

Beginning and beginning Again: lesson 14

Genesis 49-50, January 13, 2011

Laurel Ann Porro

In this week's lesson we close the door on the lives of the Israel's first three great patriarchs. The successes and failures of their lives had a direct effect on their descendants, the history of the world, indirectly on us also. Studying the Bible without the knowledge of Genesis is like coming into the middle of a movie; you don't have a complete understanding of how it all started. As you continue to study the Old Testament, you will more clearly understand how God worked out the destinies of the descendants of the patriarchs and will appreciate how things fit together from what you have learned in your study of Genesis.

Our lesson this week concludes the lives of Jacob and Joseph, but looks beyond their deaths in Egypt to the time when Israel will conquer and settle in the Promised Land. Some of Jacob's blessings to his sons project even farther to the coming of the Messiah and into the millennial kingdom. Let's take a look at how Jacob and Joseph finished their lives and see what lay ahead for their descendants.

Chapter 49: Jacob called his sons to him so that he could share with them what only God could have revealed to him about each one of them. Genesis contains other prophecies announced by God or one of His angels, but his was the first one announced by a man who knew what God was telling him to say, even if he did not know how it would work out to be true. Come, he said, so that I can tell you what will happen to you.....slide: birth order

Mothers and birth order (indicated by number) of Jacob's children:

Leah	Bilnah	Zilpah	Rachel
1-Reuben	5-Dan	7- Gad	11- Joseph
2- Simeon	6. Naphtali	8. Asher	12-Benjamin
3. Levi			
4. Judah			
9. Issachar			
10. Zebulon			
(11 th child Dinah)			

Slide of Reuben

1. Reuben

As the oldest son of the family Reuben had claim to the inheritance rights of the firstborn. Usually the firstborn was the spiritual and social leader of the clan and as God's chosen people, Reuben should have had a great legacy in leadership. But Reuben forfeited it by sleeping with his father's concubine Bilhah as we studied in Genesis 35:22. Jacob described Reuben as turbulent as the waters, meaning that he was inconsistent in his decision-making, so blessing, priesthood, and ruling authority were divided among the other sons of Israel rather than being given to his tribe alone.

Jacob prophesied in verse 4, that Reuben would no longer excel and that was true for his descendants; no prophet, no judge, or no king ever came from the tribe of Reuben. And there were other problems with his descendants:

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In Numbers 16:1: the sons of Reuben joined a renegade group who became insolent and rose up with the sons of Korah against Moses. This was so divisive to the community that God judged their insolence by opening up the ground and swallowing the family of Dathan so that they all perished. [Slide of Tribes Map](#)

Later in Numbers 32, the Reubenites along with the sons of Gad, were among those who wanted to remain on the east side of the Jordan River where their flocks could graze rather than make the difficult move into occupied land on the west side of the Jordan. Moses had to challenge their decision and make them promise to help their brothers conquer the land west of the Jordan before they could finally settle in their preferred territory.

Moses gave in, but the Reubenites paid a price; later in 2 Kings 10:32, during the time of the divided kingdom in the reign of Jehu it is written that, "In those days, the Lord began to reduce the size of Israel" and he began with the territory of Reuben east of the Jordan River. In other words, their land was more easily accessible to attack when the king of Assyria began encroaching into Israelite land. This eventually resulted in the Assyrian conquest of the northern kingdom.

[slide of Simeon](#)

2. Simeon Second-born son Simeon and the third-born son Levi received the consequence for their violence when they wiped out all the men of Shechem in retaliation for the rape of their sister Dinah several years earlier. At the time, Jacob had only a small complaint about their deed, recall that he merely said, You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to the people living in the land". Yet, the Lord remembered this event and made sure that the consequences were long-lasting. Cursed for their anger, their numbers diminished from the third largest when they left Egypt (59,300) to the smallest by the time of the second census in the wilderness (22,200). Later in Deuteronomy 33 when Moses pronounced a blessing on the Israelites before his death, there is no mention of a blessing for the tribe of Simeon.

3. [Slide of map](#)

Later in Joshua 19, when the allotment of land was given out, the tribe of Simeon was not given their own land with set boundaries, but instead the tribe was given an inheritance within the territory of Judah.

[Slide of Levi](#)

Levi, the third son also received the curse of a scattered tribe, but this tribe later redeemed itself during the rebellion of the golden calf at the foot of Mount Sinai (Exodus 32). As Moses descended from the mountain and saw the people running wild, he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Whoever is for the Lord, come to me." And all the Levites rallied to his side and the next day, walked through the camp killing the others to wipe out the stench of their sin. As a result, Moses announced that, 'You have been set apart to the Lord today and He has blessed you.....' Thus the prophecy of scattering became a blessing for Levi. His descendants did not receive a specific section of the Promised Land, for the Lord

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became their inheritance; they instead received a portion of land in 48 different cities of Israel as compensation for their service to the people as priests. [Slide of Judah](#)

4. Judah

It's surprising to me that Judah received such a glorious blessing, since this fourth son of Leah wasn't a completely exemplary character.

- In Genesis 37, he suggested that the brothers sell Joseph for money rather than killing him, showing that he was interested in profiting from his brother's misfortune.
- He did not deal truthfully with his daughter-in-law Tamar and he hired her as a prostitute in Genesis 38.
- But he redeemed his reputation when he offered himself as a substitute for Joseph in Genesis 44. For this act of sacrifice, Judah's descendants would receive the greatest blessing of all, for the name Judah means, [click](#) God be praised, and of course the greatest blessing is to have been the ancestor of the Messiah Himself. Jacob said, "You are a lion's cub, Judah," [click](#) and Judah would later produce a lion that would have the scepter of the King who shall one day cause all the nations to bow down. [Click](#) Ever since Jacob's prophecy, the Messiah became known as the lion that would come from the tribe of Judah.

[Click](#) Genesis 49: 10: And the scepter will not depart from Judah, until it comes to whom it belongs. Jesus is referred to here as Shiloh, in some translations, the name meaning, "He whose right it is" and a title anciently understood to speak of the Messiah. [Click](#) "The right to rule and the ruler Himself shall always be from the tribe of Judah.

[Click](#) Gen 49:11 *He will tether his donkey to a vine and his colt to the choicest branch:* Verse 11 is a reference to the events we celebrate on Palm Sunday when [click](#) Jesus fulfilled prophecy by riding into Jerusalem riding on a donkey, [slide Judah-2](#) and the garments and robes described next will be seen in the future according to Revelation 14 and 19.

Did Judah deserve this great blessing? Probably no more so than his brothers, but we see that despite Judah's failings and the tarnished people in his lineage, this blessing is an example of the riches of God's grace. [Slide of Zebulon](#)

Jacob now skipped the birth order and continued with the sons born of Leah.

5. Zebulon

Literally, shall live by the seashore meant that both on the East and West, his land would be close to water. It is located between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee with easy access to both, which was most likely an asset. The tribe of Zebulon was a quiet tribe, remembered for supporting Deborah, and was noted for its faithfulness to David, supplying the largest number of soldiers to David's army of any single tribe: in 1 Chronicles chapter 12.

It was in the land of Zebulon that the people living darkness would see a great light, because this is where Jesus grew up and spent much of His ministry. Eleven of the twelve apostles came from Galilee.

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Slide of Issachar

6. Issachar was a large tribe - third in size at 64,300 men according to the Numbers 26 census. Because of their size and abundance, they were often targets of oppressive foreign armies. "Issachar is a raw-bones donkey lying down between two saddlebags", may refer to its location between these two tribes (map). It may mean that Issachar was strong, but not likely to protest much when the going got tough. His tribe would enjoy the good land assigned to them, but later in 2 Kings 15, when the king of Assyria invaded the land of Israel, he conscripted from the Issacharites; they thus became Assyria's vassals. [Slide of Dan](#)

7. Dan

Dan will provide justice for his people showed itself to be true when

[Click](#) it supplied one of the most prominent of the Judges, Samson. Not well known for wise decision-making, nevertheless, Samson did enact "justice" on the Philistines for their cruel treatment of him.

Genesis 49:17 says, Dan shall be a serpent by the roadside: But Dan was a troublesome tribe.

[Click](#) In Judges chapter 18, we read that they had trouble taking possession of the land allotted to them, so they resorted to a bullying tactic, where they scouted out a peaceful and unsuspecting people far to the north, attacked them and took over their city, renaming it Dan. You'll notice that the tribe of Dan has two locations. [Click](#) In the northern location, they set up their own idol worship, and later became popular in Israel for the worship of King Jeroboam's golden calves.

Jeremiah 8:16 notes this:

"The snorting of enemy horses is heard from Dan", indicating their revolt, and chapter 8 of Amos includes this notation: As surely as your god lives, O Dan, they will fall, never to rise again.

In verse 18, Jacob interrupts his prophecies with this:

"I look for your deliverance, O Lord". Deliverance=salvation, the Hebrew word for salvation if Yeshuwah....Perhaps at this point, Jacob saw that he was near death and needed more strength to go on, calling out to Jesus as author and finisher of the race. [Slide of Gad](#)

8. Gad and Asher the two sons of Zilpah received brief attention.

"Gad will be attacked by raiders, but he will attack them at their heels" was all Jacob had to say for the descendants of Gad. Gad and Reuben had desired the first land that they saw before entering the Promised Land and had settled east of the Jordan, where there was less protection. They had to become strong to defend their land from constant attack. According to 1 Chronicles 12, when David was assembling an army of mighty men to defend himself against Saul's attacks, the Gadites were brave warriors, ready for battle and able to handle the shield and spear. However, later when Assyria was knocking at their doorstep, Jeremiah asked, 'why has Molech, the god of the Assyrians, taken possession of Gad?' [slide of Asher](#)

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9. Asher: Named 'happiness' by Leah after a time of her own infertility, Asher's allotment on the coast of the Mediterranean would bring much happiness to the land. In Deuteronomy 33:24, Moses confirmed the prophecy regarding Asher by saying *Asher is most blessed of sons; let him be favored by his brothers, and let him dip his foot in oil.* **Slide of Naphtali**

10. Naphtali

During the time of judges, the tribe of Naphtali participated in many a battle to secure the borders of the land and free it from the Canaanites.

But Jacob's words, "Naphtali is a doe set free that bears beautiful fawns" could have pointed to the future location of this tribe whose land was in a key portion near the Sea of Galilee, bordering the land of Zebulun, where Jesus did much of His teaching and ministry. **Slide of Joseph**

11. Joseph

Jacob uses strong metaphors to recount the life of his favorite son, fruitful vine, attacked by archers, but his strong arm remained steady because of the hand of the Mighty One..... God's hands were on Joseph's hands, giving him strength and skill to work the bow expertly. God was there, even when Joseph did not know it.

Because of the blessing Jacob had already given to his two sons, Joseph received the double portion of a firstborn. Since he was the firstborn of Jacob's first love, Rachel, Jacob was, in a way, entitled to bestow this on Joseph. The first census of the Israelites showed that the two tribes together had the second largest number of people, 72,700, after leaving Egypt.

In Judges 16, we read of the allotment of land for Joseph which of course was divided into a large section of land for Manasseh and Ephraim. It included the areas which their forefathers had set up altars before their sojourn in Egypt. Bethel where Rachel was buried, the place where Jacob had wrestled with God, the brothers had slaughtered the Shechemites. Later on when the kingdom divided, Ephraim was the nickname given to the ten northern tribes of Israel.

By the end of Jacob's life, he fully understood who God was: **slide of names**

Verse 49:24: Mighty One of Jacob

The Shepherd

Rock of Israel

Verse 25: Your father's God

The Almighty

He is no longer the God only of Abraham and Isaac. Jacob acknowledged that his own blessings are greater than he deserved. He concludes with the comforting words that Joseph was the prince among his brothers, as he indeed was. Joshua who led the Israelites into the Promised Land, was from the tribe of Ephraim, and in him, Jacob's prophecy concerning his favorite son received its main fulfillment.

Slide of Benjamin

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Benjamin: Jacob's last son Benjamin received the prophecy that he is a ravenous wolf, which likely referred to his tribe which developed a reputation for cruelty. The book of Judges relates several incidences of fierce fighting of men from the **click** tribe of Benjamin; Ehud known as the left handed deliverer, plunged his sword into the belly of the unsuspecting king of Moab. Later, after the rape and death of a Levite's concubine as recorded in the sordid account in Judges chapter 19, the Benjamites mobilized 26,000 fighting men to fight against their fellow Israelites and lost 25,000 of them after several days of battle.

Click King Saul was a Benjamite, and at one point, as told in 1 Samuel chapter 22, he ordered the slaughter of 85 priests who had sided with David in his effort to avoid being killed by Saul.

Click And then, Saul of Tarsus was a Benjamite who before his dramatic conversion was known for breathing out murderous threats against the Lord's disciples. (Acts 9)

With prophetic words completed, Jacob was now finished with his life's work. His sons' tribes eventually settled the Promised Land, but due to disobedience and idolatry, they lost it to foreign conquests. However, God is not done with the twelve tribes who followed Jacob's sons. Revelation chapter 7 has their names listed once again as part of the faithful 144,000 servants of God who will escape harm in the end times. So Jacob's blessing of his sons has not yet been completely fulfilled even until today.

Jacob's last words were instructions to Joseph regarding his burial. "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."

Slide of Abraham's grave

Egypt was filled with magnificent tombs, and Jacob could have been buried like a Pharaoh. But he wanted to be buried in an obscure cave in Canaan because that was the land promised to Abraham by covenant, and the cave would mean that his remains were with Abraham and his wife Sarah, his parents Isaac and Rebekah, and next to..... Leah. Leah, not Rachel, is the one who takes her place among the matriarchs of the family. Most likely, as the years went by, Jacob grew to love and respect the less-favored Leah. She was a comfort to him after the death of Rachel. **Slide of sons of Jacob** She bore Jacob seven children and gave God the praise for that.

So Jacob died in peace with and was gathered to his people; a clear reminder that death is not an end, but a transition at which time we will join those who have gone before us.

Because of Joseph's stature as prime minister of Egypt, he was able to arrange to have Jacob's body embalmed according to Egyptian customs and with Pharaoh's permission; he organized a massive funeral cortege that traveled from Egypt to Canaan. This was a dramatic burial. The entire clan gathered together to pay tribute to this man who was the last link with the patriarchs.

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But shortly after that, his sons began to discuss the notion that Joseph would take his revenge on them now that their father was no longer around. Here, the brothers are projecting their own guilt onto Joseph even though Joseph had done nothing to make them suspect that this was even a possibility. However, they knew that they were deserving of punishment, which is why they come groveling before Joseph, begging his assurance that he had no ulterior motives. Joseph reminded his brothers that God, who had chosen their family, could take whatever evil and violence they had been involved in in the past and bring good out of it. Evil could be stopped. The power of sin could be broken. Forgiveness was possible. Neither sin nor death was the end of the story. What a great principle we have here; one I'm sure that you've seen in your own lives. How many of us have an "all things work together for good for those who love the Lord and are called according to His purpose" story?

Here is one of the strongest rocks in the foundation of God. It does not matter what circumstances we encounter in life; we know that God loves us.

It does not make any difference what event comes into the life of a believer. God means it for good. We can face death, life, angels, principalities, powers, things present, things to come, height, depth, or any other creation, and know that nothing can separate us from His love. He means all for our good.

Joseph was the human agent most responsible for bringing this family to Egypt, most likely saving God's people from starvation and perhaps extinction. Yet he did not take the credit for what had been accomplished. He knew that only because of God's provision had he been able to provide for them and never once did he seek to gloat over his role even when his brothers clearly fulfilled the dreams of his youth. Joseph was one of the few Biblical characters we have or will meet who was able to achieve a perfect balance in his loyalties. He was loyal to Pharaoh, and he was loyal to his family and he was loyal to his God. He gave all the credit to the One who had spared him from the pit. We would do well to follow his example and give God all the credit for anything that we may have accomplished in this world.

Joseph had a rich and rewarding life and lived to see his great-great grandchildren born in Egypt, but his final words to his brothers were, "Take my bones back to Canaan." This showed that Joseph's heart was in the Promised Land. It also proved him to be a man of great faith, trusting in things not yet seen. Joseph died looking forward to God's unfolding plan of redemption, and that is where the Book of Genesis - the Book of Beginnings - ends.

Slide of Exodus According to tradition, Joseph's body was never buried. His coffin laid above ground for the 400 or so years until it was taken back to Canaan when Israel left Egypt in the Exodus. All during that time, when a child of Israel saw Joseph's coffin and asked what it was there for and why it was not buried, they heard the answer, "Because the great man Joseph did not want to be buried in Egypt, but in the Promised Land God will one day lead us to." It was a silent witness for all those years that Israel was going back to the Promised Land, just as God said. Like his father, Joseph had based his life squarely on the promises of God, not on the fleeting glories of Egypt.

Genesis began with the Creator of the world putting His mighty power on display for the angels alone to see, concluding with God's crowning glory, man created in His image. What soon

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followed, however, was the invasion of sin which played on the weakness of man and plunged us into a cycle of sin, sorrow, restoration, forgetfulness, sin, sorrow, restoration and forgetfulness that would destroy us if not for the confidence we hear in Joseph's words to his brothers that mercy is greater than violence; forgiveness is greater than guilt; and that God can break the chain of sin and revenge, pain and suffering. The rest of the Bible looks forward to the One who is going to accomplish all of these things. He was born in a stable, and died on a cross. We, as his servants, await his return, when He will finally bring about the fulfillment of the promises made to Abraham.