

38. The final chapter of Jacob's life

12/4/2005

When a person face the end of his life, he has a tendency not to concern about what other would think or say about him. Jacob is a case in point. As he enters into the final chapter of his life, this patriarch wants to share his heart with his sons and grandchildren. These two chapters 48 and 49 are very important chapters in the Old Testament, because they set a tone of each tribe's future and even the prophecy about Jesus.

A. JACOB'S BLESSINGS TO JOSEPH'S SONS

Genesis 48:1-4 Now it came to pass after these things that Joseph was told, "Indeed your father is sick"; and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. 2 And Jacob was told, "Look, your son Joseph is coming to you"; and Israel strengthened himself and sat up on the bed. 3 Then Jacob said to Joseph: "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, 4 and said to me, 'Behold, (1) I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and (2) give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.'

Can you imagine the thrill that fills the heart of this old man? Here comes Joseph, his favorite son, with his two sons. Jacob never dreamed he would see Joseph again because he thought he had been killed. Yet he sees Joseph elevated to this important position in Egypt, and he can trace the way God had worked out the affairs of his life. Jacob had been in Egypt for seventeen years now. He is an 147 years old man and is dying. But Jacob has come a long way spiritually. He is now trusting God.

There are three specific points to the covenant from God to Jacob:

(1) the nation, (2) the land, and (3) the blessing

God already fulfilled the first and the third promises. The reason that you and I are sitting down with the Bible right now is because God has fulfilled two-thirds of this promise which He promised thousands of years ago.

The second one is not fulfilled yet. The Jews do not have the land of Israel yet. Yes, they have a little sliver of it, but it is certainly a bone of contention. When they get the land from the hand of God, they will live there in peace. They will own property and pay no taxes. That sounds like a paradise of the Millennium, doesn't it? Yes, that is what it will be.

B. THE BEGINNING OF THE TRIBE OF EPHRAIM AND MANASSEH

Genesis 48:5-6 And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. 6 Your offspring whom you beget after them shall be yours; they will be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance.

These two grandsons, the two sons of Joseph, will each become a tribe. There was no tribe of Joseph, but there were the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, and that makes thirteen in any man's mathematics. Yet the Bible counts twelve tribes.

Here is the secret: the tribe of Levi was not counted as a tribe. They became the priestly tribe and were not given any land or territory but were scattered as priests throughout the other tribes. So they were not counted as a tribe.

By the way, Ephraim and Manasseh are over seventeen years old because they were born before Jacob came to Egypt.

C. THE LAST WILL BE THE FIRST

Genesis 48:7-16 But as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died beside me in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).” 8 Then Israel saw Joseph’s sons, and said, “Who are these?” 9 And Joseph said to his father, “They are my sons, whom God has given me in this place.” And he said, “Please bring them to me, and I will bless them.” 10 Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. Then Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them. 11 And Israel said to Joseph, “I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!” 12 So Joseph brought them from beside his knees, and he bowed down with his face to the earth. 13 And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel’s left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel’s right hand, and brought them near him. 14 Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim’s head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh’s head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn. 15 And he blessed Joseph, and said: “God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has fed me all my life long to this day, 16 The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; Let my name be named upon them, And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.”

The ‘right hand’ in the Bible always has the idea of the favored position because generally speaking, the ‘right hand’ is the hand of strength and skill.

Ephraim is to become the leader above Manasseh. Later on we will see that the tribe of Manasseh marched under the banner of the tribe of Ephraim in the wilderness march, as described in the Book of Numbers. Joshua came out of the tribe of Ephraim.

This was fulfilled in Israel’s history. Both tribes were blessed, but Ephraim was greater as a tribe, even to the point where the name “Ephraim” was used to refer to the whole northern nation of Israel.

D. GOD’S WAY, NOT MAN’S WAY

Genesis 48:17-22 Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took hold of his father’s hand to remove it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. 18 And Joseph said to his father, “Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head.” 19 But his father refused and said, “I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.” 20 So he blessed them that day, saying, “By you Israel will bless, saying, ‘May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!’ ” And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh. 21 Then Israel said

to Joseph, "Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. 22 Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow."

Jacob knew exactly what he intended to do. He deliberately chose the second-born to receive a greater blessing than the firstborn.

Joseph had better accept this because he is not the oldest, either. He happens to be one of the youngest.

This is truly a passing of the torch to Joseph. Jacob was the last of the three great patriarchs to pass from the scene.

E. JACOB'S LAST WORDS TO HIS SONS

1) Reuben

Genesis 49:1-4 And Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days: 2 "Gather together and hear, you sons of Jacob, And listen to Israel your father. 3 "Reuben, you are my firstborn, My might and the beginning of my strength, The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power. 4 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.

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 particular deathbed message is dramatic because it is prophetic. 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.

As the firstborn of the family Reuben had claim to the inheritance rights of the firstborn, but he forfeited it through immorality. Reuben's immorality with his father's concubine Bilhah – the mother of his brothers Dan and Naphtali – is recorded in Genesis 35:22. Reuben paid a high price for his stupidity and instability.

The tribe of Reuben never did excel. No prophet, no judge, or no king came from the tribe of Reuben. Reuben is a great example of how the first can be last.

2) Simeon & Levi

Genesis 49:5-7 "Simeon and Levi are brothers; Instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place. 6 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 hamstringed an ox. 7 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.

The second-born son Simeon and the third-born son Levi received the same "blessing" for the same evil deed. They were instruments of cruelty when they wiped out all the men of Shechem in retaliation for the rape of their sister Dinah in Genesis 34.

The sins of our past can come back and haunt us. Even when forgiven, we may have to face consequences for a lifetime.

The prophecy of dividing and scattering turned out to be a curse for Simeon. The tribe of Simeon was the weakest numerically of the 12 tribes and shared an allotment of land with Judah. They started out from Egypt being the third largest tribe, but some 35 years later, they became the smallest tribe.

However, the prophecy of dividing and scattering became a blessing for Levi. Because of the faithfulness of this tribe during the rebellion of the golden calf in Exodus 32, it was scattered as a blessing throughout the whole nation of Israel. They received no portion of land, because the Lord was their inheritance, not land.

3) Judah

Genesis 49:8-12 "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. 9 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? 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. 11 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. 12 His eyes are darker than wine, And his teeth whiter than milk.

Previously Judah wasn't a completely model character. But he did outshine when he interceded and offered himself as a substitute for Benjamin as we have studied.

Jesus is referred to as Shiloh, the name meaning, "He whose it is" and a title for Messiah.

From David until the Herods, a prince of Judah was head over Israel even Daniel in captivity. The promise was that Israel would keep this scepter until Shiloh comes. Even under their foreign masters during this period, Israel had a limited right to self-rule, until 7 A.D. Then under Herod and the Romans, their right to capital punishment was taken away.

At the time, the rabbis considered it a disaster of unfulfilled Scripture. Seemingly, the last trace of the scepter had passed from Judah, and they did not see the Messiah. Rabbis walked the streets of Jerusalem and said, "Woe unto us, for the scepter has been taken away from Judah, and Shiloh has not come." Yet God's Word had not been broken. Certainly, Jesus was alive as a teenager at that time.

4) Zebulun

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

The tribe of Zebulun was noted for its faithfulness to king David, supplying the largest number of soldiers to David's army of any single tribe.

The tribe of Zebulun seems to settle the piece of land sitting between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. Literally, Zebulun did look to the sea, both to the East and West.

5) Issachar

Genesis 49:14-15 "Issachar is a strong donkey, Lying down between two burdens; 15 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 a large tribe - third in size according to the Numbers 26 census. Because of their size and abundance, they were often targets of oppressive foreign armies who put them into slavery. According to Jacob's prophecy, they became a band of slaves.

6) Dan

Genesis 49:16-18 "Dan shall judge his people As one of the tribes of Israel. 17 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. 18 I have waited for your salvation, O Lord!

The tribe of Dan did judge his people. They supplied one of the most prominent of the Judges, Samson. But Dan was a troublesome tribe. They introduced idolatry into Israel. Jeroboam 1st set up one of his idolatrous golden calves in Dan and later Dan became a center of idol worship in Israel.

Dan is left out of the listing of tribes regarding the 144,000 in Revelation 7:5-8. But Dan is the first tribe listed in Ezekiel's millennial roll call of the tribes. This is another remarkable sign of God's redemption.

7) Gad, Asher & Naphtali

Genesis 49:19-21 "Gad, a troop shall tramp upon him, But he shall triumph at last. 20 "Bread from Asher shall be rich, And he shall yield royal dainties. 21 "Naphtali is a deer let loose; He uses beautiful words.

8) Joseph

Genesis 49:22-26 "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.

Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, would be put in the territory which was Samaria later in history. That was called gentile territory in Christ's day. It was a great place to witness, and the Gospel did go into that area. Our Lord Jesus Himself ministered there. In John 4 we have the record of His witness to the Samaritan people, beginning with a woman at a well.

9) Benjamin

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

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.

Genesis 49:28 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.

F. APPLICATION

1) We don't have to wait until our deathbed to speak the truth. It is our God-given duty to speak the truth to whomever God designates in love. If the person chooses not receive the truthful advice from us, the responsibility lies with that person, not us.