

## 54. The final blessings from Jacob

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Someone shared a story with me about last words and how what we say and how we say it really makes a difference. This was a story of a woman, one of the survivors from the Auschwitz concentration camp:

"She went to Auschwitz when she was 15 years old and her brother was 8, and the parents were dead. And she told me this, 'We were on the train going to Auschwitz, and I looked down, and I saw my brother's shoes were missing. And I said, Why are you so stupid? Can't you keep your things together? For goodness' sake!' The way an elder sister might speak to a younger brother. Unfortunately, it was the last thing she ever said to him, because she never saw him again. He did not survive. And so, when she came out of Auschwitz, she made a vow. She said, 'I walked out of Auschwitz into life, and the vow was, I will never say anything that couldn't stand as the last thing I ever say.'"

Anything that a man says on his deathbed is important because generally, if he ever tells the truth, he tells it on his deathbed. In the law of evidence, a dying declaration is a testimony that would normally be barred as hearsay but may in common law nonetheless be admitted as evidence in criminal law trials because it constituted the last words of a dying person. The rationale is that someone who is dying or believes death to be imminent would have less incentive to fabricate testimony, and as such, the hearsay statement carries with it some reliability.

Jacob's deathbed message is dramatic because it is prophetic. He spoke to his sons who were to become the twelve tribes in the nation of Israel and would be dwelling in the land of Canaan. In his last words, he blessed many of his sons, but at the same time, he also let them know that he was not pleased with 3 of them. While he was doing that, he also gave a profound Messianic prophecy.

### A. 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.*

As the firstborn of the family, Reuben had a 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 and 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 hamstrung 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 in chapter 44.

This was the tribe that the brothers would praise. This did not happen for several hundred years until David finally ascended the throne. But when David ascended the throne, Judah became a dominant tribe and remained in that way, especially in the southern kingdom.

The prophecy was that the scepter should not pass from Judah until Shiloh came. “Shiloh” is related to the Hebrew word “shalom,” which means “peace.” The prediction was that there would be from the tribe of Judah a ruling body until the Messiah came.

Even under their foreign masters during the period of the exile and return, Israel had a limited right to self-rule, until A.D.6. Then under Herod and the Romans, their right to capital punishment was taken away. You remember when the Jews brought Jesus to Pilate that he said, “You take Him and judge Him according to your law,” in John 18:31. What was the reply from the Jewish leaders? “It is not lawful for us to put anyone to death,” signifying the sentence they were wanting for Jesus but which they had no power to carry out.

The interesting thing is that when that power was stripped from the Jewish leaders in A.D. 6, many of the rabbis covered themselves with ashes. They put on sackcloth

and went mourning through the streets because they said, "God's Word has failed. We no longer have the authority of law and the Messiah has not come." Little did they know that in Nazareth the Messiah was growing up, but He was just a young boy at that time.

Now another interesting thing is that in A.D. 70, the scepter was taken and there was no longer a lawgiver, which means that the Messiah had to come sometime before A.D. 70 or the Word of God did indeed fail. If Jesus was not the promised Messiah of Israel, there is none. There is to be none because here God's Word plainly declares that the scepter will not depart from Judah nor a lawgiver from between his feet until the Messiah, the Shiloh, the peace has come.

The Messiah is either Jesus or no one. This is a great piece to use when you speak to your unbelieving Jewish friend to show that Jesus is the Messiah they've been waiting for.

#### 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 seas, 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, and 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.*

The tribe of Gad supplied many fine troops for king David later. In the days of Jeremiah, among other times, foreign armies oppressed Gad. In the end, the tribe survived.

Apparently, the land eventually occupied by Asher was good enough to bring not only necessities but also luxuries.

Naphtali's land was in a key portion near the Sea of Galilee, the region where Jesus did much of His teaching and ministry.

*Matthew 4:12-16 Now when Jesus heard that John had been put in prison, He departed to Galilee. 13 And leaving Nazareth, He came and dwelt in Capernaum, which is by the sea, in the regions of Zebulun and Naphtali, 14 that it might be fulfilled which was spoken by Isaiah the prophet, saying: 15 "The land of Zebulun and the land of Naphtali, By the way of the sea, beyond the Jordan, Galilee of the Gentiles: 16 The people who sat in darkness have seen a great light, And upon those who sat in the region and shadow of death Light has dawned."*

Because so much of the ministry of Jesus took place in the region of Naphtali, this was fittingly said of him.

## 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.*

## B. APPLICATIONS

1) We don't have to wait until our deathbed to speak the truth. It is our God-given duty to speak the truth in love to whomever God designates.

If the person chooses not to receive the truthful advice from us, the responsibility lies with that person, not us.

**2) No one is beyond God's redemption. But to receive His redemption, we must repent from our sins.**

Regardless of what these brothers did to Joseph, the Lord still forgave them and use them mightly in His purpose.

*Isaiah 59:1 Behold, the Lord's hand is not shortened, that it cannot save; nor His ear heavy, that it cannot hear.*