

Genesis 47:27 – 49:33

^{47:27} Now Israel lived in the land of Egypt, in Goshen, and they acquired property in it and were fruitful and became very numerous. ²⁸ Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years; so the length of Jacob's life was one hundred and forty-seven years. ²⁹ When the time for Israel to die drew near, he called his son Joseph and said to him, 'Please, if I have found favor in your sight, place now your hand under my thigh and deal with me in kindness and faithfulness. Please do not bury me in Egypt, ³⁰ but when I lie down with my fathers, you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place.' And he said, 'I will do as you have said.' ³¹ He said, 'Swear to me.' So he swore to him. Then Israel bowed in worship at the head of the bed. ^{48:1} Now it came about after these things that Joseph was told, 'Behold, your father is sick.' So he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim with him. ² When it was told to Jacob, 'Behold, your son Joseph has come to you,' Israel collected his strength and sat up in the bed. ³ Then Jacob said to Joseph, 'God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me, ⁴ and He said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and numerous, and I will make you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your descendants after you for an everlasting possession. ⁵ Now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, as Reuben and Simeon are. ⁶ But your offspring that have been born after them shall be yours; they shall be called by the names of their brothers in their inheritance. ⁷ Now as for me, when I came from Paddan, Rachel died, to my sorrow, in the land of Canaan on the journey, when there was still some distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem).' ⁸ When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, 'Who are these?' ⁹ Joseph said to his father, 'They are my sons, whom God has given me here.' So he said, 'Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them.' ¹⁰ Now the eyes of Israel were so dim from age that he could not see. Then Joseph brought them close to him, and he kissed them and embraced them. ¹¹ Israel said to Joseph, 'I never expected to see your face, and behold, God has let me see your children as well.' ¹² Then Joseph took them from his knees, and bowed with his face to the ground. ¹³ Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right, and brought them close to him. ¹⁴ But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, crossing his hands, although Manasseh was the firstborn. ¹⁵ He blessed Joseph, and said, 'The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, ¹⁶ the angel who has redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and may my name live on in them, and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.' ¹⁷ When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on Ephraim's head, it displeased him; and he grasped his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. ¹⁸ Joseph said to his father, 'Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn. Place your right hand on his head.' ¹⁹ But his father refused and said, 'I know, my son, I know; he also will become a people and he also will be great. However, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations.' ²⁰ He blessed them that day, saying, 'By you Israel will pronounce blessing, saying, 'May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!'' Thus he put Ephraim before Manasseh. ²¹ Then Israel said to Joseph, 'Behold, I am about to die, but God will be with you, and bring you back to the land of your fathers. ²² I give you one portion more than your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow.'

^{49:1} Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, 'Assemble yourselves that I may tell you what will befall you in the days to come.

² Gather together and hear, O sons of Jacob;
And listen to Israel your father.

³ Reuben, you are my firstborn;
My might and the beginning of my strength,
Preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.

⁴ Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence,
Because you went up to your father's bed;
Then you defiled it
He went up to my couch.

⁵ Simeon and Levi are brothers;
Their swords are implements of violence.

⁶ Let my soul not enter into their council;

Let not my glory be united with their assembly;
Because in their anger they slew men,
And in their self-will they lamed oxen.
7 Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce;
And their wrath, for it is cruel.
I will disperse them in Jacob,
And scatter them in Israel.

8 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.

9 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?

10 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.

11 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.

12 His eyes are dull from wine [dark like wine],
And his teeth white from milk [white like milk].

13 Zebulun will dwell at the seashore;
And he shall be a haven for ships,
And his flank shall be toward Sidon.

14 Issachar is a strong donkey,
Lying down between the sheepfolds.

15 When he saw that a resting place was good
And that the land was pleasant,
He bowed his shoulder to bear burdens,
And became a slave at forced labor.

16 Dan shall judge his people,
As one of the tribes of Israel.

17 Dan shall be a serpent in the way,
A horned snake in the path,
That bites the horse's heels,
So that his rider falls backward.

18 For Your salvation I wait, O LORD.

19 As for Gad, raiders shall raid him,
But he will raid at their heels.

20 As for Asher, his food shall be rich,
And he will yield royal dainties.

21 Naphtali is a doe let loose,
He gives beautiful words.

22 Joseph is a fruitful bough,
A fruitful bough by a spring;

Its branches run over a wall.
²³ The archers bitterly attacked him,
And shot at him and harassed him;
²⁴ But his bow remained firm,
And his arms were agile,
From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob
(From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),
²⁵ From the God of your father who helps you,
And by the Almighty who blesses you
With blessings of heaven above,
Blessings of the deep that lies beneath,
Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.
²⁶ The blessings of your father have surpassed the blessings of my ancestors
Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills;
May they be on the head of Joseph,
And on the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers.

²⁷ Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;
In the morning he devours the prey,
And in the evening he divides the spoil.'

²⁸ All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them. He blessed them, every one with the blessing appropriate to him. ²⁹ Then he charged them and said to them, 'I am about to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, ³⁰ in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site. ³¹ 'There they buried Abraham and his wife Sarah, there they buried Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and there I buried Leah – ³² the field and the cave that is in it, purchased from the sons of Heth.' ³³ When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

Historical and Cultural Background

The children of Jacob, Leah, Zilpah, Rachel, and Bilhah in order of birth

	Leah	Zilpah	Rachel	Bilhah
1	Reuben (disqualified)			
2	Simeon (disqualified)			
3	Levi (disqualified)			
4	Judah			
5				Dan
6				Naphtali
7		Gad		
8		Asher		
9	Issachar			
10	Zebulun			
	Dinah			
11			Joseph	
12			Benjamin	

- ‘Shiloh’ (49:10): a word that is difficult to translate. The Latin Vulgate translates it ‘he that is to be sent’. In which case, it would be the equivalent of the Hebrew *shaluach*, ‘messenger.’
 - ‘Shiloh is used in the Talmud [an encyclopedia of Jewish tradition] as a personal name for the Messiah.’¹ (p. 205).
 - Hamilton observes, ‘There is no doubt about how the Qumran community [of the Dead Sea scrolls fame] understood Genesis 49:10.’² For example, in 4Q Patriarchal Blessings, the interpretation of the Genesis text reads: ‘A ruler shall not depart from the tribe of Judah while Israel has dominion. There will not be cut off a king in it belonging to David. For the staff is the covenant of the kingship; the thousands of Israel are the feet, until the coming of the Messiah of Righteousness, the branch of David, for to him and his seed has been given the covenant of kingship over his people for everlasting generations.’³

A Literary Pattern: Narrative – Poetry – Epilogue⁴

- Creation narrative (Gen.1:1 – 26), poetry (1:27), and epilogue (1:28 – 2:3)
- Garden narrative (Gen.2:4 – 22), poetry (2:23), and epilogue (2:24)
- Fall narrative (Gen.3:1 – 13), poetry (3:14 – 19), epilogue (3:20 – 24)
- Cain narrative (Gen.4:1 – 22), poetry (4:23), epilogue (4:24-26)
- Noah narrative (Gen.6:8 – 9:24), poetry (9:25 – 27), epilogue (9:28 – 29)
- Abraham narrative (Gen.11:27 – 24:59), poetry (24:60), epilogue (24:61 – 67)
- Jacob narrative (Gen.25 – 36, and then to 48), poetry (49:1 –27), epilogue (49:28 – 33)
- Joseph narrative (Gen.37 – 48), poetry (48:15 – 16), epilogue (48:17 – 22)
- Exodus narrative (Ex.1 – 14), poetry (Ex.15:1 – 18), epilogue (Ex.15:19 – 21)
- Balaam narrative (Num.22:1 – 24:2), poetry (Num.24:3 – 9; 15 – 24), epilogue (Num.24:25)
- Moses narrative (Dt.1 – 31), poetry (Dt.32:1 – 33:29), epilogue (Dt.34:1 – 12)

¹ Herbert Alleman, ‘Genesis,’ in H.C. Alleman & E.E. Flack, editors, *Old Testament Commentary* (Philadelphia: Muhlenberg Press, 1948), p.205

² Victor Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), p.660.

³ Millar Burrows, *More Light on the Dead Sea Scrolls* (New York: Viking, 1958), p. 401

⁴ John H. Sailhamer, *The Pentateuch as Narrative* (Grand Rapids, MI: Zondervan, 1992), p.35 – 37

Questions

1. In general, why are a person's last words important?
2. What are all the emotions of the deathbed situation? Have you ever been part of this kind of situation? Or seen one in a story?
 - a. Emotionally, it's usually not that great to have surprises on a person's deathbed!
3. What do you think Joseph might have been expecting of his father Jacob?
4. Do you think Jacob was thinking of his own father Isaac, being blind, and giving Jacob the blessing by mistake?
5. Notice that both Judah and Joseph have had twin sons, with the typical firstborn order reversed. The story that began in Genesis 37 is now finishing with an explanation for why the tribes of Judah and Joseph are preeminent. They have grown together as godly men and as sons and brothers.
 - a. Judah's son Perez emerged from the womb before Zerah, even though Zerah stuck his hand out first (Gen.38:27 – 30)
 - b. Joseph's younger son Ephraim was blessed as first born by Jacob instead of the older son Manasseh (Gen.48:13 – 20)
 - c. This signifies a kind of divine intervention and blessing from God. God can set aside the typical order of men to accomplish His own purposes and reward people according to some other criteria: either because of their own faithfulness to Him, or His sheer choice.
6. Is the order of Jacob's blessing significant? What's the difference between the birth order of the sons and the way Jacob groups them? Is it just how they were standing in his room?

Jacob's order of blessing

	Son	Mother
1	Reuben (disqualified)	Leah
2	Simeon (disqualified)	Leah
3	Levi (disqualified)	Leah
4	Judah	Leah
5	Zebulun	Leah
6	Issachar	Leah
7	Dan	Bilhah
8	Gad	Zilpah
9	Asher	Zilpah
10	Naphtali	Bilhah
11	Joseph	Rachel
12	Benjamin	Rachel

- a. He groups the sons of Leah first, and goes in birth order among them. He explains why Judah is the firstborn in the sense that the Adamic kingship will one day materialize in his line, not in Reuben, Simeon, or Levi.
 - b. He groups the sons of the handmaidens next, mixing them. This seems to indicate that he does not express preference between Bilhah and Zilpah, corresponding to Rachel and Leah, respectively. He equalizes them.
 - c. He groups the sons of Rachel last. He seems to give the blessing of fruitfulness to Joseph, who is given a kind of special honor, but not in the same sense as Judah.
7. Reuben, Simeon, Levi
 - a. They are not the firstborn.
 - b. Simeon and Levi, because of their bloodshed, will not inherit land. This is consistent thematically with Cain shedding Abel's blood and not being able to settle in the land.
 8. Judah
 - a. Who will bow down to Judah, the tribe?
 - i. Brothers (v.8a), father's sons (v.8c)
 - ii. Enemies (v.8b)
 - iii. The peoples (v.10d)
 - b. Kingship – symbolized by the scepter (v.10a) and ruler's staff (v.10b)
 - c. The motif of the garden is found in the donkey, vine, and grapes (v.11)

- d. Who is Shiloh? This is taken to be a reference to the Messiah. A personal title.
 - e. Why is Judah characterized by a lion? Already his leadership among his brothers is being highlighted.
9. Dan
- a. The tribe of Dan will produce honored judges (leaders), especially Samson.
 - b. Serpent in the way: is this positive or negative? In whose way? Who are the horse and rider who will fall backward? There is a double entendre:
 - i. The tribe of Dan settled between the mountains of current day Lebanon and the Golan Heights. If what Jacob means is that Dan would be a tough and resilient people (a serpent, a horned snake), then perhaps he means that they would protect the nation of Israel (be in the way of) from the attacks of enemies coming from the north. This might apply to Samson himself who did indeed deliver the Israelites from the Philistines, both through his judgments and his physical actions.
 - ii. But the tribe of Dan also introduced idolatry to the people of Israel. Jeroboam set up an idol of a calf in the city of Dan, known as the center of idol worship.
 - c. Why does Jacob suddenly call out in hope for God's *salvation*? Perhaps because he's tired and wants to say that before he is too tired. But perhaps because he has just mentioned a serpent. That is the first time the word *salvation* appears in the Pentateuch. It will occur again at the Exodus (Ex.14:13; 15:2) meaning 'deliverance' and 'rescue.' Apparently, the tribe of Dan would exemplify the need for God's salvation. Their idolatry would reflect the need for God to deliver them from the venom of the primeval serpent of old?
10. Joseph
- a. Notice that Jacob calls God a shepherd and a stone. Those have been very prominent motifs in Jacob's life. In many ways Joseph has also been a shepherd (one who cares and oversees) and a stone (firm person to rely on).
 - b. Joseph gets the blessing of fruitfulness, for Ephraim and Manasseh.
11. Benjamin
- a. A warrior?