

## ***The Church of the Servant King***

### **Survey of the Bible Series – Prophecy Series**

#### **Proph11A – Messianic and Eschatological Prophecies in the Pentateuch**

#### **Genesis 49 – Jacob’s Last Words to His Sons**

##### ***Introduction***

In this chapter of Genesis, we see Jacob pronouncing his blessing upon his sons while on his deathbed. Genesis 49 demonstrates God’s continued pledge of faithfulness to His covenant with Abraham in spite of the maze of human jealousy, family divisions, and racial hatred that had been demonstrated among God’s chosen by the time of Jacob. [examples – see the “In Depth” section at Ge 45:6] Not only are Jacob’s words prophetic of each tribe’s patriarch, but they are prophetic of the age of the Messiah. The full meaning of some of the blessings or prophetic statements with regard to each tribe may be obscure to us, but the blessings Jacob pronounced upon Judah (vv. 8-12) and Joseph (vv. 22-26) are very clear prophecies about their ultimate destinies.

In verse 1, Jacob makes it very clear that his prophetic blessings are related to the “last days” or “in days to come.” This same phraseology is used in other contexts to refer to God’s future deliverance of His chosen people.<sup>1</sup>

For instance, in Numbers 24:14, Balaam states – “And now, indeed, I am going to my people. Come, I will advise you what this people will do to your people in *the latter days*.” The pagan Balaam then proceeds to describe a vision given to him in verses 15-19. The vision is one of Israel’s Messiah Who will be the victor over Israel’s enemies including Moab – the nation that hired Balaam to curse Israel. The Messiah is described in this passage as a “Star” that comes out of Jacob and a “Scepter” that arises out of Israel.

Another example of this prophetic and Messianic use of the phrase “last days” or “latter days” is found in Deuteronomy 31:29. In this passage, Moses states –

For I know that after my death you will become utterly corrupt, and turn aside from the way which I have commanded you. And evil will befall you in the *latter days* because you will do evil in the sight of the Lord to provoke Him to anger through the work of your hands.

This verse serves as an introduction to Deuteronomy 32 which contains the Song of Moses. This song depicts Israel’s future in rather gloomy terms. Her recently acquired wealth would lead her into apostasy. However, after she suffered judgment from the Lord, He would demonstrate His compassion by delivering His people and take vengeance on their enemies. When combined with Moses’ use of the phrase “*latter days*” in 31:29, there is a Messianic connection established.

The center of the deliverance in each of these passages is a king (Ge 49:10; Num 24:7; Deut 35:5). In our passage – Genesis 49 – that king is connected to the house of Judah as we shall see.

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<sup>1</sup> Frank E. Gaebelin, *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary* (Grand Rapids, Michigan: Zondervan Publishing House, 1989-1998), Zondervan Reference Software.

### ***The Order of the Blessings Upon the Sons***

The order of the blessings upon the sons roughly follows the order of the record of their birth (Gen 29-30).<sup>2</sup> The order of the blessing is presented below in combination with one view of how that order compares to Israel's history.<sup>3</sup>

<b>Verses</b>	<b>Tribe</b>	<b>Jacob's Prophecy &amp; Its Relationship to Israel's History</b>
3-4	Reuben	Represents the nation's failure in it's early history
5-7	Simeon & Levi	Corruption and violence during the period of the Judges
8-12	Judah	The period of the nation's greatest prosperity – the reigns of David and Solomon
13	Zebulun	The period of dominance by the Gentiles a.k.a. the "times of the Gentiles"
14-15	Issachar	
16-18	Dan	The period of Satanic power displayed against Israel while Israel in faith waits for Yahweh's salvation
19	Gad	The power and blessing associated with the Messiah's coming
20	Asher	
21	Naphtali	
22-26	Joseph (representing Ephraim and Manasseh)	
27	Benjamin	Type of the Messiah (Joseph is seen as the one who was separated from his brethren and later exalted; whereas Benjamin is presented as the Man at God's right hand [Ge 35:18; Psa 80:17]. <sup>4</sup> )

### ***The Blessings Described***

**Reuben** – the first born of Jacob. Jacob starts with a declaration of the privilege and exalted status of the first-born (v. 3). However, any further praise that Reuben might have enjoyed as a result of his position is cut short. Reuben had committed adultery with Jacob's concubine Bilhah (35:22). Though Reuben as the firstborn was entitled to double inheritance and a position of leadership, (1 Chron 5:1-2), there is no evidence that he received this inheritance.<sup>5</sup> Reuben was denied his otherwise rightful inheritance due to his instability and undependable nature. Through his adulterous affair with his father's concubine, Reuben wrongly attempted to solidify his claims to all of Jacob's blessings. His schemes which were contrary to God's plan only doomed his cause. In fact, the tribe of Reuben is criticized for not providing leadership during the period of the Judges (Jud 5:15-16).

**Simeon and Levi** – these two sons are linked together because of the fierce and cruel revenge they took against Shechem and his people (Ge 34). Even though Shechem had raped

<sup>2</sup> Ibid. See also F.W. Grant, *The Numerical Bible*, Volume 1: 127, quoted in Carl Armerding, "The Last Words of Jacob: Genesis 49," *Bibliotheca Sacra* 112:448 (October, 1955): 321. Grant who is quoted in Armerding lived during the late 19<sup>th</sup> Century and started his study of the Bible in depth with an analysis of the Psalms. He was so impressed by the structure and harmony found within the Psalms that he attempted to find the same harmony throughout the rest of the Bible. This search was the basis for his Numerical Bible issued in several volumes. Thus, Grant was characteristic of many theologians of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early-to-mid 20<sup>th</sup> Centuries with whom typology was a very significant part of their study and writings.

<sup>3</sup> Armerding, 322-323.

<sup>4</sup> Benjamin is the name selected by Jacob for his son as Rachel was dying. Benjamin means "son of the right hand." See Earl D. Radmacher, gen. ed., *The Nelson Study Bible* (Nashville, Tennessee: Thomas Nelson Publishers, 1997), 69.

<sup>5</sup> John Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook* (Wheaton, Illinois: Victor Books, 1990), 31.

their sister, their vengeance went too far especially under the circumstances. In addition, they used the sacred rite of circumcision in a manner that was deceitful and that dishonored that practice. Jacob never forgot their cold and unrepentant response to his reprimand (Ge 34:31). Both tribes were later scattered among Israel. Simeon was largely disintegrated (with its land inside Judah – Josh 19:1, 9). Levi was dispersed too, but the tribe had some honor restored in that it was the priestly tribe (Josh 21).

**Judah** – see next lesson – *Proph11B*.

**Zebulun** – this tribe was enriched by seaborne trade even though it never occupied the seashore of the Mediterranean (Josh 18:10-16; 19:10-11). Zebulun was given precedence over his brother Issachar even though Issachar was born first (30:18-20).<sup>6</sup> The territory of Zebulun lay in Canaan between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean and Nazareth and Cana were in it.

**Issachar** – this tribe would be forced to work for others. They occupied the fertile plain of Esdraelon which was constantly subject to invading armies.<sup>7</sup> Jacob's words portend a heavy enslavement following a time of plenty. Jacob's prophecy was fulfilled by Issachar's tribe being forced to pay tribute to the other marauding tribes attracted to its territory by the richness of its crops.<sup>8</sup>

**Dan** – the name Dan means “judge” and implies fair and equal justice. Instead, Dan is described as a snake that bites at a horse's heels so that the rider tumbles off of the horse. Idolatry first appeared in the tribe of Dan during the period of the Judges (Jud 18:30). Dan is also omitted from the 144,000 of Israel (Rev 7:4-8).<sup>9</sup>

Jacob inserts a prayer or plea in the middle of all of these blessings (v. 18). This was probably due to the realization that only God could deliver his descendants from self-destruction.

**Gad** – three of the six Hebrew words in verse 19 are a play on the name Gad (“attack”). Gad is attacked by a band of attackers, but Gad in turn attacks. Surprise attacks from Israel's enemies were common, especially to those tribes that settled to the east of the Jordan (1 Chron 5:18-19).<sup>10</sup> Along with Reuben, Gad requested that Moses give them their portion of the Land to the east of the Jordan because they had an exceeding large number of livestock. After giving assurance that they would assist their brothers in the conquest of the land of Canaan, Moses granted their request. “The Gadites were a warlike tribe, and they bravely aided their brethren in the conquest of Canaan (Josh 4:12; 22:1-4). Surrounded by the Ammonites, Midianites, and many other hostile tribes, they nobly defended their country.”<sup>11</sup> The Gadites were hospitable and gave assistance to David years later when he was forced to flee for his safety from Saul's persecution (2 Sam 17:24, 27-29). When the kingdom was divided, Gad became a part of the Northern kingdom and many of the wars between Syria and Israel must have ravaged its territory (2 Ki 10:33). The Gadites were taken captive to Assyria when the Northern Kingdom fell (2 Ki

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<sup>6</sup> John Walvoord and Roy Zuck, editors, *The Bible Knowledge Commentary* (Wheaton: Illinois, Victor Books, 1985), 99.

<sup>7</sup> Ibid.

<sup>8</sup> Merrill F. Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary* (Chicago, Illinois: Moody Press, 1988), 638.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid. See also Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, 32.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid. See also Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, 32.

<sup>11</sup> Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 450.

15:29; 1 Chron 5:26).<sup>12</sup> Gad will triumph at last when they participate in the Messianic reign of Christ as a part of the restored and pre-eminent nation of Israel.

**Asher** – the tribe of Asher eventually settled in an area of very fertile soil which bordered the seashore from Carmel northward (Josh 19:24-31; 17:10-11; Jud 1:31-32). Jacob's prediction probably relates to this fact. The tribe's location near the Phoenicians may have contributed to its degeneracy (Jud 1:31; 5:17). By the time of David's reign, the tribe had become so insignificant that its name is altogether omitted from the list of the chief rulers (1 Chron 27:16-22). With the exception of Simeon, Asher is the only tribe west of the Jordan that furnished no judge or hero to the nation.<sup>13</sup>

**Naphtali** – this tribe eventually settled northwest of the Sea of Galilee in a mountainous area that is pictured like a deer that is free by Jacob. In the book of Judges, Deborah pictured both the people of Zebulun and Naphtali as risking their lives on the heights of the field (Jud 5:18).<sup>14</sup> The remainder of Jacob's prophecy in Genesis 49 is brief and probably only meant to be given as words of encouragement.

**Joseph** – see next lesson – *Proph11B*.

**Benjamin** – this tribe consisted of great warriors. The first king of the Jews, Saul, was a Benjamite (1 Sam 9:1-2; 10:20-21). After Saul's death, they showed allegiance to Ish-bosheth (2 Sam 2:15; 1 Chron 12:29). They returned to David, however (2 Sam 3:19-20; 19:16-17). Benjamin and Judah came into a close alliance as a result of David establishing his residence in Jerusalem which technically belonged to Benjamin, but Judah was immediately contiguous to it. After Solomon's death, Benjamin and Judah formed a kingdom by themselves. Stories of the exploits of the Benjamites are found in Judges 3 (Ehud), Saul's career, Judges 20 (Gibeah) and 2 Samuel 2:15-16 (Gibeon). Saul (Paul) of Tarsus was a Benjamite.<sup>15</sup>

### ***Principles and Application***

**Principle:** The personality characteristics, foibles, strengths, weaknesses, and sin nature trends and tendencies of one's ancestry exert a tremendous influence that can only be counteracted by Truth that is appropriated (inculcated and applied) in one's life.

**Application:** What characteristics of your ancestry are exerting a tremendous influence in your life that is contrary to the Truth you know from God's Word?

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<sup>12</sup> Ibid.

<sup>13</sup> Unger, *The New Unger's Bible Dictionary*, 113.

<sup>14</sup> Walvoord, *The Prophecy Knowledge Handbook*, 33. See also Unger, 904.

<sup>15</sup> Unger, 159.