

Joshua 19:17

Authorized King James Version (KJV)

And the fourth lot came out to Issachar, for the children of Issachar according to their families.

Analysis

And the fourth lot came out to Issachar, for the children of Issachar according to their families. This verse marks the allocation of tribal territory to Issachar, Jacob's ninth son by Leah (Genesis 30:17-18). The Hebrew name Yissākhār (יִשָּׂאכָר) derives from sākhar (שָׂכַר, "wages" or "hire"), reflecting Leah's declaration: "God hath given me my hire" (Genesis 30:18). The tribe's inheritance came through the sacred lottery system (gōrāl, גֹּרָל), demonstrating that land distribution was determined by divine providence, not human merit or military strength.

Jacob's blessing pronounced Issachar "a strong ass couching down between two burdens" who would "bow his shoulder to bear" (Genesis 49:14-15). This prophecy found fulfillment in their fertile but strategically vulnerable territory. The phrase "according to their families" (l'mishpēḥōthām, לְמִשְׁפְּחֹתָם) emphasizes the covenant's extension through family structures—God's promises operated not through atomized individuals but through households and clans, establishing a corporate identity rooted in genealogical continuity.

Historical Context

This allocation occurred approximately 1400-1390 BC after Joshua's conquest campaigns. Issachar received territory in the fertile Jezreel Valley, one of ancient Palestine's most productive agricultural regions. The Jezreel corridor served as a major trade route connecting Egypt with Mesopotamia, making it economically

valuable but militarily vulnerable. Control of this valley meant control of commerce and military movement between continents. However, this strategic location also made Issachar's territory a frequent battleground. Major biblical conflicts occurred here: Deborah and Barak defeated Sisera (Judges 4-5), Gideon routed the Midianites (Judges 6-7), and Josiah died fighting Pharaoh Necho (2 Kings 23:29).

Related Passages

John 15:13 — Greatest form of love

1 Corinthians 13:4 — Characteristics of love

Study Questions

1. How does the lot-casting system for tribal inheritance teach us to recognize God's sovereignty over our circumstances and opportunities?
2. What does Issachar's blessing-burden (fertile land in vulnerable location) reveal about how God's gifts often come with corresponding responsibilities?
3. How might the emphasis on 'families' challenge modern individualistic approaches to faith and covenant community?

Interlinear Text

יִשָּׂשכָר	יָצָא	הַגּוֹרֵל	הַרְבִּיעִי	לְבָנָיו	יִשָּׂשכָר
of Issachar	came out	lot	And the fourth	for the children	of Issachar
H3485	H3318	H1486	H7243	H1121	H3485

לְמִשְׁפְּחוֹתָם:

according to their families
H4940