

Genesis Chapter 48-49a- John Karmelich

1. If you knew you only had a few hours left to live, what message would you want to pass on to your children? Let's say it was limited to one topic. What would that topic be? What would you're last words be? (There's an upbeat way to start a lesson! ☺)
 - a) The answer would have to do with whatever is most important to you. It probably won't be a reminder to take out the trash. ☺ It would probably be whatever values are most important to you.
2. These two chapters represent the end of Jacob's life. He dies at the end of Chapter 49.
 - a) In a sense, this is Jacob's "last will and testament".
 - b) He gives final words to all 12 of his sons, plus some words to Joseph's two sons.
 - c) A lot of what Jacob says is prophetic. It is not so much about the individuals as it is prophetic about what happens to the descendants of the 12 tribes of Israel.
 - d) In Chapter 48, most of the chapter is Jacob blessing the two sons of Joseph.
 - e) In Chapter 49, Jacob is pronouncing a blessing on each of his 12 sons.
 - f) Why Joseph's sons get priority over Jacob's sons will be discussed in a page or two!
 - i) In summary, Joseph gets a "double blessing" as if he was the first-born son.
 - ii) There are also lessons about certain people being "chosen" by God to have greater historical destinies than other.
3. I need to give some Jewish thoughts on the concept of "blessings".
 - a) First of all, in Jewish thought, every person is a "father of a nation". The same way each of the 12 brothers is the father of one of the tribes of Israel. There is a "thought" in Judaism that when you murder a person, you are murdering a nation as well. If you keep that in mind, you will understand that when Jacob is "blessing" each of the children, he is mainly talking about what will happen to the descendants.
 - b) Let's think about this from the children's perspective: A selfish child can think, "Yeah, yeah, my great, great great grandchildren will do this or that, who cares about them, what about me?"
 - i) To answer that, one has to remember that many of the predictions tie to key events in the life of the brother. It is almost as if Jacob is saying, "You have this personality trait. That trait will be past down to your descendants and here are the long term effects of that personality trait."
 - ii) The application is "actions have consequences". When we sin, we may think, "OK, I've confessed it, I can move on." In the aspect of forgiveness, it is true only if we have repented of that. Often there is a deep-rooted problem that repeats itself over and over again. The sin-of-the-day is that problem acting itself out. Until we get to the underlying problem and let God "root it out", it is there.
 - a) Which leads back to the "blessings" over the 12 brothers. When you read them, some of them read like curses more than blessings. It is as if Jacob is saying, "Here is what you have done in the past, and here is how it will grow in the future".
 - b) The application is to teach us to deal with those internal issues. If there is a particular sin that is popping up over and over again, ask God, "What is going on? Why is this happening over and over again? What is it in my life that needs to be "turned over" to God to make me more Christ like?"
 - iii) The blessings are also intended to be prophetic, especially those of Chapter 49.
 - a) We'll discuss those when we get there. The important to thing to understand is that the blessings are intended to be predictions about what will happen to those 12 tribes. Some believe the predictions go "one step further" and lay out a prophetic history of the Nation of Israel.

- c) The Jewish concept of “blessing” is something that never really caught on in the Christian world. At least not in the same aspect as for religious Jews.
- i) As Christians, the word “blessing” has become a catchall phrase.
 - ii) We say “God bless you” one sneezes.
 - iii) Christians say, “God bless you” as a goodbye greeting without much thought.
 - iv) In the bible, a blessing is much more than a catchall phrase.
 - a) It is often used on deathbeds of a father to a son.
 - b) It is used to describe one’s “last will and testament”.
 - c) Further, from a children’s perspective, they want “daddy’s approval”.
 - (1) There is a need in all people that our lives are “approved” by our parents. It comes from a need to receive love from our parents. If God gave us the command to “honor your mother and father”, it implies that God gave us a need to honor them.
 - (2) Therefore for a parent on their deathbed to “bless” their child is a way of saying, “I love you” and “I approve of you”.
 - v) With that, let’s get back to my opening question of “What would you say to your children on your deathbed? My original answer is that your values come forth.
 - a) For example, if your primary issue is money, you may discuss how to take care of other members financially.
 - b) For example, if family is your primary issue, you may tell how much you love your children and enjoyed watching them grow up.
 - c) Both of these are fine. In the world of estate planning, I believe it is the moral responsibility of parents to plan for their children in case something happens to them. The question is not planning. The question is, “What is the most important values you want to pass on to your children?”
 - d) Part of my opening question asks, “If you were limited to one topic on your deathbed, what would it be?
 - (1) The answer I’m hoping for is that if God is the primary focus of your life, than those fear-of-God values should be emphasized on your deathbed as they have been emphasized all of your life.
 - (2) There is nothing wrong with family, money and a bunch of other similar things. The Christian life is God-first and everything else is second. That is the primary values to teach our children.
 - (3) Which leads me to Jacob. The last time I checked, this is about Jacob and Genesis. ☺ The one thing I want you see through these two chapters is the God-centered comments that Jacob passes on to his kids. His final words aren’t about “take care of your kids” or even “I love you’s”, but they are prophetic messages. The idea is “God is on the throne of my life. God is in control whether you like it or not. Let God guide your life.” That underlying tone is through all of these final blessings.
 - vi) With all of that said, let’s jump in.
4. Chapter 48, Verse 1: Some time later Joseph was told, "Your father is ill." So he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim along with him. ² When Jacob was told, "Your son Joseph has come to you," Israel rallied his strength and sat up on the bed.
- a) In Chapter 47, we read that from the time Joseph and his father Jacob had the long-lost reunion, Jacob was going to live another 17 years.
 - b) This means we have a 17-year gap in time between these Chapters 47 and 48. Chapter 49 ends with Jacob dying, and the events of these two chapters appear to go together.

- c) It is assumed that Jacob went on with his job of “top administrator” in Egypt even after the seven years of famine were over. You can visualize Joseph going to work one day, when he gets a message his sick father. He drops everything, goes to find his two sons who are probably in their late teens or twenties by now and goes to his father.
 - d) This is now Jacob’s last big moment to say some final words to Joseph and his sons.
5. Verse 3: Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and there he blessed me ⁴ and said to me, `I am going to make you fruitful and will increase your numbers. I will make you a community of peoples, and I will give this land as an everlasting possession to your descendants after you.'
- a) These verses tie to my opening theme of “What are your final words to your children?”
 - i) Notice there is no mention of “I was a schemer and conniver all of my life.” ☺
 - a) In a sense all of those sins are forgiven, so Jacob could forget those.
 - b) The emphasis is on “God God God”. God did this in my life...God did that....”
 - i) Specifically Jacob mentions the first time God spoke to him and the promises God made to Jacob. Jacob is stating how God has kept those promises despite the life long actions of Jacob himself.
 - ii) The lesson to pass on is, “God is faithful even when we are not.” God is going to keep His promises because His reputation is on the line, not ours”. It is not about being “good enough”. It never was and never is. If we commit our lives to serving God, then God makes promises to bless us all of our lives and God keeps those promises. That blessing is internal and eternal. It is not about how many children you have or your net worth. It is that peace one has of knowing we are forgiven of our sins and we have eternal rewards for that commitment to God.
 - c) There is another reason for Jacob to emphasize these promises to Joseph.
 - i) In case you forgot, they were all living in Egypt. Jacob hadn’t forgotten about the prediction of the 400 years of slavery. I believe he knew it was coming. Therefore it was essential that the promise of redemption be stated to the kids so that the promise can be passed on to future generations.
 - a) The application to us is to tell our children “This is not the end of my life or your life. It goes on. There is a God and you will live forever. How you choose to live here is a reflection of how you will live forever. Despite slavery (or pain or sorrow), it does not go on forever. There is redemption. For some, we get to see the redemption in our lifetime (like those who lived during the time of Moses) and some have to hope for a future day like those who lived during the 400 year time span.”
 - ii) The promise is that they will inherit the Promised Land (Israel) forever. That is stated in Verse 4 where it says, “I will give you this land...”
 - a) Notice the word “give”. It is not conditional. It does not say, “I will give you this land, unless of course you sin too much or reject the Messiah”.
 - b) This is why most Christians today emphasize the fact the Promised Land belongs to the descendants of Jacob. If we can’t trust God’s unconditional promises to Jacob, how can we trust His promises to us through Jesus?
6. Verse 5: "Now then, your two sons born to you in Egypt before I came to you here will be reckoned as mine; Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine. ⁶ Any children born to you after them will be yours; in the territory they inherit they will be reckoned under the names of their brothers.
- a) Jacob is saying to Joseph that Jacob’s two grandsons will be like sons to Jacob.
 - b) It is as if from an inheritance point of view: “I Joseph no longer have two sons, but two new brothers.”

- c) Remember that Jacob is dying. This is about inheritance.
- i) Jacob is saying, "Instead of splitting my inheritance 12 ways (12 brothers), it now gets split 13 ways." Let's pretend Jacob had a million dollar net worth to be passed on to the children. Before Jacob's announcement, each of the 12 sons would get 1/12 of that inheritance. With Jacob announcing to his son Joseph "your two sons are mine", he is saying, "We now split the inheritance 13 ways. You Joseph don't get a share, but each of your two children get a share".
 - ii) In summary, Joseph is getting a "double portion" of the inheritance. He will get twice as much as the brothers because each son will get something.
- d) Ok, the big "why" question: Why did Jacob do this?
- i) First of all, it is not a thank-you present for rescuing him from the famine.
 - ii) This has to do with the rights of the firstborn.
 - a) The ancient tradition is that when an inheritance is given to all the children, the firstborn child gets a double-portion. The practical aspect is that this is an "administration fee" for being the leader of the family.
 - b) If you remember, Joseph is not the oldest child.
 - c) Jacob had 12 sons from 4 women, plus Jacob had one daughter. The tradition is the daughter does not get part of the inheritance as she is to be married off to another family. (Hey, I don't make the rules! ☺)
 - (1) In Jacob's case, the firstborn son of the firstborn wife would have "first shot" at getting the double-portion of the "firstborn".
 - (2) The firstborn son of the second born wife would be next in line, followed by the firstborn sons of the concubines.
 - (3) One can lose these rights if they either willfully give them away or if their father thinks they are not worthy or responsible.
 - d) The first wife was Leah. She had 4 sons: Reuben, Simeon, Levi and Judah.
 - (1) Reuben was the one who had sexual relations with one of Jacob's two concubines. That "ruled him out".
 - (2) Here is the interesting part. Reuben is forgiven. He is not going to hell for their crime. Yet, he lost the double-blessing rights of the first born for their sins.
 - iii) How do I know all of this about the firstborn rules? The bible says so! ☺
 - a) "The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (he was the firstborn, but when he defiled his father's marriage bed, his rights as firstborn were given to the sons of Joseph son of Israel; so he could not be listed in the genealogical record in accordance with his birthright, For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler; but the birthright was Joseph's:)" (1st Chronicles 5:1-2 NIV)
 - b) To paraphrase 1st Chronicles: "Since son #1 of Jacob's first wife Leah messed up, the birthright goes to son #1 of Jacob's second wife Rachel".
 - c) These two verses also state that Judah prevailed as the leader of the 12, but that is irrelevant to the fact that Joseph gets the right of the firstborn.
 - d) The rules imply that if there are multiple children of multiple wives and the first born of wife #1 messes up, the double blessing goes to the first born of wife #2. (Again, I don't make up the rules, just interpret them! ☺)
- e) All of this is also important as you study the "12 tribes of Israel" throughout the bible.
- i) Because Joseph's two children now "count" as part of the 12 tribes, there are technically "14" tribes of Israel. Sometimes the bible lists the 12 tribes and just lists Joseph. Sometimes another tribe is omitted and in order to have the "magic number 12", Joseph is omitted and the two son's tribes are listed instead.

- ii) For example, there are times when the tribe of Levi is not counted. In the future, they don't get a territory like the other tribes. The Levites were God's priests and they were to be scattered through Israel. Therefore when the bible needed to "count to 12 tribes" and needed to exclude Levi, the tribe of Joseph was "split in two" counting both sons so the number "12" could still be used.
 - iii) The number "12" in the bible implies "God's perfection for division".
 - a) That is why there are always 12 tribes of Israel counted even though there were "14 brothers to choose from". That is why Jesus picked 12 apostles when he had a larger following. That number 12 is symbolic.
 - b) It reminds me of a classic joke about an old English pastor. He was describing a monument in feet and inches and not meters. He stated, "If our Good Lord wanted us to use the metric system there would be only 10 apostles and only 10 tribes of Israel". ☺
 - f) Meanwhile, back in Egypt with Jacob...
7. Verse 7: As I was returning from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan while we were still on the way, a little distance from Ephrath. So I buried her there beside the road to Ephrath" (that is, Bethlehem).
- a) Remember that Jacob is only talking to his son Joseph. Jacob is telling Joseph about the double blessing. Joseph's two sons are not in the room yet.
 - b) Jacob is recalling the events about how Rachel died. Rachel is the mother of Joseph.
 - c) This is Jacob on his deathbed. While he is looking at Joseph, he may be flashbacking to his memory of Joseph's mother Rachel, who was Jacob's favorite wife. To paraphrase, "Oh Joseph, when I look at you, I remember my sweet Rachel. I'll always remember the day she died in Bethlehem.
 - d) These two verses are also prophetic, although it's hard to see it that way.
 - i) Remember Jacob started this conversation about how God was going to redeem the Jewish people from Egypt. Later, Jacob is going to request that when those 400 years are over, Jacob wants to be buried next to his father and grandfather and his other wife Leah. Rachael is not in the family burial plot, but buried in Bethlehem.
 - ii) To all Christians, Bethlehem is the birthplace of Jesus. It was predicted in the Old Testament that this is the birthplace of the Messiah (Michah 5:2).
 - iii) That can't be a coincidence that Jacob mentions his favorite wife's burial place as part of his last words to Joseph. Somehow, this obscure reference to Rachel being buried in Bethlehem is a "clue" to the "redemption" subject at hand.
 - a) It is as if we are getting clues of "God will redeem his people from Egypt, but there is another redemption, through the Messiah through Bethlehem."
8. Verse 8: When Israel saw the sons of Joseph, he asked, "Who are these?"⁹ "They are the sons God has given me here," Joseph said to his father. Then Israel said, "Bring them to me so I may bless them."¹⁰ Now Israel's eyes were failing because of old age, and he could hardly see. So Joseph brought his sons close to him, and his father kissed them and embraced them.
- a) Verse 10 states that Jacob was going blind, which explains why he didn't recognize Joseph's two sons in Verse 8. This is a key point over the next few verses.
 - b) It is important to stop and state that these two sons get blessing over Jacob's other sons.
 - i) It is not that these two sons are more special than Jacob's other sons. It is simply a matter of establishing "the double blessing" prior to giving out the other blessings.
9. Verse 11: Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see your face again, and now God has allowed me to see your children too."
- a) Here's an example of God' grace. Jacob listed as "Israel" (hint hint ☺) states how God has blessed him more than he expected. Jacob "let go, let God." Jacob never expected to see his son again, and God allowed him to see him again as well as his grandchildren. It is a simple reminder of how God can bless us far greater than our expectations.

10. Verse 12: Then Joseph removed them from Israel's knees and bowed down with his face to the ground. ¹³ And Joseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right toward Israel's left hand and Manasseh on his left toward Israel's right hand, and brought them close to him. ¹⁴ But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn.
- a) Let me set the scene:
 - i) Joseph understood the adoption/ double blessing scenario.
 - ii) He also understood his father was going blind and could not see well.
 - iii) In Jewish thought, the right hand is superior to the left (e.g., Exo. 15:6, Job 40:14).
 - iv) Therefore, Joseph placed his older son Manasseh close to Jacob's right hand.
 - v) Joseph placed his younger son Ephraim close to Jacob's left hand.
 - vi) Joseph thought, "Manasseh is the oldest and should get the greater/first blessing".
 - vii) Jacob had other thoughts. He cross his arms and placed his right hand on the younger brother and the left hand on the older brother. Visualize an "X" being formed with Jacob's arms as he held the two young men.
 - b) We'll discuss the purpose of this in a few more verses.
 - i) I know Jacob knew what he was doing from the verses coming up.
 - ii) Jacob is called "Israel" in these verses. In previous lessons I've beaten to death the idea that when Jacob is called "Israel", essentially, he is doing God's will. It is as if God told Jacob/Israel to do the "cross-arms-bit" on purpose.
 - c) What is interesting to think about is the pattern of the second-born son getting a priority blessing over the firstborn son.
 - i) Remember that when Jacob was young, he was the younger of two brothers.
 - ii) His father Isaac was also going blind near his death. Jacob disguised himself as his older brother in order to get the blessing of the "firstborn".
 - iii) Now, were two generations later, and again, the "second born" is getting special rights over the firstborn. Further, Joseph got the rights of the firstborn son, even though he is the son of the second born wife.
 - iv) Confused? Good. ☺ Let me explain further. All I am saying is there is a pattern of the "second one getting a special blessing over the first one". It has now happened over three generations. That pattern is significant.
 - a) The pattern is the reminder to us of the necessity of being born-again. The "flesh" man is born first, and the greater new man "born-again" is born second. Jesus said in order to be saved we must be born-again (John 3:3).
 - b) The point is when we are born, we are both with a sinful nature. That is the cliché term "born of the flesh". When we turn our lives over to God, our second life begins as we are born again.
 - c) Here in Genesis, God is establishing a "prophetic word-picture" of the greater blessing to the second born. The real application is to our lives as when we become born-again and live for God.
 - d) The bible teaches that the "second born" is also tied to the fact the first man, as represented by Adam ties to our old human nature. The "second man" ties to Jesus. When we become saved, we become "born-again" and become like Him.
 - (1) "The first man (Adam) was of the earth, made of dust; the second Man (Jesus) is the Lord from heaven. As was the man of dust, so also are those who are made of dust; and as is the heavenly Man, so also are those who are heavenly." And as we have borne the image of the man of dust, we shall also bear the image of the heavenly Man." (1st Corinthians 15:47-49).

- d) Meanwhile, back at Jacob's deathbed. ☺
11. Verse 15: Then he blessed Joseph and said, "May 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 delivered me from all harm --may he bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth."
- a) Notice that Verse 15 states, "He blessed Joseph". If you read the rest of these two verses, the blessing is all focused on Joseph's two sons.
 - b) To paraphrase, "he blessed Jacob": "Joseph, I'm giving a special blessing to your two sons. You will be blessed because you are the father of these two young men."
 - c) When we see "Sunday school lessons" on this topic, the two boys are usually young teenagers. Remember the "boys" are either older teenagers are in their late 20's.
 - d) The point of this introduction to the blessing is Jacob saying, "God has protected me all the years of my life and he has fulfilled the promises made to my father and grandfather."
 - i) These verses are a reminder to pass on the importance of our relationship with God to our children and our grandchildren when we have the chance.
 - ii) Remember my opening theme of "what would you say on your deathbed?" Children remember vividly your last words. Like Jacob, make those last words your testimony of how God has been faithful in your life and tell your children how God will be faithful in theirs.
12. Verse 17: When Joseph saw his father placing his right hand on Ephraim's head he was displeased; so he took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. ¹⁸ Joseph said to him, "No, my father, this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head."
- a) Here Joseph tried to "help" his dad by uncrossing his father's arms. Joseph wanted Jacob's right hand to be on the oldest son.
 - i) Apparently, Joseph didn't read my mini-sermon on the last page about the importance of the second-born being a word-picture of born again. ☺
 - ii) The main point of these two verses is to emphasize that Joseph understood that his father Jacob was purposely blessing the younger son and it's not an accident.
 - b) Personally, I don't see this action as a sin on Joseph's part.
 - i) The bible does not say anything negative about Joseph.
 - ii) The "closest" we can see of any mistake made by Joseph is the time he was in jail and asked the wine steward to "put in a good word for him to Pharaoh (Genesis 40:14)". You can argue that wasn't a mistake, but the point is the wine steward forgot about Joseph and left him in jail.
 - iii) One can argue that this is a "mistake" on Joseph's part, and of all the things we read of Joseph in the bible, this is the only negative aspect. Considering all that Joseph has been through, if this is the only mistake listed, it's a good track record.
13. Verse 19: But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He too will become a people, and he too will become great. Nevertheless, his younger brother will be greater than he, and his descendants will become a group of nations." ²⁰ He blessed them that day and said, "In your name will Israel pronounce this blessing: `May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh.' " So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.
- a) OK, here is the actual blessing on the two sons.
 - b) It is important to understand that this is a prediction as well as the word-picture of the "second-born as a symbol of born-again".
 - c) At the time of the Exodus, the population of the children of Ephraim and Manasseh was not that significant as compared to the other tribes.
 - d) What is important is that centuries later the children of the younger son, Ephraim became the dominant population of the 12 tribes of Israel.

- i) Right after King David the nation of Israel split in two. They were simply called the “Northern Kingdom” the Southern Kingdom”. The Northern Kingdom took the name “Israel” (just to make it confusing ☺) and the Southern Kingdom took the name “Judah” as Judah was the dominant tribe of the Southern Kingdom.
 - ii) The dominant tribe of the Northern Kingdom was Ephraim. Again, this is the second-son of Joseph. In fact, the nickname for the Northern Kingdom was “Ephraim”. When Isaiah prophesized over the Northern Kingdom, he usually used the nickname Ephraim to refer to the Northern Kingdom (Ref: Isaiah 7:8, 7:17, 11:13, etc.).
 - iii) My point is the fact the Ephraim got a first blessing over his brother Manasseh is predictive of the fact that Ephraim became a dominant tribe among the twelve.
 - e) One more thing and then we can move on. Notice that “firstborn” is a title and not necessarily referring to a firstborn son.
 - i) This may seem obvious, but it is an important point when dealing with cults.
 - ii) Some groups like the Jehovah Witnesses like to argue that Jesus is not God, but a lower deity. They will say that a title of Jesus is the “firstborn” (e.g., Col 1:15). This is correct. While the term “firstborn” can refer to a first-born son, it is also a title as we have seen here in Genesis.
 - iii) Here is a good pair of verses to point out to counteract this argument:
 - a) “Joseph named his firstborn Manasseh” (Genesis 41:51a NIV)
 - b) “Ephraim is my firstborn son.” (Jeremiah 31:9b” NIV)
 - iv) If “firstborn” only refers to a first-born son, these two verses are a contradiction.
 - a) If the term “firstborn” is also a title, this is not a contradiction.
14. Verse 21: Then Israel said to Joseph, "I am about to die, but God will be with you and take you back to the land of your fathers." ²² And to you, as one who is over your brothers, I give the ridge of land I took from the Amorites with my sword and my bow."
- a) Jacob is saying that one-day, when all the Israelites go back to the Promised Land, carry my dead body up there and bury me in the burial plot with my father and grandfather.
 - b) First of all, Jacob is again emphasizing that, “our living in Egypt is not the end”. He is reminding them how God told Abraham and Gold told Jacob that after 400 years, they would be back in the Promised Land.
 - c) In Verse 21, Jacob is restating this in order to say, “I want you to trust in the promise of God. Be “in” Egypt, but not “of” Egypt. Egypt is not your home.
 - d) Egypt is a word-picture of “the world” in the sense is represents living a life for anything other than God. We are to be “in the world” but have our focus toward a future day because our “home” is in heaven.
 - e) Verse 22 has a reference to a piece of land that Joseph got from the Amorites.
 - i) There is no previous biblical record of this incident. Apparently, some time earlier Joseph got a piece of land that he won in a battle. This land is deeded to the descendants of Joseph.
 - ii) This is a rather obscure reference and is different from the “peaceful yet conniving” Jacob we have come to know over all of Genesis.
 - iii) My speculation is this may be prophetic of the “conquering” of the Promised Land that is the requirement of Book of Joshua.
 - iv) When the Israelites actually enter the Promised Land, the residents don’t just surrender and give them the land. They have to fight for it. I’m wondering if this little mention of Jacob’s fight with the Amorites is a prediction of those wars.

15. Chapter 49, Verse 1: Then Jacob called for his sons and said: "Gather around so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come. ² "Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob; listen to your father Israel.
- a) Chapter 49 is specific prophecies to the 12 sons, including Joseph himself.
 - i) Notice the phrase translated "days to come". It probably refers to the entire scope of Israel's history up to and including the end times.
 - b) This is one of those cases where you can learn a lot of interesting details, and forget them a few weeks later. ☺ The important part to remember is that the predictions told by Jacob in this chapter came or will come true. Prophecy validates the bible as truth.
 - c) When you read the commentaries on this chapter, they are "all over the place".
 - i) Some commentaries state that these predictions have "double-fulfillments". They tie to literal events of the 12 tribes of Israel, but are also Messianic in some aspect.
 - ii) What you need to remember is God's word is accurate. If some of these predictions are fuzzy, that is because it maybe describing some future event to us.
 - iii) One of the important rules to remember in bible prophecy is "Study the bible with the bible". That means to look for cross-references elsewhere in the bible to support the ideas taught, especially in prophecy.
 - a) It is similar to studying Revelation. Revelation speaks in idioms. Unraveling those idioms is to look up those references elsewhere in the bible. The same applies to many of these predictions given by Joseph.
 - d) Notice Verse 2 says, "Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob; listen to your father Israel."
 - i) The negative term "Jacob" and the positive term "Israel" are used together.
 - ii) It is as if the father new the children understood what both words meant!
 - iii) The idea is, "I'm going to tell you about the future to your children. Some of these predictions are negative, as they reflect the negative traits of your own personality. Some of the predictions are positive, as they represent "God's will" (i.e., "Israel" in the sense they are struggling to do God's will.)"
16. Verse 3: "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honor, excelling in power. ⁴ Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel, for you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch and defiled it.
- a) Jacob starts off by giving a blessing and a prediction about his firstborn son Reuben.
 - i) Jacob starts by saying in effect "you definitely are my first born, and because you were born first, you were born to be given special privileges....however". ☺
 - b) These verses remind us that just because you are the "firstborn", you are not guaranteed special privileges.
 - i) In a broad application, this can apply to the individual Jewish people. It is the reminder that just because you are a "Son of Abraham" doe s not automatically guarantee you a place in heaven. Both Jesus and John the Baptist pointed that out. (E.g., Matthew 3:9 John 8:39).
 - ii) The same can be said of Christian family members. The idea is we're not saved because say, "my spouse or my parents are devout Christians".
 - c) Let's get back to the specific crime that got Reuben in trouble.
 - i) He had sexual relations with his father's concubine Bilhah. (Genesis 35:22)
 - ii) This happened right at the time of Rachel's death (Genesis 35:19)
 - iii) Neither one was Reuben's mother, but both women were "stepmothers".
 - iv) Bilhah was Rachel's handmaiden. Remember that when Jacob started having children, Rachel wasn't having any. Rachel offered Bilhah to Jacob in order to have children "in her name". When Rachel died in Chapter 35, I suspect that Bilhah was hurting emotionally. Reuben took advantage of that situation.
 - v) When you read Chapter 35, the interesting thing is you don't read of Jacob punishing Reuben for that incident.

- vi) Now here we are forty years later, and Jacob is saying, “Remember what you did 40 years ago? That’ll cost you the rights of the firstborn”.
 - vii) Remember that Jacob made Joseph the coat of many colors as a symbol of authority. One suspects that Jacob had “doubts” about Reuben being in charge even prior to this bad event with Bilhah.
 - d) The key phrase is “You will no longer excel”.
 - i) If you read through all of the “hero’s” of ancient Israel, none come from Reuben.
 - a) There are no judges or kings or heroes that emerge from Reuben.
 - ii) My point is that each of these prophecies are designed to reach past the person themselves and onto their children.
 - iii) The lessons to us about Reuben is simply “actions have consequences”. Those actions often affect our offspring as well ourselves. Reuben was never punished for his actions 40 years ago. Now, “they’re coming home to roost” and his father makes a negative prediction about the future of his family.
17. Verse 5: "Simeon and Levi are brothers--their swords are weapons of violence. ⁶ Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly, for they have killed men in their anger and hamstringed oxen as they pleased. ⁷ Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel.
- a) This prophecy is about the next two brothers: Simeon and Levi.
 - b) The text says, “They are brothers”. Jacob is not just stating the obvious. It is more like saying, “they are two of a kind” or “they act alike.”
 - c) When their sister Dinah was raped, these were the two overreacted and led the charge to kill every person in that town, and not just the guy who did it. (Genesis 34).
 - d) There is also this reference to “hamstrung oxen as they pleased”. This probably refers to the same time they killed the men of Shechem, they also took or killed all of the animals.
 - e) Jacob predicts their punishment: “I will scatter them in Jacob/ disperse them in Israel”.
 - i) Translation: They don’t get a territory like the other brothers.
 - ii) Simeon became the smallest of the tribes when they entered the Promised Land. They didn’t really get their own territory, just territory within Judah’s territory.
 - a) “The inheritance of the Simeonites was taken from the share of Judah, because Judah’s portion was more than they needed. So the Simeonites received their inheritance within the territory of Judah.” (Joshua 9:9 NIV)
 - iii) As to the Levite’s, they became the priests. God’s orders for them was not to have an allotted territory, but to be have cities among all the other tribes.
 - iv) What’s the point to remember? Jacob’s prediction came true!
18. Verse 8: "Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you. ⁹ You are a lion's cub, O Judah; you return from the prey, my son. Like a lion he crouches and lies down, like a lioness--who dares to rouse him?
- a) Now we get to the good stuff. ☺
 - b) Jacob says more about Judah than any other son. That is because the Messiah comes through the tribe of Judah. That is predicted in these verses.
 - c) Verse 8 says about Judah: “Your brothers will praise you” and “your father's sons will bow down to you”
 - i) It is saying that “all Jewish” people will praise and bow down to this Messiah.”
 - ii) “‘As surely as I live,’ says the Lord, ‘every knee will bow before me; every tongue will confess to God.’” This is Romans 14:11 (quoting Isaiah 45:23). Paul’s point in Romans is that every knee will bow to Jesus. That would include every Jewish knee! ☺ It ties to Jacob’s prediction about some future descendant of Judah.

- d) The verse compared Judah to a “lion”.
 - i) Revelation fans immediately think of Revelation 5:5:
 - ii) “Then one of the elders said to me, “Do not weep! See, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals.” The “Lion of the tribe of Judah” is a title of Jesus Christ.
 - e) A theological question: What did Judah do to deserve this blessing?
 - i) In a sense, nothing. Every now and then I like to pose the famous children’s riddle: Where does an 800-pound gorilla sleep? The answer is anywhere he wants to. That joke reminds us of God’s sovereign power. God choose Judah because God can do “anything he wants to” and He choose Judah.
 - ii) You can argue it was because of how Judah emerged as the leader in the last few chapters among the other brothers, but that is simply a word-picture showing how a descendent of Judah will also “emerge as a leader among his brethren”.
19. Jacob continues, Verse 10: The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.
- a) “The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes”. The King James ends with “until Shiloh comes”.
 - b) This prediction is that “somebody” from Judah will rule over the Jewish people until the Messiah comes. King David was of the tribe of Judah. One of his descendants ruled on the throne until the Babylonian captivity. Records were still kept of David’s descendants until 70AD, when all records were destroyed when Jerusalem was conquered. My point is a descendant of King David did rule forever and does rule forever. The records were destroyed in 70AD, as “in a sense” they were no longer necessary.
 - c) When the Romans conquered Israel, they allowed freedom of religion. They even allowed Jewish people to punish their own for violations of their religion. The one exception, around 12AD, is the Romans would not allow anyone but them to inflict capital punishments. That means Jews could not execute anyone for a crime.
 - d) According to 1st Century historian Josephus, the Jewish Rabbi’s believed “this prediction has failed”. Verse 10 says, “the scepter will not depart from Judah...until he comes” is believed to be tied to the Messiah. When the Jews lost the right to capital punishment, they believe “the prediction failed” and the Messiah didn’t come. Little did they know that the Messiah was a 12-year old boy (more or less) at that time growing up in Galilee!
20. Verse 11: He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes. ¹² His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk.
- a) This verse is still talking about Judah. This verse is believed to be tied to his second coming. Christians believe this is true simply because it does not tie to any event of the Gospels, but does tie very well to future predictions about Jesus in Revelation.
 - i) Verse 11 says, “wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood”.
 - a) This means his clothes will be bloody from war.
 - ii) “He is dressed in a robe dipped in blood, and his name is the Word of God” (Revelation 19:13, NIV). The same author of Revelation, (John) states that the Word of God” is a title of Jesus in the Gospel of John (John 1:1-3).
 - iii) The specific Revelation event is the “Battle of Armageddon”. (It’s not really a battle. It’s more of a “wipe-out”.) This is where Jesus single-handedly defeats the forces of the Anti-Christ out to destroy those who choose to follow God.)
 - iv) Thus, both Revelation and the prediction of Judah are about the Messiah conquering His enemies in one-big battle.
 - b) In summary, these verses predict Jesus 2nd coming, which ties to judgment.

21. Verse 13: "Zebulun will live by the seashore and become a haven for ships; his border will extend toward Sidon.
- a) The New King James says, "Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea". The idea in the Hebrew is that they "look toward the sea" as if they had a hillside view of the sea area. Their territory also had a "sea view of the Sea of Galilee". Their territory looked to the sea to the east (Galilee) and to the west (Mediterranean).
 - i) My point is when you study the territory allotted to Zebulun, they don't actually get the shoreline area.
 - b) Some commentators point out that their territory was along the main trade route from Egypt, through Israel to Syria and beyond. The "traders of the sea" therefore had to go through Zebulun.
 - c) Note that Jacob is no longer going in birth order. Zebulun is 10th among the 12 children.
 - i) This is why some theorize that Jacob is "laying out some specific end-time story" or the predictions tie to the history of Israel.
 - ii) Zebulun is the home of Galilee region. Matthew Chapter 4 states the fact this region "saw the light" as Jesus disciples were from this area.
22. Verse 14: "Issachar is a rawboned donkey lying down between two saddlebags. ¹⁵ When he sees how good is his resting place and how pleasant is his land, he will bend his shoulder to the burden and submit to forced labor.
- a) Issachar became a large tribe, but the implication is "they were strong, but became lazy" and lost members to slavery due to their laziness.
 - b) Notice the prediction ends with "submit to forced labor".
23. Verse 16: "Dan will provide justice for his people as one of the tribes of Israel. ¹⁷ Dan will be a serpent by the roadside, a viper along the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider tumbles backward.
- a) Dan gets a "slap-in-the-face" most of the time he is mentioned in the bible.
 - b) When you get to Revelation, God specifically picks out 12,000 from each of the 12 tribes to be witnesses. The one tribe that is excluded is Dan.
 - i) Yet when Jesus rules for a 1,000 years (Revelation 20:1-5), there is an allotment of land given to the tribe of Dan, so there is some restitution (Ezekiel 48:3)
 - c) Dan gets "picked on" as they are tribe that first allows idolatry among the 12 (Judges 18).
 - d) Let's compare a prediction about Dan to something said early in Genesis:
 - i) "(Dan) bites the horse's heels so that its rider tumbles backward. (Verse 17)
 - ii) "You (Satan) will strike his heel" (Genesis 3:15).
 - iii) Some connect the fact that there is a prediction made when Satan tempted Adam and Eve with Dan's prediction. Genesis 3:15 says that Satan will strike his (Jesus?) heel and he (Jesus?) will strike Satan's head.
 - iv) This "striking of the heel" is believed to be talking about end-times and the Anti-Christ will do "some damage", but in the end will be killed.
 - v) With all of that in mind, there are those who believe the Anti-Christ will come from the tribe of Dan. There are some Jewish groups who believe there will be a false-Messiah who will come from Dan.
 - vi) It's an interesting theory. We'll wait and see what happens. ☺
24. Verse 18: "I look for your deliverance, O LORD.
- a) Right after this negative prediction about Dan, comes this one line prayer of deliverance.
 - b) If a descendant of Dan does cause havoc, the next line is the prayer of deliverance.
25. Verse 19: "Gad will be attacked by a band of raiders, but he will attack them at their heels.
- a) "The tribe of Gad supplied many fine troops for David (1st Chron. 12:14)". David Guzik
 - b) Jeremiah 49:1 states how Gad was conquered by the Amorites.
 - c) The original Hebrew has a "play on words" about this text. The idea is that Gad will be defeated like the other Israelites, but the Messiah through Judah will deliver them.

26. Verse 20: "Asher's food will be rich; he will provide delicacies fit for a king.
- a) Asher's location was the agricultural "breadbasket" for Israel.
 - b) Following the idea of the "Messiah blessing all of Israel" is the idea that after Jesus comes back will be a "bountiful" time for all who followed Him.
27. Verse 21: "Naphtali is a doe set free that bears beautiful fawns.
- a) Here is a case where I don't like the NIV translation: The New King James says it better:
 - i) "Naphtali is a deer let loose; He uses beautiful words. (Genesis 49:21, NKJV).
 - ii) I say that because the territory of Zebulun and Naphtali were the locations where Jesus set up his early ministry in Galilee. I believe this prediction of "beautiful words" ties to the coming of the Messiah.
 - b) Again, this may tie to a future blessing when all Israelites are blessed by the Messiah.
28. Verse 22: "Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall. ²³ With bitterness archers attacked him; they shot at him with hostility. ²⁴ But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel, ²⁵ because of your father's God, who helps you, because of the Almighty, who blesses you with blessings of the heavens above, blessings of the deep that lies below, blessings of the breast and womb. ²⁶ Your father's blessings are greater than the blessings of the ancient mountains, than the bounty of the age-old hills. Let all these rest on the head of Joseph, on the brow of the prince among his brothers.
- a) Here is the blessing upon Joseph. In chapter 48, Jacob blessed Joseph's two children. This blessing encompasses what will be the future of both tribes.
 - b) The key word in this paragraph is "blessing". It is used five times:
 - i) Joseph was already blessed because God used him greatly to redeem his family.
 - ii) God "rewards Joseph by making his (Ephraim's tribe) the larges.
 - iii) Jacob realized that God has blessed him despite his negative antics through his life. Jacob realized that no matter how bad he messed up, God always loved him, God always wanted the best for him, and God always worked on maturing Jacob to make him a better person. A great lesson for all of us.
 - c) This paragraph is more about Jacob recounting how God has used Jacob for a great blessing on the whole family than it is to give future predictions to Joseph.
 - i) It is as if Jacob and Joseph already know how Joseph is blessed and this paragraph is "testimony time" to that fact.
29. Verse 27: "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he devours the prey, in the evening he divides the plunder."
- a) Benjamin is described for his cruelty. Certainly we didn't read any of this about Benjamin himself, so it applies to his descendants.
 - i) The book of Judges is full of stores about Benjamites who committed cruelty against other tribes of Israel as well as foreigners. (Judges 3:15, Judges 20).
 - b) King Saul was from Benjamin. Among other things, he tried to kill David and killed a large group of priests who Saul thought was trying to protect David. (1st Samuel 22).
 - c) Paul also stated he was from Benjamin (Acts 13:21). Before he was converted, he was zealous in his effort to persecute Christians. (Acts 22:3)
30. Let's stop here, catch our breath, and tie this all together: ☺
- a) I stated a few pages back that the key to all of this is just to remember that these predictions came true. The speculation among bible commentators has to do with "double meanings". Some believe that besides the literal predictions that happens to the 12 tribes, there is also double-predictions that tie to Jesus.
 - i) "For the testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." (Rev. 19:10a NIV)
 - b) Remember that this is Jacob on his deathbed making predictions about his sons and what will happen to his descendants. Jacob had faith there will be a future day of redemption for his family as well as a "future-history" to happen to each of the children.

31. With that said, I'm going to finish the last part of Chapter 49 in the next lesson and tie it to Chapter 50. I believe the last few verses tie better to Chapter 50 than Chapter 49 anyway. More on that in the next lesson!
32. Let's pray: Heavenly Father, help us to remember that we only have a limited time on earth. Help us to use our time wisely for you. Help us like Jacob pass our faith on to the next generation, who you have called upon to further carry out your message. Help us to "finish well" the life you have designed for us. Guide us to glorify You in all we do. For we ask this in Jesus name, Amen.