

## e-concepts

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#### Lessons from Jacob's Blessing of Issachar

By Jerry Collins

*"Issachar is a strong donkey, Lying down between the sheepfolds. When he saw that a resting place was good and that the land was pleasant, He bowed his shoulder to bear burdens, and became a slave at forced labor (Genesis 49:14-15).*

**Verse 14**—"Issachar is a strong donkey"—Issachar was given this name because of his mother's exclamation at his birth. *God gave heed to Leah, and she conceived and bore Jacob a fifth son. Then Leah said, "God has given me my wages because I gave my maid to my husband." So she named him Issachar (Genesis 30:17-18).* Donkeys in ancient Israel were very valuable service animals. They carried most of the cargo that was transported. So, too, Issachar would become a burden-bearer.

- **"Lying down between the sheepfolds"**—Issachar would desire an agricultural way of life and what it produced, rather than political supremacy among the tribes. Lower Galilee, including the valley of Jezreel, which Issachar obtained, was a pleasant and productive farming area. The mention of *sheepfolds* refers to enclosures for holding the animals that would be needed due to the abundance of grazing in that area.

**Verse 15**—"When he saw that a resting place was good and that the land was pleasant"—Issachar would prefer abundance and luxury. The richness of the area would content this tribe in the region.

- **"He bowed his shoulder to bear burdens, and became a slave at forced labor"**—Issachar would be too willing to trade his liberty for the material things of life. The future of the tribe was forced labor, for after seeing that rest *was good* and *the land was pleasant*, Issachar would become a servant, lowering his shoulder to accept the burden. Bearing *burdens* and *forced labor* describe compulsory labor of subservient people. Issachar would become unpaid labor like prisoners of war (Deuteronomy 20:10). The difference here, though, is the reversal of the relationship that should have prevailed between Israel and the Canaanites. In this case, Issachar would work for the Canaanites for that food and rest they desired. Jacob's oracle considered the gain of rest and abundance as a mockery due to Issachar's enslavement.

**An Application**—We are meant to take possession of our position in life. God has given each of us certain possessions—our personality, gifts, talents, opportunities, physical situation and so on. We must take these and move with them in a godly direction. Issachar's tribe settled for less than their calling by resisting those resources God gave them to fulfill their calling. They exchanged their freedom for servitude. Instead of dispossessing the Canaanites, they made a truce of sorts, carrying Canaanites produce and commerce with their donkeys.

#### A Review of the History of the Tribe of Issachar in Joshua 19:17-22

**Verses 17-18**—*The fourth lot fell to Issachar, to the sons of Issachar according to their families. Their territory was to Jezreel and included Chesulloth and Shunem*—Issachar was the fourth tribe to receive allotment from Joshua of rich fertile territory in the midst of the Jezreel Valley in the north of Israel.

**Verse 22**—*The border reached to Tabor and Shahazumah and Beth-shemesh, and their border ended at the Jordan; sixteen cities with their villages*—Issachar received 16 towns. Issachar's boundary on the north was Mt. Tabor and on the south Mt. Gilboa. Thus, these two mountains on either side of the valley mimicked the large 'burdens' on the sides of Issachar who *bowed his shoulder to bear burdens, and became a slave at forced labor.*

#### Observations from the Tribe of Issachar

- The chronicler noted about Issachar that *of the sons of Issachar, men who understood the times with knowledge of what Israel should do, their chiefs were two hundred; and all their kinsmen were at their command* (1 Chronicles 12:32). The men of Issachar were not only knowledgeable of God's Word, but also knowledgeable of God's world. They understood the trends of the age so that they knew how to apply God's Word to life.

**PT**—Jesus condemned some Pharisees and Sadducees for their lack of such insight into their age. *"Do you know how to discern the appearance of the sky, but cannot discern the signs of the times?"* (Matthew 16:3).

- After God motivated Deborah and Barak into action against the Canaanites, several Israelite survivors of the oppression followed their lead into the Valley of Jezreel. Deborah spoke of Issachar in her song: *"And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; As was Issachar, so was Barak; Into the valley they rushed at his heels"* (Judges 5:15). Most of Issachar's territory laid in the valley where this battle took place. When the times required bold action, Issachar's leaders stood up to the challenge in a way that benefited the war effort.

**An Application**—When you are strong, use your strength to drive out the things in your life that will cause you to sin! Like the men of Issachar, God's people must take the advantage against sin by fighting for complete victory. That will require *mighty men of valor...who understood the times...willing to enter the valley [as] they rushed at his heels*. Bold action, decisive strategy, and a determination to fight and win.

\* Learn more by checking out our study of the "Twelve Tribes of Israel" at [relationalconcepts.org](http://relationalconcepts.org) \*

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