

Genesis – Lesson 30

Jacob's Final Blessings

Read Genesis 49.

1. Which son was given the *prominent* position among the sons of Jacob? Which son received the *longest* and most *beautiful* of blessings? Which the *shortest*? Which the most *odd*?

Although these questions may be somewhat *subjective*, it would appear that Judah is given the most prominent position among Jacob's sons, given that he is told that his brothers would praise him (v. 8). The longest and most beautiful blessing goes to Joseph, which takes five (5) full verses, and uses the word "*blessing*" a number of times. The shortest blessing is a toss-up between Gad, Asher and Naphtali, with Gad the most likely. The oddest blessing probably goes to Naphtali; what exactly is meant by him being a "*doe*" that bears "*beautiful fawns*" (prophetically or personally) is difficult to interpret.

2. (a) What *event* precipitated Jacob's condemnation of Reuben (v. 4)? How does Jacob *view* his eldest son? Why is this *significant*?

Jacob's condemnation of Reuben is based on the event of 35:22, when Reuben slept with Bilhah, Jacob's concubine. Jacob notes this event *specifically*, and views Reuben as "*unstable*"; apparently Reuben, as the eldest, is "passed over" in favor of Judah because he cannot be trusted and has little sense of morality in sleeping with one of his "stepmothers." Thus, Reuben (the firstborn) is *not* given the preeminent position amongst the brothers, and is shut out of being the tribe that would bring the Seed.

(b) What *curse* did Jacob place upon Simeon and Levi. Why? How did the Levites eventually *redeem* themselves before God (see Exodus 32)?

Jacob curses these two brothers to be "*scattered*" in Israel (v. 7). This is because they chose to slaughter the men of Shechem after their sister Dinah has been raped (see 34:27), something that Jacob had not explicitly commanded or desired. This scattering would be accomplished in two ways: the Levites would *not* be given any specific territory of their own, and the Simeonite territory would be *encapsulated* within the tribe of Judah (in the desert region W of the Dead Sea). However, the Levites stepped up to support Moses at the Golden Calf incident (exacting the punishment of death that God had prescribed), and Moses declared that their allegiance now granted them a place of service before the Lord (see Exo. 33:26-29).

3. (a) List at least three *blessings* bestowed upon Judah and his lineage by Jacob.

Jacob bestows the following blessings upon Judah: 1) they will be praised by the rest of their brothers, meaning that Judah would become the *primary* tribe of Israel, 2) they will have power over their enemies in an unusual way (e.g. see David), 3) the royal power of Israel will reside in and remain in Judah (e.g. see David's throne; see 3b below), and 4) the promised seed will come through the tribe of Judah (v. 10b-12).

(b) What does it mean that the “*scepter shall not depart from Judah*” (v. 10)? Who is the “*him*” of that same verse?

The “*scepter*” is the staff used by royalty to designate his/her position of regal imperial power. The one holding the scepter is the one with royal power, thus Jacob is prophesying that an eventual king of Israel would be established from this tribe and that that royal position would never depart from that tribe. The “*him*” is a reference (first) to the royal position itself, probably an early reference to the Davidic line that would establish the throne, but (second) is also a reference to the *permanent* royal line established in the Messiah who would come as a descendent of that tribe. Although the throne was *initially* established from the tribe of Benjamin in Saul, it is David who establishes the throne in a more “*permanent*” way (until the schism under Rehoboam), and through which Christ himself comes.

4. Using a Bible map, locate *where* the tribes of Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, and Naphtali reside after the conquest under Joshua, and *link* that to the blessings given here to each of them.

Zebulun is established as a small territory in the center of the land W of the Sea of Galilee; although landlocked, the tribe was situated on the trade routes between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean, and they were often referred to as involved in coastal commerce. Issachar is established as a small territory at the SW corner of the Sea of Galilee; this space is situated “*between*” four other tribes, and may be a connecting point. Dan is established as a small territory in the center of the country, on the coast directly W of the top of the Dead Sea; his position between Judah and the northern tribes might be depicted as a “*serpent in the way.*” Gad is established as a large territory along the E of the Jordan; this place outside of Canaan would make him an easy target for raiders. Asher is established as a mid-sized territory along the Mediterranean at the farthest N point of Israel; being situated on the sea, it is likely that this territory produced rich foods. Naphtali is established as a mid-sized territory at the N end of the land of Israel (adjoining Syria); this territory is at the top of the Fertile Crescent, and may be pictured as a “*doe*” who bears “*beautiful fawns.*”

5. (a) What do you think Jacob was *referring to* in his statement regarding Joseph in vv. 23-24?

It is likely that Jacob is referring to the various trials that Joseph had to endure, both from his brothers and while in Egypt before rising to power. The “*archers*” may be picturesque of the troubles that befell him, and that he “*remained unmoved*” implies that he remained faithful to the God of his fathers.

(b) According to Jacob, how did Joseph *persevere* through difficult times? What does it teach *you*?

Jacob attributes Joseph’s perseverance to the Mighty One of Jacob (the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel, the God of your father, the Almighty). God *kept* Joseph through each of these trials until he was ready to serve the Lord in Egypt. The obvious implication is that perseverance through any trial comes from God; our reliance must be on him in order to remain steadfast. Clearly, this also has to do with our *salvation*; God has purposed to persevere those who belong to him, thus our salvation is both *from* the Lord and *through* the Lord day-by-day.

(c) Name a *prominent* Benjamite from the Old Testament and one from the New Testament. How might the blessing given to Benjamin *apply* to these men?

Ironically, there are two (2) Benjamites named “Saul” in the Bible: the original king of Israel (1 Samuel 9:21), and the great apostle of the N.T. (a.k.a. Paul, Romans 11:1). Benjamin, in this blessing, is pictured as a “*ravenous wolf*,” a predator who devours prey like a wild animal. Saul fits this picture in that he, as the first king of Israel, was used by God to destroy the Ammonites (1 Samuel 11), perhaps a picture of this kind of devouring. Paul also fits this picture in that he, as the leading proponent of the gospel and founder of the church, was used to conquer the hearts and souls of men for Jesus, perhaps a picture of the “*devouring*” nature of the gospel as it moves forward in the world.

6. From the following verses, name some *blessings* we as Christians receive from God:
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| John 20:29 | <u>the blessing of eternal life</u> | Titus 2:13 | <u>the hope in Christ's return</u> |
| Acts 20:35 | <u>the blessing of helping others</u> | James 1:12 | <u>the crown of an eternal life</u> |
| Romans 4:7-8 | <u>forgiveness of sins in Christ</u> | 1 Peter 3:9 | <u>patience with opposition</u> |
| Ephesians 1:3 | <u>the spiritual blessings of Christ</u> | Revelation 1:3 | <u>the revelation of Scripture</u> |

7. What does it mean that Jacob was "*gathered to his people*?" What *spiritual* significance is implied?

To be "*gathered*" to his people is a euphemism for death; it means to die and (by implication) to be buried with one's ancestors. However, it carries the *greater* meaning of leaving this world (the physical) to join those who have gone "beyond" it into the spiritual realm. It clearly carries the connotation of going to a place where one's ancestors *are now*; it is not simply to pass out of existence, but to join those who have gone on to an eternal reward.