

# **'A Troop Cometh': Ancient Gad and Modern Switzerland in History and Prophecy**

**by Philo-Israel II**

Many nations have armies. Switzerland is an army. Situated in the mountainous heart of Europe, the Swiss are the very symbol of strict neutrality and internationalism. On the other hand, the Swiss are the most militaristic country in the world. Every Swiss man bears arms, but Switzerland has not fought a war for almost two centuries!

The Swiss, despite their militarism, are arguably the most democratic country in Europe. Many issues are decided by direct vote. While most of them speak German, the Swiss are very un-German in many, many ways. While most of Europe operates government welfare states, the Swiss run a free market system that provides privately-funded social programs.

In spite of their uncompromising neutrality and isolation from NATO and the European Union, the Swiss have played an important role in the history of Western Civilization. Who are they? Are they just another Germanic region? Or are they a unique and distinctive people who can trace their origins all the way back to ancient Israel?

## **A Son of Zilpah**

The Swiss, both German and French, in fact descend from one of the younger sons of Jacob. In addition to the eight sons from his two actual wives, Leah and Rachel, Jacob also bore four sons from his two concubines, Bilhah and Zilpah. Through Zilpah, Jacob fathered Gad and Asher.

Zilpah was probably an Aramean or a Chaldean, and when she gave birth to her first son, Leah took it as a sign of good luck in her ongoing rivalry with Rachel. The naming of Zilpah's sons suggests that even Leah still clung to the superstition and idolatry of the region in which they had grown up. Gad meant 'fortune' or 'good luck'. The idea of fortune and luck was a Babylonian concept. Baal-Gad was a prominent Canaanite god condemned in the Book of Joshua and Isaiah 65 also condemned worshipping this god of good luck. Gad and his brother Asher would grow up in Jacob's household with some superstitious influences.

Little is known of them from Genesis. Asher seems to have been easy-going, and hedonistic. His brother Gad was to be the opposite. Gad was a fighter.

Like his half-brothers Dan and Simeon he was pugnacious. Gad was not tolerant like Zebulun friendly or easy-going like Issachar. The term Gad also means a troop, but not in the sense of a disciplined Assyrian-style professional army. Gad has more the sense of a band of mercenaries or a citizen militia!

Gad was a tough, stern individual. He would have what people today would describe as a 'lion' like personality as opposed to an otter or a beaver. In 'The Testament of Gad' the dying patriarch recalls how he 'was valiant in keeping the flocks' and often killed wild beasts with his bare hands. He looked upon Joseph as 'tender' and his father's favorite. When Gad and his brothers ate a dying lamb, self-righteous Joseph 'snitched' on Gad accusing him of embezzling the flock. Gad was punished and came to hate Joseph. To Gad, Joseph was a preachy, spoiled 'goody-goody'.

Gad, like Simeon was a leading party in wanting to kill him. Gad and Judah sold Joseph into slavery and then pocketed ten of the thirty pieces of gold. Gad later confessed his greed as well as his envy to his own children: 'through my covetousness I was fully bent on his [Joseph's] destruction.' (1-2) Gad also warned his growing tribe against self-righteousness. One could keep the laws of God, but if one had a spirit of hatred and envy, such law-keeping was worthless. (3-5). At the end of their lives he and Joseph had forgiven one another, but the patriarch warned his children never to give into hatred or envy. Jacob/Israel, meanwhile, prophesied that Gad, like Judah and Benjamin, would have a warlike history.

### **The Tribe of Gad**

Adam Clarke commenting upon Genesis 49 :19 says Gad would face 'frequent disturbances' but that he would have a 'hostile, warlike disposition, that would always lead them to repel every aggression.' Jamieson, Fawcett and Brown wrote that Gad 'should be often attacked and wasted by hostile powers on their borders. But they were generally victorious in the close of their wars.'

The Gadites left Egypt during the Exodus. Gad associated with Reuben and Simeon and camped and marched with them. When they were in the wilderness, the Gadites strongly supported the rebellion of Korah and the Reubenites Dathan and Abiram against Moses. This said that authority resided not with Moses but with the entire congregation. The Gadite sympathy with the Reubenite cause suggested strong democratic tendencies.

The history of ancient Gad continued to be entwined with Reuben and the Gileadite half-tribe of Manasseh. All of these were herdsmen and cattle -raisers

and were given permission by Moses to settle on the eastern side of the Jordan. Gad's chosen territory included a very mountainous region.

The Gadites crossed the Jordan to help Joshua conquer the rest of the Promised Land but then returned to the mountains and pastures of Gilead. The named Gilead means 'hills of rock'. The tribe was likely untouched by the early punishments against Israel meted out by Cushan-Rishathaim of Aram and Eglon of Moab. When Deborah and Barak fought against the Canaanites shortly after 1200 BC, Gad remained neutral. Reuben debated joining Israel, but Gad did not even consider intervention. This policy of neutrality continued in the days of Gideon when the city of Succoth refused to help him in the war on Midianite terrorism. In the days of Jephthah the Ammonites overran Gad's territory but they were eventually defeated.

In Deuteronomy 33: 20-21 Moses prophesied that Gad would be enlarged.

According to Adam Clarke this could refer to deliverance out of distress (Ps. 4:1). The victories of Jephthah began this and after these victories the tribe began to expand. Gadites spread into the territory of the Arabs and even among the Manassites east of the Jordan.

The tribe developed a reputation for warlike prowess. They were described as dwelling like lions. According to JFB 'the epithet of lion or lion-like was applied to this tribe from their fierce and warlike disposition.' In I Chr. 12:8 they are described as swift as deer upon the mountains. No king or prince could stand against them. Matthew Henry added that Gad 'would be a valiant and victorious tribe, [which] would, if let alone, dwell secure and fearless as a lion; but, if provoked, would, like a lion, tear the arm with the crown of the head; that is, would pull in pieces all that stood in his way, both the arm (that is, the strength) and the crown of the head (that is, the policy and authority) of his enemies.'

The quality of the Gadites as fighters appears in I Sam.22. After the death of King Saul the tribe as a whole supported his son Ish-Bosheth. A few Gadite volunteers, though, swam the Jordan to hire themselves out to David.

Matthew Henry describes these Gadites as 'able-bodied men, men of incredible swiftness, as the roes upon the mountains, so that no man could escape from them.' No one could outfight them, because the Gadites were disciplined and well-trained. Obviously the Gadites were a very militaristic people. The eleven who joined David were, according to Henry, ; officers of the militia in their own tribe.

### **The Exile of Gad**

The Gadites became part of the House of Israel when Jeroboam revolted from the House of David around 930 BC. It is possible that the Prophet Elijah came

from Gad or Eastern Manasseh. The Gadites must have suffered terribly when the Arameans later overran Bashan and Gilead until Jehoahaz and Jeroboam II liberated the territory. The Gadites probably supported Pekah's anti-Assyrian coup in 734 BC. The following year Tiglath -Pileser III overran their territory and took the entire population , along with the Reubenites and Eastern Manassites to the Habor region in eastern Syria. The land of Gad was so depopulated that the Ammonites (Jordanians today) moved into their towns (Jeremiah 49:1). Some were later settled in Assyria and Media.

Many of the Gadites would be part of the great Cimmerian and Celtic migration that founded the Hallstatt and La Tene cultures in Gaul. The bulk of the inhabitants of what is now Switzerland came from the Celtic tribe of the Helvetii. According to Sharon Turner , the name meant "Jutes of the Hills". A branch of the Helvetii , called the Tigurini, allied themselves with the Cimbri then living in Denmark. This suggests the Helvetii were closely linked to the Celtic tribes that settled near the North Sea and Baltic.

The Helvetii numbered 390.000 . In the days of Julius Caesar all of them tried to settle on the west coast of Gaul but the Roman legions drove them back to the Alps and they were then conquered by Augustus. Helvetia and Rhaetia became Roman provinces until around AD 400. The territories were then invaded by two Germanic tribes. The Alemanni 'All the Men' were a federation of tribes living in southern Germany. Many of these were Israelites that had been living with the Assyrians and had fled west with the Assyrian army when Nineveh fell in 612 BC. It is an interesting coincidence ? that the city of Aleppo in Syria was called Alman.

The Burgundians came from the Baltic island of Bornholm, part of an earlier Israelite migration from the east into Scandinavia. The Alemanni moved into central and eastern Helvetia and merged with the Helvetians. Their German dialect became the basis for the Schweezer Tuetsch spoken in the region today. Parts of Baden, Alsace , and Vorarlberg in western Austria are also of Alemannish and presumably Gadite descent. The Burgundians settled around Lyon and Geneva but eventually became French, not German speaking.

### **The Swiss Revolt**

The Swiss, both Helvetian and Alemannic became part of the Frankish Kingdom which revived the Roman Empire after Charlemagne and then passed to the domain of Lotharingia . They were then absorbed into the Holy Roman Empire of Otto the Great and the medieval German Kaisers. When Frederick II died in 1254, the Empire had no ruler until 1273. Rudolf of Habsburg, who lived in a castle in Aargau in Switzerland became the Archduke of Austria and Holy Roman Emperor in 1273. The Swiss were now part of the Habsburg domain. The Habsburgs saw themselves as a family of destiny. They would come to believe they would give birth to a future King of Rome who would rule the world

and bring an era of world peace. Rudolf saw himself as the defender of the Catholic faith.

The Swiss were destined to strike the first blow against the powerful Roman system that sought to enslave Israel. Already in the 1100's Peter Waldo, a merchant of Lyons of Swiss descent, raised up a religious movement that would sow the seeds of the future Reformation.

The Swiss chafed under Habsburg rule. They wished to preserve their isolation and local, democratic rule. They did not want the Babylonian-style feudal system. They revolted. In 1291 three cantons Uri, Schwyz, and Unterwalden gave birth to the Swiss nation. Uri, interestingly enough was one of the sons of Gad. Even more interesting is the presence of the Gadman Valley in Swiss territory. Their first victory against the Habsburgs took place in 1315 at the battle of Morgarten. The three Swiss cantons not only secured their freedom but went on to liberate other cantons. By the early 1400's there were eight Swiss states, including Zurich, Lucerne and Bern. The Swiss became rich and powerful and renowned as fighting mercenaries. They were swift, fearless mountain fighters just like their Gadite ancestors.

Even after the French halted Swiss expansion at the Battle of Marignano in 1405, everyone prized the Swiss mercenaries that rarely flinched on the field of battle. In the 1470's they fought Charles the Bold of Burgundy. The big climactic war with the House of Austria took place in the Swabian War in the 1490's. In 1499 the Habsburg Emperor Maximilian I recognized Swiss independence from the Holy Roman Empire.

Gad was also to become a lawgiver and arbitrator for Israel. Ulrich Zwingli began the Swiss Reformation but John Calvin took it much further.

Jean Cauvin, or John Calvin was a Frenchman who sought to bring many in Europe back to the laws of God. Calvin's theocracy in Geneva patterned itself upon ancient Israel and inspired the Scottish and Dutch Reformations as well as the Puritans who founded New England. The Swiss were torn by religious conflict as some cantons embraced the Reformation and others remained staunchly Catholic. Switzerland's independence was ensured by the Peace of Westphalia in 1648 which ended the Habsburg attempts to eradicate nationalism and Protestantism.

Europe now passed from Habsburg to French hegemony. In France, a number of philosophers began to question Catholic tradition and call for 'enlightened despotism'. The French Swiss were not immune from these currents but the men of Geneva went much farther and staged a democratic revolution before the American and French Revolutions.

Jean Jacques Rousseau led a democratic revolution in Geneva and then inspired a bigger one in France. The men of Gad even in ancient times exhibited democratic proclivities. When the Levite Korah staged his rebellion against Moses he was joined by the Reubenites Dathan, Abiram and On. The rebellion was both religious and civil and was strongest on the south side of Israel's camp, where Reuben was joined by Simeon and Gad. The message of Korah was that authority lay in the people, who had the right of revolution. The Genevans revived these ideas in the person of Jean--Jacques Rousseau.

Rousseau's ideas were picked up in France in 1789, but the French experiment ended in the rule of Napoleon who created another revival of the Roman Empire. Napoleon was the last foreign invader to conquer Switzerland in 1798. Napoleon set up the puppet Helvetic Republic and drove the Swiss once again to a revolt against the Roman conqueror.

Once again Jacob's prophecy came to pass. An invading army defeated and overcame Gad but Gad would win in the end. Napoleon suppressed the Swiss uprisings but in 1803 granted the Swiss local autonomy. Switzerland became a Confederation. Austrian and Russian armies invaded the country and civil war broke out between those who wanted local autonomy and those who wanted a more centralized system. The Congress of Vienna in 1815 ratified Swiss independence and neutrality.

The Bible shows precedents for Swiss neutrality in ancient times. In the wars of Deborah and Barak the Gileadites remained isolated beyond the Jordan and this included the Gadites. In Judges 8: 14-17 Gideon pursued the terrorists of Midian across the Jordan into the territory of Gad. The man of Succoth, however, clung to their strict neutrality and refused to help Gideon's Manassites. Gideon was enraged with them.

During World War II Switzerland was surrounded by Axis territory. Dogfights took place between Swiss and German Messerschmitts. The Swiss collaborated economically with Nazi Europe and provided Hitler with needed reserves of hard currency. They also turned away Jewish and other refugees trying to escape the Nazis. On the other hand, the Swiss prepared for a German invasion. Most Swiss had no sympathy with the totalitarian doctrines of National Socialism. They provided the Allies with vital intelligence and as the tide began to turn and a German invasion became less likely, Switzerland began to open her doors to refugees.

After the war Switzerland continued to maintain her strict policy of neutrality. She became the only country really prepared to survive a nuclear war. The Swiss did not join the United Nations for decades and refused membership in NATO. Foreigners are still not welcome in Switzerland.

Every few years the Swiss hold a referendum to keep them out. Swiss politics continues to be skewed to the right. In the early 2000's the largest political party is the far-right Swiss Peoples' Party which resembles the movements of Jean-Marie Le Pen and Joerg Haider.

The Swiss do not wish to join the European Union. They have consistently rejected membership but they may ultimately have little choice. The Swiss are surrounded by EU states and must do business with them. Doing business with the EU necessitates adopting more and more EU policies and regulations. When the EU becomes an aggressive, revived Holy Roman Empire, possibly ruled over by a Habsburg, it will not tolerate an independent Protestant Switzerland in its midst. Jacob's prophecy hints that at the very end of the age, Switzerland will one way or another be forced into the new empire The Swiss will not like it. During the Great Tribulation they will come to recognize their Israelite identity. Will they begin a revolt against Habsburg rule ?

The Swiss may be instrumental in launching a new Reformation inspired by the preaching of the Two Witnesses that will go much farther than that of John Calvin.