

Standing at Dad's Deathbed Part 2

Jacob blesses his sons before he dies

Text: Genesis 49:13-33

Introduction:

1. Death draws near for Jacob in this section of Genesis and he calls his sons to give them a final Patriarchal prophecy and blessing. Jacob first has an audience with Joseph and his two sons (Chap. 48), then he summons all his sons to his deathbed for his final words (Chap. 49).
2. "Of Jacob's sons there are two over whom his heart seems especially to pour itself – Judah the ancestor of the royal tribe, and Joseph. The future fortunes of their descendants are painted in most glowing colours." (Maclaren)
3. We are considering Jacob's final words over two messages with a simple two-point outline:
 - The Prophecy concerning Joseph's Sons (Gen. 48)
 - The Prophecy concerning Jacob's Sons (Gen. 49)

I. THE PROPHECY CONCERNING JOSEPH'S SONS (47:27-48:22)

A. The Context of Jacob's Final Words (47:27-31)

B. The Content of Jacob's Final Words (48:1-22)

II. THE PROPHECY CONCERNING JACOB'S SONS (49:1-28)

Having pronounced a special blessing on Joseph and his sons, Jacob now summons the rest of his sons to his bedside to deliver his final message before he passes through the door of death. There is a poetic and prophetic tone in Jacob's words.

A. Reuben (Vs. 3-4)

B. Simeon and Levi (Vs. 5-7)

C. Judah (Vs. 8-12)

D. Zebulun (Vs. 13)

1. Little is said concerning Zebulun except for the fact they would be a coastal people who would be a haven for ships.
2. "While not directly on the Mediterranean coast, the tribe of Zebulun was assigned land close enough to the sea to make the transport of goods profitable for the people. Zebulun was located on an important route that carried merchandise from the coast to the Sea of Galilee and to Damascus. Elon, one of the judges, was from this tribe (12:11-12)." (Wiersbe)

E. Issachar (Vs. 14-15)

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1. Issachar was situated on the eastern end of the fertile Jezreel Valley (Josh. 19:17-22), sandwiched between Zebulun and the Jordan River. The judge Tola was from Issachar (Jud. 10:1-2). David had soldiers from that tribe who understood the times and knew what Israel should do (1 Chr. 12:32).
2. "Jacob compared Issachar to a strong ass "bowing down beneath a double burden". 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. Historically, Issachar had rich lands and rich crops, which attracted marauders and captors." (Morris)

F. Dan (Vs. 16-18)

A couple of things are said about Dan:

1. Dan would judge his people. The name 'Dan' means "judge".
2. Dan would be characterized by stealth in military matters. Dan is compared to a venomous snake that would defeat a mounted soldier by striking the heel of his horse. Sadly, Dan also led the way in introducing idolatry to Israel.
3. Immediately after Jacob describes the picture of the serpent striking the heel, he says "I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD." It appears Jacob's mind goes to God's primeval promise of the coming Seed whose heel would be bitten by the serpent, but who would in turn finally crush his head and bring the long-awaited salvation (Gen. 3:15). It is fascinating to note that this is the first mention of the word 'salvation' in the Bible and it comes from the Hebrew word "Yeshuah" which is the name "Jesus" in Hebrew! Salvation is not found in a religious system but in a Person, the Lord Jesus Christ.

G. Gad (Vs. 19)

1. The name Gad means "troop". Jacob prophesied that though Gad might be overcome by a troop, as a troop himself, he would overcome them.
2. Because of the tribe's location on the east side of the Jordan, enemy troops could easily invade their territory, Jacob assured the Gadites that no conquest would be final, but that they would eventually conquer their enemies. The Gadites were great warriors (Josh. 22:1-6).

H. Asher (Vs. 20)

1. Gad's brother Asher was to have an enjoy rich food and royal delicacies. As it turned out, Asher's lot fell on the rich northern seacoast north of Mount Carmel, all the way to Tyre and Sidon (Josh. 19:24-31). However, they failed to take possession of the Tyre-Sidon region.
2. The name 'Asher' means "blessed" or "happy". They became an agricultural people, taking advantage of the fertile land God gave

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them (Josh. 19:24-30). Moses said that Asher was “most blessed” referring to its wealth olive oil and the security of its cities (Deut. 33:24-25).

I. Naphtali (Vs. 21)

1. Naphtali, Dan’s brother, is described as “a hind let loose”. His descendants would be known for swiftness, as warriors fleet of foot.
2. They would also be known as composers of eloquent speech and beautiful literature – “he giveth goodly words”.
3. The best known of Naphtali’s descendants was Barak, who, with Deborah, won a mighty victory over Jabin and Sisera of the Canaanites (Judges 4:6, 15) mainly with men from his own tribe and that of Zebulun (Judg. 4:10; 5:18). The prediction regarding “goodly words” was, no doubt, fulfilled in part by the victory song of Deborah and Barak (Judg. 5:1-31).

J. Joseph (Vs. 22-26)

Jacob had the most positive things to say about Judah and Joseph out of the 12 sons. What Jacob said of Joseph on this occasion was a miniature portrayal of Joseph’s life. Remember, all the other brothers are hearing this! Jacob speaks of:

1. The Fruitfulness of Joseph’s Life (Vs. 22)
 - a. The picture. Jacob employs a beautiful word picture to summarize Joseph’s life and character. Joseph is pictured as a flourishing, fruitful branch of a tree by a well. Joseph’s life was laden with spiritual fruits such as patience, longsuffering, faith, forgiveness, compassion and purity.
 - b. The principle. The secret to the fruitfulness and flourishing of the tree in the picture is the well of water. The tree was drawing from this life source. Joseph had flourished in dry and difficult circumstances because he had been nourished, sustained and refreshed through his close walk with God. He had drawn deeply on the wellsprings of God’s grace and power in his life. Joseph was located by the spiritual well of God and His Word. Joseph lived all his life in nearness to God.
 - i. “How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against **God**? (Gen. 39:9)
 - ii. “Do not interpretations belong to **God**?” (40:8)
 - iii. “**God** shall give Pharaoh an answer of peace” (41:16)
 - iv. “**God** did send me before you to preserve life...And **God** sent me before you to preserve you a posterity in the earth...So now it was not you that sent me hither, but **God**” (45:5, 7-8)
 - v. “**God** meant it unto good” (50:20)
 - vi. “**God** will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence” (50:25)

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- c. Illustration: The blessed man of Psalm 1:1-3 “Blessed *is* the man that walketh not in the counsel of the ungodly, nor standeth in the way of sinners, nor sitteth in the seat of the scornful. But his delight *is* in the law of the LORD; and in his law doth he meditate day and night. And he shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that bringeth forth his fruit in his season; his leaf also shall not wither; and whatsoever he doeth shall prosper.” If you would be fruitful as a Christian, you must stay near the well of the Word – the written Word (the Bible) and the living Word (Christ).
 - d. Joseph was fruitful:
 - i. In a natural sense. God gave him two sons Ephraim and Manasseh who would become a great and numerous people (See Num. 1:33-35, Josh. 17:17, Deut. 33:17).
 - ii. In a spiritual sense. Joseph’s personal life flourished spiritually as he walked with God and whatever was under his charge flourished and prospered, whether it was in Potiphar’s house, the dungeon or Pharaoh’s court. Joseph’s life was a channel of blessing to others wherever he was, especially as he grew during his trials.
 - iii. Phil. 1:11 “Being filled with the fruits of righteousness, which are by Jesus Christ, unto the glory and praise of God.”
2. The Fiery trials of Joseph’s Life (Vs. 23)
Jacob now employs a war picture of archers firing arrows to describe Joseph’s trial filled life. Joseph had experienced:
- a. Hurt – “The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot *at him*,”. The darts against Joseph had principally come from his bitter brothers. These darts came in the form of bitter words and actions. Potiphar’s wife also fired her darts of false accusation at Joseph. Joseph was wounded (“grieved”) by these experiences but he chose healing for those wounds through God’s grace rather than allowing them to fester with the infection of bitterness. Remember, the Christian life is not a life without hurts. Hurts WILL come, sometimes from those close to us. It is what we do with the hurts that count.
 - b. Hatred – “and hated him:” Joseph had been the object of his brother’s bitter envy and hatred (See Gen. 37:4, 8 & 11).
3. The Fortifying of Joseph’s Life (Vs. 24)
God had strengthened Joseph in the battles he faced. This is stated in two ways:
- a. His bow abode in strength. Note that there is no mention of arrows with Joseph. God strengthened him to withstand the attacks but he did not fire back in the flesh. His defence was

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spiritual rather than carnal. Joseph overcome evil with good (Rom. 12:21). Alexander Maclaren touchingly writes, “Look at the picture. – Here stands the solitary man, ringed all round by enemies full of bitter hate. Their arrows are on the string, their bows drawn to the ear. The shafts fly thick, and when they have whizzed past him, and he can be seen again, he stands unharmed, grasping his unbroken bow...He has been able to stand in the evil day – and look! a pair of great, gentle, strong hands are laid upon his hands and arms, and strength passes into his feebleness from the touch of “the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. By the side of the hunted man stands a mighty figure, and it is His strength, not the mortal’s impotence, that has overcome.” He further adds, “Remember he who fights for God never fights without God.”

- b. His arms were strengthened by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. Great strength is required to pull back the string of a bow, especially in a battle scenario where it must be done repeatedly. If Joseph’s only resource in his trials had been his own strength, he would have failed. Joseph was supernaturally strengthened and sustained in the battle by the All-Powerful God of Jacob. The invisible, powerful hands of Almighty God gripped Joseph’s arms in the battle and gave him the strength he didn’t have to endure and withstand the attacks against him. Maclaren writes, “That strong hand is laid on ours, and lends its weight to our feeble pull. The bow is often too heavy for us to bend, but we do not need to strain our strength in the vain attempt to do it alone...Can we not feel that large hand laid on ours; and does not power, more and other than our own, creep into our numb and relaxed fingers? Yes, if we will let Him. His strength is made perfect in our weakness; and every man and woman who will make life a noble struggle against evil, vanity, or sin, may be very sure that God will direct and strengthen their hands to war, and their fingers to fight.”
 - i. Isaiah 26:3-4 “Thou wilt keep *him* in perfect peace, *whose mind is stayed on thee*: because he trusteth in thee. Trust ye in the LORD for ever: **for in the LORD JEHOVAH is everlasting strength.**”
 - ii. Colossians 1:11 “**Strengthened with all might**, according to his glorious power, unto all patience and longsuffering with joyfulness;”
 - iii. Eph. 6:10 “Finally, my brethren, be strong in the Lord, and **in the power of his might.**”
- c. The Shepherd and Stone of Israel. The phrase “from thence” means “from that place” or “from there”.

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- i. The immediate reference is a continuation of the Names and character of the God who had strengthened Joseph. Joseph had been strengthened by “the mighty God of Jacob, the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel.” The Shepherd pictures watch care and guardianship; the stone a firm foundation.
 - ii. There also appears to be another Messianic reference here. From God Almighty the Shepherd and Stone of Israel would come. These are both titles of Jesus Christ the Messiah.
 - Jesus Christ is the good, great and chief Shepherd (John 10:11, 14; Heb. 13:20; 1 Pet. 5:4).
 - Jesus Christ is the living stone (1 Pet. 2:4) and the chief corner stone (Eph. 2:20, 1 Pet. 2:6-7).
4. The Favour upon Joseph’s Life (Vs. 25-26)
Joseph was abundantly blessed by God for His steadfastness through suffering. Joseph’s descendants were mightily blessed because of his faithfulness and godliness. Proverbs 20:7 says, “The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him.” Joseph and his descendants would be blessed with:
- a. Multifaceted blessings (Vs. 25-26)
 - i. The blessings of prosperity – “blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under”. A reference to rains from above and water streams and reservoirs from beneath. See Gen. 48:20 and the reference to Ephraim.
 - ii. The blessings of progeny – “blessings of the breasts, and of the womb”. Children are always viewed as blessings from God in the Bible (Psalm 127). This is quite a contrast to the world’s perspective that views them as curses to be aborted rather than blessings to be embraced.
 - iii. The blessings of the patriarch (Vs. 26). Jacob says that the he had been blessed of God above his progenitors (forefathers) and that these blessings would be on the head of Joseph who had been separate from his brethren. It is interesting to note the principle here of blessing through separation. The believer must practice separation if he/she would know God’s blessings.
 - b. Multitudes of blessings (Vs. 25-26) The word ‘blessings’ in the plural appears five times in these two verses and the word ‘bless’ once. How God delights to abundantly bless his children as they walk with him. Whatever you are going through, stay faithful to God, walk with Him, and in the long term you will see that it was the path of true blessing. God’s will and way is

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always best. Psalm 18:30 “As for God, **his way is perfect**: the word of the LORD is tried: he *is* a buckler to all those that trust in him.”

K. Benjamin (Vs. 27)

1. Benjamin is likened to a ravening wolf, devouring the prey and dividing the spoil. It reveals the tribe of Benjamin would become a tribe skilled in warfare. Israel's first king was Saul and he was a man of war. Like a wolf, he pursued David and ruthlessly murdered everybody in the priestly city of Nob (1 Sam. 22). Other Benjamites known for their ferocity were Abner (2 Sam. 2:23), Sheba (chap. 20) and Shimei (16:5-14). Saul of Tarsus, a Benjamite (Rom. 11:1; Phil. 3:5) was like a wild animal who persecuted the church of God.
2. When you read Judges 19-20 you see the ravenous wolf in action. In Judges 20:16 the Bible reveals that in the tribe of Benjamin there were “seven hundred chosen men lefthanded; every one could sling stones at an hair breadth, and not miss.”

L. Summary (Vs. 28)

Conclusion: Are you allowing God's grace and power to work through you and make you fruitful for His glory even in the midst of trials and difficulties?