

Gen 49 - Jacob Blesses His Sons

THEME: Jacob's deathbed blessing and prophecy; final words and death of Jacob.

This is another remarkable chapter, as it is the deathbed scene of old Jacob. In fact, in the previous chapter we saw him on that deathbed as he strengthened himself, sat upon the bed, and blessed the sons of Joseph.

After that interview, the rest of Jacob's sons came in, so that around him now are all twelve of his sons. He has a farewell message for each of them. He begins with the eldest and goes right down the list. Anything that a man says on his deathbed is important because generally, if he ever tells the truth, he tells it on his deathbed. This deathbed message is dramatic because it is prophetic. It tells what will happen to the twelve sons of Jacob when they become tribes. What was prophetic then has now become largely historical.

This is our final opportunity to see another evidence of faith in the life of Jacob. He spoke to his boys who were to become the twelve tribes in the nation of Israel and would be dwelling in the land of Canaan. What faith! Remember that the Canaanite was then in the land and that Jacob's family was favorably situated in Egypt. - McGee

Gen 49:1 And Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days:

We come here to an important expression. We find that there are certain expressions which the Bible uses over and over again. One of those expressions is right here: "in the last days." The last days of the nation Israel will be different from the last days of the church. There is a very sharp dispensational distinction which needs to be made. Now he is talking about the last days of the nation Israel and what is going to happen then to the twelve tribes which will develop from his sons and will form the nation.

A friend of mine in seminary (a very intelligent young man who did a great deal of studying) wrote his thesis on the prophecies concerning the twelve sons of Jacob and the tribes that came from them. I enjoyed talking with him because he always had something new to offer. I came to appreciate at that time the marvelous fulfillment there has been of these prophecies to the tribes, especially those given by Moses in Deuteronomy 33.

Many folk talk about the fact that certain prophecies concerning the nation Israel have been fulfilled, and that is true. But we can narrow it down further by dividing Israel into twelve parts and recognizing that God has had something to say concerning each of the twelve. Not only have His prophecies concerning the nation been fulfilled, but prophecies concerning each tribe have been fulfilled. My friend, that makes it remarkable indeed. In the chapter before us we will see the prophecies of what will befall each tribe in the "last days." While some of them have been fulfilled already, most of them wait for final fulfillment. I will be hitting only the highlights, but if you want a more comprehensive study, I recommend two sources listed in the bibliography at the end of this book: Paradise to Prison: Studies in Genesis by Davis, and The Genesis Record by Morris. – McGee

Gen 49:2 "Gather together and hear, you sons of Jacob, And listen to Israel your father.

Here now is the old man sitting up in bed. I've seen pictures of him stretched out in bed looking like he wouldn't be able to raise his head. But that is not true! He was leaning on his staff, as we learn in Heb_11:21. Frankly, old Jacob had been on the go all of his life, and he wanted to keep going. Death is really an embarrassment. It comes at a most inconvenient time, a time when we want to keep going down here. (I have made appointments two years ahead, and I don't know whether I'll fulfill them or not. I accept them with one stipulation: "provided I'm alive.") Jacob found that he couldn't keep going. He was leaning on his staff. He wanted to keep going, but he couldn't. What a remarkable man he was in many ways. - McGee

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Gen 49:3-4 *“Reuben, you are my firstborn, My might and the beginning of my strength, The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power. 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.*

These patriarchs recognized the great subject of heredity that is of so much concern today. Like father, like son. Jacob recognizes that and sees that this boy Reuben is a great deal like himself. “Unstable as water” could have described Jacob in his early years. It was true of his oldest son, also. “Thou shalt not excel.” Reuben never did. He never did win a blue ribbon. He won a couple of red ribbons and some white ribbons, but he was never in first place.

There are a lot of folks like that today. They are satisfied and do not wish to excel. I have a preacher friend who is a wonderful man. He could have been an outstanding writer, but he didn't want to be. I think he wrote two little pamphlets. He could have been a great Bible teacher, but he didn't want to be. He just did what he wanted to do. He was satisfied with the red ribbon and never won a blue ribbon.

The story about Reuben which Jacob mentions here is a sordid story. I didn't dwell on it when we went through Genesis because I see no reason to dwell on that. Contemporary literature, plays, movies, and television give us enough of the sordid to make us sick of it. God does not intend for us to dwell on man's sins. In fact, He gives us these instructions: “Finally, brethren, whatsoever things are true, whatsoever things are honest, whatsoever things are just, whatsoever things are pure, whatsoever things are lovely, whatsoever things are of good report; if there be any virtue, and if there be any praise, think on these things” (Php_4:8). But God records human sins so that we may have an accurate picture of the human family.

The next two boys are classed together. They were full—brothers, sons of Leah. - McGee

Gen 49:5-7 *“Simeon and Levi are brothers; Instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place. 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. 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.*

You remember how they went to Shalem, a city of Shechem, and killed all the inhabitants of the city because one man was guilty of raping their own sister. They took their revenge on the whole town! They should not have done that, of course, and Jacob reminds them of this.

In Levi, we see an exhibition of the marvelous grace of God. It is true that they were scattered in Israel, but this was because they were made the priestly tribe. It was the grace of God that could take a cruel person like Levi and make him the head of the priestly tribe.

It is the grace of God that has transformed us sinners into a kingdom of priests, my friend. All believers are priests today. Among them are converted drunkards, converted harlots, converted murderers. I have had several of them in the churches where I have served. How did they become priests in the Kingdom of God? Just as we all did—by the marvelous grace of God. “Forasmuch as ye know that ye were not redeemed with corruptible things, as silver and gold, from your vain conversation received by tradition from your fathers; but with the precious blood of Christ, as of a lamb without blemish and without spot” (1Pe_1:18-19). Then he goes on in 1Pe_2:5 to say, “Ye also, as living stones, are built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices, acceptable to God by Jesus Christ.” Who is he talking about? Those who have been redeemed by the precious blood of Christ!

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Reuben lost first place, and Simeon and Levi also lost first place. The king will not come from any of these tribes. There is another boy who was also a sinner. We will see what the grace of God did for him: - McGee.

Gen 49:8-9 "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 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?"

Judah (meaning praise) would be praised and respected by his brothers because of his victories over his enemies. He is likened to a lion that goes forth to capture prey, then returns to well-deserved rest that no one dares disturb. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Gen 49:10 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.

"Until Shiloh comes"—Shiloh is the ruler.

This is one of the more remarkable prophecies in all the Word of God. Already we have been told that there will be a seed of the woman. That was the first prophecy of Christ: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen_3:15). The "seed" of the woman is the One who will do the bruising of the serpent's head. He will be the One to get the victory. This first prophecy was in Genesis; then that Seed was confirmed to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Now it is confirmed to Judah—out of Judah's line He is coming. Also, the word Shiloh means "rest and tranquility." Christ is the One who will bring rest. Remember that when the Lord Jesus walked here on earth, He turned from those who had rejected Him, and He said to the populace, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will rest you" (Mat_11:28). That is Shiloh—Shiloh had come.

Not only is Christ Shiloh, but also, He is the One who will hold the scepter. The scepter of this universe will be held in nail-pierced hands. In the last part of verse Gen_49:24 of this chapter we read that from God will come the Shepherd, the

Stone of Israel. So, this Shiloh is also a shepherd and a stone. When we get to Num_24:17 we will find that a Star is prophesied. Think of all that the coming of Christ means. He is the Seed promised to the woman and to the patriarchs. He is the Shiloh who brings rest. He is the King who holds the scepter. He is the Shepherd who gave His life, and He is the Chief Shepherd who is coming someday. He is the Stone that the builders disallowed but who is now the headstone of the corner. He is the Star, the bright and morning Star for His church. This is the line that went from Adam to Seth (after Abel was murdered). From Seth it went through Noah to Shem and to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and now to Judah. Friend don't miss this wonderful fact that God is moving according to a pattern and a program here. This is very important for us to see. - McGee

Gen 49:11-12 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. His eyes are darker than wine, And his teeth whiter than milk.

Who is this talking about? It is Christ who came riding into Jerusalem on a little donkey, offering Himself as the Messiah, the King, and the Savior. "He washed his garments in wine"—what kind of wine? Blood, His own blood. But when Christ comes the next time, His garments will be red. The question is asked, "Wherefore art thou red in thine apparel, and thy garments like him that treaded in the wine vat?" (Isa_63:2). At this time, it will not be His own blood but the blood of His enemies. This predicts Christ's second coming when He returns in judgment. - McGee

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Gen 49:13 "Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea; He shall become a haven for ships, and his border shall adjoin Sidon.

Zebulun would enjoy prosperity from maritime commerce. Since this tribe's territory in OT times was landlocked, this prophecy may look forward to the Millennium. – Believers Bible Commentary

Zebulun was the tribe which lived along the coast up in the northern part of the land. – McGee

Notice: There is a key factual difference between the commentaries. This underscores the fact that we have to be Bereans!

Gen 49:14-15 "Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between two burdens; 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 also finally located way up in the northern part of the land. They were the ones who did a great deal of the work that constituted the backbone of the nation. They were the workers, and that is the thought here. We hear a great deal about the silent majority today, that is, the average person like you and me. We don't get on television. It is the unusual, often the peculiar, people whom we see on television and whom people consider to be great. People try to convince us that these are the kind of folk who are the important people. But, my friend, they are not the backbone of this nation, or of any nation. The little tribes, like Zebulun and Issachar, which we tend to pass over were really the backbone of the nation Israel when they got settled in the Promised Land. - McGee

Gen 49:16-18 "Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. 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. I have waited for your salvation, O LORD!

Dan, true to the tribe's name, would concern itself with judging the people. Verse 17 is difficult. It may allude to Dan's introducing the idolatry which caused the nation's fall (Jdg_18:30-31). Many think that it is a veiled reference to the Antichrist's springing from Dan, and that this is why this tribe goes unmentioned in 1Ch_2:3; 1Ch_8:40 and Rev_7:3-8. In verse 18, Jacob injects a prayer for the final deliverance of his people from their foes or for his own deliverance. – Believers' Bible Commentary

Gen 49:19-21 "Gad, a troop shall tramp upon him, but he shall triumph at last. "Bread from Asher shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties. "Naphtali is a deer let loose; He uses beautiful words.

Gad, unprotected in its territory east of the Jordan, would be subjected to frequent enemy raids. But the tribe would trample the troops of its foes.

Happily, for Asher (happy), this tribe would have fertile agricultural land, producing delicacies fit for a king.

Naphtali is likened to a doe that has been released from confinement. It springs forth with tremendous speed to carry good news. All the disciples except the traitor came from the territory of Naphtali, and much of the Lord's ministry was there (Mar_4:13-16).

Gen 49:22-26 "Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a well; His branches run over the wall. The archers have bitterly grieved him, shot at him and hated him. 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), By the God of your father who will help you, And by the Almighty who will bless you With

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blessings of heaven above, Blessings of the deep that lies beneath, Blessings of the breasts and of the womb. 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.

Compassing the territories of Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph is a fruitful bough, sending out blessings far beyond his own borders. He was the object of bitter hostility, but he did not yield, because he was strengthened by the Mighty God of Jacob—the One from whom the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel (that is, the Messiah) comes forth. God blesses Joseph with rain in abundance, wells and gushing springs, and numerous progenies. Jacob humbly felt that he had been blessed more richly than his ancestors. Now he wishes that such blessings might come to Joseph, the one who was separate from his brothers. - McGee

Gen 49:27 "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; In the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil."

This is a strange prophecy concerning Benjamin. Benjamin was closely identified with Judah, so much so that Benjamin went with the tribe of Judah at the division of the kingdom. The tribe of Benjamin was the only one that stayed with the house of David. - McGee

Jacob's Death and Burial

Gen 49:28-31 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. 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, 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. There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife, there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah.

We see that death to Jacob was not the end of it all. He was going to be with his people. He wanted his body to be buried in the cave that Abraham had bought and paid for. He wanted to make sure that he stayed in that land until the day when he would be raised from the dead to live in that land.

We can see how much this man knew of his own family history. I don't imagine that he was carrying with him a written record at this time, yet he carried this information in his mind.

It is not so much that he was interested in being buried by Leah (after all, Rachel was buried up in Bethlehem), but he wants to be buried where he will be raised from the dead at the Resurrection so he will be right there when God fulfills His promises to the nation Israel. – McGee

Gen 49:32-33 The field and the cave that is there were purchased from the sons of Heth." 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.

It is interesting to see that up to the very last Jacob kept his feet on the floor. He started out in life as a man of the flesh. He took hold of his brother's heel at birth which was why he was called Jacob, "the supplanter." He lived up to that name, which was certainly characteristic of him. He held on to everything that he could find, and he was always trying to be first. He started out on all fours, and he took what he wanted by any method. As a young man he walked on his own two feet in his own strength and ability. He depended on his own cleverness

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and ingenuity. He thought he could take care of himself and did not need God. He was self-sufficient, self-opinionated, self-assertive, aggressive, contemptible, and despicable.

At Peniel God crippled him. God had to “break” him to get him, and I think God was prepared to break his neck! After that, he went through life limping. He had to go on three legs, using a staff or walking stick, because he could no longer walk by himself. Here, before his death, he is sitting on the bed, leaning on his staff. Now the time has come. He pulls his feet up into the bed, puts down the staff, and lies down to die. This is Jacob. He has walked a long way through life. He ends in a final act of faith, looking forward to the day when he will be raised from the dead in the land, according to the promise of God.

“These all died in faith, not having received the promises, but having seen them afar off, and were persuaded of them, and embraced them, and confessed that they were strangers and pilgrims on the earth” (Heb_11:13). - McGee