

Jacob's Prophecy 4-20-08

Genesis 49

Jacob is dying. It is time for him to pronounce his final blessing on each son. *"Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come."* There is a prophetic ring to this that will echo through time. In the future of Israel, prophets would call the people together to share with them what God had decreed. (Isaiah 34:1)

Jacob began this poem (the longest one in Genesis) addressing the eldest son, Reuben. Reuben must have trembled at the thought of what was coming. He knew his bid for taking over the clan by sleeping with one of Jacob's wives had brought about the wrath of his father, but did it also bring the wrath of God?

This idea of consequences is deeply imbedded in Jewish thought. Sin and its just punishment could be seen as the theme of the first 11 chapters of Genesis. The Jewish Civil New Year, Rosh Hashanah, is followed 10 days later by the fall festival of Yom Kippur or Day of Atonement. During those ten days, it is believed that God writes the name of each repentant person in the Book of Life. On the Day of Atonement, the names are sealed. One's contrition during this time is considered to determine their fate for the coming year. Religious Jews have always believed in a connection with humble repentance and their future.

The modern world is losing this sense of accountability to God. The reality of reaping and sowing isn't being challenged as much as the definition of an evil action is being redefined. (Isaiah 5:20) As if we could tell God what should be acceptable to Him. Unless we are aware of sin, we see no consequences or need of repentance. The attempt in our day to see truth as relative is really an attempt to have the freedom to express the evil desires of our hearts without the fear of consequences in this life or the next. (Job 4:8)

A recently popular New Age speaker promoted by a TV celebrity is telling us to live in the now. Though I have not yet read his book, I've seen some interviews and heard a few of his lectures. False doctrine is nearly always partially true. While it is important to not let the pain and disappointments of the past dominate your thought life in the present, the past does have consequences. We learn from our mistakes so that we don't repeat them in the present. We should consider the consequences of our present thoughts that result in actions that affect our future. We are part of a larger story, one with a past that affects our present and our present that has much to do with our future. That doesn't have to lessen the experience of the moment. Instead it can enhance your experience of the moment. What New Age objects to are the limits and boundaries an eternal perspective puts on the present. Those limits are there for our good, as we will see in the lives of the sons of Jacob. Notice how the past, present and future are all bound up in the reality of the prophecies of Jacob.

The word to Reuben began wonderfully. ³ *"Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honor, excelling in power.* A product of Jacob's virility, he began with great promise. But Jacob's next words relayed the

Commented [notes1]: 1 Come near, you nations, and listen; pay attention, you peoples! Let the earth hear, and all that is in it, the world, and all that comes out of it!
Isaiah 34:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes2]: 20 Woe to those who call evil good and good evil, who put darkness for light and light for darkness, who put bitter for sweet and sweet for bitter.
Isaiah 5:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes3]: 8 As I have observed, those who plow evil and those who sow trouble reap it.
Job 4:8 (NIV)

consequences of Reuben's actions. ⁴ *Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel, for you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch and defiled it.* Five words predicted the price of his sin, "You will no longer excel."

The waves of the sea are used in Scripture to describe destructive and evil power. (Isaiah 57:20) The tribe of Reuben was not noted for excelling in any positive thing in Israel's future. The only time it took the lead was in rebellion against Moses. (Numbers 16:1) It wasn't long after entering the Promised Land that the tribe faded into history. Consequences from sin are inevitable. If we could only see them ahead of time, we would exercise much greater caution. We wouldn't even allow temptation a second glance, if we could just see the damage we would reap. (Hosea 8:7)

The next two brothers were grouped together. They were the brothers of Dinah and it was their reaction to her being raped that disqualified them from a blessing of promise. ⁵ *"Simeon and Levi are brothers-- their swords are weapons of violence. ⁶ Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly, for they have killed men in their anger and hamstringed oxen as they pleased.* This was their unguarded moment when they acted out their rage without thought for the consequences. Together they killed all the men of a city.

Jacob mentions their hamstringing the oxen as an example of their evil hearts. The oxen were used for plowing, and the Israelites were shepherds. The oxen were of no use to them and so they made them of no use to anyone else. It was senseless brutality and waste out of sheer anger. (Ecclesiastes 7:9)

The next verse describes the consequences of their actions. ⁷ *Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel.* Jacob used his names referring to the Promised Land. Both Simeon and Levi were to be disbursed and scattered in the land. The tribe of Simeon disappeared after the conquest of the land, absorbed into the tribe of Judah.

Levi became the priestly tribe and was required to be scattered around the nation to relay the teachings of the Law. (Joshua 21:41) Though they were scattered as predicted, their role was redeemed by their bold willingness to stand with God's leader, Moses, when others went the way of the fleshly nature. (Exodus 32:25-29) Just because previous generations gave in to sin, doesn't mean you have to. You can change the course of the future by boldly standing for God.

Now we come to the fourth son, Judah. He was certainly not sinless. He had left the clan, sired a son through his dead son's wife who he thought was a Canaanite shrine prostitute. But through these painful experiences, he humbled himself and was changed. He even foreshadowed Christ in his offering to take Benjamin's place as a prisoner in Egypt. The bulk of Jacob's prophetic words will be to Judah and Joseph.

For us to really see the significance of the prophecy, we have to step back and look at the big picture. Genesis 1-11 recorded primeval history. It was a dark history filled with sin and judgment. There was the fall of man, the first murder, the need for the flood, and the need to confound the languages of man, all a judgment on wickedness.

Commented [notes4]: 20 But the wicked are like the tossing sea, which cannot rest, whose waves cast up mire and mud.
Isaiah 57:20 (NIV)

Commented [notes5]: 1 Korah son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and certain Reubenites-- Dathan and Abiram, sons of Eliab, and On son of Peleth--became insolent[1
Num 16:1 (NIV)

Commented [notes6]: 7 "They sow the wind and reap the whirlwind. The stalk has no head; it will produce no flour. Were it to yield grain, foreigners would swallow it up.
Hosea 8:7 (NIV)

Commented [notes7]: 9 Do not be quickly provoked in your spirit, for anger resides in the lap of fools.
Eccl 7:9 (NIV)

Commented [notes8]: Joshua 21:41 (NIV)
41 The towns of the Levites in the territory held by the Israelites were forty-eight in all, together with their pasturelands.

Commented [notes9]: Exodus 32:25-29 (NIV)
25 Moses saw that the people were running wild and that Aaron had let them get out of control and so become a laughingstock to their enemies.
26 So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Whoever is for the LORD, come to me." And all the Levites rallied to him.
27 Then he said to them, "This is what the LORD, the God of Israel, says: 'Each man strap a sword to his side. Go back and forth through the camp from one end to the other, each killing his brother and friend and neighbor.'"
28 The Levites did as Moses commanded, and that day about three thousand of the people died.
29 Then Moses said, "You have been set apart to the LORD today, for you were against your own sons and brothers, and he has blessed you this day."

Hope came back into the picture at the beginning of the patriarchal section in Genesis 12. We saw God again communing with man and promising blessing to flow to the world through the descendents of Abraham. (Galatians 3:8) The patriarchal story was filled with highs and lows so much like our own stories, but the thread of hope continued as the promises were repeated to each generation.

That brings us to this promise to Judah. We watched the promise go from one generation to another, and now we have 12 sons. The promised seed will come through one of the 12. ⁸ "Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you. This is reminiscent of Isaac's blessing given to Jacob. (27:29) Judah will be honored by his brothers just as Joseph's brothers bowed before Joseph. He will be victorious over his enemies.

⁹ You are a lion's cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness--who dares to rouse him? The tribe of Judah is compared to a lion. The book of Revelation will specifically refer to the Messiah as the Lion of the tribe of Judah. (Revelation 5:5)

¹⁰ The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his. Judah will be the ruling tribe, the tribe from which the kings of Israel would come, that is, until the One to whom all authority should be given comes. Who is this One to whom the nations will bow in obedience? Who deserves the tribute of nations (Shiloh)? He is the lion of the tribe of Judah, Christ Jesus. If you think I'm just reading that into the text, consider Jesus' words after His victory over death and the grave. ¹⁸ Then Jesus came to them and said, "All authority in heaven and on earth has been given to me. Matthew 28:18 (NIV) Since the coming of the Messiah, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, there has been no ruler from the tribe of Judah, just as Jacob predicted. The nations do not yet submit themselves to Him, but many people in every nation do. The day is coming when all will submit in the Millennial Kingdom. (Philippians 2:10-11)

¹¹ He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes. The prophecy goes on to express in poetic form the abundance of that coming kingdom. This One will tie his donkey to the choicest branch. There will be such an abundance of grapes and wine that you won't worry about your donkey eating the choice branches you've tied it to. There are plenty to spare. In fact, there is so much wine that you could use it instead of water to wash your clothes. This is language that implies such abundance as to be almost beyond imagination. This evocative imagery gives a sense of the Kingdom the Messiah. (Joel 3:18)

It is no wonder then, that the Holy Spirit chose the transformation of water into wine as Jesus' first miracle. The Jewish mind rightly saw this as a sign that the Messiah had arrived; the abundance of the Kingdom was present. The 150 gallons of water for ritual washing was suddenly the best of wines. (John 2:11) Here was wine in abundance like the imagery in the prophecy. That's why the Scripture records that at this miracle his disciples put their faith in Him. Rabbis of old have associated these verses with the coming of the Messiah.

Commented [notes10]: 8 The Scripture foresaw that God would justify the Gentiles by faith, and announced the gospel in advance to Abraham: "All nations will be blessed through you." [Gal 3:8 (NIV)]

Commented [notes11]: Genesis 27:29 (NIV) 29 May nations serve you and peoples bow down to you. Be lord over your brothers, and may the sons of your mother bow down to you. May those who curse you be cursed and those who bless you be blessed."

Commented [notes12]: 5 Then one of the elders said to me, "Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." Rev 5:5 (NIV)

Commented [notes13]: Philippians 2:10-11 (NIV) 10 that at the name of Jesus every knee should bow, in heaven and on earth and under the earth, 11 and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father.

Commented [notes14]: Joel 3:18 (NIV) 18 'In that day the mountains will drip new wine, and the hills will flow with milk; all the ravines of Judah will run with water. A fountain will flow out of the LORD's house and will water the valley of acacias.

Commented [notes15]: John 2:11 (NIV) 11 This, the first of his miraculous signs, Jesus performed at Cana in Galilee. He thus revealed his glory, and his disciples put their faith in him.

¹² *His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk.* Our beautiful Savior! Though the world does not see Him as beautiful, we certainly do. To the ancient Hebrew reader, all these expressions denoted the coming prosperity of the Messiah's Kingdom. No wonder they longed for it. Do you long for the Kingdom of Heaven?

¹³ *"Zebulun will live by the seashore and become a haven for ships; his border will extend toward Sidon.* Zebulun did not have ports, but by living near the sea, their tribe's wealth was increased by trading with those who did.

¹⁴ *"Issachar is a rawboned donkey lying down between two saddlebags.* ¹⁵ *When he sees how good is his resting place and how pleasant is his land, he will bend his shoulder to the burden and submit to forced labor.* Issachar did not overcome those who possessed the fertile land they wanted so they subjected themselves as serfs so that they could stay on that rich soil.

¹⁶ *"Dan will provide justice for his people as one of the tribes of Israel.* ¹⁷ *Dan will be a serpent by the roadside, a viper along the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider tumbles backward.* Samson was the tribe of Dan's most notable judge. Many Rabbi see him as the chief fulfillment of this passage. When he pulled down the Philistines' temple filled with feasting revelers, he was that serpent biting the horses' heel. (Judges 16:30) Dan was the first tribe to turn to idolatry, which is another possible interpretation for being like a serpent. (Judges 18:30)

Then seemingly out of place, Jacob utters a word of praise. ¹⁸ *"I look for your deliverance, O LORD.* It sounds as if he was overcome by the Spirit of God and had to utter this phrase in the midst of these prophecies. Literally he was saying "I look for Your Yeshua (Jesus), O YHWH!" Knowing his hour was at hand, he cried out to the LORD. The inspired wording means much more to us today. It may have been a plea for strength to finish his prophecy. Perhaps the mention of the serpent brought to mind the promise of a Deliverer from Genesis 3:15.

He went on with one-sentence predictions for three of his sons, and then he got to Joseph. ²² *"Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall.* My son has a neighbor whose apple tree branches hang over a wall into his yard. On years when the freeze doesn't kill the blossoms, they have an abundance of apples from branches that hang over the fence. Joseph would be so fruitful. This was a play on his son's name, Ephraim, which means fruitful.

²³ *With bitterness archers attacked him; they shot at him with hostility.* The words of his brothers, Mrs. Potiphar, and probably those of the royal court of Egypt were all shot like arrows at Joseph. He never complained or retaliated. He just let the truth speak for him as he continued his faithful walk.

²⁴ *But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel,* Jacob gives all the credit to the hand of God for the faithfulness of Joseph. Notice now that Jacob is no longer referring to God as only the God of his fathers. He calls Him the Mighty One of Jacob. He calls him the Shepherd. This was probably the inspiration for Psalm 23. The Shepherd metaphor will come up again and again, as well as the next name for

Commented [notes16]: 30 Samson said, "Let me die with the Philistines!" Then he pushed with all his might, and down came the temple on the rulers and all the people in it. Thus he killed many more when he died than while he lived.
Judges 16:30 (NIV)

Commented [notes17]: 30 There the Danites set up for themselves the idols, and Jonathan son of Gershom, the son of Moses, and his sons were priests for the tribe of Dan until the time of the captivity of the land.
Judges 18:30 (NIV)

Commented [notes18]: Genesis 3:15 (NIV)
15 And I will put enmity between you and the woman, and between your offspring and hers; he will crush your head, and you will strike his heel."

God, the Rock of Israel. (2Samuel 23:3; Isaiah 30:29) This name implies a personal, unshakable, and consistent God. This is the God who helped Joseph and who helps you and me in our time of trial.

²⁵ because of your father's God, who helps you, because of the Almighty, who blesses you with blessings of the heavens above, blessings of the deep that lies below, blessings of the breast and womb. ²⁶ Your father's blessings are greater than the blessings of the ancient mountains, than the bounty of the age-old hills. Let all these rest on the head of Joseph, on the brow of the prince among his brothers. With the five names of God came the numerous blessings poured out on Joseph. We see a variation of the word "bless" five times in these two verses.

God had truly blessed Joseph in the land of his suffering and made him fruitful. (Genesis 41:52) The obedience of Joseph would affect his children for generations to come. What a contrast with those who had given-in to the temptations they faced. Our lives do indeed affect our descendents whether we like it or not. That is probably seen clearer in this prophetic chapter than anywhere else in Scripture. We are not an island. Our spiritual heritage can be more influential than our physical DNA. What are you passing on to your descendents?

Finally, Jacob blessed his youngest. If Judah was a lion, Benjamin was a ravenous wolf. The tribe of Benjamin was small but powerful and fierce in combat.

Jacob had finished his poem. His final words were specific instructions about where he was to be buried, mentioning all the others who were buried there and how the site became family property. O to be so clear minded up until the last moment on this earth. He believed what he had just predicted. He was ready to be gathered to his fathers, and that doesn't mean his body to go to the cave of Machpelah, for that wouldn't happen until after he was embalmed and the people mourned for him. No, the text says ³³ *When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people.* He was there as soon as he breathed his last breath here. The same will be true for all who have trusted in Yeshua, Jesus, the Lord's salvation. (Philippians 1:23)

Let me leave you with two thoughts. We've just seen the life of Jacob draw to a close. What a journey from selfish pride to dependence upon God! Then we have looked at a snapshot of the lives of his children and how their actions determined the destiny of future generations. What are you sowing into future generations? Do you realize your decisions and actions carry so much weight? We need to be serious and intentional about how we live our lives. We have to realize the battle that rages over our destiny and that of our family. We can't play around on the battlefield and think we won't become a casualty or cause casualties. (Ephesians 6:12)

The second is to remind you of the big picture. This has been a chapter about blessings. It is the continuing story of God redeeming fallen man. We see the blessing to the world coming now through the line of Judah. It culminated in Jesus, our Savior, our Redeemer, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. The Apostle Paul said that in Christ we have every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places right now. (Ephesians 1:3) The abundance that was predicted, the spiritual affluence is ours in Christ today, and

Commented [notes19]: 2 Samuel 23:3 (NIV)
3 The God of Israel spoke, the Rock of Israel said to me: "When one rules over men in righteousness, when he rules in the fear of God,

Commented [notes20]: Isaiah 30:29 (NIV)
29 And you will sing as on the night you celebrate a holy festival; your hearts will rejoice as when people go up with flutes to the mountain of the LORD, to the Rock of Israel.

Commented [notes21]: 52 The second son he named Ephraim and said, "It is because God has made me fruitful in the land of my suffering."
Gen 41:52 (NIV)

Commented [notes22]: Philippians 1:23 (NIV)
23 I am torn between the two: I desire to depart and be with Christ, which is better by far;

Commented [notes23]: 12 For our struggle is not against flesh and blood, but against the rulers, against the authorities, against the powers of this dark world and against the spiritual forces of evil in the heavenly realms.
Eph 6:12 (NIV)

Commented [notes24]: 3 Praise be to the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us in the heavenly realms with every spiritual blessing in Christ.
Eph 1:3 (NIV)

throughout eternity. Have you entered into it? His garments were washed in his own blood, so that yours could be washed in the blood of grapes. His suffering was for your spiritual fullness. Don't waste your life ignoring that great message He came to deliver.

These two thoughts are tied together. It was Joseph's yielding to God that brought him blessing upon blessing, and it is our yielding to the life of Christ (the One that Jacob and the prophets foretold) that reaps blessings for us and those who follow us. Are you yielding to Him today? (Romans 6:19)

Commented [notes25]: 19 I put this in human terms because you are weak in your natural selves. Just as you used to offer the parts of your body in slavery to impurity and to ever-increasing wickedness, so now offer them in slavery to righteousness leading to holiness.
Romans 6:19 (NIV)