

What can we learn from the tribe of Asher?

Asher is one of Israel's twelve tribes. In the time of Moses, Asher was divided into five clans: the Imnites; the Ishvites; and the Berites; and, through Beriah, the Berite patriarch, two more clans: the Heberites and the Malkielites. The first three clans were named after Asher's sons; the fourth and fifth after Beriah's sons (Numbers 26:44-45).

Asher was Jacob's eighth son. His mother was Leah's maidservant, Zilpah, and he was her second and last child with Jacob. When Asher was born, Leah said, "How happy am I! The women will call me happy" (Genesis 30:13). Asher's name means "happy."

Asher was one of six tribes chosen to stand on Mount Ebal and pronounce curses (Deuteronomy 27:13). Through these curses, the people promised God they would refrain from bad behavior. For example, one curse says, "Cursed is the man who dishonors his father or his mother" (Deuteronomy 27:16). Another states, "Cursed is the man who leads the blind astray on the road" (Deuteronomy 27:18). Still another: "Cursed is the man who sleeps with his mother-in-law" (Deuteronomy 27:23). In all, Asher delivered twelve admonishments (Deuteronomy 27:15-26).

When Jacob blessed his sons, he said, "Asher's food will be rich; he will provide delicacies fit for a king" (Genesis 49:20). Later, Moses blessed the tribe, saying, "Most blessed of the sons is Asher; let him be favored by his brothers, and let him bathe his feet in oil. The bolts of your gates will be iron and bronze, and your strength will equal your days" (Deuteronomy 33:24). Washing one's feet in oil was a sign of prosperity, and Jacob's reference to Asher's food being "rich" indicated that Asher would possess fertile lands. In Joshua 19:24-31, we learn that Asher received land along the Mediterranean coast.

Despite all its blessings, the tribe of Asher failed to drive out the Canaanites, and “because of this the people of Asher lived among the Canaanite inhabitants of the land” (Judges 1:31-32). In the time of Deborah and Barak, “Asher remained on the coast and stayed in its coves” rather than join the fight against Jabin, a Canaanite king (Judges 5:17). This failure to aid their fellow tribes could indicate a lack of reliance on God, a lack of effort, a fear of the enemy, or a reluctance to upset those with whom they did business. Thus, the example set here is a negative one: although Asher was richly blessed, they did not behave admirably; when the time for action came, they failed to trust in God and honor His plan.

Later in Judges, Asher does respond to Gideon’s call to repel the Midianites, Amalekites, and others from the East (Judges 6:35). In another important gesture, Asher accepts Hezekiah’s invitation to the tribes from the Northern Kingdom to join the Passover celebration in Jerusalem (2 Chronicles 30:11). This was considered an act of humility, proof of a contrite heart before God.

In the end, we find that Asher received many great blessings from God. Having received a blessing, they were expected to obey the Lord’s commands. In this they sometimes succeeded and sometimes failed. We, too, have been blessed by God (Ephesians 1:3), and the Lord expects us to obey His commands (John 14:15). Just as Asher received a prophetic blessing from Jacob, God’s children have been told, “In his great mercy [God] has given us new birth into a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, and into an inheritance that can never perish, spoil or fade. This inheritance is kept in heaven for you, who through faith are shielded by God’s power until the coming of the salvation that is ready to be revealed in the last time” (1 Peter 1:3-5).

Praise the Lord for His wonderful plans for us. What a comfort!