly evident, 1. In the case of Reuben, from whom he had received the grossest insult, however the passage relative to him may be understood; and, 2. In the case of Joseph, the tenderly beloved son of his most beloved wife Rachel, in the prophecy concerning whom he gives full vent to all those tender and affectionate emotions which, as a father and a husband, do him endless credit.

3. Reuben, my first-born art thou! My might, and the prime of my strength, Excelling in eminence, and excelling in power:

4. Pouring out like the waters: - thou shalt not excel, For thou wentest up to the bed of thy father, - Then thou didst defile: to my couch he went up!

GENESIS 49:2 Assemble yourselves, and hear, you sons of Jacob. Listen to Israel, your father.

GENESIS 49:3 "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength; excelling in dignity, and excelling in power.

Verse 3

Reuben as the first-born had a right to a double portion of all that the father had; see Deu 21:17

The eminence or dignity mentioned here may refer to the priesthood; the power, to the regal government or kingdom - In this sense it has been understood by all the ancient Targumists. The Targum of Onkelos paraphrases it thus: "Thou shouldst have received three portions, the birthright, the priesthood, and the kingdom:" and to this the Targums of Jonathan ben Uzziel and Jerusalem add: "But because thou hast sinned, the birthright is given to Joseph, the kingdom to Judah, and the priesthood to Levi." That the birthright was given to the sons of Joseph we have the fullest proof from 1Chr 5:1.

GENESIS 49:4 Boiling over like water, you shall not excel; because you went up to your father's bed, then defiled it. He went up to my couch.

Verse 4

Pouring out like the waters - This is an obscure sentence because unfinished. It evidently relates to the defilement of his father's couch; and the word פָּחַז pachaz, here translated pouring out, and in our Version unstable, has a bad meaning in other places of the Scripture, being applied to dissolute, debauched, and licentious conduct. See Jdg 9:4; Zep 3:4; Jer 23:14, Jer 23:32; Jer 29:23.

Thou shalt not excel - This tribe never rose to any eminence in Israel; was not so numerous by one third as either Judah, Joseph, or Dan, when Moses took the sum of them in the wilderness, Num 1:21; and was among the first that were carried into captivity, 1Chr 5:26.

Then thou didst defile - Another unfinished sentence, similar to the former, and upon the same subject, passing over a transaction covertly, which delicacy forbade Jacob to enlarge on. For the crime of Reuben, see Clarke on Gen 35:22 (note).

5. Simeon and Levi, brethren: They have accomplished their fraudulent purposes.

6. Into their secret council my soul did not come; In their confederacy my honor was not united: For in their anger they slew a man, (ישׂא ish, a noble), And in their pleasure they murdered a prince.

7. Cursed was their anger, for it was fierce! And their excessive wrath, for it was inflexible! I will divide them out in Jacob, And I will disperse them in Israel.

GENESIS 49:5 “Simeon and Levi are brothers. Their swords are weapons of violence.

Verse 5

Simeon and Levi are brethren - Not only springing from the same parents, but they have the same kind or disposition, head-strong, deceitful, vindictive, and cruel.

They have accomplished, etc. - Our margin has it, Their swords are weapons of violence, i. e., Their swords, which they should have used in defense of their persons or the honorable protection of their families, they have employed in the base and dastardly murder of an innocent people.

The Septuagint gives a different turn to this line from our translation, and confirms the translation given above: Συνετελεσαν αδικια εξαρσεως αυτων· They have accomplished the iniquity of their purpose; with which the Samaritan Version agrees. In the Samaritan text we read calu, they have accomplished, instead of the Hebrew כלי keley, weapons or instruments, which reading most critics prefer: and as to מכרתיהם mechertheyhem, translated above their fraudulent purposes, and which our translation on almost no authority renders their habitations, it must either come from the Ethiopic macar, he counselled, devised stratagems, etc., (see Castel), or from the Arabic macara, he deceived, practiced deceit, plotted, etc., which is nearly of the same import. This gives not only a consistent but evidently the true sense.

GENESIS 49:6 My soul, don't come into their council. My glory, don't be united to their assembly; for in their anger they killed men. In their self-will they hamstrung cattle.

Verse 6

Into their secret council, etc. - Jacob here exculpates himself from all participation in the guilt of Simeon and Levi in the murder of the Shechemites. He most solemnly declares that he knew nothing of the confederacy by which it was executed, nor of the secret council in which it was plotted.

If it should be said that the words תבא tabo and תחד techad should be translated in the future tense or in the imperative, as in our translation, I shall not contend; though it is well known that the preterite is often used for the future in Hebrew, and vice versa. Taken thus, the words mark the strong detestation which this holy man's soul felt for the villany of his sons: "My soul shall not come into their secret council. My honor shall not be united to their confederacy.

For in their anger they slew a man - איש ish, a noble, an honorable man, viz., Shechem.

And in their pleasure - This marks the highest degree of wickedness and settled malice, they were delighted with their deed. A similar spirit Saul of Tarsus possessed previously to his conversion; speaking of the martyrdom of St. Stephen, St. Luke says, Act 8:1 : Σαυλος δε ην συνευδοκων τη αναρσει αυτου· And Saul was gladly consenting to his death. He was with the others highly delighted with it; and thus the prediction of our Lord was fulfilled, Joh 16:2 : Yea, the time cometh, that whosoever killeth you will think that he doeth God service. And it is represented as the highest pitch of profligacy and wickedness, not only to sin, but to delight in it; see Rom 1:32. As the original word רצון ratson signifies, in general, pleasure, benevolence, delight, etc., it should neither be translated self-will nor willfulness, as some have done, but simply as above; and the reasons appear

sufficiently obvious. They murdered a prince - Hamor, the father of Shechem. Instead of שור shor, which we have translated a wall, and others an ox, I read שר sar, a prince, which makes a consistent sense; (see Kennicott's first Dissertation, p. 56, etc.); as there is no evidence whatever that Simeon and Levi either dug down a wall or houghed the oxen, as some have translated the passage; Or houghed oxen; on the contrary, the text, Gen 34:28, Gen 34:29, proves that they had taken for their own use the sheep, oxen, asses, all their wealth, their wives, and their little ones.

GENESIS 49:7 Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel. I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.

Verse 7

Cursed was their anger - The first motions of their violence were savage; and their excessive or overflowing wrath, עברה ebrah, for it was inflexible - neither the supplications of the males, nor the entreaties, tears, cries, and shrieks of the helpless females, could deter them from their murderous purpose; for this, Gen 49:5, they are said to have accomplished.

I will divide them out, אחלקם achallekem, I will make them into lots, giving a portion of them to one tribe, and a portion to another; but they shall never attain to any political consequence. This appears to have been literally fulfilled. Levi had no inheritance except forty-eight cities, scattered through different parts of the land of Canaan: and as to the tribe of Simeon, it is generally believed among the Jews that they became schoolmasters to the other tribes; and when they entered Canaan they had only a small portion, a few towns and villages in the worst part of Judah's lot, Jos 19:1, which afterwards finding too little, they formed different colonies in districts which they conquered from the Idumeans and Amalekites, 1Chr 4:39, etc. Thus these two tribes were not only separated from each other, but even divided from themselves, according to this prediction of Jacob.

8. Judah! thou! Thy brethren shall praise thee. Thy hand, in the neck of thine enemies: The sons of thy father shall bow themselves to thee.

9. A lion's whelp is Judah: From the prey, my son, thou hast ascended, He couched, lying down like a strong lion And like a lioness; who shall arouse him?

10. From Judah the scepter shall not depart, Nor a teacher from his offspring, Until that Shiloh shall come, And to him shall be assembled the peoples.

11. Binding his colt to the vine, And to the choice vine the foals of his ass, He washed his garments in wine, His clothes in the blood of the grape.

12. With wine shall his eyes be red, And his teeth shall be white with milk.

GENESIS 49:8 "Judah, your brothers will praise you. Your hand will be on the neck of your enemies. Your father's sons will bow down before you.

Verse 8

Thy brethren shall praise thee - As the name Judah signifies praise, Jacob takes occasion from its meaning to show that this tribe should be so eminent and glorious, that the rest of the tribes should praise it; that is, they should acknowledge its superior dignity, as in its privileges it should be distinguished beyond all the others. On the prophecy relative to Judah, Dr. Hales has several judicious remarks, and has left very little to be farther desired on the subject. Every reader will be glad to meet with them here. "The prophecy begins with his name Judah, signifying the praise of the Lord, which was given to him at his birth by his mother Leah, Gen 29:35. It then describes the warlike character of this tribe, to which, by the Divine appointment, was assigned the first lot of the promised land, which was conquered accordingly by the pious and heroic Caleb; the first who laid hands on the necks of his enemies, and routed and subdued them, Jos 14:11; 15:1; Jdg 1:1, Jdg 1:2; and led the way for their total subjugation under David; who, in allusion to this prediction, praises God, and says: Thou hast given me the necks of mine enemies, that I might destroy them that hate me, Psa 18:40. In the different stages of its strength, this tribe is compared to a lion's whelp, to a full grown lion, and to a nursing lioness, the fiercest of all. Hence a lion was the standard of Judah; compare Num 2:3, Eze 1:10. The city of David, where he reposed himself after his conquests, secure in the terror of his name, 1Chr 14:17, was called Ariel, the lion of God, Isa 29:1; and our Lord himself, his most illustrious descendant, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, Rev 5:5. "The duration of the power of this famous tribe is next determined: 'the scepter of dominion,' as it is understood Est 8:4; Isa 14:5, etc., or its civil government, was not to cease or depart from Judah until the birth or coming of Shiloh, signifying the Apostle, as Christ is styled, Heb 3:1; nor was the native lawgiver, or expounder of the law, teacher, or scribe, intimating their ecclesiastical polity, to cease, until Shiloh should have a congregation of peoples, or religious followers, attached to him. And how accurately was this fulfilled in both these respects! "1. Shortly before the birth of Christ a decree was issued by Augustus Caesar that all the land of Judea and Galilee should be enrolled, or a registry of persons taken, in which Christ was included, Luk 2:1-7; whence Julian the apostate unwittingly objected to his title of Christ or King, that he was born a subject of Caesar!' About eleven years after Judea was made a Roman province, attached to Syria on the deposal and banishment of Archelaus, the son of Herod the Great, for maladministration; and an assessment of properties or taxing was carried into effect by Cyrenius, then governor of Syria, the same who before, as the emperor's procurator, had made the enrolment, Luk 2:2; Act 5:37; and thenceforth Judea was governed by a Roman deputy, and the judicial power of life and death taken away from the Jews, Joh 18:31. "2. Their ecclesiastical polity ceased with the destruction of their city and temple by the Romans, a. d. 70; at which time the Gospel had been preached through the known world by the apostles, 'his witnesses in Jerusalem, and in all Judea, and in Samaria, and unto the uttermost parts of the earth;' Act 2:8; Rom 10:18. "Our Lord's triumphant entry into Jerusalem, before his crucifixion, 'riding on an ass, even a colt the foal of an ass,' which by his direction his disciples brought to him for this purpose, 'Go into the village over against you, and presently ye shall find an ass tied, and a colt with her; loose them, and bring them to me,' Mat 21:2-5, remarkably fulfilling the prophecy of Zechariah, (Zac 9:9) is no less a fulfillment of this prophecy of Shiloh, 'binding or tying his foal to the vine, even his ass's colt to the choice vine.' In ancient times to ride upon white asses or ass-colts was the privilege of persons of high rank, princes, judges, and prophets, Jdg 5:10; Jdg 10:4; Num 22:22. And as the children of Israel were symbolized by the vine, Psa 80:8; Hos 10:1, and the men of Judah by 'a (choice) vine of Sorek,' in the original, both here and in the beautiful allegory of Isaiah, Isa 5:1-7, adopted by Jeremiah, Jer 2:21, and by our Lord, Mat 21:33, who styled himself the true vine, Joh 15:1; so the union of both these images signified our Lord's assumption, as the promised Shiloh, of the dignity of the king of the Jews, not in a temporal but in a spiritual sense, as he declared to Pilate, Joh 18:36, as a prelude to his second coming in glory 'to restore again the kingdom to Israel.' "The vengeance to be then inflicted on all the enemies of his Church, or congregation of faithful Christians, is expressed by the

symbolical imagery of 'washing his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes;' which to understand literally, would be incongruous and unusual any where, while it aptly represents his garments crimsoned in the blood of his foes, and their immense slaughter; and imagery frequently adopted in the prophetic scriptures. "The strength and wholesomeness of Shiloh's doctrine are next represented by having 'his eyes red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.' And thus the evangelical prophet, in similar strains, invites the world to embrace the Gospel: -

Ho, every one that thirsteth, come to the waters, And he that hath no money; come, buy and eat: Yea, come, buy wine and milk, Without money and without price. Isa 55:1. "On the last day of the feast of tabernacles it was customary among the Jews for the people to bring water from the fountain of Siloah or Siloam, which they poured on the altar, singing the words of Isaiah, Isa 12:3 : With joy shall ye draw water from the fountain of salvation; which the Targum interprets, 'With joy shall ye receive a new doctrine from the Elect of the Just One;' and the feast itself was also called Hosannah, Save, we beseech thee. And Isaiah has also described the apostasy of the Jews from their tutelar God Immanuel, under the corresponding imagery of their 'rejecting the gently-flowing waters of Siloah,' Isa 8:6-8. "Hence our Lord, on the last day of the feast, significantly invited the Jews to come unto him as the true and living Fountain of waters, Jer 2:13. 'If any man thirst, let him come to Me and drink;' Joh 7:37. He also compared his doctrine to new wine, which required to be put into new bottles, made of skins strong enough to contain it, Mat 9:17; while the Gospel is repeatedly represented as affording milk for babes, or the first principles of the oracles of God for novices in the faith, as well as strong meat [and strong wine] for masters in Christ or adepts, Mat 13:11; Heb 5:12-14. "And our Lord's most significant miracle was wrought at this fountain, when he gave sight to a man forty years old, who had been blind from his birth, by sending him, after he had anointed his eyes with moistened clay, to wash in the pool of Siloam, which is the Greek pronunciation of the Hebrew הלש Siloah or Siloh, Isa 8:6, where the Septuagint version reads Σιλωαμ, signifying, according to the evangelist, απεσταλμενος, sent forth, and consequently derived from ηλσ shalach, to send, Joh 9:7. Our Lord thus assuming to himself his two leading titles of Messiah, signifying anointed, and Shiloh, sent forth or delegated from God; as he had done before at the opening of his mission: 'The Spirit of the Lord is upon me, because he hath anointed me to preach the Gospel to the poor; he hath sent me forth (απεσταλκε) to heal the broken-hearted,' etc.; Luk 4:18. "And in the course of it he declared, I was not sent forth (απεσταλην) but unto the lost sheep of the house of Israel, Mat 15:24, by a two-fold reference to his character in Jacob's prophecy of Shiloh and Shepherd Of Israel, Gen 49:10-24. 'This is life eternal, to know thee the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom thou sentest forth,' (απεστειλας), to instruct and save mankind, Joh 17:3; and he thus distinguishes his own superior mission from his commission to his apostles: 'As The Father hath sent Me, (απεσταλκε με), so I send you,' επμπω υμας, Joh 20:21. Whence St. Paul expressly styles Jesus Christ 'the Apostle (Ο Αποστολος) and High Priest of our profession,' Heb 3:1; and by an elaborate argument shows the superiority of his mission above that of Moses, and of his priesthood above that of Aaron, in the sequel of the epistle. His priesthood was foretold by David to be a royal priesthood, after the order of Melchizedek, Psa 110:4. But where shall we find his mission or apostleship foretold, except in Jacob's prophecy of Shiloh? which was evidently so understood by Moses when God offered to send him as his ambassador to Pharaoh, and he declined at first the arduous mission: 'O my Lord, send I pray thee by the hand of Him whom thou wilt send,' or by the promised Shiloh, Exo 3:10; Exo 4:13; by whom in his last blessing to the Israelites, parallel to that of Jacob, he prayed that 'God would bring back Judah to his people,' from captivity, Deu 33:7. "Here then we find the true meaning and derivation of the much disputed term Shiloh in this prophecy of Jacob, which is fortunately preserved by the Vulgate, rendering qui mittendus est, he that is to be sent, and also by a rabbinical comment on Deu 22:7 : 'If you keep this precept, you hasten the coming of the Messiah,

who is called Sent.' "This important prophecy concerning Judah intimates, 1. The warlike character and conquests of this tribe; 2. The cessation of their civil and religious polity at the first coming of Shiloh; 3. His meek and lowly inauguration at that time, as spiritual King of the Jews, riding on an ass like the ancient judges and prophets; 4. His second coming as a warrior to trample on all his foes; and, 5. To save and instruct his faithful people." - Hales' Anal., vol. ii., p. 167, etc.

GENESIS 49:9 Judah is a lion's cub. From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down, he crouched as a lion, as a lioness. Who will rouse him up?

GENESIS 49:10 The sceptre will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs. To him will the obedience of the peoples be.

Verse 10

From Judah the scepter shall not depart - The Jews have a quibble on the word שבט shebet, which we translate scepter; they say it signifies a staff or rod, and that the meaning of it is, that "afflictions shall not depart from the Jews till the Messiah comes;" that they are still under affliction and therefore the Messiah is not come. This is a miserable shift to save a lost cause. Their chief Targumist, Onkelos, understood and translated the word nearly as we do; and the same meaning is adopted by the Jerusalem Targum, and by all the ancient versions, the Arabic excepted, which has kazeeb, a rod; but in a very ancient MS. of the Pentateuch in my own possession the word sebet is used, which signifies a tribe. Judah shall continue a distinct tribe till the Messiah shall come; and it did so; and after his coming it was confounded with the others, so that all distinction has been ever since lost.

Nor a teacher from his offspring - I am sufficiently aware that the literal meaning of the original מבין רגליו mibbeyn raglaiv is from between his feet, and I am as fully satisfied that it should never be so translated; from between the feet and out of the thigh simply mean progeny, natural offspring, for reasons which surely need not be mentioned. The Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel, and the Jerusalem Targum, apply the whole of this prophecy, in a variety of very minute particulars, to the Messiah, and give no kind of countenance to the fictions of the modern Jews.

13. At the haven of the seas shall Zebulun dwell, And he shall be a haven for ships. And his border shall extend unto Sidon.

GENESIS 49:11 Binding his foal to the vine, his donkey's colt to the choice vine; he has washed his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes.

GENESIS 49:12 His eyes will be red with wine, his teeth white with milk.

GENESIS 49:13 "Zebulun will dwell at the haven of the sea. He will be for a haven of ships. His border will be on Sidon.

Verse 13

Zebulun's lot or portion in the division of the Promised Land extended from the Mediterranean Sea on the west, to the lake of Gennesareth on the east; see his division, Jos 19:10, etc. The Targum of Jonathan ben Uzziel paraphrases the passage thus: "Zebulun shall be on the coasts of the sea, and he shall rule over the havens; he shall subdue the provinces of the sea with his, ships, and his border shall extend unto Sidon.

14. Issachar is a strong ass Couching between two burdens.

15. And he saw the resting place that it was good, And the land that it was pleasant; And he inclined his shoulder to the load, And he became a servant unto tribute.

GENESIS 49:14 "Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between the saddlebags.

Verse 14

Issachar is a strong ass - חמור גרם chamor garem is properly a strong-limbed ass; couching between two burdens - bearing patiently, as most understand it, the fatigues of agriculture, and submitting to exorbitant taxes rather than exert themselves to drive out the old inhabitants.

The two burdens literally mean the two sacks or panniers, one on each side of the animal's body; and couching down between these refers to the well-known propensity of the ass, whenever wearied or overloaded, to lie down even with its burden on its back.

GENESIS 49:15 He saw a resting place, that it was good, the land, that it was pleasant. He bows his shoulder to the burden, and becomes a servant doing forced labour.

Verse 15

He saw that rest - The inland portion that was assigned to him between the other tribes. He inclined his shoulder to the load; the Chaldee paraphrase gives this a widely different turn to that given it by most commentators: "He saw his portion that it was good, and the land that it was fruitful; and he shall subdue the provinces of the people, and drive out their inhabitants, and those who are left shall be his servants, and his tributaries." Grotius understands it nearly in the same way. The pusillanimity which is generally attributed to this tribe certainly does not agree with the view in which they are exhibited in Scripture. In the song of Deborah this tribe is praised for the powerful assistance which it then afforded, Jdg 5:15. And in 1Chr 7:1-5, they are expressly said to have been valiant men of might in all their families, and in all their generations; i. e., through every period of their history. It appears they were a laborious, hardy, valiant tribe, patient in labor and invincible in war; bearing both these burdens with great constancy whenever it was necessary. When Tola of this tribe judged Israel, the land had rest twenty-three years, Jdg 10:1.

16. Dan shall judge his people, As one of the tribes of Israel.

17. Dan shall be a serpent on the way, A cerastes upon the track, Biting the heels of the horse, And his rider shall fall backwards.

GENESIS 49:16 "Dan will judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel.

Verse 16

Dan shall judge - Dan, whose name signifies judgment, was the eldest of Jacob's sons by Bilhah, Rachel's maid, and he is here promised an equal rule with those tribes that sprang from either Leah or Rachel, the legal wives of Jacob. Some Jewish and some Christian writers understand this prophecy of Samson, who sprang from this tribe, and judged, or as the word might be translated avenged, the people of Israel twenty years. See Jdg 13:2; Jdg 15:20.

GENESIS 49:17 Dan will be a serpent on the trail an adder in the path, That bites the horse's heels, so that his rider falls backward.

Verse 17

Dan shall be a serpent - The original word is נחש nachash, and we have seen on Genesis 3 that this has a great variety of significations. It is probable that a serpent is here intended, but of what kind we know not; yet as the principal reference in the text is to guile, cunning, etc., the same creature may be intended as in Genesis 3.

A cerastes upon the track - The word שפִּיפִּוֹן shephiphon, which is nowhere else to be found in the Bible, is thus translated by the Vulgate, and Bochart approves of the translation. The cerastes has its name from two little horns upon its head, and is remarkable for the property here ascribed to the shephiphon. The word נֶרֶךְ orach, which we translate path, signifies the track or rut made in the ground by the wheel of a cart, wagon, etc. And the description that Nicander gives of this serpent in his Theriaca perfectly agrees with what is here said of the shephiphon. εν δ' αμαθοισιν Η και ἀματροχησι παρα στιβον ενδυκες ανει. v. 262.

It lies under the sand, or in some cart rut by the way.

It is intimated that this tribe should gain the principal part of its conquests more by cunning and stratagem, than by valor; and this is seen particularly in their conquest of Laish, Judges 18, and even in some of the transactions of Samson, such as burning the corn of the Philistines, and at last pulling down their temple, and destroying three thousand at one time, see Jdg 16:26-30.

18. For thy salvation have I waited, O Lord!

This is a remarkable ejaculation, and seems to stand perfectly unconnected with all that went before and all that follows; though it is probable that certain prophetic views which Jacob now had, and which he does not explain, gave rise to it; and by this he at once expressed both his faith and hope in God. Both Jewish and Christian commentators have endeavored to find out the connection in which these words existed in the mind of the patriarch. The Targum of Jonathan expresses the whole thus: "When Jacob saw Gideon the son of Joash, and Samson the son of Manoah, which were to be saviors in a future age, he said: I do not wait for the salvation of Gideon, I do not expect the salvation of Samson, because their salvation is a temporal salvation; but I wait for and expect thy salvation, O Lord, because thy salvation is eternal." And the Jerusalem Targum much to the same purpose: "Our father Jacob said: Wait not, my soul, for the redemption of Gideon the son of Joash

which is temporal, nor the redemption of Samson which is a created salvation; but for the salvation which thou hast said by Thy Word should come to thy people the children of Israel: my soul waits for this thy salvation." Indeed these Targums understand almost the whole of these prophecies of the Messiah, and especially what is said about Judah, every word of which they refer to him. Thus the ancient Jews convict the moderns of both false interpretations and vain expectations. As the tribe of Dan was the first that appears to have been seduced from the true worship of God, (see Jdg 18:30), some have thought that Jacob refers particularly to this, and sees the end of the general apostasy only in the redemption by Jesus Christ, considering the nachash above as the seducer, and the Messiah the promised seed.

19. Gad, an army shall attack him, And he shall attack in return.

This is one of the most obscure prophecies in the whole chapter; and no two interpreters agree in the translation of the original words, which exhibit a most singular alliteration: - גַּד גִּדּוּד יְגוּדֵנּוּ gad gedud yegudennu; והוא יגד עקב vehu yagud akeb.

The prophecy seems to refer generally to the frequent disturbances to which this tribe should be exposed, and their hostile, warlike disposition, that would always lead them to repel every aggression. It is likely that the prophecy had an especial fulfillment when this tribe, in conjunction with that of Reuben and the half tribe of Manasseh, got a great victory over the Hagarites, taking captive one hundred thousand men, two thousand asses, fifty thousand camels, and two hundred and fifty thousand sheep; see 1Chr 5:18-22. Dr. Durell and others translate the last word עקב akeb, rear - "He shall invade their rear;" which contains almost no meaning, as it only seems to state that though the army that invaded Gad should be successful, yet the Gadites would harass their rear as they returned: but this could never be a subject sufficient consequence for a prophecy. The word עֵבֶב ekeb is frequently used as a particle, signifying in consequence, because of, on account of. After the Gadites had obtained the victory above mentioned, they continued to possess the land of their enemies till they were carried away captive. The Chaldee paraphrasts apply this to the Gadites going armed over Jordan before their brethren, discomfiting their enemies, and returning back with much spoil. See Jos 4:12, Jos 4:13, and Jos 22:1-2, Jos 22:8.

20. From Asher his bread shall be fat, And he shall produce royal dainties.

This refers to the great fertility of the lot that fell to Asher, and which appears to have corresponded with the name, which signifies happy or blessed. His great prosperity is described by Moses in this figurative way: "Let Asher be blessed with children, let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil;" Deu 33:24.

21. Naphtali is a spreading oak, Producing beautiful branches.

This is Bochart's translation; and perhaps no man who understands the genius of the Hebrew language will attempt to dispute its propriety; it is as literal as it is correct. Our own translation scarcely gives any sense. The fruitfulness of this tribe in children may be here intended. From his four sons Jahzeel, Guni, Jezer, and Shillem, which he took down into Egypt, Gen 46:24, in the course of two hundred and fifteen years there sprang of effective men 53,400: but as great increase in this way was not an uncommon case in the descendants of Jacob, this may refer particularly to the fruitfulness of their soil, and the especial providential care and blessing of the Almighty; to which indeed Moses seems particularly to refer, Deu 33:23 : O Naphtali, satisfied with favor, and full with the blessing of the Lord. So that he may be represented under the notion of a tree planted in a rich soil, growing to a prodigious size, extending its branches in all directions, and becoming a shade for men and cattle, and a harbour for the fowls of heaven.

22. The son of a fruitful (vine) is Joseph; The son of a fruitful (vine) by the fountain: The daughters (branches) shoot over the wall.

23. They sorely afflicted him and contended with him; The chief archers had him in hatred.

24. But his bow remained in strength, And the arms of his hands were made strong By the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob: By the name of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel.

25. By the God of thy father, for he helped thee; And God All-sufficient, he blessed thee, The blessing of the heavens from above, And the blessings lying in the deep beneath, The blessings of the breasts and of the womb

26. The blessings of thy father have prevailed Over the blessings of the eternal mountains, And the desirable things of the everlasting hills. These shall be on the head of Joseph, And on his crown who was separated from his brethren.

GENESIS 49:18 I have waited for your salvation, LORD.

GENESIS 49:19 “A troop will press on Gad, but he will press on their heel.

GENESIS 49:20 “Asher’s food will be rich. He will yield royal dainties.

GENESIS 49:21 “Naphtali is a doe set free, who bears beautiful fawns.

GENESIS 49:22 “Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine by a spring. His branches run over the wall.

Verse 22

The sum of a fruitful vine - This appears to me to refer to Jacob himself, who was blessed with such a numerous posterity that in two hundred and fifteen years after this his own descendants amounted to upwards of 600,000 effective men; and the figures here are intended to point out the continual growth and increase of his posterity. Jacob was a fruitful tree planted by a fountain, which because it was good would yield good fruit; and because it was planted near a fountain, from being continually watered, would be perpetually fruitful. The same is used and applied to Jacob, Deu 33:28 : The Fountain Of Jacob shall be upon a land of corn, and wine, etc.

The daughters, בנות banoth, put here for branches, shoot over or run upon the wall - Alluding probably to the case of the vine, which requires to be supported by a wall, trees, etc. Some commentators have understood this literally, and have applied it to the Egyptian women, who were so struck with the beauty of Joseph as to get upon walls, the tops of houses, etc., to see him as he passed by. This is agreeable to the view taken of the subject by the Koran. See Clarke on Gen 39:6 (note).

GENESIS 49:23 The archers have severely grieved him, shot at him, and persecute him:

Verse 23

The chief archers - בעלי חצים baaley chitstsim, the masters of arrows - Joseph's brethren, who either used such weapons, while feeding their flocks in the deserts, for the protection of themselves and cattle, or for the purpose of hunting; and who probably excelled in archery. It may however refer to the bitter speeches and harsh words that they spoke to and of him, for they hated him, and could not speak peaceably to him, Gen 37:4. Thus they sorely afflicted him, and were incessantly scolding or finding fault.

GENESIS 49:24 But his bow remained strong. The arms of his hands were made strong, by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob, (from there is the shepherd, the stone of Israel),

Verse 24

But his bow remained in strength - The more he was persecuted, either by his brethren or in Egypt, the more resplendent his uprightness and virtues shone: and the arms his extended power and influence, of his hands plans, designs, and particular operations of his prudence, judgment, discretion, etc., were all rendered successful by the hand - the powerful succor and protection, of the Mighty One of Jacob that God who blessed and protected all the counsels and plans of Jacob, and protected and increased him also when he was in a strange land, and often under the power of those who sought opportunities to oppress and defraud him.

By the name of the Shepherd; the Rock of Israel - Jehovah, and El-Elohey Israel; see Gen 33:20. This appears to me to refer to the subject of the thirty-second chapter, where Jacob wrestled with God, had God's name revealed to him, and his own name changed from Jacob to Israel, in consequence of which he built an altar, and dedicated it to God, who had appeared to him under the name of Elohey-Israel, the strong God of Israel; which circumstance led him to use the term Rock, which, as an emblem of power, is frequently given to God in the sacred writings, and may here refer to the stone which Jacob set up. It is very probable that the word shepherd is intended to apply to our blessed Lord, who is the Shepherd of Israel, the good Shepherd, Joh 10:11-17; and who, beyond all controversy, was the person with whom Jacob wrestled. See Clarke on Gen 16:7 (note) and Gen 32:24 (note).

GENESIS 49:25 even by the God of your father, who will help you; by the Almighty, who will bless you, with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies below, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb.

Verse 25

The God of thy father - How frequently God is called the God of Jacob none needs be told who reads the Bible.

God All-sufficient - Instead of אֱת שַׁדַּי Eth Shaddai, The Almighty or All-sufficient; I read אֱל שַׁדַּי El Shaddai, God All-sufficient; which is the reading of the Samaritan, Septuagint, Syriac, and Coptic, and of three reputable MSS. In the collections of Kennicott and De Rossi. The copies used by those ancient versions had evidently אֱל El, God, and not אֱת eth, The, a mistake produced in later times. On the word אֱל שַׁדַּי El Shaddai, See Clarke on Gen 17:1 (note).

The blessing of the heavens from above - A generally pure, clear, serene sky, frequently dropping down fertilizing showers and dews, so as to make a very fruitful soil and salubrious atmosphere.

Blessings lying in the deep beneath - Whatever riches could be gained from the sea or rivers, from mines and minerals in the bowels of the earth, and from abundant springs in different parts of his inheritance. Our translation of this line is excessively obscure: Blessings of the deep that lieth under. What is it that lies under the deep: By connecting ברכת bircoth, blessings, with רבצת robetseth, lying, all ambiguity is avoided, and the text speaks a plain and consistent sense.

The blessings of the breasts and of the womb - A numerous offspring, and an abundance of cattle. The progeny of Joseph, by Ephraim and Manasseh, amounted at the first census or enumeration (Numbers 1). to 75,900 men, which exceeded the sum of any one tribe; Judah, the greatest of the others, amounting to no more than 74,600. Indeed, Ephraim and Manasseh had multiplied so greatly in the days of Joshua, that a common lot was not sufficient for them. See their complaint, Jos 17:14.

GENESIS 49:26 The blessings of your father have prevailed above the blessings of your ancestors, above the boundaries of the ancient hills. They will be on the head of Joseph, on the crown of the head of him who is separated from his brothers.

Verse 26

The blessing of thy father, etc. - The blessings which thy father now prays for and pronounces are neither temporal nor transitory; they shall exceed in their duration the eternal mountains, and in their value and spiritual nature all the conveniences, comforts, and delicacies which the everlasting hills can produce. They shall last when the heavens and the earth are no more, and shall extend throughout eternity. They are the blessings which shall be communicated to the world by means of the Messiah.

The Jerusalem Targum paraphrases the place thus: "The blessing of this father shall be added unto the blessings wherewith thy fathers Abraham and Isaac, who are likened to mountains, have blessed thee; and they shall exceed the blessings of the four mothers, Sarah, Rebekah, Rachel, and Leah, who are likened to the hills: all these blessings shall be a crown of magnificence on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was a prince and governor in the land of Egypt."

27. Benjamin is a ravenous wolf: In the morning he shall devour the prey, And in the evening he shall divide the spoil.

This tribe is very fitly compared to a ravenous wolf, because of the rude courage and ferocity which they have invariably displayed, particularly in their war with the other tribes, in which they killed more men than the whole of their own numbers amounted to. "This last tribe," says Dr. Hales, "is compared to a wolf for its ferocious and martial disposition, such as was evinced by their contests with the other tribes, in which, after two victories, they were almost exterminated, Judges 19, 20." Its union with the tribe of Judah seems to be intimated in their joint conquests, expressed nearly in the same terms: "Judah went up from the prey;" "Benjamin devoured the prey." Moses in his parallel prophecy, Deu 33:12, confirms this by signifying that the sanctuary should be fixed in his lot, and that he should continue as long as the existence of the temple itself: -

The Beloved Of The Lord shall dwell with him in safety,

And shall cover him all the day long,

And shall dwell between his shoulders. Deu 33:12.

In the morning, etc. - These expressions have been variously understood. The sense given above is that in which the principal interpreters agree; but Houbigant protests against the prophecy signifying the continuance of this tribe, as the words, "in the morning devouring the prey," and "in the evening dividing the spoil," are supposed to imply; "because," he observes, "after the return from the Babylonish captivity, this tribe is no more mentioned." But this may be accounted for from the circumstance of its being associated with that of Judah, (see 1Kgs 12:21-24), after which it is scarcely ever mentioned but in that union. Being thus absorbed in the tribe of Judah, it continued from the morning till the evening of the Jewish dispensation, and consequently till the Lion of the tribe of Judah was seen in the wilderness of Israel. In the morning, according to Mr. Ainsworth, "signifies the first times; for Ehud of Benjamin was the second judge that saved the Israelites from the hands of the Moabites, Jdg 3:15, etc. Saul of Benjamin was the first king of Israel; he and his son were great warriors, making a prey of many enemies, 1Sam 11:6, 1Sam 11:7, 1Sam 11:11; 1Sam 14:13, 1Sam 14:15, 1Sam 14:47, 1Sam 14:48. And the evening, the latter times; for Mordecai and Esther of Benjamin delivered the Jews from a great destruction, and slew their enemies, Est 8:7, Est 8:9, Est 8:11; Est 9:5, Est 9:6, Est 9:15, Est 9:16."

GENESIS 49:27 "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf. In the morning he will devour the prey. At evening he will divide the plunder."

GENESIS 49:28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father spoke to them and blessed them. He blessed everyone according to his blessing.

Verse 28

Every one according to his blessing - That is, guided by the unerring Spirit of prophecy, Jacob now foretold to each of his sons all the important events which should take place during their successive generations, and the predominant characteristic of each tribe; and, at the same time, made some comparatively obscure references to the advent of the Messiah, and the redemption of the world by him.

GENESIS 49:29 He instructed them, and said to them, "I am to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite,

Verse 29

Bury me with my fathers, etc. - From this it appears that the cave at Machpelah was a common burying-place for Hebrews of distinction; and indeed the first public burying-place mentioned in history. From Gen 49:31 we find that Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah, had been already deposited there, and among them Jacob wished to have his bones laid; and he left his dying charge with his children to bury him in this place, and this they conscientiously performed. See Gen 50:13.

GENESIS 49:30 in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite as a burial place.

GENESIS 49:31 There they buried Abraham and Sarah, his wife. There they buried Isaac and Rebekah, his wife, and there I buried Leah:

GENESIS 49:32 the field and the cave that is therein, which was purchased from the children of Heth."

GENESIS 49:33 When Jacob made an end of charging his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the spirit, and was gathered to his people.

Verse 33

He gathered up his feet into the bed - It is very probable that while delivering these prophetic blessings Jacob sat upon the side of his bed, leaning upon his staff; and having finished, he lifted up his feet into the bed, stretched himself upon it, and expired!

And was gathered unto his people - The testimony that this place bears to the immortality of the soul, and to its existence separate from the body, should not be lightly regarded. In the same moment in which Jacob is said to have gathered up his feet into the bed, and to have expired, it is added, and was gathered unto his people. It is certain that his body was not then gathered to his people, nor till seven weeks after; and it is not likely that a circumstance, so distant in point both of time and place, would have been thus anticipated, and associated with facts that took place in that moment. I cannot help therefore considering this an additional evidence for the immateriality of the soul, and that it was intended by the Holy Spirit to convey this grand and consolatory sentiment, that when a holy man ceases to live among his fellows, his soul becomes an inhabitant of another world, and is joined to the spirits of just men made perfect.

1. It has been conjectured (See Clarke Gen 37:9 (note)) that the eleven stars that bowed down to Joseph might probably refer to the signs of the Zodiac, which were very anciently known in Egypt, and are supposed to have had their origin in Chaldea. On this supposition Joseph's eleven brethren answered to eleven of these signs, and himself to the twelfth. General Vallancy has endeavored, in his *Collectanea de Rebus Hibernicis*, vol. vi., part. ii., p. 343, to trace out the analogy between the twelve sons of Jacob and the twelve signs of the Zodiac, which Dr. Hales (*Analysis*, vol. ii., p. 165) has altered a little, and placed in a form in which it becomes more generally applicable. As this scheme is curious, many readers who may not have the opportunity of consulting the above works will be pleased to find it here. That there is an allusion to the twelve signs of the Zodiac, and probably to their ancient asterisms, may be readily credited; but how far the peculiar characteristics of the sons of Jacob were expressed by the animals in the Zodiac, is a widely different question.

1. Reuben - "Unstable (rather pouring out) as waters" - the sign Aquarius, represented as a man pouring out waters from an urn.
2. Simeon and Levi - "The united brethren" the sign Gemini or the Twins.
3. Judah - "The strong lion" - the sign Leo.
4. Asher - "His bread shall be fat" - the sign Virgo or the Virgin, generally represented as holding a full ear of corn.
5. Issachar - "A strong ass" or ox, both used in husbandry - the sign Taurus or the Bull.

6. and

7. Dan - "A serpent biting the horse's heels" - Scorpio, the Scorpion. On the celestial sphere the Scorpion is actually represented as biting the heel of the horse of the archer Sagittarius; and Chelae, "his claws," originally occupied the space of Libra.

8. Joseph - "His bow remained in strength" - the sign Sagittarius, the archer or bowman; commonly represented, even on the Asiatic Zodiacs, with his bow bent, and the arrow drawn up to the head - the bow in full strength.

9. Naphtali - by a play on his name, הַטֵּל taleh, the ram - the sign Aries, according to the rabbins.

10. Zebulun - "A haven for ships" - denoted by Cancer, the crab.

11. Gad - "A troop or army" - reversed, דָּג, a fish - the sign Pisces.

12. Benjamin - "A ravening wolf" - Capricorn, which on the Egyptian sphere was represented by a goat led by Pan, with a wolf's head. What likelihood the reader may see in all this, I cannot pretend to say; but that the twelve signs were at that time known in Egypt and Chaldea, there can be little doubt.

2. We have now seen the life of Jacob brought to a close; and have carefully traced it through all its various fortunes, as the facts presented themselves in the preceding chapters. Isaac his father was what might properly be called a good man; but in strength of mind he appears to have fallen far short of his father Abraham, and his son Jacob. Having left the management of his domestic concerns to Rebekah his wife, who was an artful and comparatively irreligious woman, the education of his sons was either neglected or perverted. The unhappy influence which the precepts and example of his mother had on the mind of her son we have seen and deplored. Through the mercy of God Jacob outlived the shady part of his own character, and his last days were his brightest and his best. He had many troubles and difficulties in life, under which an inferior mind must have necessarily sunk; but being a worker together with the providence of God, his difficulties only served in general to whet his invention, and draw out the immense resources of his own mind. He had to do with an avaricious, procrastinating relative, as destitute of humanity as he was of justice. Let this plead something in his excuse. He certainly did outwit his father-in-law; and yet, probably, had no more than the just recompense of his faithful services in the successful issue of all his devices. From the time in which God favored him with that wonderful manifestation of grace at Peniel, Genesis 32, he became a new man. He had frequent discoveries of God before, to encourage him in journeys, secular affairs, etc.; but none in which the heart-changing power of Divine grace was so abundantly revealed. Happy he whose last days are his best! We can scarcely conceive a scene more noble or dignified than that exhibited at the deathbed of Jacob. This great man was now one hundred and forty-seven years of age; though his body, by the waste of time, was greatly enfeebled, yet with a mind in perfect vigor, and a hope full of immortality, he calls his numerous family together, all of them in their utmost state of prosperity, and gives them his last counsels, and his dying blessing. His declarations show that the secret of the Lord was with him, and that his candle shone bright upon his tabernacle. Having finished his work, with perfect possession of all his faculties, and being determined that while he was able to help himself none should be called in to assist, (which was one of the grand characteristics of his life), he, with that dignity which became a great man and a man of God stretched himself upon his bed, and rather appears to have conquered death than to have suffered it. Who, seeing the end of this illustrious patriarch, can help exclaiming, There is none like the God of Jeshurun! Let Jacob's God be my God! Let me die the death of the righteous, and let my last end be like his! Reader, God is still the same: and though he may not make thee as great as was

Jacob, yet he is ready to make thee as good; and, whatever thy past life may have been, to crown thee with loving-kindness and tender mercies, that thy end also may be peace.