

July 3, 2011

At the End of Days...

Genesis 49:1-27

Genesis 49 ¹Then Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you at the end of days.

²"Assemble and listen, O sons of Jacob,
listen to Israel your father.

TLNB- With failing breath, Jacob prophesied what would befall his sons in days to come (lit "at the end of days"). The character of the sons would live on in the 12 tribes and determine their role in the history of salvation. In directing the lives of the patriarchs and their descendants, God had in view a final fulfillment "at the end of days." His promise envisioned a "fullness of time," "the end of the ages," when His son would be born of a woman to redeem all nations (Gal. 4:4; 1 Co 10:11). It looked to the end of time, when all God's people would be gathered about the throne of the Lamb (Rv 7:1-10).

1 "I may tell you what shall happen"- this blessing contains explicit, predictive prophecy

2 verse two introduces the poetry of the chapter, greater than any other poetic section of Genesis

The sons are not listed by birth order, but by mothers partially. Even then they are not listed in exact birth order.

REUBEN (Gen. 49:3-4)

First son of Jacob with Leah, his name means "Behold, a son!"

3 "firstfruits of my strength"- born at Jacob's physical peak

4 "Unstable as water"- such as failing to rescue Joseph (37:22-29) and offering up his sons (42:37)

"you shall not have preeminence"- what was ascribed to him in v3 is taken away

"because you went up to your father's bed"- incest with Bilhah (35:22)

How it played out: Though the oldest son, Reuben's tribe became insignificant. 1 Chron 5:1 assigns his birthright to the two sons of Joseph. They would join the rebellious northern kingdom and be demolished by Assyria. Yet Reuben remains named in the eschatological restoration of Israel in Ezekiel 48.

SIMEON & LEVI (Gen. 49:5-7)

Second and third sons of Jacob and Leah,

Their names mean "YHWH heard I am hated" and "My husband will be attached to me"

5 "weapons of violence are their swords"- co-conspirators in the Shechemite massacre (Gen 34)

6 vividly describes their actions in Shechem and Jacob's disapproval

7 "I will divide ... and scatter"- the consequences for their actions are applied to the tribes' fate

How it played out: Simeon was absorbed into Judah and ceased to be a distinct tribe, yet they too are redeemed "at the end of days" by Jesus Christ, the New Israel. The sons of Levi were not given an inheritance either, they were scattered and divided throughout all the land in priestly cities (Jsh 13:33; ch 21). And yet we have many famous Levites like Moses & Aaron and they have the great responsibility of carrying out the priestly work of God meeting with His people.

JUDAH (Gen. 49:8-12)

Fourth son of Jacob and Leah, his name means, "I will praise YHWH"

TLNB- When blessing Judah, the foregather of King David and of the Messiah (cf. Mt 1:1-17), Jacob prophesies about the future age of the kingdom of God. Judah and his offspring are described with contrasting images of war (vv 8-10a) and peace (vv 10b-12).

8 "Judah, your brothers shall praise you"- a word play on Judah's name: praise

"on the neck of your enemies"- they cannot escape his victorious hold on them

- “father’s sons shall bow down before you”- this was Joseph’s dream! The messiah belongs to Judah, his brothers will bow down to that heir, the seed through whom all nations will be blessed!
- 9 This verse is where “the Lion of the Tribe of Judah” comes from (Rev 5:5)
- 10 “The scepter shall not depart from Judah”- the scepter is the symbol of royal authority
~~“until tribute comes to him”~~ ESV uses the Septuagint, the Hebrew says “until Shiloh comes” This is a direct Messianic prophecy about the final heir of Judah
 “to him shall be the obedience of the peoples”- not just the sons of Israel, but all peoples
- 11 Doesn’t this sound like Palm Sunday and Holy Week!?!?
 “washed his garments in wine”- originally an expression of rich celebration, given greater meaning in Jesus Christ’s death and sacraments. cf Rev 7:14
- 12 “wine... milk”- often used of the Salvation of the Messiah (Is 25:6-9; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13)
How it played out: After Solomon dies the nation splits, but a Davidic ruler remains. Matthew and Luke track the genealogy for us and we see Jesus Christ, Son of David, Son of Judah, Son of Israel as the Fulfillment of Genesis. All Israel (the Church) praises and bows to him (v8), his hand is on the neck, even crushing the head, of his enemies (v8). He is the Lion of Revelation 5 (v9). The scepter did not depart from his feet (v10), as his kingdom is not of this world. Even now the scepter remains his. And the richness and splendor of verses 11-12 is accomplished during Holy Week, remains true in heaven, and is united to us where Heaven meets Earth in the Divine Service.

ZEBULUN (Gen. 49:13)

- Tenth son of Jacob and sixth son of Leah, name means “My husband will honor me”
- 13 short and sweet, this “blessing” is a strictly geographic prophecy
How it played out: Though not quite on the sea in Joshua’s day, the tribe would eventually migrate north to Sidon. In Judges 1 they are listed with Ephraim & Manasseh and other brothers who failed to expel the Canaanites. This will lead to their downfall and the downfall of Israel. Yet they are redeemed by Judah’s heir and included in the promises of Ezekiel 48.

ISSACHAR (Gen. 49:14-15)

- Ninth son of Jacob and fifth son of Leah, his name means “God has given me my wages”
- 14 “strong donkey”- an idiom similar to our “lazy/stubborn ass”
- 14-15 as a whole, the prophecy predicts he will never reach his potential and will fall into servitude
How it played out: Issachar accomplishes very little in the history of the Sons of Israel, but he does join the Northern Kingdom and is levelled by Assyria. They are also restored by the Messianic Age in Ezekiel 48.

DAN (Gen. 49:16-18)

- Fifth son of Jacob and first son of Bilhah, Rachel’s servant, name means “God has judged me”
- 16 “Dan shall judge his people”- another word play on his name
- 17 *TLSB* connects this verse with Samson, a Judge from the tribe of Dan, overthrowing the Philistines
- 18 Jacob inserts a brief prayer for salvation in the midst of his blessing his sons
How it played out: There is also a city in the far north named Dan often spoken in the phrase “From Dan to Beersheba” as a way of including the whole country. Dan will side with the rebellious Northern Kingdom and be destroyed by the nations. Restoration is theirs in Christ Jesus and the messianic age spoken of in Ezekiel 48.

GAD (Gen. 49:19)

- Seventh son of Jacob and first son of Zilpah, Leah’s servant, name means “Good Fortune”
- 19 “Raiders” in Hebrew “Gadud” setting up a word play on the sound of Gad and Gadud
How it played out: Based on their location they would normally be the first line of defense to raiders and invaders. After the rebellion they remained in the disputed territory east of the Jordan River, constantly

surrounded by Ammon (Jer 49:1). They too would cease to be until the New Israel is realized in Christ Jesus and all nations meet their savior. Gad is restored in the eschatological sense as depicted in Ezekiel 48.

ASHER (Gen. 49:20)

Eighth son of Jacob and second son of Zilpah, Leah's servant, name means "Blessed am I"

20 This prophecy likely refers to the very fertile land they would occupy

How it played out: In Judges 1 they are listed as one of the tribes guilty of not driving out the Canaanites. Asher joined with the Northern Kingdom and was wiped out by Assyria. Yet they too are included in Ezekiel 48 and find their full restoration in Jesus' death and resurrection for the world.

NAPHTALI (Gen. 49:21)

Sixth son of Jacob and second son of Bilhah, Rachel's servant,

Name means "wrestled with my sister and prevailed."

21 Sounds kinda fruity... but seems to indicate his independence and fruitfulness

How it all plays out: Aside from this obscure blessing and prophecy, Judges 1 includes them as one of the nations who failed to drive out the Canaanites, opening the door for long term difficulties. They would be redeemed from destruction, nonetheless, by the salvation foretold in Ezekiel 48. And from their land would come Jesus of Nazareth.

JOSEPH (Gen. 49:22-26)

Eleventh son of Jacob and first son of Rachel, name means "May he add another son to me"

22 this verse speaks of the many generations who would flow from Joseph and his two tribes of sons

23 "the archers bitterly attacked him"- a reference back to his brothers' attacks in ch 37

24 Joseph's blessings by God are clear and continue to his sons, especially Ephraim

25-26 all these blessing find their fulfilment in Christ

26 "bounties of the everlasting hills... on the head of Joseph... brow of him"- possibly picturing a crown

How it all played out: Leaders such as Joshua, Gideon, and Jeroboam would come from Joseph's sons. At times in the OT prophets, "Joseph" is used as an alternate name for the nation of Israel, the northern kingdom in particular.

BENJAMIN (Gen. 49:27)

Twelfth son of Jacob and second son of Rachel, name means "Son of my right hand"

27 for someone who has had so little said of him, he sure receives a harsh prophecy!

How it all played out: Benjamin's future is characterized by battle. In Judges 1 they too did not drive out the native people (Jebusites). The Judge Ehud (Jdg 3:15-30) brought more battle. They saw more fighting against the Ammonites in Judges 10. In Judges 19 – 20 all of Israel wages war against Benjamin for the atrocities he committed. Eventually, Saul is chosen as King and he is a son of Benjamin. According to 1 Kings 12, Benjamin was the only tribe that remained with Judah when the kingdom split.

PRAYER

NEXT WEEK: The Close of Genesis- Jacob's Death & Burial, The Brothers Reconcile, Joseph Dies