

The Sons of Jacob (Chapter 30, 34-35, 38)

Jacob's family is filled with the same deceit and back biting that he experienced with Laban and Esau. Within his own wives there is a great rivalry for his affection. Leah is a very sad character in this drama, for she does all she can to try to win Jacob's affection, but to no avail. Even after bearing four sons, Jacob still doesn't care for her.

Rachel is barren, and following the tradition of Sarah, gives Jacob her handmaiden, Bilhah as a concubine. She produces two offspring. To keep up with the competition, Leah also gives her handmaiden, Zilpah, who also produces two offspring. Leah then also bears two more sons and a daughter, Dinah.

Eventually God opens Rachel's womb and she gives birth first to Joseph and then Benjamin.

Jacob's Oldest Sons

The Legacy of Reuben (35:22)

After Rachel's death Reuben, the first born of Israel, sleeps with Rachel's handmaiden and Israel's concubine, Bilhah. Not much else is said of this incident except that Israel learned about it. We won't find until later that this becomes a significant event for Reuben, as it causes him to lose the family birthright.

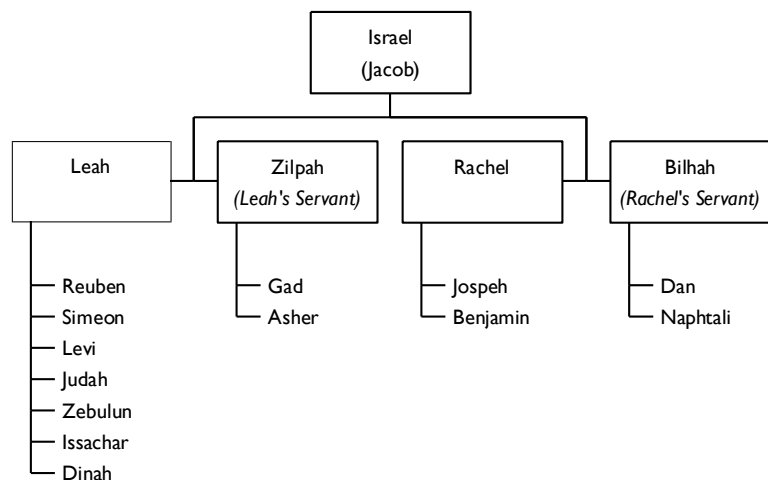
The Legacy of Levi & Simeon (Chapter 34)

With Reuben excluded from the birthright, the next two eldest sons would be the natural choice. However, these two are excluded for their role in the slaughter of the men of Shechem.

After Israel purchases land near the city of Shechem, the prince of that land, Shechem falls in love with Dinah and ends up raping her. He is ashamed of this, and asks his father to gain Dinah as his wife. Strangely, Jacob knew of the incident with Dinah, but doesn't stand up for her, nor does he become involved in the bridal negotiations. Instead, his sons carry on the negotiation, telling the men of Shechem that before they can intermarry, all the men of Shechem must be circumcised.

While this appears to be an attempt to allow intermarriage between these Canaanites and the Israelites through the adoption of this sign of the covenant, it is actually a deception. As the men are recovering from their surgery, Levi and Simeon enter the town and slaughter the men. Then all Jacob's sons looted the city and took the women and children as their slaves.

The Sons of Israel



This grieved Jacob. Jacob was perhaps partially to blame for not taking leadership in handling the situation. Nonetheless, Jacob would now bear the responsibility for the slaughter. He had made a peace treaty with Shechem, and now all the Canaanites would not trust any treaty he made. For Levi and Simeon, this cost them the opportunity to gain the family birthright.

Judah

The Legacy of Judah (Chapter 38)

Without Reuben, Levi and Simeon, as next oldest, Judah appears to be the one on whom the birthright would fall. But Judah seems to have the same disregard for the birthright as did Esau.

Judah takes Shua the Canaanite as his wife and she bares him three sons: Er, Onan and Shelah. Er marries Tamar, but then he dies because he was “evil in the sight of the Lord.” As per the Hebrew custom, Onan then is responsible to take Tamar as his wife to carry on his brother’s line. However while Onan used Tamar for his own sexual gratification⁴⁰, he refused to carry out his duty and impregnate Tamar. This also displeased God, so he too was killed. Tamar would have then passed to the next brother to fulfill the family line, but Shelah was too young. So Judah asks Tamar to remain in his household until Shelah became old enough to marry.

Time passed and Shelah grew old enough, but Judah never gave him to Tamar to marry. It seems that Judah lacked concern for ensuring that the family line would continue. Tamar, however, was deeply concerned about it and devised a plot to ensure that Judah’s lineage would continue. She pretends to be a prostitute and sleeps with Judah, who apparently had no problems having relations with temple prostitutes⁴¹. As a result of this liaison, Tamar conceives twins.

When later Judah learns of Tamar’s deception, he is not angry, but is convicted of his own disregard for carrying on the family line, calling Tamar “more righteous than I.” Judah does not see Tamar’s actions as sinful, for she was only trying to carry on the lineage which he had so blatantly disregarded. Furthermore, it is only through Tamar’s actions that the Messianic line is able to continue. For this reason, she is one of only four women mentioned by Matthew in the Messianic line (Matthew 1:3). The story of the birth Tamar’s offspring carry on the theme throughout Genesis of the younger being chosen over the elder.

The Leadership of Judah

The narrative now shifts to the story of Joseph, his betrayal by his brothers, and his protection by God in Egypt. In the midst of the Joseph narrative, however, we see a new leader emerge from the remaining brothers: Judah.

Judah was complicit in the enslavement of Joseph. However it is Judah who suggests that they not kill him, but rather sell him into slavery (37:26). He seems to already have influence over his brothers, and has kept them from committing murder.

Several years later Judah and his brothers must return to Egypt to buy food. In their first encounter, Joseph tells them that they cannot return unless they bring their youngest brother Benjamin. Jacob is reluctant to send Benjamin, but it is Judah who steps up and takes leadership. He assures his father that he will personally protect Benjamin, and if he fails to bring him back, that he will bear the full blame (43:9). And so, Judah convinces Jacob to let them return to Egypt.

When Joseph’s cup is found in Benjamin’s sack, Judah is the one who stands before Joseph to plead for mercy. Judah then demonstrates his heartfelt repentance regarding their enslavement of Joseph, by entreating Joseph to take his life rather than disappoint his father by not bringing back

⁴⁰ Ross.

⁴¹ There is an interesting contrast between Judah’s lack of sexual morality in chapter 38 with Joseph’s refusal of Potiphar’s wife in chapter 39.

Benjamin (44:33-34). It is Judah's humble leadership by taking responsibility for Benjamin that finally convinces Joseph that his brother have changed and that he can now reveal himself to them.

Finally, when all the sons of Israel move to Egypt, it is Judah who leads the way, finding them a home in the land of Goshen (46:28).

Israel's Songs of Blessing

In chapter 48-49, as he is about to die, Israel gathers his sons and to pass on a blessing. But this is no ordinary blessing, for what he is about to tell them is "what will befall you in the days to come." This is translated in the King James as "the last days." This is not just a blessing, but a prophecy.⁴² Israel is telling us something of the end times in the midst of the blessings of his sons.

Blessings of the Younger Son

- Seth not Cain (4:25)
- Isaac not Ishmael (17:18-19)
- Jacob not Esau (25:23)
- Perez not Zerah (38:27-30)
- Ephraim not Manasseh(48:14)
- Judah not Reuben (49:3)

The Blessing of the Eldest Sons

Joseph begins with the eldest brother, telling him that he "shall not have preeminence," (49:3-4) because of his relations with Bilhah, Jacob's concubine (35:22). Likewise, the next to eldest sons, Levi and Simeon, would not receive the prominent role in the family due to their slaughter of the men of Shechem (34:25).

Nearly 1400 years later the author of Chronicles gives commentary to this passage:

Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (for he was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph the son of Israel; so that he is not enrolled in the genealogy according to the birthright. Though Judah prevailed over his brothers, and from him came the leader, yet the birthright belonged to Joseph). (1 Chronicles 5:1-2)

The Blessing of Joseph's Sons

Due to the forfeiture of the eldest three sons, Joseph gains the birthright. Israel gives Joseph's sons, Ephraim and Manasseh what should have belonged to the firstborn (48:5). Traditionally the eldest son would receive a double-portion of the inheritance, and by granting his grandsons equal status with his sons, Joseph would receive that double portion. As a result, within the 12 tribes of Israel, we do not have the tribe of Joseph, but instead Ephraim and Manasseh each have their own tribe on an equal level with the others.

In a scene reminiscent of Isaac's blessing of Jacob, Israel blesses Ephraim, the youngest of the two of Joseph's sons. Joseph tries to correct the nearly blind Israel, telling him that he is about to bless the wrong child, that he has his hand on the younger son, not the eldest. But Israel says he knows what he is doing, and once again in Genesis, it is the younger who receives the blessing.

We can not miss this significant theme in the book of Genesis. Moses is trying to make it clear that the blessing is passed down not according to the normal rights. It is something which can be lost due to disregard or disobedience. Likewise, the blessing is not something to be earned, but which comes through grace. Finally, it speaks something of our God, who seems to give favor to the underdog and who hates pride and arrogance.

⁴² Sailhamer

The Blessing of Judah

While Joseph's sons receive the birthright and the double-portion inheritance, Joseph's lineage is not the Messianic line. That is reserved for the family of Judah.

As Israel blesses Judah, first he prophesies that Judah will have the place of leadership amongst the tribes of Israel:

*Judah, your brothers shall praise you;
Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies;
Your father's sons shall bow down to you*

*Judah is a lion's whelp;
From the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He couches, he lies down as a lion,
And as a lion, who dares rouse him up? (49:8-9)*

Judah is a lion that no one dares to wake up. The tribe of Judah is like a lion laying in wait, which at some point will pounce. The tribe will stay quiet until some future point, when a king will rise up⁴³. In the meantime Judah lies in wait. This point is reiterated in less figurative language in the following verse.

*The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes,
And to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. (49:10)*

The scepter is held in Judah, but is waiting "until Shiloh comes." Unfortunately the NASB and the KJV have transliterated the Hebrew in the word *shîylôh*. This is not a proper noun⁴⁴, but merely the Hebrew word which means "to whom it belongs." The scepter may not be evident in Judah, but Judah retains it until the one to whom the scepter belongs arrives.

Who is the one to whom the scepter belongs? Certainly King David will be a partial fulfillment of this prophecy, as he will be the most prominent king in the history of Israel. But the last line of this verse tells us that there is someone even greater than David that Israel has in mind, for *Shiloh* will have the obedience of the peoples or of all the nations. The scepter of Judah will rule over, not just the nation of Israel, but the whole world. Clearly this is an reference to the coming Messiah.

The world-wide reign of the Messiah will be accompanied by great prosperity. This is illustrated in the figurative language of verses 11 and 12:

*He ties his foal to the vine,
And his donkey's colt to the choice vine;
He washes his garments in wine,
And his robes in the blood of grapes.*

*His eyes are dull from wine,
And his teeth white from milk.(49:11-12)*

Choice grape vines will be so commonplace that they will be used as hitching posts for common barnyard animals.⁴⁵ Clothing will be washed in wine, because wine will be as prevalent as water. In Judah, people will have so much wine available that they will have red eyes (red being a better translation than dull) and so much milk that their teeth will be white. These are pictures of prosperity.

⁴³ Sailhamer.

⁴⁴ Ibid.

⁴⁵ Ross.

Israel's blessing of the rest of his sons (with the exception of Joseph) are remarkably short. However, they all carry the theme of prosperity. This indicates that when the Messiah comes, all of Israel will participate in His prosperity.⁴⁶

Fulfillment of Judah's Blessing

Eve's seed from Genesis 3:15 has passed through Seth, Noah, Shem, Abraham, Isaac, Jacob, and now through Judah. God's plan of redemption for all humanity will arise out of Judah. This prophecy is reiterated numerous times throughout the prophets of the Old Testament, and becomes a major proof for Jesus as Messiah in the gospels (Matthew 1:3, 2:4-6, Luke 3:30). Finally, this prophecy will have its greatest fulfillment yet to come, as we see the throne room of God in Revelation:

(Revelation 5:5, 9) And one of the elders said to me, "Stop weeping; behold, the Lion that is from the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has overcome so as to open the book and its seven seals."

And they sang a new song, saying, "Worthy are You to take the book and to break its seals; for You were slain, and purchased for God with Your blood men from every tribe and tongue and people and nation."

⁴⁶ Ibid.

Bibliography

- Baylis, Albert. *From Creation to the Cross*. Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 1996.
- Davis, Barry. Classroom notes from “Genesis through Song of Solomon.” Multnomah Biblical Seminary, Fall 2003.
- Easton. M.G.. *Illustrated Bible Dictionary*. Electronic Edition: E-Sword Software.
- Erickson, Millard J.. *Christian Theology*. Grand Rapids MI: Baker Books, 2002.
- Fee, Gordon D. and Douglas Stuart. *How to Read the Bible Book by Book*. Grand Rapids MI: Zondervan, 2002.
- Kim, Stephen. Classroom notes from “Gospels, Hebrews-Revelation.” Multnomah Biblical Seminary, Spring 2003.
- LaSor, William Sanford. “Biblical Creationism.” *The Asbury Theological Journal*. Vol. 42, No. 2, (1987), 7.
- Orr, James, ed. *International Standard Bible Encyclopedia*. Electronic Edition, E-Sword software.
- Ross, Allen P. “Genesis.” *Bible Knowledge Commentary*. John F. Walvoord and Roy B. Zuck, ed. Victor Books, 1985. Electronic Edition STEP files.
- Ryrie, Charles C. “Genesis.” *Ryrie Study Bible*. Chicago: Moody’s Press, 1995.
- Sailhamer, John H. “Genesis.” *The Expositor’s Bible Commentary*. Frank E. Gaebelein, ed. Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1998. Electronic edition STEP file.
- Wecks, John. Classroom notes from “Daniel and Revelation.” Multnomah Biblical Seminary, Spring 2003.