

Book of Genesis – Part XIX

Genesis 48-50 “Blessing and Prophecy”

We come now to the conclusion of Genesis. We will see that the whole book is in fact a foretelling of the entire Bible. We have seen the great themes of creation, the fall, the calling of an elect people (in ways that mystify us as sinful human beings), the continuing conflict between righteous and sinful behavior even on the part of God’s chosen people and the themes of redemption and reconciliation. In the last chapter we are reminded of God’s overarching providence. While we are free to make our own choices, God determines the final outcome of all things.

I. **The blessing of Manasseh and Ephraim (or, here we go again)– Chapter 48**

1. Jacob has come to the end of his life. In spite of all the earlier tragedies and disappointments he has faced (many of which were due to his own actions) he is ending his life in happiness and security.
2. Knowing that his father is about to die Joseph brings his two sons to be blessed by their grandfather. As we noted earlier, “blessing” bestowed a special, favored status on the recipient, not unlike our view of baptism.
3. Jacob repeats the promise of God that was made originally to Abraham (48:3; 17:1-8). The whole theme of the Bible can be summarized as the story of God’s promise to a sinful and rebellious people (II Corinthians 1:19-20).
4. Jacob’s eyes are weak (48:10) so he asks Joseph to bring the boys to him.
5. Joseph presents the boys so that Manasseh, the older will receive the favored blessing of the right hand. However Jacob intentionally crosses his hands so that the younger, Ephraim receives the favored blessing. Joseph, displeased at what his father is doing and perhaps assuming that Jacob is mistaken due to his poor eyesight, tries to correct the situation (48:17-18). Jacob reaffirms that he knows what he is doing (48:19). This of course is a repeat of Jacob himself receiving the blessing of his father Isaac over that of his older brother, Esau. However where Jacob (and his mother’s) action was deceitful Jacob is very up front about what he is doing. This is a critical scene because it reminds us that God’s ways are not our ways (Isaiah 55:8-9). God loves Jacob rather than Esau (Mal. 1:2-3). The first shall be last (Matt. 10:31). If we could grasp this spiritual lesson spelled out here explicitly in the first book of the Bible we would face less distress and questioning in our spiritual lives. God’s pattern is not our pattern. We never have the whole picture.

II. **The Destiny of the Twelve Sons – Chapter 49**

- I. Jacob now summons all his sons and gives basically a prophecy of their future destinies.
 1. Reuben is the firstborn but rather than enjoying the fruits of this status his father pronounces him as “unstable as water.” His

sexual involvement with his father's concubine (35:22) is ultimately a disgrace against his father. The ancient world both within and outside the Bible regarded such actions as abhorrent (I Cor. 5:1-2). The Greek dramatist Euripides in his play *Hippolytus* speaks to this and this may well be what Paul is referring to when he cites the "pagans."

2. Simeon and Levi are cursed because of their violence. This goes back to their murder of Shechem and all his people because of the rape of their sister (34:25-30). This is a condemnation of the spiral of violence which Jesus invokes in the Sermon on the Mount (Matt. 5:38-42).
 3. The most significant prophecy has to do with Judah.
 1. Judah will be powerful (49:8).
 2. He will be like a lion – 49:9; Rev. 5:5
 3. He will be a king – 49:10; Ps. 89:18-37
 4. references to a donkey's colt refers to his humility – 49:11; Zech. 9:9; Matt. 21:1-5
 5. wine is a symbol of the coming Kingdom of God – 49:11-12; Joel 3:18; Amos 9:13; John 2:1-11
 6. The ultimate descendent of Judah of course is Jesus Christ – Matt. 1:3-16
 4. Zebulun will be in favored location – Joshua 19:10-16; Matt. 4:12-16
 5. Issachar will capitulate to slavery in order to find his "resting place" – 49:14-15
 6. Dan will be a judge and sneak up on his enemies – 49:16-17; Joshua 19:40-48
 7. Gad's tribe will distinguish themselves in battle – 49:19; Num. 26:15-18
 8. Asher will settle in a fertile land – 49:20; Deut. 33:24-25
 9. Naphtali's land will be blest – 49:21; Deut. 33:23; Matt. 4:13
 10. Joseph's line, not surprisingly, is full of promise and blessing. Yet the Messiah will come through Judah (49:22-26).
 11. Benjamin, in spite of the rather passive role he has in Genesis will be a forceful tribe like a wolf (49:27). Benjamin's most famous descendent is the apostle Paul (Phil. 3:4-5)
- II. After pronouncing these blessings (and curses) Jacob expresses his desire to be buried with his ancestors. He then breathes his last – 49:29-33

III. The Final Word – chapter 50

- I. Joseph complies with his father's request. First, Jacob is embalmed according to the custom of the Egyptians (50:2-3). Then he is taken to Canaan to be buried with his family (50:4-14). What is striking here is that elements of both Egyptian culture and Hebrew practice are combined.

Already we have the idea that God's promise and his chosen people will indeed include a blessing for the nations (12:3).

- II. Joseph's brothers then worry about possible retaliation at the hands of Joseph now that their father is dead (50:15).
- III. In this final scene of the Book of Genesis two great themes are emphasized.
 1. The last word on human sin is forgiveness. (50:17). The brothers here ask for forgiveness. This is the essence of repentance (Matt. 4:17). Yet Joseph has already forgiven them (50:17-19). God's forgiveness precedes even our repentance (Luke 23:34; Acts 13:38; Eph. 1:7). Joseph's forgiveness is absolute and complete. They have nothing to fear. He speaks kindly to them. Indeed he will provide for them (50:21).
 2. All this is God's plan (Rom. 8:28). God's good purpose does not negate the harm that the brothers intended. Yet in God's sovereign purpose that harm is overruled "for good" (50:20; Acts 2:23; Luke 22:22).
- IV. Joseph dies at the age of one hundred and ten. He repeats the promise made to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. He asks them when they leave Egypt to bring his body back to his homeland. He therefore prophesies the Exodus (50:24-26; Ex. 13:19).
- V. This concludes the story of the patriarchs.

Questions for us –

1. Why do you think the theme of reversal is so prominent in Scripture? What lessons can we take from God choosing Jacob over Esau or Jacob favoring Ephraim over Manasseh? Is this fair (cf. Matt. 20:1-16)?
2. What are we to make of the promise to Judah (49:8-12)? Judah is far from guiltless (37:26-27; 38:1-26). Why do you think the plan of salvation is carried out through Judah's line rather than through Joseph or Benjamin?
3. What does it mean to say that God can bring good out of harm (50:20)? Have we experienced this in our own lives? What do we say to the person in distress who questions God's goodness?

Next Study – March 3: The Epistle to the Romans – Rom. 1:1-17