

## Introduction

When Joe Warner was here a few weeks ago, we were discussing all the various prophetic words that had been given to me over the last forty years. Many of the words were very condemning and negative. We went through a period in the 90's where many pastors felt like they had to give prophetic words to validate their ministry. I believe that many of the words were soulish, rather than spirit-led. In any case, many of these words for me were negative. According to 1 Corinthians 14:3, the purpose of prophetic ministry is threefold: to encourage, exhort and to comfort. Many of the words did not meet these criteria. Additionally, many of the words were not words that should have been given publicly, if given at all. Finally, the people giving those words were generally not receptive to correction. I have a great appreciation for prophetic ministry, particularly prophetic ministry that is from the Holy Spirit and accurate.

In our text today, Moses records that Jacob blessed his sons with these prophetic words. While they are prophetic, some of the words were far from encouraging, exhorting, or comforting. Some of these words seem to be more judgmental in nature. His prophetic words were futuristic. Jacob summoned his sons and said, "Assemble yourselves that I may tell you **what will befall you in the days to come.**" God had revealed to Jacob some of the things that were going to happen to his sons in the days to come. Some of the words were things that were going to happen to their sons' tribes many centuries later. Some of his prophetic word to Judah pertained to the coming of the Messiah, which was roughly seventeen centuries later. So, these were not just common prophetic words that we give to one another to encourage and build up one another. In our passage, Israel gathered his sons to bless them. Then, he told each of them what would befall them. Finally, he charges his sons with his burial request.

### 1. Israel Gathers His Sons (Gen 49:1-2)

(Gen 49:1-2) "Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, "Assemble yourselves that I may tell you what will befall you in the days to come. {2} "Gather together and hear, O sons of Jacob; And listen to Israel your father."

Last week, Jacob counted Manasseh and Ephraim as his own sons, and blessed them. He was on his death bed and he has some things on his heart that he wants to share with his sons. So, after meeting with Joseph, he summoned all of his sons and told them to assemble themselves to hear what will befall them in the days to come. God had revealed some things to him, and he wanted to share these things with his sons.

There are two thoughts and each one is shared twice. The first thought is assemble. He tells them to assemble themselves and then he tells them to gather together. He wanted them to all be together to hear what God had placed on his heart. When we gather together or assemble together, we want to hear what God has for us. Not only do we gather to hear what God has for us, but we also gather to encourage one another. In Hebrews 10:24-25, God tells us to "consider how to stimulate one another to love and good deeds, not forsaking the assembling of ourselves together, as is the habit of some, but all the more as we see the day drawing near." We are to assemble ourselves together to stimulate one another, to encourage one another, and to strengthen one another. In 1 Corinthians 14:1, Paul shares that we are to earnestly desire spiritual gifts, especially that we might prophesy. Why? Because prophecy encourages, builds up, exerts, and strengthens. Our assembling together is not much different than what Jacob asked his sons to do.

The second thought that is mentioned twice is to hear or listen. Jacob said, “Gather together and hear, O sons of Jacob; And listen to Israel your father.” The same Hebrew word, *shama*, is used twice, but translated as different words. *Shama* means to hear intelligently, to give careful attention to, to heed, and to obey. If you do not apply or do according to what you have heard, then you have not really listened the way *shama* implies. Jacob wanted his sons to listen carefully, to understand, and to heed the words that he was going to share.

When we gather at church, it is not much different. God does not want us to be merely hearers who delude ourselves. (See James 1:22.) He wants us to be doers of the word. He wants us to apply the things that we are learning.

## 2. Israel's Prophetic Words For His Sons (Gen 49:3-28)

I have divided up verses 3-28 into eleven smaller passages, as Israel gave a single word to Simeon and Levi, and he spoke an individual word to the other ten sons. I will deal with each prophetic word separately, as it pertains to the son or sons.

### a. Reuben (Gen 49:3-4)

(Gen 49:3-4) “Reuben, you are my firstborn; My might and the beginning of my strength, Preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. {4} "Uncontrolled 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.”

Reuben is the firstborn son, and Israel acknowledges that. However, he tells him that he will not have preeminence. He lost the rights of the firstborn because of his devious behavior. In Genesis 35:22, after Rachel had died, he went into Bilhah, who was Rachel's maid and had become one of Israel's concubines. Israel said that he was his might and the beginning of his strength, preeminent in dignity and power. Those were the blessings that the firstborn should have had. However, Israel continued by saying that he was uncontrolled as water. The scholars say that uncontrolled as water refers to water that is boiling over. Reuben's passions were boiling over and in his passion he violated his father's bed. Because of this action, he was not going to have preeminence. There are consequences for our actions. Even though he was a young man, his foolish and devious behavior are going to cost him dearly.

We find this verified in 1 Chronicles 5:1, where we read that Reuben's birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, so that Reuben is not enrolled in the genealogy according to the birthright. Reuben paid a price for the sins that he had committed.

(1 Chron 5:1) “Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (for he was 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 he is not enrolled in the genealogy according to the birthright.”

Reuben did some good things. When his brothers wanted to kill him, he told them not to shed innocent blood, and he rescued Joseph. When he returned to the pit and Joseph was not there, he tore his clothes in repentance and protest of what his brothers had done. (See Genesis 37:21-29.) Reuben did a lot of good things, but he lost his preeminence of being the firstborn by defiling his father's bed. We are to honor our fathers and Reuben had dishonored his father.

b. **Simeon and Levi** (Gen 49:5-7)

(Gen 49:5-7) “Simeon and Levi are brothers; Their swords are implements of violence. {6} "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. {7} 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.”

Simeon and Levi were Leah's next two sons, and Israel speaks of their sin at Shechem. After Shechem had violated their sister, Dinah, they devised an evil plan and had all the men of Shechem circumcised. Then, when they were in pain on the third day, they came upon the city unawares and killed every male. Then, they looted the city and took all the livestock. Israel said, “Let not my soul enter into their council.” Israel was not in agreement of their plan, and is basically saying that he had no part of that evil thing that they did. He goes on to say that he did not want his glory be united with their assembly, because in their anger they slew men and lamed oxen. They took violent revenge and slew many innocent people. What Shechem had done was terrible, but what Simeon and Levi had done was also terrible. At that time, Israel had to leave the area because they had made them odious among the people of the area. If it were not for God's protection on Israel, the people of the area would have destroyed Israel and his family. (See Genesis 34:25-31.)

Again, we see that there are consequences for our actions. Israel said, “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.” When Joshua led the tribes of Israel into the Promised Land, Levi did not get land of their own. The tribe of Levi was scattered among all the other tribes of Israel. That did not mean that God did not love them. It did not mean that God would not use them. They were made priests and Levites and they served God. Their inheritance was the tithes and the sacrificial offerings. But, per Israel's prophetic word, they were scattered among the other tribes.

c. **Judah** (Gen 49:8-12)

(Gen 49:8-12) “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 whelp; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him up? {10} The scepter shall 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. {11} 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.”

Israel's third word is to Judah, and he begins by speaking a word about his name. Judah means praise, and Israel said that his brothers would praise him. He speaks about Judah's dominion over his enemies. He said that his hand shall be on the neck of his enemies. He also speaks of his preeminence over his brothers, and that they would bow down to him.

Israel refers to Judah as a lion. Israel is prophesying about the line of Christ coming through Judah. Jesus is the Lion of Judah. When it says that the scepter shall not depart from Judah, it is referring to the rule and reign of Christ. The scepter would not depart from Christ. He will rule

forever and ever. All the tribes of Israel will bow down before Christ. Every knee will bow and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord. (See Philippians 2:10-11.)

Some scholars say that Shiloh is more than a name for towns, but is a name for the Messiah. Still others, like Jamieson Faucet, say that the term Shiloh means “the sent,” and it is fulfilled in John 17:3, which says, “This is eternal life, that they may know You, the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom You have sent.” Jesus is the Sent One. Again, this prophetic word is about the line of Christ coming through Judah.

The references to tying a colt to the vine, having eyes dull from wine and teeth white from milk all refer to peace and prosperity. The main industry was wine and goats. So, there would be an abundance of wine and goats milk. And, tying a colt to the vine speaks of resting when the work is done.

Israel talks about washing garments with wine and robes with the blood of grapes. Again, I believe this is referring to Christ. Though our sins are as scarlet, He makes them white as snow. (See Isaiah 1:18.) It is the blood of Christ that paid for our sins and made us white as snow. The wine represents Christ's blood that was shed for us. When we share in the Lord's Supper, we drink the wine in remembrance that He shed His blood for us. The wine represents the New Covenant that we have with God. (See Matthew 26:27-28.)

d. **Zebulun** (Gen 49:13)

(Gen 49:13) “Zebulun will dwell at the seashore; and he *shall be* a haven for ships, and his flank *shall be* toward Sidon.”

Zebulun comes from the word zabal, which means to dwell. Israel's word to Zebulun is taken from the meaning of his name. When we look at the territory that he received two hundred years later, it was not on the shoreline of the Mediterranean, and it was not on the shoreline of the Sea of Gallilee. It was sandwiched in between the two. It also did not extend to Sidon. Some commentaries say that Sidon refers to the territory of Sidon rather than the city of Sidon. In that case, Zebulun's territory did have Sidon as its flank. Different commentaries give different explanations about the interpretation of this prophecy. One suggested that it is not speaking of a literal dwelling place, but more of a symbolic one. The ships brought in great wealth, and that Zebulun would be a dwelling place for the wealth that comes in.

e. **Issachar** (Gen 49:14-15)

(Gen 49:14-15) “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 bear *burdens*, and became a slave at forced labor.”

Issachar is referred to as a strong donkey, which is a beast of burden. He would lay down or rest between the sheepfolds. The land of Zebulun would be good and pleasant and suitable for sheep. Israel also prophesied that Zebulun would rather bear a burden and submit to the rule of others, and become a slave at forced labor than fight for self-rule. They were going to pursue rest rather than political power or rule. In Judges 5:14-15, Issachar is praised for their bravery in connection with Zebulun. But, the “Ease at the cost of liberty will be the characteristic of the tribe of Issachar.” (Keil and Delitzsch)

f. **Dan** (Gen 49:16-18)

(Gen 49:16-18) “Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. { 17 } Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a horned snake in the path, that bites the horse's heels, so that his rider falls backward. { 18 } For Your salvation I wait, O LORD.”

Israel again uses the meaning of a name to speak of his future. Dan means to judge. When Rachel named her son, Dan, it was for a different reason. She said, God has vindicated or judged me, and has heard my voice and has given me a son. Leah had been bearing children, but her womb had been closed. She cried out to God and gave her maid, Bilhah, to Jacob. Bilhah conceived and gave birth to Dan. (See Genesis 30:1-6.)

Israel's word is not about God judging Rachel, but God using Dan to judge his people. Even though Dan was the son of a concubine, he was not inferior to his brothers and would rule or judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Israel also said that Dan would be a serpent in the way, a horned snake in the path that bites the horse's heels. The horned snake is the same color as the sand and is difficult to see, yet it is extremely venomous. This word implies that those who do not respect Dan and his position among the sons of Israel would suffer the consequences. This tribe would be powerful and needs to be respected by others.

g. **Gad** (Gen 49:19)

(Gen 49:19) “As for Gad, raiders shall raid him, but he will raid *at* their heels.”

Israel speaks of Gad's valor and bravery. When people come to raid him, he will fight back and put them to flight, raiding at their heels. The KJV says that “a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last.” So, the tribe of Gad would be brave fighters, who would be unrelenting and would overcome those who attack them. We get a glimpse of this bravery in 1 Chronicles 12:8. David had fled to the wilderness when Saul was trying to kill him. While there, the Gadites “*came over to David in the stronghold in the wilderness, mighty men of valor, men trained for war, who could handle shield and spear, and whose faces were like the faces of lions, and they were as swift as the gazelles on the mountains.*”

In Revelations 12:11, we are told three things about being overcomers. First, we overcome by the blood of the Lamb. Jesus has already secured the final victory. We become overcomers when we confess Christ as our Lord and become part of the His kingdom of light. Second, we overcome by the word of our testimony. We need to be ready to share our testimony at all times. Third, we overcome by not loving our life, even unto death. When we are secure in our faith, knowing that when we leave this earthly life that we will be with Jesus in heaven, it gives us a boldness and courage that overcomes.

h. **Asher** (Gen 49:20)

(Gen 49:20) “As for Asher, his food shall be rich, and he will yield royal dainties.”

The KJV says “*Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties.*” Fat generally refers to the very best portion. When Abel gave the fat portion to the Lord, he gave his very best. Asher's inheritance would produce an abundance of food and he would eat off of the fat of the land. It would be of excellent quality that would be fit for kings.

The inheritance that he eventually received was the lowlands of Carmel on the Mediterranean, which was one of the most fertile parts of Canaan. It abounded in wheat and oil, and when Solomon was building the temple, he made a deal with Hiram and gave him twenty thousand measures of wheat and twenty measures of oil. (See 1 Kings 5:8-12.) Much of that wheat and oil probably came from Asher's territory.

i. **Naphtali** (Gen 49:21)

(Gen 49:21) "Naphtali is a doe let loose, he gives beautiful words."

Israel said that Naphtali was a doe or hind let loose. A doe or hind is a graceful animal that is very quick and agile, and able to avoid being captured. This picture implies that Naphtali would be free and loose. Israel also said that he gives beautiful or goodly words. The tribe of Naphtali would be known for its gracious and eloquent words.

We are exhorted by the apostle Paul in Colossians 4:6 to "*Let your speech always be with grace, as though seasoned with salt, so that you will know how you should respond to each person.*" Gracious speech, beautiful or goodly words, endear people and open up the doors of communication.

In Ephesians 4:29, Paul tells us "*Let no unwholesome word proceed from your mouth, but only such a word as is good for edification according to the need of the moment, so that it will give grace to those who hear.*" We are to set a guard over our mouth and anything that does not build up others and give grace to them should not be allowed to come out of our mouth. We need to be like Naphtali and use beautiful, goodly, and gracious words with people.

j. **Joseph** (Gen 49:22-26)

(Gen 49:22-26) "Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; *its* branches run over a wall. {23} The archers bitterly attacked him, and shot *at him* and harassed 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), {25} 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 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."

Israel says four things about Joseph. First, he says that he will be fruitful. He uses the image of a fruitful bough by a spring that runs over a wall. The actual Hebrew word is ben, which means son. It has been translated as bough because of the imagery in the verse. The bough is the main branch of a tree. When I looked at the territories of Israel on a map and then the territory of Joseph, particularly Manasseh, it almost looks like the main branches of a tree going out on both sides. So, Joseph would be fruitful. By the way, the name, Joseph, means to add another or to bring increase. When Rachel had Joseph, she immediately asked God for another son, and named Joseph as a prayer to God. God answered that prayer in giving her Benjamin.

The second thing that Israel prophesied over Joseph is that God would help and protect him. When archers and others attacked, God would help him. He would remain strong and agile because of God, the Mighty One, the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel.

The third thing that Israel prophesies over Joseph is that God would bless him with the blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, and the blessings of the breasts and of the womb. His blessings would surpass the blessings of his fathers and ancestors.

Finally, Israel said that this will come upon the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers. Joseph has been the one distinguished from his brothers all of his life. He was favored by his father and was given a varicolored tunic. He was given dreams about the sheaves that would bow down. He was given dreams about the sun and moon bowing down to him. He was distinguished from his brothers all of his life. God had special plans for this wise and discerning man of integrity. God was with Joseph and had helped him, and blessed him. These blessings would continue on through his descendants.

God wants all of us to be fruitful. He is glorified when we are fruitful. (See John 15:8.) He expects us to be fruitful, and He expects good fruit from our lives. He tells us that the key to our fruitfulness is to abide in Him. He is the vine and we are the branches. If we abide in Him we will bear much fruit, but apart from Him we will bear nothing. Are you abiding in Him? Are you spending time in His word? Are you spending time at His feet listening to Him? Are you spending time worshipping Him? Are you abiding in Him? If so, you will bear much fruit.

God is with us. He is Immanuel. He is our Helper, our Ebenezer. He has given us a Helper, the paracletos, the Holy Spirit. (See John 14:16-17.) God is with us at all times. Greater is He who is with us than He who is in the world. Just as God was with Joseph, He is with us.

Just as God blessed Joseph, He has blessed us. In Ephesians 1:3, we read that He has blessed us with EVERY spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ. I believe that we are to be full of gratitude for the blessings He has given us. Psalm 103:1-5 tells us to bless the Lord and forget not any of his benefits. We need to thank God for His blessings and name them one by one.

Finally, God has made us distinguished from others. In 1 Peter 2:9, we are called a chosen race, a royal priesthood, a holy nation, a people for God's own possession. The KJV says that we are a peculiar people. We are peculiar and distinguished from others. God wants us different. He made us that way so that we would stand out. He wants us to be a light set on a hill. (See Matthew 5:14-16.) He wants us to proclaim the excellencies of Him who has called us out of darkness into His marvelous light.

k. **Benjamin** (Gen 49:27-28)

(Gen 49:27-28) "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; In the morning he devours the prey, And in the evening he divides the spoil." {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."

Finally, Israel gets down to his twelfth son, Benjamin. He said that Benjamin is a ravenous wolf that devours his prey in the morning and in the evening he divides the spoil. The two times that a wolf hunts is in the morning and evening. The imagery of a wolf is one that is fearless, aggressive, and is unrelenting in pursuing its prey. Benjamin would be known for its warlike character and persistent pursuit of prey. Both Saul and Jonathan came out of the tribe of Benjamin.

Moses wraps up this section by saying that these are the blessings that Israel gave to his sons. As I mentioned at the start, some of these appear to be more of a judgment than a blessing, but Moses referred to them as blessings that were appropriate to each of them.

### 3. Israel Charges His Sons With His Burial Request

(Gen 49:29-33) “Then he charged 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 before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field from Ephron the Hittite for 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 charging his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.”

In Genesis 47, Israel had called for his son Joseph, and he had given his burial request. He made Joseph place his hand under his thigh and swear to him that he would carry him out of Egypt and bury him in “their burial place.”

(Gen 47:29-31) “When the time for Israel to die drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "Please, if I have found favor in your sight, place now your hand under my thigh and deal with me in kindness and faithfulness. Please do not bury me in Egypt, {30} but when I lie down with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." And he said, "I will do as you have said." {31} He said, "Swear to me." So he swore to him. Then Israel bowed in worship at the head of the bed.

Shortly after that he fell sick and Joseph heard about it, and he brought his sons to visit Dad. We covered that in Genesis 48. Now, Israel has called all his sons together, and he charges all of them with burying him at “their burial place,” which is the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham had bought from Ephron. It is known as the Cave of the Patriarchs. The Jews and Muslims have fought over the site, and both consider it a holy place. In 1967 the Jews took the existing mosque and divided the structure into two facilities, a synagogue and a mosque. The Jews go into one side of it and the other side is reserved for Muslims. It is appropriately named the Cave of the Patriarchs because Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah, Jacob's first wife, were all buried there. It was very special to Israel and he wanted to make sure that he was buried there.

### Conclusion and Applications

Many years ago a man tried to stump me and others by asking what tribe of Israel I was part of. To me, Jesus has a bride, not ten tribes. Jesus has a church made up of Jews and Gentiles. Yes, we are grafted in, but we are grafted into the vine, and that is Jesus. But, if you ever get asked, we are in Christ, and the Messiah was from the tribe of Judah. That was in our text today. It is in Christ that we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.

As we wrap up this morning, are you in Christ? Have you received Christ, the Messiah, into your life? Do you believe that Jesus came and died for our sins, and that He was raised from the dead? If you believe that, have you confessed Jesus as your Lord and Master? It is in Christ that we receive the blessings of Abraham, Isaac, and Israel. It is in Christ that we have every spiritual

blessing in the heavenly places. And it is by abiding in Christ that we produce fruit and glorify our Father in heaven.

If you have never received Christ, let me encourage you to receive Christ this morning. Today is Father's Day. What better day to receive Christ and have your relationship with our Heavenly Father restored. Let's pray.

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