

Prophecy in Jacob's Last Words Concerning His Sons

(Genesis 49)



Jacob Blessing Joseph, by Harry Anderson, © IRI

When Jacob was about to die he blessed his sons in the order of their birthright. This was the order that Moses, many years later, adopted. We read this in Deuteronomy 21: 15-17: *If a man has two wives, one loved and the other disliked, and they both have borne him children, and if the firstborn is the son of the one who is disliked, then on the day when he wills his possessions to his son, he shall not put to firstborn of his loved wife in place of the [actual] firstborn of the disliked wife- her firstborn being older. But he shall acknowledge the son of the disliked as the firstborn by giving him a double portion of all that he has, for he was the first issue of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his.*

Here is the order in which Jacob blessed his sons:

Leah's sons

Rueben

Simeon

Levi

Judah

Rachel's maid Bilhah

Dan

Naphtali

Leah's maid Zilpah

Gad

Asher

Leah's sons

Issachar

Zebulon

Rachel's sons

Joseph

Benjamin



Jacob blessed Rueben saying, "Reuben," you are my firstborn, my might, the beginning of my manly strength and vigor; [your birthright gave you] the preeminence in dignity and the preeminence in power." but Reuben lost it because of adultery (Gen. 35:22). Simeon and Levi were skipped over because of their violence against the people of Shechem, in retaliation for the rape of their sister, Dinah. He said of them, "Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath, for it was cruel. I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel" (Vs. 7).

According to Bible commentary, this was literally fulfilled. Levi got no inheritance except 48 towns scattered throughout different parts of Canaan. As to Simeon, they were originally given only a few towns and villager in Judah's lot (Josh 19: 1).

We see in the words of Jacob that the world's history is centered in the nation of Israel. The first three sons of Jacob pictured how the natural man is guided by lust and violence. These two evils existed since the fall of men. Cain's violence drove him out of God's presence. Subsequently, the world was filled with corruption and violence, bringing God's judgment upon men and the earth through the universal flood, from which only the righteous Noah and his family were saved. But Noah's descendants' hearts became proud and idolatrous and disobedient. In the pursuit of making a name for themselves apart from God, they tried to build a tower that would reach the sky. They said said. "Come, let us build us a city and a tower whose top reaches into the sky, and let us make a name for ourselves, lest we be scattered over the whole earth (Gen. 11: 1-4). After the flood, God's words to them were to "Be fruitful, multiply and fill the earth".

The birthright position therefore was given to the fourth son, Judah. He said, "The scepter of leadership shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh (the Messiah) comes to Whom it belongs and to Him shall be the obedience of the people" (vs. 10). Judah was the most blessed of all the tribes, because it was from his lineage that Messiah came. The name Judah means praise. God's choosing David as king of Israel, the words to Judah as the royal tribe, were fulfilled until Shiloh came.

Jacob's words to Zebulon, Issachar and Dan, the prophecy is twofold: Historical and future. To Zebulon, which means dwelling, he said, Zebulon shall live toward the seashore, and he shall be a haven and a landing place for ships; and his border shall be toward Sidon (vs.13). These prophetic words in relation to sea, are nations (Cf. Isa. 17:12-13; Rev.17: 15), especially Sidon from where the worship of Baal had originated and brought to Israel by King Ahab (I Kings 16:31-33).

Words to Issachar were that he is "a strong-boned donkey crouching down between the sheepfolds. He saw that rest was good and that the land was pleasant and he bowed his shoulder to bear and became a servant to tribute" [subjected to forced labor] (vs.14-15). The meaning of his name is "hire or wages". The prophecy here relates to Israel's captivity when they were subjugated to forced labor by Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia.

There is much to ponder concerning the prophecy to Dan. Jacob said of him, he shall judge his people and he shall be a serpent by the way, a horned snake in the path that bites at the horse's heels, so that his rider falls backwards (vs.18). Dan is a type of antichrist, who will judge or reign over the nations under the power of the serpent (devil) during the seven years of tribulation. That time will be the lowest point in the life of Israel, bringing her to sign a contract with the devil, resulting in the great tribulation falling on them and on the world (Isaiah 28: 14-22). The remnant, however, will continue to be faithful to the Lord; they will be the ones waiting for the Lord's salvation, as we read on verse eighteen "I wait for Your salvation, O Lord."

The prophecy to Gad, Asher and Naphtali shows God's salvation of Israel in the end times. Gad means troop. Jacob said to him: a raiding troop shall raid him, but he shall raid at their heels and assault them [victoriously] (vs. 19). Israel will be victorious over her enemies in the words, "He shall raid at their heels and assault them".

Asher means happy. He will enjoy the abundance of God's blessings. The prophetic words to him were: Asher's food shall be rich and fat, and he shall yield and deliver royal delights (vs.20).

Naphtali means my wrestling. He will finally be free and rejoice with songs of salvation. Jacob said of him, Naphtali is a hind let loose which yields lovely fawns (vs.21). the prophecies to these three sons of Jacob represent the final salvation and restoration of Israel.



Joseph and Benjamin carry a twofold prophetic picture. Joseph means “He will add.” When the rights of firstborn were denied to Reuben, the position of firstborn was given to Judah, but the double wealth belonging to the firstborn, was given to Joseph, who was the firstborn of the wife Jacob loved. His blessing is long and rich. He said, By the God of your father, Who will help you, and by the Almighty, Who will bless you with blessings of the heavens above, blessings lying in the deep beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father are greater than the blessings of my forefathers and are as lasting as the bounties of the eternal hills; they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was the consecrated one and the one separated from his brethren and is prince among them (vs.25-26). Joseph is a type of the Messiah- rejected and sold by His brothers, but was exalted by His Father, Who gave Him the position to sit at His right hand.

Benjamin means the son of the right hand. Jacob’s words to him were: Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey and at night dividing the

spoil (Vs. 27). The prophecy concerning Benjamin is the type of the millennium reign of Christ. At His appearing, Christ will destroy all His enemies, as Paul said in I Cor. 15: 24-25: After that comes the end, when He delivers over the kingdom to God the Father after rendering inoperative and abolishing every rule and every authority and power, for [Christ] must be King and reign until He has put all [His] enemies under His feet.

In short, the first three sons Reuben, Simeon, and Levi are the type of the natural, sinful man. **Reuben** “a son” was unworthy of the right to the firstborn inheritance for committing adultery. **Simeon** “heard” and **Levi** “attached” became partners in crime; **Judah, Joseph and Benjamin** are a type of Christ. **Zebulon, Issachar and Dan** are type of Israel’s downward fall and apostasy, including the apostasy of the last days. **Gad, Asher and Naphtali** are prophetic of Israel’s final restoration.

Worth noting in these prophetic words is that the sons of Jacob’s concubines received their blessings with the other sons, as opposed to Ismael, whose blessings were separated from the son of the promise, Isaac (Gen. 21: 8-21). God said to Abraham, Do not let it seem grievous and evil to you because of the youth and your bondwoman; in all that Sarah has said to you. Do what she asks, for in Isaac shall your posterity be called. And I will make a nation of the son of the bondwoman also, because he is your offspring (Gen. 21:12-13). In Galatians 4: 21-31 Paul made known to us the clear distinction. He said, For it is written that Abraham had two sons, one by the bondmaid and one by the free woman. But whereas the child of the slave woman was born according to the flesh and had an ordinary birth, the son of the free woman was born in fulfillment of the promise.

These prophetic blessings given to the sons of Jacob are pictures of the past and future events in the life of Israel, connecting the world’s history as one until Shiloh or Messiah comes.

(References from Hugo Bouter’s *Summary of Jacob’s Last Words to His Sons*).