

“...he blessed them”

In this penultimate chapter of Genesis we meet the foreknowledge* of God, and his predestination of souls and what they do in life. It is a fact that continues into the final chapter. It continues simply because it is the truth. (**Understand that ‘foreknowledge’ is NOT the same as predestination, though many try to make it so, to avoid salvation of some but not others, and to reject the fact that God actively sends people to hell for not being saved*).

On his death-bed, Jacob relates to his sons their individual fates. He accurately describes their characters and tells them what will happen to them in the future. That is, he does so through prophecy. And what is prophecy if not God’s word made manifest to men? Prophecy is not a mere dream that happens to come true. It is an action brought about by God Himself, Who foretells it through his servants. True prophecy comes about exactly as foretold. Modern ‘prophets’ gather like little children, pretending to themselves and to others, that God has given them this or that word. They obey their father, the devil, and lie.

Men of sin are driven to their ends by their own evils, with Satan cracking a whip behind them. They must follow their path because they are chosen to destruction by God. But, those who are His, will know salvation and guidance. Jacob spells all this out to each son.

It might be thought that a son who is told he will become evil, deliberately becomes evil in protest, saying “Well, if I’m evil I may as well act like it!” This is a modern way of looking at it, and it is wrong (and stupid!). The son will do evil not because it is expected of him – but because he is lost and destined to hell. He will do evil because that is his real nature, as used and abused by Satan. In other words, he has no choice but to do evil, just as those who are saved have no choice but to be saved. God predestinates, and those who are not elect will live for sin and by sin... it is their nature.

Verses 1-4

1.

“And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days.

2.

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Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father.

3.

Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power:

4.

Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch.”

It seems, from reading the whole of Jacob's life, that he was very used to prophesying. In this, the last hour or so of his life, he makes multiple prophecies, concerning his sons. We also see big clues as to the character of the individual sons.

Jacob knew he was soon to die and he called all his sons into the room or tent. He said 'I want to tell you all what will happen to you in the last days.' By this he meant his own last day. 'Gather around my bed and listen.'

To be expected he began with his eldest son, Reuben, and what he had to say was very far from good or praiseworthy. He was Jacob's firstborn, his 'might' and start of his strength – probably referring to the strength that comes from having a big family full of sons. The excellency of dignity and power are his own, not those of Reuben, for Reuben was as “unstable as water”: water runs where it likes and spreads wantonly; so Reuben was reckless and wanton.

As a result, Reuben would not make much of himself in life and would not 'excel', *yathar* – become eminent. The text shows us that our misdeeds and bad characteristics can come back to hit us hard: Reuben had, many years previously, defiled' his father's bed by sexually violating Jacob's concubine, Bilhah. Like most people, he also had his 'good' side – but we are left in no doubt that his sin with the concubine was enough to taint his life. His coming lack of earthly success, then, was caused by his sexual sin. None of us should think we can get away with sin! At some time, the effects must catch us up, physically, mentally, or spiritually.

Verses 5-7

1.

“Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations.

2.

O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall.

3.

Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.”

We know that Simeon and Levi were ‘brethren’, so what does Jacob mean by this term? He does not just mean they are brothers – he means they are alike, twins in their personalities. That is, they were “instruments of cruelty” in their thoughts and ways.

Jacob shudders as he considers anyone coming into their presence... it is best to keep their characters secret! Even as a father, he could not unite with them, for his honour would be compromised. They were angry in their disposition and that is why they killed and destroyed buildings. This is a reference to when they went to Shehem and took vengeance for the rape of their sister by the prince of the city. They then lay the city to ruin. The word ‘man’ does not reflect what they really did, for they killed every male in the city. Thus, Jacob condemned the brothers from his death-bed for those acts.

Their angry characters, and penchant for cruelty, he said, were cursed. For that reason their families would not be an easy part of the tribal system to be known later as the Hebrews. Instead, their clans would be restless and wandering. God, too, can sometimes wait for a long time (in human terms) before striking at those who disobey and do wrong. Never think God sleeps, because He does not.

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You will note that the two brothers were 'instruments of cruelty'. Thus, they were both instigators and victims of their own characters, yet fully accountable. Those who live by sin habitually might enjoy the fruits of their evil, but they are also afraid of them, for they know they cannot escape their black hearts. Satan plays instruments finely and when he finds willing slaves to their own sins, he makes the most of the opportunity!

Verses 8-12

1.

"Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee.

2.

Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?

3.

The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.

4.

Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes:

5.

His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk."

Judah, on the other hand, was praised and would continue to be praised, even by the family and their tribes. He would be victorious over his enemies and the other families would bow down to his tribe. You will notice here the heavenly acceptance of 'just war'. The only way an enemy can be subjugated is by putting your foot on his neck – by that time he is dead. It is an error to think that Christians must never go to war, or that they can never be involved in what is loosely termed 'violence'. Not all violence is bad, or wrong, or sinful. Also, violence can take

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many forms. (2014 note: Today, we see Islamic brutes slaughtering Christians. These wicked men and women MUST be brought to book swiftly, by an unceremonious, shaming death).

Judah is “a lion’s whelp”. That is, he is the son of a mighty man and will himself be mighty. Evidence of this will be in his victories over his enemies. His prowess and power would continue for aeons, without abatement, “until Shiloh come”. The actual meaning of this name is unclear, but it interprets as ‘he to whom it belongs’. For this reason Christians take this to be a name for Christ. That is, when He comes to this earth, He will take the reins and be the head of spiritual Israel, e.g. “unto him shall the gathering of the people be.”

Jewish scholars define the ‘sceptre’ as the tribal staff of authority amongst the tribes, and the authority of the tribes to apply God’s laws to the people. Jacob continues with what seems to be an odd part of the prophecy, that Judah would tie his colt or ass to the best vine, wash his garments in wine (also called the “blood of grapes”).

We see here a direct comparison with the allusion of wine as ‘blood’, as found in communion. The intensity of the wine would redden his eyes, but milk would make his teeth pure white. Is this the sacrifice on the cross plus the purity of His person? Other lesser meanings have been given to this section, but it would seem odd to ‘dilute’ the meaning in such a strong prophecy. My suggestion as to the meaning is just as much a personal opinion as is any other interpretation, for no man today can fully understand.

Verse 13

1.

“Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for an haven of ships; and his border shall be unto Zidon.”

Some sons take up much of Jacob’s time. Here, Zebulun takes up one sentence (at least in the written account. It is possible that Jacob said much more than this, which is not recorded). Jacob’s words are simply a description of this son’s financial future – he would found a sea-port to be visited by many ships, and the border of his land would touch on the border of Zidon (‘hunting’). This was an ancient Phoenician city north of Tyre.

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Verses 14&15

1.

“Issachar is a strong ass couching down between two burdens:

2.

And he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute.”

A modern rendition of this verse is that Issachar was strong as a horse and could work hard. He was big and powerful in body. However, he could see the blessing of rest and peace and would enjoy his land, working hard in between times to keep what he owned. He “became a servant unto tribute”. That is, his preference for peace and goodness led him to become a slave to others, by way of paying tribute money to whoever required it. Protection money! We should note that no Christian must readily and willingly offer himself as a slave to another human being, for any reason (This is God’s command).

Today, many Christians try to ‘keep the peace’ by any means and at all costs, though this is not a Biblical concept or Christian attribute. There are times when we *must* rise up and fight back! Today, such evils are homosexuality, the continuous demands of Islam, and an infernal ‘political correctness’ that defies all logic, reason and morality. It is when we sit back and accept slavery by others and their evils, that ‘good men stay silent’, and the evils proliferate.

Note the language used by Jacob – as though the things he spoke of had already taken place. This is because prophecy is God’s plan brought to fruition later in time, whereas God acts in eternity. Therefore, what we think will happen tomorrow has already happened in eternity!

Verses 16-20

1.

“Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel.

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2.

Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.

3.

I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD.

4.

Gad, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last.

5.

Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties.”

Dan and his tribe would judge the people. He and his tribe would attack those who attack God's sons and daughters, bringing help and success. An army would overcome him (that is, his tribe) but when close to defeat, they would arise and be victorious over them. After that the tribe would enjoy plenty and have the niceties of life.

Verse 21

1.

“Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words.”

For Naphtali, Jacob reserves a few good words. This son is a “hind let loose”, like a deer set free. His freedom consists of giving “goodly words”... good advice and beautiful sentiments.

Verses 22-26

1.

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“Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall:

2.

The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him:

3.

But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:)

4.

Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb:

5.

The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.”

Joseph receives a bountiful blessing from his father, who considers him to be fruitful, a son who gives much blessing himself. Not only is he like a bough laden with fruit, but he also shelters the water in the well, keeping it cool. Even so, some tried to kill him – was this a reference to his brothers? It seems to be, for, at the time, they ‘hated him’. But, even so, Joseph was given strength and honour by God. He is called the ‘shepherd’ and the ‘stone of Israel’. Both are apt – it was Joseph who God used to protect and save many thousands of people from starvation. The ‘stone’ means a sacred memorial to God’s help and is also a reminder of Joseph’s firm and steady hand.

As blessed of God, Joseph would know plenty, spiritually and physically, from family as well as from heaven. At one time Joseph was separated from his brethren, but God would show him favour, with blessings over and above what was known to his brothers. This is a parallel statement to those speaking of Christ as the cornerstone, and as the stone rejected by the

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people raised to prominence.

Verse 27

1.

“Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.”

Benjamin would “ravin as a wolf”. Like a wolf he would tear at his prey and eat it, and share what he has obtained by his power. Benjamin’s tribe was known for its warlike behaviour.

Verses 28-33

1.

“All these are the twelve tribes of Israel: and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them.

2.

And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite,

3.

In the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite for a possession of a buryingplace.

4.

There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah.

5.

The purchase of the field and of the cave that is therein was from the children of Heth.

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6.

And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.”

And so we have been introduced to the 12 mighty tribes of Israel and to what Jacob told his sons at his death. Jacob finished blessing them and then gave instructions – he was to be buried with his forefathers in the cave of Ephron the Hittite, bought by Abraham for that purpose. It was where Abraham, Isaac and their wives were buried and that was where Jacob must be laid to rest.

To this juncture Jacob had been sitting on the edge of his bed, facing his sons. When he finished speaking, he pulled his legs and feet into the bed and lay down. Then, he died and was ‘gathered unto his people’ at Mamre in due time.

Notes:

Foreknowledge = *prognōsis*; forethought or pre-arrangement.

Predestination = *proorizō*; predetermine from eternity; foreordain, appoint beforehand.

Though looking similar they have subtle differences.

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