

GENESIS WEEK 43, CHAPTER 49

Last week we finished examining the Cross-Handed Blessing of Jacob, as told in Genesis 48; this was a prophetic blessing made upon Ephraim and Manasseh, but the primary target of this blessing was Ephraim. We discovered that Ephraim would in some way, not yet fully clear, be a blessing to the gentile world. And, as we looked yet again at Ezekiel 37, learned why the prophecy that Ephraim and Judah would be reunited in the Land of Israel, never to be removed, had everything to do with what we are witnessing today, in our time.

This week we are going to look at another, separate set of blessings made by Jacob. Recall that we are speaking of a time when the 12 tribes of Israel were in Egypt; Joseph was the Vizier of Egypt, and Israel were honored guests of Pharaoh. So, it's probably around 1700 to 1750 B.C. when the events of Genesis 48 and 49 occurred.

In Genesis 49, we are going to look at the destinies, as described in the form of blessings, which were prophetically called out for each of the 12 tribes of Israel. We have come a long way, haven't we? In earlier parts of Genesis we saw Israel created by God via giving Jacob a name transplant (to Israel), and now we will see prophecies concerning the future of the individual tribes of Israel called out hundreds of years before their fulfillment. Much of what we will learn about them is already fulfilled prophecy. What we can take from this is the absolute inerrancy, and the literal nature, of Bible prophecy. And, that is important to us in our time, because there are STILL many prophecies about the tribes of Israel that are in process of being fulfilled, and others that soon will be. True enough, some of these prophecies are a little obscure, and their meaning cloudy, but the veil IS starting to lift. I think that if you pay close attention to what we'll study about these tribes, the book of Revelation in particular will have new meaning to you. Recall that last week, for instance, we discovered that the make-up of the 12 tribes of Israel looks different in Revelation 7, than it does in the Torah; with Ephraim and Dan being removed, and Joseph and Levi being added back in.

Now, as we read through Genesis 49, we need to put it in proper perspective; what Jacob was pronouncing was overall pictures of each of these tribes. These were not prophecies about things they would necessarily DO, they were prophecies about what each of these tribes would BECOME. Jacob would pronounce what each of these tribes' CHARACTERISTICS and attributes would be over the long haul. Not exactly how they would behave at some given moment in time, though we can see moments when a certain tribe eerily reflected the blessing Jacob gave it. We need to keep in mind that it was more than 3500 years ago that Jacob made these pronouncements concerning what the traits of the DESCENDANTS of the sons gathered around his deathbed would look like, if one could look at the history of each tribe from beginning to end. And, let's remember: from here on out, when the Bible speaks of a one of the 12 Israelite tribes such as Rueben, or Judah, or Ephraim, it's not speaking about the destiny of any particular man.... for these men, these 12 sons of Jacob, were long dead before the individual tribes that went by

their names grew large enough to even form identifiable characteristics. Rather, the Bible is speaking of **the thousands and millions of descendants** of each of these men who stayed together in family groups called tribes; this was the typical social structure then, and it might surprise you to know that the largest part of the world population today is still tribal. So, far from tribalism being a thing of the past, it is alive and well and how it operates has everything to do with the intractable troubles we face in the Middle East, as well as the horrible genocides of modern day Africa.

READ GEN. 49 all

Like a modern-day family, sitting around a table while an executor reads the will of the departed one who had held sway on all the family wealth and power, there was an air of anticipation among the 12 brothers. The 12 sons of Jacob were anxiously waiting to hear what their particular blessing might be; and, like the family at the reading of the will, some were going to be pleasantly surprised at their portion, while others would be drained with disappointment. And, still others would walk away content however modest their lot.

Later, after it all had time to sink in, hard feelings would also likely result as some of those sons of Jacob who received the lesser blessing burned with envy against those who received the greater. Of course, those who received the greatest blessings looked down smugly upon those who never deserved as much as they had rightfully received, anyway. And, time doesn't necessarily solve these hurts and rejections; sometimes it can actually magnify the animosity. Such would be the case as we follow the history of Israel from this point forward. For we will find some of the tribes of Israel will have long term hatred against other tribes of Israel, and at times they will actually war against one another.

The 12 sons of the last Patriarch, Jacob, called Israel, gathered around their father who has just enough strength left in that aged body to perform his final duty on earth; and, they listen intently as the all-important blessings begin, predictably, with Rueben, the firstborn, and progress in approximate, but not exact, accordance with the order of their birth.

In V1, Jacob begins by saying something that has an unclear meaning to scholars even to this day: he says "...that I may tell you what shall befall you in the days to come". Some versions say "in the latter days", and still others say "in the last days".

Now, the Hebrew used here is *acharit ha'yamim*. In its MOST literal sense, it means "in the end of the days". Some Rabbis and scholars say that this speaks of the time when Israel's days in Egypt will be over, and Moses leads them out. Others say this is speaking of the latter days and end-times of the world, as we are so prone to call it. There have been very reasonable arguments for both sides. Probably, Jacob's sons were not thinking in terms of thousands of years into the future. But, as with every pronouncement in the Bible that is of God, as were these blessings, we must remain aware that there is simultaneously **a physical AND a spiritual** manifestation. Certainly, Jacob's sons could only see the physical, material side. But, we can, with hindsight, also see the spiritual.

About 1000 years after this blessing 10 of the twelve tribes, all but Judah and Benjamin (and the tribe of special category, the Levites), would vanish; therefore one would have to think that indeed the meaning of Jacob's words, "the end of days", spoke of a time BEFORE they vanished; a time that represented the state of each tribe in the years that would lead up to their exodus from Egypt. This as opposed to Jacob's words referring to the end-times of the world. Yet, as we are just now suddenly aware that Ephraim who represents all those currently lost tribes, is supposed to mysteriously reappear in some form in the end-times, it leaves open the possibility that indeed Jacob DID mean end-times of the world, and not simply the end of Israel's time in Egypt. Of course, it could mean both. Time will tell. Likely, it has some elements of both past and future; for we see many Biblical prophecies repeat themselves. Bible prophecy tends to create patterns as much as they foretell future events. For the present, I prefer to leave this as an unknown, rather than to dogmatically say it means one thing over the other. Perhaps over the next few months and years, God will make this more clear to us.

With that, let's examine the blessing given to each son.

RE READ Gen.49:3 & 4

Though we are not told the reaction of any of the sons, it should not be hard to imagine the crushing blow dealt to Reuben; for at this instant, humiliated in front of his brothers, he was disowned from his position as the NATURAL firstborn of Israel. One can imagine he SHOULD have suspected such a result, particularly since his younger brother Judah had been relied on more and more by Jacob for leadership over the past few years. Reuben knew the wrongs he had committed against his father; but hit with the unalterable finality of it all, a brutally depressed Reuben had to be the result.

Jacob says of Reuben, you are....."unstable as water.....you shall not have preeminence.....because you defiled my bed". In other words, you do not have the necessary attributes to lead Israel, so you shall not receive the firstborn blessing.

This "bed defiling" incident is recalled for us in Chronicles. PLEASE TURN TO THIS SCRIPTURE. We need to take in VERY carefully what it says, for it is key to our understanding of the blessings that Jacob will give his sons, AND more.

1Chronicles 5:1-2 "The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel.....he was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to **the sons** of Joseph the son of Israel, though not in such a way as for him to be regarded in the genealogy as the firstborn. For Judah became greater than his brothers, inasmuch as the ruler came from him; nevertheless, the birthright went to Joseph."

Now, in a long way around the barn, this verse tells us a couple of things: first, the cause of Jacob passing over Reuben was that he had slept with Jacob's concubine, Bilah; straightforward enough. But, what also happened was, in essence, the honors and blessings that traditionally went to the firstborn **got split between two other sons:**

Joseph and Judah. Or, as we saw in Genesis 48, actually the firstborn rights got split between Ephraim, Joseph's son, and Judah. So, the Chronicler tells us that the EARTHLY reason behind Jacob's Cross-Handed Blessing upon Joseph's sons was to disinherit Reuben because of what Reuben had done. Of course, God had other reasons to allow this scenario to unfold.

There are two major components that make-up the traditional firstborn blessing: **first**, was the double-portion, which meant that the firstborn was to receive two shares (or more) of the tribe's wealth instead of one. **Second**, was that the firstborn was given the right of authority to LEAD, to rule over, the whole tribe. If all had gone as normal, Reuben would not only have been the leader of the tribe his own birth had created (the tribe of Reuben), he would have become the leader over all of Israel...he would have ruled in his father, Jacob's, place....over the full 12 tribes. AND, he would have received a double-portion, twice as much of the tribe's wealth as any of his brothers received. Reuben got none of this. Instead, we see that Joseph would receive the double portion (by means of his sons, Ephraim and Manasseh) and Judah would receive the right to rule and lead. Now, let me tell you: this is strange action that Jacob took, in splitting the firstborn blessing. But, also keep in mind a very important element that the writer of Chronicles explains: genealogically speaking, Judah's family was the one who would carry forth authority. So, in matters of Israel where genealogy was the deciding factor.... such as who would be the first legitimate King of Israel (David), and who would be the King forever (Jesus)... It would be Judah's bloodlines that would be used....not Joseph's and not Reuben's. Yet, in a strange way, Joseph ALSO received the firstborn blessing. Let me show you how that happened.

Here's the thing: often we will see the Bible use the terms "double-portion blessing" and "birthright" and "firstborn blessing" interchangeably. BUT..... we need to understand, that even though in the common vernacular of that day the term double-portion was used synonymously with firstborn blessing, technically, the double-portion was only PART of the firstborn blessing. It was ASSUMED, according to tradition that whoever was awarded the firstborn blessing got every element that traditionally went with it. That is, whoever received the double-portion of the family's wealth ALSO automatically received the right to rule over the tribe. But, Jacob did something very novel in splitting the firstborn blessing between two heirs, two sons, two tribes of Israel.

In my opinion the reason that the writer of Chronicles worded these verses in the way he did, is because he didn't fully comprehend what it all meant, and what it would all lead to. WHY the Firstborn blessing was divided between two sons, the writer obviously doesn't know because it wasn't usually done this way. In fact, I'm unaware of anywhere else in the Bible that the splitting of the firstborn blessing, as Jacob did, ever again occurred. This event seems to be completely unique. So, all the writer of Chronicles does is to assert the facts, as he understands them, without further explanation.

Now, lets see how Jacob's blessing of Reuben worked out.....the prophesy that Reuben's descendants would be as unstable as water, and that they would not be leaders.

When we search the scriptures, we will find that the tribe of Rueben did not produce one single military leader, king, prophet, nor judge.....not one of Rueben's descendants are mentioned in the Bible as having attained a position of particular value or honor, nor accomplishing anything of significance. We also find that after the 12 tribes, led by Moses, approached the promised land of Canaan, the tribe of Rueben decided NOT to enter the Promised Land, but rather to settle for "good enough". They took some territory as their inheritance on the east side of the Jordan River, outside the land of Canaan.

We even find that Rueben's tribe began a steady decline in their population. Moses was apparently so concerned about the condition of the tribe of Rueben that he prayed (Deut.33:6) " Let Rueben live, and not die; and let not his men be few".

The tribe of Rueben was destined to become an asterisk in the history of Israel, due to Rueben's unstable ways and his sin. It is a simple, yet profound, Biblical principle that while our sins are most certainly forgiven and paid for, the consequences of our sins can be enduring throughout our lifetimes and on into the lives our children, our children's children, and beyond. We may not like it, but it is so. Our sinful ways can introduce characteristics into our families that are detrimental and long lasting in their effects. And, all we have to do is live long enough to know the truth of that statement.

Next, we read of the prophetic blessings pronounced upon the two tribes of Simeon and Levi.

RE READ Gen.49:5-7

Another harsh verdict; and, undoubtedly, two more stunned inheritors. Jacob sees his 2nd and 3rd born sons in the same light, with similar personal attributes and characteristics, therefore apparently..... and I underline the word APPARENTLY... sharing a common destiny. They are brothers in violence, and so they shall be brothers in their transgressions.

Unlike Rueben's primary offense which was done in secret, Simeon and Levi had committed their greatest offense for everyone to see, and were proud and unrepentant for what they had done, to boot!

Let's revisit just what the great offense of Simeon and Levi was, as told in Genesis 34.

READ Genesis 34:1,2 5-7, 13-15, 25-27

The primary thrust of this blessing was that neither Simeon nor Levi would partake in the promised land in the same proportion as their brothers; this as a result of their bloodlust and cruelty, as demonstrated upon the citizens of Shechem. They would, instead, be divided and scattered. And, that is exactly what took place. But, let me give you a hint in advance of our look at what happened to Simeon and Levi: remember that one of God's Governing Dynamics is to divide....divide, separate, and elect. It's a deceived mankind that looks upon division as an automatic negative.

Let's look first at Simeon, who would become the smallest tribe by the time of the census of Numbers 26; and, like Rueben, struggled simply to stay in existence and to maintain a separate tribal identity. In a census reported in the early part of the book of Numbers, Simeon is said to have had a population of 59,300. Within a mere 40 years, however, the census of Numbers 26 shows their population has shrunk by over 50% to 22,200. Now, just for the sake of clarity, the census would have been ONLY of men....and only of men in the prime and middle portions of their lives. This is often expressed in the Hebrew idiom as "men capable of bearing arms". So, this is probably something on the order of ages 20 to 50 years old. Males younger and older than this, children, the elderly, the disabled, were not counted. Neither were females of any age or status.

Further, when we find Moses officiating over the handing out of the tribes' land inheritances, Simeon is given territory WITHIN Judah's territory..... technically, and more accurately, certain cities within Judah's territory. Simeon's territory was like the round bulls eye in the center of a target: they were completely surrounded by the tribe of Judah. Worse yet, the area they occupied within Judah was primarily the Negev.....an arid desert.

Simeon was probably the first tribe to be completely absorbed by the other tribes, with some of them joining with Judah, and others joining what would eventually come to be known as the 10 northern tribes of Ephraim. There was even mention in 1st Chronicles of some members of the tribe of Simeon leaving the Holy Land altogether, and joining with Edom.....recall that Edom was the descendants of Esau, Jacob's twin brother. Jacob said they would be scattered..... how true this proved to be.

Levi suffered a similar, though not destructive, fate as concerns land and territory. Levi, as with Simeon, was not given its own territory.... rather, it too was given cities.....48 cities.....but within the tribal boundaries of EVERY tribe. However, Levi was divided and separated out to become God's own priests....in Hebrew, God's cohanim. It was the Levites who would officiate all matters at the Wilderness Tabernacle, and then the Temple. So, while Simeon was destined to the loss of its tribal identity and near extinction, Levi's separation from Israel became a holy matter.

What an incredible thing it is that Jacob's prophesy so accurately depicts the ironically similar, yet opposite, fates of Simeon and Levi. Look once again at V7, the end of it, where it says ".....I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel". Both actions happened, but each in its own way. Levi was divided, separated and elected away from the other tribes to become priests to God, and Simeon was utterly scattered into all the other tribes of Israel. Levi maintained their identity, and Simeon lost theirs.

Often we will see in Scripture two phrases or sentences, back-to-back, that appear to simply be a repetition..... like in V7, ".....I will divide.....I will scatter". Usually this is just a standard Hebrew literary device called a doublet or a couplet. At other times, though, there is a subtle and important message being introduced and it is not the same thing being said, just in two different ways.

Let me also mention, as an aside, that whereas particularly in the Prophets it looks to be unarguable that there is much repetition, in fact, its because of the near impossibility to translate Hebrew word structure into English. And, one of the reasons that this is so, is because the Bible was originally created in a structure meant to be learned through the spoken word and through hearing. This is as opposed to our English, Latin, French, and German translations that were written in a style meant to be absorbed by reading. While to those of us who are not literary professionals, the difference between creating a speech designed to be absorbed by the ears, versus creating a manuscript designed to be absorbed by the eyes, might not seem apparent.....the differences are substantial.

It is interesting to notice that even up to our time, the Levites are seen as separate from the rest of Israel. Jews do NOT regard Levites as Jews.....they are separate and distinct. Even if the rest of the world, through ignorance, doesn't make this distinction, God does, and considering where we are in prophetic times, it might be wise for US to understand and acknowledge it, because the time is near that the Levites are going to once again play a prominent role in Judaism.

So, the end result of Jacob's pronouncements are that the first 3 brothers, the eldest, are now dispossessed and their blessings look more like a curses, to them. Now, we come to the 4th in line, Judah.

RE READ Gen. 49:8-12

The first thing we notice is that Jacob has a lot more to say to Judah than to Judah's older brothers. Many excellent commentaries now tell us that Judah here receives the firstborn blessing. Well, that's only partially so. As I mentioned earlier, what Judah actually receives is only part of the blessing that goes to the firstborn. Since there are two primary elements to the firstborn blessing, 1) receiving double the amount of tribal wealth as any other inheritor, and 2) the official assumption of the leadership and authority over the tribe, we see that what Judah inherited was only the 2nd part: tribal authority and leadership. Back in Genesis 48, Joseph was given the other part of the firstborn blessing, the double-portion, and this was in the form of making Joseph's two sons equal with all of Jacob's sons. Therefore, Joseph received 2/12ths of all that was Israel, through his two sons.

Judah is the lion.....an ancient symbol of regal status... Judah is the new leader of Israel. And, true to his name, Judah, which means praise, will have the praise of his brothers, and eventually the whole world, because out of him would come God's anointed Kings of Israel, and the Messiah. The royal line of David will come from Judah, and the right to rule Israel will remain with the tribe of Judah until, finally, Shiloh comes.

Now, take a look at V10. This is another controversial verse in this chapter. Some Bibles use, like in mine, the words "to whom obedience belongs" in place of the word Shiloh.

Let's take a look at this, because it is most interesting, if not important.

First, the word Shiloh appears in the oldest manuscripts we have, and in the Septuagint which was a Greek translation of the OT created 250 years before Christ. So, the word Shiloh, by everything reasonably evident, is part of the original text. Later in the OT, we will see that there is a town in Canaan called Shiloh, and it's there that the Tabernacle of the Wilderness will rest for many years. Interestingly, Shiloh will be in the territory of Ephraim. This is actually the first Holy City of the Holy Land. While we all think of Jerusalem in that regard, in reality Shiloh was first, and later the honor of being the holiest city was transferred to Jerusalem. But, even then, Shiloh remained a holy city in Israel for centuries to come, 2nd only to Jerusalem. Some scholars believe that this city of Shiloh is what was being referred to in this verse, though of course it was not yet in existence at the time of Jacob's blessing. But, if we render the meaning of Shiloh in Jacob's blessing to be the name of a future city, the verse doesn't make a lot of sense. For most certainly the scepter...that is, the authority to rule.... did not depart from Judah when the city of Shiloh was founded, nor did Judah's leadership decline as prophesied here, so we ought not to take this to mean a city.

The next popular explanation is that Shiloh is but a word that has the meaning "to whom obedience belongs", and that is what we find in most Bible versions. While this most certainly has the implication of referring to a Messiah, in order to achieve this meaning it takes actually assuming that one of the letters in the word "Shiloh" was handed down to us incorrectly....that is, that the Hebrew was misspelled (that the Hebrew letter "sheen" should have been a "seen"). There is no evidence that this was the case, and even if it seems to afford us a nice answer to what "Shiloh" is, we should not accept such a thing that does not trust the scripture to be what it is, without modifying it to help achieve an answer that suits us.

The last, and most appropriate, explanation is that Shiloh is another name for the Messiah. In other words, Shiloh is a proper noun, in this case, a name. What's kind of ironic is that the previous explanation is an attempt to prove the Messianic nature of this verse by modern day Christians who regarded the original Hebrew word Shiloh as having no literal meaning that they could discover.... so, they made one up.

Yet, beginning with the most ancient Hebrew commentary in existence (called Bereshit Rabba), the majority of Hebrew sages and scholars from times long past, agree that Shiloh is purely messianic in nature. It speaks of the Messiah, Shiloh. So, in the end, if Christians had not, for the last 1900 years, such an animosity towards the Jews, they could have had very early sources for their belief that this "Shiloh" was talking about the coming Yeshua of Nazareth; instead, they had to twist some meaning around, to our shame, that eventually wound up with the same result, anyway!

So, beginning right here in Genesis 49, we have it prophesied that the Messiah will come from the Hebrews, the nation of Israel, the tribe of Judah, the family of David. With the benefit of the hindsight we now have, knowing who the Messiah is, it would in no way be incorrect to read Genesis 49:10 as fulfilled prophecy, right? "The scepter shall not

pass from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his legs, until it is handed over to Jesus Christ." And, of course, that ruler ship has indeed been passed to Jesus.

One more thing about Judah, and we'll move on. Religious Jews have a big problem today. They continue to assert, correctly, that the Messiah.... or, at least ONE of the Messiahs (because many Jews believe there will be 2).... is to be from the tribe of Judah, and more precisely, from the Jewish royal family of David. But, of course, they do NOT acknowledge that Yeshua, who revealed Himself about 30 AD, is that Messiah. So, the problem is that when that expected day arrives and a "messiach" reveals himself as such, how will the Jews ever be able to prove that it is actually Him, in the manner they prefer to prove such things.....by genealogy? Because, in 70 AD, the house of records in Jerusalem, and every document that proved the lineage of every Jewish family, was destroyed. Coupled with the nearly 1900 year exile and dispersal they suffered through after that, before returning to a re-born Israel in 1948, there is absolutely no way for any one alive today claiming to be Jewish, to prove it genealogically. Jesus WAS able to prove it, and His genealogy has never been, right up to this day, disputed by the Jews. Even ultra-Orthodox Jews today readily admit that Yeshua of Nazareth existed, that He WAS of the tribe of Judah that he WAS of the line of David. Yet, due to the blindness that has overcome so many Israelites, they cannot see the reality of Jesus' being Messiah, or that it is hopeless that they could, by their very own requirements, EVER prove that whoever it is they think will be Messiah, actually is.

Next week, we'll look at the remaining tribes' blessings, beginning with the last 2 children that Leah, Jacob's first wife, bore to him.