

When a child is growing up, more than almost anything else, he or she wants to hear their father bless them. In our culture, this blessing can take many forms. It might be as simple as a father saying, “I love you.” Maybe you long to know that your father does love you with an unconditional love. Maybe you long to know that your father is proud of you—not just because you performed well in academics or sports but because your dad can see that you are developing a good and Godly character and you know that he is really proud of you. All children long to hear such things from their parents, but especially from their fathers. Tell me this—does this longing for approval from your father end when you grow up and leave home? Hardly. This longing for acceptance can follow you well into adulthood and for some people the search for such words of acceptance can rule their lives like an iron fist.

As we turn to the second to the last chapter of the book of Genesis, we read of Jacob’s blessing to his twelve sons. But what is surprising and even shocking to us is the fact that what Jacob said to his twelve sons would not exactly fit the category of what we would call a blessing. I will skip over Reuben and read the “blessing” to Simeon and Levi.

⁵“Simeon and Levi are brothers—their swords are weapons of violence.

⁶Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly,
for they have killed men in their anger and hamstringed oxen as they pleased.

⁷Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel!
I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel.

We need to think back to when Jacob stole Esau’s blessing from Isaac. Jacob and his mother did everything in their power to trick Isaac and when Esau discovered the ruse, he begged and pleaded for Isaac to bless him also. Jacob was mightily blessed by his father but Jacob did not similarly bless all of his sons. Part of the problem here is that this chapter is not a blessing at all. What is confusing is the fact that most of the English translations have a chapter heading titled *Jacob Blesses His Sons*. This is a very good reason not to rely on chapter headings as they are

certainly not inspired. This is not a blessing at all. The NASB has it right with its title: *Israel's Prophecy Concerning His Sons*. This is precisely what verse one says. Then Jacob called for his sons and said: "Gather around *so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come.*" Jacob did not say, "Gather around so that I can bless you" or "gather around so that I can tell you how proud I am of all of you and smother you with kisses." He said "Gather around *so I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come.*" Jacob's words are prophetic words. He is not giving a touchy-feely blessing. He is not even giving a last encouragement to trust the Lord in all of their coming trials. Rather he is telling each of his sons their future destiny. One commentator described his words in this way. "Jacob addressing his sons is comparable to Moses addressing the assembly of Israel."¹ Not all of the twelve sons are going to like what they hear. Nevertheless, Jacob told them what was going to happen to them.

Simeon and Levi were the second and third sons born to Jacob and Leah. These two are the only one out of twelve who are treated as one. They do not have their own separate prophecy. They may have been closest in age and apparently developed a close relationship and personality. Jacob's prophecy about them refers back to the genocide enacted by Simeon and Levi against the Shechemites. When you read through the incident with the Shechemites one could draw the conclusion that there was no discipline for Simeon and Levi's behavior. Nothing could be further from the truth because Jacob only spoke words of condemnation and not a single word of blessing. *Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel! I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel.*

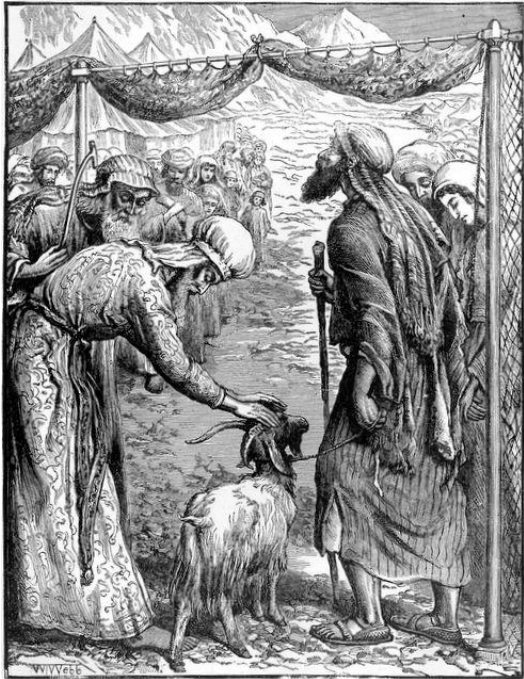
Their punishment is very similar to the one the Lord spoke to Cain.

The LORD said, "What have you done? Listen! Your brother's blood cries out to me from the ground. Now you are under a curse and driven from the ground, which opened its mouth to receive your brother's blood from your hand. When you work the ground, it will no longer yield its crops for you. You will be a restless wanderer on the earth." Cain said to the LORD, "My punishment is more than I can bear (Ge 4:10-13).

To be scattered and dispersed from one's land and one's people was the worst possible type of punishment. The Amish certainly understand this and is the reason they practice shunning of wayward family members. Some shunning or disfellowshipping is intended to be purely punitive. Its purpose is to punish the wrongdoer. But this is never the Bible's purpose for scattering and dispersing. The Lord pronounces banishment on people in order to bring about repentance and reformation. The most obvious example in Scripture was the deportation of Israel to Assyria and the deportation of the southern kingdom of Judah to Babylon under the tyrannical Nebuchadnezzar. There were countless other instances when Israel was subjected to the wrath of her enemies. But all of these examples of judgment and even the major deportations were intended to bring about conviction and genuine repentance. This is the purpose of Biblical church discipline.

What eventually happened to the tribe of Levi? What is this tribe known for? Exodus chapter two begins this way. *Now a man of the house of Levi married a Levite woman,² and she became pregnant and gave birth to a son. And the name of this son was _____?* This was Moses, born of a Levite mother and a Levite father. Moses' brother was Aaron who was the first High Priest and founder of the priestly clan of all of Israel. What a great privilege this was, especially

considering the ominous beginnings of his ancestor, Levi. When Aaron dressed himself in his priestly robes and entered the Holy of Holies once per year on the Day of Atonement, when he sprinkled the blood of the sacrificial bull on the mercy seat of the ark, do you think Aaron ever thought about Jacob's condemnation of Levi? Words such as this: *Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel!* In a sense, Aaron was making atonement for the grievous sins of his ancestor. When Aaron walked the goat to the edge of the encampment of Israel and ceremonially placed the sins of every Israelite man, woman and child onto the head of that goat, do you think he reflected back on the sins of Levi?



Listen to the description of the scapegoat.
When Aaron has finished making atonement for the Most Holy Place, the Tent of Meeting and the altar, he shall bring forward the live goat. He is to lay both hands on the head of the live goat and confess over it all the wickedness and rebellion of the Israelites—all their sins—and put them on the goat's head. He shall send the goat away into the desert in the care of a man appointed for the task. The goat will carry on itself all their sins to a solitary place; and the man shall release it in the desert (Lev. 16:20-22).

Do you see what happened to the scapegoat? The sins were laid upon it and it was cast out into the wilderness. The goat was scattered, cut off and banished, in the same way that Levi and Simeon were dispersed from their own people. If we follow the bloodline of Levi we see an amazing display of God's grace. How does one go from an angry, banished perpetrator of genocide to the High Priest of Israel? By grace alone through faith alone. There is no other answer. How do you and I go from one who is dead in our trespasses and sins to alive in Christ? By grace alone through faith alone in Christ alone. There is no other answer. Rather than focus on Levi and Simeon's punishment we must see their story as a tale of redemption. The punishment was not punitive but rather restorative. God harmed them in order to heal them. God spoke his Law to them so that they could receive his grace.

Jacob's warning in verse six is reminiscent of the wisdom found in the first Psalm.

Genesis 49:6

Let me not enter their council,
 let me not join their assembly,
 for they have killed men in their anger
 and hamstringed oxen as they pleased.

Psalms 1:1

Blessed is the man
 who does not walk in the counsel of the wicked
 or stand in the way of sinners
 or sit in the seat of mockers.

² But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.

³ He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.

God's amazing grace is what teaches us to love righteousness and shun evil.



Judah

“Judah, your brothers will praise you;

In contrast to Reuben, Simeon and Levi whose sins are listed here, Judah's sins are not remembered. Instead of shame and cursing, Judah will be praised by his brothers. Judah failed in regard to not providing a husband for Tamar. Judah failed in regard to selling Joseph to the Ishmaelites. However, Judah's character was shown in his dealings with Joseph in ch. 42-44. Judah is the only one who took full responsibility for his sins. Judah is the only one who seemed to be genuinely sorrowful and repentant.

Also, Judah's name means “praise.”

your hand will be on the neck of your enemies;

This was fulfilled during the reign of King David as well as other times throughout Israel's history.

your father's sons will bow down to you.

This was most definitely fulfilled with King David but could also be a reference to Christ.

You are a lion's cub, O Judah;

you return from the prey, my son.

*Like a lion he crouches and lies down,
like a lioness—who dares to rouse him?*

A lion can eat 40-50 pounds of meat in a single meal and not eat again for 3-4 days. The lion is so powerful that even when he is resting and digesting his meal no other animal dares to rouse him or come near him.

*The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet,
until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.*

This is where we see the full messianic part of Judah's prophecy. If you are reading the gospel harmony then this past week you would have read the genealogy of both Mary and Joseph. Both of Jesus' parents were descended from the tribe of Judah. Jesus is the rightful bearer of the scepter, ruling over all that ever was, is or will yet be. But does the obedience of the nations belong to Christ? Jesus certainly deserves obedience but the nations are not yet obedient to him. These last few verses look forward to the millennial reign of Christ the obedience of the nations will truly belong to Jesus. If you do not know, the millennium is the thousand year reign of Christ on the earth when Satan and his legions will be locked up and great abundance, peace and prosperity will reign.

The prophecy of Judah can be split into three different sections. Verses 8-9 relate to the time between Judah to Jesus, especially the time of King David. Verse ten is a prophecy concerning the Messiah, Jesus and verses 11-12 deal with the prophecy concerning the Millennial Kingdom of Christ. Many Old Testament prophecies have this type of double or even triple fulfillment where a single prophecy has more than one point of future fulfillment.

Verse eleven is a nice visual picture of this of the millennial kingdom. *He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch.* Why is not a good idea to tie a donkey to a grapevine? Because the donkey will eat everything he can reach. But in the period of the millennium, it won't matter. There will be such abundance and prosperity that it will not matter one bit if every animal is tethered to a grapevine. As the French say, "Let them eat cake!" so will we will one day say, "Let the donkeys eat grapes!"

Next we see the prophecy concerning Joseph.

²² *"Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall."*^j

This verse is reminiscent of the later part of Psalm one. *But his delight is in the law of the LORD, and on his law he meditates day and night.* ³ *He is like a tree planted by streams of water, which yields its fruit in season and whose leaf does not wither. Whatever he does prospers.*

I really think that this prophecy regarding Joseph looks backward as much as it looks forward. It is the closest thing in this chapter to a true blessing, and in the case of Joseph it was a blessing for obedience. Joseph may have felt like he was being planted in a dry desert but they were actually lush oases flowing with water. All of Joseph's desert experiences were actually times of growth because he planted himself by the streams of water. He abided in the Lord. He obeyed in all of the small things. But Joseph experienced more than mere desert. He was viciously attacked.

²³ *With bitterness archers attacked him; they shot at him with hostility.* ²⁴ *But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber*

Joseph was shot at by his brothers. He was shot at by Potiphar's wife but in all of these things, he overcame. How did he do this?

²⁴ *because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel,*
²⁵ *because of your father's God, who helps you, because of the Almighty,^l who blesses you with blessings of the heavens above, blessings of the deep that lies below, blessings of the breast and womb.* ²⁶ *Your father's blessings are greater than the blessings of the ancient mountains, than the bounty of the age-old hills. Let all these rest on the head of Joseph, on the brow of the prince among his brothers.*

Does that last verse sound like a little fatherly favoritism? Jacob called Joseph the prince among his brothers and he did it while they were all standing around and listening. We can't read back into their culture and day that it was a case of favoritism. Jacob was just telling the truth. He was calling them as he saw them. He was delivering a prophecy.

I want to make on final comparison between Jacob and Joseph, specifically in regard to how they died.

²⁹ Then he gave them these instructions: *“I am about to be gathered to my people. Bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Ephron the Hittite,³⁰ the cave in the field of Machpelah, near Mamre in Canaan, which Abraham bought as a burial place from Ephron the Hittite, along with the field.³¹ There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah.³² The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites.”*^a

³³ When Jacob had finished giving instructions to his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed, breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

Interestingly, Jacob died immediately after giving this prophecy. They were literally his last words. He asked his sons to bury them with his Abraham, Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah. This makes logical sense so after Jacob’s body was embalmed, they carried him back to Canaan and buried him there. Most of chapter 50 is about the pomp and circumstance regarding this extended burial scene.

Now compare this with Joseph’s death and burial.

²⁴ Then Joseph said to his brothers, *“I am about to die. But God will surely come to your aid and take you up out of this land to the land he promised on oath to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob.”*

²⁵ And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, *“God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place.”*

²⁶ So Joseph died at the age of a hundred and ten. And after they embalmed him, he was placed in a coffin in Egypt.

Did you notice the major difference between the two burials? Both were embalmed and both were buried but Joseph was buried in Egypt. Why? Could he not have instructed his sons and their families to also have carried him to Canaan to be buried with his father, grandfather and great-grandfather? Yes, he certainly could have done so, so why didn’t he? I believe he chose to be buried in Egypt so that through his death he could remind the generations that followed him that God would keep his promise. Look at verse 25 again. *And Joseph made the sons of Israel swear an oath and said, “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up from this place.”* Do you not think that this phrase was repeated again and again throughout the 400 years of slavery in Egypt? Can you see how this would have brought hope to the abused slaves? God will surely come to your aid. Joseph had such rock solid faith in this promise that he made them swear to bury him in Egypt in the perfect hope that they would carry his bones to the Promised Land one day.

Chapter thirteen of Exodus records the fulfillment of Joseph’s faith. ¹⁹ *Moses took the bones of Joseph with him because Joseph had made the sons of Israel swear an oath. He had said, “God will surely come to your aid, and then you must carry my bones up with you from this place.”* Isn’t that amazing? Four hundred years later they carried the bones of Joseph out of Egypt.

But Joseph knew this was coming because the Lord had Abraham way back in chapter fifteen.

Then the Lord said to him, “Know for certain that your descendants will be strangers in a country not their own, and they will be enslaved and mistreated four hundred years. But I will punish the nation they serve as slaves, and afterward they will come out with great possessions.

This reminds me of what Jesus said in Jon 16:33. *I have told you these things, so that in me you may have peace. In this world you will have trouble. But take heart! I have overcome the world.*

In other words, there may be difficult times ahead, but God will bring deliverance in the end. This is what we do as believers. We look back to the finished work of Christ on the cross and we look forward to his second coming and thousand year reign on the earth. In between is where we live our daily Christian lives between these two.

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January 9, 2011

ⁱ Hamilton, p. 646.

^j Or *Joseph is a wild colt, | a wild colt near a spring, | a wild donkey on a terraced hill*

^l Hebrew *Shaddai*

^a Or *the sons of Heth*