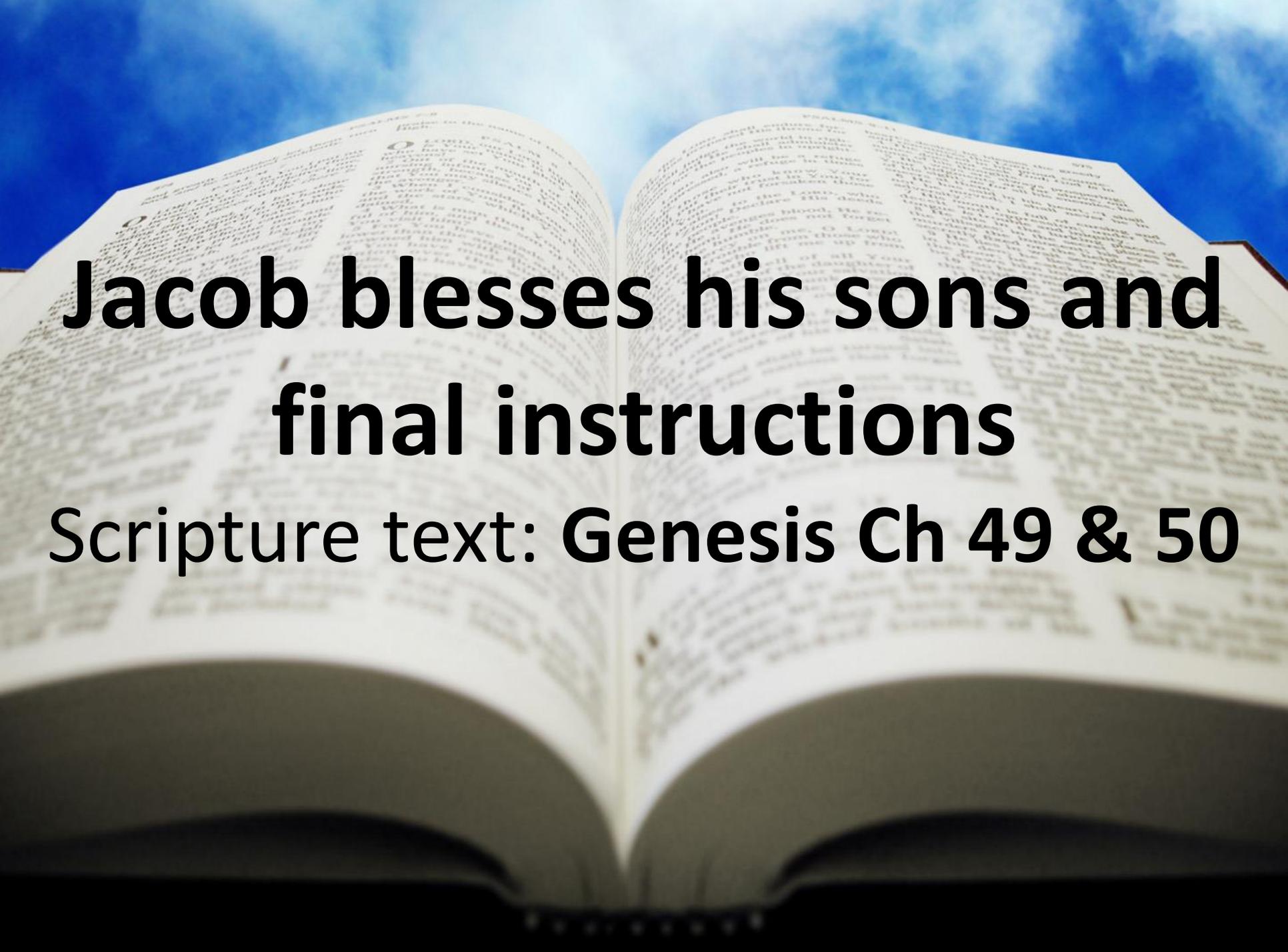


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Jacob blesses his sons and final instructions

Scripture text: Genesis Ch 49 & 50

Verses 1–2. In calling his sons to his bedside, Jacob said he would tell them what would become of them in the days ahead. His words, then, were a deliberately chosen prophetic oracle.

Verses 3–4. Jacob heaped praise upon Reuben, his firstborn, which collapsed when he announced that Reuben had defiled his father’s couch, clearly a reference to Reuben’s adultery with Jacob’s concubine Bilhah (35:22). Reuben was entitled to leadership and a double inheritance (1 Chron. 5:1–2), but because he had the ungoverned impulse of boiling water (turbulent as the waters) he would fail in leadership. In the time of the Judges (Jud. 5:15–16), the tribe of Reuben was characterized by irresolution.

Judges 5:15-18 the princes of Issachar came with Deborah, and Issachar faithful to Barak; into the valley they rushed at his heels. **Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings of heart.**

Why did you sit still among the sheepfolds, to hear the whistling for the flocks? **Among the clans of Reuben there were great searchings of heart.**

Gilead stayed beyond the Jordan; and Dan, why did he stay with the ships? Asher sat still at the coast of the sea, staying by his landings. Zebulun is a people who risked their lives to the death; Naphtali, too, on the heights of the field.

Verses 5–7. Simeon and Levi were men of anarchy (violence) and not justice, men of uncontrolled anger and fury, **with disregard for men and animals. Here was God’s moral judgment on their slaughter of the Shechemites (34:25–29).**

God distinguishes holy war from vengeance. Both tribes were later scattered (49:7). Simeon was largely disintegrated (with its land inside that of Judah; Josh. 19:1, 9), but Levi was afforded an honorable dispersion because it was the priestly tribe (Josh. 21).

Genesis 34:24-29 And all who went out of the gate of his city listened to Hamor and his son Shechem, and every male was circumcised, all who went out of the gate of his city. On the third day, when they were sore, two of the sons of Jacob, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and came against the city while it felt secure and killed all the males. **They killed** Hamor and his son Shechem with the sword and took Dinah out of Shechem's house and went away. The sons of Jacob came upon the **slain and plundered the city**, because they had **defiled their sister**. They took their flocks and their herds, their donkeys, and whatever was in the city and in the field. All their wealth, all their little ones and their wives, all that was in the houses, they captured and plundered.

Genesis 49:5-7 "Simeon and Levi are brothers; **weapons of violence** are their swords. 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. 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.

Joshua 19:1 The second lot came out for Simeon, for the tribe of the people of Simeon, according to their clans, and their inheritance was **in the midst of the inheritance of the people of Judah.**

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Joshua 19:1 The inheritance of the people of Simeon formed part of the territory of the people of Judah. Because the portion of the people of Judah was too large for them, the **people of Simeon obtained an inheritance in the midst of their inheritance.**

Verses 8–12. In this oracle Jacob predicted a fierce lionlike dominance of Judah over his enemies and over his brothers who would praise him. A wordplay was made here on the name Judah which means “praise”. The oracle pivots on the word until (49:10b). **When the Promised One who will rule the nations appears**, the scene will become an earthly paradise. These verses anticipate the kingship in Judah culminating in the reign of Messiah (cf. the tribe of Judah, Rev. 5:5), in which nations will obey Him.

Revelation 5:5-8 And one of the elders said to me, **"Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered,** so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." And between the throne and the four living creatures and among the elders I saw a Lamb standing, as though it had been slain, with seven horns and with seven eyes, which are the seven spirits of God sent out into all the earth. And he went and took the scroll from the right hand of him who was seated on the throne. And when he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four **elders fell down before the Lamb, each holding a harp, and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.**

The NASB renders the third line of Genesis 49:10, “Until Shiloh comes.” Many sources, including the Targum (Aram. paraphrase of the OT), see “Shiloh” as a title of the Messiah. However, the Hebrew word šîlōh should be rendered **“whose it is,”** that is, the scepter will not depart from Judah ... **until He comes whose it (i.e., the scepter) is** (or as the niv puts it, to whom it belongs).

Similar words in Ezekiel 21:27, **“until He comes to whom it (the crown, Ezek. 21:26) rightfully belongs”** were addressed to the last king of Judah.

Ezekiel 21:24-27 "Therefore thus says the Lord GOD: Because you have made your guilt to be remembered, in that your transgressions are uncovered, so that in all your deeds your sins appear--because you have come to remembrance, you shall be taken in hand. And you, O profane wicked one, prince of Israel, whose day has come, the time of your final punishment, thus says the Lord GOD: Remove the turban and take off the crown. Things shall not remain as they are. Exalt that which is low, and bring low that which is exalted. A ruin, ruin, ruin I will make it. This also shall not be, until he comes, the one to whom judgment belongs, and I will give it to him.

With the coming of Messiah there will be paradise-like splendor. Kidner says that every line of Genesis 49:11–12 “speaks of exuberant, intoxicating abundance: it is the golden age of the Coming One, whose universal rule was glimpsed in [v.] 10c” (Genesis, p. 219). For Judah, grapevines will be so abundant that they will be used for hitching posts; wine will be as abundant as wash water. In Judah, people’s eyes will be red or bright from wine and their teeth will be white from drinking much milk. These are picturesque ways of describing the suitability of Judah’s territory for vineyards. Such abundance will be evident in the Millennium (Isa. 61:6–7; 65:21–25; Zech. 3:10).

Isaiah 61:4-7 They shall build up the ancient ruins; they shall raise up the former devastations; they shall repair the ruined cities, the devastations of many generations. Strangers shall stand and tend your flocks; foreigners shall be your plowmen and vinedressers; but **you shall be called the priests of the LORD**; they shall speak of you **as the ministers of our God**; you shall eat the wealth of the nations, and in their glory you shall boast. Instead of your shame there shall be a double portion; instead of dishonor they shall rejoice in their lot; therefore in their land they shall possess a double portion; they shall have everlasting joy.

Isaiah 65:21-25 They shall build houses and inhabit them; they shall plant vineyards and eat their fruit. They shall not build and another inhabit; they shall not plant and another eat; for like the days of a tree shall the days of my people be, and **my chosen shall long enjoy the work of their hands.** They shall not labor in vain or bear children for calamity, for they shall be the offspring of the blessed of the LORD, and their descendants with them. Before they call I will answer; while they are yet speaking I will hear. The wolf and the lamb shall graze together; the lion shall eat straw like the ox, and dust shall be the serpent's food. They shall not hurt or destroy in all my holy mountain," says the LORD.

Verses 13–15. Zebulun would be enriched by seaborne trade (though it did not actually border the Mediterranean; cf. Josh. 19:10–11). Like a strong donkey, the tribe of **Issachar would be forced to work for others**. Issachar, located in the fertile broad pleasant plain of Esdraelon, was often subject to invading armies.

Joshua 19:10-11 The third lot came up for the people of Zebulun, according to their clans. And **the territory of their inheritance** reached as far as Sarid. Then their boundary goes up westward and on to Marel and touches Dabbesheth, then the brook that is east of Jokneam.

Verses 16–17. Dan shows another disparity between calling and achievement (cf. vv. 3–4). Dan was to provide justice (“Dan” means “judge”), but **the tribe chose treachery**, like a snake by the roadside. In the time of the Judges the **first major practice of idolatry appeared in the tribe of Dan (Jud. 18:30)**.

Judges 18:30-31 And the people of Dan set up the carved image for themselves, and Jonathan the son of Gershom, son of Moses, and his sons were priests to the tribe of the **Danites until the day of the captivity** of the land. So they set up Micah's carved image that he made, as long as the house of God was at Shiloh.

Verses 18. Jacob then interjected a request for deliverance by the Lord. He may have been indirectly reminding his sons of **their need for dependence on the Lord** (if he needed it, certainly they did too). Or he may have been **expressing his desire to enjoy the messianic hope**, when he would be delivered from all trouble and grief (cf. “redemption” in Anna’s desires; Luke 2:38).

Luke 2:38 And coming up at that very hour she began to give thanks to God and to speak of him to all who were waiting for the redemption of Jerusalem.

Verses 19–21. Three of the six Hebrew words in verse 19 are a play on the name Gad (“attack”): **Gad will be attacked by a raid of attackers, but he will attack.** The verb gādad means “to break into” or “to attack.” Border raids were often experienced by the tribes settled east of the Jordan River (1 Chron. 5:18–19).

1 Chronicles 5:18-19 The Reubenites, the **Gadites**, and the half-tribe of Manasseh **had valiant men** who carried shield and sword, and drew the bow, expert in war, 44,760, able to go to war. They **waged war** against the Hagrites, Jetur, Naphish, and Nodab.

Asher would be fertile and productive, providing rich food. That tribe settled along the rich northern coast of Canaan. **Naphtali**, like a doe, would be a free mountain people. Deborah sang of the people of Naphtali risking their lives “on the heights of the field” (Jud. 5:18). That tribe settled northwest of the Sea of Kinnereth (Galilee).

Judges 5:18 Zebulun is a people who risked their lives to the death; Naphtali, too, **on the heights of the field.**

Verses 22–26. This oracle treats Joseph more lavishly than any of the others, for here the main blessing lay (cf. 1 Chron. 5:1–2). Jacob took up the promise of fruitfulness from the name of Joseph's son Ephraim (which means fruitful) and lavished the promise of victory (Gen. 49:23–24a) and prosperity (v. 25b) on Joseph's two tribes.

Victory in battle was experienced by Joshua, Deborah, and Samuel, all of the tribe of Ephraim, and by Gideon and Jephthah, both of Manasseh's tribe.

In these verses are several marvelous titles for God—the Mighty One of Jacob ... the Shepherd (cf. 48:15), the Rock of Israel ... your father's God ... the Almighty (šadday; cf. 'ēl šadday in 17:1)—the **One who ensures blessings from the heavens above** (i.e., rain for crops) from the deep ... below (i.e., streams and wells for water), and from the breast and womb (i.e., abundant offspring). **Jacob bestowed on Joseph the greater blessings because he was the prince among his brothers** (cf. 41:41).

Verses 27–28. The oracle about **Benjamin** describes a **tribe violent in spirit**: a ravenous, **devouring wolf** (cf. the cruel Benjamites in Jud. 20, and Saul, a Benjamite, in 1 Sam. 9:1–2; 19:10; 22:17).

1 Samuel 9:1-2 There was a man of **Benjamin** whose name was Kish, the son of Abiel, son of Zeror, son of Becorath, son of Aphiah, a **Benjaminite**, a man of wealth. And he had a son whose name was **Saul**, a handsome young man. There was not a man among the people of Israel more handsome than he. From **his shoulders upward he was taller than any of the people.**

These oracles serve a purpose in the book similar to that of Noah's oracles about his sons (Gen. 9:24–27). Both **look ahead prophetically to the destinies of the sons at the end of their respective ages**—Noah in the primeval days and Jacob in the patriarchal.

Genesis 9:24-27 When Noah awoke from his wine and knew what his youngest son had done to him, he said, "**Cursed be Canaan**; a servant of servants shall he be to his brothers." He also said, "**Blessed be the LORD, the God of Shem**; and let Canaan be his servant. May **God enlarge Japheth, and let him dwell in the tents of Shem, and let Canaan be his servant.**"

Revelation 7:4-8 And I heard the number of the sealed, 144,000, sealed from **every tribe of the sons of Israel**: 12,000 from the tribe of **Judah** were sealed, 12,000 from the tribe of **Reuben**, 12,000 from the tribe of **Gad**, 12,000 from the tribe of **Asher**, 12,000 from the tribe of **Naphtali**, 12,000 from the tribe of **Manasseh**, 12,000 from the tribe of **Simeon**, 12,000 from the tribe of **Levi**, 12,000 from the tribe of **Issachar**, 12,000 from the tribe of **Zebulun**, 12,000 from the tribe of **Joseph**, 12,000 from the tribe of **Benjamin** were sealed.

In 49:29–33, the aged man had asked to be buried with his family in the cave of Machpelah. Already Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah, and Leah were there, and Jacob's body would be the seventh. When Jacob died, his sons mourned for him and gave him an honorable burial. Apparently the entire land mourned for him for seventy days, and during forty of these days, the embalmers were preparing his body. **This is the first case of an embalmed body and an elaborate funeral in the Bible.** Why did Jacob (and Joseph after him, 50:24–26) want to be buried in Canaan? This was the land God had given him; he did not belong to the world (Egypt). **Perhaps we have a spiritual lesson here as well:** not only does the believer's spirit go to heaven when he or she dies, but the body will also be taken from this world at the resurrection.

It is unfortunate that Joseph's brothers did not believe his words when he told them years before that he had forgiven them! In fact, **their unbelief and fear caused him to weep.** They illustrate weak Christians today who cannot accept **God's Word, and, as a consequence, live in fear and doubt.** "Fear not!" is Christ's Word to us just as it was Joseph's word to his brothers. In their blindness, they wanted to work for his forgiveness ("We are your servants," v. 18), **but he gave them full pardon through grace.**

Genesis begins with a garden and ends with a coffin. **What a commentary on the results of sin in this world!** But the Bible ends with a description of a beautiful "garden city" (Rev. 21–22), **the home of all who put their trust in Jesus Christ.**