

Lesson 49

Israel's Blessing

Israel blessed his sons before his death.

Overview

Lesson Focus

Israel gave a prophetic blessing to each of his sons concerning their future tribes, but the Savior was promised to Judah's descendants. Israel died and was buried in the land of Canaan, but his sons remained in Egypt and multiplied greatly.

Key Passages

Genesis 49:8–10, 49:22–24, 50:24–26; Exodus 1:8–11

Objectives

Students will be able to:

- Connect the promise of a Messiah to Jacob's son Judah.
- Describe the enslavement of the Israelites under a new Pharaoh.

Memory Verse

Romans 8:28 And we know that for those who love God all things work together for good, for those who are called according to his purpose.

Prepare to Share

Scriptural Background

Prepare to teach by preparing your heart. Read the key passages for this lesson along with this background.

God used a famine to bring Jacob and his family to Egypt where Joseph could provide food for them. God promised Jacob that he would make him into a great nation and bring his descendants back to the land of Canaan (Genesis 46:3–4). Joseph's position enabled him to settle his family in the land of Goshen where they could tend to their flocks and herds. During the remaining years of famine, Joseph provided bread for his family (Genesis 47:12) and sold bread to the Egyptians until they had used up their money and livestock and were forced to sell themselves and their land to Pharaoh.

Jacob lived in Egypt for 17 years. Before he died, he blessed Joseph's sons Manasseh and Ephraim and named them as his own sons, giving Joseph a double portion as his inheritance (Genesis 48:5–6, 48:22). Israel also gave a special blessing to Ephraim, Joseph's younger son, which displeased Joseph (Genesis 48:17–20). God often chose a younger son to receive the blessing of the firstborn, as he did with Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, and Ephraim over Manasseh. This was against the cultural norm of the day.

Israel had more blessings to give, and he called all 12 of his sons to him before his death. The blessings he gave in Genesis 49 are prophetic regarding his sons' future tribes. God revealed many things in Israel's inspired blessing and final words. As he'd done before, God chose a younger son to receive the covenant of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. In Israel's family, Judah was chosen to receive the promise of the Messiah, to whom belongs "the obedience of the peoples" (Genesis 49:10). Judah's tribe was also chosen to lead as kings. Judah received the leadership of the firstborn, which did not go to Reuben because of his instability and affair with his father's concubine Bilhah (Genesis 49:3-4).

Joseph received a special blessing of fruitfulness and abundance (Genesis 49:22-26). Jacob's other sons also received the blessing of being a part of the nation of Israel, even those who received rebuke for past actions (e.g., Reuben, Simeon, Levi). After giving his blessing, Israel commanded his sons to bury him in the cave at Mamre in the land of Canaan, where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah were all buried (Genesis 49:29-32). When Israel died, Joseph had him embalmed, and the Egyptians participated in his mourning and burial procession to Canaan (Genesis 50:1-11). Once Israel was gone, Joseph had to assure his brothers that he would not take revenge on them for how they had wronged him so many years earlier. He believed that God was sovereign despite their evil deeds (Genesis 50:20).

Joseph lived a long life and died at age 110. He was embalmed and buried in Egypt. His final request was for his family to take his bones with them to Canaan when they returned (Genesis 50:25). This request showed his trust in God's promise to Israel that his family would return to the land of Canaan.

During their time in Egypt, the Israelites prospered and multiplied. God was making them into a great nation. But when a new king came to power who did not know Joseph, he feared the Israelites would take over the land. His solution was to enslave the Israelites. He set taskmasters over them and made them serve as builders, farmers, and makers of brick (Exodus 1:8-14). Just as Joseph experienced trials in Egypt, the Israelites were entering a period of trials and suffering that was all part of God's plan.

Historical/Apologetics Background

One question that often arises from Israel's final words to his sons in Genesis 49 is why Reuben, Simeon, and Levi received a rebuke for their past sins while Judah was greatly blessed. Judah received the leadership over his brothers. His descendants would be rulers and lawmakers. He would defeat his enemies and enjoy an abundance of wine (Genesis 49:8-12). But Genesis 38 shows that Judah, like his brothers, was guilty of serious sins. However, there appears to be a difference in how Judah responded to his sin. In Genesis 38:26, Judah recognized his sin, called Tamar more righteous than himself, and did not commit the same sin with her again. Judah's actions during Joseph's test in Egypt also show that he was changed. He took responsibility for Benjamin and offered to take his place as a slave (Genesis 43:8-10, 44:18). Reuben, on the other hand, did not demonstrate a major change in his conduct. Another thing to consider is that God may choose whomever he wants to accomplish his will.

Other great people of faith in the Bible were guilty of terrible sins (Rahab, King David, Paul), but God still used them.

Simeon and Levi were rebuked for the incident in Shechem where they slaughtered men and animals in rage and revenge for their sister Dinah. While the tribe of Levi was scattered throughout Israel as Jacob said (Genesis 49:7), they received the blessing and special privilege of being the firstborn of Israel (Numbers 3:12), the priests dedicated to God and his service (Deuteronomy 10:8–9). This shows God’s mercy and how future godly men can influence their descendants. It was the men of Levi during the exodus who showed great zeal for defending the holiness of God in their camp (Exodus 32:26–28). Just as godly men can influence generations for good, so evil men can cause damage to future generations.

A key message in Israel’s blessing is that his sons’ actions would affect their descendants. The great patriarchs Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob died without seeing all of God’s promises fulfilled, but they had faith and hope that these things would come to pass. The goal of Israel’s message to his sons was to encourage them to live their lives in purity and holiness for God and their future generations. They were not meant to remain comfortably in Egypt but to return to Canaan and claim God’s promises. However, the growth of the tribes and their enslavement in Egypt were steps in God’s perfect plan to prepare the Israelites to be his chosen people, a nation of priests.

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