

Israel Blessed the Sons of Leah

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain how Israel grew as he learned to walk with the Lord. In this topic, and the next, we will see that Israel gave a blessing to each of his sons during the last hours of his life before he died. We see that he began by blessing each of the sons of Leah.

Genesis 49:1-4 says, “And Jacob called his sons and said, ‘Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days: Gather together and hear, you sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel your father. Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity and the excellency of power. 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.” Jacob began by telling all of his sons what would happen to them in the last days. God led Israel in telling his sons what would happen to the various tribes that would develop in the future among his sons. Later, the Lord fulfilled each of these prophecies.

Reuben was the oldest of all of his sons. Israel began by speaking about the things that were special regarding his life, because of the fact that he was the oldest son. Because he was the oldest son, Israel said that Reuben was his might and the beginning of his strength. The word translated “might” means *to be firm* and is usually translated by strength or power. Nearly half of the uses of the word “strength” are used to speak of the firstborn, and that is how it is used here. In contrast, in Isaiah 26-27, it speaks of the creative power of God. Israel said that as the oldest son, the firstborn status could have resulted in both dignity and power.

However, Israel said that the sinful choice of Reuben would prevent Reuben, and also his descendants, from excelling. In fact, the choice he made showed that he was as unstable as water. Genesis 35:22 says, “And it happened, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father’s concubine; and Israel heard *about it*.” Here, we see that he made the choice to have a sexual relationship with the concubine of his father. In 1 Chronicles 5:1, we read, “Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel—he *was* indeed the firstborn, but because he defiled his father’s bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that the genealogy is not listed according to the birthright...” This verse points out the fact that Reuben was the firstborn, but he did not receive the birthright. Instead, the birthright was given to the sons of Joseph. Then, we see that 1 Chronicles 5:2 points out a second consequence. That verse says, “...yet Judah prevailed over his brothers, and from him *came* a ruler, although the birthright was Joseph’s...” David, Solomon and all of the kings of Judah came from Judah, instead of Reuben. An even greater consequence was the fact that Christ was a descendant of Judah instead of being a descendant of Reuben. The choice of

Reuben, to defile the bed of his father, had a serious consequence that meant Christ could not come from his family.

Genesis 49:5-9 says, “Simeon and Levi *are* brothers; Instruments of cruelty *are* in their dwelling place. 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. 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. 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. 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?” Here, we see that Israel began to speak about the next three sons of Leah.

Simeon and Levi are mentioned together because of the choices they made when they took personal revenge on the men of Shechem for defiling their sister, Dinah. They lied to the men of Shechem and then took personal revenge on all of the men of the city, instead of just the one who had defiled their sister. Genesis 34:25 says, “Now it came to pass on the third day, when they were in pain, that two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah’s brothers, each took his sword and came boldly upon the city and killed all the males.” Israel made it clear they had not asked him for advice about how they chose to deal with the men of Shechem. Israel did not want his honor to be united with their decision to kill all of the men. That was their own revenge. Israel particularly spoke about their anger and their self-will.

Jacob said that their anger was fierce and their wrath was cruel. The word translated “anger” is used to speak of enemies when it is used of people. As a result, they treated all of the men of Shechem like enemies, even though only one of the men had sinned and defiled their sister. When they poured out their anger against the men of Shechem, Israel said their wrath was cruel. The word translated “cruel” means to *show stubbornness so that the actions are hard to bear*. The word is used, in Exodus 1:14, to speak about how the suffering Egypt caused Israel was hard to bear. That verse says, “And they made their lives bitter with hard bondage—in mortar, in brick, and in all manner of service in the field. All their service in which they made them serve *was* with rigor.” Israel said that because of these things, their descendants would be scattered later when they lived in the land of Israel.

In contrast, Israel had a much different prophecy when he spoke to Judah. He said the other brothers and their descendants would praise Judah and his descendants. Israel also said the hand of Judah would be on the neck of their enemies. The word translated “neck” is most commonly translated *stiff-necked*. However, the word is also used to speak of *God giving victory over such enemies*. 2 Samuel 22:41 says, “You have also given me the necks of my enemies, so that I destroyed those who hated me.” That entire chapter is known as the song of David and showed how the Lord had worked in his life. David, Solomon, and all of the kings of Judah were descendants of Judah. That is why,

in the next sentence, Israel said all of his descendants would bow down before Judah. The word translated “a lion’s whelp” is the word for the *young lions that are born to a lion*. Israel said that the kings who came from Judah would have the strength of a young lion. However, he also said no other family would rule Judah.

Genesis 49:10-15 says, “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. Binding his donkey to the vine, and his donkey’s colt to the choice vine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes. His eyes *are* darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk. Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea; He *shall become* a haven for ships, and his border shall adjoin Sidon. Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between two burdens; 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.” This last part of the prophecy about Judah goes far beyond the kings that ruled Israel and Judah in the Old Testament. The scepter was the rod that a king used as he ruled.

The word translated “Shiloh” means *He who is or the One who brings* and was recognized by the Jews as a title for Messiah. That is why Revelation 5:5 says, “But one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose its seven seals.’” Christ is the One who could open the seal and will rule in the millennium (one thousand years) as explained in Revelation 20. The rest of Revelation 5 summarizes the complete ministry of Christ. Revelation 5:9b says, “You are worthy to take the scroll, and to open its seals; for You were slain, and have redeemed us to God by Your blood out of every tribe and tongue and people and nation.” Revelation 5:12b says, “Worthy is the Lamb who was slain to receive power and riches and wisdom, and strength and honor and glory and blessing!” Then, Revelation 5:13b says, “Blessing and honor and glory and power be to Him who sits on the throne, and to the Lamb, forever and ever!” Verse 9 says Christ redeemed us to God. Verse 12 says He is the One who deserves all things. Verse 13 says Christ will reign forever. The eternal rule of Christ is the complete fulfillment of this prophecy.

Israel went on to talk about the future of the final two sons of Leah. Zebulun would benefit from the sea trade. The territory that was later given to Zebulun, by the casting of lots in Joshua 19:10-16, placed the tribe of Zebulun on the important trade route that ran from the Mediterranean Sea to places east of the nation of Israel. As a result, this prophecy meant that his descendants would continue to benefit from the trade passing through the land they inherited throughout the time they were in the land in the future. For many years, the city of Sidon was a very important place for the trade of ships that traveled on the Mediterranean Sea. Since the trade route went from Sidon, through the land of Zebulun, the people would benefit as the traders went through their land.

Then, Israel spoke about Issachar. The name “Issachar” means *there is recompense or give a man wages*. We see that the prophecy about the descendants of Issachar talks

about the way they would work. A donkey was the common work animal that carried heavy loads, so Israel called Issachar a strong donkey. Donkeys often carry their heavy loads so the loads are balanced with about half of the weight on each side so it is easier to carry a heavy load. As a result, this tribe that would become known as a tribe that had learned to be strong workers. Their inheritance was next to the inheritance of Zebulun. These prophecies are all important, but we especially want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why the prophecy given regarding the One who would come from Judah is so important because of what these verses teach about the ministry of Christ. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things.