

Jason Huffman  
Genesis 49  
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### **Discussion Questions:**

1. What kind of things would you hope people would say about your life in the end?
2. Reuben's problem was instability. What are things we can do to be stable in our spiritual lives?
3. How much impact do you think the decisions of the past impact the future? How can we alter that direction for good? (Think of Levites and Judah).
4. Judah is the tribe that produces the Messiah. What might we learn about God's ways that the Messiah didn't come from the line of Joseph?
5. What do the names of God that Jacob uses say to you about Jacob's relationship with God? What are some of the most often used names you personally use for God? Why?

### **Teaching Notes:**

Jacob has come to the end of his life and we are able to witness a very unique event as Jacob blesses his 12 sons.

We were told that Jacob was sick.

**This is the first illness mentioned in the Bible.**

It is the beginning of the end of Jacob's life and the 3 patriarchs.

**Jacob now divides his blessing not into one son, but 12.**

We say blessing, but honestly not all of what he has to say...  
...is actually a blessing.

**What Jacob says is predictive but not all positive.**

This section is the longest poem in the Bible and...  
...most of it is about Joseph and Judah.

**It is the first purposeful prophecy in the Scripture and it is a father to his sons.**

Usually when someone is evaluating the balance of a life...  
...most people do it graciously.

People say things that are mostly true...  
...and make it sound like it was all true.

But not Jacob.

He is going to tell it like it is and predict it as he sees it.  
...But it is mostly blessings...

And Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days: 2 "Gather together and hear, you sons of Jacob, And listen to Israel your father.

3 "Reuben, you are my firstborn,  
My might and the beginning of my strength,  
The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power.

**At this point it sounds pretty good.**

Reuben, no doubt is feeling good about his strength.  
What Jacob is saying is you were my first.  
You were the beginning of it all, my dignity, power etc.

In this culture, family and honor are big deals...  
So for Jacob, this is where it all began: Reuben.  
But then Jacob lays it out...

4 Unstable as water, you shall not excel,  
Because you went up to your father's bed;  
Then you defiled *it*—  
He went up to my couch.

**In a way, as the first, Reuben had the best chance.**

But Jacob says Reuben can't be trusted.  
He is unstable, he goes this way and that.

**It is one thing to be flexible and fluid...**

**...it is another thing to be unstable and unfaithful.**

Because of his instability, he will not excel.

**There is a tremendous blessing in consistency.**

But there is great frustration with someone you can't depend on.

Proverbs asks, 20:6 Most men will proclaim each his own  
goodness, But **who can find a faithful man?**

Most say good things about themselves.  
But who is truly faithful?

Reuben's issue goes back to him sleeping with Bilah.

It is long ago, but not forgotten or forgiven?

**...Reuben never did excel. No prophet, no judge, no king.**

“So a man may have great opportunities, and yet lose them.

Uncontrolled passions may make him very little who  
otherwise might have been great.” (Spurgeon)

**Without the ability to control ourselves we will never reach  
our full potential.**

Simeon and Levi together and there is nothing good he says.

5 “Simeon and Levi *are* brothers;  
Instruments of cruelty *are in* their dwelling place.  
6 Let not my soul enter their council;  
Let not my honor be united to their assembly;  
For in their anger they slew a man,  
And in their self-will they hamstrung an ox.  
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.

**The 2nd and 3rd sons are just cruel.**

Jacob gives no council nor will he have anything to do with them.

They slew a man in anger and hamstrung an ox.  
They are angry, violent, and cruel.

This reminds me of Proverbs 22:24-25

24 *Make no friendship with an angry man,  
And with a furious man do not go,  
25 Lest you learn his ways  
And set a snare for your soul*

They were malicious in the way they got revenge for the rape of their sister Dinah in Shechem.

Though it seemed like not much happened at the moment...  
... their actions would effect their future.

**BUT... even though they were put together...**

**...because of later decision, they had different results.**

Simeon was scattered and weakened.

Simeon was the third largest tribe leaving Egypt...

...but became the smallest during the wilderness wandering.

And they were given a section of land within Judah's section.

**But the Levites, turned this curse into a blessing.**

They turned their passion towards sin and were rewarded.

**They were scattered, but the Lord was their inheritance.**

They were blessed and taken care of by the Lord.

**We are not locked and limited by our past.**

**New decisions can bring new mercies.**

**Now Jacob looks to Judah which is a major focus. v.8-12**

8 "Judah, you *are he* whom your brothers shall praise;

Your hand *shall be* on the neck of your enemies;

Your father's children shall bow down before you.

Judah means praise and Jacob says your brothers will praise you.

Judah had several questionable character issues...

...but seems to have been set apart when he offered himself as a substitute for Benjamin.

**Everything that Jacob speaks for Judah really points to the highpoint of Judah's future which is Jesus Christ.**

9 Judah *is* a lion's whelp;

From the prey, my son, you have gone up.

He bows down, he lies down as a lion;

And as a lion, who shall rouse him?

This is the Lion of the tribe of Judah.

Revelation 5:5 says, And one of the elders saith unto

me, Weep not: behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of

David, hath prevailed to open the book, and to loose the seven seals thereof.

10 The scepter shall not depart from Judah,  
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,  
Until Shiloh comes;  
And to Him *shall be* the obedience of the people.

This was the prophecy that was first fulfilled in David as the first to rule from Judah and then Christ the ultimate ruler.

From David to the Herods, they always had a prince that ruled. Then in 7 AD, Rome removed the power of capital punishment.

“Reportedly, rabbis walked the streets of Jerusalem and said, “Woe unto us, for the scepter has been taken away from Judah, and Shiloh has not come.”

Shiloh means “He whose right it is or to Whom it belongs”  
This was a standard reference to the Messiah.

11 Binding his donkey to the vine,  
And his donkey’s colt to the choice vine,  
He washed his garments in wine,  
And his clothes in the blood of grapes.

12 His eyes *are* darker than wine,  
And his teeth whiter than milk.

This section also points to Christ...

Riding in on a donkey.

Jesus said I am the vine and turned water into wine.

The blood of grapes speaks of the cross and communion.

Judah’s land was rich with vineyards.

And Jesus was born in Bethlehem in the land of Judah.

Jacob goes outside of the birth order but stays with Leah's sons.

13“ Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea;  
He *shall become* a haven for ships,  
And his border shall adjoin Sidon.

They had between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee.

14 “Issachar is a strong donkey,  
Lying down between two burdens;  
15 He saw that rest *was good*,  
And that the land *was pleasant*;  
He bowed his shoulder to bear *a burden*,  
And became a band of slaves.

**They were a large tribe but didn't realize their potential.**

*“The meaning seems to be that Issachar was strong, but docile and lazy. He would enjoy the good land assigned him but would not strive for it. Therefore, eventually he would be pressed into servitude and the mere bearing of burdens for his masters.”*  
(Leupold)

Another commentator said this tribe...

...traded their freedom for “the humiliating comforts of slavery.”

16 “Dan shall judge his people  
As one of the tribes of Israel.  
17 Dan shall be a serpent by the way,  
A viper by the path,  
That bites the horse's heels  
So that its rider shall fall backward.

One of the judges that came from Dan was Samson.

**Idolatry was introduced by Dan in Judges.**

Also when Jeroboam brought the two golden calves that became a real stumbling block and caused many to fall backward.

18 I have waited for your salvation, O Lord!

Jacob cries out here for God's salvation which is Jeshua/Jesus!

**Now Jacob adds three with short but positive prophecies.**

19 "Gad, a troop shall tramp upon him,  
But he shall triumph at last.

20 "Bread from Asher *shall be* rich,  
And he shall yield royal dainties.

21 "Naphtali *is* a deer let loose;  
He uses beautiful words.

**Jacob finishes with his two favorite sons.**

22 "Joseph *is* a fruitful bough,  
A fruitful bough by a well;  
His branches run over the wall.

***Joseph is blessed by God and is a blessing from God.***

This is the idea of all of Genesis.

God is a blessing God.

God blesses people so that people bless other people.

23 The archers have bitterly grieved him,  
Shot *at him* and hated him.

24 But his bow remained in strength,  
And the arms of his hands were made strong

These are the words of a proud father.

III John 1:4 I have no greater joy than to hear that my children  
walk in truth.

Joseph didn't have an easy life, and stayed strong...how? GOD.

Look at the names for the Lord Jacob uses.

**The names we use often communicate our relationship.**

Mighty God, Shepherd, Stone of Israel, God of your father, and Almighty.

By the hands of the *Mighty God* of Jacob  
(From there *is* the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),  
25 By the God of your father who will help you,  
And by the Almighty who will bless you  
*With* blessings of heaven above,  
Blessings of the deep that lies beneath,  
Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.  
26 The blessings of your father  
Have excelled the blessings of my ancestors,  
Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.  
They shall be on the head of Joseph,  
And on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his  
brothers.

27 “Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;  
In the morning he shall devour the prey,  
And at night he shall divide the spoil.”  
Benjamin was a powerful tribe.  
Ehud the judge, Saul the first king, and even the apostle Paul.

**28** All these *are* the twelve tribes of Israel, and this *is* what their  
father spoke to them. And he blessed them; he blessed each one  
according to his own blessing.

Next again Jacob speaks with faith in the future.  
With the understanding of God’s faithfulness yesterday...  
... you can have faith for tomorrow.

**29** Then he charged them and said to them: “I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that *is* in the field of Ephron the Hittite, **30** in the cave that *is* in the field of Machpelah, which *is* before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite as a possession for a burial place. **31** There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah. **32** The field and the cave that *is* there *were* purchased from the sons of Heth.” **33** And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

And that is the end of Jacob’s life.

**Jacob is actually a great picture for all of us.**

He started out as a “heal catcher”...

...literally coming out of the womb grasping to get ahead.

He tricked and schemed his way through much of life.

He took his bumps and bruises, and endured great pain.

But ultimately he enjoyed God’s grace and blessings and finishes his life by sharing God’s blessings with those that would go beyond him.