

Lesson 11 – 11 July 2010

Jacob Blesses His Sons

Lesson Scope: [Genesis 49:1-28](#)

Lesson Focus

Jacob had just finished blessing Joseph's sons. It is possible that he called his other sons to him immediately afterward. In both cases Jacob was aware that his time to die was nearing, and he wanted to impart his blessings before his death.

His blessings included comments on past actions or circumstances in the lives of some, and certain character traits in others. He prophesied concerning future developments in the nation of Israel.

The birthright belonged to Reuben, but he forfeited it by his moral failure, and the next two in line also proved themselves unworthy by their treacherous deed to the Shechemites. Jacob gave the double portion belonging to the oldest two sons, but the regal right was passed right to Judah, who was also to be the progenitor of the promised Redeemer.

Jacob deals with both positive and negative situations as he blesses his sons. Some of Jacob's comments may be difficult to understand. As you study the life of each of Jacob's sons and the tribes that follow them, many truths become clear. Four main points should guide our study.

1. The law of sowing and reaping.
2. In spite of the law of sowing and reaping, by God's help and personal repentance, change for the better is possible.
3. There is both a negative and a positive expression of the same personality.
4. A lack of diligence may limit the development of a good trait.

Past choices and present character greatly influence a man's future and that of his posterity. However God does provide them power to rise above past failures and to choose the way of godliness.

Lesson Aim: To discover truths from Jacob's parting blessing to his sons.

Theme Verse: [Proverbs 20:7](#). The just man walketh in his integrity: his children are blessed after him.

Lesson Text

Genesis 49:1-28

And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you *that* which shall befall you in the last days. ²Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father.

³Reuben, thou *art* my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: ⁴Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou *it*: he went up to my couch.

⁵Simeon and Levi *are* brethren; instruments of cruelty *are in* their habitations. ⁶O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall. ⁷Cursed *be* their anger, for *it was* fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.

⁸Judah, thou *art he* whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand *shall be* in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. ⁹Judah *is* a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? ¹⁰The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him *shall* the gathering of the people *be*. ¹¹Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: ¹²His eyes *shall be* red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.

¹³Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he *shall be* for an haven of ships; and his border *shall be* unto Zidon.

¹⁴Issachar *is* a strong ass couching down between two burdens: ¹⁵And he saw that rest *was* good, and the land that *it was* pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute.

¹⁶Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. ¹⁷Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward. ¹⁸I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD.

¹⁹Gad, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last.

²⁰Out of Asher his bread *shall be* fat, and he shall yield royal dainties.

²¹Naphtali *is* a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words.

²²Joseph *is* a fruitful bough, *even* a fruitful bough by a well; *whose* branches run over the wall: ²³The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot *at him*, and hated him: ²⁴But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty *God* of Jacob; (from thence *is* the shepherd, the stone of Israel:)²⁵*Even* by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: ²⁶The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.

²⁷Benjamin shall ravin *as* a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.

²⁸All these *are* the twelve tribes of Israel: and this *is it* that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them.

Questions for Study

1. What produces an unstable character?
2. To what do anger and self-will lead?
3. Explain how negative traits of character or disposition can be turned for good.
4. What evidences from Judah's life show improvement of character from his past?
5. What will bring a person into bondage?
6. How was the tribe of Dan a -serpent by the way? Give positive and negative examples.
7. Give an admirable trait each for Gad, Asher and Naphtali.
8. What was the source of Joseph's strength?
9. Describe a fruitful Christian life.

Analyzing the Passage

In the plan of God, Israel was being formed into a nation. God had chosen Isaac as the promised seed. Of Isaac's two sons He chose Jacob. Now Jacob gathered all his sons together as one family to warn, instruct, and bless them.

Jacob declared Reuben unstable. Reuben had committed grievous immor-

ality, yet he showed mercy and compassion toward Joseph when the other brothers were planning to kill Joseph (Genesis 37:19-30: 42:22). This illustrates unpredictability of character and a loss of influence in the family.

Genesis 34 depicts how Levi's and Simeon's indignation for the violation of their sister's purity grew into anger and uncontrolled vengeance. Exodus 32:26-29 describes the tribe of Levi's abhorrence for sin, which grew into a holy zeal for the Lord, turning Jacob's curse on him into a blessing. The tribe of Levi scattered among Israel became Israel's spiritual leaders.

Many illustrations of Levites' faithfulness can be given from Israel's history. Very soon in the early church - a great company of the priests [Levites] were obedient to the faith" (Acts 6:7).

Jacob prophesied of Judah's leadership among them and of the coming Messiah (Gen. 49:10). Jesus Christ is the "Lion of the tribe of Juda" (Revelation 5:5).

The serpent and adder illustrate the treacherous nature of the Danites. Samson used these characteristics in his exploits against the Philistines. In a negative sense, the Danites expressed this tendency when they stole from Micah as they migrated northward. See Judges 18.

There is true poetic beauty in Jacob's blessing upon Joseph. The God of Jacob was the God of Joseph and is the true Shepherd of all who follow Him. He is also the Stone, the sure Foundation, of all who trust Him (Gen. 49:24).

Principles and Applications

1. Sin weakens man's character and hinders his potential for good (Gen. 49:3-4). Physical strength and natural advantages do not give spiritual power over sin. "For she [an evil woman] hath cast down many wounded: yea, many strong men have been slain by her" (Proverbs 7:26). Yielding to sin increases the tendency to yield again. Sin destroys the trust and confidence others had placed in one who has fallen.

2. Acts of uncontrolled anger may result in years of reaping (Gen. 49:5-7). Anger, self-will, and secret conspiracy combine to seek for vengeance far beyond the demands of justice. Honor and dignity are lost that can be regained only with great effort.

Wrong cannot be met with wrong. Evil cannot be overcome with evil. If self-control is lost or secret manipulation is used to solve problems, many innocent people will suffer.

3. Victory, usefulness, and blessing are promised to the repentant and faithful (Gen. 49:8-12). Rising from weakness and sin to strength and victory is possible. At what was possibly a turning point in Judah's life, he asked, "How shall we clear ourselves? (Genesis 44:16). Judah accepted accountability (Genesis 43:8-14: 44:32). When men accept full accountability for their sin and clear themselves, God gives power for victory and can make them channels of blessing to others.

To the faithful, God gives His choicest blessings. The world is more beautiful, affections are more tender, friendships are more loyal, and the Joys of life are far richer to God's children.

4. God uses a faithful remnant to fulfill His will (Gen. 49:10). God said of Abraham, -For I know him, that he will command his children and his household after him, and they shall keep the way of the Lord to do justice and Abraham which that the LORD may bring upon Abraham that which he hath spoken of him" (Genesis 18:19). God's plan will never fail. God nurtured a remnant throughout Israel's history, even amid apostasy, disbursement to foreign countries, and the intertestament period with its absence of direct revelation. Those who taught God's law did not fail. Can God work through us today? "When the Son of man cometh, shall he find faith on the earth"" (Luke 18:8).

5. The enjoyment of ease and pleasure may destroy potential strength and bring us to servitude (Gen. 49:4, 15). "The hand of the diligent shall hear rule: but the slothful shall be under tribute" (Proverbs 12:24). That the "borrower is servant to the lender" is a fact of life. Many persons are in bondage for the sake of ease and pleasure. They live far beyond their means simply by the unwise use of extended credit.

Discipline and self-denial develop true strength. The well-ordered housewife, the pure-minded husband, the studious teacher, the deep-thinking minister, and the efficient businessman became such because they made the hard choice to do what was best rather than what was easy.

6. Perseverance is essential to victory and blessing (Gen. 49:19). Those who follow Christ are called and chosen and faithful (Revelation 17:14). We must forget those things that are behind and reach forth unto those things that are before (Philippians 3:13). "But I keep under my body, and bring it into subjection: lest that by any means, when I have preached to others, I myself should be a castaway" (1Corinthians 9:27).

7. The faithful develop God-given resources into rich fruitfulness (Gen.

49:20). "The thoughts of the diligent tend only to plenteousness" (Proverbs 21:5). "The substance of a diligent man is precious" (Proverbs 12:27). Christians should not be slothful in business, but fervent in spirit, serving the Lord (see Romans 12:11). We must teach our children the care of possessions in an age of consumerism. We are commanded to work to give to those in need (see Ephesians 4:28).

8. In the midst of trial, the faithful enjoy an abundant life as God strengthens them (Gen. 49:22-24). "Life is not fair, some say. But God is fair. God is more than fair. God is merciful and gracious. The faithful are more than repaid. The abundant life of the faithful springs from the overflowing well of God's grace.

9. The faithful experience the rewards of victory (Gen. 49:27). To experience the rewards of victory requires faith and practice. We need to grow in grace, add to our faith, and give all diligence to make our calling and election sure.

Important Teachings

1. Sin weakens man's character and hinders his potential for good (Gen. 49:3-4).

2. Acts of uncontrolled anger may result in years of reaping (Gen. 49:5-7).

3. Victory, usefulness, blessing are promised to the repentant and faithful (Gen. 49:8-12).

4. God uses a faithful remnant to fulfill His will (Gen. 49:10).

5. The enjoyment of ease and pleasure may destroy potential strength and bring us to servitude (Gen. 49:4, 15).

6. Perseverance is essential to victory and blessing (Gen. 49:19).

7. The faithful develop God-given resources into rich fruitfulness (Gen. 49:20).

8. In the midst of trial, the faithful enjoy an abundant life as God strengthens them (Gen. 49:22-24).

9. The faithful experience the rewards of victory (Gen. 49:27).

Answers to Questions

1. What produces an unstable character?

A lack of self-discipline leaves a person vulnerable to the whims of one's desire. When sin is yielded to once, it is easier to yield the next time. Wrong or unwholesome thought patterns weaken conviction and the re-

solve to do what is right. A desire for acceptance with one's peers will make us men-pleasers, following the fads around us. A lack of a proper fear of God, fervent prayer life, and diligent Bible study will leave us without conviction to stand for Biblical truth.

2. To what do anger and self-will lead?

Anger and self-will lead to an unholy desire for vengeance that will result in treachery and cruelty, even to innocent persons.

3. Explain how negative traits of character or disposition can be turned for good.

Levi's fiery temperament gave him zeal for the Lord's cause when Aaron made the golden calf. Phinehas (of the tribe of Levi) turned God's wrath from Israel by zealously executing sinners. (See Numbers 25:6-13.) Peter's outspoken nature made him a great spokesman for Christ. In each case the key is for us to yield ourselves to God's cause rather than to serve our own interests. Self-control is necessary for God to use our characteristics for His cause. In the New Testament, the Holy Spirit helps us serve the Lord

4. What evidences from Judah's life show improvement of character from his past?

Judah's desire to clear himself and his willingness to assume responsibility and accountability prepared him for greater service. See Genesis 43:8-14; 44:16, 29-32.

5. What will bring a person into bondage?

A lack of self-discipline and self-denial will bring a person into the bondage of carnal lusts. A desire for ease and pleasure will prevent a person from making the nobler choices of life. A lack of diligence and/or improper spending habits may bring one into the bondage of debts. Refusing to die with Christ will leave us in bondage to our own self-will.

6. How was the tribe of Dan a "serpent by the way"? Give positive and negative examples.

A "serpent" suggests deceit, treachery, or a downward influence. "By the way" speaks of single-handed, undercover exploits. On the positive side, Samson's life and exploits illustrate these tactics, but his lack of self-discipline hindered his effectiveness. The negative side is illustrated in the tribe of Dan's northward migration and theft of Micah's idols.

7. Give an admirable trait each for Gad, Asher and Naphtali.

Gad possessed the trait of perseverance. Asher diligently developed his resources into a productive condition. Naphtali was known for excellence of

speech and words that lifted the souls of others.

8. What was the source of Joseph's strength?

Joseph's strength lay in God. By his relationship to God, he drew from God's boundless resources as from an overflowing well. God's strength in Joseph was so real and visible to men that it seemed as if his hands were being moved by God's hands (Gen. 49:24). God was Joseph's Shepherd and the Rock he trusted in.

9. Describe a fruitful Christian life.

The fruitful Christian is filled with the fruit of the Spirit (Galatians 5:22-23). The fruitful Christian reaches out to uplift and encourage others. The fruitful Christian brings praise and glory to God and leaves a warm testimony of God's grace in his heart. The fruitful Christian is filled with love even for his enemies and desires to win them for Christ.

Summarizing the Lesson

For every positive trait of character or disposition, there is a corresponding weakness. The mild and peaceable may be weak and compromising. The strong champion of truth may be insensitive to the feelings of the weak. The affectionate parent may fail to discipline. May each of us, by God's grace, rightly use our strengths, improve our weaknesses, and give all diligence for His cause now so that our churches and our children may be blessed after us.

Research Guide

1. Deuteronomy 33 gives Moses' blessing on the tribes of Israel.
2. Judges 5:12-18 relates Deborah's comments on the response of various tribes to the crisis they faced.
3. See 1 Chronicles 4:9-10, 21-23, 39-43; 1 Chronicles 5:1-10, 18-26 and 1 Chronicles 12:1-40 for interesting illustrations from the later life of the tribes.