

## Genesis Chapter 49 - Commentary By Mike Wells

**Overview of Genesis 49:** In the previous chapter, Jacob gave blessings and prophecies concerning his adopted sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. In this chapter, he prophesies concerning his twelve natural sons. When he addresses his sons, Jacob speaks about the past and its relationship to what will happen in the future to the tribes that will descend from the sons.

**Genesis 49 : 1-2** - *1 And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days. 2 Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father.*

- Jacob knew he was dying.
- So he sent for his other eleven sons and proceeded to give each of them a blessing
- Each of the sons of Jacob basically came before the judgment seat of their father.

**Genesis 49 : 3-4** - *3 Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: 4 Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch.*

- As firstborn, Reuben should have received the birthright, which included a double portion of his father's inheritance, as well as the position of leadership in the family.
- And though, in his youth Reuben "**excellency of dignity**" and "**excellency of power**", later he sinned greatly against his father by sleeping with his father's concubine Bilhah (see Gen. 35:22).
- Bilhah was the mother of two of Jacob's sons (and Reuben's step-brothers) Dan and Naphtali which meant that Reuben was sleeping with his step-mother.
- Because of this, Jacob removed the birthright from Reuben
- The birthright was taken from Reuben and split between Joseph and Judah
- Joseph received the double portion of the inheritance, and Judah (as we shall see later in this chapter) received the right of leadership in the family.
- Interestingly, the statement "**shalt not excel**" applied not only to the birthright, but also (prophetically) to the subsequent history of the tribe of Reuben.
- No judge, no king, and no prophet in the Bible came from the tribe of Reuben.
- Also, rather than entering the promised land with the other tribes and choose land there, the tribe of Reuben chose to stay on the east side of the Jordan (see Numbers 32:5).

**Genesis 49 : 5-7** - *5 Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. 6 O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. 7 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.*

- Jacob has nothing good to say about Simeon and Levi.
- It seems that they were violent and cruel all their lives.
- We saw some of this in the episode concerning Dinah, when they took revenge upon the whole town of Shechem, by killing every man in the town, because their sister Dinah had been seduced (see Gen. 34:25).

- Also, many commentators think that Simeon was the ringleader in the persecution of Joseph, since Joseph chose Simeon to remain in prison while his brothers returned to Canaan to bring Benjamin to Egypt (see Gen. 42:24).
- The punishment for their cruelty is that they will be "**divided in Jacob**" and "**scattered in Israel**".
- This prophecy was fulfilled for both the tribe of Simeon and the tribe of Levi.
- The tribe of Simeon was allotted land within the territory of the tribe of Judah (see Josh. 19:1), so they were "**divided in Jacob**" in this way.
- The tribe of Levi was not given its own territory.
- Instead, the Levites became the priests for the Israelites, and so they were given towns within the territories of each of the other tribes (see Joshua 21) "**scattered in Israel**".
- The punishment of Levi the person, actually became a blessing for Levi the tribe, as that tribe was given the privilege of being the priests of God (God's grace at work)
- To Simeon and Levi, Jacob reminded them that they had been "*instruments of cruelty*".

***Genesis 49 : 8-9 - 8 Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. 9 Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?***

- As we see in this prophecy, Judah received the leadership portion of the birthright:
- "***Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee.***"
- So Judah, the son whose name means "**praise**", would receive praise.
- Actually, this prophecy suggests that Judah would receive far more than the birthright privilege of leading the family.
- Jacob's prophecy looked ahead to the kingship of the tribe of Judah, and then, ultimately, to the Kingship and Lordship of the Lion of the tribe of Judah (see Rev. 5:5).
- Later, the kings of Israel (excluding Saul) would be from the tribe of Judah.
- The prophecy, "**your brothers will praise you**", was partially fulfilled by King David and his successors.
- However, this prophecy primarily, and ultimately, pertains to the Lord Jesus Christ.

***Genesis 49: 10-12 - 10 The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. 11 Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: 12 His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.***

- The latter portion of the prophecy certainly could only apply to Jesus:
- The ultimate fulfillment would be when **Shiloh** comes.
- Though the English word **Shiloh** appears a total of 31 times in the Old Testament, in verse 10 is the only appearance of this form in Hebrew (**Shiylah**).
- Here, it literally means '**He whose it is**' and clearly is a prophecy of Christ.
- The throne of David belongs to Christ
- The other 30 references to Shiloh in the Old Testament refer to a place with the same name.

- In addition, the reference to him washing “*his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes*” also seems to refer to Christ.
- The focus has shifted from Judah to Shiloh (i.e., Christ).
- The symbolism to His shed blood seems evident as noted in (Revelation 19:16).
- There is also a reference in (Isaiah 63:1) of Christ returning from the battle of Armageddon with blood splattered upon Him.
- Though the blessing began upon Judah, it is clear, the Spirit of God shifted Jacob’s blessing to refer to Christ (Shiloh).

**Genesis 49 : 13 - *13 Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for an haven of ships; and his border shall be unto Zidon.***

- Of Zebulun, Jacob prophetically noted that he would someday dwell by the sea.
- This would later be fulfilled as Joshua gave Zebulun the region of Galilee along the shore of Lake Tiberias, reaching to the Mediterranean.
- Thus, the ports of Zebulun were a “*haven*” for the boats from the sometimes fierce storms that would blow on the sea of Galilee.
- But Zebulun was also an important “*haven*” in another respect: after fleeing King Herod, upon returning from Egypt, Joseph and Mary, with their child Jesus, took refuge in Galilee, which was in the territory allotted originally to Zebulun.

**Genesis 49 : 14-15 - *14 Issachar is a strong ass couching down between two burdens: 15 And he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute.***

- The land allotted to Issachar, as this prophecy predicts, was a “**pleasant**” land.
- The prophecy seems to indicate that Issachar, seeing how pleasant the land is, and not wanting to be removed from it, would be willing to “*become a servant unto tribute*”, rather than fight for the land.
- We may find a subtle indication of the fulfillment of this prophecy in Judges 1, where the battles of some of the tribes are described, as the tribes tried to overtake the Canaanites and take possession of the land God had given them.
- In Judges 1:27-36, the battles of Zebulun, Manasseh and Asher are mentioned.
- However, there is nothing mentioned here about Issachar, even though the territory of Zebulun, Manasseh and Asher surround the territory of Issachar.

**Genesis 49 : 16-17 - *16 Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. 17 Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.***

- To Dan, Jacob foretold that he would “*judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel.*”
- The name **Dan** literally means **judge** and in itself held some prophetic meaning.
- There is no record in Old Testament history of Dan as a person or as a whole tribe judging Israel.
- However, Samson, one of the notable judges, was from that tribe (see Judges 13).
- Next Jacob calls Dan a “*serpent by the way*”
- These are not very positive words to say about the tribe of Dan.

- This most likely refers to the fact that Dan was the first tribe that brought idolatry into the land (see Judges 18:30), causing the Danites, as well as those around them, to "*fall backwards*".
- It is perhaps because Dan becomes a "**serpent**" and "**viper**" that the tribe of Dan seems to get subtly slighted throughout the Bible.
- The tribe of Dan is omitted from the list of the twelve tribes which make up the 144,000 sealed from harm in the last days (see Rev. 7:4-8).
- Instead, the half-tribe of Manasseh is included, even though the tribe of Joseph is also included.
- The omission of Dan as part of the 144,000 has led some to believe that the beast described in Revelation (popularly known as the anti-christ) will come from the tribe of Dan.
- There is lots of speculation on the meaning of this from lots of Theologians

**Genesis 49 : 18 - 18 *I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD***

- Jacob in faith mentions how he had waited for the deliverance and salvation of God.

**Genesis 49 : 19 - 19 *Gad, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last.***

- Gad was one of the tribes who chose to stay on the east side of the Jordan in Gilead (see Num. 32), rather than cross the Jordan and be with the other tribes within the promised land.
- Because of this, they were isolated from the other tribes, and thus, were subject to attacks by border raiders (see Judg. 10:8; Judg. 11:4; I Chron. 5:18; Jer. 49:1).
- The tribes east of the Jordan, including Gad, were the first to be taken into captivity (I Chron. 5:26).

**Genesis 49 : 20 - 20 *Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties.***

- Asher was allotted the coastal area in the north of the promised land, towards Tyre
- This was a prosperous area.
- This area was known for its delicacies: wheat, olive oil, wine, milk and butter (see Deut. 33:24-25; I Kings 5:11).
- It is noted in I Kings 4:16 that Solomon centuries later would procure portions of his royal provisions from Asher.

**Genesis 49 : 21 – 21 *Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words.***

- To Naphtali, Jacob likened him to "*a hind let loose; he giveth goodly words.*"
- A *hind* refers to a **doe** or **deer**.
- The prophetess and judge, Deborah, was of the tribe of Naphtali and some have thought this to apply prophetically to her.
- Barak, at Deborah's request, took troops from Naphtali and Zebulun to fight against Sisera's army (see Judges 4-5).
- Jacob compared Naphtali to uttering goodly words which many believe to be the song of Deborah in Judges 5.

**Genesis 49 : 22-26** - *22 Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: 23 The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: 24 But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:) 25 Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: 26 The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.*

- Since Jacob has already prophesied about the sons of Joseph (see Gen. 48:15-20), and the tribes that will spring from Ephraim and Manasseh, here Jacob focuses on giving Joseph the more traditional death-bed blessing.
- Jacob speaks of Joseph's perseverance and uprightness through adversity.
- Though Joseph was persecuted and imprisoned, he was a "**fruitful bough**", a blessing to those who persecuted him.
- The blessings he brought overflowed to all those around him, even to other nations, as "**his branches run over the wall.**"
- Despite the fact that "*The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him* ", through all his distress and persecution "*his bow abode in strength* ".
- Though sorely hated by his brothers, nevertheless he abode strong by the "*God of Jacob.*"
- Reference to Joseph's righteous character is clear.
- Jacob also made clear that God had helped him and would continue to do so.
- His blessings would be of heaven above as well as the blessings of the earth (which he had so prudently overseen) and also of his children.
- Jacob even went on to note that the blessings of Joseph would exceed those of his forefathers Abraham and Isaac.
- Both of his sons were in the lineage of promise whereas only one son of Abraham and Isaac were so blessed.
- The fullest blessing would be given to Joseph.
- In fact, the largest proportion of the inheritance in the land went to Ephraim and Manasseh – Joseph's sons.

**Genesis 49 : 27** – *27 Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.*

- To Benjamin, Jacob blessed him prophetically, likening him to a wolf with its strength, courage, and valor.
- Down through centuries, Benjamin, though a small tribe, prevailed over greater enemies such as when they with 26,000 defeated an enemy of 400,000 in Judges 20:15-25.
- And this prophecy turned out to be true. Throughout the Bible, there are many examples of the fierceness of the war-like tribe of Benjamin (see Judges 5:14; Judges 19:16; I Sam. 11:1; II Sam. 2:15,16; II Sam. 12:2; II Chron. 14:8; II Chron. 17:16).

- Three Benjamites noted for their fierceness were **Ehud** (see Judges 3:1-22), **King Saul** (see I Sam. 22:17-20) and the **apostle Paul** (before he became a Christian, he violently persecuted the church, see Acts 9:1).
- Other notables of Benjamin were Mordecai and Esther.

***Genesis 49 : 28-33 - 28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel: and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them. 29 And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, 30 In the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a buryingplace. 31 There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah. 32 The purchase of the field and of the cave that is therein was from the children of Heth. 33 And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.***

- After Jacob had blessed his twelve sons, Jacob gave very specific instructions to his sons for his burial.
- He didn't just say, "Bury me in the promised land."
- He told them exactly where.
- It was very important to Jacob to be buried with his forefathers Abraham and Isaac.
- The three patriarchs of the nation of Israel-- are Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- Our God is called, many times, the God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.
- And so, it is fitting that these three patriarchs be buried together.
- After Jacob's death, these three belonged to the past, and yet, their burial together in the Promised Land pointed very much to the future.
- God had directly promised each of them--Abraham (see Gen. 15:18), Isaac (see Gen. 26:3), and Jacob (see Gen. 28:13)--that their descendants would be given the promised land.
- And so, Jacob's desire to be buried in the Promised Land can be seen as Jacob staking a claim to that Promised Land.