

Deuteronomy 33:12

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

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.

Analysis

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. Moses's shortest tribal blessing honors Benjamin with intimate divine protection. The Hebrew yedid YHWH (יְדִיד יְהוָה, "beloved of the LORD") is striking—the same term appears only in Deuteronomy 33:12 and regarding Solomon ("Jedidiah," 2 Samuel 12:25). This unique designation signals special covenant affection.

Shall dwell in safety by him uses shakan betach (שָׁכַן בְּטָח), meaning "abide securely/confidently." The imagery intensifies: **"the LORD shall cover him all the day long"** (chopeph alayv, חֹפֶף עָלָיו) suggests protective hovering, like wings covering young (compare Deuteronomy 32:11). The final phrase, **"he shall dwell between his shoulders"** (בֵּין כְּתֻפֵּי שֵׁכֶן), pictures Benjamin nestled between God's shoulders like a child carried on father's shoulders—intimate, secure, elevated perspective.

This blessing is purely relational, promising no material prosperity or military victory—only God's immediate presence. Benjamin receives what Israel sought at Sinai: "Show me thy glory" (Exodus 33:18). The imagery anticipates John leaning on Jesus's breast (John 13:23) and believers seated with Christ in heavenly places (Ephesians 2:6). Ultimate security isn't circumstantial but relational—abiding in divine love.

Historical Context

Benjamin's tribal territory was small but strategically crucial, located between Judah and Ephraim in central Canaan. The allotment included Jerusalem (though initially controlled by Jebusites until David's conquest), Jericho, Bethel, and Gibeah. This placed Benjamin "between the shoulders" geographically—surrounded by and connecting major tribes.

The blessing's promise of protection proved literal when the Temple was built in Jerusalem on Benjamin's border with Judah (some traditions place it fully in Benjamin's territory). Thus Benjamin uniquely "dwelt between the shoulders" in that God's manifest presence in the Temple was within or adjacent to Benjamin's inheritance. When Israel divided after Solomon, Benjamin remained loyal to Judah, maintaining access to Temple worship (1 Kings 12:21).

Benjamin's history included both privilege and peril. The tribe nearly perished after the Gibeah outrage (Judges 19-21), demonstrating that divine favor doesn't guarantee easy circumstances. Later, Benjamin produced Israel's first king (Saul) and the apostle Paul (Philippians 3:5), showing continued significance in redemptive history. The blessing ultimately points to Christ, the true "beloved of the LORD," in whom believers find absolute security.

Related Passages

Romans 1:17 — The righteous shall live by faith

Hebrews 11:1 — Definition of faith

1 John 4:8 — God is love

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

Study Questions

1. How does Benjamin's blessing of pure relationship challenge our tendency to evaluate blessing by material prosperity?

2. What does it mean practically to "dwell between the shoulders" of God in daily life?
3. How can we cultivate the security that comes from God's love rather than seeking safety in circumstances?
4. In what ways does this blessing anticipate the New Testament reality of union with Christ?
5. How should understanding ourselves as "beloved of the LORD" transform our approach to threats and uncertainties?

Interlinear Text

וּלְבִנְיָמִן	אָמַר	יְדִיד	יְהוָה	שָׁכֵן:
And of Benjamin	he said	The beloved	of the LORD	long and he shall dwell
H1144	H559	H3039	H3068	H7931
טָח	עַל יוֹ	חִפּוֹ	עָלָיו	כָּל הַיּוֹם
in safety	by him and the LORD shall cover			him all the day
H983	H5921	H2653	H5921	H3605 H3117
וּבֵין	בְּתֵפֵי יוֹ	שָׁכֵן:		
H996	between his shoulders	long and he shall dwell		
	H3802	H7931		

Additional Cross-References

2 Chronicles 15:2 (References Lord): And he went out to meet Asa, and said unto him, Hear ye me, Asa, and all Judah and Benjamin; The LORD is with you, while ye be with him; and if ye seek him, he will be found of you; but if ye forsake him, he will forsake you.

Psalms 91:4 (Parallel theme): He shall cover thee with his feathers, and under his wings shalt thou trust: his truth shall be thy shield and buckler.

Matthew 23:37 (Parallel theme): O Jerusalem, Jerusalem, thou that killest the prophets, and stonest them which are sent unto thee, how often would I have gathered thy children together, even as a hen gathereth her chickens under her wings, and ye would not!

Isaiah 51:16 (Parallel theme): And I have put my words in thy mouth, and I have covered thee in the shadow of mine hand, that I may plant the heavens, and lay the foundations of the earth, and say unto Zion, Thou art my people.

Isaiah 37:35 (Parallel theme): For I will defend this city to save it for mine own sake, and for my servant David's sake.

Isaiah 37:22 (References Lord): This is the word which the LORD hath spoken concerning him; The virgin, the daughter of Zion, hath despised thee, and laughed thee to scorn; the daughter of Jerusalem hath shaken her head at thee.

Deuteronomy 12:10 (References Lord): But when ye go over Jordan, and dwell in the land which the LORD your God giveth you to inherit, and when he giveth you rest from all your enemies round about, so that ye dwell in safety;

1 Kings 12:21 (Parallel theme): And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he assembled all the house of Judah, with the tribe of Benjamin, an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against the house of Israel, to bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam the son of Solomon.

2 Chronicles 11:1 (Parallel theme): And when Rehoboam was come to Jerusalem, he gathered of the house of Judah and Benjamin an hundred and fourscore thousand chosen men, which were warriors, to fight against Israel, that he might bring the kingdom again to Rehoboam.