

On the Beginning

41. Jacob's Blessing

NOTE ESPECIALLY Genesis 48:1 - 49:32

The Book of Genesis, the first book Moses wrote by divine inspiration, is drawing to a close. The volume that began with the majestic words, "*In the beginning God...*" (1:1) will end with "*...in a coffin in Egypt*" (50:26). Genesis ends with the death of Jacob. First comes the blessings he pronounced on his sons just before he died (Chapters 48 and 49). Then comes his death and burial (Chapter 50). His final blessing of his sons is very significant, as we will see in studying this passage.

1. Jacob is **Sick**.
Genesis 48 opens with Joseph being called to his father's sickbed (vs. 1-2). He brought his two sons with him as he came to Jacob, and probably he also called for his brothers to come. When Joseph arrived, the Patriarch reminded him of the great covenant their family had with God (vs. 3-4). Then he rewarded Joseph for all he had done for the family by giving his sons equal standing with his direct offspring (vs. 5-7). The family would become a nation, and the descendants of Jacob's sons would become tribes within the nation of Israel. Because of Jacob's pronouncement, Manasseh and Ephraim would also be the fathers of Israelite tribes.
2. **Ephraim's** Blessing.
Then something strange happened. Joseph brought his two sons forward to receive his father's blessing (vs. 8-16). When Jacob put his right hand on Ephraim's head, Joseph objected because Manasseh was the firstborn (vs. 17-22). The right hand symbolically bestowed the greater blessing, which normally belongs to the firstborn. Of course, the Lord often does things in an unusual way. It was not the firstborn of Abraham that received the greater blessing, nor the firstborn of Isaac. Now God was going to bless Ephraim in a greater way than Manasseh, and the history of the tribes of Israel bears out the fact that He did!
3. The **Sons** of Leah.
In Genesis 49:1-12, we read the blessing Jacob pronounced upon the sons of his wife Leah (Genesis 29:32-35, 30:14-20).
 - a. Reuben, Jacob's firstborn, was unstable because of his weakness of character, and the tribe of Reuben would have the same characteristics.
 - b. Simeon and Levi would inherit property scattered in Canaan instead of having some big lot of territory. This actually did happen, as Simeon was given spots within the territory of Judah, and Levi was given cities and suburbs scattered throughout Israel. This was done because of their "*cruelty*" at Shechem, but for Levi it ended up a blessing, while Simeon found the arrangement to be a curse. A decision the Levites made to be on the Lord's side (Exodus 32) made the difference in their future.
 - c. Judah (vs. 8-12) is designated as the father of the *royal tribe*, as well as of the Saviour

(“*Shiloh*”).

- d. Zebulun and Issachar were born to Leah later in life after it seemed that she would bare no more children (Genesis 30:14-20). The future of their tribes is told in Jacob’s prophecy.

4. The Sons of the **Handmaids**.

Jacob also had sons by the two handmaids of his wives. Bilhah had Dan and Naphtali, and Zilpah had Gad and Asher (Genesis 30:1-3). In Genesis 49:16-21 we find Jacob’s prophecies about them. Dan’s tribe was the first one to go thoroughly into idolatry (Judges 17-18) and it is the only one not mentioned among the Tribulation Remnant in Revelation 7:1-8. Perhaps this is why Jacob associates him with a serpent. Perhaps verse 18 refers back to Genesis 3:15. It is a Messianic prophecy, and the first verse in the Bible to use the word “salvation.”

5. The Sons of **Rachel**.

Jacob’s last blessings (vs. 22-27) are on the two sons of his favorite wife, Rachel. Joseph has the longest blessing of the twelve. He has obviously been chosen to have the birthright instead of Reuben, and his especially-blessed son Ephraim becomes the main tribe of the Northern Kingdom of Israel in later history. The Southern Kingdom is led by Judah, who has the greatest spiritual blessing of the twelve tribes. Ephraim inherits the carnal birthright, and Judah the spiritual one.

6. The **Charge** of Jacob.

After blessing his sons, Jacob charges them to bury him up in Canaan when they someday go to the Promised Land (vs. 28-32). This charge shows his faith in God’s promises.