

The Future of Israel

Genesis 49

Jacob has blessed Pharaoh, adopted Ephraim and Manasseh, and now he gathers all of his sons. He wants them to know “what shall befall you in the latter days” (v1), and we might be surprised when Moses says he blesses each of them (v28). Jacob knows each of his boys and he speaks to their sins and strengths, temptations and circumstances they will face. He dies in hope, looking toward the Messiah and knowing that God holds the future.

Blessing Through Discipline

Reuben is the firstborn with dignity and power, but he proved himself unstable when he slept with his stepmother Bilhah (vv3-4; 35:22). Rachel had just died and this was her servant, so Reuben was making a play for a leadership position that wasn't his yet, which is why he is disqualified from it. Though it seems harsh, Jacob is loving Reuben: “He who spares his rod hates his son, but he who loves him disciplines him promptly” (Prov. 13:24; cf. 3:12; 27:6; Ps. 141:5). Reuben has not been cast out, nor is he doomed to be unstable. He now has the clearest opportunity to change. If we aren't disciplined, then we are not true children (Heb. 12:7-11).

Blessing Through Hope for Restoration

Jacob also has hard words for Simeon and Levi. Rather than wait for justice, they took revenge by killing the Shechemites for raping their sister Dinah (34:25-31). Jacob shuns their council because they are prone to cruelty (v6; cf. Prov. 12:10). They will be divided and scattered in Israel. Simeon will be allotted within Judah, and wonderfully the Levites will become the priestly tribe who were scattered in cities throughout Israel, teaching Israel to love and worship God (Josh. 19:1, 9; Num. 35:1-5). The Levites will also host six cities of refuge where a person who accidentally killed someone could go until their trial (Num. 35:9-15). Like a thief who repents and becomes generous, this tribe will be a means of justice to prevent personal vengeance in Israel.

Blessing Through Strength & Weakness

Judah will be praised for his strength, his hand on his the neck of his enemies and a leader among his people (v8). He is like a lion, hunting, getting up, lying down, no one can mess with him (v9). He is a king and the scepter will remain with him until Shiloh/tribute comes, and peoples will obey him (vv10-12). Zebulun will dwell next to Sidon and be part of sea trade (v13). Issachar has the power of a workhorse but trades liberty for ease (vv14-15). Dan will be a judge with wisdom to discern between good and evil in Israel, and will use that wisdom to get justice over his enemies (vv16-17; cf. Jdgs. 13). Jacob passionately calls on God for salvation for his people (v18). Gad will be attacked but will triumph at last (v19; cf. Judg. 10-12; Jer. 49:1-6; Dt. 33:20-21). Asher will have a fertile land, wealth and abundance (v20). Naphtali is an agile deer who has beautiful words/fawns (v21). The strengths and weaknesses, trials and triumphs, God gives us are part of His plan and story.

Blessing From the Kingdom to Come

Joseph is a well-watered tree that has grown over the garden wall (v22). Though he has been shot at and despised, his bow is strong and his hands are limber by Jacob's Mighty God (vv23-24). God is his Shepherd and Rock who will continue to help and bless with blessings from everywhere (vv24-25). God's blessings have been greater to Jacob than his ancestors, and like a tsunami they will come on the head of Joseph, the one-time enslaved exile (v26). His younger brother Benjamin will not be a sulking lastborn, but a faithful soldier, fierce like a wolf in battle (cf. Jdg. 3:15-20). Jacob has run his course, finished his race, blessed his children, and he goes to death ready to be gathered to his people (vv28-29, 33). Joseph weeps tears of sadness and hope (50:1). For Jacob's sons, the future is bright—not easy, but God's grace and promises are at work for the worst of sinners. The hope of Israel is not Israel, but the Messiah who will come from Judah. He will not just rule Israel, but the nations will come to him (v11). He will tie his donkey to the vine and wash his clothes in wine (v11; cf. Jn. 2:1-11). Jesus is the King and his is the kingdom Jacob looked for and found (Heb. 11:13-16).

NOTES FOR LITTLE SAINTS

Today's Passage: Genesis 49:22-26

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.

1. Jacob is dying, ready to go be with the Lord. The last thing he does is bless his kids. What does Jacob say about Joseph in verses 22-23?
2. Jacob uses metaphors to describe what happens to Joseph. He says "archers have shot at him". A metaphor is when one thing is used to describe another: "Billy runs so fast. He is a rabbit!" "Rabbit" is the metaphor—Billy runs fast like one. In Joseph's life, can you think of anyone who attacked and "shot arrows" at him?
3. In verse 26, Jacob says he has been more blessed than his ancestors (parents, grandparents, great-grandparents), and all these blessings shall fall on Joseph's head. What blessings have come to you from Jesus and from your parents?
4. Draw a picture of Jacob dying, happy and full of peace, surrounded by his twelve sons.

Memory Verse to Recite Next Week:

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. —Genesis 26:22