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A STUDY OF THE WHOLE BIBLE

THE BOOK OF GENESIS

DEATH AND BLESSINGS (48:1-50:26)

The Place of the Passage

Genesis begins with God's blessing upon Adam and the command to "Be fruitful and multiply and fill the earth and subdue it" (Genesis 1:28). This blessing is passed on from Adam to Abraham and his descendants, and Jacob refers to how "God Almighty . . . blessed me and said to me, 'Behold I will make you fruitful and multiply you'" (Genesis 48:34). The blessing of posterity is fulfilled as Israel has been fruitful and multiplied greatly, filling the land of Egypt (Genesis 47:27). Similarly, in Genesis 49, Jacob/Israel blesses each of his children, preparing the reader for the story of the growth of Israel in the land of Egypt. The blessing of the land, too, is in view, as Jacob's death brings a return to Canaan to bury him there.

Gospel Glimpses

OBEDIENCE OF THE NATIONS

To Judah, Jacob prophesies, "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him; and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples" (Genesis 49:10). This prophecy begins to be fulfilled through King David, of the tribe of Judah, but it ultimately is fulfilled in King Jesus. Through Jesus "we have received grace and apostleship to bring about the obedience of faith for the sake of his name among all the nations" (Romans 1:5). Similarly, Paul's ministry seeks "what Christ has accomplished . . . to bring the Gentiles to obedience — by word and deed" (Romans 15:18; cf. 16:26). The obedience of the nations comes through the scepter of King Jesus. This king, however, rules by the saving power of the gospel and not the killing power of the sword.

YOUNGER AND OLDER

Although Jacob was younger, he received the blessing of the older son, and he similarly blesses Joseph's younger son (Ephraim) over the older son (Manasseh). He says about Manasseh, "his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations" (Genesis 48:19). Similarly, "God chose what is weak in the world to shame the strong; God chose what is low and despised in the world, even things that are not, to bring to nothing things that are, so that no human being might boast in the presence of God" (1 Corinthians 1:27-29). Such radical reversal is present even from the time of the fathers in Genesis. The firstborn frequently do not receive the blessing of God, from Cain (Genesis 4) to Esau (Genesis 25:23) and Reuben (Genesis 49:3). This gives great hope to us today. God delights to use and enrich those whom the world deems most insignificant.

Theological Considerations

ESCHATOLOGY

“Eschatology” means “the doctrine of last things.” Genesis 49:1 addresses what will happen “in the latter days.” While this statement may simply mean “in days to come,” its later uses suggest a more eschatologically charged sense. While dominion and fruitful procreation were God’s original intention in creation (Genesis 1:28), we see that Jacob looks forward to dominion especially through Judah (Genesis 49:8-12) and fruitful procreation especially through Joseph (Genesis 49:22-26). Jacob sees that God’s purposes at the beginning of creation are fulfilled at the end. Eschatology (what happens at the end) reflects and fulfills protology (what happened at the beginning).

GOD’S FAITHFULNESS

As Jacob nears the end of his life, God’s abundant faithfulness gives him confidence that his children will become a multitude (Genesis 48:16) and will return to the land of their fathers (Genesis 48:21). He is “the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life long to this day” (Genesis 48:15). Similarly, the God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob continues to be faithful to his promises, “for all the promises of God find their Yes in [Christ]. That is why it is through him that we utter our Amen to God for his glory” (II Corinthians 1:20). The supreme promise to which God proves faithful is that he will restore his people to himself one day. In Christ, this promise is decisively guaranteed.

LATTER DAYS

Jacob speaks of what will “happen to you in days to come,” which can also be translated “in the latter days” (Genesis 49:1). This expression may be simply a reference to the future, but it may have a more specifically eschatological nuance. It occurs next when Balaam speaks of “what this people will do to your people in the latter days” (Numbers 24:14), when “a star shall come out of Jacob, and a scepter shall rise out of Israel [to] crush the forehead of Moab” (Numbers 24:17). Jesus himself is “the bright morning star” (Revelation 22:16; cf. II Peter 1:19), who crushes his enemies (Matthew 21:44). Jesus is the cornerstone who falls on his enemies, just as “in the latter days” a stone made without hands would crush the nations that rise up against God (Dan. 2:28, 44-45).

RETURN FROM EGYPT

Egypt is clearly not the final destination for the sons of Israel. Much earlier, God had spoken to Abraham that they would be “sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. . . . And they shall come back here in the fourth generation” (Genesis 15:13,16). Similarly, when Jacob prepares to go down to Egypt to see Joseph, God promises, “I myself will go down with you to Egypt, and I will also bring you up again” (Genesis 46:4). At his own death, Joseph tells his brothers, “I am about to die, but God will visit you and bring you up out of this land to the land that he swore to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob” (Genesis 50:24). Hebrews 11:22 says, “By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones.” This return from Egypt parallels Israel’s return from exile that would happen much later, but ultimately it is fulfilled in Jesus’ own return from Egypt (Matthew 2:13-15, 19-23).

GLOSSARY OF TERMS

PROSTERTY

The line of offspring and children. This is of particular importance in Genesis because of the prominence of genealogies tracing the offspring of Eve who will crush the head of the offspring of the serpent (Genesis 3:15).

LAND

Beginning in Genesis 12:113, God repeatedly promises Abraham and his offspring the Promised Land, where they would live.

GENESIS 48 ASSIGNMENTS

Discussion Questions:

If our focus is only on the high drama of Joseph, then Genesis 48-50 seem anticlimactic. Yet these chapters provide a suitable conclusion to the book of Genesis because they trace out how the promises of offspring, land, and blessing to the nations are fulfilled. In Genesis 48:1-7, Jacob looks back to how God revealed himself at Luz/Bethel and promised, “Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a company of peoples and will give this land to your offspring after you for an everlasting possession” (Genesis 48:4). How is the blessing of to “make you fruitful and multiply you and . . . make of you a company of peoples” passed on from Jacob to Ephraim and Manasseh in Genesis 48:8-22?

How is the blessing of land passed on to Joseph and his sons in Genesis 48:21-22? While the older is usually blessed before the younger, how does Israel deliberately reverse this? Why do you suppose he does this?

Please answer the following questions:

1. Why did Joseph visit Jacob, and whom did he take with him — 48:1,2?

2. What promise did Jacob say God had given him — 48:3,4? Where else is this promise recorded?
3. Explain again the significance of this promise in our study.
4. What promise did Jacob make regarding Joseph's sons in 48:5?
5. What sad event did Jacob recall in 48:7, and where and when did it occur?
6. What did Jacob do to Joseph's sons? What observation did he make — 48:8-11?
7. What blessing did Jacob pronounce on the boys — 48:12-16?
8. Describe how Jacob placed his hands on the sons — 48:17,18. What did Joseph say?
9. What was the significance of where Jacob placed his hands? What were the consequences to the sons — 48:19,20?
10. What assurance did Jacob have regarding his family after he died — 48:21?

GENESIS 49 ASSIGNMENTS

Discussion Questions:

In Genesis 49, Jacob gathers his sons and speaks prophetically over them of “what shall happen to you in days to come” (Genesis 49:1). Simeon and Levi notably destroyed the city of Shechem after the rape of Dinah. What consequences do they receive?

Although Judah similarly is shown in an unfavorable light in Genesis 38 with the affair with Tamar, Jacob issues an unexpected blessing upon Judah. How is the call to Adam in Genesis 1:28 developed in the blessing on Judah in Genesis 49:8-12?

How does the blessing given to Joseph in Genesis 49:22–26 develop the call of Genesis 1:28?

Please answer the following questions:

1. Summarize what chapter 49 is about.
2. What did Jacob say regarding Reuben — 49:3,4? What event is referred to here?
3. What had Simeon and Levi done — 49:5-7? What did Jacob say about it?
4. Describe Jacob’s prophecy about Judah — 49:8-12. Compare it to previous sons.

5. What does 49:10 show about the tribe of Judah?

6. Summarize the statements regarding each of the following sons:
 - Zebulun —
 - Issachar —
 - Dan —
 - Gad —
 - Asher —
 - Naphtali —

7. What blessings are pronounced on Joseph — 49: 22-26?

8. Summarize the blessing on Benjamin — 49:27.

9. Explain how 49:28 shows the importance of all Jacob had just said.

10. Where did Jacob want to be buried — 49:29-32? Describe his death.

GENESIS 50 ASSIGNMENTS

Discussion Questions:

With the death of Jacob, the focus shifts from the blessing of offspring to the blessing of land. Amid the extensive mourning for Jacob, where is the primary focus for his burial in Genesis 49:28-50:14?

Joseph's brothers panic at the death of their father, fearing that Joseph will lash out against them in revenge. How does an understanding of God's providence help Joseph to deal with his brothers in Genesis 50:15–21?

How are the promises of land and offspring fulfilled through Joseph in Genesis 50:22–26? How does this foreshadow what is to come?

Please answer the following questions:

1. What did the physicians do with Jacob's body? How long did it take? How long did the Egyptians mourn for him — 50:1-3?
2. What request did Joseph then make? Why — 50:4-6?
3. Who went with Joseph? Who/what did not go — 50:7-9?
4. Where did they stop and why — 50:10? How did this affect the Canaanites?
5. What name was given to this place, and what does the name mean?
6. What did the sons do with Jacob's body? What promise did this fulfill — 50:12,13?

7. What concern did Joseph's brothers have? What did they do about it — 50:14-18?

8. What does the Bible teach about confessing sin and asking forgiveness of those whom we have wronged?

9. How did Joseph respond to his brothers? How did he say he would treat them — 50:19-21?

10. What are we told about the rest of Joseph's life — 50:22,23?

11. What promise did he ask his relatives to make regarding his body — 50:22-26? Where else does the Bible refer to this, and what lesson can we learn?

12. What four main lessons have you learned from Joseph.