

Genesis 49:1-12 | Then Jacob called his sons and said, “Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in days to come.

- 2 “Assemble and listen, O sons of Jacob,
listen to Israel your father.
- 3 “Reuben, you are my firstborn,
my might, and the firstfruits of my strength,
preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.
- 4 Unstable as water, you shall not have preeminence,
because you went up to your father’s bed;
then you defiled it—he went up to my couch!
- 5 “Simeon and Levi are brothers;
weapons of violence are their swords.
- 6 Let my soul come not into their council;
O my glory, be not joined to their company.
For in their anger they killed men,
and in their willfulness they hamstrung oxen.
- 7 Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce,
and their wrath, for it is cruel!
I will divide them in Jacob
and scatter them in Israel.
- 8 “Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
your father’s sons shall bow down before you.
- 9 Judah is a lion’s cub;
from the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He stooped down; he crouched as a lion
and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?
- 10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,
until tribute comes to him;
and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.
- 11 Binding his foal to the vine
and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine,
he has washed his garments in wine
and his vesture in the blood of grapes.
- 12 His eyes are darker than wine,
and his teeth whiter than milk.

Genesis 49 | Blessing the Son's of Israel

We noted last week that Jacob's great faith in his old age was demonstrated as he looked forward to his offspring as the fulfillment of God's promise and therefore looked forward through their lives to God's continued faithfulness to them. Jacob's blessing of his sons is a demonstration of his trust in God's unceasing faithfulness. Although his life will cease, God's faithfulness will not, and therefore God's faithfulness to him will not be cut off even in death.

Genesis 49:1-12 | Then Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in days to come.
² "Assemble and listen, O sons of Jacob, listen to Israel your father.

Jacob gathers his sons. And he begins by saying he will tell them what will come in the days after him. Going one by one through each son, I'll not do that today. Instead we'll look at the first four sons, Rueben, Simeon Levi and Judah. Then we'll look at Joseph. Then We'll look at the hope in the death of Jacob.

1. Reuben Simeon Levi

Genesis 49:3 | "Reuben, you are my firstborn,
 my might, and the firstfruits of my strength,
 preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.

Reuben is the firstborn son of Israel and to him belongs the blessing of leadership and a double portion of the inheritance. This is the ordinary pattern of the firstborn in scripture. And here we see that laid out in the first verses of Rueben's prophecy. He is might, preeminent in dignity and power. But Reuben will not receive the blessing of the firstborn.

Genesis 49:4 | Unstable as water, you shall not have preeminence,
 because you went up to your father's bed;
 then you defiled it—he went up to my couch!

Jacob pronounces, you will not have preeminence. The reason is Rueben's unrepentant sin. Reuben was sexually immoral with one of his father's wives and in this sexual immorality he remained unrepentant. His whole life he tried to make up for it, but nowhere in his life do we see repentance. Jacob shares this with Rueben and then he finally turns to his brother's and makes plain the sinfulness of Rueben. This one is not the king. Next in line are Simeon and Levi, the second and third born of Jacob.

Genesis 49:5-6 | "Simeon and Levi are brothers;
 weapons of violence are their swords.
⁶ Let my soul come not into their council;
 O my glory, be not joined to their company.

Remember Simeon and Levi responded to the defiling of their sister by destroying all the people of Shechem. At the telling of the story we noted the lack of narrative commentary. We could have half an inkling that what they did was right. The taking of their sister was terrible and unjust, but their response was terrible and unjust. Wonton violence has no place in the people of God. Jacob makes their curse explicit.

Genesis 49:7 | Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce,
and their wrath, for it is cruel!
I will divide them in Jacob
and scatter them in Israel.

This cursing of the Simeon and Levi comes to pass in the allocation of land to their respective tribes. Simeon is scattered partially among the inheritance of Judah and then partially among the inheritance of tribes of the Northern kingdom. They are too small for their own allotment. Their hastiness to take what did not belong to them resulted in their loss of what might have belonged to them.

The Levites similarly receive no inheritance or portion. But it is in a different way from Simeon.

Numbers 18:20-21 | And the Lord said to Aaron, “You shall have no inheritance in their land, neither shall you have any portion among them. I am your portion and your inheritance among the people of Israel.

When Moses went up the mountain all the tribes turned to worship the cult of Baal, the levites are first to return to Moses and by their swords they are set apart as priests. They are given a priestly heritage, and although scattered throughout the tribes it is an honorable inheritance. It is an inheritance of the Lord himself. This tells us something about the curses of God, they are not the workings of blind fate.

Jeremiah 18:7-8 | If at any time I declare concerning a nation or a kingdom, that I will pluck up and break down and destroy it, ⁸and if that nation, concerning which I have spoken, turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I intended to do to it.

Curses are made to be broken. They are punishments but in so far as our hearts turn back toward the Lord they are discipline. Our God is quick to relent. I say this to all who may feel cursed. Bad parents, sinful living, your call is the same as any other, turn to the Lord.

2. Judah

Genesis 49:8 | “Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
your father’s sons shall bow down before you.

That sounds pretty good and it is. Judah sounds like praise, and so his brothers praise him. Judah also sounds like hand, so his hand on the neck of his enemies.

Genesis 49:9-10 | Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? ¹⁰ The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

Judah is the king. He is a lion, who is raised up on prey. That means he experienced war in his youth, but he is able to lie down like a lion with his pride and who would rouse that lion? He is given the scepter that is the power to rule. And the staff is between his feet. The symbolism is profound and specific. And it is about his offspring. The scepter between the legs is ruling offspring, it shall never depart. What Jacob is seeing here for Judah is the everlasting Kingdom. Verse 10 is very difficult interpretively. It reads something like, until "Shiloh" comes to him. Which is the name of a city. But has connotations of peace, and of the son of David Solomon. But certainly under this reign we see the inclusion of the gentiles, as even the peoples are obedient to this king. It is from this line of Judah, the line of David comes, and from the line of David comes Christ, the savior King.

But let us consider this in the moment for Judah. We've seen two Judah's in this story. The young Judah betrays his brother. The young Judah raises wicked sons, two of which die and the third he refuses to give in marriage. Judah's wicked youth meant the end of the line of Judah. More time is spent on his sin than Ruebens. Why is Judah not cut off? Judah repents. So now the man who in his sinfulness lost his sons receives the promise of a never ending line of kings. Repentance is something else.

While Judah is given the Kingship, It is Joseph who is given the double portion of the birthright. For the Bible tells me so. Check out 1 Chronicles.

1 Chronicles 5:1-2 The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (for he was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's couch, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph the son of Israel, so that he could not be enrolled as the oldest son; ² though Judah became strong among his brothers and a chief came from him, yet the birthright belonged to Joseph)

So let us conclude by looking at the birthright given to Joseph.

3. Joseph

Genesis 49:22-23 | "Joseph is a fruitful bough,
a fruitful bough by a spring;
his branches run over the wall.

²³ The archers bitterly attacked him,
shot at him, and harassed him severely,

The Blessing of Joseph is something like a biography. Here at the beginning we see the fruitful Joseph is attacked and harassed. Here at the end of his story we see the what the difference was the whole time. Joseph is attacked by his own brothers. All conspired against him.

Genesis 49:24 | yet his bow remained unmoved;
his arms were made agile
by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob
(from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),

Yet here is the difference in Josephs life. It was the mighty one of Israel who had him. The shepherd, the stone. He is with his sheep and he is immovable and steadfast. The blessing of Joseph is the presence of God who was with him and to whom Joseph was faithful. Jacob's blessing overflows into the glorious names of God the likes of which we have yet to see in Genesis.

Genesis 49:25 by the God of your father who will help you,
by the Almighty who will bless you
with blessings of heaven above,
blessings of the deep that crouches beneath,
blessings of the breasts and of the womb.

Joseph is surrounded by the blessing of God. Above, below and beside this is where our God is for his people. So what is it? Do the other brothers just get to look on and wish they got all Joseph got? Here we are again, just like old times, Joseph gets the best coat. No its not like that. All the blessings are for all the sons. But for now as Joseph is the leader the blessings are found in him. But even with this greatness of blessing Joseph will fall away.

Psalm 78:67–68 He rejected the tent of Joseph;
he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim,
but he chose the tribe of Judah,
Mount Zion, which he loves.

You see these great blessings are for the sons. But there is this sense in which none of the sons can bear them. There is no son righteous enough that even the other sons could find shelter under before the Lord. The history of Israel will in one sense confirm the blessing, but in another sense and a parallel true story the history of Israel will continually raise the question, who is the son who could hold the blessing.

There is a son, who like Judah will be the king and like Joseph he will get the double portion. He will help you. He will bless you with blessings above he will go to the depths to bless you, he will provide food the bread of life. All these blessings are yours as you find shelter in the son who is most blessed forever.