



# Jacob's Blessing

Three Views of the Literal and  
Prophetic Interpretations

*A Biblical Case for Zion Oil & Gas*



*All these are the twelve tribes of Israel: and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them.*

Genesis 49:28

Steve Spillman — “Olive Oil vs. Petroleum Oil”

Roger Luther, Ph. D. — “An Overview of (Genesis 47:1-49)  
and (Deuteronomy 33: 1-29) — With Focus  
Directed upon the Blessings to Joseph”

Philip Mandelker --- “The Search for Oil in the Land of  
Israel: A Biblical Treasure Hunt”

# **Summary of Key Essays in \*Jacob's Blessing\***

## **1. Steve Spillman - "Olive Oil vs. Petroleum Oil"**

Steve Spillman critiques the assumption that references to "oil" in the Bible-especially in Jacob's blessing-must always mean olive oil. He argues that interpreting the Bible solely through the lens of the original writers' immediate cultural context limits divine intent. Using the example of Jacob's blessing in Genesis 49, Spillman shows that the biblical use of "shemen" (oil) does not always mean olive oil. He emphasizes that many of Jacob's metaphors (e.g., lion, serpent, wolf) are clearly symbolic and forward-looking, suggesting the same could apply to the reference to oil. He encourages readers to consider that such biblical language might prophetically point to modern petroleum resources, especially when aligned with Israel's restoration and God's promises.

## **2. Roger Luther, Ph.D. - "An Overview of Genesis 47:1-49 and Deuteronomy 33:1-29 - With Focus Directed upon the Blessings to Joseph"**

Dr. Luther provides a theological and linguistic analysis of the blessings pronounced upon Joseph in both Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33. He emphasizes the language that refers to "the deep that lies beneath" and "blessings of the breasts and of the womb," interpreting these as potential references to natural resources. Dr. Luther proposes that these passages, particularly those involving "the precious things of the earth and its fullness," could be hinting at petroleum as a divine provision. He supports this interpretation by examining Hebrew word usage and contextual symbolism, connecting the blessings to the idea of hidden riches beneath the land-a possible biblical endorsement of oil exploration in Israel.

## **3. Philip Mandelker - "The Search for Oil in the Land of Israel: A Biblical Treasure Hunt"**

Philip Mandelker frames oil exploration in Israel as a spiritually significant endeavor tied to biblical prophecy and heritage. He blends theological insight with historical references to Zion Oil & Gas's mission, arguing that the biblical promises to the tribes-especially Joseph and Asher-imply more than agricultural abundance. Mandelker likens the modern search for oil to a "biblical treasure hunt," suggesting that modern believers and geologists are participating in the fulfillment of ancient promises.

---

## Olive Oil vs. Petroleum Oil

---

By: Steve Spillman

April 9, 2006

As I share the message of the promise of a great oil reserve, to be discovered in Israel in the last days as explained in our book *"Breaking the Treasure Code; the Hunt for Israel's Oil"* a question sometimes arises about just what kind of oil the Bible means when it speaks of Jacob's Blessing. Critics argue that the passages referring to "oil" should be interpreted as "olive oil." To read "petroleum" into the words of Jacob's Blessing, in their estimation, is ridiculous; taking the words out of context. According to them there is only one way to interpret these passages – literally, in the context of the day in which it was written. When the word "oil" is used "olive oil" is meant.

On the surface their interpretation seems pretty sound. Olive oil was used almost universally in the days of the Old Testament and usually, when the word "oil" was used, "olive oil" was meant. People in the days of Jacob, when the blessing was first given; and then in Moses' time when the blessing was repeated, were familiar with olive oil as part of the every day economy. There was no word in the Hebrew language for petroleum oil. The concept of petroleum oil didn't exist for Jacob's sons (around 1800 BC) or their descendents in the time of Moses (around 1400 BC). So how in the world could anyone interpret "oil" in the Old Testament to mean petroleum oil?

When Moses mentioned oil in his repeat of Jacob's Blessing in Deuteronomy, he used the Hebrew word "shemen." In English translations of the Genesis account of Jacob's Blessing, the word oil is never used. "Shemen," according to Strong's Concordance, in its noun form means literally "grease, especially liquid"; in its verb or adjective form it means, "fatness" as in to make fat or to become fat (prosperous). "Shemen" is a general term; it can, in its noun form be used to describe olive oil, but it can also describe any substance that is oily or greasy or fatty.

The use of the word "shemen" in ancient Hebrew is analogous to the American usage of the word "oil" circa 1800 AD. Just like olive oil in the ancient Middle East, whale oil in the early 1800's was a major and ever-present part of the American economy. Whale oil was used almost universally for lighting, soaps, cosmetics, and cooking. Two hundred years ago, when a Bostonian mentioned oil, people could assume he was speaking of whale oil. Likewise, today, if the Wall Street Journal states that oil is selling for \$60.00 a barrel we can assume it's referring to petroleum; not olive oil or whale oil. If we read the passages in Genesis and Deuteronomy strictly within the limits of the understanding of the time in which it was written it is easy to assume the word "shemen" refers to olive oil.

Ancient Hebrew however, was not without the ability to describe specific meaning. When Moses addressed the people of Israel as God's spokesman, there were times when he wanted them to understand exactly what he meant. If Moses wanted God's people to understand that he meant "olive oil" specifically he would use the words "shemen" (oil) and "zayith" (olive) in conjunction. Moses used this conjunction at least four times recorded in the Exodus, Leviticus and Deuteronomy. Leviticus 24:2 gives us a good example of "shemen" and "zayith" being used in conjunction to mean specifically olive oil. "Command the children of Israel, that they bring unto thee pure oil (shemen) olive (zayith) beaten for the light, to cause the lamps to burn

*continually.*” When speaking to the children of Israel, Moses was to express God’s instructions precisely and specifically. If Moses wanted the children of Israel to understand that the “oil” in Jacob’s Blessing was literally “olive oil” and nothing else, he used the “shemen/zayith” conjunction. Modern day critics who contend that every time the word “oil” was used in the Bible it must be interpreted literally as “olive oil” might have had some trouble convincing Moses.

### Perspective

How we understand the Bible is limited to what kind of book we think it to be. We probably could agree that the Bible can be described as a collection of ancient wisdom and history written by men who lived a long time ago. But if that’s as far as we go we miss the whole point and power of the book. Limiting our understanding of what the Bible is by that statement is like saying the Mona Lisa is an assortment of colored grease smeared on a piece of canvas by a man who lived a long time ago. The statement itself is true but it misses the point, purpose and power of the object.

If our understanding of the Bible is limited to the context and comprehension of the men who penned its words we’ve missed the point, the purpose and the power of the Bible. If, however, we open our spiritual eyes and ears enough to imagine that the Bible is God’s Word to His people, whether they lived in the first days or live in the last days, and that His message is as personal and relevant to us today as it was to Jacob 3,600 years ago, we begin to understand that the Bible is more than a collection of ancient wisdom and history...a lot more. The Bible is literally “*God’s Word*.” That means God inspired the men who wrote the words of the Bible to write what they wrote. The Bible is a message to man of God’s intent and purpose. The men penned the words but it was God who directed the pen. If we limit God’s ability to communicate with man through the ages via His written word to Jacob’s and Moses’ ability to fully comprehend the meaning of the message in their limited personal context, then yes, God probably meant olive oil.

Of course if we’re going to stick with the theory that Jacob and Moses had to comprehend the full meaning of the message they were given, in their cultural and literal context, then we’re in real trouble. Jacob opens his blessing by saying, “*Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days.*” Chances are Jacob didn’t know what was going to happen the next day, let alone what was going to befall his children’s children in the “*last days*.” So we know that he knows he wasn’t speaking in the context of his present day and time. Jacob goes on to call Judah a “*lion’s whelp*”; he calls Issachar an “*ass*”; Dan is a “*serpent*”; Naphtali is a “*hind*” (*deer*); Joseph is a “*fruitful bough*”; and Benjamin is a “*wolf*.” Unless Jacob held a poor opinion of his son Issachar we can assume he wasn’t speaking literally.

So we’ve pretty much concluded that Jacob wasn’t speaking in the context of his present day and he wasn’t speaking literally. Of course Jacob never mentioned oil, olive or otherwise, in his blessing of Genesis 49. He did, however use the word “shemen” in its adjective form. Jacob told Asher that “*his bread shall be fat*.” The adjective form of “shemen” is used here, translated in English to “*fat*.” According to Vine’s Dictionary, this use, in its adjective form means “*rich*” or “*fattening*.” It seems that critics, who argue that the use of “shemen” or its derivatives in the Bible could only mean olive oil, disagree with Jacob who, the single time he used the word in his blessing refers to “*fat bread*.”

Moses used "*shemen*" or its derivatives three times in Deuteronomy 32 and only once in Deuteronomy 33. Deuteronomy 32 is known as the "*Song of Moses*." It was a hymn for Israel in remembrance of their deliverance, salvation and future as God's people. Its words are figurative, prophetic and mystical. It would be very difficult for anyone to argue that the *Song of Moses* was literal in its meaning and limited to the cultural context and comprehension of Moses or his contemporaries. As long as our critics want to be sure of the word's meaning in the "*context*" of the passage, let's look at the context in which these words are used:

1. Verse 9 states: "*For the Lord's portion is his people; Jacob is the lot of his inheritance.*" God set aside the children of Israel (*Jacob*) as His "*portion*" when He divided the nations. What does the word "*lot*" mean when the passage states; "*Jacob is the lot of his inheritance*"? According to Strong's Concordance "*lot*" is the Hebrew word "*chebel*" meaning "*measuring line, district, region, or country.*" Moses was using a term that was geographic in context to describe Jacob's Blessing; it had to do with the land in which Jacob's descendents were about to enter. We haven't seen any oil or "*shemen*" yet, but be patient; remember we're looking at the context of the passage.
2. Verse 13 states: "*...and he made him suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock...*" This verse has oil in it and it's the Hebrew word "*shemen*." Now we're getting somewhere! Our critics, however, are sticking to their story; in this passage oil means literally "*olive oil*" and honey means literally "*bee's honey*." Bees have been known to make hives in rocky crags, and olive trees grow on rocky hillsides all over the Holy Land. They even conjecture that the ancients could have used hollow reeds to "*suck*" honey from the hives in the rocky crags (*how the ancients "sucked" olive oil from the rocky hillsides, I'm not sure*).

Let's dissect this passage a little further. Not only is Jacob (remember verse 9, *Jacob is the lot of his inheritance, the blessing is in the land*) sucking oil (*shemen*) out of the rock; and he's also sucking honey out of the rock. The English word "*suck*" in this verse is the Hebrew word "*yanaq*." This is the word used for a baby nursing; literally sucking milk from its mother's breast. The English word "*suck*" translates two other Hebrew words in the Old Testament. The meanings for both of these other Hebrew words are closer to "*drink*" or "*sip*," not suckle as a baby to its mother. It seems strange that if Moses were speaking of Jacob ingesting olive oil and bee's honey he would use the word meaning suckle rather than either of the two words meaning to "*drink*" or "*sip*." It seems a bit of a stretch to believe he was trying to say that Jacob's descendents should use hollow reeds to "*suck*" bee's honey and olive oil out of the ground. But perhaps Moses was trying to convey an idea other than sucking up olive oil and bee's honey? Remember, the Hebrews had no word for petroleum oil in the days of Moses and the mechanical pump hadn't been conceptualized. If Moses wanted to express the notion of "*pumping petroleum*" (*two concepts of which he hadn't the faintest idea*), it's conceivable that the only words available to describe the picture he had been given by God to convey was "*suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock.*"

Let's say you're willing to consider for a second that "*shemen*" might be used to mean petroleum oil and "*yanaq*" might be used to express the concept of "*sucking*" something to the surface like a pump. This verse says Jacob will "*suck honey out of the rock*"; surely there's not some hidden or double meaning to the word "*honey*"? Every time honey is mentioned in the Old Testament it's the same Hebrew word, "*d'bash*." "*D'bash*" is the only Hebrew word in the Old Testament for honey; and we know this can't mean petroleum

oil...can it? According to Strong's the literal meaning of "*d'bash*" is "*to be gummy*." The word, "*d'bash*," described the gummy, sticky characteristic of honey. The ancient Hebrews literally described bee's honey as "*that gummy, sticky stuff*."

If Moses meant only that Jacob's descendents would enjoy olive oil and honey in the Promised Land why would he say (*all in the same phrase*) that Jacob would "*suck (yanaq) honey (d'bash) out of the rock, and oil (shemen) out of the flinty rock...*"? Mentioned individually, you might be able to make a case that Moses was just being poetic; but together in the same phrase, you've got to wonder if perhaps he may have meant something else. Moses, in fact, did mean something else; and he meant exactly the same thing when he put "*sucking honey out of the rock*" and "*oil out of the flinty rock*" together. This literary structure, common in the Bible, is known as a Hebrew parallelism. The first object (*honey*) of the parallelism is symbolic; the second object (*oil*) is literal. Both objects are tied together by the verb (*suck*) to form the parallelism. Whatever Moses was trying to convey will be "*sucked*" from the rock is of the same essence. In this case "*honey*" and "*oil*" hold the same meaning.

If Moses was trying to accurately describe an understanding given to him by God that, in the last days, an oily, gummy, sticky substance, maybe amber in color, was to be sucked from the rocks and there were no words for or concept of petroleum oil being pumped from deep underground, could he use the word "*yanaq*" (*to suck*) instead of pump and the words "*d'bash*" (*gummy sticky stuff*) or "*shemen*" (*oil*) instead of petroleum? Why not? These were probably the most accurate Hebrew words at the time to describe the image he had been given.

3. Still speaking of Jacob eating "*the increase of the fields*," verse 14 states, "*with the fat of kidneys of wheat*." The English word "*fat*" in this verse is the root form of "*shemen*." This passage is referring to the good (*fat*) part of the wheat kernel. As far as we know, it's not implying petroleum and surely not meaning olive oil.
4. Verse 15 again uses the root form of "*shemen*" referring to Jacob getting "*fat*" and being "*covered with fatness*." This passage speaks of the rebellion and wickedness of the people of Israel. We can assume this usage has nothing directly to do with olive oil or petroleum oil.
5. In Deuteronomy chapter 33, the only mention of the word "*oil*" in Jacob's Blessing is in verse 24. The verse states, "*And of Asher he said, Let Asher be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil*." The Hebrew word in this passage is "*shemen*" (*oil*), not "*shemen/zayith*" (*olive oil*).

This is probably the most used verse in the Bible to justify (*or refute*) the existence and location of petroleum in Israel; by both those who believe that God has ordained vast oil deposits in the land of Israel, and those who don't believe and think the whole idea is nonsense. The "*believe*" group says, "*Asher is dipping his foot in oil! Let's find the foot of Asher and start drilling!*" The "*don't believe*" group contends, "*This verse means olive oil. You can't extract a petroleum oil prophecy out of one vague reference to (olive) oil in the Old Testament*."

If either side is basing their argument on this one passage, then both groups are wrong. The "*believes*" can't cover the Holy Land with oil derricks based on a single passage in scripture. The "*don't believes*" can't single out this verse as proof that God always means "*olive oil*"

in the Old Testament. This verse is just one of many “clues” pointing to God’s meaning. The biblical evidence for the belief that Israel has been endowed by God with a treasure buried deep beneath the surface of its land extends far beyond whether or not we can interpret “oil” mentioned in the Old Testament as anything but olive oil.

It’s obvious by now that when the Bible uses the word “oil” in English translations or “shemen” in the original Hebrew that the term is generic and, though usually used in reference to olive oil, is in no way exclusive. We’ve also begun to build the case that in the few specific instances regarding Jacob’s Blessing in Genesis and Deuteronomy that the Bible could conceivably be speaking of a future petroleum discovery. What we haven’t discussed in this article is the overwhelming contextual evidence that the Bible does indeed allude to subterranean liquid “treasures” as a part of Israel’s “inheritance.” To present all the evidence that Jacob’s Blessing does indeed refer to a latter day petroleum discovery would require a book length essay. That, of course, was the purpose for writing *“Breaking the Treasure Code; the Hunt for Israel’s Oil.”* For a more in depth study on the subject this would be an obvious first choice. The book, however, is not the only resource on the subject.

The more Jacob’s Blessing is researched, by serious Christian and Jewish scholars the more evident it becomes that the Bible points to something beyond olive oil. Theologian and former trustee of Southeastern Baptist Theological Seminary, Dr. Roger Luther has written an excellent study on the 47<sup>th</sup> through 49<sup>th</sup> chapters of Genesis and the 33<sup>rd</sup> chapter of Deuteronomy. Israeli petroleum attorney Philip Mandelker has written a study on the roots of the word “shemen” and references to petroleum both in scripture and antiquity. Mandelker’s *“The Search for Oil in the Land of Israel: A Biblical Treasure Hunt”* presents a scholarly historical, geological and Jewish perspective on the subject. As an Old Testament prophecy alluding to a last days discovery of petroleum in the land of Israel is, both biblically and historically, a Jewish subject, Philip’s paper allows a depth and perspective Gentile Bible scholars would most likely miss. The book, *“Breaking the Treasure Code; the Hunt for Israel’s Oil,”* Dr. Luther’s study and Mr. Mandelker’s paper are available at [www.oilinisrael.net](http://www.oilinisrael.net).

Does the Bible allude to petroleum oil being discovered in the land of Israel in the “last days” or is this just the pipe dream of a few latter-day would-be prophets and some well meaning evangelical Christian oil men? Can the word “oil” in the English Bible or “shemen” in the Hebrew Bible possibly mean something besides olive oil? Could certain uses of the term actually apply to petroleum? The answer to these questions is found within the pages of the Bible. The clues can and have been mined by Bible scholars. How these clues are interpreted depends largely on the perspective the seeker brings to the book. If the seeker is predisposed to flights of fancy and shallow research, the Bible could probably reveal anything the seeker wanted bad enough to see. Likewise, if the seeker is predisposed to see the Bible as an historical document, written and inspired solely by men who penned its words, it would be difficult to find any interpretation outside of the context of the time in which it was written.

We believe that the Bible is the Word of God; that God directed the minds and pens of the men who wrote it, and that its message communicates God’s plan and purpose to us today with as much or more relevance as it communicated in the day the original text was written. If the seeker brings this perspective to the book, the meaning and power of its message is not confined to the era and cultural framework of its earthly scribes. Limiting the potential of God’s Word to the context and understanding of the men who penned its pages doesn’t do justice to the living power of the Bible or to our faith in an omnipotent God Who knows the beginning and the

ending of all things and Whose perfect purpose is at work in these days just as it was in the days of Jacob and Moses.

Taking the position that when the Bible speaks of "oil" it means "*olive oil*" has a surface logic that seems reasonable to those who are comfortable to treat the text as just an historical book. The patriarchs were familiar with olive oil and the concept of petroleum oil, as far as we can tell from biblical texts, was foreign to them. They didn't understand "oil" as "*petroleum oil*"; so we assume they couldn't have possibly meant "*petroleum oil*" when they penned the text. When the word "oil" is used in the Bible, in the vast majority of cases, it does mean olive oil. So the argument for the olive oil interpretation, then, is this:

1. since the patriarchs apparently didn't have a concept of petroleum oil they couldn't have meant petroleum oil any time oil was mentioned in the Bible in any context.
2. Since when "oil" is mentioned in the Bible, it almost always means "*olive oil*," we are safe to take "*olive oil*" as our default understanding, regardless of the contextual clues.

If our desire is to read the words of the Bible casually, or if we choose to treat it as strictly an historical document, then the arguments above make sense and we can move on to other casual and conceptually safe Bible study topics. Although I would suggest staying away from the prophet Ezekiel, where men with four faces live in whirlwinds of fire and ride wheels within wheels covered with eyes. The prophet Daniel would be good to ignore as well. The book is filled with disturbing images of lions with wings and other troubling apparitions that would be difficult to rationalize in light of Daniel's cultural and historical limitations.

It's a good thing that Daniel himself didn't rely on his limited cultural and historical understanding to scribe the message he was given. In the last passages of the book that bears his name, after a detailed and disturbing vision about happenings which Daniel could, in no way interpret or understand in light of his cultural and historical context, he addresses the pre-incarnate Christ:

*And I heard, but I understood not: then said I, O my Lord, what shall be the end of these things? And he said, Go thy way, Daniel: for the words are closed up and sealed till the time of the end...and none of the wicked shall understand; but the wise shall understand. (Daniel 12: 8-9, 10b)*

American Bible expositor and teacher, the late Donald Grey Barnhouse offers a sound approach to understanding the Word of God.

*If we are going to understand the Word of God, we must have a spiritual attitude toward it. The Lord said that "the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God; for they are foolishness unto him: neither can he know them, because they are spiritually discerned" (1 Corinthians 2:14). God refuses to reveal Himself to just any casual passer-by.<sup>1</sup>*

Barnhouse continues with his recommended methodology for studying any subject in the Bible to extract its full meaning.

---

<sup>1</sup> Donald Grey Barnhouse, *The Invisible War* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1965)11.

### *Putting The Puzzle Together*

*The proper method of Bible study, then, is analogous to the putting together of a puzzle. For any given doctrinal subject, read the entire volume, selecting every verse that bears the truth under study. Put all of these passages together, and the synthesis of the result is the true Bible doctrine on the question with which you are concerned. A verse from Moses, and one from Ezekiel, and one from Paul, put side by side, each illuminating the others, fit into the perfect pattern of the whole design and give the whole light which God has been pleased to reveal on that particular theme. Taken one by one the verses may be no more than mere shapes, meaningless as far as the overall purpose of the inspired revelation is concerned...*

*The Lord says that the anointing by the Spirit renders us capable of understanding, so that we do not need to have anyone teach us... The responsibility of reading and knowing the Word and will of God is upon every individual, who must find out for himself, conclude what he believes and be ready to give an answer for the hope that is within him, knowing that he will be answerable to the Lord for the content of his faith, and that he will not be permitted to present the excuse that he believed what some church or group of clergy interpreted for him...<sup>2</sup>*

If the idea that certain passages in Jacob's Blessing point to a vast liquid treasure to be found in the land of Israel in the last days was limited to a verse or two where the Hebrew word "shemen" is translated "oil" then it would be a pretty weak idea indeed. If this was the extent of evidence for the argument, I would have to side with the "don't believe," and let biblical oil be olive. If, however, the idea that passages in Jacob's Blessing point to a vast oil treasure reserved for Israel in the last days, is based on substantial contextual evidence, not only in the passages in question, but throughout the Bible, and if geographic, historical, and now geologic evidence confirms the scriptural evidence we would be hard pressed not to consider the message lying there for us.

So then; how should we answer the question of "olive oil" versus "petroleum oil" in the Bible? Let's break it down into three questions:

**Question:** When the Bible mentions oil, is it referring to olive oil?

**Answer:** In many case, most cases, yes. Olive oil was almost universally known and used in Bible times.

**Question:** When the Bible mentions oil, should we assume that it is always referring to olive oil.

**Answer:** No, of course not; even a casual study of the Bible and Hebrew terms reveals that "oil" (*shemen*) is a generic term referring to any oily, greasy, liquid and that when the Hebrew wished to express olive oil specifically, the conjunction "*shemen*" (*oil*)/"*zayith*" (*olive*) was used.

**Question:** Could the Bible, in some cases, be referring to petroleum oil?

---

<sup>2</sup> Barnhouse 11-12.

**Answer:** Yes, we believe it does. Our interpretation is based on the approach that the words of the Bible are inspired by God, Who knows the end from the beginning and Whose message is for man in these times every bit as much as it was for men in earlier times. The contextual clues in Genesis and Deuteronomy pointing to Israel in the last days, a treasure that lies deep underground, and earth honey and rock oil, confirmed by passages from other parts of scripture are so overwhelming that the reader, if presented with all the evidence would have to be predisposed to believe that the Bible is nothing but an historical book to deny the idea's validity. Further research - historical, cultural, geographic, and geologic, has added to the biblical evidence.

An old proverb says that *"the proof of the pudding is in the eating."* Will skeptics and critics still exist when petroleum oil is discovered in Israel, in the exact spot Jacob's Blessing pronounced it to be more than 3,600 years ago and brought to the surface before the eyes of the world? Probably. Their post-discovery argument has already been developed. *"After all,"* they reason, *"the middle-east is awash in oil; it was only a matter of time before Israel discovered reserves in their land."*

Is all this talk of prophecy and clues and hidden meanings a little difficult to swallow? Does God really communicate His purpose through cryptic allusions planted in the Bible, to be figured out at a later time? Jesus had to address his disciples as to why he spoke to the people in parables (*cryptic allusions to be figured out at a later time*).

*He answered and said unto them, "Because it is given to you to know the mysteries of the kingdom of heaven, but to them it is not given. For whosoever hath, to him shall be given, and he shall have more abundance: but whosoever hath not, from him shall be taken away even that he hath. Therefore speak I to them in parables: because they seeing see not; and hearing they hear not, neither do they understand. And in them is fulfilled the prophecy of Isaiah, which saith,*

*'By hearing ye shall hear and not understand; and seeing ye shall see and not perceive: for this people's heart is waxed gross, and their ears are dull of hearing, and their eyes they have closed; lest at any time they should see with their eyes, and hear with their ears, and should understand with their heart, and should be converted, and I should heal them.'*

*But blessed are your eyes, for they shall see: and your ears for they shall hear. For verily I say unto you, That many prophets and righteous men have desired to see those things which ye see, and have not seen them; and to hear those things which ye hear, and have not heard them."* (Matthew 13: 11-17)

By: Steve Spillman  
True Potential Publishing, Inc.  
P.O. Box 904 Travelers Rest, SC 23960  
sspillman@tppress.com



## An Overview of Genesis 47:1-49:33 and Deuteronomy 33:1-29 With Focus Directed upon the Blessings to Joseph

### Genesis 47

1 Then Joseph came and told Pharaoh, and said, My father and my brethren, and their flocks, and their herds, and all that they have, are come out of the land of Canaan; and, behold, they *[are]* in the land of Goshen. 2 And he took some of his brethren, *[even]* five men, and presented them unto Pharaoh. 3 And Pharaoh said unto his brethren, What *[is]* your occupation? And they said unto Pharaoh, Thy servants *[are]* shepherds, both we, *[and]* also our fathers. 4 They said moreover unto Pharaoh, For to sojourn in the land are we come; for thy servants have no pasture for their flocks; for the famine *[is]* sore in the land of Canaan: now therefore, we pray thee, let thy servants dwell in the land of Goshen. 5 And Pharaoh spake unto Joseph, saying, Thy father and thy brethren are come unto thee: 6 The land of Egypt *[is]* before thee; in the best of the land make thy father and brethren to dwell; in the land of Goshen let them dwell: and if thou knowest *[any]* men of activity among them, then make them rulers over my cattle.

Although Joseph had previously spoken to Pharaoh about his father and brothers, before us we note that Joseph announced their arrival to Pharaoh and then he proceeded in selecting five of the new emigrants and personally introduced them to Rameses. One is inclined to consider that Pharaoh may have possibly attributed Joseph's genius to his Father. In any case, Pharaoh willingly extended an invitation for some of Joseph's qualified relatives to be overseers of his precious cattle. In addition, Pharaoh not only displayed confidence in Joseph but, Joseph's introduction of Jacob to Pharaoh set the stage for a relationship of on-going respect and admiration between these two very different leaders. Joseph quickly proceeded with getting his entire family settled down on an already predetermined parcel of some of Egypt's finest land. Joseph's perpetual actions of caring for their every need continued to magnify his complete forgiveness of his brethren.

7 And Joseph brought in Jacob his father, and set him before Pharaoh: and Jacob blessed Pharaoh. 8 And Pharaoh said unto Jacob, How old *[art]* thou? 9 And Jacob said unto Pharaoh, The days of the years of my pilgrimage *[are]* an hundred and thirty years: few and evil have the days of the years of my life been, and have not attained unto the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their pilgrimage. 10 And Jacob blessed Pharaoh, and went out from before Pharaoh. 11 And Joseph placed his father and his brethren, and gave them a possession in the land of Egypt, in the best of the land, in the land of Rameses, as Pharaoh had commanded. And Joseph nourished his father, and his brethren, and all his father's household, with bread, according to *[their]* families. 12 And *[there was]* no bread in all the land; for the famine *[was]* very sore, so that the land of Egypt and *[all]* the land of Canaan fainted by reason of the famine. 13 And Joseph gathered up all the money that was found in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, for the corn which they bought: and Joseph brought the money into Pharaoh's house. 14 And when money failed in the land of Egypt, and in the land of Canaan, all the Egyptians came unto Joseph, and said, Give us bread: for why should we die in thy presence? for the money faileth. 15 And Joseph said, Give your cattle; and I will give you for your cattle, if money fail. 16 And they brought their cattle unto Joseph: and Joseph gave them bread *[in exchange]* for horses, and for the flocks, and for the cattle of the herds, and for the asses: and he fed them with bread for all their cattle for that year. 17 When that year was ended, they came unto him the second year, and said unto him, We will not hide *[it]* from my lord, how that our money is spent; my lord also hath our herds of cattle; there is not ought left in the sight of my lord, but our bodies, and our lands: 18 Wherefore shall we die before thine eyes, both we and our land? buy us and our land for bread, and we and our land will be servants unto Pharaoh: and give *[us]* seed, that we may live, and not die, that the land be not desolate. 19 And Joseph bought all the land of Egypt for Pharaoh; for the Egyptians sold every man his field, because the famine prevailed over them: so the land became Pharaoh's. 20 And as for the people, he removed them to cities from *[one]* end of the borders of Egypt even to the *[other]* end thereof. 21 Only the land of the priests bought he not; for the priests had a portion *[assigned them]* of Pharaoh, and did eat their portion which Pharaoh gave them: wherefore they sold not their lands. 22 Then Joseph said unto the people, Behold, I have bought you this day and your land for Pharaoh: lo, *[here is]* seed for you, and ye shall sow the land. 23 And it shall come to pass in the increase, that ye shall give the fifth *[part]* unto Pharaoh, and four parts shall be your own,

for seed of the field, and for your food, and for them of your households, and for food for your little ones. 25 And they said, Thou hast saved our lives: let us find grace in the sight of my lord, and we will be Pharaoh's servants. 26 And Joseph made it a law over the land of Egypt unto this day, *[that]* Pharaoh should have the fifth *[part]*; except the land of the priests only, *[which]* became not Pharaoh's. 27 And Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions therein, and grew, and multiplied exceedingly. 28 And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years: so the whole age of Jacob was an hundred forty and seven years. 29 And the time drew nigh that Israel must die: and he called his son Joseph, and said unto him, If now I have found grace in thy sight, put, I pray thee, thy hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me; bury me not, I pray thee, in Egypt: 30 But I will lie with my fathers, and thou shalt carry me out of Egypt, and bury me in their buryingplace. And he said, I will do as thou hast said. 31 And he said, Swear unto me. And he swore unto him. And Israel bowed himself upon the bed's head.

It is safe to assume that during his seventeen years in Egypt Jacob must have observed Joseph at work and realized that his son was a responsible, loving, and a fair prince. Also, observing and understanding how God had used Joseph to preserve the Egyptians as well as the entire clan, he was firmly convicted that if any man would be led of God in the future to care for his family it was, undoubtedly, Joseph.

We now see Jacob about to commission and to repay his son. First, he sent for Joseph. Secondly, he asked if he had found **“grace”** (*khane*) in his sight. Joseph answered with silence. This answer seemed to give Jacob the necessary peace to proceed. It is as if Jacob desired to only proceed if Joseph deemed his father a man worthy of such an act. The old warrior of God was certainly testing his son. Thus, Jacob had carefully laid the foundation for the next phase of his intentions. We may also safely surmise that Joseph understood quite well that that his father was about to introduce a very serious matter. Jacob proceeded with his intentions by directing Joseph to take an oath by placing his open hand under his thigh (or perhaps generative parts) and lifting up. To Jacob, this was the highest form of oath taking. The word for **“swear”** is *shaw-bah*. It carries the meaning - to *seven oneself*. That is: Jacob asked Joseph to assure him seven times that, when the proper time arrived, his committal service would be in the land promised by God. Therefore, by Joseph taking this type of oath, not only would he be reflecting his sincerity, allegiance, and character but also he would be swearing upon the entire lineage line containing God's promises. Joseph willingly complied.

Jacob had now settled two of his life's greatest matters. First, he could now die in peace with the assurance of ending up in the Promised Land. Secondly, Joseph had proven himself trustworthy enough to assume the responsibility and accept the up-coming family blessing. In all probability, Joseph must have expected some sort of blessing but certainly nothing on the scale he was about to discover.

The following parallel passage continues the narrative.

#### Genesis 48

1 And it came to pass after these things, that [one] told Joseph, Behold, thy father [is] sick: and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. 2 And [one] told Jacob, and said, Behold, thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed. 3 And Jacob said unto Joseph, God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me, 4 And said unto me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people; and will give this land to thy seed after thee [for] an everlasting possession. 5 And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, [are] mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. 6 And thy issue, which thou begetteth after them, shall be thine, [and] shall be called after the name of their brethren in their inheritance. 7 And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet [there was] but a little way to come unto Ephrath: and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath; the same [is] Bethlehem. 8 And Israel beheld Joseph's sons, and said, Who [are] these? 9 And Joseph said unto his father, They [are] my sons, whom God hath given me in this [place]. And he said, Bring them, I pray thee, unto me, and I

will bless them. 10 Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, [so that] he could not see. And he brought them near unto him; and he kissed them, and embraced them. 11 And Israel said unto Joseph, I had not thought to see thy face: and, lo, God hath shewed me also thy seed. 12 And Joseph brought them out from between his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. 13 And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought [them] near unto him. :14 And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid [it] upon Ephraim's head, who [was] the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh [was] the firstborn. 15 And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, Gen 48:16 The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth. 17 And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him: and he held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head unto Manasseh's head. 18 And Joseph said unto his father, Not so, my father: for this [is] the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head. 19 And his father refused, and said, I know [it], my son, I know [it]: he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations. 20 And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh: and he set Ephraim before Manasseh. 21 And Israel said unto Joseph, Behold, I die: but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers. 22 Moreover I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow.

Although he was a long way from Canaan, the old patriarch knew that one day his entire family would be in the land God had promised to grandfather Abraham.<sup>1</sup> Joseph had previously sworn to his

---

<sup>1</sup> God called Abram when he was the 75-year-old son of a pagan living in Mesopotamia. God's appearance and calling were very clearly understood. The ball was then in his court. Abram was convicted enough to pull up stakes and travel to a general geographical area known only to him as Canaan. According to Stephen in Acts 7, he heeded the call but paused and lived in Charan (Haran) until his father, Terah, died. He finally arrived in the land, traveled through it, and continued looking **"for a city which hath foundations, whose builder and maker is God."** (Heb.11:10) Even though Abram was along in years, Stephen again, quoting from Genesis 15, reminds us that God promised the land to his seed. This vast stretch of land extended from the Nile in Egypt, eastward to the river Euphrates and then to the land of the Canaanites, and unto Lebanon (Gen.15; Deu.1:7). God informed Abram that his descendents would dwell in this land and eventually forced into servitude in strange land for four hundred years. Abraham learned that God would eventually judge this nation and once again bring them into this land of promise. This must have been a vast thing for a man like Abram, now Abraham, to swallow but he obeyed by simply believing God. Through this act of faith, Paul, in Romans 4:3 and Galatians 3:6, and James, in 2:23, both record that God declared him as being righteous.

In his old age, Abraham fathered a son Isaac (*"laughter"*). Before Isaac's birth Abraham succumbing to an old Mesopotamian custom by fathering a son, Ishmael, through Sarah's handmade Hagar. Great problems and levels of friction would follow through out their lives and even ripple down to our day. According to Genesis 25, when Abraham was 175 years of age he summoned all his children, gave gifts to all the sons of his concubines, and then sent them to **"the land of the East"** to be away from Isaac. The scripture also clearly teaches that Abraham personally oversaw all this before his death. Abraham knew that Isaac was his promised child so he gave **"all"** he had to him. When Abraham died Isaac and Ishmael came together to bury their father in **"the cave of Machpelah, in the field of Ephron the son of Zohar the Hittite, which is before Mamre;"** (Gen. 25:9). At the age of 40, Isaac's wife, Rebekah, gave birth to twins. The first-born son was Esau (*"hairy"*). The second son's name was Jacob (*"heal catcher"*). It is extremely important to note that God had previously told Rebekah that she was carrying two nations in her womb. God also informed Rebekah that older one, Esau, would be weak and serve his younger and stronger brother -Jacob. (Gen. 25) He went on to additionally enlighten her with the everlasting truth that these two nations would grow apart and have entirely different manners and customs. Before Isaac's death, the time came for him to pass his blessing to his sons. In spite of what commentators have said about Rebekah's actions, God apparently used her to guarantee the fulfillment of His words to the letter! This blessing was as follows **"Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed be every one that curseth thee, and blessed be he that blesseth thee"** (Gen.27:29). Many later years later Jacob would hunt for, and find, his father Isaac dwelling near his grandfather's beloved town of Hebron. Before Isaac's death, Esau would also show up. Isaac died at the ripe old age 180. Together the two sons buried their father. During the last portion of their lives, Jacob and Esau seemed to be friends but, as scripture, history and time revealed, they gradually grew apart – just as God had told Rebekah. Without a

father that he would bury him in Canaan but Jacob realized Joseph's need to understand that God had very special plans for him and his family in Canaan.

Thus, we begin looking at this most interesting blessing. The narrative seems to imply that soon after taking the oath Joseph received word of Jacob's illness. He quickly returned only this time he was accompanied by his two sons – Ephraim (*"double fruit"*) and Manasseh (*"causing to forget"*). The boys were probably around eighteen to twenty years of age at this time. When Joseph arrived, Jacob immediately, **"strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed,"** welcomed him, and then proceeded with informing Joseph of a very special covenant God initiated with him at Bethel a long time before.<sup>2</sup>

Jacob continued his conversation with Joseph by informing him of his willingness to bless him, adopt his two Egyptian-born sons as his own, and present to them an inheritance of their own distinguished by their respective names.

Just being with Joseph must have directed the old patriarch's memory toward the death of Rachel - Joseph's mother for, we read, he quickly delivered an overview of her death. Although years had passed, nothing, except the possibility of God's providence with Joseph, had filled this tremendous void in Jacob's heart.

Jacob detected the presence of some figures with Joseph. Without doubt, Jacob had seen Ephraim and Manasseh before but now his eyesight had evidentially deteriorated to the point where he no longer could identify the boys. Joseph, realizing that his father was about to pronounce a blessing upon his sons, attempted to assist his father by carefully placing the boys in front of him so as he would not make a mistake. He positioned Ephraim near his left hand and Manasseh near his right. Joseph believed this act would insure the proper blessing to each son. Yet, we clearly see God's providential work in the text. First, Jacob pronounced a blessing upon Joseph and his sons in a general way. Secondly, Jacob's next act perplexed Joseph. Jacob placed his opened right hand upon Ephraim and his opened left hand on Manasseh. This was opposite of how Joseph had positioned the lads to begin with. His arms make an x or a type of cross. Joseph tried to correct his father's hands but Jacob lovingly rebuked him. Without a doubt, God had directed Jacob's maneuver for we read that Jacob guided **"his hands wittingly"**.

The three soon discovered that, although the older would receive a blessing, the younger would receive the inheritance<sup>3</sup> and double blessing<sup>4</sup> usually given to the firstborn<sup>5</sup>. Although in reality,

---

doubt, Jacob was the most knowledgeable person in his era of his people's history with God. He knew all too well that one day his people would be in the land just as promised to grandfather Abraham many years before. Today they still do not have the entire land grant as prophecy declared but rest assured one day they will!

<sup>2</sup> This covenant was as follows: **"And God appeared unto Jacob again, when he came out of Padanaram, and blessed him. And God said unto him, Thy name [is] Jacob: thy name shall not be called any more Jacob, but Israel shall be thy name: and he called his name Israel. And God said unto him, I [am] God Almighty: be fruitful and multiply; a nation and a company of nations shall be of thee, and kings shall come out of thy loins; And the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to thee I will give it, and to thy seed after thee will I give the land. And God went up from him in the place where he talked with him. And Jacob set up a pillar in the place where he talked with him, [even] a pillar of stone: and he poured a drink offering thereon, and he poured oil thereon. And Jacob called the name of the place where God spake with him, Bethel."** (Gen.35:9-15)

<sup>3</sup> *"Birthright is the right which naturally belonged to the firstborn son. Where there were more wives than one, the firstborn was the son who in point of time was born before the others, apparently whether his mother was a wife or a concubine. Sarah protests against Ishmael being with Isaac heir along, but it is possible that the bestowal of the rights of the firstborn on Isaac was not due to any law, but rather to the influence of a favorite wife (Gen 21:10). The birthright of the firstborn consisted in the first place of a double portion of what his father had to leave. This probably means that he had a double share of such property as could be divided. We have no certain knowledge of the manner in which property was inherited in the patriarchal age, but it seems probable that the lands and flocks which were the possession of the family as a whole, remained so after the death of the father. The firstborn became head of the family and thus succeeded to*

Reuben was Jacob's firstborn and in direct line for the first-born's double inheritance and blessing, Jacob, even in his old age, had never forgotten the time when Reuben brought great shame on his family by lying with his father's concubine—Billah, as recorder in Genesis 35:21. The Bible records, in our very next chapter, **"Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: 4 Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch."** (Gen. 49:3-4) Another reference to this shameful act, and it's repercussions, is recorder in the Chronicles, **"Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel, (for he [was] the firstborn; but, forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel: and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright."** (1Chr.5:1)

Joseph learned that he would have a portion **"above thy brethren"** and that this portion was the one his father had taken as spoils from the Amorites (*"the westerner"*). What could the Amorites have possessed,

---

*the charge of the family property, becoming responsible for the maintenance of the younger sons, the widow or widows, the unmarried and daughters. He also, as head, succeeded to a considerable amount of authority over the other members. Further, he generally received the blessing, which placed him in close and favored covenant-relationship with Yahweh. According to the accounts which have come down to us, all these gifts and privileges could be diverted from the firstborn son. This could happen with his own consent, as in the case of Esau, who sold his birthright to Jacob (Gen 25:29-34), or by the decision of the father, as in the case of Reuben (Gen 48:22; Gen 49:3, Gen 49:4; 1Ch 5:1, 1Ch 5:2) and of Shimri (1Ch 26:10). In the Deuteronomic version of the law, a provision is made, prohibiting the father from making the younger son the possessor of the birthright, just because his mother was specially beloved (Deu 21:15-17). The blessing also could be diverted from the eldest son. This was done when Jacob blessed the children of Joseph, and deliberately put the younger before the elder (Gen 48:13, Gen 48:14, Gen 48:17-19); even when the blessing was obtained by the younger son in a fraudulent manner, it could not be recalled (Gen 27). Jacob does not appear to have inherited any of the property of his father, although he had obtained both the birthright and the blessing. In the New Testament "birthright," *prototokia*, is mentioned only once (Heb 12:16), where the reference is to Esau. In various passages where our Lord is spoken of as the firstborn, as in Col 1:15-19; Heb 1:2, the association of ideas with the Old Testament conception of birthright is easy to trace."* (The International Bible Encyclopedia)

<sup>4</sup> In considering the act of blessing or to bless, Merrill Unger in his Bible Dictionary wonderfully states, *"...Acts of blessing may be considered: (1) When God is said to bless men (Gen. 1:28; 22:17). God's blessing is accompanied with that virtue that renders His blessing effectual and which is expressed by it. Because God is eternal and omnipresent, His omniscience and omnipotence cause His blessings to avail in the present life in respect to all things and also in the life to come. (2) When men bless God (Psa. 103:1-2; 145:1-3; etc.). This is when they ascribe to Him those characteristics that are His, acknowledge His sovereignty, express gratitude for His mercies, etc. (3) Men bless their fellowmen when, as in ancient times under the spirit of prophecy, they predict blessings to come upon them. Thus Jacob blessed his sons (Gen. 49:1-28; Heb. 11:21), and Moses the children of Israel (Deu.33:1-29). It was the duty and privilege of the priests to bless the people in the name of the Lord. Further, men bless their fellowmen when they express good wishes and pray to God in their behalf."*

<sup>5</sup> Although Reuben was Jacob's first born and the rights of this first born were passed through Joseph and his two sons; I think it needful to remember that God referred to Israel not only as His Son but also as His **"firstborn"**. Thus, He has a nation called the **"firstborn"**. His Word teaches that the nation of Israel was, and still is, the only nation God ever called to carry and deliver His redemptive message. With this setting aside, His original directive will was made very clear to them: **"And ye shall be unto me a kingdom of priests, and an holy nation. These are the words which thou shalt speak unto the children of Israel"** (Ex.19:6). Because of their rejection, God finally turned to **"whosoever will"** (both Jew and Gentile) to redeem and spread the redemptive message. Yet, God's plan for them is not finished. Paul reminds us, **"I say then, Have they stumbled that they should fall? God forbid: but rather through their fall salvation is come unto the Gentiles, for to provoke them to jealousy"** (Rom.11:11) From Genesis chapter three until today sin has certainly blinded the minds of the unredeemed. One day God will once again work with them as a nation. The devil is knowledgeable of this and down through history he has done everything possible to eradicate all Jews. As always, the more their enemies persecuted them the more they grew and the more their attackers crumbled under the hand of God. Genesis forever records what God told Abram, **"And I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed"** (Gen.12:3) Someday the last part of this will be fulfilled to the fullest. God and His redeemed have something this world desperately need. The scriptures bring great comfort in assuring us that just as God sees Jesus as the first born through Mary and the first born from the dead, He sees us as a member of the **"...church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven..."** (Heb.12:23)

perhaps unbeknown to themselves that made it valuable enough to pass along as an inheritance by Jacob to Ephraim through Joseph? Could it be something in, around, near or perhaps something under the mountains? In 1 Chronicles 5:2 we find two outstanding things: First, from God's standpoint, the genealogy of Judah, which would eventually lead to our Savior, warrants more attention than the genealogy of Joseph thus, it is emphasized more through out the Bible. Secondly, God, eventually will utilize the blessing of the birthright passed down from Abraham to Isaac to Jacob and finally to Joseph, in some fashion to bless, protect, and to sustain Israel within their homeland! Although the entire tribe of Joseph was extremely large and very powerful, for obvious redemptive reasons, emphasis in Scripture focuses more on the tribe of Judah.

In vs.19 we note: **"And his father refused, and said, I know [it], my son, I know [it]: he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations."** This blessing was not just a good wish. It was to have prophetic significance and guaranteed fulfillment at God's appointed time. A vast span of time would need to occur first, though. God's prophecy to Abraham would certainly be fulfilled to the letter! **"And he said unto Abram, Know of a surety that thy seed shall be a stranger in a land [that is] not theirs, and shall serve them; and they shall afflict them four hundred years; 14 And also that nation, whom they shall serve, will I judge: and afterward shall they come out with great substance."** (Gen.15:13-14). Under Moses' leadership, we note that the tribe Manasseh is still vastly larger than that of Ephraim. **"These [are] the families of Manasseh, and those that were numbered of them, fifty and two thousand and seven hundred."** (Num 26:34) **"These [are] the families of the sons of Ephraim according to those that were numbered of them, thirty and two thousand and five hundred. These [are] the sons of Joseph after their families."** (Num.26:37) As Jewish history progressed, especially during the time of the Judges, the tribe of Ephraim would greatly increase in power and number. For a period, especially during the era of the divided kingdom, the tribe of Ephraim would practically become synonymous with the name Israel. Its power and resources would assume leadership of the northern tribes. Personally, Joseph would never live in the Promised Land. God's history recorded that not only would his seed eventually receive a tract of land there but also they would be instrumental in its conquest.

Before moving along, it is important to remember that this promised land would be an **"...everlasting possession."** (48:4). Certainly Jacob and his family were not inhabitants of the land when he pronounced this blessing but one day things would be different. Intermittently, history has shown short periods of this partially fulfilled but, as we breathe, it carries future fulfillment in its entirety. Regardless of the beliefs and actions of critics, liberals, politicians, seculars philosophers, and military might, God will soon give the entire land to Jacob's descendants!

As noted before, Joseph would have no land by his name. Instead, his inheritance would be a double portion divided between his two sons. Strange as it may seem, in the book of Revelation, chapter seven, when we read of God's plans to seal His 144,000, the tribes of Ephraim and Dan are omitted. In the list, God replaced Ephraim and Dan with Levi and Joseph and retained the name of the tribe of Manasseh. Thus, it appears that God has plans for Manasseh in the promised land. Could it be that God will use the blessings given to one of Joseph's sons to help preserve the Jews in the promised land and then seal them, along with the rest of the lineage, for later redemptive purposes? I am personally inclined to believe so.

#### Genesis 49

**1 And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you [that] which shall befall you in the last days. 2 Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father. 3 Reuben, thou [art] my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: 4 Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou [it]: he went up to my couch. 5 Simeon and Levi [are] bretkehren; instruments of cruelty [are in]**

their habitations. 6 O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. 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. 8 Judah, thou *[art he]* whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand *[shall be]* in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. 9 Judah *[is]* a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? 10 The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him *[shall]* the gathering of the people *[be]*. 11 Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: 12 His eyes *[shall be]* red with wine, and his teeth white with milk. 13 Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he *[shall be]* for an haven of ships; and his border *[shall be]* unto Zidon. 14 Issachar *[is]* a strong ass couching down between two burdens: 15 And he saw that rest *[was]* good, and the land that *[it was]* pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute. 16 Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. 17 Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward. 18 I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD. 19 Gad, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last. 20 *Out of Asher his bread [shall be] fat, and he shall yield royal dainties.* 21 Naphtali *[is]* a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words. 22 Joseph *[is]* a fruitful bough, *[even]* a fruitful bough by a well; *[whose]* branches run over the wall: 23 The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot *[at him]*, and hated him: 24 But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty *[God]* of Jacob; (from thence *[is]* the shepherd, the stone of Israel:) 25 *[Even]* by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: 26 The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren. 27 Benjamin shall ravin *[as]* a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil. 28 All these *[are]* the twelve tribes of Israel: and this *[is it]* that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them. 29 And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that *[is]* in the field of Ephron the Hittite, 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 of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a buryingplace. 31 There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah. 32 The purchase of the field and of the cave that *[is]* therein *[was]* from the children of Heth. 33 And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.

In the above text, we are quick to detect the approaching death of Jacob. Thus, he called his sons together one last time to pass along his lasting thoughts, blessings, and prophetic utterances.

In order to stay with our objective, it is needful to jump ahead to verse twenty. Asher ("*happiness*") was the eighth of Jacob's sons. Asher's seed would eventually experience the reality of this prophecy by receiving one of the most fertile tracts of land in all of Canaan. This parcel would rest along the Mediterranean coast just north of the land of Manasseh. The allotment would richly abound with wheat and olive trees. A little later in history, King Solomon would supply commodities from this land to King Hiram. "And Solomon gave Hiram twenty thousand measures of wheat for food to his household, and twenty measures of pure oil: thus gave Solomon to Hiram year by year." (1Ki.5:11) Without a doubt, God's prophetic will would soon to become reality in Jacob's use of the term "royal dainties" ! Was this prophecy to have only a one-time fulfillment? Truthfully, only the immediate future holds this answer.

When we advance to verse twenty-two, we quickly bump into the over-all blessings for the entire tribe of Joseph. Under God's direction Jacob boldly uses some very figurative, significant, and prophetic words to summarize his God-given convictions of what he now sees in Joseph and what he sees in the future for Joseph's seed.

22 "Joseph is a fruitful [paw-raw'=a primitive root; to bear fruit (literally or figuratively): - bear, bring forth (fruit), (be, cause to be, make) fruitful, grow, increase.] bough, [bane - a son (as a builder of the family name), in the widest sense (of literal and figurative relationship, including grandson, subject, nation, quality or condition, etc., one born, bough,

branch,] **even a fruitful bough by a well;** [*ah'-yin* = probably a primitive word; an *eye* (literally or figuratively); by analogy a *fountain* (as the *eye* of the landscape)] **whose branches run over the wall:**

Jacob saw Joseph as no mortal could. He compared him to a young fruit tree planted by a well. His people would be very prolific and, when they received their tract of land, something very significant about them and their inheritance, would enable them to stand out among others. Joseph also learned that his descendants would never want for necessities and, in some unknown fashion, they would also be equipped to supply a wonderful commodity to all.

**23 “The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot [at him], and hated him: 24 But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty [God] of Jacob; (from thence [is] the shepherd, the stone of Israel:) 25 Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with...**

Jacob's did not pen these utterances to brag about Joseph's accomplishments or his moral character. Instead, they are purely prophetic of what awaited his people in the land. The majestic, sovereign, shepherding God of his father would be their strength when strength when needed.

**blessings of heaven above,** [*shaw-mah'-yim, shaw-meh'* = from an unused root meaning to *be lofty*; the *sky* (as *aloft*; the dual perhaps alluding to the visible arch in which the clouds move, as well as to the higher ether where the celestial bodies revolve)] **blessings of the deep** [*teh-home'* = an *abyss* (as a *surging* mass of water), especially the *deep* (the *main* sea or the subterranean *water supply*): - deep (place), depth.] **that lieth** [*raw-bats'* = to *crouch* (on all four legs folded, like a recumbent animal); by implication to *recline, repose, brood, lurk, imbed*] **under,** [*akh'-ath* = the *bottom* (as *depressed*); only adverbially *below* (often with prepositional prefix *underneath*)]

We now begin to discover, in a more specific fashion, the special blessings awaiting Joseph's seed in the promised land. Jacob tells of three and then he uses verse twenty-six to re-gather it all together.

First, God would soon be sending Heavenly prosperity their way. This prophecy could be anything from good weather to answered prayers. God would use time in teaching everyone that only He could fill some desperate needs by utilizing Heavenly resources! Even relatives and friends would even have their limitations.

Secondly, Jacob told Joseph of still another unique blessing awaiting his people. This blessing would be liquid, deep in the ground, resting and waiting, and it would be in a depressed form. Many commentators have said this to be a spring or underground lake. I have difficulty with this for several reasons. If it were a spring why describe its depth plus the fact it is depressed? If it were an underground lake why mention it to Joseph? His poor children would have no way of digging down to the depths implied. Their wells were all shallow hand dug wells that were dependent upon streams near the surface and an underground lake, if accessible, could possibly be stagnated. The words carry the meaning “*as a mass of water*” – but not necessarily water. Besides all this, God would somehow someday use this buried resource in a prophetic way to draw, provide for, and unify His people, through Joseph's descendants, in the land of promise. Later on God, Himself, would tell Moses on the Mount, “**And I am come down to deliver them out of the hand of the Egyptians, and to bring them up out of that land unto a good land and a large, unto a land flowing with milk and honey;...**” (Exo 3:8)

**blessings of the breasts, and of the womb:**” Not only would Joseph's seed be well taken care of in the promised land but, their well being would keep them in good health and lead to their prolific ability.

**26 “The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills:...** Jacob must have stood in awe as he heard of the blessing's magnitude! His family's blessings would be far superior to those passed down to Jacob. Jacob proceeded to use the illustration of the mountains to aid in his communication. Not only would Joseph's blessing be higher, as the mountains are above the plain, but they would also have, by analogy, a sense of longevity. In addition, qualitatively, his blessings would be richer than the treasures of the oldest mountains.

**they shall be on the head of Joseph**, [*roshe* = from an unused root apparently meaning to *shake*; the *head* (as most easily *shaken*), whether literally or figuratively (in many applications, of place, time, rank, etc.) ] **and on the crown** [*kod-kode'* = the *crown* of the head (as the part most *bowed*): - crown (of the head), pate, scalp, top of the head.]

**of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.** These blessings would rest specifically on the scalp of Joseph's head. I feel that there are at least two implications here. First, this blessing of information would be foremost in Joseph's mind. It would reside there as a crown resting upon the head of a prince. Secondly, if these words have prophetic implications to the geographical land grant as a whole, we are entering a completely different avenue of study. We would then need to consider the above-mentioned blessing finding its location at the top edge of the land given to Joseph's sons.

Even though God used the same man (Moses) to record both the above and below passages, we now jump ahead in Israel's history some four centuries. In the following excerpt, we find Moses giving the laws and blessings of God to a new generation on the verge of entering into the promise land under Joshua's leadership. Once again, for the sake of time and staying with our objective, we jump down to those only dealing with Joseph and Asher.

### Deuteronomy 33

1 "And this [*is*] the blessing, wherewith Moses the man of God blessed the children of Israel before his death. 33:2 And he said, The LORD came from Sinai, and rose up from Seir unto them; he shined forth from mount Paran, and he came with ten thousands of saints: from his right hand [*went*] a fiery law for them. 3 Yea, he loved the people; all his saints [*are*] in thy hand: and they sat down at thy feet; [*every one*] shall receive of thy words. 4 Moses commanded us a law, [*even*] the inheritance of the congregation of Jacob. 5 And he was king in Jeshurun, when the heads of the people [*and*] the tribes of Israel were gathered together. 6 Let Reuben live, and not die; and let [*not*] his men be few. 7 And this [*is the blessing*] of Judah: and he said, Hear, LORD, the voice of Judah, and bring him unto his people: let his hands be sufficient for him; and be thou an help [*to him*] from his enemies. 8 And of Levi he said, [*Let*] thy Thummim and thy Urim [*be*] with thy holy one, whom thou didst prove at Massah, [*and with*] whom thou didst strive at the waters of Meribah; 9 Who said unto his father and to his mother, I have not seen him; neither did he acknowledge his brethren, nor knew his own children: for they have observed thy word, and kept thy covenant. 10 They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt sacrifice upon thine altar. 11 Bless, LORD, his substance, and accept the work of his hands: smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again. 12 [*And*] of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the LORD shall dwell in safety by him; [*and the LORD*] shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders.

13 And of Joseph he said, Blessed of the LORD [*be*] his land, [*eh'-rets* = from an unused root probably meaning to *be firm*; the earth] **for the precious things of heaven**, [two words make up this phrase: *min-nay'* = *from or out of* & *meh'-ghed* = from an unused root properly meaning to *be eminent*; properly a *distinguished* thing; hence something *valuable*, as a product or fruit] **for the dew**, [two words are once again used: *min-nay'* = *from or out of* & *tal* = *dew* (as *covering* vegetation)] **and for the deep** [once again we see two words used at this point: *min-nay'* = *from or out of* & *teh-home'* =; an *abyss* (as a *surging* mass of water), especially the *deep* (the *main* sea or the subterranean *water supply*): - deep (place), depth.] **that coucheth** [*raw-bats'* = to *crouch* (on all four legs folded, like a recumbent animal); by implication to *recline*, *repose*, *brood*, *lurk*, *imbed*: - crouch (down), fall down, make a fold, lay (cause to, make to) lie (down), make to rest, sit.] **beneath**," [*takh'-ath* = the *bottom* (as *depressed*); only adverbially *below* (often with prepositional prefix *underneath*) ].

By reading and comparing word definitions, the reader will discover this verse is almost identical to the statements Jacob made much earlier in Geneses 49:22 & 25 ["Joseph is a fruitful bough, [*even*] a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: ... *Even* by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb:"] It is extremely important, though, to understand there is a bit of difference in the motive of the blessing given the second time by Moses. Whereas Jacob wished God's prosperity primarily upon Joseph's growth into a powerful, productive, prolific, and healthy

people, having all their needs met in the new land, Moses is pronouncing a blessing upon the land, itself, to accomplish this most significant task. We continue to see this as we progress in the next few verses.

14 “And for the precious fruits [brought forth] by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon, 15 And for the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of the lasting hills, 16 And for the precious things of the earth and fulness thereof, and [for] the good will of him that dwelt in the bush: All discovered, planted, and received in this tract of land would be richly beneficial for the dwellers and their neighbors. Taking into consideration my proposal of Moses focusing on the land, let us continue to examine a few more verses.

let [the blessing] come upon unused root apparently meaning **and upon the top of the head** part most *bowed*): - crown (of the [that was] separated [naw-zeer' a Nazirite ] from his brethren.”

Two things are quickly blessing would be near the more specifically, on the a crown on a man's head consideration the difficulty boundaries, I thought that illustrating the above combined tribes of Ephraim resemble the side profile of crown. Secondly, God set aside Joseph's blessing for a specific tribe and geographical area destined for a specific divine purpose.

17 His glory [is like] the firstling of his bullock, and his horns [are like] the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they [are] the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they [are] the thousands of Manasseh.

Joseph's family members would be people of might, resembling the horns of powerful animals of the highest choice. His two primary horns would be Ephraim and Manasseh. Hundreds of years later, when the tribes eventually left Egypt and migrated toward Canaan, they had already adopted their individual tribal standards.



JOSEPH  
(Ephraim and Manasseh)



Numbers chapter two verses one to thirty two record the organization and assembly of these standards. Rabbinical tradition has it that Manasseh's standard was a type of unicorn and that of Ephraim as a golden flag with the head of a calf.

Actually, the tribe of Manasseh consisted of two parts. The larger section settled on the east side of the Jordan River and possessed warlike tendencies. The smaller Manasseh, located in the fertile plains on the north side of Ephraim, seemed to focus more on farming. Although Ephraim would be the descendants of Joseph steeped more in public affairs, the total tribe of Manasseh would supply four judges to Israel: Gideon, Abimelech, Jair, and Jephthah.

It is somewhat interesting to note that during the march through the wilderness the positions of Ephraim and Manasseh were on west of the tabernacle (Num.2:18-20) - the sections of land focused upon in this work.<sup>6</sup>



the head of Joseph, [*roshe* = from an to shake; the head (as most easily shaken)] [*kod-kode'* = the crown of the head (as the head), pate, scalp, top of the head.] of him = separate, that is, consecrated (as prince,

noted. First, Joseph's land grant geographical top of the land and, part resembling the resting place of (directly on the top). Taking into of often discerning ancient perhaps the little map would aid in sentence. Please note that the and Manasseh do strangely a man's head supporting a type of

<sup>6</sup> For an interesting study one needs to look straight down at the camping layout of the tribes around the tabernacle in Nu.2:1-32. Secondly, replace the names of those tribes with their respective standards. Finally,

When Moses commissioned the spies to check out the promised land all but two the returning crowd, Joshua and Caleb, were fearful. Joshua was out of the tribe of Ephraim and Caleb of the tribe of Judah. Just as God once greatly used representatives of the tribes of Joseph and Judah to cry out for the land and eventually became leaders in its conquest, He may very well plans to use them again. Believers know that our wonderful Messiah is out of the lineage of Judah and ultimately He, and He alone will bring about the final conquest, security, and fulfill His covenants to that small tract of land. It is highly possible and very probable, however, that God has additional plans in the future that include the land, products, and inhabitants from the land once promised to the sons of Joseph! If God used the productivity and power from the land of Joseph, to conquest and drive away once, He certainly can use it again! What ever comes out of that land will have might and this might will be of the utmost quality and quantity.

**33:18** And of Zebulun he said, Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and, Issachar, in thy tents. **19** They shall call the people unto the mountain; there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness: for they shall suck *[off]* the abundance of the seas, and *[off]* treasures hid in the sand. **20** And of Gad he said, Blessed *[be]* he that enlargeth Gad: he dwelleth as a lion, and teareth the arm with the crown of the head. **21** And he provided the first part for himself, because there, *[in]* a portion of the lawgiver, *[was he]* seated; and he came with the heads of the people, he executed the justice of the LORD, and his judgments with Israel. **22** And of Dan he said, Dan *[is]* a lion's whelp: he shall leap from Bashan. **23** And of Naphtali he said, O Naphtali, satisfied with favour, and full with the blessing of the LORD: possess thou the west and the south.

**24** And of Asher he said, *Let Asher* [*"aw-share" = happy*] **be blessed** [*"baw-rak" = as an act of adoration*] **with children; let him be acceptable** [*"raw-tsaw = to be pleased with"*] **to his brethren, and let him dip** [*"taw-bal" = dip, plunge*] **his foot** [*"reh'-gel = a foot (as used in walking)"*] **in oil** [*"sheh'-men = grease, especially liquid"*] .

**25** **Thy shoes** [*"man-awl" = shoe*] **shall be iron** [*"bar-zel" = iron (as cutting); by extension an iron implement*] **and brass** [*"nekh-o'-sheth = copper; hence, something made of that metal, that is, coin, a fetter; figuratively base"*]; **and as thy days** [*"yome = a day or to be used figuratively as a space of time"*] , **[so shall] thy strength** [*"do'-beh = a quietness that provides strength"*] **be**.

Moses now pronounces a blessing of richness upon the tribe of Asher. Asher would experience several aspects of this blessing. First, Asher would produce many happy and peaceful children whom would become greatly pleasing to the other tribes. Security and rest were required for the enjoyment of this blessing. Thus, Asher would dwell in castle-type cities.

Additionally, the text speaks of shoes made of iron and brass. The feet are on the bottom and provide stability. At least one foot would be plunged into something - oil. Dipping the foot in oil pointed to a location with oil and strength. Although the Jews would not be miners, the words definitely point to rich natural resources awaiting them in the land. When one studies a map reflecting the ancient land division among the twelve tribes of Israel, something very unusual is noticeable about Asher's land. The land actually resembles a leg with the tip or point of the land expending into the land of Manasseh. This blessing would be available for and through the tribe of Asher because of what the land contained or could produce. Moses essentially pronounced a blessing for the people and their neighbors with some sort of prosperity from the earth. Thus, the land already promised to Jacob in Genesis 49:20 was to be rich and fertile throughout.

If one were to place a dot on this southeastern most point of the land of Asher, follow the boundary northwest to the sea, come back to our dot and then continue on in a southeasterly direction, a student of prophecy would be quick to note that this is the plain of Esdraelon {another name for Jezreel = "God sows"}.

Without question, scripture teaches that this tip area of Asher's foot, not just has the potential but, contains some of the greatest wealth of all the land promised to Abraham's children and it was

---

compare this description of the cherub in Ezek. 1:10. The description and position of the creature's faces, when compared to the central tribal standard on each of the camp's four sides, will be most amazing!

assigned specifically to the tribe of Asher. Secondly, part of this wealth is mineral and part of it was, or is, in liquid form. In the Old Testament time, I am very certain that, at least for a while, there had to be a *might* from the land for the people of Asher. Perhaps some of it did take the form of oil from olives but, please stay with me a minute. Common sense tells me that a land with all this prosperity should have had some sort of lasting historical input. Strangely enough, during the time of the Judges we find God recording this about the people of Asher, **“Neither did Asher drive out the inhabitants of Accho, nor the inhabitants of Zidon, nor of Ahlab, nor of Achzib, nor of Helbah, nor of Aphik, nor of Rehob: But the Asherites dwelt among the Canaanites, the inhabitants of the land: for they did not drive them out.”** (Judges 1:31-32) For some reason the tribe of Asher seems to have rapidly degenerated. Perhaps due to the proximity of the Phoenicians, it gradually blended in with them. I discovered, with the exception of Simeon, Asher is the only tribe West of the Jordan River that furnished no judge or hero to the nation. Taking the above into consideration, there is the very strong possibility that the fullest wealth of this land tip, and its nearby area, as of yet, has not been discovered, fully utilized, or tapped into!

In summarizing, let me see if I can bring some pieces together. The promise given by God to Abraham was passed on to Isaac and then, eventually, on to Isaac’s sons. More specifically, the bulk of the promises went to Jacob. God then gave Jacob the opportunity to pass this blessing on to all his sons. Two of the twelve did not directly receive land grants (Levi and Joseph). When Jacob gave Joseph’s blessing to his two sons the total number of the tribes receiving land bounced back up to twelve. This succession of blessings quickly pointed out several things: First, we quickly see God’s divine guidance produced a progressive revelation of the promises. This act of God generated multiplication in number and detail as they moved from father to son or sons. Secondly, the blessing and blessings all had, and have, a prophetic significance. Thirdly, God turned the act Reuben’s sin against his father around and thereby produced another strange twist. Jacob gave Joseph the blessings of the firstborn instead of Reuben. Since this blessing was that of a double portion, each son quickly acquired an inheritance.

Jacob has to stand out as one of the wisest and God-fearing men of the entire Old Testament! I am very certain that Jacob never forgot the wonderful gracious act of God when He permitting him to discover that his favorite son was very much alive. I’m also persuaded that this aging saint of God must have often pondered the story of Joseph’s strange dream when he was just a lad of seventeen years of age, as recorded in Genesis 37ff. Thirdly, Jacob would forever remember God’s promise to his grandfather, Abraham [**“That in blessing I will bless thee, and in multiplying I will multiply thy seed as the stars of the heaven, and as the sand which */is/* upon the sea shore; and thy seed shall possess the gate of his enemies;”** (Gen. 22:17)] and, more recently, the promise God had given to his father Isaac [**“And I will make thy seed to multiply as the stars of heaven, and will give unto thy seed all these countries; and in thy seed shall all the nations of the earth be blessed;”** (Gen. 26:4)].

Through out Jacob’s life, God would continually savor Jacob with direct and indirect personal blessings. There was the special blessing from his father Isaac when he was just a young boy [**“Therefore God give thee of the dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn and wine: Let people serve thee, and nations bow down to thee: be lord over thy brethren, and let thy mother's sons bow down to thee: cursed */be/* every one that curseth thee, and blessed */be/* he that blesseth thee.”** (Gen. 27:28-29)] and, the additional blessing as he set out to Padanaram to find a wife [**“And God Almighty bless thee, and make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, that thou mayest be a multitude of people; And give thee the blessing of Abraham, to thee, and to thy seed with thee; that thou mayest inherit the land wherein thou art a stranger, which God gave unto Abraham.”** (Gen. 28:3-4)]. Also, we must always remember the very special time when God privately gave Jacob rich and gracious promises as he traveled to Padanaram [**“And he dreamed, and behold a ladder set up on the earth, and the top of it reached to heaven: and behold the angels of God ascending and descending on it. And, behold, the LORD stood above it, and said, I */am/* the LORD God of Abraham thy father, and the God of Isaac: the land whereon thou liest, to thee will I give it, and to thy seed; And**

thy seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and thou shalt spread abroad to the west, and to the east, and to the north, and to the south: and in thee and in thy seed shall all the families of the earth be blessed. And, behold, I *[am]* with thee, and will keep thee in all *[places]* whither thou goest, and will bring thee again into this land; for I will not leave thee, until I have done *[that]* which I have spoken to thee of” (Gen. 28:12–15) ].

I feel that we can clearly assert that Jacob, having reflected over God’s providential work through out his life, had no problem seeing God’s finger pointing to his favorite son, Joseph, whom God had preserved and utilized in a marvelous way. Thus, this blessing for Joseph seems to be a very natural reaction for Jacob. At the same time, we must always remember that God was a work behind the scene fulfilling His perfect will.

Joseph’s two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, were, obviously, the recipients of this double portion blessing of the first-born. Once in the new land, the lives of their seeds were, prophetically, enriched with abundance, productive, health, physical might, and praise to their redeemer. God’s objective for His people in the promised land was that of worshipping Him and being God-honoring witnesses. Unfortunately, their habitual yielding to sin led them away from God’s directive will. This departure eventually demanded a tremendous price.

Pointers from the proceeding Scriptures lead me to conclude that the primary wealth of Joseph’s land grant, passed on to his sons, would be located near its top geographical boundary where the tip of Asher’s land dips into the land of Manasseh. Some of its great wealth would result from the productive fertile soil when coupled with the climate and the refreshing rains coming in from the Mediterranean. Even in our times, this breadbasket area is still providing blessings from its richness. Secondly, even though we lack evidence of any of Joseph’s descendants becoming miners, mineral wealth would certainly be awaiting them. Thirdly, this land area holds still another wealth. This last wealth is in liquid form, resting, and pressurized deep underground. Whatever specific identity this wealth may assume, it remains crouched like an animal waiting to pounce. These promises given to Abraham, passed on to Isaac, and then on to Jacob and, finally, to Jacob’s children, have not yet been fulfilled in their entirety.

Since the destruction of Jerusalem by Titus in 70 A.D., no Jew alive knows, with certainty, which tribe he is from, yet he knows he is a Jew and deep inside there is a God-planted concern about him and the land promised his people! Although many Jews have returned to Israel, countless others are still scattered over the world and suffering from some sort of persecution. Dear reader, rest assured, God is not finished yet!

God has always provided, or will provide, everything needed to accomplish His divine will. In our New Testament we are quickly reminded of this promise to the redeemed, “ **But my God shall supply all your need according to his riches in glory by Christ Jesus.**” (Phil. 4:19). This supply may take the form of produce, mineral, liquid, or it may take a form unknown to man. What ever is needed to provide for or protect the people of God walking in the will of God, both Jews and Gentiles alike, God already has it available or He will soon make it available in order to accomplish His objective! Thank God, He has brought to fulfillment many prophecies concerning the Jews and their land but there remains much ahead! One day God will establish His land as promised to Abraham and He will have His Jewish people in it.

The Bible teaches that one day the antichrist will direct all his evil strengths on the little nation of Israel with intentions of annihilating the people whom God called a long time ago – the Jews. His primary reason will be that of making a mockery of God. (Those who reject this reflect to all their need for sound doctrinal Biblical exposition.) Just what if there is a secondary reason the antichrist directs his coalition toward the little land?

Today, a company called Zion Oil and Gas is in the process of oil exploration in the very afore mentioned section of Joseph’s inheritance through his sons. If Zion’s discoveries prove to be what

they thus far appear to be, the company may very well discover itself being in the center of world history with God at work behind the scene! Oil beneath this area of Israel could undoubtedly be a tool in God's hands. A number of years ago, the company's founder shared with me that his personal goal, and his company's objective, was that of ministering to the Jews and to do what ever needful to help people, both Jews and gentiles alike, to come to a saving knowledge of our Wonderful Lord. I know of no other higher goals that carry with them such an extreme level of divine provision and blessing!

Our entire Bible has as its underlying theme, and main objective, that of redemption. To carry this burden is to carry the empowered will of God! Secondly, long ago God told Abraham, **"...I will bless them that bless thee, and curse him that curseth thee: and in thee shall all families of the earth be blessed."** (Gen.12:3) As you see, God promised blessings to those who help the Jews. This especially holds true if it has to do with redemption and His promised land for them. The verse also promises otherwise to those who desire to rid the world of the Jewish people. A quick overview of history, from Bible times to now, with regards to the Jewish people, should enlighten even the hardest critic's mind to the on-going reality of this verse. Oh how much different our world would be if only our leaders would believe God, grab hold of, and apply, just this single verse!

God's Word also contains all He desires for us to know about Him, His plans, about ourselves, and our adversary – the devil. All of our Biblical writers either refer to or write about the wonders of God. Regardless of how much we know or may think we know there is always something new to discover. Years ago, Jesus encountered some men whom were placing more emphasis on the print of the scriptures than upon the identity of its real Author. His response was simply, **"Search the scriptures; for in them ye think ye have eternal life: and they are they which testify of me."** (Jn.5:39) We can dig out deep theological and doctrinal riches, assemble our findings, cross reference verses, perform deep word studies, pour over the writings of great scholars but, there is a time when we must lay down our findings and look to Him as never before.

Ellen Frankel and Betsy Platkin Teutsch, in their wonderful book on Jewish symbols make the following statement, *"On Friday nights, parents bless their sons with the words bestowed by Jacob upon Joseph's sons [Through you shall Israel bless, saying]: God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh. Joseph's line thus represents family continuity and hope for the future."*<sup>7</sup>

Remember, all Scripture still points to the Author! One way or the other, with or without us, God's directive will, will prevail! Oh, how much better it is for us to be a part of it!

---

<sup>7</sup> Frankel, Ellen and Teutsch, Platkin, Betsy The Encyclopedia of Jewish Symbols. Jason Aronson Inc.: 230 Livingston Street, Northvale, New Jersey 07647 1992. p.84





6510 Abrams Rd, Suite 300 • Dallas, TX 75231

## **THE SEARCH FOR OIL IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL**

---

### **A BIBLICAL TREASURE HUNT**

**Collected and Presented by  
PHILIP MANDELKER**

(Reprinted with permission of the author)

#### **NOTICE:**

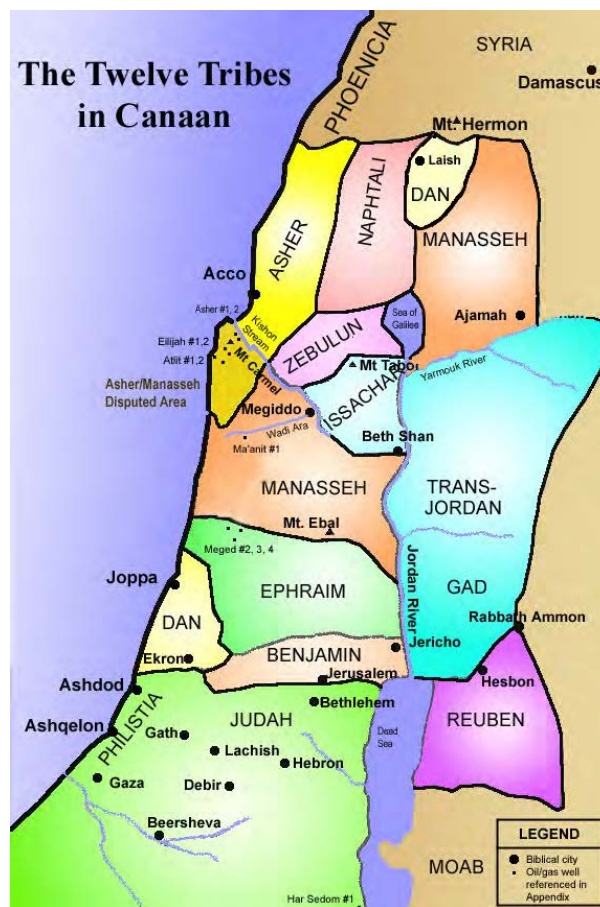
Zion Oil & Gas, Inc. has filed a registration statement (including a prospectus) with the SEC for the offering to which this communication relates. Before you invest, you should read the prospectus in that registration statement and other documents Zion Oil & Gas has filed with the SEC for more complete information about Zion Oil & Gas and its offering. You may get these documents for free by visiting EDGAR on the SEC web site at [www.sec.gov](http://www.sec.gov). Alternatively, Zion Oil & Gas or its underwriter will arrange to send you the prospectus if you request it by calling toll free 1-888-891-9466 or emailing [amy@zionoil.com](mailto:amy@zionoil.com). Direct links to the SEC location, or to the documents in PDF, may be found on the home page of Zion Oil & Gas, Inc. at [www.zionoil.com](http://www.zionoil.com).

# THE SEARCH FOR OIL IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL

## A BIBLICAL TREASURE HUNT

Collected and Presented by

PHILIP MANDELKER



Copyright 2006 by Philip Mandelker

## C O N T E N T S

Author's Preface and Caveat	3
Introduction	6
I. The Biblical Clues	9
A. The Blessings of Joseph	10
1. Jacob's Deathbed Blessing of Joseph	10
2. Moses' Deathbed Blessing of the Tribes of Joseph (Manasseh and Ephraim)	11
B. The Blessing of Asher - Moses' Deathbed Blessing of the Tribe of Asher	11
C. Moses' Song of Praise to God and the Land of Israel and Deathbed Testament to the Nation of Israel	11
II. The Lands of Joseph (Manasseh and Ephraim) and Asher – The Map	12
III. A Possible Interpretation of the Blessings in the Hunt for Petroleum (Rock Oil) in Israel	13
(i) The Location	13
(ii) The Treasure: Hard Mineral or Liquid?	14
(iii) The Treasure: Water or Petroleum? or Both?	16
(a) "MEGED" – Water or Oil?	16
(b) "SHEMEN" – Olive Oil or Rock Oil?	17
(c) Rock Oil in Biblical Hebrew – "SHEMEN" or "NEFT"?	19
(d) Biblical Parallelism	23
(iv) The Treasure: References to Sacred Fire and Oil Seeps Near Mt. Carmel?	24
IV. The Next Step – The Role of Man and Science	27
APPENDIX Scripturally Inspired/Influenced Petroleum Exploration in Israel	28

## **AUTHOR'S PREFACE AND CAVEAT**

My first acquaintance with the oil industry was in 1974, when as a young New York lawyer I represented several major New York utilities in a series of antitrust and breach of contract lawsuits against Chevron, Texaco and Mobil. The actions arose out of the Arab oil boycott following the 1973 Arab-Israeli Yom Kippur war. I was hooked.

In 1975 and 1976, as a lawyer in the Israeli Ministry of Finance, I represented the Israeli government in negotiating a series of oil exploration concessions and production sharing agreements with a group of American independent oil companies interested in exploring for oil in the Sinai Peninsula and the Gulf of Suez. These efforts led to the discovery of the Alma Field in the Gulf of Suez, which field was returned to Egypt in 1979 in the context of the Israeli-Egyptian peace accords.

I have been involved professionally with the oil and gas exploration industry in both the United States and Israel ever since. During the entire period I have been fascinated by the history and politics of oil and oil exploration, as well as by petroleum geology, and have read extensively on those subjects.

My acquaintance and interest with the Bible and ancient Middle Eastern religions and languages goes back even further - to my school days at a *yeshiva ktana* (Jewish religious elementary day school) in New York, high school Latin studies and college courses in linguistics, philosophy and religion.

My personal and professional background may have provided fertile ground for the journey I commenced in 2004, the current stage of which is reflected in *The Search for Oil in the Land of Israel – A Biblical Treasure Hunt*. Without the persistence of my good friend John Brown, founder of Zion Oil & Gas, Inc., a small American oil and gas exploration company exploring for oil on the coastal plains and hills of Israel, that I start on the journey and without my curiosity being sparked by my new friend Priscilla Hilton's insightful question about the meaning and origin of "NEFT", the modern Hebrew word for petroleum, however, it is doubtful the journey would ever have been commenced. To both John and Priscilla I owe a debt of gratitude for what has become one of the most fascinating ventures I have undertaken.

Before sharing the results to date of that venture, I must point out that, though an "amateur" – in the classic sense of one involved in an art or science not professionally but for his own pleasure, I am not a Bible scholar or a scholar of ancient Semitic languages. Neither am I a petroleum geologist. Rather, as noted above, I am a lawyer who for over 30 years been professionally involved in one form or another in oil and gas exploration ventures both in the United States and in Israel (including several mentioned here, specifically Zion Oil & Gas where I serve as General Counsel and a director and Ness Energy to which I acted as a legal advisor.) I have also read widely on the history of oil and gas exploration generally, including exploration in the Land of Israel, am fluent in Hebrew and have a general familiarity with Biblical and inter-Testamental literature, as well as with other religious traditions and texts of the

ancient Middle East. And I am aware of the fact that many major petroleum discoveries, including several of the large Caspian (the “oil fountains” of Baku), Iraqi (Baba Gurgur in Kurdistan near Kirkuk) and Persian fields, had their origins in ancient religious traditions associated with oil and gas seeps: - Baku was the territory of the “eternal pillars of fire” worshipped by the Zoroastrians and, according to tradition, the flaming seeps at Baba Gurgur were the “burning fiery furnace” into which Nebuchadnezzar cast the Jews.) (See, Yergin, D., *The Prize* [Simon & Schuster, New York, 1991], at pp. 57 and 204.) Indeed, local traditions of oil and gas seeps and asphalt deposits are one of the tools frequently used by petroleum exploration geologists in their work.

That said, I would emphasize that nothing I propose here should be viewed as a definitive interpretation of the texts involved or as a statement of my personal belief as to the meaning of any of them. Rather, my work should be read and understood only as a guide to the possible interpretation of certain texts in an attempt to shed some light on the basis for the beliefs of many who have been and continue to be interested and active in exploration for petroleum in the biblical Land of Israel.

The journey has not been mine alone. On it I have been accompanied and assisted by many to whom I would like to express my gratitude. To John Brown for his inspiration and persistence. To Priscilla Hilton for her curiosity and gift of Laurence Oliphant's *Haifa or Life in Modern Palestine*, with its surprising reference to a Persian fire temple at Mt. Carmel. To Shari Friedman – my aunt, “big sister” and fellow amateur – I owe a debt of gratitude for her invaluable comments on and critique of my text and argument in their early stages, as well as the use of her library and mid-night research assistance. The comments of geologist friends and colleagues - Dr. Ya'acov Mimran, Israeli Petroleum Commissioner, who called my attention to the aquifers in the Ramot Menasseh region, Dr. Avi Honigstein, Deputy Israeli Petroleum Commissioner, who provided me with access to the story of Hoshana Oil Co., Dr. Yehezkel “Charlie” Druckman, former Israeli Petroleum Commissioner, who clarified various issues relating to the Ramot Menasseh aquifers, Dr. Eliezer Kashai, former President of the Israel Geological Society and Vice President, Exploration of Zion Oil & Gas, who first brought to my attention the relationship and interbedding of chert sills and the oil shales and bituminous chinks throughout Israel, and Stephen Pierce, international consulting petroleum geologist and Zion Oil's Senior Geologist, from whose comments I benefited editorially as well as substantively - assisted me in placing my work in proper geological context and are highly valued. - - And The Map - without Gene Soltero's facility with computers, it might not have been and who ever heard of a Treasure Hunt without a map.

The comments and suggestions of my friend and fellow amateur Benzi Kahana cannot be forgotten, as will not his introducing me to the works of his grandfather, Prof. Avraham Kahana, a true biblical scholar who first translated many of the books of the Apocrypha, including the Books of the Maccabees, from the Greek back into the putative original, but since lost, Hebrew. The encouragement of David Halperin and Moshe Fox in the early stages of this adventure, when many thought my quest somewhat strange to say the least, was and remains much appreciated. Glen Perry is to be acknowledged for generally putting up with me (and me with him) throughout the process. Special thanks is due to Richard Rinberg, good friend and yet another fellow amateur, for his support and encouragement over the course of the journey, as

well as his patience in reading almost every draft of my paper. And, of course, to my wife Edna and children Nir and Inbal, for putting up with a living room piled high with books and papers pulled from all sorts of nooks and crannies and with a husband and father bent on what to them appeared an arcane and quixotic venture – thank you.

To all of them, I can only say that the journey is not yet over and I am sure their services will be called on yet again.

Philip Mandelker  
*Tel-Aviv, Israel*  
*January 2006.*

## THE SEARCH FOR OIL IN THE LAND OF ISRAEL

---

### A BIBLICAL TREASURE HUNT

---

#### INTRODUCTION

The Bible has been the principal source of inspiration to hundreds of millions of people through the ages. Many Jews and Christians believe the Bible to be the absolute Word of God and strive to derive significance from every word of the text. For these individuals, the Land of Israel, within whose borders most of the events told of in the Bible unfold is the Holy Land – ארץ הקודש – the Promised Land - and, as such, has been and continues to be a source of wonder and fascination.

In the second half of the nineteenth century, the Land of Israel again became readily accessible to European and American Christians and Jews. Jews began to return to the Land, then called Palestine, to resettle it, first in small bands of Zionist pioneers and then in larger and larger groups of immigrants. Christians came mostly as pilgrims to visit and pray at the Holy Sites, but also as scholars. Others came to settle as the Templars; and still others simply as tourists to explore and wonder - who can forget Mark Twain and his *Innocents Abroad*. But they all came with Bible in hand as their guidebook eager to uncover the Land's past and present secrets. The scholars established learned societies – the British Palestine Exploration Fund, the American School of Oriental Research, the German Deutscher Verein zur Erforschung Palaestinas. They came as archaeologists, as geographers, as ethnographers, as geologists, as agriculturalists; others came as seekers of fortune, as artists, as poets, as mystics. Some, inspired and guided by the words of the Bible, came to explore for oil.

Oil?! What have the Bible and the Land of Israel to do with oil? Israel may be the Land of Milk and Honey, a land even of olive oil - but petroleum? Everyone has heard of the famous quip that, when coming out of Sinai, Moses mistakenly turned left to Canaan (Israel), the only land in the Middle East without oil, when he should have turned right to Midian (modern Saudi Arabia). Yet there have been oil and gas discoveries in Israel. The Heletz oil field was discovered in 1955 and is still producing, if only marginally, today some 50 years later. The Zohar gas field was discovered near Arad in 1958 and is still in marginal production. Major world class gas discoveries (with estimated reserves of over 3 trillion cubic feet) were made in 1999 and 2000 in the Mediterranean Sea off the coasts of Israel and Gaza.

Indeed, hydrocarbons in the form of tars and asphalts have been known and mined in the Dead Sea region of the Land of Israel since Neolithic times 11-12,000 years ago (Mithen, S., *After the Ice*, [Phoenix, London, 2003], at pp. 74-75). The Bible in Genesis 14:10 refers to wells of tar or slime as the basis for the wealth of the Cities of the Plain, including Sodom and Gomorrah. Strabo the famous Greek geographer writing at the beginning of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century of the Common Era (C.E. = A.D.) extensively describes the tar and asphalt seeps in the Dead Sea and the surrounding canyons. (Strabo, *Geography*, vol. XVI, Chap. 2, paras 42-45.) Josephus in *The Jewish War*, writing towards the end of the 1<sup>st</sup> Century of the Common Era discusses the Dead Sea asphalts towards the end of Excursus V.

Thus, it should come as no surprise that in the 1830s, the Austrian mining engineer, Josef von Russeger, conducting a geological survey for the Egyptian government, should report on asphalt seeps from rocks on the southeastern shores of the Dead Sea. The German traveler Rothe describes asphalt seeps and small oil impregnated pools in the Nahal Arnon canyon on the southeastern shore of the Dead Sea in 1874. Similar sightings were made by various geologists and travelers in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and early years of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century in canyons along the southwestern shore of the Dead Sea (particularly in Nahal Heimar, where tar seeps can be seen even today) and at various other sites in the rift valley from the Dead Sea in the south to the Yarmuk River Valley just south of the Sea of Galilee in the north. (See Lavi, B., *Ha'zahav Ha'shachor b'Eretz Yisrael* (Black Gold in the Land of Israel) [Carmel, Jerusalem, 1999] [*Black Gold in Israel*"], at pp. 24-27 and the sources cited there.)

Serious commercial interest in petroleum exploration in the Land of Israel goes back to the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> century. The Socony Vacuum Company, predecessor of Mobil Oil, received exploration licenses in the years preceding World War I, though the first well was not commenced until 1947 by the British-dominated Iraqi Petroleum Company which had discovered the major oil fields in northern Iraq. This first well, known as the Huleikhat Well, was abandoned shortly after its commencement as a result of increasing violence in the area preceding Israel's independence. The well (renamed the Heletz #1 and still in marginal production) was reentered by two small Israeli oil exploration companies in 1955 and led to the Heletz field discovery. Regrettably though, essentially for geo-political reasons, following Israel's independence, the large international oil and gas companies which had been involved in the area since before World War I withdrew from Israel and have since steered

clear of the Land and refused to participate in oil and gas exploration activities there, preferring to protect their interests in the Arab and Islamic world.<sup>1</sup>

Notwithstanding the desertion of the large international oil and gas companies following the establishment of the State, exploration continued in Israel over the ensuing 50 years, albeit in fits and starts, led by Israeli and a number of smaller American and Canadian companies. Among these companies have been at least seven, which have drilled or participated in the drilling of at least 11 exploratory wells, the founders of which were directly inspired by Biblical references they and many of their supporters interpreted as pointing to the existence of oil and gas reservoirs in particular areas in the Land of Israel. An eighth company, Hoshana Oil, directly inspired by Biblical references, acquired an exploration license, but never drilled a well. - A detailed listing of the companies, their founders and their activities is set out in the **Appendix**.

Interestingly, with the exception of one company, Ness Energy, founded by Texas oilman Harold "Hayseed" Stephens who, inspired by the stories in Genesis concerning the Cities of the Plain, was drawn to and active in the southwestern corner of the Dead Sea, all of the biblically inspired wildcatters have been drawn to areas in the Sharon Plain and on and around Mt. Carmel, just to its north.

Six of the wells drilled over the years by four companies (Asher Oil, Moriah Exploration, Camberly Exploration, Ness Energy) have been relatively shallow, drilled to targets in rocks of Jurassic age (150 million years old) and into younger rocks of Pliocene and Cretaceous age between 650 and 2,682 meters (2,136 and 8,800 feet) deep. These were all dry holes. Five of the wells drilled by another group of companies (Energy Exploration, Givot Olam Oil Exploration and Zion Oil & Gas) have been drilled to much deeper targets, between 3,500 and 6,531 meters (11,484 and 21,428 feet), into older rocks of Triassic age (200 to 250 million years ago). All these deeper wells - the Atlit #1 (known also as the Asher-Atlit well), the Meged #2, Meged #3, Meged #4 and the Ma'anit #1 (re-entry) - have had strong petroleum shows. Projects responsible for the drilling of four of these wells, the three Meged wells and the Ma'anit #1 well (re-entry) are in early 2006 still active: - the Meged wells drilled by Givot Olam, an Israeli public limited partnership, were recognized in 2004 by the Israeli Petroleum Commissioner as having resulted in a discovery although production has not yet been established; and the Ma'anit #1 (re-entry) well, drilled by Zion Oil & Gas, an American company, is undergoing appraisal and analysis.

What is it in the Bible that inspired the founders of these companies, mostly Christian evangelicals, but also a Jewish Habad Hasid, to spend years of their life and a good part of their personal fortunes on these activities? The founders of the companies that drilled the wells both on and at the foot of Mt. Carmel were generally inspired both by

---

<sup>1</sup> At the end of the 1990s, following the discovery of the Mari field by the Israeli-American Yam Tethys (the Delek group and Noble Energy) consortium, British Gas, a large multinational natural gas company extensively involved in Egypt, got involved in off-shore exploration in the Mediterranean Sea off the Israeli coast. In early 2005, British Gas, after failing over a period of several years to interest other international oil and gas companies to participate in the project, returned almost all its rights to the Israeli government for a combination of geo-political and commercial reasons while retaining its Palestinian and Egyptian interests.

the story of Elijah's sacrifice described in I Kings 18:30-40, believing that the water poured on Elijah's offering was oil from oil seeps in the area - and also by the Blessing of Asher in Deuteronomy 33:24. The founders of the three companies who drilled and are drilling the deep wells in the central and northern parts of the Sharon Plain and on the Mediterranean coast north of the Plain of Sharon and west of Mt. Carmel were and continue to be inspired primarily by the Blessings of Joseph and Asher in Genesis 49:22-26 and Deuteronomy 33:13-17 and 24. The founder of Hoshana Oil, who was interested in the area just south and east of Mt. Carmel, was inspired by Blessings of Asher and Zebulun and Issachar in Deuteronomy 33:18-19 and 24.

What are these Blessings? How do the founders of these oil and gas exploration companies, many of them oil and gas professionals with years of industry experience, come to connect Biblical verses with potential petroleum reservoirs located deep underground? Is there any possible connection between the Blessings and the story of Elijah's sacrifice? With other references appearing in historical texts concerning what may possibly be oil seeps in the area of the Carmel?

In what follows I have tried to collect and present the various Biblical and historical references that I understand have inspired the founders of these petroleum exploration ventures.

## I. THE BIBLICAL CLUES

THE TRANSLATION: Except where otherwise noted, the translation used is that of *The Jerusalem Bible* (Koren, Jerusalem, 2000). *The Jerusalem Bible* is a Bible published with the original Hebrew text and an English translation printed on facing pages. In the words of the editors:

*"The English Translation is not essentially new: it is rather a thoroughly corrected, modernized and revised version of those Anglo-Jewish Bibles which have long been accepted for home and synagogue use throughout the English-speaking world. As a basis for this edition, the 'Jewish Family Bible' of M. Friedlander, published with the sanction of the Chief Rabbi of the British Empire, Dr. N. M. Adler in 1881, was selected. That version had two important merits: it was faithful to the MASORA, or received Hebrew text, and it retained as much as Jewish sentiment permitted of the unsurpassed language and rhythm of the 'Authorized Version' [King James] of 1611. These advantages have been preserved in the present version.*

*"In addition to the text of Friedlander, a comparison was made with the interesting nineteenth century Jewish Bible of Isaac Lesser, and with other later translations. As a result many fresh readings have been adopted. The language of the older versions has been modernized where it was felt that the ancient linguistic and grammatical forms would cause difficulty for the present-day reader. Also many points of detail have been corrected in the light of modern scholarship, or as a result of fresh application to the TARGUMIM and the classical Jewish commentators."*

For ease of use, proper names do not appear in transliteration from the Hebrew as in The Jerusalem Bible, but in traditional English spelling. Also, rather than using

colons followed by small letters to show breaks between sentences as in *The Jerusalem Bible* which follows the traditional Hebrew punctuation, I follow the modern English tradition using periods followed by capital letters.

## A. THE BLESSINGS OF JOSEPH

### 1. Jacob's Deathbed Blessing of Joseph:

פרשת ויחי (בראשית מ"ט : כ"ב – כ"ו):

"בן פרת יוסף בן פרת עלי-עין בנות צעדה עלי-שור: וימררהו ורבו וישטמהו בעלי חצים: ותשב באיתן קשתו ויפזו זרעי ידיו מידי אביר יעקב משם רעה אבן ישראל: מאל אביך ויעזורך ואת שדי ויברכך ברכת שמים מעל ברכת תהום רבעת תחת ברכת שדים ורחם: ברכת אביך גברו על-ברכת הורי עד-תאות גבעת עולם תהיין לראש יוסף ולקדקד נזיר אחיין:"

Genesis 49: 22-26:

"Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall. The archers fiercely attacked him, and shot at him and hated him; but his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made supple by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob (from thence from the shepherd, the Stone of Israel), by the God of thy father who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee, with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that couches beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of thy father are potent above the blessings of my progenitors to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills, they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separated from his brothers."

[**Variant Translation:** *The Jerusalem Bible* translation above is based on *The King James Version*. *The Revised Standard Version* translates the opening passage of verse 26: "*The blessings of your father are mighty beyond the beyond the blessings of the eternal mountains, the bounties of the everlasting hills, ....*" This translation is based on the Septuagint, the 3<sup>rd</sup> Century translation of the Bible into Greek by the Jews of Alexandria. The Septuagint translates the Hebrew "HOREI", literally "parents", as "mountains" based on the argument that the root "HOR" in this context can also mean mountain as in "HOR HA'HAR" (Numbers 20:22). The translation of the Septuagint was adopted by the Rashbam (Rabbi Samuel ben Meir), the grandson of the noted Rabbi Solomon ben Isaac (Rashi), who lived in the

Rhine Valley in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century. *Olam Ha'Tanakh* (Davidson–Eti, Tel-Aviv, 1993) [*“Olam Ha'Tanakh”*], vol. *“Breishit”* [Genesis], p. 253.]

2. Moses' Deathbed Blessing of the Tribes of Joseph (Manasseh and Ephraim):

פרשת וזאת הברכה (דברים ל"ג : י"ג – י"ז):

"וליוסף אמר מברכת ה' ארצו ממגד שמים מטל ומתהום רבצת תחת:  
וממגד תבואת שמש וממגד גרש ירחים: ומראש הררי-קדם וממגד גבעות  
עולם: וממגד ארץ ומלאה ורצון שכני סנה תבואתה לראש יוסף ולקדקד  
נזיר אחיו:"

Deuteronomy 33 : 13-17:

“And of Joseph he said, *Blessed* of the Lord *be his land*, for the precious things of heaven, for the dew and *for the deep that couches beneath*, and for the precious fruits brought forth by the sun, and for the precious things put forth by the moon, and for *the chief things of the ancient mountains, and for the precious things of primordial hills, and for the precious things of the earth*, and its fullness, and for the good will of him that dwelt in the bush. Let *the blessings come upon the head of Joseph, and upon the top of the head* of him who was separated from his brothers.”

B. THE BLESSING OF ASHER

Moses' Deathbed Blessing of the Tribe of Asher

פרשת וזאת הברכה (דברים ל"ג : כ"ד):

"ולאשר אמר ברוך מבנים אשר יהי רצוי אחיו וטבל בשמן רגלו:"

Deuteronomy 33 : 24:

“And of Asher he said, be Asher blessed above sons; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and *let him dip his foot in oil*.”

C. MOSES' SONG OF PRAISE TO GOD AND THE LAND OF ISRAEL  
AND DEATHBED TESTAMENT TO THE NATION OF ISRAEL

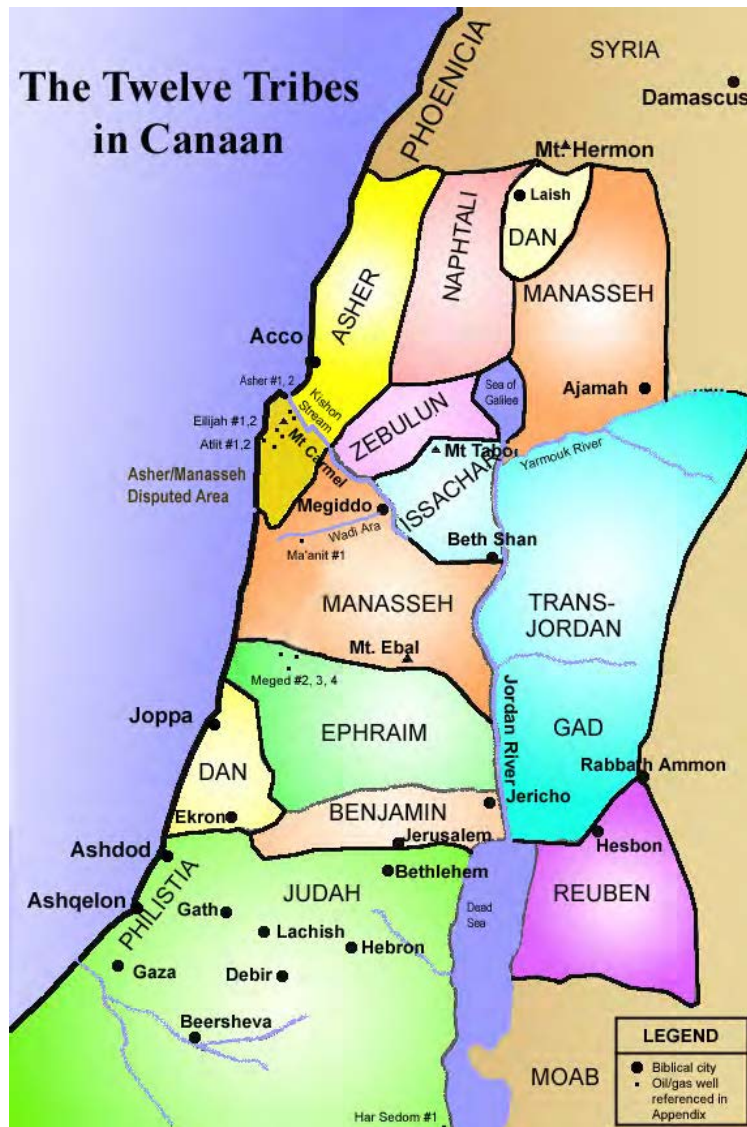
פרשת האזינו (דברים ל"ב : י"ג):

"וירכבהו על-במותי ארץ ויאכל תנובת שדי וינקחו דבש מסלע וישמן מחלמיש  
צור:"

Deuteronomy 32 : 13:

"He made him ride on the high places of the earth, and he ate the produce of the fields; and he made him suck honey out of the rock, and oil out of the flinty rock."

II. THE LANDS OF JOSEPH (MANASSEH AND EPHRAIM) AND ASHER –  
THE MAP.



**Cartographical Note:** There is a dispute among scholars as to whether the southern border of Asher extended down the Mediterranean coast to Caesarea and included the northern parts of Mt. Carmel or it ran along the Kishon Stream which flows along the northeastern flank of Mt. Carmel. In all cases it is generally agreed that the Lands of Manasseh abutted on and lay just to the south of the Lands of Asher.

**Geographical Note:** In the context of appreciating the geological implications of the map of the northern portions of the Lands of Manasseh, it should be mentioned that running approximately from somewhat east of Caesarea in the West to Megiddo in the East and representing the southern boundary of the Mt. Carmel range is Wadi Ara, the Ara Valley or Nahal I'ron (part of the ancient Via Maris or Way of the Sea that ran between Egypt and Damascus) which, from dipping beds and seismic data, geologists infer to be a major fault feature. A fault the size of Wadi Ara in a tectonically active area, in which the Carmel range and the northern Samarian hills (including the Umm-el-Fahm anticline) are located, is a phenomenon which is of major interest to petroleum geologists and explorationists.

### III. A POSSIBLE INTERPRETATION OF THE BLESSINGS IN THE HUNT FOR PETROLEUM (ROCK OIL) IN ISRAEL

1. The Blessings of Joseph and of the Tribes of Joseph (Manasseh and Ephraim) mention their “land” as being blessed with “blessings”, “bounties”, “chief things” and “precious things” lying deep underground in “ancient mountains” and “primordial hills”. It is also said that these “blessings” shall be on “the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of [Joseph].” Finally, the Blessings compare Joseph to a fruitful tree “by a well.”
2. Two questions arise: (i) what are the precious things lying deep underground? and (ii) under what part of the lands of Joseph do these precious things lie?
3. Initial clues to possible answers to both of these questions appear in the Blessings of Joseph; additional clues appear in the Blessing of Asher and the Song of Praise.

#### (i) The Location:

The Joseph Blessings in both Genesis and Deuteronomy talk of the blessings coming “upon the head of Joseph and the top of the head of [Joseph].” The Hebrew word for “head” is “ROSH”. In Hebrew, when talking geographically and topographically, “ROSH” can mean the upper or higher area, thus the northern area, in the same way as the Upper Peninsula of Michigan is the northern part of that state. The Hebrew word for “crown of the head” – “KODKOD” – also can have

a geographical/topographical connotation meaning highest part or crest.

Looking at the map, we can see that the lands of Joseph's son Manasseh are in the northern part of the lands of Joseph, north of the lands of Ephraim, thus in the "ROSH" or "head" of the territories of Joseph. The reference to the "KODKOD" or "crown of the head" then points us to the upper or northern portions of the lands of Manasseh.

But we can see from the map that the lands of Manasseh stretch all the way from the Mediterranean Sea to the Jordan River and parts of the Tribe of Manasseh occupied lands east of the Jordan River. Where in this wide stretch of territory do we begin our search?

Let us start with the Blessing of Asher who "dips his foot in oil". The word "foot" in Hebrew is "REGEL" and, again, "REGEL" also has a geographical and topographical meaning. Specifically, it means the lower portion of an area, i.e. the southern portion of an elongated territory running on a north – south axis, in the same way again as Michigan's Lower Peninsula is the southern portion of that state. (And, of course, there is always the Puglian "heel" and Calabrian "toe" of the "boot" of Italy) Assuming for a moment that the "precious thing" and the "bounty" refer to "oil", we note that the blessing does not say that the precious thing is in the "foot of Asher", rather it says that Asher "dips" his foot into the oil. Again looking at the map, we see that the southern portion of the lands of Asher touch on and, indeed, extend into the western side of the lands of Manasseh, west and south of the Carmel range.

We thus appear to have a geographical marker as to where the search might begin: the western side of the northern parts of the lands of Manasseh near that part of the southern portion of the lands of Asher which extend into the lands of Manasseh. Interestingly, this is also the area through which Wadi Ara runs, the inferred fault which divides the Carmel range to the north and the Plain of Sharon and Samaritan hills (including the Umm el-Fahm anticline) to the south. (See the Geographical Note to the Map above.)

As noted in the Cartographical Note to the Map above, some biblical scholars are of the opinion that the southern border between the lands of Asher and Manasseh is the Kishon Stream that flows in the plain along the hills flanking Mt. Carmel to the north-east, with the Carmel range lying wholly within the lands of Manasseh. Even in this case, though, the southern portion of the lands of Asher "dips" into the northern portions of Manasseh.

(ii) The Treasure: Hard Mineral or Liquid?

The Joseph Blessings talk generically of "precious things", "chief things", "bounty", "fullness" and "blessings" lying in "ancient

mountains” and “primordial hills” deep underground. But what are these “precious things”? Gold? Silver? Diamonds? Coal? Iron? Uranium? Water (which in the thirsty Land of Israel is certainly a treasure)? Petroleum (which derives from the Latin “petrus” meaning rock and “oleum” meaning oil – in other words “rock oil”)? Or perhaps some other mineral or liquid treasure.

Not surprisingly, this question was raised as early as the 12<sup>th</sup> Century by the biblical scholar and grammarian Rabbi David Kimhi (the Radak) who lived in the Provence, France. In his commentary on the Blessing of Joseph in Genesis, the Radak talks of subterranean waters; while in his commentary on the Blessing in Deuteronomy, in discussing “MEGED” - “precious things” - he raises the possibility of gold or silver or other precious metals, at the same time also referring to waters in his discussion of the reference to “TEHOM” which follows the verse’s first reference to “MEGED” and precedes the second reference to “MEGED”. (Kamelhar, M., ed., *Commentaries of Rabbi David Kimhi on the Torah* (Mosad HaRav Kook, Jerusalem, 1970) [“Radak Commentaries”], at pp. 209 and 288.)

The first clue to answering this question can be found in Jacob’s blessing of Joseph in Genesis which at 49:22 refers to the fruitfulness of Joseph lying “by a well”. A “well” can be a cistern dug into the ground to be filled with rainwaters or waters (or other liquids) brought by aqueduct from afar. Or it can be a well dug to an underground source of naturally flowing liquids, as an artesian well. The Hebrew word used in the Blessing is “A’YIN”. “A’YIN” in Hebrew means a naturally flowing spring or fountain; this as differentiated from “BE’ER” which is the Hebrew word for a well or cistern. (*The Revised Standard Version* properly uses “spring” in translating “A’YIN” in verse 22.) Thus, from his Blessing in Genesis, one can conclude that the fruitfulness of Joseph’s lands will flow naturally from an underground source. If correct, this would seem to rule out the underground treasures being hard metals or minerals.

This conclusion appears to be supported by the use of the words “TEHOM” and “ROVETZET” in one of the phrases (“the deep that couches beneath”) that appears in both of the Joseph Blessings and is used to describe the location of the treasures in relation to the surface of “the land” of Joseph – above, on or below. “TEHOM” principally denotes particularly deep waters, as well as subterranean waters, and is only derivatively used to denote an abyss. “ROVETZET” is a word used to describe an animal lying recumbent, ready to pounce when cause is given, a condition similar to that of a liquid lying pressurized deep underground ready to spring/flow upwards when the pressure is released by drilling a well into the reservoir. – Interestingly, use of analogies from the animal world to the world of petroleum continues through the ages. For example, the legal regime applying to ownership rights in underground petroleum reserves which can flow from under the property of one person to that of another is strongly

influenced by the medieval English “law of capture” that governed the rights to wild animals which roamed at will from the lands and forests of one landowner to those of another, something which neither forest trees nor hard mineral mines did or could do. And, of course, “wildcat” is the term used for a high risk exploration well. (In Talmudic times, the root word “RAVOTZ” was used also to denote the act of sprinkling water. *Babylonian Talmud*, “Tractate Shabbat” 95:1 - שבת צה ע"א - and the commentary of Rashi there, as discussed in *Sefer Breishit* [Genesis], vol. 3 [Mosad HaRav Kook, Jerusalem, 2003], at p. 328, “Da’at Mikra” commentaries to 49:27.)

The source of the Hebrew word TEHOM is the Babylonian TIAMAT. According to the ancient Mesopotamian creation story as told in the epic “*Enuma Elis*”, Tiamat was the primordial goddess of the salt waters. In the war with the younger gods - the offspring of Apsu (the primordial god of the sweet waters) and Tiamat - which led to the creation of the world, Tiamat was killed by Marduk, the champion of the younger gods. Marduk then stretched Tiamat’s carcass out over the waters and of it created the sky and the earth, commanding her carcass (now the earth) not to allow the salt waters, the waters of the deep, Tiamat’s original realm, to escape. (Pritchard, J. B., ed., *The Ancient Near East – An Anthology of Texts and Pictures* [Princeton, 1958], at pp. 31-35 [“Akkadian Myths and Epics, The Creation Epic”, Tablet IV, ll. 130-140].) “TEHOM” or TIAMAT also plays a role in the Biblical creation, Genesis 1:2 : “. . . and darkness was on the face of the deep [TEHOM]” – “והשך על פני תהום”. And then Genesis 1:6-7 tells us: “Let there be a firmament in the midst of the waters, and let it divide water from water. And God made the firmament, and divided the waters which were under the firmament from the waters that were above the firmament, and it was so.” See “*Olam Ha’Tanakh*”, vol. “*Breishit*” [Genesis], at pp. 13-14 (discussion at “Early Creation Stories”) and pp. 17 – 18 (discussion at Genesis 1:2 - “TEHOM”).

The story of Tiamat and the creation of the earth from her dead female body also appears relevant for the present purposes when we recall the reference in Jacob’s Blessing in Genesis to “the blessings of the breasts and of the womb” immediately following the references to “the blessings of the deep [TEHOM] that couches beneath.”

\* \* \*

But the question remains, are the riches referred to in the Blessings of Joseph water or petroleum (rock oil)? Or perhaps both?

(iii) The Treasure: Water or Petroleum? or Both?

(a) “*MEGED*” – *Water or Oil?* - The traditional answer to this question has been water. The Radak (R. David Kimhi) suggested as much in the 12<sup>th</sup> Century in his commentary on Genesis 49:25

(“*Radak Commentaries*”, at p. 209). Rabbi Sa’adia Gaon, the leading rabbi and scholar of the 10<sup>th</sup> Century and founder of the great Academy at Sura in Iraq, appears to agree. (Kapach, Y., ed., *Commentaries of Rabbeinu Sa’adia Gaon on The Torah* (Mosad HaRav Kook, Jerusalem, 1963) [“*Rasag Commentaries*”], at p.154.) In both these cases, the reasoning appears to be grounded in the references in the Joseph Blessings to TEHOM which, as discussed above, is associated with underground water.

Nor, indeed, should this conclusion come as any surprise. The southern foothills of the Carmel range just north of Wadi Ara, located in the northern portion of the Lands of Manasseh and today known as Ramot Menasseh - the Manasseh Hills - are among the most fertile lands in Israel, blessed with a great number of natural springs. The cause lies in the fact that underlying Ramot Menasseh are two fresh water aquifers – the Mountain Aquifer carbonates of late Cretaceous age and the overlying local Ovdar Group Aquifer of the more recent Eocene age. Most of Israel benefits from only one or rarely two aquifers; so with its two aquifers, the Ramot Menasseh region in the north of the Lands of Joseph is, indeed, blessed with precious subterranean sweet waters.

However, there is a clue in the Blessings of Joseph which could support a conclusion that the “precious thing” is or is also petroleum. This clue can be found in the multiple references to the treasure lying in “eternal” and “ancient mountains” and in “everlasting” and “primordial hills”. One of the first things one looks for in exploring for petroleum is “ancient” anticlines (as the Umm el-Fahm anticline, see the Geographical Note at The Map, above) and buried structural highs. Anticlines and structural highs are geological terms for mountains and hills now typically lying deep under ground, but which had been mountains and hills on the earth’s surface in “primordial” ages tens and hundreds of millions of years ago. Interestingly, in these anticlines one frequently finds both oil and water, with the oil, being lighter than water, lying on top of the water – though sometimes the oil and water bearing strata are interspersed. But at the relevant depths the water is almost always salt water, the sweet waters of the aquifers feeding the springs of the Ramot Menasseh and other sweet water springs and wells around the world usually running in more recent geological strata which overlie the oil bearing strata and so, being closer to the earth’s surface, are more readily accessible to man.

As noted, in the dry Land of Israel, these sweet waters are indeed precious blessings; but are they the only precious liquids referred to in the Blessings of Joseph? Specifically, they may be “precious things of earth”, but not necessarily the “precious things” of the “deep [TEHOM] that couches beneath”. Rather, those deep or rather deeper blessings may be the precious things that lie on top of the salt water of Tiamat, the goddess of whose skin and bones the earth was made with the purpose of ensuring that the subterranean salt waters not escape.

And these deeper precious things, lying just on top of the abysmal salt waters, may just be (rock) oil.

(b) *“SHEMEN” – Olive Oil or Rock Oil?* - For the next clue, we turn again to the Blessing of Asher which refers specifically to “oil”. The Hebrew word for “oil” as it appears in the Blessing is “SHEMEN”. Any speaker of modern Hebrew will tell you that “SHEMEN” means vegetable oil, particularly olive oil, but can also mean oils extracted from animal fats. He will very likely point out, however, that it does not mean “rock oil” or petroleum, for which he will say a wholly distinct word exists: “NEFT”.

Even in modern Hebrew, however, petroleum based lubricants are referred to by the word “SHEMEN” and oil shales, rocks suffused with hydrocarbons from which oil can be extracted by various treatment processes, mining and retorting and *in situ* heating, are known as “PITZLEI SHEMEN”. Unabridged dictionaries of modern Hebrew go even further and reveal that one of the uses of the word “SHEMEN” is in the term “SHEMEN ADAMA” or “earth oil”, which is defined as “a type of oil which is taken out of the earth and is used for burning; . . . petroleum.” See Gur, Y., *Milon Ivri* (1946) and Even-Shoshan, A., *Ha’Milon Ha’Hadaash* (Kiryat Sefer, Jerusalem, 1979) (*Even-Shoshan*). In his groundbreaking lexicon of the Hebrew language, Eliezer Ben-Yehuda, uses the term “SHEMEN ADAMA” in his definition of “NEFT”: “this is SHEMEN ADAMA, a form of liquid which flows out of the ground and even spouts up, and is used for light and heat, Naphta; . . .” Ben-Yehuda, E., *A Complete Dictionary of Ancient and Modern Hebrew* (Yoseloff, New York – London) (*Ben-Yehuda*), vol. VIII, p. 3719. But more importantly, in his long entry for the word SHEMEN, along with reference to the term “SHEMEN ZAYIT” (“olive oil”), Ben-Yehuda refers to the terms “SHEMEN AVANIM” and “SHEMEN AVNI” - forms which mean “stone oil” or “mineral oil”). In his discussion of the term “SHEMEN AVANIM”, Ben-Yehuda states “of the first type are NEFT (naphtha), stone oil (stein öl)”. *Ben Yehuda*, vol. XV, p. 7258.<sup>2</sup> So we find in Hebrew an accepted use of the word “SHEMEN” in the form of “SHEMEN ADAMA” or “earth oil”<sup>3</sup> and

---

<sup>2</sup> Use of “SHEMEN AVANIM” as the Hebrew term for petroleum or naphtha appears in “*Raishit Limudim*”, a scientific primer written in Hebrew by B.B. Linda and published in Berlin (Rossman) in 1878. The reference appears in a discussion of mineral and earth resins at p. 75, sec. 107.

<sup>3</sup> “Earth oil” as a term for petroleum is common in petroleum producing provinces around the world. In Sumatra, Indonesia, where petroleum seeps have been known for centuries and where Royal Dutch-Shell had its first major discoveries at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, the term for petroleum is “miniac tennah” or “oil from the earth”. Forbes, R.T., *Studies in Early Petroleum History* (Brill, Leiden, 1953) (*Early Petroleum History*) at pp. 111 and 172-173 (quoting P.S. Boccone, *Museo di Fisica* [Venezia, 1697].) - In Burmah, a tributary of the Irawaddy River along which oil seeps have also been known for centuries, is known as Yenangyoung or Earth-Oil Creek. Forbes, *Early Petroleum History*, at p. 169 (quoting M.A. Symex, *An Account of an Embassy to the Kingdom as Ava, sent by the Governor-General of India in the year 1795*). It was near Earth Oil Creek that Burmah Oil, forerunner of British Petroleum, got its start at the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> Century.

in the form of “SHEMEN AVANIM” or “stone oil” for petroleum, just as in Latin where “PETROLEUM” is “rock oil”.

But true to customary usage, the typical speaker of modern Hebrew will nonetheless, in all likelihood, persist in saying that the reference in the Asher Blessing to “oil” means quite literally “olive oil” and has nothing to do with petroleum. And he will rightly add that the lands of Asher along the Mediterranean coast of Israel, as the lands of Manasseh to the south and east of Asher, were historically blessed with olive groves and known as a major source of olive oil; whereas there have been no commonly known petroleum fields in the region.

\* \* \*

This persistence will be supported by the speaker’s knowledge that in Biblical times, olive oil was very valuable and had many uses – for cooking, illumination, medication and lubrication, among others. He will add that the best indication of the perceived value of olive oil is the fact that olive oil was used to anoint kings and high priests and that the word “SHEMEN” and its derivatives are used metaphorically in Hebrew to denote plenty, fullness, riches.

Following this line of thought, though, can lead us to the interesting conclusion that the reference in the Blessing of Asher to the “SHEMEN” in which Asher’s “foot” or southern territories is dipped need not necessarily be only a literal reference to “oil” whatever its source (in which kings and soldiers were wont in Biblical times to wash their feet before setting out on or on returning from a long journey – see commentary on Job 29:6 in “*Olam Ha’Tanakh*”, vol. “*T’yov*” [Job], at p. 159). Rather, such reference might also be a metaphoric reference to the precious things – “MEGED” is the word repeatedly used in Moses’ Blessing of the Tribes of Joseph – and bounty to be found couching in the deep beneath the lands of Menasseh on which the southern territories of Asher border and which are to flow to the surface out of Joseph’s well.

(c) Rock Oil in Biblical Hebrew - “SHEMEN” or “NEFT”? - The question, though, still remains as to the nature of the apparently liquid treasure – “MEGED”: petroleum or water? Does the answer perhaps lie in the use of the word “SHEMEN” in the Blessing of Asher not only in a metaphorical sense referring to riches generically, but also in the literal sense of “SHEMEN ADAMA” – “earth oil” - or “SHEMEN AVANIM” – “stone oil”, petroleum, “rock oil”?

As noted, the common Hebrew word for petroleum is today “NEFT”. However, the word “NEFT” does not appear in the books of the Hebrew scriptures. The first appearance of the word “NEFT” in Hebrew literature is in “Tosephta Shabbat” (2:3) in a discussion of what oils are permitted to be used in lighting Sabbath candles. (The Tosephta are Rabbinic works composed in the early Mishnaic period

in the last centuries Before the Common Era [B.C.E. = B.C.]). – Interestingly, “NEFT” or petroleum is permitted for use in Sabbath candles, while there is a dispute as to whether “ZEFET” or tar may be used – “ZEFET” frequently deemed to be ritually unclean, a condition not attributed to “NEFT”. (It should also be noted that a possible reading of the final version of the Tosephta as appears in Mishna Shabbath 2:2 (3<sup>rd</sup> Century of the Common Era) is that, rather than being a product wholly distinct from “SHEMEN”, “NEFT” is one of the several sub-categories of “SHEMEN” that are discussed: “and the sages permit all the oils with sesame oil with nut oil etc. with resin and with petroleum” – וחכמים מתירים בכל השמנים בשמן שומשומין בשמן (אגוזים וכו' בעטרן ובנפט).<sup>4</sup>

The fact that the word “NEFT” does not appear in the Hebrew scriptures should come as no surprise since “NEFT” was originally a Persian word which in all likelihood was introduced into the Hebrew language with the return of the Jewish exiles from Babylon during the first Persian domination of the Land of Israel in the period described in the Books of Ezra and Nehemiah. (See, II Maccabees 1:36 [E.J. Goodspeed, *The Apocrypha – An American Translation*, Random House, New York, 1959]: “Nehemiah’s people called this Nephtar, ...; but most people call it Nephtai.” Both the Greeks and Arameans also adapted the Persian word “neft” for their word for petroleum – “naphtha”).

What then was the Hebrew word, if any, used in the pre-Persian period for petroleum or “rock oil”? For an answer to this, we perhaps need look only as far as the Moses’ Song of Praise which appears in chapter 32 of Deuteronomy immediately preceding chapter 33 in which the Blessings of Joseph and Asher appear. There, Moses, in praising the bounty of the land of Israel, describes one of its attributes as a place where the People of Israel will “suck ... oil out of the flinty rock” (“YA’NIKEIHU . . . SHEMEN MEI-HALAMISH TZUR” – “ינקוהו . . . שמן מחלמיש צור”) (Deut. 32:13). The Hebrew word used in this passage is “SHEMEN” – the same word that appears in the Blessing of Asher. The context in which the word “SHEMEN” appears in the Song of Praise can understandably lead to the conclusion that “rock oil” or petroleum is meant and that in Biblical times, the word “SHEMEN” may have referred also to “stone oil” or “earth oil” – “SHEMEN AVANIM” or “SHEMEN ADAMA” (the terms used by Eliezer Ben-Yehuda and other modern Hebrew lexicographers and educators since at least the 19<sup>th</sup> Century) – as well as to vegetable and animal oils – just as in current English usage the word “oil” refers generically to vegetable, animal and mineral,

---

<sup>4</sup> The Midrash (traditional stories, typically with didactic intent, concerning Biblical topics collected during the Mishnaic period) relates the following in its telling of the famous meeting between King Solomon and the Queen of Sheba in which the Queen of Sheba asks Solomon the three riddles. According to the Midrash, the second riddle was: “Dust from the earth it comes forth, and it feeds on the dust of the earth. It pours like water and looks to its home. What is it? He (King Solomon) answered and said to her: NEFT [petroleum].” (As related in Lavi, *Black Gold in Israel*, at p. 24.)

including “rock”, oils. Indeed, the appearance throughout Israel of patches oil shales (“PITZELEI SHEMEN” in modern Hebrew) and bituminous chalk deposits interbedded with flintlike or flinty rock (chert or, in Hebrew, “HALAMISH TZUR” - the phrase used in the Song of Praise) deposits appears to support that conclusion (see footnote 7 below) - The word “SHEMEN” is also used in describing a natural excretion of stone in Job 29:6: “... and the rock poured me out rivers of oil” – “V'TZUR YATZOUK I'MADI PALGEI-SHAMEN” – “וצור יצוק עמדי פלגי-שמן:”. Note that again in Job the word for rock is “TZUR”, the same word used in the Song of Praise, notwithstanding the existence of many other words for “rock” in Hebrew.<sup>5</sup>

At this point it should be noted that the Hebrew word “SHEMEN” originates in the Akkadian (ancient Babylonian) word “ŠAMNU” or “SHAMAN” - meaning a thick, viscous liquid - and is a cognate of similar words used in ancient Semitic languages throughout the Middle East. (See, *Ben-Yehuda*, vol. XV, p. 7254 n.1, and *Even-Shoshan* at “SHMN”). Interestingly, Akkadian (and neighboring Assyrian) also had a word for petroleum, indeed two compound words, both of which were based on the word “šamnu”: specifically “šaman-iddi” and “šaman-šadi”. The first means literally “oil of asphalt” and the second “oil of the mountain”. (See, Forbes, R.J., *Bitumen and Petroleum in Antiquity* [Brill, Leiden, 1936] [*Petroleum in Antiquity*], at p. 7 and Table I.) The development of both of these terms makes eminently good sense given the major asphalt and tar resources found in the region and extensively used by the ancient Sumerians, Babylonians and Assyrians, as well as the many liquid oil seeps in the mountains of Kurdistan lying in Assyria north of Babylon and, to a lesser extent, on the plains of the Euphrates to Babylon’s northwest,<sup>6</sup> all of which were well known in antiquity. Assuming that Forbes is correct in his lexicographic and etymologic references – and there seems no reason to doubt them – it is clear that

---

<sup>5</sup> The story of Job did not take place in Israel, but rather in the Land of Uz. There is a dispute as to where Uz was located. Some argue it was in the area of Damascus and others in northern Mesopotamia. The bulk of opinion, though, holds that Uz bordered on the lands of Edom between Petra in Southern Jordan and Basra in southern Iraq. See, *Olam Ha'Tanach*, vol. “T’yov” (Job) at p. 25, commentary on “B’ERETZ UTZ”. These lands were and are in the desert with agriculture limited to mountain tops and oases in which olive trees do not as general matter grow. On the other hand, these are areas where there are oil seeps and surface deposits and outcrops of oil infused rocks as well as major oil fields. (See fn 7 below.) If this opinion is correct, it would appear doubtful that the reference in Job to rock pouring out rivers of oil is to olive oil. Rather, logic would appear to support a reading whereby the oil coming from the “TZUR” is “rock” oil or petroleum. If so, then, as the combination of words used in Job “SHEMEN” and “TZUR” is likely to refer to “rock oil”, there is no reason not to conclude that, when “SHEMEN” appears in the same combination of words in the Song of Praise, that the reference is also to “rock oil”.

<sup>6</sup> The Akkadian and Assyrian word for asphalt and bitumen - “iddû” or “ittu” - may have its origin in the name of the city of Hit on the banks of the Euphrates 150 miles northwest of Babylon. Hit, the center of the Mesopotamian bitumen industry even before the times of Sargon (c. 25th century B.C.E.), lies on the tributary stream of Is around which the famous Fountains of Is oil and asphalt seeps flowed (fn. 11 below). Forbes, *Petroleum in Antiquity*, at p. 25.

the root word “SHMN” or ŠMN was used by the Semitic speaking peoples of the ancient Middle East to include petroleum – the “rock oil” of the Romans and the “stone oil” or “earth oil” of the modern Hebrew lexicographers. What reason then for the Song of Praise’s reference to “oil out of flinty rock” and Job’s “rock poured ... rivers of oil” not to be references to petroleum?<sup>7</sup> The relevant texts were all

---

<sup>7</sup> The Land of Israel has large quantities of oil shales (“PITZLEI SHEMEN” in modern Hebrew), oil suffused rock, lying in thick surface strata in the hills of Bet Shemesh southwest of Jerusalem, mid-way between Jerusalem and the Mediterranean coast, and in the desert plateau of Mishor Rotem overlooking the Dead Sea. Several attempts over the past twenty-five years have been made to extract oil from these shales. These attempts have had very limited success, among other reasons because of the relatively poor quality (low organic content) of the rock and high costs of production. (Efforts to produce these shales have recently been renewed by Lapidoth-Heletz, L.P., an Israeli petroleum exploration company using a new Russian *in situ* production technology.) Some geologists are of the opinion that the Mishor Rotem shales and shales buried under the Dead Sea are the source of the oil and tar seeps in the Dead Sea area.

Interestingly, underlying these oil shales and bituminous chalk deposits which are also located throughout the Negev plateau are chert beds of the Senonian (Upper Cretaceous) age. To the north, the chert beds pass laterally into patches of highly bituminous (10-20% organic matter) chalk deposits located throughout the Land of the Shefala, the Sharon Plain, the Galilee and the Jordan Valley. Outcrops of these bituminous chalk-chert interbeddings appear at several sites in the Lower and Western Galilee and in the Jordan Valley. Surface deposits of bituminous limestones with organic content as high as 25% have been found near Hammath and Tiberias in the valleys of the Jordan River and its tributary the Yarmouk and on the high plains of Jordan above the eastern bank of the Jordan River and eastern shore of the Dead Sea. These deposits too are sometimes associated with chert beds. Forbes in *Petroleum in Antiquity*, at p. 25 (quoting Vitruvius, a Roman architect and engineer writing in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BCE,) notes that it is possible that these deposits were known in antiquity.

In his *Black Gold in Israel*, at pp. 29-3, Lavi describes the attempts to explore the Yarmouk deposits in the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries. These attempts had their origin in stories of local Bedouin of oil seeps and a burning hill covered with “NEFT” at Tel-el-Hamid. Based on this and similar petroleum sightings in the Yarmouk valley, the first attempt to drill an oil well was commenced in 1914 at Macarin in the Yarmouk Valley, about 24 km (13 mi.) east of the Sea of Galilee. According to Lavi, the well was never completed and its findings were in dispute. During World War I, German engineers exploited bituminous shales containing crude oil in the Macarin area for the Hijazi trains. H. Michelson, “Geological Survey of the Golan Heights (With Some Remarks on Exploration for Hydrocarbons)” (TAHAL Hydrology Division, 1982), at p. 13 and the works cited there.

In 1982, a water well was drilled at Ein Said on the northern bank of the Yarmouk some 6 kilometers (4 miles) northeast of Hammat – 17 kilometers west of the Macarin well and 7 kilometers east of the Sea of Galilee. Unexpectedly, this well encountered several sections of rich bituminous chalks containing liquid hydrocarbons. These sections, which contained chert sills, were found at depths between 500 – 900 meters (1,600 – 3,000 ft.) *Id.*, at Fig. 1 and pp. 6, 12-14.

As noted above at page 20, the Hebrew word for chert, a flintlike rock, is “HALAMISH”, one of the two words in the phrase appearing in the Song of Praise’s reference to the source of the “oil” to come from “the flinty rock” – “SHEMEN MEI-HALAMISH TZUR”. The other word in the verse, “TZUR”, means rock generically and, in certain contexts, is also used specifically as a variant of the word “TZOR” which is the Hebrew word for flint. It should be noted too that, as can be seen on the Map, the Yarmouk River was the southern boundary of the territories of Menasseh east of the Jordan.

Historically, oil shales, bituminous chalks and marls, and bituminous limestones (with organic content ranging from 4% to 20% and even up to 25%) were known as rockasphalts. Outcrops and surface deposits of rockasphalts occur throughout the Middle East and Mediterranean. They are known to exist in Syria, Armenia, Iraq, Iran, Kouweit, Bahrain, Albania and Sicily, as well as in Israel and Jordan. Many of these deposits were known in classical times. Forbes, *Petroleum in Antiquity*, at pp. 18-30. And according to Forbes, methods to produce bitumens (semi-solid and viscous hydrocarbons) from rockasphalts were known in antiquity and classical times, with vases of asphalts produced from rockasphalt found by archaeologists in the ancient Persian city of Susa, and references to the process in the works of Aetius of Amida, the 6<sup>th</sup> Century Byzantine physician, and al-Ma’sudi, the 10<sup>th</sup> Century Arab historian. *Id.*, at pp. 37-39.

written in approximately the same period.<sup>8</sup>

(d) *Biblical Parallelism*. The common Biblical literary form parallelism, may provide additional support for the conclusion that the reference to SHEMEN in the Song of Praise may well be to “rock” oil and not olive oil. The verse reads “suck honey out of the rock and oil [SHEMEN] out of the flinty rock.” Most of the medieval European exegetes of the Sephardic (Spanish) and Ashkenazic (Rhine Valley) traditions, including for example, Rashi (Rabbi Solomon bar Isaac) (11<sup>th</sup> century), Avraham Ibn Ezra (12<sup>th</sup> century) and the Rosh (Rabbi Asher ben Yehiel) (13<sup>th</sup> Century), understand the reference to “honey” and “oil” metaphorically as reference to date palms and olive trees both of which grow in abundance in the rocky Land of Israel.

This agriculturally based interpretation of the rabbinical scholars living in rich agricultural areas of Europe is understandable (Rashi owned vineyards and was a grower of grapes in the Champagne region of France); but is it appropriate? The question arises in light of the phrase introducing the reference to honey and oil: “made him suck” or in Hebrew “VA’YA’NI’KEIHU”. Literally, “YA’NI’KEIHU” means the sucking of milk out of a breast, but it also means generically to draw out or absorb. This hardly seems an apt metaphor for the growing of trees out of earth, even though it may be argued that the root systems of trees suck up ground water for sustenance, which in turn enables their fruit to grow, and ground water generally underlies even rocky surfaces. The term, however, might well be appropriate for use when referring to sucking or drawing or pumping liquids out of rock formations above or below ground, in caves or subterranean strata – from Tiamat’s breasts and womb: the “blessings of the breasts and of the womb” of Jacob’s Blessing.

Interestingly, in his translation into Arabic and his interpretation of the relevant verse in the Song of Praise, the great Sa’adia Gaon does not refer to “honey” as being the honey of sweet dates, though date palms certainly abounded in Iraq. Rather, for the sage, honey is

---

<sup>8</sup> The similarities between and tendencies to confuse “rock oil” and the more common – at least for the ancients – olive oil is not new or limited to persons attempting to interpret the Song of Praise and Blessing of Asher, but go at least back to the Greeks and Romans. In his *Petroleum in Antiquity*, Forbes refers to similar confusion in the armies of Alexander the Great in connection with oil seepages in Turkmenistan near the river Oxus as reported by the Roman historian Plutarch (“The greasy oily liquor ‘Became perfectly clear, when the surface was taken off, and neither in taste or smell differed from real (Olive) oil nor was it inferior to it in smoothness and brightness, though there was no olive tree in that country.’”) and to confusion about the nature of the seeps near Agrigento in Sicily reported in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BCE by the Greek physician Dioscorides (“Bitumen is found in its liquid state near Acragantium in Sicily. It floats on the surface of springs and is used in lamps instead of (olive) oil. Those who call it Sicilian oil are mistaken for it is an established fact that it is a kind of liquid bitumen.”), with Pliny and Aristotle making similar observations. Forbes, *Petroleum in Antiquity*, at pp. 28 and 30. – In this connection, in his *Early Petroleum History*, at p. 85, Forbes relates that in 1690 a local chemist analyzed a clear, white and thick waxy petroleum found in a well near Viterbo, Italy “and found it very much like olive oil, as it did not have the usual sulphurous smell.”

literally the honey of bees which were known to build their hives in rock crevices and caves of the Middle East and Israel. (*Rasag Commentaries*, at p. 151 n. 10; see also *Olam Ha'Tanach*, vol. "Devarim" [Deuteronomy] 32:13, at p. 240 at "VA'YA'NI'KEIHU DEVASH MI'SELA".) This is a phenomenon which is still well known in Israel today, where bees continue to build their hives in the burial caves of Beit Shearim on the north-east flank of Mt. Carmel (see "Ha'aretz", June 30, 2005, at p. A-18.) Regrettably, Sa'adia Gaon does not appear to address the term "SHEMEN" as appears in the following clause of verse 13, other than by an unexplained reference to "HALAV" or "milk", which of course is also sucked out of its natural container - the breast. (This use of "milk" and "honey" may be a reference to the preceding chapter of Deuteronomy in which the Land of Israel is described as the "land of milk and honey" - אֶרֶץ זָבַת חָלֶב וּדְבַשׁ. Deuteronomy 31:20. And, interestingly, in his translation of Deuteronomy 32:13, R. Sa'adia Gaon does reverse the verse's reference to "honey" and "oil" to read "milk" and "honey".) Thus, from Sa'adia Gaon's reading, the parallelism seen in verse 13 of the Song of Praise can lead to the conclusion that the reference to "SHEMEN" may well be a reference to "SHEMEN ADAMA" or "SHEMEN AVANIM" – earth oil or stone oil: As "DEVASH" or honey is deposited in crevices of surface rocks in the porous matrix of a bee-hive to be sucked or otherwise drawn out of the honey-comb by man for his use, so the "SHEMEN" in the context of "earth oil" is deposited in the porous matrix of subterranean rock strata, the breasts and womb of TEHOM, from there to be sucked or pumped out by man. – This interpretation is strengthened by the presence of black chert – "HALAMISH" – interbedded with bituminous chalk and oil shale – "PITZLEI SHEMEN" – deposits throughout Israel. (See footnote 7 above.)

\* \* \*

Thus, it would appear that, as well as giving us a geographical marker as to where the search for the treasure should begin, the Blessing of Asher, when read together with the Song of Praise, may also provide us with an indication concerning the nature of at least one of the "precious things" located under the north-western portion of the lands of Manasseh; an indication which points to the treasure's being petroleum - "rock oil", "stone oil", or "earth oil".

(iv) The Treasure: References to Sacred Fire and Oil Seeps Near Mt. Carmel?

Is the "rock" or "stone" or "earth oil" which may be referred to in the Blessing of Asher as the treasure lying under the lands of Manasseh also perhaps referred to in later Biblical and inter-testamental Jewish literature and elsewhere?

Were “rock oil” (petroleum) seeps around the lands of Manasseh perhaps the source of the “waters” that Elijah poured on his offering (I Kings 18:30-40) and which were “in the trench” and were consumed by “the fire of the Lord” (I Kings 18:38 – וַתִּכַּף אֵשׁ-ה'... וְאֵת-הַמִּיִּם אֲשֶׁר - בתעלה לחכה: - an offering made on the Carmel in the lands of Asher just north of the lands of Manasseh?<sup>9</sup> (In Judaism water is a ritual purifying agent and was used in preparations for ritual sacrifices. “NEFT” in the Persian tradition was also associated with ritual purification. See, II Maccabees 1:36 [E.J. Goodspeed translation]: “Nehemiah’s people called this Nephtar, which is translated ‘Purification’.”)

Were such “rock oil” seeps perhaps also the source of the “muddy water” used to rekindle the holy fire in the Temple upon the return of the Jews from the Babylonian exile as described in II Maccabees 1:18-36? Modern commentators appear to think so. (See, Hartom, A.S., *Ha'Sfarim Ha'Hitzeni'im* [The Apocrypha], vol. *Hashmonaim Bet* [II Maccabees] [Yavneh, Tel-Aviv, 1958], note to II Maccabees 1:20, at p. 10; Kahana, A., *Ha'Sfarim Ha'Hitzeni'im* [The Apocrypha], vol. 1, book 2, *Macabim Bet* [II Maccabees] [Mekorot, Tel-Aviv, 1937], note to II Maccabees 1:20, at p. 180.) And according to the writer quoted by II Maccabees, this “muddy water” was called by the followers of Nehemiah “Nephtar” and its source declared by the Persian king “a sacred inclosure”.

The derivation of Nephtar or Neft from the Persian has been discussed above. And it should come as no surprise that a Persian king should make of the site of a petroleum seep “a sacred inclosure”. At the relevant time, the Persians practiced the religion of Zarathustra. In Zoroastrianism, fire represented the principle of light and good in the never-ending struggle with darkness and evil. Zoroastrian temples, called “fire temples” by the Greeks, were built around sacred fires which were lit at sites of oil (petroleum) seeps which abounded in Persia – modern day Iran - a country in which are found some of the world’s largest petroleum reservoirs. (The locations of ancient Persian

---

<sup>9</sup> In Diderot’s and d’Alembert’s famous 18<sup>th</sup> Century *Encyclopedie ou Dictionnaire raisonne des Sciences, Arts et des Metiers*, Tome XI, p. 15, edit. 1774, at the entry for “Naphta” there appears a description which is quite reminiscent of the Biblical description of Elijah’s sacrifice: “Naphta is what Naturalists call a white, transparent, very fluid and light bitumen which floats on water. This substance is so highly inflammable that it can ignite at a distance; it has a penetrating odour and burns without leaving any residue.” (As quoted in Forbes, *Early Petroleum History*, at pp. 43-44.) - A scientific text published in Paris in 1694 describes petroleum from oil seeps near Modena in Italy: “The white naphta which we normally call white petroleum oil, both by reason of its whiteness, transparency and beauty and because it cannot mix with anything at all, is lighter than anything you may add to it, always rising to the surface ... which makes it highly volatile and liable to catch fire, ...” (As quoted in Forbes, *Early Petroleum History*, at pp. 93-94.) It is in the area around Modena, in the Po Valley region of Italy, that some of the largest petroleum fields in Europe have been discovered. - Ancient Japanese texts talk of seeps of “burning water” in the Echigo region during the reign of Tenjitenno in about 615 C.E., in which region petroleum was traditionally collected from “ditches excavated” along an outcrop and from hand dug wells. Forbes, *Early Petroleum History*, at p. 180. It was in this region that one of the few Japanese oil fields was discovered in the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century. *Id.*, at p. 181.

oil seeps and Zoroastrian fire temples were at the heart of the development of the modern petroleum industry at Baku on the Caspian Sea in the mid-19<sup>th</sup> Century and were instrumental in the discovery at the beginning of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century of the Iranian – then still known as Persian - oil fields.)

Was it to these substantial underground Persian petroleum reservoirs Isaiah referred in blessing Cyrus (the Persian king who freed the Jews from Babylonian captivity and enabled their return to the Land of Israel under the leadership of Ezra and Nehemiah): “I will give thee the *treasures of darkness and the hidden riches of secret places* that you mayst know that I, the Lord, who call thee by thy name, am the God of Israel.” (Isaiah 45:3 - "ונתתי לך אוצרות חשך ומטמני מסתרים למען" "תדע כי-אני ה' הקורא בשמך אלוהי ישראל:?)

The similarities between Isaiah’s Blessing of Cyrus and the Blessings of Joseph are obvious. Is it possible then that the source of the “muddy water” discovered by the followers of Nehemiah on their return to Israel from Babylon and used by them to rekindle the holy fire in the Temple in Jerusalem, called by them Nephtar and enclosed as sacred by the Persian king (as described in II Maccabees) was a petroleum seep similar to those that fed the Zoroastrian “fire temples” in Persia – a seep that was located in the border regions of the lands of Manasseh and Asher; near the site of Elijah’s offering on the Carmel?

In *Haifa or Life in Modern Palestine* (Blackwood, London, 1887) Laurence Oliphant (a Scottish diplomat, world traveler, journalist, novelist, explorer of the Holy Land and ardent Christian supporter of the early Zionist movement and resettlement of Jews in the Land of Israel, who for many years lived on the Carmel) republished an article first written by him in 1882. In the article, originally published in the New York “Sun”, Oliphant noted that, “According to the most ancient Persian traditions, sacred fire burned at the extreme western point of Carmel.”(*Haifa*, at p. 27.)<sup>10</sup>

Was the site of the Persian sacred fire referred to by Oliphant the site at which the “muddy waters” were found by the followers of Nehemiah? The source of the water used by Elijah for his offering to the Lord? Joseph’s well<sup>11</sup> in the northern portion of the lands of

---

<sup>10</sup> According to Forbes, Vitruvius, the Roman architect and engineer writing in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BCE, mentioned oil seeps near Jaffa, while Dioscorides, the Greek physician, also writing in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century BCE and Pliny, the Roman historian, writing in the 1<sup>st</sup> Century CE, both mention oil seeps near the city of Sidon in what is today southern Lebanon. (Forbes, *Petroleum in Antiquity*, at p. 18.) Mt. Carmel lies equidistant between Jaffa and Sidon, Sidon lying about 60 miles to its north and Jaffa about 60 miles to its south.

<sup>11</sup> As discussed above, Joseph’s well is really Joseph’s “spring” or “fountain”. The use of the words “spring” and “fountain” in connection with oil seeps has been common through the ages. As Arab travelers before him, Marco Polo described the oil seeps near Baku: “... there is a fountain from which oil springs in great abundance” (Forbes, *Early Petroleum History*, at pp. 154-155); the earliest oil seeps known to history and archeology near the city of Hit, located on the Is River, a small tributary of the

Manasseh near the border of the lands of Asher? Were these perhaps sites of oil seeps in the region of Mt. Carmel and its surrounding foothills which have since been sealed by ensuing tectonic movements in the geologically active area around the Carmel range?

If so, can one hope today to rediscover the site of the fire temple? and, with it, perhaps discover the underlying source of the seeps?

#### IV. THE NEXT STEP - THE ROLE OF MAN AND SCIENCE

Armed with the Map of the Lands of the Tribes of Israel and inspired by the clues contained in the Blessings of Joseph and Asher and in the Song of Praise and the references in I Kings, II Maccabees and other texts discussed, it remains for man - aided by the tools of geology, geophysics and engineering - successfully to locate where, if at all, in the north-western portion of the lands of Manasseh and at what depths and in what geological structures under those lands, the precious bounty of petroleum lies. Following that, it will remain for the engineering prowess of man to enable that liquid treasure, of which believers believe it was foretold, to flow out through Joseph's well and so ensure fulfillment of the blessings that Joseph's bough blossom into economic plenty.

Ph.M.

---

Euphrates 150 miles northwest of Babylon, were known as the Fountains of Is and Fountains of Pitch and referred to as "springs" in the annals of Tukulti Ninurta II (890-884 BCE): "In front of Hit, by the bitumen springs. . ." and in several 16<sup>th</sup> century texts of European travelers (Forbes, *Petroleum in Antiquity*, at pp. 25-27); the oil seep near the small French village of Gabian in the Languedoc region of southern France from which oil was extracted since the 17<sup>th</sup> century and where the first French oil field was discovered in the 1920s, was known as the "Font de L'Oli", the Fountain of Oil (Forbes, *Early Petroleum History*, at pp. 1ff.)

## **APPENDIX**

### **SCRIPTURALLY INSPIRED / INFLUENCED PETROLEUM EXPLORATION IN ISRAEL**

---

1. 

<u>Company:</u>	Asher Oil Company
<u>Founder:</u>	Weslie Hancock. California based. A family company was active in oil and gas exploration in the United States.
<u>Scriptural Basis:</u>	Blessing of Asher in Deuteronomy and story of Elijah's sacrifice in I Kings.
<u>Period of Activity:</u>	Early-middle 1960s.
<u>Area of Activity:</u>	North-east flank of Mt. Carmel overlooking the plain of the Kishon Stream.
<u>Primary Activity:</u>	Drilling of two wells:  (i) <u>Asher #1</u> 1963 - drilled to 2,391 meters (7,845 ft) to a target in the Middle Jurassic. Results: Dry. (ii) <u>Asher #2</u> 1965 – drilled to 1,314 meters (4,311 ft) to a target in the Middle Jurassic. Results: Dry
<u>Related Non-Scripturally Inspired Drilling:</u>	In 1975, Sonol, a major Israeli gasoline marketing company reentered the Asher #2 well and deepened it to 2,596 meters (8,517 ft) to a target in the Early Jurassic. In 1980, OEL, an Israeli-government exploration company drilled the Asher #3 near the first two Asher wells to 574 meters (1,883 ft) to a Cretaceous target. Both these wells were dry.
2. 

<u>Company:</u>	Energy Exploration Inc.
<u>Founder:</u>	Andy Sorelle. Texas based petroleum engineer and wildcatter.
<u>Scriptural Basis:</u>	Blessing of Asher in Deuteronomy
<u>Period of Activity:</u>	First half of 1980s.
<u>Area of Activity:</u>	Coastal plain between Mt. Carmel and the Mediterranean Sea, specifically in the area of the town of Atlit.
<u>Primary Activity:</u>	Drilling of one well in two stages:  (i) <u>Atlit #1</u> 1981 – drilled to 5,273 meters (17,301 ft) to a target in the Early Jurassic. Results: Dry (ii) <u>Atlit #1 Deep</u> 1982-1983 - deepened the Atlit #1 to 6,531 meters (21,428 ft) to target in Late Triassic. Results: asphalt and then light oil shows in cuttings before well was lost for technical reasons.
3. 

<u>Company:</u>	Moriah Exploration
<u>Founder:</u>	Gilman Hill. Colorado based geoscientist active in oil and gas exploration and developer of exploration technology.

- Scriptural Basis: Story of Elijah's sacrifice in I Kings and the Blessing of Asher in Deuteronomy.
- Period of Activity: Early and mid-1980s.
- Area of Activity: Mt. Carmel near the traditional site of the Elijah sacrifice.
- Primary Activity: Drilling of two wells in 1980 and 1986:
- (i) Elijah #1 1980 – drilled to 2,682 meters (8,800 ft) to a target in the Middle Jurassic. Results: Dry.
  - (ii) Elijah #2 1986 – drilled to 651 meters (2,136 ft) to a target in the Cenomanian. Results: Dry.
4. Company: Ness Energy
- Founder: Harold "Hayseed" Stephens. A Texas oil and gas explorationist and operator.
- Scriptural Basis: Genesis stories of Sodom and Gomorrah and a long series of scriptural references in various books of the Old Testament.
- Period of Activity: 1980s and late 1990s-2001.
- Area of Activity: Area surrounding the southwest quadrant of the Dead Sea and adjacent areas.
- Primary Activity: Participation in drilling of one well in 1985; acquisition of certain exploration licenses in the late 1990s. The well, the Har Sedom #1 was targeted to be drilled to about 3,500 meters about 11,500 ft), but was lost for technical reasons at 1,818 meters (5,965 ft) in the Pliocene. The exploration licenses were lost following the failure of Ness to meet its obligations under the licenses to commence the drilling of wells on the license areas.
- Related Non-Scripturally Inspired Drilling Activity The Har Sedom #1 project and well were developed and operated by an Israeli commercial oil exploration company, Seismica. Ness Energy held a minority working interest (about 15%) in the well.
5. Company: Hoshana Oil Company
- Founder: Bernard Coffindaffer. West Virginia based evangelical minister and missionary.
- Scriptural Basis: Blessings of Asher, Zebulon and Issachar in Deuteronomy
- Period of Activity: Early 1990s
- Area of Activity: Southern flank of Mt. Carmel and the Valley of Jezreel just east of the South-eastern flank of Mt. Carmel.
- Primary Activity: Acquisition of an exploration license and reprocessing and analysis of seismic data. License lapsed with no progress made towards drilling of well.
6. Company: Camberly Exploration
- Founder: Lyle Harron. Canadian oil and gas explorationist.
- Scriptural Basis: Blessings of Asher in Deuteronomy
- Period of Activity: Early-middle 1990s.
- Area of Activity: Coastal plain between Mt. Carmel and the Mediterranean Sea.
- Primary Activity: Drilling of one well:
- (i) Atlit #2 1996 – drilled to 1,633 meters (5,388 ft) to a target in the Early Cretaceous. Results: Dry.

7. Company: Givot Olam Oil Exploration  
Founder: Tovia Luskin. Russian born and educated geophysicist, active in oil and gas exploration in Canada and Australia, before moving to Israel.  
Scriptural Basis: The Blessings of Joseph in Genesis and Deuteronomy  
Period of Activity: 1990s to date  
Area of Activity: Eastern portion of Sharon Plain between Netanya and Modiin  
Primary Activity: Drilling of three wells commencing in 1994:
- (i) Meged #2 1994 – drilled to 5,200 meters (17,061 ft) to a target in the Triassic. Results: 40<sup>0</sup> API Silurian aged oil recovered from the Middle Triassic.
  - (ii) Meged #3 2000 – drilled to 4,742 meters (15,683 ft) to a target in the Triassic. Results: Oil and gas shows in the Middle Triassic, but reservoir of very poor quality (very low porosity and permeability.)
  - (iii) Meged #4 2002/3 – drilled to 4,919 meters (16,139 ft) to a target in the Triassic. Results: 36<sup>0</sup> API Silurian aged oil recovered from the Middle Triassic. Attempts in 2005 to drill a horizontal bore-hole in the well in an attempt to recover the oil which is located in tight reservoir rock failed apparently for technical reasons, with the well abandoned following loss of equipment in the horizontal bore.
- Plans underway to drill another Meged well and attempt to develop the Meged field discovery, which was recognized by the Israel Petroleum Commissioner in 2004.
8. Company: Zion Oil & Gas, Inc.  
Founder: John Brown. Michigan and Texas based businessman with roots in the machine-tool industry and active in building contracting sectors.  
Scriptural Basis: The Blessings of Joseph in Genesis and Deuteronomy.  
Period of Activity: 1990s to date.  
Area of Activity: Manasseh hills and Sharon plain from the southern flanks of Mt. Carmel to Netanya.  
Primary Activity: Drilling of a well in 2005:
- (i) Ma'anit #1  
(Re-entry) 2005 – deepening of previously abandoned Ma'anit #1 from 2,335 meters (7,661 ft) to 4,719 meters (15,483 ft) to targets in the Middle and Early Triassic. Results: The company announced that during drilling and completion operations, the well had numerous significant oil and gas shows in a 2,100-foot interval.

Related Non-  
Scripturally Inspired  
Drilling Activity:

Analysis of the results of the well is continuing and future activity, including designing comprehensive completion procedure and drilling of an appraisal well being considered.

The Ma'anit #1 was originally drilled to 2,335 meters (7,661 ft) in 1995 by an Israeli commercial oil exploration company, Sdot Neft. Though originally targeted to 4,500 meters (14,765 ft), it was abandoned as a dry hole after Sdot Neft ran out of money.



“A special company with a special task in a special country.”

(Deuteronomy 14: 2)



**Zion Oil & Gas, Inc.**

12655 N Central Expressway, Suite 1000 Dallas, TX 75243

Office: (214) 221.4610 Toll Free: (888) 891.9466 Email: [info@zionoil.com](mailto:info@zionoil.com)