

Genesis 49

Verses 1 – 2

Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, “Assemble yourselves, so that I may tell you what will happen to you in the days to come.

**² Gather together and listen, sons of Jacob;
Yes, listen to Israel your father.**

This chapter is a prophecy concerning the 12 tribes of Israel but it also recounts some of the sins and shortcomings of Jacob's sons.

Verses 3 – 4

Son # 1

³ “Reuben**, you are my firstborn,
My might and the beginning of my strength,
Preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.**

**⁴ Uncontrollable as water, you shall not have preeminence,
Because you went up to your father's bed;
Then you defiled *it*—he went up to my couch.**

The love for a firstborn son is reflected in these words. God had promised to make Jacob a great nation and Reuben was the beginning of that fulfillment. But as we have seen that blessing was dependent on that person being a person of faith. The person didn't have to be blameless but they did need to walk in faith.

**⁴ Uncontrollable as water, you shall not have preeminence,
Because you went up to your father's bed;
Then you defiled *it*—he went up to my couch.**

Rivers have many jots in various directions because they follow the path of least resistance. This is what Jacob saw in his first son. His incest with Bilhah was a demonstration of that lifestyle and it cost him the birthright.

See Genesis 35:22

²² And it came about, while Israel was living in that land, that Reuben went and slept with his father's concubine Bilhah, and Israel heard *about it*.

Verses 5 - 7

Sons 2 and 3

**“Simeon and Levi are brothers;
Their swords are implements of violence.
⁶ May my soul not enter into their council;
May my glory not be united with their assembly;
For in their anger they killed men,
And in their self-will they lamed oxen.
⁷ Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce;
And their wrath, for it is cruel.
I will scatter them in Jacob,
And disperse them among Israel.**

**⁶ May my soul not enter into their council;
May my glory not be united with their assembly;
For in their anger they killed men,
And in their self-will they lamed oxen.**

This took place in Shechem after the rape of their sister Dinah. See Genesis 34. The part about laming oxen is not mentioned in Genesis 34, so Jacob is revealing an additional detail here about their cruelty toward man and beast.

**⁷ Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce;
And their wrath, for it is cruel.
I will scatter them in Jacob,
And disperse them among Israel.**

Both tribes were scattered in Israel.

1. At the time of the Canaan conquest Simeon had become the smallest tribe of Israel. See Numbers 26. Therefore Simeon received only a few cities within the limits of Judah. See Joshua 19:1-9

2. The tribe of Levi was scattered among the 12 tribes of Israel in the year 1392 BC, 300 years after Jacob predicted it. See Joshua 21

However, the tribe of Levi redeemed themselves by standing with Moses against those who committed idolatry. See Exodus 32:25 - 29

Verses 8 - 9

Son # 4

**“As for you, Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
Your father’s sons shall bow down to you.**

**⁹ Judah is a lion’s cub;
From the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He crouches, he lies down as a lion,
And as a lion, who dares to stir him up?**

**“As for you, Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
Your father’s sons shall bow down to you.**

There is a play on words here because the meaning of Judah is praise.

The first 3 sons of Jacob lost their right to leadership for the following reasons:

1. Reuben because of his act of rebellion concerning Bilhah.
2. Simeon and Levi because of their brutality against the men of Shechem.

Patriarchal leadership now belonged to the tribe of Judah. Judah had his own indiscretion with Tamar but he admitted his unrighteousness and took responsibility for it.

No man is without sin and therefore we should not expect our leaders to be perfect, however, we should not keep a person in leadership that does not repent of their sin.

Verse 10

**The scepter will not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler’s staff from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes,
And to him *shall* be the obedience of the peoples.**

Shiloh here refers to a person and not the place. Jacob foretold that Judah would be in the position of authority until the coming of the messiah.

However, this interpretation is questionable when you consider the history of Israel

When did the rule by Judah begin?

1. During their time of slavery

Joseph died in 1635 BC and about 30 years afterward they became slaves. Was there a tribal leader of the Israelites? The scripture is silent on this question.

2. In the wilderness,

Moses was the leader but Moses was from the tribe of Levi.

3. The time of the Judges

There were a number of leaders (Judges) from different tribes but there was no central government with a king like the other nations. Samuel was the last judge and he was from the tribe of Levi.

4. Saul became **the first king** but he was from the tribe of Benjamin. From the death of Joseph to the end of Saul's reign covered about 600 years but Judah didn't seem to be a dominate tribe during this time.

5. David and Solomon

Judah finally became the leading tribe of Israel under David in 1010 BC.

6. Israel divided into North and South

Judah only ruled two tribes, themselves and Simeon who was part of Judah. This continued from 930 BC until 722 BC when the 10 Northern tribes were taken captive.

7. The tribes of Judah and Simeon

The tribe of Judah was once again in control but that would only last 136 years. Judah was taken captive by Babylon in 586 BC.

8. The Persians 538 BC

King Cyrus of Persia allowed the Jews to return, and accepted a form of Jewish home rule in Jerusalem. The four leaders during that time were a mixed bag.

1. Zerubbabel was from the tribe of Judah

2. Joshua the High Priest was a Levite.

3. Ezra was from the tribe of Levi.

4. Nehemiah is believed to be from the tribe of Judah but that is not for certain.

9. The Greeks 332 BC

Alexander the Great took over Judea.

10. The Maccabees 164 BC

A Jewish tribe, the "Maccabees", revolted against the Hellenistic occupiers, and from 142 to 63 BC Judea was an independent, Jewish state. The Maccabee brothers were from the tribe of Levi.

11. The Roman Conquest 63 BC

The Jews were granted some measure of autonomy in Jerusalem. But Judea was in reality ruled from Rome.

12. Herod The Great 37 BC

Following a failed Jewish rebellion, the Romans turned Judea into a regular Roman province, and installed the Jewish King Herod the Great as administrator.

According to the works of Josephus, Herod was a descendant of Eleazar Maccabeus of the Hasmonians (tribe of Levi). After his death in 4 BCE the province was divided between Herod's sons.

13. Archelaus 4 BC to 6 AD

1. Herod Antipas ruled Galilee and the east bank of the Jordan
2. Philip ruled the Golan Heights in the north-east;
3. Archelaus became the ruler of Samaria and Judaea.

13. The prefects 6 AD to 44 AD

After Archelaus this territory became the “Province of Judaea” directly under the control of the Romans.

The first prefect of this new province was a Roman named Coponius. The Roman prefects continued to govern Judaea Province until 41 AD. Then Agrippa I was temporarily given authority there until 44 AD. After which Roman procurators governed the province.

14. Jesus was put to death in 28 AD

When you look at the history of Israel it seems Judah was only in charge for four short periods of time.

1. During the reign of David and Solomon 1010 BC to 930 BC 80 years
2. When only the southern kingdom was left 722 BC to 586 BC. 136 years
3. During the time of Zerubbabel 538 BC to 520 BC 18 years
4. During the time of Nehemiah 465 BC to 424 BC 41 years

So how should we interpret this verse?

God has always seen the faithful in Israel as the true Israel. This was true from the time of Abraham to the time of Christ. For this prophecy, Judah represented the faithful.

So even though the tribe of Judah did not have a ruler in charge of the land thru most of their history, the faithful were still ruling in God’s kingdom.

And when Jesus came, the faithful were obedient to him.

Verse 11-12

He ties *his* foal to the vine,
And his donkey's colt to the choice vine;
He washes his garments in wine,
And his robes in the blood of grapes.
¹² His eyes are dull from wine,
And his teeth white from milk.

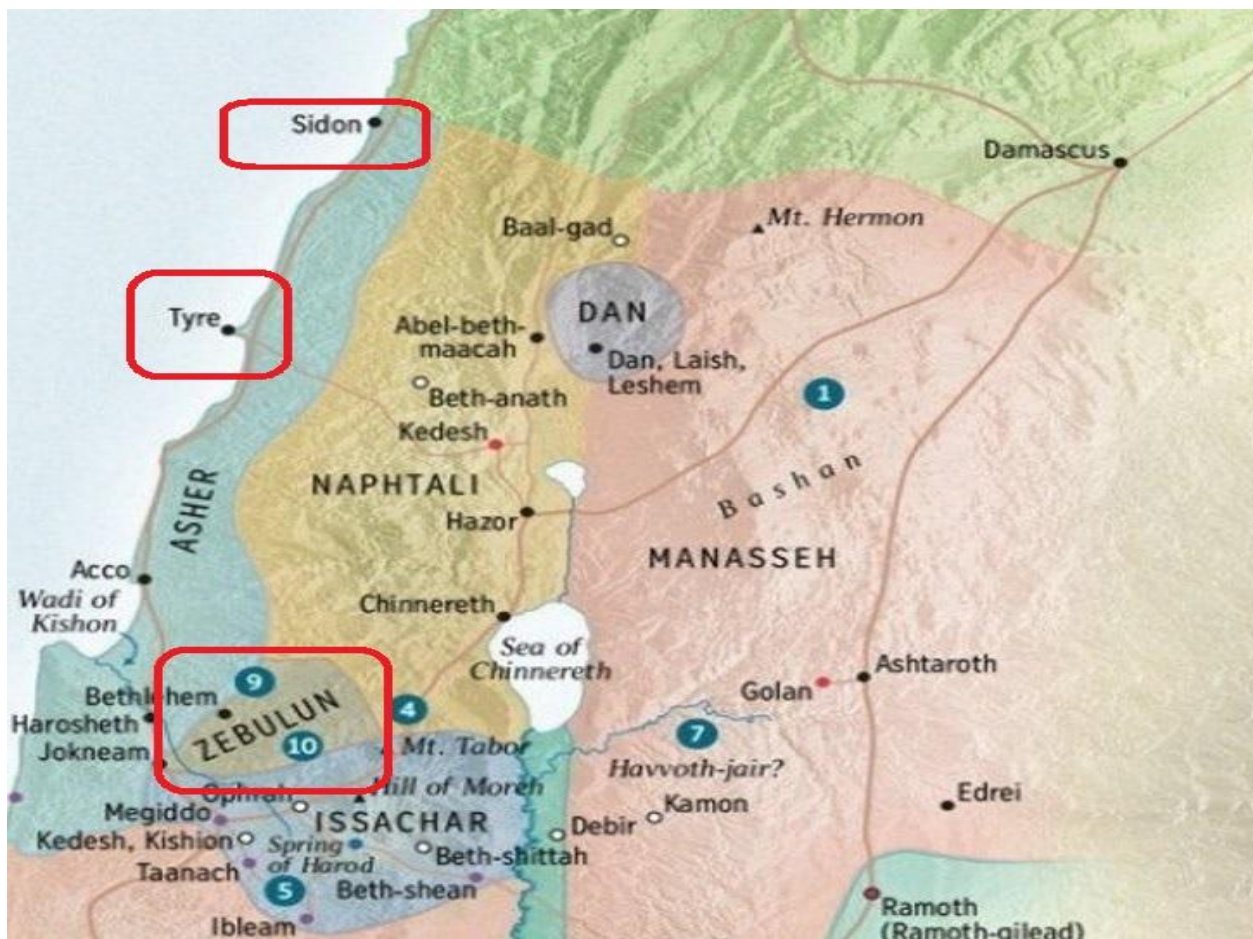
The land of Judah would provide abundant crops for its people.

Verse 13

Son # 5

“**Zebulun** will reside at the seashore;
And he *shall be* a harbor for ships,
And his flank *shall be* toward Sidon.

See pic 4905



Verse 14-15

Son # 6

“Issachar is a strong donkey,
Lying down between the sheepfolds.
¹⁵ When he saw that a resting place was good
And that the land was pleasant,
He bowed his shoulder to carry *burdens*,
And became a slave at forced labor.

This is a prophecy that Issachar would be strong but controllable. They accepted slavery rather than fight for their freedom and independence.

Verse 16-17

Son # 7

“Dan shall judge his people,
As one of the tribes of Israel.
¹⁷ Dan shall be a serpent in the way,
A horned viper in the path,
That bites the horse’s heels,
So that its rider falls backward.
For Your salvation I wait, Lord.

Dan shall judge his people
As one of the tribes of Israel.

Samson was from the tribe of Dan. He had an ongoing battle with the Philistines. In the end he destroyed their temple killing more in his death than when he lived.

See Judges 13 thru 16

¹⁷ Dan shall be a serpent in the way,
A horned viper in the path,
That bites the horse’s heels,
So that its rider falls backward.
For Your salvation I wait, Lord.

Dan was a small tribe but very dangerous. The Danites destroy Laish in northern Canaan. This was when part of the tribe of Dan moved to the most northern part of Israel. See Judges 17 and 18

Verse 19

Son # 8

“As for **Gad, a band of raiders shall attack him,
But he will attack at their heels.**

This is a word play on Gad's name which means troop. Gad was not lacking for men of bravery.

See 1 Chronicles 12:8, 14 - 15

⁸ From the Gadites valiant mighty men went over to David at the stronghold in the wilderness, men trained for war who could handle a large shield and spear, whose faces were like the faces of lions, and they were as swift as the gazelles on the mountains.

¹⁴ These men from the sons of Gad were captains of the army; the one who was least was equal to a hundred, and the greatest, to a thousand. ¹⁵ These are the ones who crossed the Jordan in the first month, when it was overflowing all its banks, and they put to flight all those in the valleys, to the east and to the west.

Verse 20

Son # 9

“As for **Asher, his food shall be rich,
And he will yield royal delicacies.**

Asher lived in the lowlands along the Mediterranean between Carmel and Tyre.

See Map 4910



Solomon supplied Hiram, the king of Tyre, with wheat and oil products from this region.

See 1 Kings 5:11

¹¹ Solomon then gave ^[h]Hiram ^[i]twenty thousand kors of wheat as food for his household, and ^[i]twenty kors of pure oil; this is what Solomon would give Hiram year by year. ¹² And the Lord gave wisdom to Solomon, just as He ^[k]promised him; and there was peace between Hiram and Solomon, and the two of them made a covenant.

Ezekiel spoke an interesting prophecy concerning Tyre.

See Video 4915 8.10 The city of Tyre

<http://www.levickfamily.com/8.10.html>

Verse 21

Son # 10

**“Naphtali is a doe let loose;
He utters beautiful words.**

The meaning of the name Naphtali is not clear and not much is recorded about this tribe in the bible. However, Naphtali and Zebulun did win a victory over Jabin a Canaanite king in Judges 4 and 5

See Judges 4:10

¹⁰ Barak summoned Zebulun and Naphtali to Kedesh, and ten thousand men went up with him; Deborah also went up with him.

Verses 22-24

Son # 11

**“Joseph is a fruitful branch,
A fruitful branch by a spring;
Its branches hang over a wall.
²³ The archers provoked him,
And shot at him and were hostile toward him;
²⁴ 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),**

**Joseph is a fruitful branch,
A fruitful branch by a spring;**

God used Joseph to save countless lives during the famine. He also had a large family.

**²³ The archers provoked him,
And shot *at him* and were hostile toward him;**

This is a reference to his brothers who were very hostile toward him.

**From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob
(From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),**

The Mighty One of Jacob is a reference to God. Then Jacob refers to God as the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel.

The "Shepherd" is a metaphor for God, portraying Him as a guide and protector.

The "Stone of Israel" is a descriptive name for God, symbolizing His strength, reliability, and unmovable nature, like a foundation or rock.

Verse 25-26

**From the God of your father who helps you,
And by the Almighty who blesses you
With blessings of heaven above,
Blessings of the deep that lies beneath,
Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.**

**²⁶ The blessings of your father
Have surpassed the blessings of my ancestors
Up to the furthest boundary of the everlasting hills;
May they be on the head of Joseph,
And on the top of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers.**

The word "blessings" is used 6 times in these two verses. Joseph received great blessings during his life and he became a blessing to many.

As was mentioned earlier, the tribe of Ephraim became the place where God put His name for over 300 years during the time of the judges

Verse 27

Son # 12

**“Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;
In the morning he devours the prey,
And in the evening he divides the spoils.”**

The fierce nature of this tribe was quite remarkable. The tribe of Benjamin killed 40,000 fellow Israelites before they were overcome. See Judges 19 thru 21

It's no surprise that King Saul and Saul of Tarsus came from this tribe.

Verse 28

²⁸ All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them. He blessed them, every one with the blessing appropriate to him.

Jacob had lived 147 years and he knew his sons pretty well but some of this had to be a revelation from God.

Verse 29-33

²⁹ Then he commanded them and said to them, “I am about to be gathered to 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 opposite Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field from Ephron the Hittite as a burial site. ³¹ There they buried Abraham and his wife Sarah, there they buried Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and there I buried Leah— ³² the field and the cave that is in it, purchased from the sons of Heth.” ³³ When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

Jacob knew he was about to die and he left no doubt as to where he should be buried.

We learn here that Leah was buried in Machpelah but nothing was said as to when that event occurred. Jacob loved Rachel more than Leah but Leah was given a place beside Jacob in the cave of the three Patriarchs. Leah was the mother of half of Israel.

Jacob died shortly after speaking these words.