

## GENESIS: Where Grace Begins

### The Fates of the 12 Tribes – Genesis 49:1-27

**49** Then Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in days to come. <sup>2</sup>"Assemble and listen, O sons of Jacob, listen to Israel your father."  
**Genesis 49:1-2 ESV**

Jacob's words in this blessing function \_\_\_\_\_. "We are not to consider this address as the expression of private feelings of affection, resentment, or partiality; but as the language of the Holy Ghost, declaring the purpose of God respecting the character, circumstances, and situation of the tribes which descended from the sons of Jacob, and which may be traced in their histories." – Matthew Henry

#### REUBEN

*"Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the firstfruits of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. Unstable 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!"*

**Genesis 49:3-4 ESV**

Reuben \_\_\_\_\_ his rightful place as the family's leader. When Reuben's descendants settled in the Transjordan, they soon disappeared from history.

No \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ or \_\_\_\_\_ would ever come from the tribe of Reuben.

#### SIMEON AND LEVI

*"Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. Let my soul come not into their council; O my glory, be not joined to their company. For in their anger they killed men, and in their willfulness they hamstrung oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel."*

**Genesis 49:5-7 ESV**

Simeon and Levi would not receive the blessing of the first-born because they were men of \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_.

Jacob's prophetic words came true in the history of the nation of Israel. The tribe of Judah eventually absorbed the Simeonites, and they disappeared from history. The Levites are shown some grace. Moses, a son of Levi, later mediates the old covenant. God would also choose the Levites to be His priests. Still, the Levites would not have their own territory. God prevented both of these tribes from dominating the rest.

## JUDAH

*"Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him?"*

### Genesis 49:8-9 ESV

Judah was given great favor by God. Besides the honor of giving name to the \_\_\_\_\_, both \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ would spring from Judah. Judah's brothers' descendants would bow down to his descendants, just as Judah and his brothers had bowed down to Joseph.

*The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.*

### Genesis 49:10 ESV

The scepter symbolizes \_\_\_\_\_. Ancient Jewish and Christian commentators almost uniformly have interpreted this verse as \_\_\_\_\_. So, Jacob prophesies of the Messiah:

*Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.*

### Genesis 49:11-12 ESV

This is deliberate language of \_\_\_\_\_. Every line of these verses speaks of exuberant, intoxicating abundance: it is the golden age of the Coming One, whose universal rule was glimpsed in verse 10.

## ZEBULUN

*"Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea; he shall become a haven for ships, and his border shall be at Sidon."*

### Genesis 49:13 ESV

Even though Zebulun had no ports of its own, its prime location would bring prosperity from the sea. Zebulun would become prosperous through international trade.

## ISSACHAR

*"Issachar is a strong donkey, crouching between the sheepfolds. He saw that a resting place was good, and that the land was pleasant, so he bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant at forced labor."*

### Genesis 49:14-15 ESV

Jacob's blessing to Issachar emphasizes the strength of his descendants. But, like a donkey, they will be forced to \_\_\_\_\_.

## DAN

*"Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that his rider falls backward."*

**Genesis 49:16-17 ESV**

This is the first time in Genesis 49 that Jacob blesses a son by a \_\_\_\_\_. Matthew Henry comments: "Dan shall be incorporated by as good a charter as any of the other tribes."

Dan will be \_\_\_\_\_ compared to his prey but far \_\_\_\_\_ than his victim suspects. Sampson, perhaps the most well-known of all the judges emerges from this tribe centuries after Jacob. Samson, by his stealth and trickery, defeated the Philistines. For that reason, medieval Jewish commentators understood the metaphor of the viper to be Sampson. Though the tribe of Dan saved Israel in Samson's day, the rest of the tribe's history wouldn't be so celebrated. In Judges 17-18, the Danites steal an idol and slaughter a quiet, unsuspecting people. Both of these activities violate God's will.

## A SHOUT OF LONGING AND PRAYER

After blessing Dan, Jacob cries out, *"I wait for your salvation, O Lord."* (v. 18).

This is both a shout of longing and a prayer of faith in the midst of the oracles.

"Though it may not seem to fit the context at first, there is good reason for him to pause and plead for his family's redemption. His words regarding Dan and Gad indicate that his offspring (including the other tribes) will be troubled by enemies and need divine help in order to survive."

## GAD

*"Raiders shall raid Gad, but he shall raid at their heels."*

**Genesis 49:19 ESV**

Gad will live the \_\_\_\_\_ life. He will have to deal consistently with raiding armies because the tribe later settles east of the Jordan river, on the border with other nations (Josh. 13:24–28). When Jacob says, *"Gad will raid at their heels,"* he's predicting that the tribe will overcome their foes. The Gadites eventually become known for their military skill (1 Chron. 5:18–22).

## ASHER

*"Asher's food shall be rich, and he shall yield royal delicacies."*

**Genesis 49:20 ESV**

Jacob speaks of great \_\_\_\_\_ for the tribe of Asher. We know from Joshua 19 that Asher will settle along the shore of the Mediterranean in a fertile area (Josh. 19:24–31). This location was

perfect because nearby trading routes enabled Asher's offspring to provide "royal delicacies" to palaces near and far. The prophetess Anna, who faithfully worshiped and proclaimed God's redemption, came from the tribe of Asher (Luke 2:36–38).

## **NAPHTALI**

*"Naphtali is a doe let loose that bears beautiful fawns."*

**Genesis 49:21 ESV**

Compared to a graceful doe, the tribe of Naphtali will \_\_\_\_\_, nourished by the rich natural resources of upper Galilee.

## **BENJAMIN**

*"Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey and at evening dividing the spoil."*

**Genesis 49:27 ESV**

Benjamin is characterized as a wolf—a description parallel to Judah's being termed a lion. Like Judah, Benjamin would be \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_ in battle. In coming centuries, when Israel went to war, they cried out, "After you, O Benjamin!"

## **JOSEPH**

*"Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall. The archers bitterly attacked him, shot at him, and harassed him severely, yet his bow remained unmoved; his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), by the God of your father who will help you, by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that crouches beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father are mighty beyond the blessings of my parents, up to the bounties of the everlasting hills. May they be on the head of Joseph, and on the brow of him who was set apart from his brothers."*

**Genesis 49:22-26 ESV**

Jacob reserves his longest blessing for Joseph, confirming his special standing among the brothers.

## **CONCLUSION**

What does this history lesson have to do with my life today?

Judah's reign over the nations looks forward to a glorious future for the King from that tribe and all those whom He represents. Jesus is that King! Romans 11 teaches us that the Lord takes Gentiles according to the flesh and makes them full citizens of His people according to the heart (Rom. 11). Because we are grafted into the tree of Israel by faith when we trust in Christ alone, we can be assured that we will enjoy the future glory promised to Israel.

According to Ephesians 1, God has “blessed us in Christ with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places, even as he chose us in him before the foundation of the world” (Ephesians 1:3, 4a). Every spiritual blessing encompasses all the gifts of the Holy Spirit given by God the Father to those who have experienced His salvation in Jesus Christ.

Jesus proclaimed, “When the Son of Man comes in his glory, and all the angels with him, then he will sit on the throne of his glory...Then the king will say to those at his right hand, ‘Come, you that are blessed by my Father, inherit the kingdom prepared for you from the foundation of the world’ ” (Matt. 25:31, 34). This is our hope!

