

Gatekeepers: Issachar

A Teaching by Ron Brown

“Rejoice...Issachar, in your tents. They will call peoples to the mountain; there they will offer righteous sacrifices; for they will draw out the abundance of the seas, and the hidden treasures of the sand.” Deuteronomy 33:18–19

It is very important for us to understand what our responsibilities and privileges are as gatekeepers. In Matthew 16 (one of the foundational scriptures we’ve used for this series on gatekeepers), Peter received a revelation from the Father that Jesus Christ was the Messiah and Jesus said, “Upon this rock of revelation I will build my church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against it.

We’ve talked about the gates and what they represent, what they symbolize, and what happened at the gates of the city and how that is important for us as leaders of Teen Challenge here in Southern California. In talking about the tribe of Issachar, in Genesis 30:14–17, Ruben (one of the sons of Leah) was out in the field and came across some mandrakes. This is a plant that has a root shaped like a person and in ancient times it was used in fertility rituals under the belief that if you made a drink with the mandrakes, it would help with conception.

Leah—the wife that Jacob married first then had to work for Laban another seven years for a total of fourteen before he was able to get Rachel—had reached a place that she was no longer bearing children, so her son Ruben brought her some mandrakes. But Rachel saw them and wanted the mandrakes because she too wanted to bear more children for Jacob. So basically she talked Leah into giving her some of the mandrakes because she wanted to be able to have children. And Leah said, “Okay, I’ll give you the mandrakes and Jacob is going to be with me then and not with you,” and out of that transaction she gave birth to Issachar.

So the name Issachar means “his reward will come” because Leah literally hired Jacob for the evening with those

mandrakes and out of that consummation came the birth of Issachar. This was Jacob’s ninth son.

In Genesis 49:14–15, we find Jacob’s prophecy concerning Issachar. He said, “Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between the sheepfolds. When he saw that a resting place was good and that the land was pleasant, he bowed his shoulder to bear burdens, and became a slave at forced labor.”

When Moses gave a blessing to each one of the tribes of Israel (Deuteronomy 33:18–19), he basically gave Zebulon and Issachar the same blessing. It says, “Rejoice Zebulon, in your going forth, and, Issachar, in your tents. They will call peoples to the mountain; there they will offer righteous sacrifices; for they will draw out the abundance of the seas, and the hidden treasures of the sand.”

In 1 Chronicles 12:32, it says of the sons of Issachar that they were “men who understood the times, with knowledge of what Israel should do.” When David was made king of Judah, his supporters gathered at Hebron and Issachar was one of the tribes that was there to support David when he came into rulership.

Don’t Be a Slave to the Enemy

What are some of the lessons for us today as we look at the prophecy concerning Issachar in Genesis 49, and as we look at Moses’ blessing in Deuteronomy 33, and what does that have to do with us and our gatekeeping responsibility?

The picture in Genesis 49 is of a donkey, which was a strong beast of burden that was made for tilling the soil and, of course, we know that Israel was an agricultural society, so animals that tilled the ground were extremely important. But



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when it talks about the donkey as a beast of burden lying down between the two sheepfolds, it is a symbol of the strength of the donkey not being fully utilized. There was a beast of burden that was not being fully utilized but was lying down rather than fulfilling the responsibility that the beast of burden is supposed to fulfill. It is very, very important that we are standing as watchman on the wall and that we are engaged with the enemy, that we are aware of what is going on.

First Peter 5:8 says, "Your adversary the devil walks about as a roaring lion, seeking whom he may devour. Resist him, steadfast in the faith..." (NKJV). If we are not aware of what is going on in our area and sphere of responsibility and we

If we are not people of prayer, we will be people of worry.

are lying down with our burden rather than carrying our burden and walking it out, then we will not be faithful in what God has called us to do in fulfilling our gatekeeping responsibilities.

Genesis 49:14–15 says that Issachar was "lying down between the sheepfolds. When he saw that a resting place was good and that the land was pleasant, he bowed his shoulders to bear burdens." Then it says he became a slave at forced labor. If we are not fulfilling our responsibilities to fight the good fight of faith to dispossess the enemy from our territory, then we are going to exact the heavy price of paying tribute to the enemy.

It was like heavy taxes. If they didn't dispossess the enemy completely from the land, then they had to deal with them. Part of the dispossessing of the enemy from the land was that they had to tear down their images. They had to destroy all of the high places and all the places where the enemy worshiped. They had to dispossess the enemy and also clear all the idol worship out of the land so that there would not be an opportunity for the enemy to reconfigure and come back at another time. In Deuteronomy and also in Numbers, God said the enemy will become pricks in your eyes and a thorn in your side, so it is very, very important that we fulfill the responsibility that God has given us completely.

Walking in the Anointing Means Victory

Any time that we don't walk in the fullness of God's authority, if we don't walk in the fullness of God's revelation, then we start operating and functioning in our own strength. What are some of the things that happen as a result of it? One of the prices that we pay is that we overwork because we are not working under the anointing. When you are working under the anointing of the Holy Spirit you are working under His strength. If you are not working under the anointing, you are working under your own strength, you are going to get tired, and you are going to become weary in your well-doing.

I can imagine that sometimes with the load of all our responsibilities, it can become very, very taxing. So we have to walk in the fullness of what God says. We cannot lie down between the burdens but we have to carry that burden—and it is a burden. There is a burden for leadership. There is a cost to be a leader, a servant leader in the Kingdom of God. You don't get a chance to say, "I don't feel like being the leader today so I'm just going to let anything happen that happens."

You have to be on guard, you have to be watchful, you have to know what is going on in your sphere of influence. You have to be engaged with the people that are coming in and out of your life. Others are saying all kinds of things to you and you have to know what is happening around you with your staff, with your people. You have to be completely engaged. You don't have the option of not being engaged. So if we are not anointed, if we are not walking in the Holy Spirit, we are not walking in revelation knowledge, then we are going to get overworked, overburdened, and we are going to become very tired.

One of the other consequences is that worry and anxiety comes in. If we are not people of prayer, we will be people of worry. Philippians 4:6 says, "Be anxious for nothing, but pray about everything" and then walk in God's peace. So it is very, very important that we become people of prayer. That's a part of our gatekeeping responsibility that God has given us and that keeps us out of worry and anxiety.

Another thing that happens to us is fear. If we are not walking under the anointing of the Holy Spirit, then fear comes. Isaiah 43 tells us to fear not, for the Lord has redeemed us. He has called us by his name. We will walk through the fire, we won't be burned. We'll go through the water and we won't drown. But fear comes when we are not fully walking in God's anointing.

Another thing that happens is murmuring and complaining. There is an opportunity for murmuring and complaining if you look up from your place of responsibility as a gatekeeper and you start

comparing yourself to everybody else.

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Paul says that

comparing yourselves to yourselves is unwise. And so, murmuring and complaining begins to happen if we are lying down with our burden and we are not fully engaged in what God has called us to do.

That is part of the leadership responsibility, that's part of the spirit of Elijah. Jesus talked about John the Baptist, who came in the spirit of Elijah. He was the last Old Testament prophet that bridged the old and the new, and he came in the spirit and the anointing of Elijah. When we are talking about the tribe of Issachar, there are some character traits and character

qualities in the spirit of Elijah that has to do with our gatekeeping responsibility.

The Responsibilities of Leadership

The first of all is burden bearer. That means to shoulder your responsibility without any hint of quitting. I think about Elijah. He was shouldering his responsibility when he stood up to the prophets of Baal. But how many of you know that when he came off that mountaintop experience, he went into depression and he wanted to quit. Why? Because when you are under the anointing, there is this flow of energy and power that comes from the Holy Spirit because Jesus said, “You will receive power when the Holy Spirit comes upon you, and you will be my witnesses in Jerusalem, Judea, Samaria, and the uttermost parts of the Earth.” But you can’t live on the mountaintop experience. You can live in the faith of that experience, the faith that experience produces, but you can’t live in an experience.

Like Elijah, our experience can be very powerful but when that experience is over, you have to live by faith. The just shall live by faith. We walk by faith but not by sight, so daily by faith you have to pick up your cross and follow the Lord. Daily by faith you have to carry the burden God has given you of leadership. You have to deny yourself and take up that cross daily. If you are a person who lives in emotional highs and lows of things, it causes you to become an inconsistent leader and an inconsistent person in your life, so you have to become that burden bearer and show responsibility without any hint of quitting.

Be Stable and Secure in God’s Will

The next thing is you have to be stable and secure in who you are as a person, who God has made you to be. The apostle Paul said, “By the grace of God I am what I am” (1 Corinthians 15:10). Understand that your stability and your security comes from the Lord. James 1:17 says that every good and perfect gift comes down from the Father of lights and there is no shadow of turning in him. We can’t have any shadow of turning in us. We will have shadows of turning and we won’t be stable and secure if we are not finding our identity in who God is and who God says he is.

Operate in a Spirit of Wisdom

The next thing we need to do is operate in wisdom. We need a spirit of wisdom. James, who was the father of the church in Jerusalem, said to ask God for wisdom and God will give it to you liberally, and he would not upbraid you or chastise you for asking. We need to walk in the wisdom of God.

Be a Protector by Praying for Others

Another character quality and another character trait of the spirit of Elijah is that you need to be a protector. As gatekeep-

ers we have to defend and shield those whom God has given us responsibility for as we stand in the place of prayer. When you stand in the place of prayer, the Holy Spirit will reveal to you the heart of God and how to pray effectively for those you are leading.

Romans 8:26 says that we don’t know how to pray as we ought to but the Holy Spirit helps us in our infirmities and weaknesses because he searches the mind of God and he will speak to us and show us how to pray effectively so that we stand in that place of protecting against the strategies of the enemy that come against the area of responsibility that the Lord has given to you. I think about David as a shepherd—he destroyed the

bear and he killed the lion because he was taking care of his father,

Jesse’s, sheep. When you take care of the sheep, you have to hold that position of protector that comes from the anointing that is upon you and you don’t allow the enemy to get in to cause confusion, to cause division among your team and among those you are leading. So you have to have that anointing upon you. I think those are some good character qualities that we need.

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Discerning God’s Plans, the Enemy, and the Flesh

You need to be a ruler and a manager to know how to organize and direct things so that they are clear. You need to make clear judgments and clear assessments of things. That is one of the things that is said about the sons of Issachar—that they understood the times and the seasons. I have specifically mentioned being a manager and organizer so that you make sound judgments about what is going on, but you really need to know what God is up to. There are times and seasons for everything under the sun.

The sons of Issachar, they were politically astute because they knew when to switch alliances. They knew when Saul was going out and David was coming in; they discerned that very quickly. In 1 Chronicles 12 they embraced David’s leadership. They understood, “There is a transition here; we need to be on David’s side.” So they were politically astute. They understood how things were working, they knew who to align themselves with and they were able to discern the times and seasons. They considered God’s dealings and how God was dealing with Israel to know what to do.

There are three things that we need to become keen at discerning if we are going to walk in this anointing of Issachar. We need to understand and discern the dealings of God,

demonic activity, and the works of the flesh. I think sometimes we don't really know which is going on and we end up fighting the wrong battle, we end up using the wrong weapons, and we end up giving the wrong advice and the wrong wisdom.

The works of the flesh have to be crucified—can't cast those out. They have to be brought under subjection to the Spirit of God, and I think if we are not keen to discern what is going on, sometimes we will be trying to cast things out that really need to be brought under subjection to the Spirit of God.

We need to be able to recognize when demonic activity is in manifestation. Everything is not a devil. There are some people who are demon chasers. They look for a devil under every rock, under every chair. Sometimes you just need to bring your flesh under subjection. We need to be able to discern when the enemy is actually in the camp, when he is coming against your assignment or your leadership.

And then there are the dealings of God. Sometimes the Lord wants you to become a person of faith and learn how to start applying faith principles. And he is not going to miraculously bail you out. I think about when David faced Goliath. That was a miraculous thing when he picked up the five smooth stones and with one stone he killed the giant. But later, there was another giant that came and David's nephew, Abishai had to help him with a sword to destroy that giant or David was not going to make it. God did not miraculously deliver David.

Sometimes God wants us to go through. David said, "Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: for thou art with me" (KJV). Sometimes we just have to go through and going through it, God is dealing with us, he is shaping us, he is molding us, he is building our character, perseverance and endurance. Indeed, James said to count it all joy when you fall into various trials, knowing that the trying of your faith produces endurance, perseverance, and character.

So sometimes we need to just go through it, and God is dealing with us individually. He deals with every leader that he uses. He wants us to become skilled at applying the principles of faith and sometimes he is not going to miraculously deliver you. As a matter of fact, I would say most of the time he is not going to miraculously deliver you because he wants you to learn how to operate with the principles of faith. When you look at the preponderance of Jesus' teaching, he taught more on faith than on anything. He was always coming to his disciples, "Where is your faith? Where is your faith? I have been with you so long. Where's your faith?"—because he wanted them to learn how to grow up in their relationship with him and learn how to operate the faith principles of the kingdom.

So we need to understand that God deals with us. We also need to understand and discern demonic activity and we

also need to understand that sometimes we just get into our flesh and we need to bring our flesh under subjection to the Spirit of God. So just as the sons of Issachar were able to discern the time and seasons, we need to be able to discern the dealings of God, demonic activity, and the works of the flesh.

There is a sovereign time that God has scheduled for all things, including the moves of the Holy Spirit and what he wants to release into the Earth and what we are to bind and what we are to loose. Remember, in our gatekeeper responsibility, Jesus said to Peter, "Upon the rock of revelation that the Father has given you I will build my Church, and the gates of hell will not prevail against you." And he said: "Behold, I give you the keys of the kingdom of heaven, and whatever you bind on earth will have been bound in heaven, and whatever you loose on earth will have been loosed in heaven" (NET).

We need to say, "God, what are you doing? What do you want to pray through me, Holy Spirit?" and be skilled in doing that.

Sometimes we are binding and loosing stuff that we shouldn't be binding and loosing because God has a timetable for everything. Don't just start opening your mouth, binding and loosing stuff. That's why Jesus said we need to listen to the Holy Spirit because the Holy Spirit will tell you what to bind and the Holy Spirit will tell you what to loose at strategic times. There are certain times when God is releasing certain things into the Earth and he wants us as his gatekeepers to prophetically speak those things, agreeing with what God is already doing in Heaven because he says whatever you loose on Earth will have already been loosed in the heavens.

Sometime it's that God has already spoken. We need to become skilled in prayer and say: "God, what are you speaking in this season? What are you speaking in this hour?" And that is what we should speak. That is what we should loose. And say "God, what is the thing that should be bound and constricted that is coming against your work in this particular endeavor that we are involved in?" Then the Holy Spirit will speak to us and will show us what to bind and loose. So the keys are there to binding and loosing but we have to become skilled in how we use binding and loosing, and not just binding and loosing anything with no faith, with no confidence, with no anointing because we have no revelation or insight about what we are loosing.

We are just mouthing off words and sounding religious. And that has absolutely no impact on the kingdom of darkness and it does nothing to advance the Kingdom of God. We need to say "God, what are you doing? What do you want to pray

through me, Holy Spirit?” and be skilled in doing that. And the Holy Spirit will teach us and he will show us how to do that.

The Four Sons of Issachar

Issachar had four sons. One was named Tola. Interesting name. I think maybe Pops was having a bad day that day because Tola means “worm.” Who names their child Worm? But that is what the word means. Psalm 22:6 says, “But I am a worm, and no man; a reproach of men, and despised of the people” (KJV). And Isaiah 41:14 says, “Do not fear, you worm Jacob...I will help you.”

I don't know that I could name my child Worm, but that is what he named his first child. You can look at it and say “Ok, it's a name that means lowly or to be humble.” I think we need to have the right estimations about who God is and we need to walk in humility. But God is not walking around looking at us as worms. We were worms when we were in our sin, but we have been delivered from our worm state and we have been transformed by the renewing of our mind so now we can soar on eagle's wings. But we do need to walk in humility. So I do think there is something instructive here when we look at this son of Issachar; we need to recognize that we need to stay in that lowly place. Jesus made himself of no reputation but he took on a form of a servant and I think it is important that we understand that we are servant leaders as Jesus taught his disciples.

Issachar had another son, Puah. It means “to blow away, or to blast, or to puff.” I believe this speaks about the brevity of life. The word of God says in James 4:14 that our lives are like a vapor, like a mist. Ephesians 5:16 says you are to make the most of your time because the days are evil. It is very, very important as gatekeepers that we maximize every opportunity that God gives us because our time is so short. It's like a vapor. It's like a puff. It's blown away and your life is gone. Don't waste your life in useless pursuits. Make every single day count, make it count to the max for the Kingdom of God. You won't be able to do that if you are slumbering,

sleeping, if you are lying down between the sheepfolds and not carrying your burden fully.

Issachar's third son was Jashub, which means that “he will return or to turn back.” Jesus is coming back again. Hallelujah! And there is going to be an accounting that we are going to have to give for our gatekeeping responsibilities when the Lord Jesus returns. How many of you are looking for the return of the Lord? I am excited about the return of the Lord. Therefore, when he comes, may he find his servants faithful in the vineyard. May he find us with our hand still to the gospel plow. May he find us continuing to be effective in the binding and loosing of the things that God has ordained for us in our season that God's kingdom can continue to manifest, to advance.

In Acts 1:11, when the angels that appeared at the ascension of Jesus, they said, “Men of Galilee, why do you stand looking into the sky? This Jesus, who has been taken up from you into heaven, will come in just the same way as you have watched him go into heaven.” He is coming back again; that is our blessed hope. We can find comfort in that, but also let there be a solemn understanding that there is an accounting that God is going to give to us about how we dispense our gatekeeping responsibilities in the Kingdom of God.

The last son of Issachar was Shimron. His name means “to protect, to hedge about, as with thorns, to beware and to be a watchman.” Isn't that powerful? That is exactly what this whole series is about. But that's what Shimron means, “guardianship, to protect, to be own guard.” I think he understood that he had a responsibility to stay in the place that God had called him to stay. May we do that, because there is a sovereign timing for everything that God has in our area of responsibility. May these few thoughts concerning Issachar speak to our lives and give us a greater understanding or some insights into how we can be more effective as watchman on the wall in the areas of responsibility that the Lord has given us.

(Note: All scriptures quoted are taken from the New American Standard Bible except where noted otherwise.)

