

Genesis 49-50 • Chapter Study

Intro

Jacob, grandson of the great Father of the Jews and Friend of God Abraham,

Lies on his deathbed at the ripe, old age of 147.

He knows his time has come and while he still has the whits and strength to do so, he calls in his now adult sons and speaks his last words to them.

Ch. 49

¹ 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.

Jacob knew his time had come.

And as the patriarch of the family God had made a unique & special covenant with, he knew his sons were the great ancestors of tribes that would form the core of a mighty people named Israel.

Thru them, God would fulfill His promise of a Savior; the Redeemer Who’d rescue Humanity from the curse.

He wanted to make sure his sons were left with words that would move them to follow in the path of faith his father & grandfather had taken.

So he gathers them round & lays out their future.

What’s provocative is his use of the phrase “*acharit hayamim*” = translated here as “the last days.”

That’s used repeatedly in the OT to refer to the end times, when history reaches its climax in a time of global unrest, that culminates in the Coming of the Messiah to establish the Kingdom of God.

Other names for it are “*The Time of Jacob’s Trouble*” & “*The Great Tribulation*.”

What’s *tricky* here is that our translation makes it appear Jacob speaks prophetically to his sons **ONLY** about what’s to come of them in the end times. It has him saying

“Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you IN the last days

The preposition translated “in” has a wider meaning than the English word.

The idea here is that Jacob’s words abide with each of the tribes from then till the end.

And ultimately, what he means them to understand is that the nation of Israel will last all the way to the end of history.

Indeed, they will be instrumental in the course history follows because God’s promises to them are the framework all history flows around.

He begins by identifying himself **both** as Jacob & Israel, the conniver & the man of faith.

Jacob’s lived both identities & sees how both are **still** alive in him.

And as he looks at his sons, he sees both of them in them as well.

So while some of what he says speaks of the blessings of faith, other is a curse on carnality.

Their future will be determined by whether they’re more like *Jacob* or *Israel*.

And note that the printing renders the text in a poetic verse format.

That’s because that’s the way Jacob spoke this – like a poem.

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

As firstborn, Reuben had the premier **claim** to the inheritance.

But he forfeited the inheritance when he gave in to his lust & had sex with Bilhah, his father’s concubine & the mother of 2 of his brothers, Dan & Naphtali.

Jacob saw a troubling **instability** in Reuben that exempted him from being the one to carry the mantle of leadership for the family.

And as we look at the history of the **tribe** of Reuben we see it **never** does excel.

It provides not a single prophet or judge.

^ One of the main qualities God looks for in His leaders is a **stable character**.

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 next 2 brothers, Simeon & Levi, are linked because throughout their lives they palled around together.

These are the 2 who came up with & carried out the plan to wipe out the men of Shechem in revenge for the rape of their sister Dinah.

They were cruel hot heads.

What marked their anger as immoral was that it was so self-willed, as it says at the end of v6.

Just as Jacob says here, they ended up divided & scattered among the other tribes.

But for different reasons.

The tribe of Levi redeemed itself by siding with the Lord during the golden calf incident in Exodus we'll soon be looking at.

Because the Levites refused to join the other tribes in worshipping the idol, God chose them to be His priests.

Being priests, their duty to serve God full time. So they didn't farm as the other tribes did.

They either served at the tabernacle, or they were stationed in the various towns and cities around Israel, representing God there.

Simeon, on the other hand, ended up being allotted the southernmost region of Israel, a barren wilderness constantly harassed by fierce raiders.

The tribe was never able to take its territory & ended up blending into & merging the other tribes.

[Show map of tribal boundaries = 3]

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. 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? 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.

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.

Jacob gives rich blessings to Judah, his 4th son & the one who, next to Joseph, had proven himself most capable of carrying on in the spiritual footsteps of his forefathers.

Yeah; Judah had a major bonehead episode with his daughter-in-law Tamar.

He also was the one to come up with the idea of selling Joseph.

But that may have been out of a desire to at least save his life.

If they'd left him in the pit in the wilderness as was the original plan, he'd have died of exposure.

By selling him, at least he'd survive.

And Judah had demonstrated he'd learned the lessons his errors taught.

He'd repented, and proven it by offering himself in the place of his brother Benjamin when Joseph threatened to execute him for stealing his special cup.

In all this, Judah's proven the **leadership role** of the firstborn ought to go to him.

So, Jacob says the rulers of Israel would come from him.

Their tribe will provide their greatest leaders & ultimately; the **Messiah** shall arise from Judah.

v10 says

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."

A scepter is a universal emblem kingly power & authority.

It was originally a **shepherd's staff** and represented the king as the shepherd of his people.

The staff was shortened into a scepter as it was easier to hold. [pics = 2]

The king's scepter was so closely associated with his power, rulers used to it show acceptance or rejection.

When a supplicant came before the throne, if the king **extended** his scepter, it meant acceptance.

But if he failed to extend the scepter, the supplicant was hauled off & executed for daring to bother his august personage.

So the scepter symbolized the power of the ruler over life.

Rabbis & Jewish scholars have always believed what Jacob said in v10 was a prophecy that the Messiah.

They therefore believe He'll come from the tribe of Judah.

Jacob calls the Messiah, "**Shiloh.**" It's an archaic word meaning "**He whose right it is;**" or "**To whom**

it belongs.”

Israel’s greatest king was David, from the Tribe of Judah.

His dynastic house provided an unbroken line of kings till the Babylonian captivity.

Afterward, there was always a descendant of the royal family who acted as a governor under foreign masters such as the Persians, Greeks & Romans.

During all that time, Israel had the right of self-rule, including the power to exercise capital punishment, which in the ancient mind is the *essence* of the power of the scepter.

But in 7 AD that changed.

Herod and the Romans, in a bid to crack down on the growing unrest in the Jewish Sanhedrin revoked their right to exercise capital punishment.

The Jewish rabbis & scholars regarded this as a disaster of cosmic proportions!

Not because of the *political* ramifications, but because in their minds, **God’s Word had been broken!**

In v10, Jacob prophesied the scepter would not depart from Judah till Shiloh had come.

But with the removal of the Jews’ right to exercise capital punishment, it seemed the scepter **had** departed **and Messiah had not come** – or so they thought.

The Messiah had come!

That’s one of the reasons we have the story of the 12-year-old Jesus going with His parents to Jerusalem for Passover.

He ends up reasoning with the rabbis in the temple courts.

That was far more than a chance encounter!

Shiloh **had come and was presenting Himself to them.**

They had no eyes to see Him for who He was because He didn’t appear in as they expected.

Jacob went on to speak of the abundance the tribe of Judah would enjoy because of the richness of the region they would inherit in the land of Israel.

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

Jacob doesn’t stick with the birth order of his sons.

He instead stays with the sons in the order they came from their moms.

Both Zebulun & Issachar were Leah’s boys, as were the first 4. They were 9th & 10th in the birth order.

What’s interesting about Jacob’s prophecy here is that Zebulun’s territory in the distribution of the land after the Exodus was **NOT** along the coast, as this seems to require.

It was located btwn the Med & Lake of Galilee, but was landlocked.

What we’re seeing here is that Jacob looks **past** the territory assigned the tribes after the Exodus.

This is prophetic of the **Millennium**, when Messiah comes & sets the borders of Israel as God promised.

Zebulun will **then** have territory along the coast.

¹⁴ “Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between 2 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.

Issachar was the third largest tribe & occupied the very center of the land of Israel.

It’s a rich and fertile area south of Galilee that’s pretty flat.

It connects the Jordan Valley to the Coastal Plain.

For that reason it became a much valued highway for the powers of the ancient world seeking the easiest route btwn Egypt & other centers like Mesopotamia.

That meant they saw a lot of invasions, with their people regularly carried away as slaves.

Under **good** leaders like David, they rallied and made great troops who could defend their land.

But they needed constant motivation from outsiders.

Without it, they tended to be lazy & fell prey to invaders.

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.

The name “Dan” means “judge” and this tribe did supply 1 of the most **notable** of the Judges; **Samson!**

But as anyone who’s read Samson’s story knows, he wasn’t exactly a moral stand-out.

No mother ever told her son, “You should be more like Samson.”

God used him *in spite of himself*.

The Danites became a source of great evil in Israel.

They were the first to introduce idolatry.

And it the northern city of Dan became a center of idol-worship.

V17 has driven interpreters nuts, trying to unravel what Jacob meant in referring to Dan *as a serpent*.

The reason why is because the Bible uses idioms & symbols pretty consistently.

So when Jacob says Dan is a serpent, we're obviously supposed to take that symbolically.

Now: You tell me. Thinking Biblically, are serpents good or evil? Evil; and in a big way.

It was as a serpent Satan appeared to & seduced Eve.

God CURSED the serpent.

In Rev., the devil is called "that old serpent."

So, based on all that, not a few commentators believe Jacob is saying here that the antichrist may be from the tribe of Dan.

Dan 11:37 & Jer 8:16 lend some support for this.

Daniel 11:37 • He shall regard neither the God of his fathers nor the desire of women, nor regard any god; for he shall exalt himself above *them* all.

Jeremiah 8:15–16 • "We looked for peace, but no good *came*; and for a time of health, and there was trouble! The snorting of His horses was heard from Dan. The whole land trembled at the sound of the neighing of His strong ones; ...

Another piece of evidence the Antichrist is a Danite is that his tribe is *omitted* from the list of tribes of Israel in Rev7 – when the career of the Antichrist is in full swing.

If this is a prophecy of the end times & the fact that the antichrist comes from Dan, it explains why Jacob says in v18

¹⁸ I have waited for your salvation, O Lord!

Jacob knows Shiloh, the Messiah, comes to end the reign of sin & death, which achieves its consummate expression during the reign of Antichrist, which he's just foreseen.

So he cries out for salvation!

The Hebrew word "*salvation*" here is *yeshuwah*, translated as "Jesus" in our Bibles.

So, Jacob is literally calling for Jesus! "I have waited for Jesus, Yahweh!"

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

The name "Gad" means "troop" and the Gadites helped form the backbone of Israel's armies.

But due to where they lived on the E side of the Jordan, they were frequently attacked by the nomadic tribes that lived in the harsh conditions of the Saudi Arabian peninsula.

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

The tribe of Asher settled the very most NW'n region Israel; a rich land for agriculture.

This region supplied David & Solomon the lion's share of the materials they used for building Jerusalem & provisioning their royal tables & lavish banquets.

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

Naphtali lies E of Asher, NW of Galilee.

This is simply gorgeous land and rich for growing.

In ancient times, it had thick forests where an abundance of deer roamed.

It's also the place Jesus did most of His ministry.

It's the region that saw His richest teaching.

The Sermon on the Mount was delivered here = a place of beautiful words.

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

We looked at this blessing 2 Sundays ago, so will go a different direction with them tonight.

You'll remember from our study last Wed. that Jacob had already blessed Jacob by adopting his two sons, Manasseh & Ephraim as his own.

These 2 tribes were the most populous & together acquired far more land.

Here Jacob briefly reviews the history of Joseph.

Even when he was the object of the hatred and evil schemes of others, he maintained his faith in God, and God sustained him, prospering all he did.

Joseph is the main son *to whom* and *thru whom* the promises of God to Abraham will now flow.

The course has been Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and now Joseph.

The tribes of Manasseh & Ephraim were mightily blessed with material prosperity as they settled in those regions which provided great pasturage and fields.

²⁷ "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; In the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil." What stands out about the tribe that comes from Jacob's youngest, is that they were great warriors, skilled in war, with an inclination toward violence.

We'll see that when we get to Judges.

²⁸ All these *are* the 12 tribes of Israel, and this *is* what their father spoke to them. And he blessed them; he blessed each 1 according to his own blessing.

Anyone who teaches Gen 49 ought to say that much of what Jacob says here to his sons is more than a bit arcane & difficult interpreting.

That's because it **IS** prophetic & won't be **totally clear** till the end times.

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.

Jacob's final instructions were to bury him back in Canaan where his ancestors were.

He wanted to impress on his sons the reality of God's promise, THAT was their land, not Egypt.

They were only visiting Egypt; it was not their home.

Moses was careful to include this – along with what we saw last week when Jacob's family first met and talked with Pharaoh.

They'd come to "dwell" in Egypt, not settle down permanently there.

That word "dwell, which Pharaoh agrees to, meant a temporary stay.

Israel's enslavement by a later Pharaoh was illegal in that it ignored the agreement Jacob & Joseph had negotiated with the ruler of Egypt.

They ought to have been free to leave whenever they wanted.

Jacob's desire to be buried in the Cave of Machpelah along with his father, grandfather, & 1st wife, made sure his sons knew where they ultimately belonged.

Ch. 50

Okay, this is it Our last ch in Gen.

¹ Then Joseph fell on his father's face and wept over him, and kissed him. ² And Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel. ³ 40 days were required for him, for such are the days required for those who are embalmed; and the Egyptians mourned for him 70 days.

Following the burial procedures for Egyptians, Joseph was **embalmed**.

The process that took 40 days. // The period of official mourning was 70 days.

Since a Pharaoh was allotted **72** days, we're meant to understand Jacob was accounted as a great man.

⁴ Now when the days of his mourning were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, "If now I have found favor in your eyes, please speak in the hearing of Pharaoh, saying, ⁵ 'My father made me swear, saying, "Behold, I am dying; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me.'"

Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father, and I will come back.”⁶ And Pharaoh said, “Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear.”

Since Joseph was technically Pharaoh’s servant, he had to get permission to make the journey to Canaan to bury his pops.

He’d be gone for a while, probably as much as month.

As PM, his duties were crucial to the smooth operation of the Egyptians court. So leaving was a big deal. Joseph was with his family in Goshen & sent a message to the capital asking permission to leave & bury Jacob.

Pharaoh gave it.

⁷ So Joseph went up to bury his father; and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt,⁸ as well as all the house of Joseph, his brothers, and his father’s house.

Only their little ones, their flocks, and their herds they left in the land of Goshen.⁹ And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen, and it was a very great gathering.¹⁰ Then they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which *is* beyond the Jordan, and they mourned there with a great and very solemn lamentation. He observed 7

days of mourning for his father.¹¹ And when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, “This *is* a deep mourning of the Egyptians.” Therefore its name was called Abel Mizraim, [**Mourning of Egypt**] which *is* beyond the Jordan.

To be frank, that such a large contingent of Egyptians went with Joseph on this journey is remarkable.

It’s a testimony to how much they honored & respected him.

What’s **doubly** notable about that was the well-known Egyptian elitism & prejudice against foreigners.

Egyptians simply thought themselves superior to others.

It’s not hard to understand why.

They’d developed an advanced civilization along the Nile centuries ahead of everyone else in the Middle East.

When Joseph arrived in Egypt, the Great Pyramid & Sphinx of Giza **were already over 500 yrs old!**

It’s become fashionable among liberal scholars to deny the Genesis account of the Jews in Egypt altogether.

They relegate it to the level of a myth; an origin story the Jews made up centuries later.

Other scholars admit the Jews were slaves in Egypt for a time, but none of them ever rose to a position of such influence as Joseph is given here.

Some Jew **may have** become a minor official during the Second Intermediate Period when the Hyksos ruled the northern, delta region of Egypt.

The Hyksos were foreigners; nomadic raiders from the NE who swept in at the end of the Middle Kingdom & managed to carve out a little kingdom for a while till the Egyptians ousted them and asserted their control over the **entire** Nile.

A guy like Joseph would be able to rise to a position of influence under the Hyksos; but NEVER among the proud Egyptians, these scholars claim.

Well, all the **evidence** points to the fact that Joseph came to Egypt during the reign of **Sesostris II**, and served as PM or Grand vizier during the reign of his son, **Sesostris III**.

These were Egyptians who ruled at the **peak** of the Middle Kingdom period.

Yet they held Joseph, a foreigner, in high regard because of his integrity & character.

So much so that they composed a huge party to accompany him on this trip north to bury his father.

That has a lot to say to us today as we contemplate our place in an increasingly hostile culture.

Joseph, who began as a **slave** of an Egyptian, then fell to the even lower place of being a convict when he was falsely accused by another Egyptian, never cursed them or wished them ill.

He always & only sought to bless them.

Elevated to the position of 2nd only to Pharaoh, he never used his power for self-promotion or enrichment.

He used his power to bless as many others as possible.

So much so, Pharaoh gave him the Egyptian name “Zaphnath-Paaneah = Savior of the World.”

There are two ways to find out what’s in a person =

- 1) Press them with severe trial. Crush them & see what comes out.
- 2) Promote them; cover them in success.

There are many who enjoy success but fail in the midst of a trial.

Then there are those who endure great trials, but are brought low by success.

The key to Joseph's amazing consistency so that neither trials nor success ruined him was that he stayed centered in who he was God's Servant.

He aimed to be one thing = Faith to God, regardless of the outward circumstances.

So he served God as a slave, a convict and as PM.

It didn't really matter what his station was, that his title – only that he served God in it.

And the Egyptians saw that and honored him for it. The WORLD honored him for being a Man of God.

Christian: Be a Man or Woman of God where ever you are.

Whatever you're doing, do it for God's glory.

Seek to be a blessing, even when it's in the midst of a society that ignores God.

Jer 29:7 • And seek the peace of the city where I have caused you to be carried away captive, and pray to the Lord for it; for in its peace you will have peace.

Mat 5:44 • [Jesus said] I say to you, love your enemies, bless those who curse you, do good to those who hate you, and pray for those who spitefully use you and persecute you,

Most likely the Egyptians who went along on this trip stayed in their camp on the E side of the Jordan.

Just Jacob's family crossed over & headed toward Hebron.

¹² So his sons did for him just as he had commanded them. ¹³ For his sons carried him to the land of Canaan, and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah, before Mamre, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite as property for a burial place. ¹⁴ And after he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers and all who went up with him to bury his father.

They then returned to the camp at Atad & headed back to Egypt.

¹⁵ When Joseph's brothers saw that their father was dead, they said, "Perhaps Joseph will hate us, and may actually repay us for all the evil which we did to him." ¹⁶ So they sent *messengers* to Joseph, saying, "Before your father died he commanded, saying, ¹⁷ 'Thus you shall say to Joseph: "I beg you, please forgive the trespass of your brothers and their sin; for they did evil to you.'" Now, please, forgive the trespass of the servants of the God of your father." And Joseph wept when they spoke to him. ¹⁸ Then his brothers also went and fell down before his face, and they said, "Behold, we *are* your servants." ¹⁹ Joseph said to them, "Do not be afraid, for *am* I in the place of God? ²⁰ But as for you, you meant evil against me; *but* God meant it for good, in order to bring it about as *it is* this day, to save many people alive. ²¹ Now therefore, do not be afraid; I will provide for you and your little ones." And he comforted them and spoke kindly to them.

We covered vs 15-21 last Sunday.

Joseph's treatment of his brothers teaches us two crucial lessons about forgiveness.

We need to forgive, and we need to know that in Christ, we are forgiven.

²² So Joseph dwelt in Egypt, he and his father's household. And Joseph lived 110 years. ²³ Joseph saw Ephraim's children to the 3rd *generation*. The children of Machir, the son of Manasseh, were also brought up on Joseph's knees.

Joseph lived long enough to play with his great grandchildren.

²⁴ And Joseph said to his brethren [**relatives**], "I am dying; but God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land to the land of which He swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob." ²⁵ Then Joseph took an oath from the children of Israel, saying, "God will surely visit you, and you shall carry up my bones from here." ²⁶ So Joseph died, *being* 110 years old; and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt.

Joseph was accorded the same honor as a natural-born Egyptian official.

He was embalmed according to their traditions, and placed in one of their rich caskets.

He was then interred in a monumental tomb common for dignitaries.

Before he died, Joseph did what his father had done.

He secured a promise from his relatives when they returned to Canaan, they'd take his remains with them and bury them alongside his father.

When the Jews left 4 Cs later, Exodus 13:19 tells us they carried Joseph's bones with them.
Speaking of Exodus, as we study v by v thru the Bible, that's our next book.

We cover 1 NT & 2 OT books.

We began with Matthew, have finished Gen & will do Exodus, then will study thru Mark.