

GENESIS

Chapter 49

Jacob Blesses His Sons

Then Jacob called his sons and said, “Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in days to come. 2 “Assemble and listen, O sons of Jacob, listen to Israel your father. 3 “Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the firstfruits of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. 4 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! 5 “Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. 6 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. 7 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. 8 “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. 9 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? 10 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. 11 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. 12 His eyes are darker than wine, and his teeth whiter than milk. 13 “Zebulun shall dwell at the shore of the sea; he shall become a haven for ships, and his border shall be at Sidon. 14 “Issachar is a strong donkey, crouching between the sheepfolds. 15 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. 16 “Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. 17 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. 18 I wait for your salvation, O LORD. 19 “Raiders shall raid Gad, but he shall raid at their heels. 20 “Asher's food shall be rich, and he shall yield royal delicacies. 21 “Naphtali is a doe let loose that bears beautiful fawns. 22 “Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; his branches run over the wall. 23 The archers bitterly attacked him, shot at him, and harassed him severely, 24 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), 25 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. 26 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. 27 “Benjamin is a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey and at evening dividing the spoil.”

49:1–27 With failing breath, Jacob prophesied what would befall his sons in days to come (lit, “at the end of days”). The character of the sons would live on in the 12 tribes and determine their role in the history of salvation. In directing the lives of the patriarchs and their descendants, God had in view a final fulfillment “at the end of days.” His promise envisioned a “fullness of time,” “the end of the ages,” when His Son would be born of a woman to redeem all nations (Gal 4:4; 1Co 10:11). It looked to the end of time, when all God’s people would be gathered about the throne of the Lamb (Rv 7:1–10). 1 Clement of Rome: “Whosoever will candidly consider each particular, will recognize the greatness of the gifts which were given by [Jacob].... All these [sons], therefore, were highly honored, and made great, not for their own sake, or for their own works, or for the righteousness which they wrought, but through the operation of His will. And we, too, being called by His will in Christ Jesus, are not justified by ourselves ... but by

that faith through which, from the beginning, Almighty God has justified all men; to whom be glory for ever and ever. Amen” (ANF 1:13). (TLSB)

49:2–27 Often called the “Blessing of Jacob,” this is the longest poem in Genesis. Its various blessings were intended not only for Jacob’s 12 sons but also for the tribes that descended from them (see v. 28). For other poetic blessings in Genesis see 9:26–27; 14:19–20; 27:27–29; 27:39–40; 48:15–16; 48:20. (CSB)

49:1 Cf v 28. Jacob’s blessing included predictive prophecy of the things God would do. (TLSB)

49:3–4 Hbr here is difficult to translate. Luther: “Reuben should have had the honor of being first-born, namely, the priesthood and the kingdom. But now both are taken from him, and to Levi the priesthood is given, and to Judah the kingdom” (WA DB 8:193). (TLSB)

49:3 *firstfruits of my strength*. He was born at the height of Jacob’s physical prowess. (TLSB)

49:4 *unstable*. Reuben’s descendants were characterized by indecision (see Jdg 5:15–16). (CSB)

Or, “like water’s foam,” i.e., he had a weak nature, as can be seen in his incest with Bilhah (35:22), his failure to rescue Joseph (37:22, 29) and his craven offer of his sons (42:37). (TLSB)

not have preeminence. Though the oldest son, Reuben’s tribe became insignificant. (TLSB)

49:5 *Simeon and Levi are brothers*. They shared the traits of violence, anger and cruelty (see vv. 6–7). (CSB)

They had the same mother and were cohorts in the Shechem slaughter. (TLSB)

49:6 *Let my soul come not into their council*. Jacob had no part in their decision to slay the Shechemites, and he took no pleasure in it. (TLSB)

glory. One’s life and reputation. Cf Ps 30:12. (TLSB)

hamstrung oxen. They destroyed Shechem the prince. In Scripture, a ruler’s might is often compared to strong oxen. Cf Dt 33:17; Ps 22:12; 68:30. They may have literally crippled the oxen when they attacked Shechem. (TLSB)

49:7 *I will scatter them*. Fulfilled when Simeon’s descendants were absorbed into the territory of Judah (see Jos 19:1, 9) and when Levi’s descendants were dispersed throughout the land, living in 48 towns and the surrounding pasturelands. (CSB)

Tribe of Simeon was later absorbed into Judah, and the tribe of Levi was scattered throughout Israel in priestly communities (Jsh 13:33). (TLSB)

49:8–12 When blessing Judah, the forefather of King David and of the Messiah (cf Mt 1:1–17), Jacob prophesies about the future age of the kingdom of God. Judah and his offspring are described with contrasting images of war (vv 8–10a) and peace (vv 10b–12). (TLSB)

49:8 *shall praise you* – Jacob’s words involve a pun, a play on words, since the Hebrew name Judah means praise. (PBC)

on neck of enemies – His enemies cannot escape. He is the victor. (TLSB)

His enemies cannot escape. He is the victor. (TLSB)

Judah, your brothers ... shall bow down before you. As those who would become the leading tribes of southern and northern Israel respectively, Judah and Joseph were given the longest (vv. 8–12 and vv. 22–26) of Jacob’s blessings. Judah was the fourth of Leah’s sons and also the fourth son born to Jacob (29:35), but Reuben, Simeon and Levi had forfeited their right of leadership. So Jacob assigns leadership to Judah (a son of Leah) but a double portion to Joseph (a son of Rachel). See also 1Ch 5:2. (CSB)

In the first verse of the oracle Judah is given a more honorable position than his brothers by his brothers. They praise Judah (note the play on sound here – jhuda joduka) and bow before him. What Jacob raised derogatively as a possibility with Joseph (37:10) he now affirms with Judah. The reason for the exaltation of Judah is because of Judah’s impressive accomplishments – your hand is on the neck of your enemies. The verse may be interpreted as describing a present circumstance (“your brothers will praise you”). The same goes from the last phrase of the verse (“your father’s sons bow/will bow”). If it is a present situation, then most likely we have a statement from the time of the Judges. If it projects a future situation, then the reference would be to the time of David when Judah assumed hegemony over the other tribes. Earlier, when the brothers were debating the best way to rid themselves of Joseph, Judah protested “let not our hand be upon him” (37:7). Both 37:7 and 49:8 use the expression yadb. Judah refused to put his hand on Joseph, but is praised by his father for putting his hand on real enemies. (Hamilton)

They will acknowledge Judah (or rather, his offspring) as their head. From Judah will come Israel’s kings and the Messiah. (TLSB)

49:9 *Judah is lion cub.* A symbol of sovereignty, strength and courage. Judah (or Israel) is often pictured as a lion in later times (see Eze 19:1–7; Mic 5:8; and especially Nu 24:9). Judah’s greatest descendant, Jesus Christ, is himself called “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” (Rev 5:5). (CSB)

Like a young lion in might and bravery. The mature lion of Judah would show his strength in David (cf 1Ch 5:2) and ultimately in the coming Messiah. (TLSB)

Here Jacob shifts from a description of what Judah had done to what Judah is like. Judah is described as lioness. In fact, three words for lion are used: gur aryeh, aryeh, and labi’. Scripture uses a lion to represent both a group (Num 23:24; 24:9) and an individual (Rev. 5:5). The analogy is also applied elsewhere to the tribe of Gad (Deut 33:20) and to Dan (Deut 33:22). What is pictured here is a lion that has grown into adulthood. Grown ... on prey is the equivalent of “your hand is on the neck of your enemies” in verse 8. The lion, having recently eaten, has retired to its sleeping quarters to digest its meal. Even while it is reposing, nothing else tries to invade its territory, so powerful is the lion. (Hamilton)

49:10–12 Judah is like a ruler mounted on a donkey, bringing peace to the nations he rules. He stops, ties up his mount, and walks the people’s vineyard, tasting the wine and smiling joyfully. His garments are dyed scarlet purple, the color of wealth and rulership. (TLSB)

49:10 Though difficult to translate (see NIV text note), the verse has been traditionally understood as Messianic. It was initially fulfilled in David, and ultimately in Christ. (CSB)

There is no doubt about how the Qumran community understood Gen. 49:10. In 4Q Patriarchal Blessings (4QP Bless) the interpretation of Gen 49:10 read as follows:

“A ruler shall not depart from the tribe of Judah while Israel has dominion. There will not be cut off a king [lit., ‘enthroned one,’ ywsb] in it belonging to (the line of) David. For the staff [hmq] is the

covenant of the kingship; the thousands of Israel are the feet, until the coming of [‘d bw’] the Messiah of Righteousness, the branch of David, for to him and to his seed has been given the covenant of the kingship over his people over everlasting generations. (Hamilton)

scepter. Symbol of royal authority. (TLSB)

Judah would also assume the position of leadership which the older three brothers had forfeited. Judah’s tribe is here pictured as a young lion, victorious over its enemies. From this tribe David would come, who would establish the dynasty that provided kings for God’s people. The rulers’ staff would be held by descendants of Judah, including great David’s greater Son, Jesus Christ (Luke 1:32, 33). (PBC)

There is some uncertainty about the Hebrew text of the phrase translated “...until he come to whom it belongs.” The King James Version translates these words “...until Shiloh comes,” and “Shiloh” is usually understood as “Rest” or “Rest-bringer,” a name for the Messiah who brings rest for our souls. (PBC)

ruler’s staff. Or, “lawgiver,” i.e., there will always be a ruler from Judah’s line. (TLSB)

until tribute comes to him. † Repeated almost verbatim in Eze 21:27 in a section where the king of Judah is told to “remove the crown” (Eze 21:26) from his head because dominion over Jerusalem will ultimately be given to the one “to whom it rightfully belongs.” (CSB)

Because this is a prophecy of what will happen with Judah’s descendants, we must think of the Coming One as being from the lineage of Judah. At the same time, it says that He “comes,” as if from elsewhere. The prophet Micah spoke of Him more clearly as He who would be both from Judah and at the same time from the beginning, from eternal days (Mi 5:2). Chemnitz: “The promise is not repeated but the promise of God concerning the Seed is beautifully illuminated. For it refers to the time of the coming of the Seed, and the new name of Shiloh is applied to the Seed. The preaching of the Gospel is metaphorically described” (LTh 2:457). (TLSB)

tribute. ESV follows LXX here. Hbr *shiloh*, “rest, peace,” i.e., the Prince of Peace. Judah will have royal authority until the coming of the One whom all nations will obey. Contrary to the war images (victor, lion, ruler) in vv 8–10a, this is an image of peace. Cf Lk 2:14. Luther: “Today, thanks to the blessing of God, we enjoy the completely clear light of the Gospel by which the word [Shiloh] is cleared up and explained as meaning the Son of a virgin and of God at the same time” (AE 8:243). (TLSB)

obedience of the peoples. When the kingdom of God comes, the Prince of Peace will rule over all nations, not just the people of Israel. (TLSB)

49:11 Judah’s descendants would someday enjoy a settled and prosperous life. (CSB)

The coming kingdom of Israel is pictured as a feast of celebration. (TLSB)

Binding his foal to the vine. Normally animals are kept out of vineyards by a fence, wall, or hedge so as not to harm the valuable grapes. But the peace and joy of the coming kingdom will be so deep that no one will be able to harm them. Therefore, there is no need for a fence around the vine, nor will humans need coercion, fear, and the law. (TLSB)

washed his garments in wine. Imagery of feasting, wealth, and joy; kingly Judah will enjoy his success. (TLSB)

49:12 *darker than wine ... whiter than milk.* Grape and wine imagery is common in describing the joyful salvation of the messianic age. Cf Is 25:6–9; Jl 3:18; Am 9:13. The kingdom of God is unveiled as a fellowship of joy. (TLSB)

49:13 Though landlocked by the tribes of Asher and Manasseh, the descendants of Zebulun were close enough to the Mediterranean (within ten miles) to “feast on the abundance of the seas” (Dt 33:19). (CSB)

The tribe of Zebulun later settled near Sidon and the coast of the Great Sea. (TLSB)

49:14–15 Issachar’s image is of a resting donkey, lying either between sheepfolds or its saddlebags, implying that Issachar’s tribe will not reach its potential and will fall into servitude. (TLSB)

49:16 *judge.* Samson was from the tribe of Dan (cf Jgs 13:2). Luther: “Samson fulfilled the blessing of Dan” (WA DB 8:195). (TLSB)

49:17 *Dan will be a serpent.* The treachery of a group of Danites in later times is described in Jdg 18:27. (CSB)

Refers to Samson cunningly overthrowing the Philistines (Jgs 16). (TLSB)

that bites the horse’s heels. Samson, from the tribe of Dan, would single-handedly hold the Philistines at bay (Jdg 14–16). (CSB)

49:18 Jacob pauses midway through his series of blessings to utter a brief prayer for God’s help. (CSB)

I wait for Your salvation, O LORD. Jacob’s brief prayer for salvation interjected here implies that his salvation is bound up in the future of his sons. The Offspring of Abraham (the Messiah), through whom Israel and the world are saved, would come from this family. (TLSB)

49:19 *raiders shall raid Gad.* Located east of the Jordan (see Jos 13:24–27), the descendants of Gad were vulnerable to raids by the Moabites to the south, as the Mesha (see 2Ki 3:4) Stone (a Moabite inscription dating from the late ninth century B.C.) illustrates. (CSB)

Gad, on the border of Israel, would be the first line of defense against enemy raids. (TLSB)

49:20 *Asher’s food will be rich.* Fertile farmlands near the Mediterranean (see Jos 19:24–30) would ensure the prosperity of Asher’s descendants. (CSB)

Asher would occupy a fertile area of Canaan. (TLSB)

49:21 *Naphtali is a doe let loose.* Perhaps a reference to an independent spirit fostered in the descendants of Naphtali by their somewhat isolated location in the hill country north of the Sea of Galilee (see Jos 19:32–38). (CSB)

Implies that the tribe of Naphtali would have freedom and bear good fruit. (TLSB)

49:22 *fruitful ... fruitful.* † A pun on the name Ephraim, who, as Jacob predicted, would be greater than Joseph’s firstborn son Manasseh (48:19–20). (CSB)

Joseph’s descendants were promised continuing fruitfulness, like a well-watered plant. (TLSB)

branches run over a wall. Ephraim's descendants tended to expand their territory (see Jos 17:14–18). (CSB)

49:23 *attacked.* Veiled reference to his brothers' jealous conduct (ch 37) or to Ephraim's future warfare. (TLSB)

49:24 *his bow remained unmoved.* The warlike Ephraimites (see Jdg 8:1; 12:1) would often prove victorious in battle (see Jos 17:18). (CSB)

Mighty One of Jacob. Stresses the activity of God in saving and redeeming his people (see Isa 49:26). (CSB)

Shepherd. Luther: "The blessing of Joseph refers to the kingdom of Israel, and is said completely of bodily government.... Thus the spiritual blessing and kingdom remains on Judah and the bodily kingdom on Ephraim" (WA DB 8:195). (TLSB)

stone of Israel. Israel's sure defense (see Dt 32:4, 15, 18, 30–31)—a figure often used also in Psalms and Isaiah. (CSB)

God is Joseph's strength (cf Ps 18:1). God singled out Joseph for blessings beyond his brothers: bountiful agriculture, large families, etc. As Joseph was richly blessed, so his descendants (esp Ephraim) would be rich and powerful, rivaled only by Judah. (TLSB)

49:25 *blessings of the heaven above.* The fertility of the soil watered by rains from above and springs and streams from below. (CSB)

of the breasts and womb. The fertility of man and animals. For the later prosperity of Ephraim's descendants see Hos 12:8. (CSB)

49:26 *Joseph.* Ephraim would gain supremacy, especially over the northern tribes (see Jos 16:9; Isa 7:1–2; Hos 13:1). (CSB)

bounties ... on the head ... brow. Perhaps precious stones, implying crown or rule. (TLSB)

set apart. Great leaders will come from Joseph (e.g., Joshua, Gideon, Jeroboam). (TLSB)

49:27 *Benjamin is a ravenous wolf.* See the exploits of Ehud (Jdg 3:12–30) and Saul and Jonathan (1Sa 11–15). See Jdg 19–21 for examples of the savagery that characterized one group of Benjamin's descendants. (CSB)

Benjamin's future would be characterized by battle (e.g., Jgs 3:15–30) and warriors (e.g., King Saul). (TLSB)

49:1–27 The blessing (testament) of Jacob is a prophecy about each son and his tribe. All 12 sons are blessed as participants in the promise that began with Abraham, emphasizing return to the land. Jacob concentrates on Reuben, Simeon, Judah, and Joseph—the first two negatively, the latter two positively. Jacob's testament promises great blessings, including the height of God's goodness: messianic kingship for Judah's line. Jacob's predictions are not uniformly happy. The reality of sin includes judgment (Simeon and Levi), oppression (Issachar), warfare (Gad, Benjamin), and other distress. Though Joseph will prosper in many ways, the greatest gift to Jacob's descendants is Judah's scepter. The Seed of

Abraham culminates in an eternal kingdom for Judah's descendants, fulfilled in the Messiah, Jesus (Shiloh). • "I wait for Your salvation, O LORD" (v 18). Amen. (TLSB)

Jacob's Death and Burial

28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel. This is what their father said to them as he blessed them, blessing each with the blessing suitable to him. 29 Then he commanded them and said to them, "I am to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite, 30 in the cave that is in the field at Machpelah, to the east of Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field from Ephron the Hittite to possess as a burying place. 31 There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife. There they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife, and there I buried Leah— 32 the field and the cave that is in it were bought from the Hittites." 33 When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew up his feet into the bed and breathed his last and was gathered to his people.

49:29 *Bury me with my fathers.* See note on 25:8. Jacob does not forget that the land of his fathers is his God-appointed homeland. (CSB)

49:29–32 Jacob reminded his sons that Canaan, not Egypt, was the Promised Land. (TLSB)