

Genesis (2011) 49

- As I mentioned a couple of weeks ago, roughly half of the book of Genesis is devoted to the messy, complicated life of Jacob
 - He is the final patriarch, the man who gives birth to the entire nation of Israel
 - He often relies on deceit rather than trusting in God
 - He frequently brought his family misery because of his mistakes
 - And yet he has also demonstrated remarkable growth and maturity, especially in his later years
 - He relied on God for protection in the face of his enemies
 - He worshipped God in the midst of trial and calamity
 - And he never lost faith in God's promises
 - It's so encouraging to see Jacob in such a good place at the end of his life
 - It's a reminder that the Lord holds out the blessing of sanctification for all of us
 - As we walk with the Lord, we grow like Him
 - We earn our merit badges, so to speak, experiencing the discipline of the Lord and profiting from it
 - But the key is to remain in that walk, standing firm in our faith, enduring the trials, trusting in the God Who brings them
 - That's Jacob
 - We've said it required the Lord to turn the pagan Abram into the patriarch Abraham
 - And so it required the Lord to turn a disobedient Jacob into the obedient Israel
 - God can do the same for us
- As we enter Chapter 49, Jacob is near death and ready to transfer his inheritance to his sons

- But before he dies he pronounces a prophetic blessing upon his sons
 - Since he has already pronounced a blessing on the two adopted sons, Jacob has the other sons to consider now
 - In this blessing, Jacob also remembers Joseph
 - The reason Joseph is included is because this blessing goes far beyond the bestowing of the inheritance
 - The Lord is using Jacob to reveal distant prophetic truths for the nation
 - And Joseph's place in the family carries significant prophetic meaning
- So we leave Chapter 48 and enter 49 in virtually the same moment, as Jacob transitions from blessing Joseph's sons to blessing the rest of the nation of Israel
 - Today we'll look at what Jacob says about each son
 - In particular, we'll consider the prophetic importance of each statement
 - All together, these prophecies make Chapter 49 one of the most important in the book of Genesis

Gen. 49:1 Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, "Assemble yourselves that I may tell you what will befall you in the days to come.

- As the chapter begins, Jacob summons his sons, and he tells them he is going to pronounce a prophetic blessing upon them
 - Notice Jacob says that this will be what will befall Israel in the days to come
 - This English translation obscures the subtleties of this phrase
 - In Hebrew, the phrase reads "what will befall Israel in the latter days" or the "days of the end"
 - Jacob is speaking about what will come upon Israel at the end of this age, prior to the Kingdom of the Messiah being established
 - So Jacob is going to speak a specific prophetic blessing concerning the tribe of Israel that comes from each son

- We've seen the Lord work in this way in Genesis before
- Noah spoke prophetically concerning the future of his sons
- And Abraham spoke prophetically concerning Ishmael
- In each case the Lord is moving by His spirit through these men to reveal His plans to men
 - This reminds us that the patriarchs functioned as God's prophet in their day
 - So these words of Jacob are divinely inspired revelations of God's plans for each tribe, particularly in the last days
- Jacob begins with Reuben, his first born son from Leah

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

Gen. 49:3 "Reuben, you are my firstborn;
My might and the beginning of my strength,
Preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.

Gen. 49:4 "Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence,
Because you went up to your father's bed;
Then you defiled it – he went up to my couch.

- Jacob doesn't proceed in exact birth order
 - Instead, he addresses the sons of each wife in turn, beginning with Leah
 - Then moving to the two concubines
 - And then ending with the sons of Rachel
- Under normal circumstances, we should have expected Reuben to receive the birthright and the best blessing
 - But instead, Reuben is given a rebuke
 - But not before Jacob reminds Reuben of what could have been his
- Jacob first says that Reuben was the firstborn, the beginning of Jacob's strength and the son who was positioned to be the preeminent son in the family
 - But Reuben forfeited this opportunity

- In Hebrew, Jacob says Reuben was boiling over like water, which suggests Reuben's uncontrollable lust and undisciplined nature
- He was disqualified from receiving these blessings in the inheritance because of his lust for his father's wife
- Reuben's prophecy is a reminder that men (and women) who do not act to discipline the flesh and control their lusts run the risk of disqualifying themselves of the blessings the Lord may offer
 - Our new birth in Christ brings a new opportunity, the chance to start fresh in serving God rather than serving ourself
 - And service to God brings with it the potential for reward
 - But we can disqualify ourselves from the blessings of service if faith is shipwrecked by our lusts and undisciplined lifestyle
 - Don't be naive and think God won't hold us accountable
 - Reuben may not have given much thought to his father's reaction beforehand
 - But Jacob took note and now he holds Reuben accountable
- Prophetically, this blessing reflects the character of Reuben's tribe
 - He was a man of great promise that amounted to nothing
 - Likewise, the tribe of Reuben never produces anyone of significance in the life of Israel
 - No judge, no prophet, no leader
 - In fact, Moses prays in Deuteronomy that Reuben's tribe wouldn't fade away, since it was so small and shrinking

Gen. 49:5 "Simeon and Levi are brothers;
Their swords are implements of violence.

Gen. 49:6 "Let my soul not enter into their council;
Let not my glory be united with their assembly;
Because in their anger they slew men,
And in their self-will they lamed oxen.

Gen. 49:7 “Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce;
 And their wrath, for it is cruel.
 I will disperse them in Jacob,
 And scatter them in Israel.

- Next, Jacob deals with his second and third sons of Leah; Simeon and Levi
 - These brothers are forever connected by their misdeeds in Shechem
 - They said they were defending their sister’s honor, but their motives were evil according to Jacob
 - They had vengeance and wrath in their hearts and they reacted in anger
 - They murdered men and they made animals lame, meaning they cut the tendons of their legs to render them useless to anyone
 - So the Lord speaking through Jacob declares that this sin will receive a punishment in the history of Israel
 - The judgment falls on their seed, in that it would be scattered
 - Neither Simeon nor Levi received land of their own
 - Instead, they lived entirely inside other tribes’ land
 - By pronouncing these judgments on the tribes of Reuben, Simeon and Levi, God wasn’t acting unfairly
 - Historians have noted that these individual sons of Jacob seemed to pass their personalities on to their respective tribes
 - The tribes of Reuben, Simeon and even Levi showed characteristics of their fathers
 - And therefore, the Lord could be seen protecting Israel from these men and their defects spreading among the tribes
 - Kings would not arise from these lines after their nature
 - Kings with the immoral nature and unrestrained emotions of these men
 - This was a blessing to Israel

[Gen. 49:8](#) "Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
Your father's sons shall bow down to you.

[Gen. 49:9](#) "Judah is a lion's whelp;
From the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He couches, he lies down as a lion,
And as a lion, who dares rouse him up?

[Gen. 49:10](#) "The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes,
And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

[Gen. 49:11](#) "He ties his foal to the vine,
And his donkey's colt to the choice vine;
He washes his garments in wine,
And his robes in the blood of grapes.

[Gen. 49:12](#) "His eyes are dull from wine,
And his teeth white from milk.

- At this point, I imagine Jacob's sons fidgeting, beginning to wonder if he was going to give any son a positive blessing...but then it came time for Judah's blessing
 - Judah's is the first true blessing, and along with Joseph's, it's the longest blessing
 - In v.8 Jacob awards Judah with the prominence over his brothers
 - This was the closest the sons got to appointing a patriarch to replace Jacob
 - In this case, an entire tribe received the prominence within the family
 - The tribe of Judah would ultimately see the other tribes bowing down, a prophecy of the coming kings of Israel from Judah
 - We see clearly that the Lord intended to give Israel kings
 - The sin of Israel in 1 Samuel wasn't the desire for a king
 - It was their rejection of the Lord's rule and their vain desire for a king
 - They asked for the wrong reasons and they asked too early, so God gave them a king from Benjamin that reflected their desires for outward appearance

- And that impatience cost the nation dearly
- Eventually the Lord brought the king He intended through Judah
- Of course, Jacob's promise speaks of an eventual descendant of Judah, the Messiah Who will reign over all Israel and the world
 - Here we see the seed promise for the Messiah
 - The promise is given to Judah exclusively
- In v.9 Judah is promised great power
 - Judah is compared to a lion for the first time
 - Like a lion, Judah will have power, authority and mastery over all adversaries...a fitting picture for the coming Messiah, Who is called the Lion of Judah
- In v.10, the kingship of Judah is further revealed
 - The scepter shall never depart Judah, meaning the tribe will reign without end over Israel
 - And the staff not depart between his feet, which is a picture of a judge ruling from a seat of judgment
 - The word Shiloh is an interesting Hebrew word
 - It can be translated as "He Whose right it is"
 - The Septuagint, Syriac and Dead Sea Scrolls all translate this verse in that way
- It means the tribe of Judah will rule over Israel until the One Whose right it is to rule comes to take up the throne
 - It's a reference to the Messiah's arrival to rule
 - While the tribe of Judah will hold the rule over Israel from generation to generation, once Messiah comes, there will be no more succession of rule
 - He will hold it forever
 - And He will rule over all peoples, Jewish and Gentile alike

- Finally, Judah's family will be so prosperous, they will tie donkeys and foals to choice grape vines
 - A grape vine is a relatively fragile thing
 - If a vine were strong enough to restrain a donkey, then it says a lot about the prosperity of the vineyard
 - Judah's vines will be unbelievably healthy and strong
 - The Jewish commentary on this verse somehow came to understand this detail as a description of the Messiah's arrival
 - According to the rabbis, the Messiah can be recognized as One who will ride on a donkey
- Furthermore, the agricultural production will be so abundant, that Judah will wash their garments in grape juice, be filled with wine, and have teeth made white from milk
 - Judah will indeed be a blessed tribe
 - And his leadership qualities will bless the nation
- Then Jacob blesses the next six sons with brief mentions each

Gen. 49:13 "Zebulun will dwell at the seashore;
And he shall be a haven for ships,
And his flank shall be toward Sidon.

Gen. 49:14 "Issachar is a strong donkey,
Lying down between the sheepfolds.

Gen. 49:15 "When he saw that a resting place was good
And that the land was pleasant,
He bowed his shoulder to bear burdens,
And became a slave at forced labor.

Gen. 49:16 "Dan shall judge his people,
As one of the tribes of Israel.

Gen. 49:17 "Dan shall be a serpent in the way,
A horned snake in the path,
That bites the horse's heels,
So that his rider falls backward.

Gen. 49:18 "For Your salvation I wait, O LORD.

[Gen. 49:19](#) “As for Gad, raiders shall raid him,
But he will raid at their heels.

[Gen. 49:20](#) “As for Asher, his food shall be rich,
And he will yield royal dainties.

[Gen. 49:21](#) “Naphtali is a doe let loose,
He gives beautiful words.

- For Zebulun, Jacob says his tribe will dwell at the seashore and the border of Sidon, the historical land of the Phoenicians
 - The problem is the territory assigned to Zebulun in the book of Joshua doesn't border the sea
 - The tribe is entirely landlocked
 - On the other hand, Ezekiel 48 describes the territory of each tribe during the Millennial Kingdom
 - And in that age to come, Zebulun does have territory on the sea and in the northwest corner of the nation
 - Exactly where Jacob says it will be
 - Remember, these instructions concern the latter days
 - This is further proof that the promises of God for Israel await the coming Kingdom on earth
 - The pithy description of Issachar as a strong donkey lying down between sheep pens communicates a lot about his character
 - He is physically strong, given over to manual labor and service
 - But in lying down, he has a lazy streak and he's not particularly ambitious
 - In v.15 Jacob says that this tribe will see the good land they're given in Canaan, and they will seek for nothing more
 - They will be strong workers and will favor working the land
 - But they will enjoy that role too much, being willing to accept a form of slavery working for others, including Canaanites to maintain the produce of the land
 - They traded obedience to God for the material pleasures of the land

- The tribe of Dan is an interesting case
 - Jacob says that in keeping with the meaning of their name, this tribe will be judges
 - The tribe of Dan produced Samson, the most prominent of the judges
 - But Dan was also the first tribe to practice idolatry
 - And Dan began the rebellion that eventually split the nation of Israel
 - Jacob alludes to these outcomes when he says that Dan is a serpent in the way of the nation
 - He bit at the horses heels, causing Israel's downfall
 - Interestingly, Dan is not listed among the tribes of Revelation 7 when the 144,000 Jews are called to evangelize the world
 - Dan's exclusion is often assumed to be a punishment, but I wonder if it has more to do with the tribe's name
 - Remember, Jesus says that until He returns for judgment, the times are devoted to salvation

[John 12:47](#) "If anyone hears My sayings and does not keep them, I do not **judge** him; for I did not **come to judge** the world, but **to save** the world.

- Since Dan means to judge, perhaps he was left out of the 144,000, since those men are selected to continuing the salvation work of Messiah
 - It isn't time for judgment as yet, though that time will be drawing very near
- Finally, Jacob says of Dan that he will await the salvation from the Lord
 - Despite Dan's failings, his tribe will be included in the Kingdom with the rest of Israel, enjoying the salvation of the Lord
- Jacob says relatively little about Gad, Asher and Naphtali
 - Gad's territory was the eastern most border of Israel across the Jordan
 - So he was vulnerable to raids from desert tribes

- The tribe were excellent warriors and defended Israel well
 - Asher is given some of the best land in the nation, very fertile ground
 - As a result, the nation comes to enjoy rich food, which literally means oily food, a symbol of richness
 - His tribe will produce delicacies for kings
 - For Naphtali, Jacob says the tribe will move like a doe set loose
 - It's a reference to the way Naphtali's territory is very mountainous, creating a degree of independence among this tribe
 - They are footloose and move around like a deer and are also gifted warriors
 - Finally, they are eloquent in speech and gifted with words
- Next we move to Joseph

[Gen. 49:22](#) "Joseph is a fruitful bough,
A fruitful bough by a spring;
Its branches run over a wall.

[Gen. 49:23](#) "The archers bitterly attacked him,
And shot at him and harassed him;

[Gen. 49:24](#) But his bow remained firm,
And his arms were agile,
From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob
(From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),

[Gen. 49:25](#) From the God of your father who helps you,
And by the Almighty who blesses you
With blessings of heaven above,
Blessings of the deep that lies beneath,
Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.

[Gen. 49:26](#) "The blessings of your father
Have surpassed the blessings of my ancestors
Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills;
May they be on the head of Joseph,
And on the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers.

- Joseph is richly blessed, the most blessed of the sons of Jacob in keeping with his award of the birthright

- Remember, that blessing was measured in way Jacob granted a double portion to Joseph's two sons
 - But Joseph himself only received Jacob's land in Shechem
 - Nevertheless, the tribe of Joseph, which has become two tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, is the most blessed tribe
 - Their blessing is pictured as a fruitful tree extending its branches outside the walls of the orchard
- Then Jacob remembers the way Joseph was attacked by his brothers and Potiphar, and yet the Lord took care of Joseph
 - And in the end, Joseph became powerful, as pictured by a firm bow and strong arms
 - And then we see Jacob confirm for us that Joseph's life is a divinely inspired picture of the Messiah
 - Jacob says in the second half of v.24 that the same hand of God that brought Joseph through these things will do the same for the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel
 - These are classic terms for the Messiah
 - So Jacob tells us that what we see in Joseph's life is a pattern for what the Lord will do to bring His Messiah to Israel
 - And of course we've studied that picture in detail throughout the story of Joseph
- Finally, in vs.25-26 Jacob speaks of the tremendous blessing Joseph received from the Lord, a blessing that even exceeded that given to Abraham and Isaac and Jacob
 - The only way to understand that statement is to see it as one, final picture of Christ in the life of Joseph
 - These statements of unsurpassed blessing are references to the blessing the Father will bestow upon the Son
 - In His glory and in His reign on Earth
 - The time when He will wear the crown on His head
- Finally, Benjamin gets his blessing

[Gen. 49:27](#) “Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;
In the morning he devours the prey,
And in the evening he divides the spoil.”

[Gen. 49:28](#) All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them. He blessed them, every one with the blessing appropriate to him.

- Benjamin is told he will be a warring tribe, often victorious and so successful he will divide the spoils with his brothers
 - The tribe produced many warriors and typically had a war-like nature
 - Among others, this tribe produced a Judge, King Saul, Jonathan, Mordecai, Esther, and the Apostle Paul
 - Warriors for the Lord can be powerful ministers or great disappointments, as Paul and King Saul demonstrate
 - Finally, in v.28 Moses confirms that these blessings were intended for more than just these boys
 - They extend to the tribes themselves as we’ve already seen
 - And each blessing was appropriate, just what the Lord intended
- And then comes the end of Jacob’s life, and he gives instructions concerning the disposition of his body

[Gen. 49:29](#) Then he charged them and said to them, “I am about to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite,
[Gen. 49:30](#) in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site.

[Gen. 49:31](#) “There they buried Abraham and his wife Sarah, there they buried Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and there I buried Leah –

[Gen. 49:32](#) the field and the cave that is in it, purchased from the sons of Heth.”

[Gen. 49:33](#) When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

- Jacob wants to see his body buried in the land God promised to him, further evidence of how strong Jacob’s faith has become in his last days
 - He wants to be buried in the cave at Machpelah, the place in the land that Abraham purchased and where the patriarchs were buried

- Notice he says that this is the place he buried Leah
- This is the first time we hear of her death, and now we know she shares the cave too
 - What Leah could never obtain in life, she obtained in death
 - The chance to be next to Jacob without competition
 - Rachel isn't buried in this cave
 - Only Leah
- Finally, after speaking to his sons, we're told he literally returned into his bed and breathed his last
 - It's as if Jacob willed himself to die at this moment
 - I wonder if the same Spirit that revealed the prophecies Jacob spoke had also revealed that this would be the day he died
 - Considering all that Jacob experienced in his amazing life, I wouldn't be surprised if this is true
- As I reflect on Jacob's story, I love this ending
 - If God can take a man like Jacob, a man who schemed his way out of every situation
 - A man who impatiently tried to fix problems his own way
 - A man who fought with God rather than rested in God
 - If God can take a man like this and bring him to the point where he could become so in tune with God that he speaks of future events with stunning clarity
 - His eyes were nearly gone, but his spiritual vision was unmatched
 - Then there's hope for me
 - If God can take a man like this and bring him to the point that he leans back in bed, so confident in God's grace and promises, that he welcomes his death
 - Then there's hope for all God's children

[Jude 24](#) Now to Him who is able to keep you from stumbling, and to make you stand in the presence of His glory blameless with great joy,

[Jude 25](#) to the only God our Savior, through Jesus Christ our Lord, be glory, majesty, dominion and authority, before all time and now and forever. Amen.