

# The Story of Joseph: Seeing the Bigger Picture

## Week 18: Jacob's Final Words and Death

### Scripture:

Genesis 49

### Motivation (Why You Need This):

#### *Where we left off last week...*

- Jacob allowed his sons to return to Egypt with Benjamin to hopefully get food
- Jacob sent them with a blessing
- Upon arrival in Egypt, Joseph's brothers were invited to a feast
- Joseph's brothers shared a meal with him, although his identity was unknown

**Genesis 43:34 (ESV)** Portions were taken to them from Joseph's table, but Benjamin's portion was five times as much as any of theirs. And they drank and were merry with him.

- ✓ They get fed. They get treated kindly. Grace shows up through the hands of this "Egyptian."
- ✓ Why? God didn't send Joseph to Egypt to get even with his brothers. He sent Joseph ahead to keep them alive. This is the BIGGER PICTURE.

Today, we are going to ask a deep question...

#### **Is it ever too late for heart change, or to right a wrong?**

We will see Joseph clearly drawing out of his brothers the true condition of their heart and whether these many years have changed them.

### Information (What You Need to Know):

#### **Jacob's Deathbed Prophecy**

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

This is the first declared prophecy through a man in the Bible.

Jacob has finally come to understand and accept that he is both Jacob and Israel. There has been a tremendous amount of tension between Jacob, a deeply flawed man (heel grabber/scoundrel), and Israel, the man who not only knows God but follows Him closely. It is like the tension in every believer, Jacob understands that God called and made him (as Israel - how God saw him - God's fulfilled perfect work in him), and he would spend a lifetime battling himself (as Jacob - his flesh).

We think of Paul's words in **Philippians 1:6** - He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it at the day of Jesus Christ.

**II Corinthians 3:18 (LSB)** But we all, with unveiled face, beholding as in a mirror the glory of the Lord, are being transformed into the same image from glory to glory, just as from the Lord, the Spirit.

We understand that God, thankfully, does not just look at our outward appearance - **I Samuel 16:7b (ESV)** - For the Lord sees not as man sees: man looks on the outward appearance, but the Lord looks on the heart.”

147 years - Jacob's life. He has known much strife and difficulty. In the last 17 years, he has known peace. His strife and pain have not been in vain because, as we will see, through it all, he knows God intimately/ personally/deeply.

Not only does he know God, but he knows his son from carefully observing them, and so he speaks good, bad, and challenging words to his sons. Words that mark them and will shape the tribes for hundreds of years to come.

Judah speaks to his sons based on their mother and birth order.

## Reuben, Simeon, & Levi - Your Character Shapes the Future

**Genesis 49:3-4 (ESV)** “Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the firstfruits of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. 4 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!

Reuben is the firstborn. He should receive a double portion of inheritance rights and blessings, but Reuben marred his future with horrifying, immoral decisions from his past. Typically, the firstborn was seen as the spiritual and social leader of the clan. The one the others could look to, trust and can go to with problems. But all the way back in **Genesis 35:22**, he proved he was not that stable firstborn - But rather Reuben had delusions of grandeur, uncontrollable lust issues and he defiled his father and family by having sex with Bilhah the mother of Dan and Naphtali. I am not going to get into it because what he did was even more questionable with you dig into the Hebrew (more than I certainly expected). Reuben was prone to very bad decisions. Remember **Genesis 42:37** - Where he offered to have his own sons killed as an option if Benjamin did not return.

As we think prophetically, we find that Reuben and his tribe never overcame or excelled. **Matt 19:30** - Jesus said the First Shall be last - that was Reuben.

So, the Reubenites -

**Numbers 16** - Dathan and Abiram worked with Korah and 250 others in the rebellion against Moses - God opened the earth and swallowed them and their families - God takes unity very seriously - Also see **Deut. 11:6-7** and **Psalms 106:17**

**Numbers 32** - Tribes of Reuben, Gad, and 1/2 of Manassah settled on the East of the Jordan River. (Technically outside of the promised land). Yet fulfilled their promise to help and support the rest of the tribes - **Joshua 22** BUT in Judges, they opted not to help and support the Judge Deborah, only to stay and care for their herds. **Judges 5:15-16**

The Reubenites were the first tribe conquered and sent into exile by the Assyrians in 732BC because of their idolatry and love for foreign gods. Just as Moses and God continually warned through the prophets.

**Matt 19:30** - Jesus said the First Shall be last - that was Reuben.

**Charles Spurgeon** said “So a man may have great opportunities, and yet lose them. Uncontrolled passions may make him very little who otherwise might have been great.”

Bad character was an unbroken pattern in the lives of the Reubenites.

Character Shapes Your Future - Continued

**Genesis 49:5-7 (ESV)** “Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. 6 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. 7 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.

In **Genesis 34**, we have the story of Dinah’s rape and the murder of all the men of Shechem. Avenging their sister's rape was not bad. Murdering all the men in a town/city was overkill. What made matters worse is their disregard for God’s covenant promise by using circumcision to murder all the men. Then looting the city and took all of the women and children captive. Apparently, Simeon and Levi were unapologetic and fierce anger marked their lives.

The weird statement of hamstringing an Ox is not clearly explained. Hamstringing is cutting the large rear tendons in an animal to cripple them to the point that they cannot even walk. So, did they use this tactic on the animals of Shechem or someone else who crossed them? We do not know. They apparently had little regard for human or animal life.

The tribe of Levi showed great commitment to God and Moses at the Golden Calf incident in **Exodus 32**. They became the priestly class of Israel. Though they never had property of their own, they served God faithfully in the tabernacle and the temple.

The tribe of Simeon had their land allotment within Judah's territory. Though they once were sizable, they shrank and were ultimately absorbed into Judah.

A much different picture for Simeon and Levi, seeing hope like Levi used as God's priests and becoming part of Judah was not a bad thing, since they lasted as a nation much longer than the Northern tribes.

## **Judah - God's Grace Can Rewrite the Story**

**Genesis 49:8-12 (ESV)** "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. 9 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? 10 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. 11 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. 12 His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk.

Judah was honestly just as bad as Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. He was the brother who wanted to sell off Joseph. He abandoned the family, pursued prostitutes, and even mistreated his daughter-in-law. And yet, his family becomes the line of blessing. Not because Judah was some amazing brother and leader. His story says otherwise. But the goodness of God poured out and here Judah is repeatedly referred to as a lion (cub, lioness). And in **Revelation 5:5** we have the name for Jesus...Lion of the Tribe of Judah. Jacob is speaking of the sheer leadership that would come from Judah.

The best line about the scepter refers to the one who would one day come and rule. Dominion. Authority. Of the promised one. The snake crusher. Then it speaks of tying up a young donkey to a choice grape vine (which no one would do because they would eat the choice wine grapes), washing clothes in wine, and white teeth. This is speaking of the coming reign of Jesus,, in which there will be unprecedented prosperity. So much so that the young donkey can eat all the special grapes it wants and there is so much more he could do no harm. Who needs fresh water when you can wash dirty clothes in precious wine? It's like going light your fires with hundred-dollar bills. But let's go really Biblical. Streets of Gold. Or Gold so plentiful that we use it in such a common manner that we just pave streets with it. That is the kingdom of Christ, the promised one. Judah's heir (an Heir of David) were in Babylon - Daniel, Hananiah, Mishael, and Azariah are believed to be from the royal court of David's line taken by Nebuchadnezzar. The final two Judean/Davidic kings, Jehoiachin and Zedekiah, ruled and had radically different ends.

**Jehoiachin** 2nd to last Davidic king, was taken to Babylon and was given a seat of honor, royal cloths, and a permanent royal allowance until he died in Babylon. Jehoiachin's grandson, Zerubbabel, led the first wave of Jewish exiles back from Babylon to Jerusalem and served as governor of Judah during Ezra's book. Zerubbabel led Mary and Joseph. That sceptor never departed.

**Zedekiah** was installed as a puppet king in Jerusalem but rebelled against Babylon, and they crushed Jerusalem, executed his sons in front of him, blinded him, and he died in chains in Babylon.

## **Zebulun, Issachar, Dan, Gad, Asher, and Naphtali - Lives That Mattered**

Final sons of Leah: Bilhah, Zilpah. Not sure why he put Zilpah's sons between Bilhah's sons. But let's go.

**Genesis 49:13-21 (ESV)** "Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea; he shall become a haven for ships, and his border shall be at Sidon. 14 "Issachar is a strong donkey, crouching between the sheepfolds. 15 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. 16 "Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. 17 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. 18 I wait for your salvation, O Lord. 19 "Raiders shall raid Gad, but he shall raid at their heels. 20 "Asher's food shall be rich, and he shall yield royal delicacies. 21 "Naphtali is a doe let loose that bears beautiful fawns.

Run quickly through how these tribes moved forward.

**Zebulun** - Was noted as being positioned between the Mediterranean and the Sea of Galilee so they had the seas on the East and West. They were noted as faithful to King David, sending him the largest number of soldiers of any single tribe

**Issachar** - Noted as a strong donkey, which is not derogatory. Donkeys are known to be strong and stubborn. They were 3rd in size but also docile and lazy. They enjoyed the land assigned to them but would not

fight for it. Eventually, because they were docile and loved material things, they were overtaken and forced into servitude bearing the burden of their masters, as you guessed it, donkeys. They gave up their liberty for what they thought was comfortable.

**Dan** - From Dan came a great Judge - **Judges 13:2** - Samson. But also a serpent along the way. But also listed as a serpent by the way...In **Judges 18** the Danites introduced idolatry to Israel. **I Kings 12** - Northern King Jeroboam set up the golden calf in Dan's territory for the Northern Tribes to worship. Leading to **Amos 8** where Dan became the center of idol worship in the Northern Kingdom.

**Gad** - Gad, meaning Raider, saw many raids during the time of **Jeremiah 49**. But ultimately, they would raid their raiders and gain victory.

**Asher** - **Deut. 33:24** - Moses listed Asher as the most blessed of the sons. The land of Asher not only provided the people with necessities but also provided great luxuries. They failed to support the tribes in Judges but provided great support to David and even to Hezekiah.

**Naphtali** - bears the beautiful fawns or words. It was in the region of Naphtali that Jesus did most of his teaching and ministry. So yes, tremendous beauty and hope came from that tribal region.

Every tribe had its time and story. Some are difficult, like Reuben and others are grace-filled like Levi.

## **Joseph and Benjamin - The Faithful Hand of God and Ferocity**

Notice the titles of God given by Jacob and how much he uses the word bless.

And from Tom last week, we know the tribes of sons of Joseph are already blessed. He as the firstborn of Rachel, received the double blessing through his sons.

**Genesis 49:22-26 (ESV)** “Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall. 23 The archers bitterly attacked him, shot at him, and harassed him severely, 24 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), 25 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. 26 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.

Through all the difficulties and circumstances Joseph faces, he is still the strong, fruitful bough. WHY? Because of his constant fellowship with God. Never giving up or giving in. He continued to walk with God, and God guided and gave him everything he needed.

The names that Jacob speaks over his beloved son show that Jacob stopped pushing, resisting, and trying to control God. But rather, he has now matured, leaned in, and knows God. Deeply.

-Mighty God of Jacob

-The Shepherd - tending, caring, providing

-Stone of Israel - solid, consistent, unmovable

-God of your father - no longer the Fear of Isaac, but now he is Jacob's God

-The Almighty - All-powerful, sovereign, in full control, never giving up, never letting go, never stopping

Jacob blesses Pharaoh and his beloved son, and as we are about to see all of the sons. He is grateful and at peace.

**Genesis 49:27 (ESV)** “Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey and at evening dividing the spoil.”

Last but not least, Benjamin. A tribe with a fierce reputation. Some notables are Ehud - **Judges 3**, also **Judges 19-20** - for some of their ferocity, King Saul, **I Samuel 9-14**, and finally **Paul!** Paul, a man who is ferocious for Christ

## **Jacob's Blessing and Demand**

**Genesis 49:28-33 (ESV)** All these are the twelve tribes of Israel. This is what their father said to them as he blessed them, blessing each with the blessing suitable to him. 29 Then he commanded them and said to them, “I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, 30 in the cave that is in the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place. 31 There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife. There they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah— 32 the field and the cave that is in it were bought from the Hittites.” 33 When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

We close with the blessing stealer now a blessing to his sons. And blessing them.

And making a simple final request. Take me home, bury me with my Father and Grandfather. And as we will see next week. It is quite a journey.

#### Application (What You Need to Do):

Today, we close the chapter on Jacob's life. I don't think that I ever expected it to make such an impact on my own life. His life is so fractured and raw. So many times I saw myself in his story. In his failures. In his pain. And I am so thankful for a faithful, consistent God who walked with, loved, and was patient with Jacob. And I smile as I close his story. Because I, too, am a broken man striving to follow a faithful God.

**Philippians 1:6** - He who began a good work in you will be faithful to complete it at the day of Jesus Christ.

We can fight against God or join him in the journey.