

Intro:

Illust:

Last week we asked the question, "How can a person die with dignity?" Our search took us to Genesis 48-49. We investigated ch 48. There we saw aged Jacob in his final years. He's bedfast, and terminally ill. The touching scene unfolded as his beloved son Joseph came to his bedside, along with his 2 sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Jacob rallied and sat up on the side of his bed. Then he did something very interesting. He blessed Joseph and his sons. He communicated his love and acceptance to them.

What was the point? Jacob was a man who truly died with dignity. He had blown it many times earlier in life. But at the end, he sought to impact those closest to him in a way that would live on after he was gone.

Q: How does a person leave a legacy that lasts?

Illust: Not everyone does. One of the most tragic stories I know is the account of Eli in I Samuel 2. Eli was a priest. He had an honored position in Israel. But he blew it at home.

2:12 "Now the sons of Eli were worthless men." What was their problem?

2:12b "they knew not the LORD." Where was the breakdown? With Eli...

2:29b "...honest thy sons above me, to make yourselves fat..."

2:30 Principle: "Them who honor me I will honor..."

Eli didn't leave a legacy that would last. Jacob did.

Q: What made the difference? In what way did Jacob leave a legacy that lasted?

Proposition: Let's investigate Jacob's final interaction with his 12 sons, in Genesis 49.

I. Jacob's Blessing (1-28)

A. A Prophetic Element (1)

B. A Personal Element (28)

II. Jacob's Burial (29-33)

Note: We'll finish our series on "Joseph" next week, in ch 50 (a favorite!).

I. Jacob's Blessing (1-28)

In ch 48, Jacob blessed Joseph and his 2 sons. In ch 49, he called the whole family together. What a scene!

V 1 "And Jacob called unto his sons and said, Gather yourselves together..."

Jacob's journey of 147 years is nearly over. God has blessed him richly. His grandfather Abraham had the son of promise Isaac, and the son of bondage Ishmael. His father Jacob had twin sons, Essau and himself. But God blessed him with 12 sons.

He called them all together on his deathbed. His final words would impact not only them, but his descendants forever. He gave them a rich blessing.

Illust: John Gowdy said this was his favorite OT passage

An Overview: Jacob's Blessing

--Full of strange imagery

--Jacob spoke to his sons individually, yet collectively. That is, he addressed them one at a time, yet he allowed the others to hear.

--He did not bless them according to their birth order.

1. Reuben (3)
- 2 & 3. Simeon & Levi (5)
4. Judah (8)
5. Zebulun (13)
6. Issachar (14)
7. Dan (16)
8. Gad (19)
9. Asher (20)
10. Naphtali (21)
11. Joseph (22)
12. Benjamin (27)

Q: Who received the most honored blessing?

--Judah's was long (vv 8-12)

--Joseph's was longer and more privileged (vv 22-26)

Q: Why did Jacob bless his sons? What's significant about the blessings?

A: His blessing involved two elements. Notice the first and last verse of the section.

A. A Prophetic Element (1)

V 1 "that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days."

Jacob's blessings had a prophetic element to them. The Patriarch (as was Abraham and Isaac) was given the special, God-given ability to predict the future of his sons. His blessing is prophetic.

"in the last days"--What does that mean? What time period does Jacob have in mind? The phrase is used in several ways in the Bible. Here the sense is general and broad (as in Dt 31:29). If you have an NIV, you'll notice, "Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come."

Caution: Don't try to put Jacob's prophecy into a neat, tidy package or chart. We view prophecy that way too often. We like to chart it, and diagram it. We approach prophecy from an Americanized, analytical, scientific, western perspective. But Jacob wasn't an American. He was a Jew, in fact, the father of the Jewish nation.

Why is that important? Jacob didn't have a timeline in mind when he uttered these predictions. In much of his prophetic blessing, Jacob looked ahead to the conquest of Canaan which would happen 400 years after his death. In another place, he looked ahead to the coming of the Messiah, which was 18 centuries away. In another

place, he describes the Messianic Kingdom, which has yet to come. So there may be a gap of hundreds of years between a prediction made in one verse and one made a few verses later.

Q: Why did God reveal future events through Jacob's blessing?

A: To reveal the certainty of God's Redemptive Program. History is indeed His Story, God's story. Following Jacob's death, his descendants would have many bumpy roads to travel. But God was in control. They could trust Him.

Key: God intends prophecy to be practical for His people.

Illust:

We'll see more of this prophetic element in a moment. A second element...

B. A Personal Element (28)

V 28 "...their father spoke unto them...blessed them..every one acc to his blessing..."

What's that mean? The phrase is ambiguous.

NIV "All these are the 12 tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, giving each the blessing appropriate to him."

"the blessing appropriate to him"--Jacob's blessing was not generic. His sons weren't clones, and he didn't treat them as such. There was an intensely personal element to his blessings.

Illust:

Let's scan the 12 blessings again. Be looking for both the prophetic and personal elements in the blessings.

1. Reuben (3)

Personal--"my firstborn, my might..."

Prophetic--"Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel."

Reuben the person, and Reuben the tribe, never did excel. As firstborn, he was entitled to a double inheritance. But he forfeited it. When?

"thou went up to thy father's bed"--Reuben violated Bilhah, his father's concubine, as described in 35:22.

Notice how Jacob described his son. With majestic terms, he said he was strong and powerful. But then, in front of his brothers, exposed Reuben's true character. He told him he was as unstable as water. He was indiscriminate. He was out of control. His passions controlled him. He was impulsive.

Illust:

2 & 3. Simeon & Levi (5)

"are brethren"--Obviously they're brothers. Why does Jacob say that? These 2 men were 2 of a pair. Birds of a feather flock together. These are the only 2 brothers that Jacob lumped together in their blessing.

Notice the personal description. It was not very complimentary:

v 6 "instruments of cruelty"

v 7 "for in their anger they slew a man"

You can read about it in Gen 34:26. These two brothers slew the Shechemites. You say, "What's the big deal? David killed people, and God blessed him. So did Gideon, and a lot of others."

Key: God distinguishes "holy war" from vengeance. David did the former. He served as God's instrument of judgment on wicked people who had offended God's holy standard. But Simeon and Levi massacred people because of a personal vendetta.

Prophetic Element: V 7 "I will divide them and scatter them in Israel."
And so it happened. The tribe of Simeon eventually disintegrated within the tribe of Judah. The tribe of Levi dispersed honorably as the priestly tribe.

Observation: God doesn't just forget the past.
Num 32:23 "Be sure your sin will find you out."
Gal 6:7 "Whatever a man sows, that shall he also reap."

God doesn't just forget the past. It was because of past sins that Rueben and Simeon and Levi forfeited the position of blessing. You can't hide sin from God. You can't cover up guilt. God doesn't just forget the past. Why not? Because He is holy.

He will not say, "Well, that wasn't so bad. Let's just pretend it never happened." No. A holy God must judge sin. God doesn't just forget the past. But listen. God will forgive the past. That's why He sent His own Son, Jesus Christ, to the cross. To take our place, to pay our penalty.

Q: Have you blown it in the past? Are you burdened with guilt?

There is hope!

I Jn 1:8-9 "If we say we have no sin, we deceive ourselves. If we confess our sin..."
Our hope came through Jacob's next son...

4. Judah (8)

Jacob commended Judah. Notice the prophetic announcement...
V 8 "thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise."

Listen to what Jacob predicted about Judah...
V 10 "The scepter shall not depart from Judah...until Shiloh come..."

Jacob announced that the "scepter" and the "lawgiver" (NIV "ruler's staff") belonged to Judah. What's that mean? The words are somewhat mysterious.

Here's the idea. Judah would have a great leadership role in the nation of Israel. Judah would hold an honored position. Judah would give direction to the 12 tribes. Until...

The word "until" in v 10 is pivotal. Judah's leadership role would continue until what? Until "Shiloh come." When Shiloh would come, the focus, the honor, the attention of Israel would be on Him. He would be the Leader of His people.

Q: Who or what is Shiloh?

A: Luther translated the word "hero." Obviously, it refers to the Messiah.

V 10 is a snapshot of the Messianic hope of Israel. Jacob anticipated the day when, from his own seed, from the tribe of Judah, the Savior of the world would come. Vv 11-12 describe the prosperity of the Millennial Kingdom.

Jacob was saved by faith. He looked ahead to the coming of the Messiah. We are saved by faith. We must look back to the coming of the Messiah.

Illust: Peter before Sanhedrin--Acts 4:12 "Neither is there salvation..."

5. Zebulun (13)

Prophetic--Shall dwell by sea

The tribe did not occupy coastal land, but was near enough to be enriched by seaborne trade.

6. Issachar (14)

Jacob said Issachar's descendants would be strong and patient. But eventually they would become subject to forced labor to oppressors.

7. Dan (16)

Jacob announced that Dan, like Reuben, would never exhibit the place of leadership for which he had the potential.

8. Gad (19)

Here's a play on words. "Gad" means "troop." Jacob says that a "troop" of enemies would overcome him, and that later he would fight and regain control. Gad settled in the Trans-jordan region. His tribe was constantly battling the mauraders to the east in the Arabian desert, just as Jacob prophecied.

9. Asher (20)

The descendants of Asher settled along the Mediteranean coast. Using that rich soil, they raised (as Jacob said they would) delicasies for the kings of Tyre and Sidon.

10. Naphtali (21)

Naphtali would be like a doe, implying swiftness in self-defense.

11. Joseph (22)

Jacob's main blessing fell on Joseph. He is like a fruitful vine (22). Jacob reflects how he was hated, harrassed, and attacked (23). Yet he prospered (24). Once again Jacob praises Joseph for his character and eloquence, the "prince" of his sons.

Q: What was Joseph's secret? God was real in his life! (see vv 24-25)

12. Benjamin (27)

The descendants of Benjamin were known for their ferocious warriors.

So Jacob pronounced a "Blessing" on his 12 sons (both Prophetic and Personal).

Application: Obviously, we can't predict the future of our children. But we can impact the future of our children. How? By our personal words of affirmation.

It's interesting how Jacob used vivid images to depict the character of his sons. He compared Reuben to boiling water. Here he says Judah is like a Lion. He called

Issachar a Rawboned Donkey! He likened Dan to a Viper, Naphtali to a Doe, Joseph to a Fruitful Vine, and Benjamin to a Ravenous Wolf.

I know Jacob had special, God-given prophetic abilities. He was able to see and describe the future of his sons. But it strikes me that here was a Dad who knew his sons. He knew their personalities, their habits, their interests, their traits. He knew his sons...all 12 of them!

Q: How well do you know your children? Do you study them?

Illust:

II. Jacob's Burial (29-33)

We'll actually see his burial next week, in ch 50. But notice what Jacob said...

Vv 29-32 "And he charged them..."

Those were the patriarch's final words.

V 33 "...he gathered up his feet..."

Note: Death is not a cessation, but a change.

Jacob left a legacy that lasted. Don't get me wrong. Jacob's life had had more than its share of turmoil. Had he had infirmities? Many. Did sins dot the landscape of his life? Unfortunately, yes. Jacob had blown it many times in his 147 years.

But listen. His life ended in blessing. What made the difference? When it was all said and done, what legacy did Jacob leave behind? He left his descendants 3 traits to follow:

1. Jacob was a Man of Desire.

As you look at his life, you see failures, yes, but beyond that, you see a man who had an inquenchable desire for God's Blessing. He wanted God's Blessing. In fact, he wanted it so badly he wrestled with God.

Gen 32:24 "And Jacob...wrestled a man..."

Gen 32:26 "I will not let thee go, except thou bless me."

Jacob had the right desire in life. He wanted God's Blessing. Do you?

2. Jacob was a Man who had learned to Depend.

Earlier in his life, Jacob was a go-getter. He was a proud conniver. He knew how to get things done. Or so he thought. But as the years past, he learned that he wasn't as smart as he once thought. He got himself into jam after jam.

Until he learned the lesson God was patiently teaching him. He needed to learn to depend, to depend not on himself, but on God. And that he did. He learned to trust God. He learned to walk by faith. He learned to live in the light of God's promises. That's what he wanted his children to do as well.

Q: You may ask, "Why? Why depend?"

3. Jacob was a Man who Discovered the source of real blessing.

Key Verse of Blessing: V 18 "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord."

That summed up a dying man's legacy. Is it true of you?