

## “Determining Your Destiny” (Genesis 49:1-28)

The year 1980 was an eventful year. Ronald Reagan was elected the 40<sup>th</sup> US president in a sweeping victory. Mount St. Helens erupted. Hewlett-Packard released its first personal computer. Jessica Simpson was born. The Philadelphia Phillies won the World Series. The Pittsburgh Steelers won the Super Bowl. *The Empire Strikes Back* was the top grossing film. “Lady” by Kenny Rogers spent the most time at the top of the US charts. US viewers got caught up in the “Who Shot J.R.?” cliff-hanger on the soap opera series *Dallas*.<sup>1</sup> On one hand, 1980 seems like a lifetime ago, on the other hand, it seems like yesterday.

In 1980, I was a nine-year-old boy. Today, I am the father of a nine-year-old son. I’m here to tell you that time flies. Our lives are here one moment and gone the next. This is why the Bible compares our lifespan with grass (Isa 40:6-8), vapor (Jas 4:14), and breath (Ps 39:5). While most of us will intellectually acknowledge the fleeting nature of life, the way we live our lives doesn’t match our beliefs.<sup>2</sup> Sadly, many of us are more excited about things that will not matter in eternity. Yet, as Matthew Henry (1662-1714) once said, “It ought to be the business of every day to prepare for our last day.” Or as Martin Luther (1483-1546) declared, “There are two days on my calendar—‘Today’ and ‘That Day.’” Honestly, a day is coming when all that will really matter is how you and I lived our lives for the sake of eternity.<sup>3</sup>

Genesis 49 provides a sobering wakeup call to contemplate both our present and future life. In the first 28 verses of this chapter, we will be able to look on as Jacob gives his last words to his 12 sons.<sup>4</sup> All 12 of Jacob’s sons<sup>5</sup> regardless of their faithfulness have a future with God and are blessed by God. But *only* the faithful sons will have an inheritance in the land. The lesson is clear: The actions of believers determine their future blessings in God’s program. Also, the choices believers make today will affect their descendants for generations to come.<sup>6</sup>

**1. Introduction (49:1-2).** Moses begins his account with these words: “**Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, ‘Assemble yourselves that I may tell you what will befall you in the days to come. Gather together and hear, O sons of Jacob; and listen to Israel your father.’**”<sup>7</sup> The expression “in the days to come” refers to the distant future, including the end of the age and millennium.<sup>8</sup> The double exhortation to give attention to Jacob’s words lays stress upon the importance of what he is about to say. His words are doubly important.<sup>9</sup> In many respects, this can be seen as a picture of that Day when the believer stands before Jesus Christ. So let me ask you, “Are you living for that Day to come?” Are you living for your Lord and for those descendants that will come after you? A believer’s works during this life significantly determine the extent of divine blessing he and his descendants will receive in the future.

The words that we are about to read are not the spontaneous thoughts of a dying man, but the carefully prepared words of a prophetic poet. The purposes of Jacob’s prophetic words are: (1) to reveal the future; (2) to serve as a warning against sin; (3) to motivate us to godly living; and (4) to foreshadow the life and ministry of Jesus the Messiah.

**2. Jacob’s three oldest sons are disinherited for their unfaithfulness (49:3-7).**<sup>10</sup> In this section we learn that uncontrolled passions lead to personal and family ruin. Jacob begins with his oldest, in 49:3-4: “**Reuben, you are my firstborn; my might and the beginning of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. 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.**” Jacob affirms that Reuben holds a special place in his heart by virtue of the fact that he was the firstborn. The firstborn son normally had two rights. First, he became the leader of the family, the new patriarch. Second, he was entitled to a double share of the inheritance. But Reuben was not to receive this blessing because he is “**uncontrolled as water.**”

The Hebrew word translated “uncontrolled” means “reckless or destructive.”<sup>11</sup> The picture is of water that floods its banks and goes wildly out of control. The metaphor, which literally means something like boiling over like water, suggests a certain seething of lust, an unbridled license. The result is an evaluation of Reuben that pointed to wildness and weakness, an undisciplined life.<sup>12</sup>

The sins of the past have disqualified him from blessing in the future. If you recall, after Rachel died Reuben slept with Rachel’s servant—the mother of his brothers Dan and Naphtali (35:22). All the text tells us is that Jacob heard about it. We don’t know for certain why Reuben did this.<sup>13</sup> This incident happened 40 years ago. Reuben, the firstborn, should have received a double portion of the inheritance. He should have been the leader among his brothers. He, above all his brothers, should have been the one to defend his father’s honor, not defile it. But his one act of indulgence robbed him of his privileges as the firstborn. Like King David after him, he paid a terrible price for a night of pleasure.

All the potential in the world won’t benefit you if you don’t develop self-control, especially in the area of sexual temptation. Satan has plenty of time to wait for you to fall. He just sets his traps and bides his time. Eventually, he knows that he’s going to trip you up. You may be preeminent in dignity and power. But if you’re as uncontrolled as water, it’s only a matter of time until your potential is swept away by the flood of lust. You may have tremendous potential in the Lord. But you’ve got a habit of flowing downstream with lustful thoughts. It’s all in your head at this point. No one else knows and no one has gotten hurt—yet. But, *great gifts are worthless without godly character*. I know many gifted pastors who are out of the ministry because they did not judge their lust. If you aren’t learning to take every thought captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ, it’s only a matter of time before your great potential is ruined by reckless lust.<sup>14</sup> Reuben provides a gripping illustration that the passion of uncontrolled lust leads to ruin.

True to Jacob’s prophecy, the Reubenites never produced a leader of any kind for Israel. They never entered the Promised Land (Num 23). They built unauthorized places of worship (Josh 22:10-34). About no other tribe do we know so little as about Reuben. The tribe produced no significant man, no judge, no king, and no prophet. From this first oracle, the teaching is clear that the behavior of one individual affects the destiny of his descendants.<sup>15</sup> Jacob now moves on to his next two sons.

In 49:5-7, Jacob declares, **“Simeon and Levi are brothers; their swords are implements of violence. 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. 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.”** When Jacob says that these men are brothers, he doesn’t mean just biological brothers. He means that they are two of a kind. Brothers and sisters can either encourage one another to righteous living or to sin. These brothers plotted how they would get even with the Shechemites because the prince of Shechem had raped their sister. They used God’s covenant of circumcision, which should have been a channel of blessing, as the means of deceiving and slaughtering all the men in the town. Here Jacob distances himself from their treachery and pronounces a curse upon their anger. These two sons teach us that the passion of uncontrolled anger leads to ruin.

Interestingly, over 40 years later, Jacob still characterizes his sons as angry men. He doesn’t say, “Cursed be their anger, for it *was* fierce, and their wrath, for it *was* cruel.” He says it “*is*” fierce and cruel. They were still angry men. Uncontrolled anger results in senseless destruction of people and property. Think of the families these men ruined by murdering all the fathers. They hamstringed some of the oxen, an act of senseless waste. The word “self-will” (49:6) has the nuance of doing as they pleased. They weren’t concerned about anybody’s feelings except their own. Most anger stems from selfishness. “I didn’t get my way! I demand my rights!” But that kind of anger hurts everyone, including the angry person.

Jacob distances himself from these two angry sons (49:6) and prophesies that they will be dispersed and scattered in Israel. That was fulfilled as the tribe of Simeon later inherited land scattered throughout Judah's territory (Josh 19:1-9; see also 1 Chron 4:28-33, 39, 42). The tribe of Levi became priests who had no inheritance, but were scattered throughout the rest of the tribal lands.<sup>16</sup>

Even though these first three tribes suffered loss for their sins, Jacob's prophecies about them were still a blessing. They retained a place in the chosen family and enjoyed the benefits of God's promises as Jacob's heirs. Yet, they were disqualified from the reward that could have been theirs because of their failure to repent of their sin (Num 32:23-24; Ezek 18:30). By demoting Reuben for his turbulence and uncontrolled sex drive, Jacob saves Israel from reckless leadership. Likewise, by cursing the cruelty of Simeon and Levi, he restricts their cruel rashness from dominating.<sup>17</sup>

Perversion and anger are the two sins that men struggle with the most. Unfortunately, both sins can be handed down from generation to generation. Take anger, for example. It's interesting that Moses was a descendant of Levi. What problem kept Moses from beginning his work at first and then from entering the Promised Land? Anger! He got angry and murdered the Egyptian who was mistreating the Hebrews and had to flee to the desert for 40 years. Then he got angry with the people and struck the rock to bring forth water, when God had told him to speak to the rock. For that sin, God prevented Moses from entering Canaan. Moses was the son of Levi.

The lesson is clear: Our actions determine our future blessings in God's program and the choices we make today will affect our descendants for generations to come. We must learn from Reuben, Simeon, and Levi that we cannot live recklessly. God, the righteous judge sees everything. We may feel that we have "gotten away" with something, but we haven't. We just haven't "faced the music" yet...but we will. Even though we are secure in Christ, there are still consequences to our actions.<sup>18</sup> We must continually recognize that one day we will have to give an account (2 Cor 5:10).<sup>19</sup>

I appreciate Jacob's willingness to step up and drill his sons between the eyes. Previously, he was a passive, sissified male, but in his final days he steps up. As parents, one of the things we must do is tell our children the truth. Our society has been caught up in self-esteem. We don't want to say or do anything that will jeopardize anyone's sense of worth. Yet, healthy people are disciplined. Who is the most rebellious and prideful being that has ever lived? Satan. He has always sought to have his own way. Apart from the boundaries God has placed upon him, he does whatever he wants. He hasn't turned out very well. Parents, discipline your children. Exercise tough love. You may feel like your children are little devils right now. Well, just wait. If you choose not to discipline them and speak hard words, you will find that they will become menaces to society.

**3. The seven acceptable sons are given responsibilities (49:13-21, 27).** In these ten verses, Jacob shares brief words with seven of his sons. True to the poetic qualities of the text, the images of the destiny of the remaining sons are, in most cases, based on a wordplay of the son's name. The central theme uniting each image is that of prosperity.<sup>20</sup> In 49:13, Jacob begins: "**Zebulun will dwell at the seashore; and he shall be a haven for ships, and his flank shall be toward Sidon.**" Zebulun later obtained territory between the Mediterranean Sea and the Sea of Galilee. This was a thriving commercial area though Zebulun may never have had permanent "waterfront property." It is possible, however, that Zebulun and Issachar shared some territory (cf. Deut 33:18-19), so Zebulun could have bordered the Sea of Galilee. Perhaps the men of Zebulun worked for the Phoenicians in their maritime trade (cf. Deut 33:19). Zebulun will extend to the sea in the millennium when his borders will extend as far as Sidon on the Mediterranean (Ezek 48:1-8, 23-27). An important caravan route from Mesopotamia to Egypt passed through his territory.

In 49:14-15, Jacob says, **“Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between the sheepfolds. 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.”** Issachar would prefer an agricultural way of life and what it produced rather than political supremacy among the tribes. Evidently Issachar was strong and capable, but also passive and lazy. In contrast to Judah, who subdued his enemies like a lion, Issachar submitted themselves as slaves to the Canaanites.

Jacob continues in 49:16-18: **“Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. 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. For Your salvation I wait, O LORD.”** Dan would be a judge in Israel. This prophecy came to reality partially during Samson’s judgeship (Judg 13:2). Dan’s victories benefited all Israel. Yet this tribe led Israel into idolatry (Judg 18:30-31; 1 Kgs 12:26-30) and became known as the center of idolatry in Israel (Amos 8:14). Thus, Jacob likened Dan to a serpent (49:17), pointing to God’s prophecy that the serpent would bite the heel of God’s promised deliverer, but the Messiah would finally crush his head and bring the long-awaited salvation (3:15).<sup>21</sup> It was natural, therefore, for Jacob to cry out, **“For Your salvation I wait, O LORD”** (49:18). Ultimately, Jacob knows that the future of the nation of Israel does not depend on his 12 sons, but rather on God who would one day send a deliverer (Matt 1:21).

In 49:19-21, Jacob speaks very brief words to the next three sons. In 49:19, he says, **“As for Gad, raiders shall raid him, but he will raid at their heels.”** The tribe of Gad would become tenacious fighters and would be victorious over all the foreign armies they faced (Jer 49:1).

In 49:20, Jacob says, **“As for Asher, his food shall be rich, and he will yield royal dainties.”** Asher would enjoy some of the most fertile land in Canaan (Deut 33:24-25; Josh 19:24-31).

In 49:21, Jacob says, **“Naphtali is a doe let loose, he gives beautiful words.”** The tribe of Naphtali would be well known for producing eloquent speakers and beautiful literature.<sup>22</sup> The most famous of these was Deborah who composed a beautiful poem of military triumph in Judg 5:1-31. Along with the land of Zebulun, Naphtali’s territory was near the Sea of Galilee, the region where Jesus did much of His teaching and ministry (Matt 4:15-16). And it goes without saying that there has never been a man who spoke such beautiful, life-giving words as Jesus Christ.

The seventh acceptable son is baby Benjamin. Jacob surprises us when he states that the runt of the litter **“is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he devours the prey, and in the evening he divides the spoil.”** The tribe of Benjamin had a reputation for being fierce and aggressive (Judg 19-21).<sup>23</sup> He produced many warriors in Israel’s history (e.g., Ehud, Saul, Jonathan, et al.) and demonstrated a warlike character among the tribes (Judg 5:14; 20:16; 1 Chron 8:40; 2 Chron 14:8; 17:17). I guess Ben learned some toughness having eleven older brothers.

**4. The two most faithful sons are given greater responsibility (49:8-12, 22-26).** Since the first three brothers were disqualified from their position, the mantle falls to the fourth child, Judah. Remember, Judah wasn’t exactly a spiritual giant: He lobbied to sell Joseph for a profit (37:26). He separated himself from God’s covenant people (38:1). He hung around ungodly men (38:12). He was sexually immoral (38:18). He failed to keep his word to his daughter-in-law Tamar (38:26). So why did Jacob pronounce such a rich blessing on Judah? He confessed and repented of his sins (38:26). He took full responsibility for the safety of Benjamin (43:8-10). He offered himself as a substitute for Joseph (44:18ff). The blessing of Judah is a beautiful picture of God’s grace to those who confess and repent of their sins (Jer 15:19). Today, if you have a long resume of sin, God wants to give you a new job description. He wants you to experience His forgiveness. He longs for you to begin again.

Jacob's words to Judah are powerful, perhaps even staggering. Jacob declares, **“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”** (49:8). Judah will be preeminent among his brothers and they will praise him. This is a play-on-words since the name Judah means “praise.” His hand would be on the neck of his enemies. His brothers would bow down to him. But his leadership will not be fully realized until the days of King David, some 640 years later.

Jacob continues in 49:9-10: **“Judah is a lion's whelp;<sup>24</sup> 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? The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh<sup>25</sup> comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.”** Jacob is informing Judah that he will be the line of the Messiah (Zech 10:4; Heb 7:14). The scepter will not depart from Judah (Num 24:17). If you know the history of Israel, you know that starting with Saul, David, and Solomon every king came from the tribe of Judah. And Matt 1:2 states that Jesus was from the tribe of Judah. After Christ, there have been no kings. So, even now in the book of Genesis, Jacob is pointing to Jesus as the rightful ruler. He is the One who will not only be King over Israel but over the nations! He is the One that Rev 5:5 calls “the Lion of Judah.”

“Shiloh” (lit. the “bearer of rest”) is an obscure word<sup>26</sup> that we should probably translate “whose it (the ruler's staff) is” or “to whom it belongs” rather than transliterate it “Shiloh” (cf. Ezek. 21:26-27).<sup>27</sup> Jacob is saying that until the One to whom all royal authority belongs comes, the tribe of Judah will always have a lawgiver in its ranks (Isa 9:1-6). Shiloh, like “seed” in 3:15, is a name for the coming Messiah.

These words are amazing! They demonstrate that God has a plan. From the first sin in Gen 3, God has been pointing His people to a Savior. And He points us in the same direction. We have the advantage of the added testimony of Christ's life, death, and resurrection. We have the testimony of those who traveled with Him and were transformed by Him. Yet, even in Gen the spotlight is on Jesus. He is the One mankind has needed so desperately. It is not something some guy dreamed up like most of the religions of the world. This is what God has been preparing from the foundations of the earth. This ought to give you and me great confidence in the Bible. It is a supernatural and prophetic book that has stood the test of time and weathered every attack!

In 49:11-12, Jacob says, **“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. His eyes are dull from wine, and his teeth white from milk.”** The picture is clear: The tribe of Judah will be a victorious tribe. Judah's descendants will be victorious in battle and will reign over the others. The descendants of Judah will be prosperous...so prosperous that the vines for wine will be so plentiful that they will use them for common purposes like tethering their donkeys or washing their clothes (Ps 16:11).

Later biblical writers drew heavily from the imagery of this short text in their portrayal of the reign of the coming Messiah. Isaiah 63:1-6 envisions the coming of a conquering king whose clothes are like those of one who has tread the winepresses. His crimson clothing is then likened to the bloodstained garments of a victorious warrior. He is the One who has come to carry out the vengeance of God's wrath upon the ungodly nations (Isa 63:6). In the book of Rev, this same image is applied to the victorious return of Christ. He is the rider on “the white horse” who is “dressed in a robe dipped in blood...Out of his mouth comes a sharp sword with which to strike down the nations...He treads the winepress of the fury of the wrath of God Almighty” (Rev 19:11, 13, 15).<sup>28</sup>

Now that we have looked at Judah, it is time to transition to Joseph. In 49:22-26, Jacob says, **“Joseph is a fruitful bough,<sup>29</sup> a fruitful bough by a spring; its branches run over a wall. The archers bitterly attacked him, and shot at him and harassed him; 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),<sup>30</sup> 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. 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.”** Joseph’s blessing is especially abundant. The two tribes that bore his sons’ names would see their fulfillment even though during his lifetime Joseph had faced much opposition. Judah received the leadership of the tribes, but Joseph obtained the double portion of the birthright (cf. 1 Chron 5:2).

How was Joseph able to persevere through the challenges of life? Jacob’s five names for God in this blessing are noteworthy:

1. **“The Mighty One of Jacob”** (cf. Ps 132:2; Isa 1:24; 49:26; 60:16)
2. **“The Shepherd”** (28:8-9; 48:15; Ps 23:1)
3. **“The Stone of Israel”** (cf. Deut 32:4, 18; Ps 18:2; 19:14; Isa 8:14)
4. **“The God of your [Joseph’s] father”** (31:5; 32:9-10; 46:3)
5. **“The Almighty”** (17:1)

Blessing is one of the key words of Gen, occurring some 88 times in the book. Here in 49:25-26, like the finale of a fireworks display, the root occurs six times (verb 1x, noun 5x) making a brilliant climax to the last words of Jacob. The God-given blessings of the future will far outshine those already experienced.<sup>31</sup>

Our passage closes in 49:28: **“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.”** Jacob treated each of his sons differently. He disciplined and blessed them appropriately. Yet, this passage closes with three usages of the word “bless.” God eagerly seeks to bless His people. Will you be a recipient of His blessing today?

This evening, we have our annual Awana awards. Every child that participates in these awards is blessed. He or she is a part of the Awana family. Many are a part of the Emmanuel family. Yet, tonight we celebrate not just participation, but faithfulness. There will be some children that worked diligently; there will be others who did not. Each child will be blessed, but not every child will be equally blessed. Some people have been critical of Awana and have suggested that it promotes “works righteousness.” Nothing could be further from the truth. Awana prepares children and adults for that Day when Jesus Christ will scrutinize our lives. On that Day, He will be looking for faithfulness. Will you be found faithful? Will you enter into your full reward or will you be disqualified from the reward that could have been yours?

In 1 Cor 10:11, Paul tells us that the stories of the Old Testament are examples that were written down as warnings for us. Will you heed the warning from Jacob and his sons? Will you recognize that your actions determine your future blessings in God’s program and the choices you make today will affect your descendants for generations to come?<sup>32</sup>

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## Notes

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<sup>1</sup> In 1980 (the year you were born): <http://www.blogthings.com/1980.html>.

<sup>2</sup> Seneca (5 BC - 65 AD), a Roman dramatist, philosopher, and politician once said, “We are always complaining that our days are few and acting as though there would be no end of them.” Preaching Today Citation: Seneca, Leadership, Vol. 4, no. 3.

<sup>3</sup> As John Tillotson (1630-1694), the Archbishop of Canterbury, once said, “He who provides for this life but takes no care for eternity is wise for a moment but a fool forever.”

<sup>4</sup> At the end of his life Moses also blessed the 12 tribes of Israel (Deut 33:1-29). Moses’ blessing was reminiscent of that of Jacob, speaking directly to the future life of each tribe in the land of Canaan. Paul Wright, ed., *Genesis: Shepherd’s Notes* (Nashville: Broadman, 1997), 86. For further study see Joel D. Heck, “A History of Interpretation of Genesis 49 and Deuteronomy 33,” *Bibliotheca Sacra* 147:585 (January-March 1990): 16-31.

<sup>5</sup> The first six sons referred to are the offspring of Jacob and Leah. The next four are the sons of the concubines of Rachel and Leah. The last two sons are the children of Jacob and Rachel, the wife of his preference.

<sup>6</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Genesis* (<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/genesis.pdf>, 2005), 269.

<sup>7</sup> Sailhamer proposes that the poetic section in Gen 49:1-28 plays a significant role in the larger structure of the Pentateuch. “At three macrostructural junctures in the Pentateuch, the author has spliced a major poetic discourse onto the end of a large unit of narrative (Ge 49; Nu 24; Dt 31). A close look at the material lying between and connecting the narrative and poetic sections reveals the presence of a homogeneous composition stratum. It is most noticeably marked by the recurrence of the same terminology and narrative motifs. In each of the three segments, the central narrative figure (Jacob, Balaam, Moses) calls an audience together (imperative: Ge 49:1; Nu 24:14; Dt 31:28) and proclaims (cohortative: Ge 49:1; Nu 24:14; Dt 31:28) what will happen (Ge 49:1; Nu 24:14; Dt 31:29) in ‘the end of days’ (Ge 49:1; Nu 24:14; Dt 31:29)...In sum, the apparent overall strategy of the author in these three segments suggests that one of the central concerns lying behind the final shape of the Pentateuch is an attempt to uncover an inherent relationship between the past and the future. That which happened to God’s people in the past portends of future events. To say it another way, the past is seen as a lesson for the future...The narrative texts of past events are presented as pointers to future events. Past events foreshadow the future. It is not hard to see that such a hermeneutic leads to a form of narrative typology. We should, then, look for signs of such a typology in the composition of the smaller units of narrative in the Pentateuch as well as in the arrangement of the legal material.” Sailhamer, *Genesis*: EBC, Electronic ed.

<sup>8</sup> The NET Study Notes state that the expression “in the future” (lit. “the end of days”) is found most frequently in prophetic passages; it may refer to the end of the age, the eschaton, or to the distant future. The contents of some of the sayings in this chapter stretch from the immediate circumstances to the time of the settlement in the land to the coming of Messiah. Sailhamer writes, “At the close of Jacob’s discourse (v. 28), the writer goes to great lengths to draw a line connecting Jacob’s words in this chapter to the theme of ‘the blessing’ that has been a central concern of the book since 1:28. He does this by repeating the word ‘blessing’ three times in the short span of v. 28, which literally reads: ‘And he blessed [*wayebarek*] them, each according to his blessing [*kebirkato*] he blessed [*berak*] them.’ By framing Jacob’s last words between v. 1 and v. 28, the writer shows where his interests lie. Jacob’s words look to the future—“in days to come”—and draw on the past, viz., God’s blessing of mankind. It is within that context we are to read and understand Jacob’s words in this chapter.” John H. Sailhamer, *Genesis*: EBC (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 1990), Electronic ed.

<sup>9</sup> S. Lewis Johnson, Jr., “Jacob’s Last Words Part 1 (Genesis 49:1-12)”: <http://www.believers-chapel.org/bulletins/genesis/genesis.html>, 3.

<sup>10</sup> Steven J. Cole, “Problem Passions” (Genesis 49:1-7): [http://www.fcfonline.org/site/search\\_methods.asp?search=1&search\\_method=advanced&sermon\\_book=Genesis](http://www.fcfonline.org/site/search_methods.asp?search=1&search_method=advanced&sermon_book=Genesis)

<sup>11</sup> The Hebrew noun *pakhaz* (“uncontrolled”) only occurs here in the OT. A related verb occurs twice in the prophets (Jer 23:32; Zeph 3:4) for false prophets inventing their messages, and once in Judges for unscrupulous men bribed to murder (Judg 9:4). It would describe Reuben as being “frothy, boiling, turbulent” as water. The LXX has “run riot,” the Vulgate has “poured out,” and *Tg. Onq.* has “you followed your own direction.” It is a reference to Reuben’s misconduct in Genesis 35, but the simile and the rare word invite some speculation. H. Pehlke suggests “destructive like water,” for Reuben acted with pride and presumption; see his “An Exegetical and Theological Study of Genesis 49:1-28” (Th.D. dissertation, Dallas Theological Seminary, 1985). See NET Study Notes.

<sup>12</sup> Johnson, “Jacob’s Last Words,” 4.

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<sup>13</sup> Some suggest that Reuben hoped to make Bilhah someone despised by his father and Reuben, in his warped sense figured that his mother Leah would then be the most cherished.

<sup>14</sup> Cole, "Problem Passions," 2-3.

<sup>15</sup> Victor P. Hamilton, *The Book of Genesis Chapters 18-50*: NICOT (Grand Rapids: Eerdmans, 1995), 647.

<sup>16</sup> Initially, the tribe of Simeon was the third largest tribe in Israel (Num 1:23). But just 35 years later the tribe of Simeon shrank to become the smallest of the 12 (Num 26:14) and were scattered throughout the tribe of Judah (Josh 19:11 Chron 4:27, 38-43). The tribe of Levi, on the other hand, received no large land grant, but Joshua gave them several cities in which they lived among the other tribes (Josh 21:1-40). While the Levites started out poorly, they turned a new direction when they took their stand with Moses against the worship of the Golden Calf (Exod 32:26-28; Num 3:5-13; 18:6-32). They eventually became the priestly tribe, but never had any land of their own and instead were scattered throughout Israel.

<sup>17</sup> Bruce K. Waltke, *Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 603.

<sup>18</sup> How can the believer lose both temporal and eternal rewards?

- We can forfeit rewards from God by seeking them from men (Matt 6:5-6; John 5:44).
- We can have rewards taken from us because of our unfaithfulness (Matt 25:28-29).
- We can become disqualified for rewards because of moral and spiritual compromise (1 Cor 9:27).
- We can lose rewards because of an unproductive and disobedient life (1 Cor 3:15; Rev 3:11).
- We can lose rewards by carelessness and waste (2 John 8).

<sup>19</sup> Eternal security and eternal rewards should be the two focal points of the believer's life. The first looks back to the cross of Christ for assurance; the second looks forward to His judgment seat for accountability. Ed Underwood, "Determining Your Destiny: An Introduction to the Doctrine of Eternal Rewards: Genesis 49," *North Umpqua Bible Fellowship Nutshell Notes*, 2/24/1991.

<sup>20</sup> Sailhamer, *Genesis*: EBC, Electronic ed.

<sup>21</sup> The NET Study Notes suggest, "The comparison of the tribe of Dan to a venomous serpent is meant to say that Dan, though small, would be potent, gaining victory through its skill and shrewdness."

<sup>22</sup> Jacob could have meant that Naphtali would exchange his freedom for a more sedentary domesticated lifestyle in the land, or that he would accommodate to the Canaanites. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 483. The NET Study Notes say this, "Almost every word in the verse is difficult. Some take the imagery to mean that Naphtali will be swift and agile (like a *doe*), and be used to take good messages (reading "words of beauty"). Others argue that the tribe was free-spirited (*free running*), but then settled down with young children."

<sup>23</sup> We have a number of examples of Benjamin's aggressive leaders (Ehud [Judg 3:15-23], King Saul [1 Sam 9:1, 14:47-52], and Paul the Apostle [Acts 8:1-3]).

<sup>24</sup> The image of Judah as a lion is common in the OT (e.g., Num 24:9; Ezek 19:1-7; Mic 5:8). Ronald F. Youngblood, *The Book of Genesis* (Grand Rapids: Baker, 1991), 278.

<sup>25</sup> The Hebrew form *shiloh* is a major interpretive problem. There are at least four major options (with many variations and less likely alternatives): (1) Some prefer to leave the text as it is, reading "Shiloh" and understanding it as the place where the ark rested for a while in the time of the Judges. (2) By repointing the text others arrive at the translation "until the [or "his"] ruler comes," a reference to a Davidic ruler or the Messiah. (3) Another possibility that does not require emendation of the consonantal text, but only repointing, is "until tribute is brought to him" (so NEB, JPS, NRSV), which has the advantage of providing good parallelism with the following line, "the nations will obey him." (4) The interpretation followed in the present translation, "to whom it [belongs]" (so RSV, NIV, REB), is based on the ancient versions. Again, this would refer to the Davidic dynasty or, ultimately, to the Messiah. See NET Study Notes.

<sup>26</sup> Shiloh could refer to the city in Canaan by that name (1 Sam 4:12). Some believe that Jacob intended to point to a future city (Shiloh) where the Ark of the Covenant would rest until that city came to an end. But this view is contextually untenable. Jacob spoke of "his feet" and the obedience that would be his. The antecedent of the pronouns seems to be a person, not an object like the city Shiloh. Furthermore, Kaiser writes, "It cannot refer to the place where the tabernacle would be pitched centuries later. If it did, Jacob would be prophesying about a place that was unknown at the time of prediction, and one that was rarely if ever mentioned in the literature of later years except as a symbol of judgment. This interpretation would also involve changing the verb 'comes' to 'comes to an end,' a meaning that adds more than the text says and only raises another question: What end and why?" Walter C. Kaiser, *Hard Sayings of the Bible* (Downers Grove, IL: InterVarsity, 1997 [1996]), Electronic ed.

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<sup>27</sup> Another option is “until tribute is brought to him.” Gordon J. Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, Vol. 2: WBC (Waco, TX: Word, 1994), 478.

<sup>28</sup> Sailhamer, *Genesis*: EBC, Electronic ed.

<sup>29</sup> Walton, Wenham, and Hamilton all understand the Hebrew word *ben* to mean “colt/ass” instead of “bough” (son). See John H. Walton, *Genesis: The NIV Application Commentary* (Grand Rapids: Zondervan, 2001), 718-19.

<sup>30</sup> The verb forms in 49:23-24 are used in a rhetorical manner, describing future events as if they had already taken place.

<sup>31</sup> Wenham, *Genesis 16-50*, 486.

<sup>32</sup> Dr. Thomas L. Constable, *Notes on Genesis* (<http://www.soniclight.com/constable/notes/pdf/genesis.pdf>, 2005), 269.