

# Meditation on Genesis 49

## THE PROPHETIC BLESSINGS OF JACOB'S SONS

### A PROPHETIC HISTORY OF THE WORLD AND ISRAEL

The table below illustrates that the order of his son's blessings according to the last words of Jacob are only partially identical with their order of birth. The meaning of the names outlines the sad history of violence and corruption in the world and Israel and its consequences and then the future blessings and glory in and through Christ, the Messiah, the Son of Man.

#	Birth Order	Mother	Blessing Order	Meaning of Name
<b>Adam to Abraham</b> (The works of the flesh)				
1.	Rueben	Leah	Rueben	"see a son"
2.	Simeon	Leah	Simeon	"heard"
3.	Levi	Leah	Levi	"attached"
<b>Abraham to Solomon</b> (The promise of God) (Future Glory of Christ)				
4.	Judah	Leah	Judah	"Praise"
<b>Rehoboam to Zedekiah</b> (Affiliation and assimilation by the nations) (Present age)				
5.	Dan	Billhah	Zebulun	'dwelling' "habitation"
6.	Naphtali	Billhah	Issachar	'hire' "wages"
7.	Gad	Zilpah	Dan	"he that judges"
<b>Future Restoration by Christ</b> Starts with the prayer of vs. 18				
8.	Asher	Zilpah	Gad	"a band" "a troop"
9.	Issachar	Leah	Asher	"happy"
10.	Zebulun	Leah	Naphtali	'that struggles or fights'
<b>Millennial Glory and Reign of Christ</b>				
11.	Joseph	Rachel	Joseph	"He will add"
12.	Benjamin	Rachel	Benjamin	"Son of the right hand"

In blessing his sons, Jacob first addressed the four sons of Leah. Then the sons of the maids follow and Zebulun is put before Issachar and Naphtali is the one mentioned last. Finally are Joseph and Benjamin the two sons of Rachel, the wife whom Jacob loved more than Leah, and for whom he served his father-in-law Laban another seven years.

The order of Jacob's sons in Genesis 49 in contrast to the order of their birth is according to that which is prophetic and spiritual giving a picture of the history of Israel until the last days but also a brief outline of man's history as a whole, because this is really centred around Israel.

Reuben forfeited his birthright as the first born and the position was given to Judah, the fourth son of Leah. Simeon and Levi were passed over because of their violence against the inhabitants of Shechem. The wealth linked with the firstborn's blessing, who was entitled to a double portion of the inheritance, went to Joseph, the

first son of Rachel, the loved one of Jacob and then was passed to Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph's sons, whom Jacob had blessed previously (Gen. 48). Thus Ephraim and Manasseh obtained a place of their own among the tribes of Israel (Deut. 33:17). Judah and Joseph are given a prominent place in the blessings of Jacob, Judah receiving **the position** of a ruler and Joseph **the wealth** laid up for the firstborn.

### **REUBEN, SIMEON AND LEVI** (vs. 3-7)

In the first three sons we see a picture of natural man failing from the beginning. Reuben was guided by his lusts, while Simeon and Levi used means of violence. These two evils of inner corruption and outward violence have been the two principal evils since the fall of man. Time and again, they can be found in both the history of mankind and that of Israel. The sin of Adam and Eve was lust, the sin of Cain was violence, and they had to be driven out of God's presence. The judgment of the flood was caused by the subsequent corruption and violence that filled the earth. After the flood there was no improvement. Man wanted to make a name for himself and started worshipping idols; with Nimrod, a mighty hunter before the Lord is seen leading the way.

### **JUDAH** (vs.8-12)

Then, with the calling of Abraham, God made a new start and separated a nation from the other nations in order that it should serve and belong to Him alone. However, Israel's history too, was one of sad failure both in the wilderness as well as in the Promised Land. Corruption and violence marked the last chapters of the Book of Judges and the first chapters of First Samuel. But then God brought relief through King David, whose birth is mentioned in the Book of Ruth the 8<sup>th</sup> book of the Bible – the number 8 meaning 'a new beginning'.

This period in Israel's history is reflected in Jacob's prophecy concerning Judah (his name means praise), the royal tribe, where nothing but praise is heard. It was a Golden Age for Israel, when the nations around them were subdued by Abraham (Gen. 14) and later by Solomon.

The words of Jacob about Shiloh (meaning "he who brings rest") refers in the first place to Solomon, the king of peace but it reaches far beyond him. This is indicated by the words that the sceptre would not depart from Judah until the arrival of Shiloh, to whom the obedience of the peoples would be. All the nations await the day when Christ alone will reign in righteousness.

Judah was to have a prominent role until the coming of Christ but our Lord being rejected the time of universal peace and prosperity, about which Jacob spoke, was postponed until Christ's second coming. Then He will reign as the Prince of Peace and His dominion will be to the ends of the earth.

### **ZEBULUN, ISSACHAR AND DAN** (vs. 13-17)

After the prosperous times of David and Solomon and also after the rejection of the Messiah Israel is assimilated with and brought into subjugation to the nations, ending in complete apostasy. This is shown in type in Zebulun, Issachar and Dan. The prophecy has a twofold application, historical and future. Israel came gradually under the influence of the surrounding nations, which resulted in their subjugation to these nations (e.g., Egypt, Assyria and Babylonia) and in serving the idols.

Here we find Zebulun (meaning habitation or dwelling) in connection with "the sea of peoples and nations" (cf. Isa. 17:12-13; Rev. 17:15). Zebulun was fully orientated towards the nations and to Sidon especially, from which the worship of Baal originated which was brought to Israel by King Ahab (1 Kings. 16:31-33).

Issachar (meaning "hire" or "wages") then submitted to forced labour and became a slave.

In Dan (meaning "judge") the power of the serpent (that is, Satan) was fully embodied, so that Israel was brought down and rendered powerless. Scripture often connects the tribe of Dan with idolatry (Judges. 18; 1 Kings. 12:29-30). Israel left the one true God and finally rejected the Messiah when He came to them in the form of a Servant.

This marked the end of the history of Israel and of the first man in his responsibility and only the salvation of the LORD could bring relief as seen in the prayer of verse 18. This salvation was manifested and is seen by faith in the cross and in the resurrection of Christ Jesus our Lord.

Jacob's short prayer is the turning point of the chapter. After Christ's rejection, the above process of decline and apostasy repeated itself and Israel was dispersed among the nations, having become more and more dependent on them and have been until today.

In the future application of these verses Dan is a type of the antichrist who will reign over ("judge") Israel with the support of the head of the revived Roman Empire and of Satan himself (Rev. 13:1-18). Idolatry will then reach an all-time high and the faithful remnant of Israel will wait anxiously for the intervention of God's salvation.

Dan marks the absolute low point and from there on Israel's history takes a turn for the better.

### **GAD, ASHER AND NAPHTALI** (vs. 19-21)

In answer to the prayer of verse 18 God reveals His salvation. Gad, Asher and Naphtali show the results of God's salvation in the end time.

Gad (meaning "troop") is still being endangered by hostile troops, but in the end he is victorious and drives the enemy out of the land (cf. Mic. 4:14-5:8).

Asher (meaning "happy") enjoys an abundance of food and shares it with others.

Naphtali (meaning "my wrestling") rejoices in the freedom of the victor and sings the song of salvation.

### **JOSEPH AND BENJAMIN** (vs. 22-27)

Finally, Joseph and Benjamin give a twofold picture of the glory of Christ in the millennium.

Joseph (meaning "He will add") is a special type of the Messiah who was rejected by His brothers; but exalted by God to sit at His right hand, thereby becoming the Saviour of the world. Pharaoh a type of God the Father is pleased with Him and He receives the richest blessings.

Benjamin (meaning "son of the right hand") is more typical of the earthly administration in righteousness of Christ's reign.

At His appearing and the dawn of the Kingdom, Christ will destroy all His enemies and reign until the last enemy, namely death, has been abolished at the end of the Kingdom (1 Cor. 15:24), and the millennium will give place to the eternal state.

### **SUMMARY**

The first three sons of Jacob show natural man's corruption. Reuben (meaning "see, a son") behaved as an unworthy son, and Simeon (meaning "heard") and Levi (meaning "attached") were brothers in evil. Then three sons, Judah, Joseph and Benjamin, who are special types of Christ show us how He intervenes first with Judah and finally with Joseph and Benjamin.

Then Zebulun, Issachar and Dan mark Israel's decline and ultimate apostasy as well as the apostasy of the last days.

Then after Jacob's prayer Gad, Asher and Naphtali give an upward course of blessing with Israel being restored and all will see the salvation of the Lord.

Genesis 49 is a prophetic history, of which several parts have already been fulfilled in the course of Israel's existence, while other parts await their fulfilment in the end time.