

## Seven brothers, Joseph, and Death of a Patriarch

- Genesis 49:13-33
- We return to Jacob's final blessing for his twelve sons today, and to his final day on the earth. After today we will have two more Sundays together around this wonderful book of beginnings. It will be exciting to finish but sad to say goodbye to Genesis. The good news is that it will remain where it is and we can visit it anytime! We have seen the blessing of God on his creation from the very beginning of time to the end of Jacob's life, and as we near the end of this story, we see again the blessing of the people of God by the final patriarch. Let's look at this passage today under the three main points you see in the title: Seven brothers, Joseph, and Death of a Patriarch.
- **Seven brothers (verses 13-21, 27)**
- As I said last week, you can do a deep dive into each of the twelve sons of Jacob and how they do after their father dies. This is merely an introductory course I am giving you, but you can go all the way to graduate level studies if you want by following their tribes through the Old Testament. But let's look at each of these in turn and try to uncover a few nuggets about them as Jacob blesses them with encouragement and prophecy.
- Zebulon represents my tribe, at least in my heart, because he is going to settle towards the sea. In fact, if he settled between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean Sea, he could look both ways and almost see water. Zebulon also holds the distinction of the tribe that sent the largest number of soldiers to David's army in Hebron and the Bible says they came to "help David with singleness of purpose." (1 Chronicles 12:33)
- Issachar is called a "strong donkey," so maybe *that's* really my tribe! It appears that Jacob is saying this tribe will be characterized by a love for material things that will lead them into forced labor. One Old Testament scholar said it like this: "The meaning seems to be that Issachar was strong, but docile and lazy. He would enjoy the good land assigned him but would not strive for it. Therefore, eventually he would be pressed into servitude and the mere bearing of burdens for his masters." -Herbert Leupold
- Dan shall judge or vindicate (root of "vindicate" is Dan). And he will. Samson was from this tribe and judged well until he gave in to his own desires. Though Dan will judge, he will also give into violence and treachery. This tribe introduced idolatry into the nation in Judges 18 and later Dan became a center for idolatrous worship. As I said a few weeks ago, the name of this tribe is left out in Revelation 7. At this point, Jacob adds, "I wait for your salvation, O Lord." (verse 18) Either Jacob was crying out to God for Dan's redemption, or some believe he was calling out to heaven for himself, as he is nearing death.
- Gad's name is mentioned in 4 of the 6 words in Jacob's prophecy. His name sounds like Hebrew for "raid" or "raider." These guys were mighty warriors "whose faces were like the faces of lions and who were swift as gazelles." (1 Chron. 12:8) Jacob says that their borders will constantly be raided, and their land sometimes possessed by enemies, as in Jeremiah 49 with the Ammonites. But in the end, they will overcome. "This has been the blessing of many a child of God - to fight, and apparently to lose the battle, yet to win it at the end." (Charles Spurgeon)
- Asher will be greatly blessed in a land of abundance. The food that comes from Asher is so good that it will supply royalty with delicacies. Moses will say of this tribe, "Most blessed of sons be Asher...let him dip his foot in oil." (Deut. 33:24) It is a metaphor for material prosperity. On the other hand, Asher's tribe, along with Reuben, Dan, and Gad, all stayed home and did not help Deborah and Barak win the battle over Sisera in Judges 5.
- Naphtali is a doe let loose that bears beautiful fawns. This would be the tribe of many of you here, because they were mountain lovers. They fought valiantly alongside Deborah and Barak and were praised as men who risked their lives to the death "on the heights of the field." This tribe lived near the Sea of Galilee in the land where Jesus did a lot of his ministry. "He went and lived in Capernaum by the

sea, in the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali so that what was spoken by the prophet Isaiah might be fulfilled...the people dwelling in darkness have seen a great light..." (Matthew 4:13-16)

- Benjamin (verse 27) will get high praise from Moses: "The beloved of the Lord dwells in safety. The High God surrounds him all day long, and dwells between his shoulders." (Deut. 33:12) But Jacob's description seems unflattering. He is a ravenous wolf. We know a wolf is aggressive and vicious, and unlike the lion, the wolf kills more than it can eat. We see the tribe's fierceness in Ehud in Judges 3 and in the war between Benjamin and Israel in Judges 19-20. But Benjamin will remain with Judah to form the Southern Kingdom after Solomon's death, and it is from the tribe of Benjamin that Saul comes, a vicious persecutor of Christ who ends up as Paul the great Apostle, defender of the faith. That leads us to...
- **Joseph (verses 22-26)**
- As I said last week, the lion's share of the blessings of Jacob go to Judah and Joseph. Judah is the lion of the tribes and Jesus is the lion of the tribe of Judah, the King of kings. But Joseph was Jacob's favorite as a child, and clearly Joseph has lived in such a way to increase favor with his father. Charles Spurgeon said, "The main point in Joseph's character was that he was in clear and constant fellowship with God, and therefore God blessed him greatly. He lived *to* God, and was God's servant; he lived *with* God, and was God's child."
- He is fruitful and prosperous. Jacob waxes poetic again in comparing his son to a fruit-bearing plant that lives by a spring and whose branches are exploding over the walls. Joseph was a man of great love for God who had developed over the years of suffering a deep and very real relationship *with* God. He was attacked, probably not with bow and arrow but with bitter and accusing words, as anyone who loves God will be. Jesus said to his disciples in the upper room, "But all these things they will do to you on account of my name, because they do not know him who sent me." (John 15:20) When Joseph was attacked, God helped him hold his bow. God helped his arms remain strong and agile. God's mighty hands gave him success, saved him, and blessed him. God was helping Joseph and was with Joseph even when he didn't know it. And the same is true for us. Jesus told his disciples they would not be in the battle alone, but he would send a Helper for them. "But if I go, I will send him to you. And when he comes, he will convict the world concerning sin and righteousness and judgment...(and) he will guide you into all the truth..." (John 16:7-8,13) God is not just with us, saints. He is *in* us.
- Jacob gives God five titles as he uses the word "blessings" five times. Remember the number 5 was a big deal in Egypt. Jacob says God is: **The Mighty One of Jacob. The Shepherd. The Stone of Israel.** (The Shepherd leads and the Stone is stable, unchanging.) **The God of your father. The Almighty.** What a great word of God to pray *back* to God! "Oh God of my father, you will help me! Almighty God, you will bless me and have blessed me with blessings from heaven!" They are true of Joseph, the blessings on his head and those who come after him, as his father says here. And they are true of all who follow Christ and are co-heirs with him.
- Jacob says in verse 26, "The blessings of your father are mighty beyond the blessings of my parents." I love this new Jacob. I don't think he is saying he has been blessed so much because he is better than his father Isaac or his grandfather Abraham. I think the opposite! I believe he is acknowledging that God's grace to him is amazing beyond anything he could imagine because he deserved none of it. He may be saying something like this: *You have blessed me beyond anything I can imagine, God, because I know I was selfish, deceitful, a bad father, and a lousy patriarch. And yet you forgave me and turned my heart towards you.* Jacob is like the woman who broke the alabaster jar and poured out extravagant oil on Jesus, and the Lord said of her, "The one who is forgiven much loves much." I think Jacob knows best at the end of his life how much God had carried him and loved him and forgiven him.
- So the twelve tribes were blessed by Jacob. That leads us to...
- **Death of a Patriarch (verses 29-33)**

- You know that Jacob did not wait until his dying breath to exact a promise from his sons about where to bury him. He believed, as maybe we all should, in pre-planning. He told Joseph earlier, in chapter 47, and even made Joseph swear an oath that under no circumstances would he bury his father in Egypt! Now he repeats that command to all his sons. He wanted 12 witnesses to this command. But look at how he does it.
- First, he says, "I am to be gathered to my people." Jacob had faith to believe in God, the only One, who can raise people from the dead. He doesn't say, "Put my remains in a cave with the remains of my father and grandfather." No! He says, "I am to be gathered with," I am *going to be with* my people. And the same is true for me and you who believe in Jesus and have been redeemed. What a glorious thing to stand at the bedside of a person you love who is dying and who says, "Yes, I know that I am going home. I am leaving my people here for a short time and going to be with my people who have gone on before. And we will all be together for eternity." And what a grief we bear when our loved one cannot or will not say that. We certainly leave that with God and we pray that perhaps at the final moment that loved one received faith to repent and believe. Jacob knew God as surely as he had known his father, and his grandfather, his wife Rachel, and his wife Leah, and he was going to see them.
- Second, he commands the 12 sons to bury him with his fathers and gave them everything but the map coordinates complete with longitude and latitude. He tells them where the burial cave is and everyone who is already buried there.
- Third, it was time and he was ready. Jacob drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last. Spurgeon wrote, "Jacob did not yield up the ghost until he had delivered the last sentence of admonition and benediction to his twelve sons. He was immortal till his work was done. So long as God had another sentence to speak by him, death could not paralyze his tongue."
- What can we take away? 1- As Spurgeon wrote, "Joseph was in clear and constant fellowship with God." May the same be said of you and me! 2- Jacob understood the amazing grace God had shown him all his life. May we walk in that same grace he gives us every moment. 3- Death is the door through which we will be eternally gathered to our people, the people of God.
- Prayer
- Communion
- Greet One Another