

The Blessings of Jacob

Genesis 49:1-27

Then Jacob Summoned his sons and said “Assemble yourselves that I may tell you What shall befall you in the days to come. Gather together and hear,O sons of Jacob; And listen to Israel your father.

Reuben you are my firstborn; My might and the beginning of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. Uncontrolled as water you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your fathers bed;Then you defiled it—he went up to my couch.

Here we see that Reuben forfeited his place of preeminence because of his fornication with Bilhah (Gen 35:22) his fathers concubine. Jacob here predicts that Reuben will be unstable and unpredictable and ineffective. The term used here 'Uncontrolled as water' means he is likely to boil over at any time which is a vivid illustration of instability. This is perhaps one of the reasons that no prophet, or Judge or even hero came from this tribe.

Simeon and Levi are brothers; their swords are implements of violence. Let my soul not enter into their council;Let not my glory be united with their assembly; Because in their anger they slew men, And in their self will they lamed Oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce;And their wrath, for it is cruel. I will disperse them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.

Here Simeon and Levi are condemned for their hot tempers and their anger and cruelty during their slaying of the Shechemites (34:25) Here in verse 49:6 Jacob disassociates himself from both their motives and actions. They cut the tendons of the Oxen which renders the animal virtually useless, so Jacob says I will disperse and scatter. Here Jacob intends to disperse them around from each other, and so we see that he gives Simeon an inheritance within the inheritance of Judah (Josh 19:1,1 Chron 4:39-43) Alternatively the Levites had no inheritance of their own, only some cities scattered throughout the land (Josh 21:1-3) The Levites were to redeem themselves by opposing the idolatry which was in connection to the golden calf.(Ex32:26) and so they became the priestly tribe.

Judah You are he whom your brothers shall praise; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies, your fathers children shall bow down before you Judah is a Lions 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? 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 peoples. Binding his donkey to the vine, He washed His garments in wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.

Here Judah is said to become the leader of the tribes, as strong as a young lion that has eaten His prey, with strength and security that no one would dare to rouse. This was predicted and came to pass in the time of King David some 640 years after the prophecy 'Shiloh comes' means 'He who brings peace' it is obviously speaking of Messiah who would come from the tribe of Judah.(Rev 5:5) At His Second Coming Messiah will receive international acknowledgement. In verses 11-12 we see described the Millennial prosperity, with the vines so plentiful everyone will have no problem tie an ass to them, even though these are herbivorous animals. There will also be wine as common as water and all people will be healthy.

Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea; He shall become a haven for ships and his border shall adjoin Sidon.

Here we see that Zebulun will have contact with many sea merchants,although Zebulun's inheritance contains no shoreline (Josh 19:10-16), this is most likely referring to the fact that Phoenicians stand between Zebulun and the sea, and the Phoenicians had the biggest fleet of their time in the Middle East.

Issachar is a strong donkey lying down between the sheepfolds.When he saw that a resting place was good and that the land was pleasant, he bowed his shoulder to bear burdens, and became a slave at force labour.

Issachar is said to be a strong ass powerful and mighty, however he prefers to lay down in the sheepfolds which means he is lazy. His main aim in life is to find a good resting place in a land that is pleasant;Hence his tribal allotment is the lush and fertile land of lower Galilee (Josh 19:17-23). Issachar's lazyness will result in the tribes slavery to the Canaanites and they become vassels to the people of the land and their oppression was so severe it was described as 'forced labour' as Israel were in Egypt.

Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a horned snake in the path, that bites the horses heels so that his rider falls backwards. For your salvation I await O Lord.

The Danites were responsible for introducing idolatry into Israel (Judg 18:30-31) this may be the reason that Dan was omitted from the tribes mentioned in Rev 7:4-8. Also Samson was a Danite who judged Israel for 20 years (Judg 13:2) there are two parts to the blessing Jacob gives to Dan, the first is in verse 16 and it begins with a pun; since the name Dan means Judge; thus he will live up to his name. This infers that the Danites will care for their own people, and although he is a half tribe having been born to Bilhah a concubine, he will have full status as the others in the tribes hierarchy of Israel. It also states that through treachery and violence they will overcome their enemies. In verse 18 the final line seems to be praising God for this ability, however true salvation can only come from the hand of God.

As for Gad raiders shall raid him, but he shall raid at their heels.

Gad was to settle east of the Jordan, but would be vulnerable to attack therefore he needs strong warriors which were eventually proven in battle (Chron 12:8-14).

Asher his food shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties.

With its fertile plain in the Western Galilee hill country north of Mount Carmel and trade routes to the sea, Asher will provide royal delicacies to the royal court in Jerusalem.

Naphtali is a doe let loose, he gives beautiful words. Naphtali is as a doe known for its swiftness along with his eloquent speech

Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; its branches run over a wall. The archers bitterly attacked him and shot at him and harassed him but his bow remained firm and his arms were agile from the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (From there is the shepherd the stone of Israel) from the God of your father who who helps you and by the Almighty who blesses you with Blessing of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The Blessings of your father have surpassed

the Blessings of my ancestors up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills; May they be on the head of Joseph and on the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers.

The blessings of Joseph are the most eloquent of all v23-24 are a brief biography of Joseph. His fruitful branches have reached over the wall of adversity in his life, such is the blessings of God on his life. So good are they Jacob says they are much greater than his own blessings from God. This is a point in fact as of all his brothers ,it is Joseph who's life in in the Bible in memorial.

Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; In the morning he devours his prey and in the evening he divides the spoil.

Here Jacob describes Benjamin as a ravenous wolf, the Hebrew actually reads 'a wolf that will tear' he is successful in war but also very cruel (Judges 20). The fulfillment of this prophecy is found in the settlement in the period of the conquest were the tribe of Benjamin receives an allotment in Canaan situated between the tribes of Ephraim and Judah and it remained a war zone through out Israel's history and the Benjamites became well known as a warrior tribe. They defied the combined forces of Israel's other tribes to fight the men of Gibeah and in two days slew 40,000 men of Israel their own army only numbered 26,700. Seven hundred Benjamites were left handed, and every one of them could sling stones at an hairs breadth and not miss. (Judg 20:16) .Both King Saul and the Apostle Paul both come from this tribe.(1 Sam 9:1-2, Rom 11:1)

Jacob was conscious that he was uttering great prophecies that would greatly effect the future of this world. Weak in his body ,but strong in his spirit Jacob this dying Patriarch was gifted with the sight of future for his children, but with implicit trust in his God, he informed without wavering those children he had sired of what their future would be. He knew them better than they knew themselves. He had left them in a state of blessing thanks to Joseph, but in his prophecy was warning them that this was not how it was going to stay, for their very different characters were going to change the future of this world irrevocably with the intervention of the Lord of Glory.