

Genesis 49 — How To Leave A Good Legacy

December 18, 2016

Good morning. I hope everyone is surviving the cold. Make sure you grab some extra coffee, tea or hot chocolate from the coffee bar if you need to keep warm.

On both our Spencer and Spirit Lake campuses we are studying Genesis. We are almost done with the book. If you are new, I realize this is like jumping into the last five minutes of a movie. Hang with us. Things will eventually make sense.

Before we dive into Genesis 49, let me set the stage to return our thoughts to the book of Genesis. Joseph was sold by his brothers into slavery. While in Egypt he was falsely accused of rape and ended up in a dungeon. God rescued him, and he went from the dungeon to the throne room and became second in command of all of Egypt in just one day. Later, God sent a famine on the land of Canaan which forced his brothers to come to Egypt looking for food. They found themselves bowing before the very brother they sold into slavery and thought was dead. Through a series of circumstances the 11 brothers and Joseph were eventually reunited. The brothers and their father, Jacob, came to Egypt and lived in the land of Goshen where Joseph provided for them. For the last 17 years Joseph's family was living reunited in Egypt. Seventeen years before, when Jacob, Joseph's father, came to Egypt he was 130. Grandpa Jacob and the bowhead whales were probably the oldest living things on the planet. In this chapter Jacob was now 147. He was about to die.

Before he died, he was going to bless his sons and tell them the kind of legacy they would leave behind. Some of the final blessings Jacob gave his sons are funny, others are sad and others are encouraging. Some of these blessings are simply based on fatherly wisdom of knowing your kids. Other blessings are unquestionably prophetic and directly inspired by God.

I am going to give you the two biggest lessons of this chapter up front so you can see them develop as we work through the text.

The first is that our choices have consequences. Our choices effect our lives, the lives of our children and generations to come. There is no way to avoid this message. It comes screaming out of this text. Our good choices influence our family line for good for generations, or our poor choices influence our family line for bad for generations. Even more important is that our repentance will also influence our family life for good for generations. We will definitely see the power of repentance in this chapter.

The second big application of this chapter is the incredible power of God's grace to take our messed up lives and do something good when we respond with repentance and humility in the face of our sin. Repentance, humility and God's grace can turn a bad legacy around and turn it into a beautiful legacy for the generations that follow.

Let's jump in. This will be a fun Sunday.

Then Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in days to come. "Assemble and listen, O sons of Jacob, listen to Israel your father. "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the firstfruits of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. Unstable 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! Genesis 49:1–4 (ESV)

Reuben was Jacob's first-born son through Leah. Like any father, Jacob had high hopes for his first-born son. You expect your firstborn to be in your image. You give him or her everything. The second and third children go along for the ride because life is busy but you give the best of everything to your firstborn. This is what Jacob said about Reuben. "I gave you the best of everything. I gave you first position in everything. I believed in you. I had high hopes for you. Everybody in the family should be looking to you for leadership and strength." Reuben was supposed to receive a double inheritance and become the leader of the family when Jacob died.

Jacob said, "I am taking everything away." Before Christmas we saw Jacob gave the double inheritance and position of family leadership to Joseph in place of Reuben. Why did dad completely reject Reuben? Reuben had sex with his stepmother, Jacob's wife Bilhah.

Why did he sleep with his stepmother? That is creepy. Here is where it gets interesting. Jacob described Reuben as unstable as water. That is a Hebrew idiom for saying someone has no self-discipline or no self-control. Reuben was unpredictable. Reuben lived for whatever felt good at the moment. Apparently he was a man that lived to satisfy appetites. I am sure he never dieted. One particular appetite over which he exercised little self-control was his lust, his sexual appetite. Reuben was not a guy that wanted to wait for the wedding. Scholars studying the Hebrew tell us the seducing of his stepmother was given as the supreme example of how out-of-control his lusts had become. It was the

prime example of his undisciplined sexual lifestyle. It was not the only example of his lack of self-discipline in this area.

The point of the story is his lack of self-discipline ruined him. It ruined the future for his children and for the tribe that came from him. Fast forward the biblical story. Once the tribe of Reuben crossed the Jordan River, it disappeared from biblical history. The consequences of Reuben's actions handicapped his children and grandchildren.

The moral of the story is that you may be born into the right family. You may have the right position in the family for leadership and inheritance. Your parents may have sacrificed for you and done everything to make you successful, like Jacob did for Reuben, but that is no guarantee of a successful future. If you choose to live an undisciplined life, in particular in the area of your sexuality, it will destroy you and cripple your children and the generations that follow.

Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. Let my soul come not into their council; O my glory, be not joined to their company. For in their anger they killed men, and in their willfulness they hamstrung oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel. Genesis 49:5–7 (ESV)

Simeon and Levi were like an evil version of Batman and Robin. They were brothers that were best friends but when they got together they egged each other on to trouble.

These guys are legendary for violence. How many of you have seen the movie "Toy Story"? I picture them like Sid from that movie. Like Sid, they dismembered their toys and blew them up with firecrackers and burned them with gasoline.

Why do I say they were so sadistic? If you were with us earlier in this series you will remember that these guys worked together to kill all the men in the city of Shechem after the prince of Shechem raped their sister. They have a seriously overactive vengeance gland. If they lived in California, they would be behind most of the road rage. If you cut them off in traffic, they might take your life.

Jacob said, "Let my soul come not in their counsel." Jacob didn't even want to be associated with his own sons because they were so evil.

To give you an idea of how much of a nutcase these guys have become, Jacob said they hamstringed oxen for sport. This means on Friday night, when they were bored because there was nothing but reruns on cable, they went out to the field and saw a huge cow. Using a sword they cut the tendon on the leg so the cow fell to the ground and could never get up again. They loved watching the cow face the agony of a slow death because it couldn't stand, and it writhed in agony on the ground. These guys were into animal cruelty for no other purpose than they liked watching things suffer. This is why Jacob said, these are not the kind of people you want to call your friends. This is why Jacob said that even though they were his second and third sons, they would not be given any land.

How did things turn out for the tribes that developed from these sons? The tribe of Simeon disappeared after the conquest of the Promised Land, just like the tribe of Reuben. They got no land. The tribe of Levi was never given any land but later became the priests. I will explain more on how that happened in a minute.

What we see with Reuben, Simeon and Levi are the common problems of most men. Men ruin their lives and their legacies by either letting their sexual appetite run out of control or by letting their anger run out of control. Aren't those the two major issues of most men? Go to jail and find out why most men are behind bars. They are rapists or murderers. While Reuben, Simeon and Levi are a clear example of what it looks like for men to have no self-discipline or self-control in these two areas of life, the good news is when we become Christians the Holy Spirit comes into our lives and one of the things he begins to develop is self-control. This morning, if you are struggling with self-control in these areas, turn to Jesus and ask for help. He will give it.

There is a message of hope in this story. Fast forward the biblical story a little more than 400 years and we see that God can take our sin and the sinful tendencies in our temperament and use those things for his glory. Just like Levi, the tribe of the Levites was known as a tribe with extreme anger against sin and they weren't afraid to get violent about it.

Four hundred years later after the nation of Israel has come out of Egypt and Moses had gone up Mt. Sinai to get the Ten Commandments from God, we find that the people on the base of the mountain were out of control. It says they rose up to play. That does not mean Monopoly or Settlers. It means they were sexually fornicating. Moses came down from the mountain and asked who would stand by him and put an end to the out-of-control sexual sin that was taking place in the nation. Who do you think grabbed their swords and executed judgement on their brothers? The violent Levites who had an overactive vengeance gland

against sin. Levi was the one who was angry when his sister Dinah was raped so he and Simeon killed the males in Shechem. Then we find his descendants were the ones who rallied around Moses and were willing to be violent to put an end to the sexual sin of the people around Mt. Sinai.

In Numbers 25 when the people of God were getting out of control and having sex with the young Canaanite girls that were their neighbors, it was Phinehas, a Levite, that impaled a man and his Canaanite girlfriend while in the act of adultery. As a result of Phinehas' zeal for God's holiness he stopped the plague that was the judgment of God upon his people for their out-of-control sexual appetites. Nevertheless, 24,000 had already died.

The Levites became the temple guards. God took the Levites' anger against sin and their propensity for violence and redeemed their anger and he used it for good. He used it to make them the protectors of his holiness. As a result of Levi and Simeon's sin, the Levites were never given land in the Promised Land but as a result of what they did to rally around Moses at Mt. Sinai and put an end to sin among the people they were given 24 towns in the Promised Land and became the priests of the nation. I love how God took their violence and their don't-tread-on-me attitude and used it for his glory.

For the moment, I am going to skip Judah. We will come back to him.

“Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea; he shall become a haven for ships, and his border shall be at Sidon. Genesis 49:13 (ESV)

The location of the tribe of Zebulun allowed it to prosper. While they had no direct sea ports because they had trees and a river that led to the sea they became inland ship builders that floated their ships down to the ocean and sold

them there. Just like Jacob prophesied long before it happened they became wealthy by the sea. That is Zebulun.

Issachar is a strong donkey, crouching between the sheepfolds. He saw that a resting place was good, and that the land was pleasant, so he bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant at forced labor. Genesis 49:14–15 (ESV)

This one is funny. Issachar was strong. He was a stud. This was a muscular guy. He looked great in the gym. Jacob said the problem with Issachar was that he was strong but he also was lazy. He had no ambition. He had so much potential but he was not going to use it. The Hebrew says he was like a strong donkey. He was a real workhorse that could handle the saddlebags. What happened is while the descendants of Issachar were strong enough to throw off the Canaanites, because they were lazy, they didn't do it. They ended up serving the Canaanites as long as they could enjoy the good land.

This is exactly what happened to this large tribe. They were content to be servants rather than rulers even though they had the ability to overthrow the Canaanites in charge of them.

If you are a parent, I am sure you see this same kind of quality in your children today. They have great potential, but if they don't believe they can accomplish anything they will be content to be servants and work for others instead of lead others and realize their potential. That was Issachar.

Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that his rider falls backward. I wait for your salvation, O Lord. Genesis 49:16–18 (ESV)

Dan turned out to be one of the smallest tribes in Israel but it was able to strike panic into nations much larger than itself, like a snake can petrify a horse and topple a rider. Probably the best example of the fulfillment of this prophecy

was Samson. He came from this tribe. Singlehandedly he struck panic into the Philistine nation.

Raiders shall raid Gad, but he shall raid at their heels. Genesis 49:19 (ESV)

The Gadites became famous for their military victories and were known as tenacious warriors. In 1 Chronicles 12:8 we find when David was running from Saul in the wilderness, many Gadites joined David. They were the core group of his army. David's mighty men were Gadites. They were a small but powerful tribe, just like Jacob prophesied.

Asher's food shall be rich, and he shall yield royal delicacies. Genesis 49:20 (ESV)

Asher turned into the family chef. Asher and his descendants were great cooks. They owned all the restaurants. I find that funny.

Naphtali is a doe let loose that bears beautiful fawns. Genesis 49:21 (ESV)

Here is another one that is funny. Jacob told Naphtali he was a good-looking guy with a great-looking wife and he was going to have some goodlooking kids. I am not sure what else to make of this verse.

Let me jump to Benjamin.

Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey and at evening dividing the spoil. Genesis 49:27 (ESV)

The tribe of Benjamin became vicious warriors. History bears this out. Many were genetically predisposed to be left-handed. Judges 20 tells of 700 left-handed Benjaminites that could sling a stone with their left hand at a hair and not miss. In Judges 20, during a time of Civil War it was 26,000 Benjaminites versus 400,000 Israelites. In many of the civil war skirmishes, the Benjaminites won even though they were vastly outnumbered.

Let's jump back to Joseph and Judah.

Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall. The archers bitterly attacked him, shot at him, and harassed him severely, yet his bow remained unmoved; his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), by the God of your father who will help you, by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that crouches beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father are mighty beyond the blessings of my parents, up to the bounties of the everlasting hills. May they be on the head of Joseph, and on the brow of him who was set apart from his brothers. Genesis 49:22–26 (ESV)

Joseph was described as a fruitful tree by a spring where his branches run over a wall. That is saying that Joseph's life was like a fruit-bearing tree. He was always giving life and nourishment to everyone that came to him. He was always blessing people, even people that were not normally connected with him. This is why Jacob said he was a fruitful tree with branches hanging over the wall. People who were outsiders were blessed by his life. That is exactly what happened to the entire nation of Egypt. They were blessed by Joseph. Millions of people were blessed by his leadership and wisdom.

Archers bitterly attacked him. This is referring to his brothers who sold him into slavery and to Mrs. Potiphar who accused him of rape and sought to ruin him. The key is that he survived all this by his reliance on God and not himself in his adversity. As Joseph learned to rely on God in his trials, he was cared for and protected by God who carried him through.

The lesson for us is as we go through hard times and people fight against us, the place to turn to is Jesus. He is the one who promises to protect his people. He promises to be the one we can rely on when it feels like the world is falling apart around us. That is what Joseph discovered. The one true God of the

universe that he relied on in adversity is the one we are encouraged to rely on as well.

Reuben was supposed to receive a double share of inheritance, preeminence in the family and to be the one through whom the messianic line would follow. Reuben was rejected for all of it. Joseph received the double inheritance, for his sons. Judah is the one who received family leadership and through whom the blessing of the seed who would conquer Satan, sin and death would come.

Let's look at Judah.

Judah, your brothers shall praise you; your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons shall bow down before you. Judah is a lion's cub; from the prey, my son, you have gone up. He stooped down; he crouched as a lion and as a lioness; who dares rouse him? 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. Binding his foal to the vine and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he has washed his garments in wine and his vesture in the blood of grapes. His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk. Genesis 49:8–12 (ESV)

Remember Judah's background. He was the fourth son of Jacob through Leah. He started out as a basket case, just like his older brothers. He left home and married a Canaanite woman outside of the faith. He had three sons but the first two were struck dead by God because they were so evil. Judah had an "F" in his parenting class. Rather than giving Tamar, the wife of his oldest deceased sons to Shela, his remaining son, so she could conceive and carry on the family line, he left Tamar to rot and gave Shelah another wife. Years later, in desperation to carry on the family name, Tamar posed as a prostitute and Judah

took the bait. He ended up fathering his own grandchildren, which is pretty creepy. That is a messed up family.

Here is the key. That was the low point in Judah's life. That is the point the Bible tells us Judah repented and changed. He sought God's mercy and forgiveness and he repented of his life. He came home. Over time he rose to assume leadership in the family. When Benjamin was accused of stealing Joseph's cup of divination, it was Judah who offered to sell himself into slavery to save his brother. That was a serious heart change for Judah. Reuben and Simeon also lived messed up lives but we do not see evidence of repentance or seeking God's forgiveness in their lives. We see that in Judah's life. As a result, Judah was given leadership in the family..

Now it gets interesting because in verse 10 Jacob clearly moved from talking about his son's personalities to biblical prophecy about things he could not know about the future.

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes to him (until Shiloh comes); and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. Genesis 49:10 (ESV)

This says the tribe that came from Judah would eventually become leader over its descendants and the leadership of the tribe of Judah will continue until tribute comes to him. As the footnote in your Bible says, another way to translate this is until Shiloh comes. The verse ends by saying the ruler from the tribe of Judah will have the obedience of the people or the obedience of the nations.

Early leaders in Israel were from different tribes. Moses came from the tribe of Levi, Joshua from the tribe of Ephraim, Gideon from the tribe of Manasseh, Samson from the tribe of Dan, Samuel from the tribe of Ephraim,

Saul from the tribe of Benjamin. There was not a leader from the tribe of Judah until 640 years after Jacob spoke these words. That leader was King David. Once David became king, Judah remained the leading tribe of Israel from that point forward just like Jacob prophesied on his death bed 640 years before it happened. There was no way for Jacob to know this would happen.

It says rulership of Judah would not depart until Shiloh came. What does that mean? Many scholars point out that the Hebrew for Shiloh is almost identical for the Hebrew word peace. *You can say the tribe of Judah will rule until the one who brings peace comes.*

Look what the prophet Isaiah says about Jesus Christ and what he brings.

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given; and the government shall be upon his shoulder, and his name shall be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Isaiah 9:6 (ESV)

Jacob said the tribe of Judah would rule until the one to bring peace came and that one who brought peace would ultimately lead the nations. Isaiah said when the Messiah came he would be known as the Prince of Peace.

Philippians 2 tells us about Jesus that every knee will bow and every tongue confess him as Lord. Jesus is the leader of the nations. This prophecy in Genesis 49 is fulfilled by Jesus.

Interestingly Revelation 5:5 tells us that this lion of the tribe of Judah in Genesis 49 is referring to Jesus.

And one of the elders said to me, "Weep no more; behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has conquered, so that he can open the scroll and its seven seals." Revelation 5:5 (ESV)

The good news is that the one that Jacob prophesied about, the one who will bring peace to the world, the one who whom everyone will eventually obey is

here. His name is Jesus and he came through the tribe of Judah, just like Jacob prophesied as he died.

Applications

Let's go over some of the applications from this chapter.

1. **Our actions influence our children for good or for ill for generations to come.** There is no way to avoid that conclusion. Reuben and Simeon's sin led to the dissolution of their tribe and inheritance. Judah's repentance led to the establishment of his tribe and blessing for his descendants. Joseph's faithfulness under fire led to blessings for his children. The same is true for us. The choices we make today are not just for us, they cast a long shadow into the lives of our children for generations to come. Choices for holiness bless our children while choices for sin hurt them. In particular the choice of repentance, like Judah, can transform a ruined legacy into a good one.
2. **God loves to redeem our sin and use it for good.** We see this in the life of Judah. He majorly repented. His repentance and change of heart was seen by his willingness to sacrifice his life to save Benjamin's life. God took his messed up life and used it in an amazing way. In the same way, God took the short-tempered tribe Levi with its hot temper against sin and channeled this for good in their descendants to make the the priests and the protectors of God's holiness and the temple. This morning, if you have a messed up life, realize there are consequences for you and your children when it comes to sin. Don't give up hope. Go to God in repentance asking for his grace and you will find it. God specializes in taking broken lives, like Judah's, and making them into beautiful lives.

3. **The lion of the tribe of Judah has come.** The good news is the lion of the tribe of Judah has come. When he came, he brought peace. He brought peace between us and God by paying for our sin. He won peace for the universe which he will eventually apply by exercising his won authority over Satan. The best news of all is he loves us and desires to give his won peace to you and me simply by us placing our faith and trust in him.



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