

for contemplating the world. It provided a visual image for all nations to unite around. It contributed to the sense that a country's problem, such as pollution, had the potential to be a *world* problem. It enhanced the ability of man to worry about the world as a whole. From 1968 onwards people were more likely to think about "those things which are coming on the earth" rather than just worry about their local surroundings.

Conclusion

1968 was no ordinary year. The froglike spirits were at work throughout the world. Moreover, the permissive and humanistic society we live in today was framed very much by what happened that year.

Frank Borman did not really save 1968. But when Christ returns he will save the world from the consequences of 1968.

Moses' last words to Israel

9. Blessings for Naphtali and Asher

David Green

NAPHTALI

Deuteronomy 33

v. 23. O Naphtali, satisfied with favour,
And full of the blessing of the LORD,
Possess the west and the south.*

IT HAS BEEN suggested that there was an initial fulfilment of the first two lines of this blessing in the preaching of the gospel message by Jesus in the land of Naphtali, with his main residence being at Capernaum (Mt. 4:13-16). Certainly that was a great blessing for the people of Galilee, and favour from the Lord for those who hearkened and repented at his preaching, but the lack of response brought a curse rather than a blessing for the cities of Chorazin, Bethsaida and Capernaum (11:20-24). Favour and blessing also came to Naphtali in the days of Joshua, in that they took possession of a well-watered and fertile area. This, when seen in vision by Moses the seer, resulted in the exclamation in which the blessing is couched.

Future fulfilment

Regarding the future, the first two lines of this blessing require no explanation and little comment. When the nation of Israel is given a new heart so that they respond to God in sincerity and truth, not only the tribe of Naphtali but all the tribes of Israel will receive His favour and blessings to the full: "they shall call on My name, and I will hear them: I will say, It is My people: and they shall say, The LORD is my God" (Zech. 13:9, AV).

The idea of blessing is connected with the name Naphtali, which is derived from the He-

brew word *pathal*, meaning to struggle or wrestle, for Jacob obtained a blessing by wrestling¹ with the angel of God (Gen. 32:24-28). The wrestling of the Lord Jesus against temptations and human adversaries "in the days of his flesh" (Heb. 5:7), and then against the enemies of God at his second advent, will bring the fullness of God's blessing on all Israel, both natural and spiritual: "with the froward Thou wilt shew Thyself froward [mg. wrestle, Heb. *pathal*]. For Thou wilt save the afflicted people; but wilt bring down high looks" (Ps. 18:26,27, AV).

"The west and the south"

The geographical area allocated to Naphtali in the days of Joshua was north of Zebulun and east of Asher (Josh. 19:34). Heading southward, its eastern border lay along the western sides of Lake Huleh, the River Jordan and the Sea of Galilee with its sunny, fertile shores. This area cannot be described as "the west and the south". In the days of Isaiah and Jesus the land of Naphtali was described as "the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan . . . Galilee of the Gentiles", with Capernaum being "upon the sea coast" (Isa. 9:1; Mt. 4:13-15, AV).

A number of modern versions, in seeking to make the words of Moses agree with the land allocation set out in the book of Joshua, have alternative translations, such as:

"he will inherit southward to the lake" (NIV);
"the Sea and the South are his domain" (Jerusalem Bible);

* All quotations from the NKJV unless stated otherwise.

1. Hebrew *abaq*, meaning 'to grapple'.

“possess the lake and the south” (RSV);
 “his patrimony stretches to the sea and southward” (NEB).

The Speaker's Commentary remarks that the Hebrew words translated “the west and the south” should not be understood as referring to geographical position but to natural characteristics, and suggests that they should be given the meaning “the sea [of Galilee] and the sunny district”. With regard to “the west” this is fair comment, since the common Hebrew word *yam* is used, which has the primary meaning ‘sea’, but fairly frequently denotes ‘the west’ because the Mediterranean Sea is the western border of the land of Canaan.²

“South” translates the Hebrew word *darom*, which is used infrequently in Scripture, and then mostly in poetry, and can signify ‘the south’ or ‘a southern region’. One suggestion, which agrees with *Speaker's Commentary*, is that in this passage *darom* should be taken as a proper name. The blessing would then read “possess the sea and Darom”. Darom would be the name given to “the mountain district, the highlands, probably so called from the southern aspect and bright landscapes”.³

It has already been suggested that Moses' blessings find complete fulfilment only in the Kingdom age. That being so, there is no need to show that his words agree with the allocation set out in Joshua 19, as Naphtali will in the future inherit a strip running from east to west, south of Asher and north of Manasseh. Taking this into account, it is still difficult to see how “the west and the south” should be interpreted, as Naphtali's strip of territory is well north of the Sea of Galilee, and all tribal areas reach to the west and to the Mediterranean Sea. Perhaps the fulfilment will only become clear when the topographical changes brought about by the great earthquake spoken of in Zechariah 14 have taken place.

ASHER

Deuteronomy 33

- v. 24. Asher is most blessed of sons;
 Let him be favoured by his brothers,
 And let him dip his foot in oil.
- v. 25. Your sandals shall be iron and
 bronze;
 As your days, so shall your strength
 be.

“Most blessed of sons”

It is not clear why Asher should be “most blessed” by God of all the sons of Jacob, nor why his brothers should favour him. An alternative translation of the second line is, “let him be the favoured one of his brethren” (*Speaker's Commentary*), that is, the one favoured by God. If this is the meaning intended, there is a parallelism between the first two lines, with Asher being both the most blessed and the most favoured by God. Since this cannot be supported from elsewhere in Scripture we must regard the modern translations as unsatisfactory. However, the AV translates these two lines, “Let Asher be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren”, a translation which is supported by both the Septuagint and the RV. This suggests that the tribe of Asher will be fruitful and multiply rapidly.

The name Asher means ‘happy’, and the tribe of Asher received a very ‘happy’ blessing from Moses. It is interesting to note that blessedness is associated with the naming of Asher by Leah, for she said, “I am *happy*, for the daughters will call me *blessed*” (Gen. 30:13). Leah was being made happy by having many children, and considered that others would regard this as a blessing. Likewise the people of Asher will be made ‘happy’ with many children that are a blessing from the LORD: “Behold, children are a heritage from the LORD, the fruit of the womb is a reward . . . *Happy* is the man who has his quiver full of them” (Ps. 127:3,5). In addition, the tribe of Asher will dwell happily with all the other tribes and they will be happy to dwell in the land with Asher. This speaks to us of a harmonious situation with no envy or distrust breaking the unity of Israel.

In the age to come all the tribes will be very fruitful with children. In the first place, spiritual Israel will constitute a great band of children: “Shall the earth be made to bring forth in one day? or shall a nation be born at once? for as soon as Zion travailed, she brought forth her children” (Isa. 66:8, AV). Isaiah also speaks of the children of natural Israel: “Enlarge the place of thy tent, and let them stretch forth the curtains

2. In the AV, *yam* is translated ‘sea’ 280 times and ‘west’ 69 times.

3. Page 259, *The Giant Cities of Bashan and Syria's Holy Places*, J. L. Porter, Nelson, 1867. The author had a good reputation as an “explorer of sacred lands” in the nineteenth century.

of thine habitations: spare not, lengthen thy cords, and strengthen thy stakes; for thou shalt break forth on the right hand and on the left; and thy seed shall inherit the Gentiles, and make the desolate cities to be inhabited" (54:2,3, AV).

A general happiness is to be the lot of all Israel, as stated in Deuteronomy 33:29: "*Happy* are you, O Israel! Who is like you, a people saved by the LORD . . . !". When that great day arrives, Israel will be the "most blessed" of all the nations of the earth:

"The Gentiles shall come to your light, and kings to the brightness of your rising . . . The wealth of the Gentiles shall come to you . . . the nation and kingdom which will not serve you shall perish . . . I will make you an eternal excellence . . . You shall drink the milk of the Gentiles . . . for the LORD will be your everlasting light, and the days of your mourning shall be ended. Also your people shall all be righteous; they shall inherit the land forever" (Isa. 60:3,5,12,15,16,20,21).

Asher's foot dipping in oil

In recent years much has been made of the possibility of finding petroleum in the territory allotted to Asher, and maybe a little has been discovered in the area specified in Joshua 19:24-31. In the future age Asher will occupy a different area, the second most northern strip of the Promised Land (Ezek. 48:2). It would seem unlikely that petroleum is meant by this prophecy as that is a non-renewable fossil fuel that causes a great deal of pollution in both its processing and the combustion of its various components. It is hard to imagine Jesus allowing its extraction and use on any appreciable scale.

What has always been counted a blessing from God is the produce of the ground, the grain, wine, fruit and oil: "I will cause the shower to come down in his season; there shall be showers of blessing. And the tree of the field shall yield her fruit, and the earth shall yield her increase" (Ezek. 34:26,27, AV). The harvest of oil will be so plentiful that it will splash on the feet of those who extract it from the olives. The figure used by Moses probably signifies the great fertility and productivity of the ground in all respects, rather than agriculture limited to the production of olive oil: "The threshing floors shall be full of wheat, and the vats shall overflow with new wine and oil" (Joel 2:24). What is specially mentioned here for Asher will be true for all the tribes of Israel in that day: "Then Israel shall

dwell . . . in a land of grain and new wine; his heavens shall also drop dew" (Deut. 33:28).

Iron and bronze sandals

The change from "him" (v. 24) to "you" (v. 25) has suggested to some commentators that verse 25 does not belong to Asher's blessing but to the concluding words of Moses addressed to the whole nation of Israel (vv. 26-29). However, translators generally do not take this view.

The Hebrew word *manal*,⁴ translated "sandals" in the NKJV, occurs only this once in the Old Testament, and is variously translated "shoes" (AV), "shoelatches" (Interlinear), "bars" (RV, RSV), and "bolts" (NEB, NIV, Jerusalem).⁵ The NKJV rendering appears to follow the Septuagint. One reason for choosing the translation "shoes"/"sandals" may have been the feeling that there is a linking of thought with the previous line about Asher's *foot* dipping in oil. On the other hand, the idea of "strength" mentioned in the next and final line of the blessing also connects with shoes because the legs, which act through the feet, are the strongest part of the human body. Although shoes can be shod with the strong metals iron and bronze to make them longer-wearing and more effective, no references have been seen which suggest that this was the practice of the Israelites. A figurative reference to iron and bronze emphasising the idea of strength seems most likely.

Feet are used as a figure for the subjection and also the destruction of enemies. For example, Joshua's commanders put their feet on the necks of the five kings before they were killed and left hanging on five trees (Josh. 10:24-26). To speak of shoes of iron and bronze implies strength to accomplish this very effectively. This blessing shows us that the tribe of Asher, together with the other tribes of Israel, will be active in subduing those nations that oppose the nation of Israel when the Lord Jesus reigns as king: "you shall go out and grow fat like stalled calves. You shall trample the wicked, for they shall be ashes under the soles of your feet"

4. Thought to derive from a root meaning to fasten or bind.

5. Another connected Hebrew word (*naal*) has two very similar forms (Strong's Nos. 5274 and 5275), which have the two meanings of 'shoe/shoelatches/sandals' and 'bolt/bar'. The word for shoe or shoe latchet is derived from the word meaning to fasten up with a cord or a bar.

(Mal. 4:2,3); “He will subdue the peoples under us, and the nations under our feet” (Ps. 47:3).

Scripture sometimes uses the figure of threshing for the subjugation of other nations by Israel. This connects with the use of metals, as sometimes animals were shod with metal when they were used for threshing, and wooden threshing sledges had iron fragments fastened into the underside (see picture):

“Arise and thresh, O daughter of Zion; for I will make your horn *iron*, and I will make your hooves *bronze*; you shall beat in pieces many peoples” (Mic. 4:13);

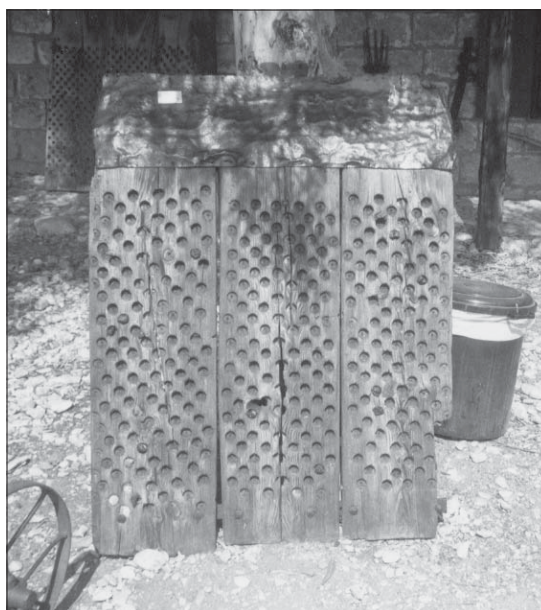
“Behold, I will make thee a new sharp threshing instrument having teeth: thou shalt thresh the mountains, and beat them small, and shalt make the hills as chaff” (Isa. 41:15, AV).

Strength and security

Asher’s blessing concludes with the words, “as your days, so shall your strength [Heb. *dobe*] be”. This part of the blessing is interpreted in the NEB as “May . . . your strength last as long as you live”. Most versions translate *dobe* as ‘strength’,⁶ but ‘security’ is given as an alternative in the RV margin, and the *SPCK Commentary* suggests ‘rest’. Apparently the word *dobe* is found only this once in the Old Testament, but its root is found in the Arabic, where it means ‘rested’ or ‘was quiet’,⁷ hence the idea of ‘security’, which fits in well with the translation ‘bolts/bars’ instead of sandals or shoes. The Jerusalem Bible reads, “Be your bolts of iron and of bronze and your security as lasting as your days!”.

In ancient times gates and doors were usually made of wood strengthened with bands of iron and brass and fitted with bolts and bars of the same metals. Concerning the conquests of Cyrus, God’s word through Isaiah was, “I will break in pieces the gates of bronze and cut the bars of iron” (45:2). Similar language is used in Psalm 107 about the deliverance of those imprisoned in a dark dungeon (v. 16).

If the translation “bolts” or “bars” of iron and brass is correct in Deuteronomy 33:25, they must be considered as being figures of the Divine protection afforded to God’s people. As for Asher, so for all Israel, they will dwell in their own land securely and safely in the age to come: “Then Israel shall dwell in safety” (v. 28). Ezekiel prophesies of this time in the following words: “When I have gathered the house of Israel from the peoples among whom they are scattered, and am hallowed in them in the sight of the Gentiles



An ancient threshing sledge on display at a farm museum in Israel. Only a few of the iron studs are left.

. . . they will *dwell safely* there . . . yes, they will *dwell securely*, when I execute judgments on all those around them who despise them” (28:25,26).

Those who seek for a fulfilment of Moses’ words prior to the days of the Babylonian captivity point out that Asher occupied territory at the northern end of Palestine and so would be particularly exposed to attack by powerful invaders from the north. To them, this blessing promises safety for the northern frontier of Israel provisional upon the faithfulness of the Israelites. However, it is better to see in Moses’ blessings the promise of things relating to the future age that are certain, particularly in view of Moses’ prophecy in chapter 32 that Israel would prove to be “a perverse and crooked generation” (v. 5), repeatedly unfaithful to their God.

“As lasting as your days”

The title for this section is taken from the Jerusalem Bible translation of verse 25, “Be . . . your security as lasting as your days”. The days of all

6. The Septuagint and Targums translate *dobe* as “strength”.

7. Adam Clarke’s commentary on Deuteronomy 33:25. An alternative Arabic root could be *dabi*, meaning ‘abound in riches’, hence the translation, “As thy days increase, so shall thy riches”.

the tribes of natural Israel will be age-lasting, enduring for a thousand years, but for spiritual Israel they will be eternal and everlasting. Within the Millennial age the individual Israelites will enjoy long, productive lives: “for as the days of a tree are the days of My people, and Mine elect shall long enjoy the work of their hands . . . for

they are the seed of the blessed of the LORD, and their offspring with them” (Isa. 65:22,23, AV). Everlasting strength and security for those who trust in God are spoken of by the prophet Isaiah: “Trust in the LORD forever, for in YAH, the LORD [Yah Yahweh], is everlasting strength” (26:4).
([To be concluded](#))

Science Update

Recent news from the world of science

David Burges

New secrets of bird migration

THE EXTRAORDINARY abilities of birds to migrate over large distances and return to the same breeding site every year have long been a source of wonder. The prophet Jeremiah was able to point to the contrast between the birds of Israel, which faithfully kept to their migratory patterns year after year, and the people of Israel, who could not discern the timing of God’s actions: “Even the stork in the heavens knows her appointed times; and the turtledove, the swift, and the swallow observe the time of their coming. But My people do not know the judgment of the LORD” (8:7, NKJV).

Now studies by scientists from the University of East Anglia have unearthed another remarkable example, in the behaviour of black-tailed godwits, wading birds many of which breed in Iceland.¹ It had been assumed that the birds, which are long-lived and pair for life, migrated from the breeding area to their winter feeding grounds together. But when the birds were ringed and tracked it emerged that they invariably split up and wintered hundreds of miles apart. The females flew off first, leaving the males to tend the growing chicks for a few more days. Then the males themselves set out, but to totally different sites.

One typical pair, nicknamed Gretar, a male, and Sigga, a female, breed at Holfi in southern Iceland. Sigga, however, spends the winter on the Humber Estuary near Hull in eastern England, while Gretar travels to the Algarve in Portugal, some 1,200 miles away. In the case of another couple, Gunnar the male winters in Essex whilst his mate Elsa travels to Spain. The

team did not find a single case of paired birds in the same migrating flock.

However, the most striking feature of their behaviour is that in the spring, despite this long separation, the birds return to their Iceland breeding area within days of each other. According to the co-author of the study, “they manage to synchronise their arrival with astonishing accuracy”. The return of the godwits is spread over a whole month, from mid-April to mid-May, yet previously paired birds arrive within three days of each other. Only rarely do they fail to meet at the right time, and then unmatched birds may well find themselves a new mate.

Thus the synchronised arrival is of great importance to breeding success, but scientists currently have no idea how the birds manage to achieve it. They speculate whether paired birds could share genetic or physiological similarities, or utilise favourable weather systems for the final stages of their journey home, but essentially this ability remains an enigma. Like so many other wonders of the living world, it testifies to the wisdom of the Creator and the complete inability of evolution to account for the origin of such mysteries.

Another new human species?

HHEADLINES in many newspapers and news bulletins recently proclaimed the ‘sensational’ discovery of yet another species of hu-

1. Roger Highfield, *The Daily Telegraph*, 7 Oct. 2004, reporting work published in *Nature*; article kindly supplied by a reader.