

STUDY NUMBER ELEVEN - Genesis 49:1-33

INTRODUCTION:

(Ponder This by Leonard Andrews)

Does it concern you
to think about
what you could have been?

It is more important
to know
what you can be.

In our last episode in the life of Joseph, Joseph was called to his father's bedside because his father had taken a turn for the worse.

Joseph decided to take his two boys Manasseh and Ephraim with him to see their grandfather probably for the last time.

While they were there, Jacob rallied, and having given the birthright belonging to Reuben to Joseph, he then blessed the two sons of Joseph and adopted them as his own sons.

We are now ready for the end of the life of this great patriarch.

His life has been filled with a lot of heartache and suffering. It has been splattered with sorrow, but also with times of tremendous blessing and insight. So what else is new? We can expect that as a part of our trip here in life upon the earth.

(When the Ceiling is Zero by Robert D. Foster)

Work, eat, and sleep then draw your pay so you can work, eat, and sleep then draw your pay so you can do it all over again. This is squirrel-cage living in the twentieth century.

Men wear out their life-machinery in the race for false happiness. There is immense activity but no satisfaction of attainment. Solomon writes this book of Ecclesiastes to show us the vanity of the world and its inability to give happiness.

v. 1 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 senses his time has come, and there's one last act to perform. And that is for him to gather his twelve sons around him and to tell them what is going to happen to them in the days that are just ahead.

v. 2 Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob; listen to your father Israel.

You can just see in your mind's eye the gathering of the twelve boys around the bedside. They are speaking in hushed tones and carrying on conversation about the condition of their old father. Finally, he calls the meeting to order: "Assemble and listen, sons of Jacob; listen to your father Israel."

v. 3 Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first sign of my strength, excelling in honor, excelling in power.

v. 4 Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel, for you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch and defiled it.

Jacob begins with Leah's boys first. There are six of them in all, and the firstborn is Reuben.

(Commentary on Genesis by Robert S. Candlish)

I. Reuben comes first (ver. 3,4). He should have been strong; he proved himself to be "unstable as water." The contrast is emphatic and affecting, as it brings out what the old man would have had his eldest son to be, and what he turned out to be. My might,--the prime of my strength,--all that I had of excellency, in respect of dignity or power,--all might have been his. But he lost it all by his instability; he wanted self-control. Impatient and impetuous, he was like an unruly stream, soon

spending its force, and then becoming languid. He had manifested this temperament in the commission of a horrible crime. It was great wickedness; but it was great weakness too. His father fastens on the weakness of it; the entire want of self-command which it too plainly showed. And he foresees that, if this is to be the character of his tribe, it must mar all prospect of high fame or fortune. Did it not really do so when, upon the first success of Moses, after the long wandering in the wilderness, Reuben grasped at the earliest chance of repose and self-indulgence,--and sought a settlement on the east of the Jordan, in the first country conquered, before Canaan proper was reached?

(Notes on Genesis by George Bush)

The whole may be paraphrased thus: 'Thou, Reuben, art my first-born, the son begotten in the prime and vigor of my days, and inheriting by birth all the privileges of primogeniture. But to thy shame and my own grief, this favored distinction thou hast forfeited. Thine ungoverned passions have hurried thee down, like a rushing torrent, from the height of thine hereditary honors, and now nothing awaits thee but comparative degradation among thy brethren. Think not to excel; for from the time of thy foul invasion of the sanctity of a father's bed all thy fair prospects of pre-eminence vanished into air, like the dew and the vapors of the morning.'

(Genesis by Donald Grey Barnhouse)

Instability is always caused by an act of sin which traces a groove in our nature again and again, and the character is molded to that form of sin. This is why we must rush to God whenever we sin, in order that the groove may be filled with grace and other grooves traced in the pattern of the divine will. Continuance in sin renders a man incapable of acting right because moral instability has become his pattern of living. The opposite of instability is seen in the Apostle who wrote, "This one thing I do" (Philippians 3:13). His stability began with forgetting things that were behind and reaching forth unto the things that were before. Lord, make us stable.

(Has Life Given You a Lemon...Make Lemonade by Robert D. Foster)

"They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Zion, which cannot be removed, but abideth forever." (*Psalms 125:1*)

W. H. Page would remind us that some men are like sand . . . ever shifting and sliding. Some are like the sea . . . restless and unsettled. Some are like the wind . .

. uncertain and inconstant. Others are as a flower . . . weak, seasonal and temporal. But the God-fearing man is like Mt. Zion . . . strong, stable and secure.

Reuben, just like my brother Esau, you had everything going for you. The birthright and the blessing could have been yours. My brother Esau decided that material things were more important than spiritual. And you have decided that moral matters don't matter.

"Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel"--and the reason being, "for you went up onto your father's bed, onto my couch and defiled it."

Reuben got involved with Bilhah, Rachel's handmaid. I am sure this probably took place sometime after Rachel died. Bilhah, because she had borne Jacob Dan and Naphtali, thought that she would probably replace Leah and everybody else in Jacob's affections; but such was not the case. It is hard for us to imagine what went on in the household of Jacob simply because of the multiplicity of women and children in that household.

When Reuben was barely six years old, he saw his mother arguing with Rachel over the mandrakes that he had picked while he was out with his father at work.

Jacob is taking the rights of the firstborn from Reuben and giving them to Joseph.

He replaces the firstborn of Leah with the firstborn of Rachel.

The leadership part of this goes to Judah, and the double portion goes to Joseph.

It is the tribe of Reuben that ends up seeking the inheritance on the east side of the Jordan.

"Turbulent as the waters, you will no longer excel"

(*The Rebirth of America* by the Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation)

A Fatal Lapse of Memory. Forgetting to acknowledge "the Power that hath made and preserved us a nation," her citizens began to congratulate themselves on their own achievements--to celebrate man, while relegating God to the back seat. The god of secular humanism began to infiltrate all of her institutions.

Wallowing in materialism, self-centeredness and pride, many Americans decided that they really did not need God after all. Some began to tamper with God's absolute standards, and to tolerate what they would never have allowed before--in their own lives or in society around them. That which God says is *never* right could be *sometimes* right, depending on the situation. Courts that had once legislated against immorality began to grant freedom to every man to "do that which was right in his own eyes" (see Judges 17:6 and 21:5). Lines of right and wrong blurred. In time, all sorts of ungodly behavior became acceptable--even admired. Americans no longer were shocked. Eyes grew "accustomed to the dark." Few citizens rose up in outrage.

v. 5 Simeon and Levi are brothers--their swords are weapons of violence.

v. 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.

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

Genesis 34:25ff

Three days later, while all of them were still in pain, two of Jacob's sons, Simeon and Levi, Dinah's brothers, took their swords and attacked the unsuspecting city, killing every male. They put Hamor and his son Shechem to the sword and took Dinah from Shechem's house and left. The sons of Jacob came upon the dead bodies and looted the city where their sister had been defiled. They seized their flocks and herds and donkeys and everything else of theirs in the city and out in the fields. They carried off all their wealth and all their women and children, taking as plunder everything in the houses. Then Jacob said to Simeon and Levi, "You have brought trouble on me by making me a stench to the Canaanites and Perizites, the people living in this land. We are few in number, and if they join forces against me and attack me, I and my household will be destroyed." But they replied, "Should we have treated our sister like a prostitute?"

It was Simeon, you will remember, who Joseph chose to hold hostage in Egypt while the brothers went back to bring Benjamin down.

The tribe of Simeon later is absorbed by the tribe of Judah. The tribe of Levi, which means "to be joined to," was joined to Aaron and the priestly ministries.

Numbers 18:2, 4

Bring your fellow Levites from your ancestral tribe to join you and assist you when you and your sons minister before the tent of the testimony. They are to join you and be responsible for the care of the tent of meeting, all the work at the tent; and no one else may come near where you are.

Exodus 32:26

So he stood at the entrance to the camp and said, "Whoever is for the Lord come to me," and all the Levites rallied to him.

The Levites, however, have no inheritance. Simeon has an inheritance in the midst of Judah, and the Levites have 48 cities scattered throughout the land.

Joshua 21:41

The towns of the Levites in the territory held by the Israelites were 48 in all, together with their pasture lands.

This is truly an act of God's grace. They were joined together to commit themselves to the Lord in the book of Exodus, and then they were divided and scattered throughout all the land.

Jacob says, "Their swords are weapons of violence," and then he says, "Let me not enter their council, let me not join their assembly," and the reason why not is "they have killed men in their anger and hamstringed oxen as they pleased."

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

v. 8 "Judah, your brothers will praise you; your hand will be on the neck of your enemies; your father's sons will bow down to you.

v. 9 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?

v. 10 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.

v. 11 He will tether his donkey to a vine, his colt to the choicest branch; he will wash his garments in wine, his robes in the blood of grapes.

v. 12 His eyes will be darker than wine, his teeth whiter than milk.

Judah is the fourth-born of Leah, and the next in line to hear the words from his father as to his future.

Everything that is stated here in these verses is a part of a Messianic prophecy. It is going to be the lion of the tribe of Judah that will go through David, the southern kingdom, and eventually to Jesus Christ.

Leadership shall come from this tribe. "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."

Isaiah 9:6, 7

For to us a child is born, to us a son is given, and the government will be on his shoulders. And he will be called Wonderful Counselor, Mighty God, Everlasting Father, Prince of Peace. Of the increase of his government and peace there will be no end. He will reign on David's throne and over his kingdom, establishing and upholding it with justice and righteousness from that time on and forever. The zeal of the Lord Almighty will accomplish this.

Judah's name means "Praise the Lord."

Judah, your brothers will praise you.

(*Thru the Bible* with J. Vernon McGee)

"Until Shiloh come"--Shiloh is the ruler.

This is one of the more remarkable prophecies in all the Word of God. Already we have been told that there will be a seed of the woman. That was the first prophecy of Christ: "And I will put enmity between thee and the woman, and between thy seed and her seed; it shall bruise thy head, and thou shalt bruise his heel" (Gen. 3:15). The "seed" of the woman is the One who will do the bruising of the serpent's head. He will be the One to get the victory. This first prophecy was in Genesis; then that Seed was confirmed to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. Now it is confirmed to Judah--out of Judah's line He is coming. Also, the word *shiloh* means "rest and tranquility." Christ is the One who will bring rest. Remember that when the Lord Jesus walked here on earth, He turned from those who had rejected Him, and He said to the populace, "Come unto me, all ye that labor and are heavy laden, and I will rest you" (Matt. 11:28). That is Shiloh--Shiloh had come. Not only is Christ Shiloh, but also He is the One who will hold the sceptre. The sceptre of this universe will be held in nail-pierced hands. In the last part of verse 24 of this chapter we read that from God will come the *Shepherd*, the *Stone* of Israel. So this Shiloh is also a shepherd and a stone. When we get to Numbers 24:17 we will find that a Star is prophesied. Think of all that the coming of Christ means. He is the *Seed* promised to the woman and to the patriarchs. He is the *Shiloh* who brings rest. He is the *King* who holds the sceptre. He is the *Shepherd* who gave His life, and He is the chief *Shepherd* who is coming someday. He is the *Stone* that the builders disallowed but who is now become the headstone of the corner. He is the *Star*, the bright and morning Star for His church.

v. 13 Zebulun will live by the seashore and become a haven for ships; his border will extend toward Sidon.

Here Jacob reverses the last two boys as far as age is concerned. Issachar is older than Zebulun.

Zebulun benefited by being on the trade route from the sea. It was a blessing, and the blessing they would receive is from the situation or location of its inheritance.

(*Genesis* by Donald Grey Barnhouse)

Zebulun was to live by the sea and provide a haven for ships. W. H. Griffith Thomas says, "The Jews were never particularly enamoured of seafaring life, but this reference to Zebulun clearly shows the possibility of this method of living if they had been willing to seize upon it." Haifa may be derived from the Hebrew word for haven. There was no other good port in the land of Israel. There are remarkable prophecies concerning geographical changes to occur when the Lord comes again. He will stand on the Mount of Olives which will split in two (Zechariah 14:4) and the sea will come up to Jerusalem. A great river from the temple in Jerusalem will flow down to the Dead Sea, causing this to overflow into the Gulf of Aqaba (Ezekiel 47:1-8), thus establishing havens in all parts of the land. Lord, we are eager for Thy day.

v. 14 Issachar is a rawboned donkey lying down between two saddlebags.

1 Chron. 12:32

Men of Issachar, who understood the times and knew what Israel should do--

They might have known, but the question is: Did they do it?

The picture seems to be ease at the cost of liberty.

Amos 6:1

Woe to you who are complacent in Zion and to you who feel secure on Mt. Samaria.

(Commentary on the Old Testament by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch)

"Ease at the cost of liberty will be the characteristic of the tribe of Issachar" (Delitzsch). The simile of a bony, i.e. strongly-built ass, particularly adapted for carrying burdens, pointed to the fact that this tribe would content itself with material good, devote itself to the labour and burden of agriculture, and not strive after political power and rule. The figure also indicated "that Issachar would become a robust, powerful race of men, and receive a pleasant inheritance which would invite to comfortable repose."

(Notes on Genesis by George Bush)

Asses were not so contemptible animals in the eyes of the Jews as they are amongst us. We are not therefore to suppose that Issachar was vilified by this comparison, any more than Dan was by being called a serpent, or Benjamin by being likened to a wolf. The peculiar habits of the ass are familiar to all; the drift therefore of the comparison can be mistaken by none. The qualities of this animal are patience, gentleness, great capability of endurance, laborious exertion, and a meek submission to authority. Issachar therefore the progenitor of a race singularly docile, and distinguished for their patient industry, is exhibited under the similitude of the meekest and most laborious of quadrupeds.

(The Rebirth of America by the Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation)

The history of liberty is a history of limitations of governmental power, not the increase of it. When we resist, therefore, the concentration of power, we are resisting the powers of death, because concentrations of power is what always precedes the destruction of human liberties.

(Who Speaks for God? by Charles Colson)

The history of liberty is a history of limitations of governmental power, not the increase of it. When we resist, therefore, the concentration of power, we are resisting the powers of death, because concentrations of power is what always precedes the destruction of human liberties.

Issachar is going to be characterized as a people who are able to discern the times and know what needs to be done, but they are not doing it. They are content to be like donkeys lying down between two saddlebags, saddlebags of responsibility and work that is theirs to discharge and leave that work undone. Oh, how many apathetic, pathetic, and complacent people we have about us who are content like ostriches to put their heads in the sand in hopes that the problems will go away.

v. 15 When he sees how good is his resting place and how pleasant is his land, he will bend his shoulder to the burden and submit to forced labor.

When he sees how good is his resting place and how pleasant is his land, he will finally bend his shoulder to the burden and submit to forced labor. It will not be spontaneous labor as a result of vision and sacrifice and drive and direction. It will only be labor forced upon them by another.

Jacob now turns from the six sons of Leah to the four sons of the handmaids Bilhah and Zilpah.

v. 16 Dan will provide justice for his people as one of the tribes of Israel.

v. 17 Dan will be a serpent by the roadside, a viper along the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider tumbles backward.

(*Genesis* by Donald Grey Barnhouse)

The tribe of Dan produced only one judge, but he was a great man--Samson. He seems to be indicated in this prophetic word of Jacob, who was recalling that his beloved Rachel gave the name of Dan to the baby born to her maid (30:6). Samson seems to have embodied all the characteristics of this Dan whom Jacob described in such wonderful and terrible terms. Samson was unsteady, unscrupulous, violent, possessed of a certain grim humor, stealthy in tactics, "a serpent in the way, an adder in the path." Samson, like the serpent, killed the enemy without touching him, so that when the horse fell, the rider was brought down with him. We must be careful to yield all our characteristics to the Lord that they may be submerged in the new life that is ours in Christ. Lord, clothe us ever with Christ.

(cont.)Verse 17: Dan . . . a serpent

Had it not been for this verse, this volume might have appeared several years earlier. For a long time I thought that the omission of Dan from the tribes in Revelation 7 meant that he was cast off because of the apostasy of some of his descendants (Judges 18). But I am now convinced that the position of Dan is as secure as that of his brothers. There are twenty lists of the tribes in the Bible; Dan appears in eighteen of them, and in the context of the nineteenth. Because I am unsure of some things in connection with Dan, I append the references to the twenty lists (Genesis chs. 29-35, 46, 49; Exodus 1; Numbers 1:1-15, 20-43; 2; 7; 10; 13; 26; 34; Deuteronomy 27; 33; Joshua 13ff.; Judges 5; 1 Chronicles 2:1, 2; 2:3-8:40; 12; 27; Ezekiel 48; Revelation 7). We must take warning, however, from the history of God. Although the tribe produced Samson, they set up graven images and chose men of the tribe to be priests. As late as Amos the phrase "god of Dan" was used for devilish idolatry (Amos 8:14). Lord, keep us from all departure from the truth.

Jacob's words of Dan are epitomized in Samson, who is unsteady, unscrupulous, and violent.

Dan is the firstborn of Bilhah.

v. 18 I look for your deliverance, O Lord.

I feel like this is a burst of praise from the lips of Jacob that he realizes that he's getting close to the goal.

This could have been called forth from Jacob's lips because of the sad prophecies that he has given up to this point, or perhaps he is saying this because of the prophecy that has been given with regard to Judah. He is thrilled to death that out of Judah the scepter will not depart or the ruler's staff from between his feet, until he comes to whom it belongs and the obedience of the nations is his.

One is reminded of old Simeon in Luke 2:25-32

And behold, there was a man in Jerusalem whose name was Simeon; and this man was righteous and devout, looking for the consolation of Israel; and the Holy Spirit was upon him. And it had been revealed to him by the Holy Spirit that he would not see death before he had seen the Lord's Christ. And he came in the Spirit into the temple; and when the parents brought in the child Jesus, to carry out for Him the custom of the Law, then he took Him into his arms, and blessed God, and said, "Now Lord, Thou dost let Thy bond-servant depart, in peace, according to Thy word; for mine eyes have seen Thy salvation, which Thou hast prepared in the presence of all peoples, a light of revelation to the Gentiles, and the glory of Thy people Israel."

(Commentary on Genesis by Robert S. Candlish)

Ah! it might well be with deep and poignant grief that the dying Israel, feeling himself to be still,--to be at that dread moment more than ever,--the poor, weak, sinful worm, Jacob,--uttered this plaintive voice, in the midst of his prophesying,--"I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord."

He had thought he was now at last to obtain full satisfaction. He would gladly have laid an arrest on the bright and beauteous form that flitted past him, as he saw for a moment the coming Shiloh. Fain would he have sought leave to gaze on him a little longer;--if by any means he might see in him any sign of a better ransom than "the blood of bulls or of goats" could ever furnish. But the vision vanishes swiftly and sadly from his view. The great problem of reconciling the final welfare of the guilty with interests of even higher moment in the righteous government of the Most High,--the question of questions,--"How can man be just with God?"--How can God himself be "a just God and a Saviour?"--is scarcely at all more clearly solved than it was before. It is still as one who has not yet attained that he has to say; "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord."

May not something of the same spirit be traced in other Old Testament references,--especially in the Psalms and in Isaiah,--to the salvation of the Lord; and in the attitude of the church, or of the believer, towards that salvation?

(cont.)

Thus in the thirty-fifth Psalm, we have such supplications as these: "Plead my cause, O Lord, with them that strive against me;--Say unto my soul, I am thy salvation." "My soul shall be joyful in the Lord, it shall rejoice in his salvation" (ver. 1,3,9). Here there is waiting for the salvation of the Lord,--waiting in confident expectation.

For, as another Psalm puts it (xcvi. 2), if like Simeon, we see--and like Jacob, we wait for--the Lord's salvation; let us "sing unto the Lord, and bless his name, and show forth his salvation from day to day."

Yes! let us show forth his salvation; let us tell all men that he saves, and how he saves; let us make known the way of saving grace. The more we do so the more shall we have of insight and experience--of hope and expectation--with regard to it. Both Simeon and Jacob tried that method; let us try it also. The more we try it, the more shall we have cause to say with Simeon, "Mine eyes have seen thy salvation;"--and with Jacob, "I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord."

(*Genesis* by Donald Grey Barnhouse)

All the commentators tie this verse to Dan which precedes it, or to Gad which follows it. I prefer to take it back to Jacob's bed. The old man, leaning on the top of his staff, gave forth these great pronouncements from God concerning the coming history of Israel. The RSV puts it in the present tense, "I wait for thy salvation, O Lord." Read it thus and you see the old man, gasping for breath, waving back his loved ones, and regaining control. Looking up to the Lord, he cried, "I wait for thy salvation, O Jehovah." It is a magnificent testimony to the strengthening power of the Lord for His own in the midst of all their troubles. Lord, teach us to wait on Thy salvation.

v. 19 Gad will be attacked by a band of raiders, but he will attack them at their heels.

The men of Gad are characterized as mighty men of valor.

Deut. 33:20, 21

About Gad he said, "Blessed is he who enlarges Gad's domain! Gad lives there like a lion, tearing at arm or head. He chose the best land for himself; the leader's portion was kept for him. When the heads of the people assembled, he carried out the Lord's righteous will, and his judgments concerning Israel." Whereas Dan was the firstborn son of Bilhah, Gad is the firstborn son of Zilpah, Leah's handmaid.

v. 20 Asher's food will be rich; he will provide delicacies fit for a king.

Asher means "happy."

Asher is the secondborn son of Zilpah.

Deut. 33:24, 25

About Asher he said: "Most blessed of sons is Asher; let him be favored by his brothers, and let him bathe his feet in oil. The bolts of your gates will be iron and bronze, and your strength will be equal your days."

(Commentary on the Old Testament by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch)

Asher received as his inheritance the lowlands of Carmel on the Mediterranean as far as the territory of Tyre, one of the most fertile parts of Canaan, abounding in wheat and oil, with which Solomon supplied the household of king Hiram (1 Kings v. 11).

(A Commentary on Genesis by Harold G. Stigers)

Asher, like Gad, has but one verse. Rich produce is to be his lot from the fertile coast northward from Carmel. The word "rich" (RSV, "fat" in AV) is either fat or oil, the former signifying here the abundance of (cont.) produce. In Deuteronomy 33:24 this is paralleled by the phrase "dip his foot [toe] in oil," which suggests he will walk in a "fat" land, enjoying the richness of the soil of the Esdraelon Valley. The reference to providing royal dainties indicates the proof of the productivity of the territory of Asher. There is no reference here to locale; only the quality of products is mentioned. A "fat" heritage is predicted.

v. 21 Naphtali is a doe set free that bears beautiful fawns.

Deut. 33:23

About Naphtali he said: "Naphtali is abounding with the favor of the Lord and is full of his blessing; he will inherit southward to the lake."

Hab. 3:19

The sovereign Lord is my strength; He makes my feet like the feet of a deer. He enables me to go on the heights.

FREE and FRUITFUL characterize the blessing of Naphtali.

Naphtali is the second-born to Rachel's handmaid Bilhah.

Now that ten of the sons have been spoken to, Jacob turns to the two sons of his much-loved wife Rachel.

He will speak first of Joseph and then of Benjamin.

Perhaps he has chosen to save the best until last.

v. 22 Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall.

v. 23 With bitterness archers attacked him; they shot at him with hostility.

v. 24 But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob, because of the Shepherd, the Rock of Israel,

v. 25 because of your father's God, who helps you, because of the Almighty, who blesses you with blessings of the heavens above, blessings of the deep that lies below, blessings of the breast and womb.

v. 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.

Oh yes, he is the prince among his brothers!

"Joseph is a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine near a spring, whose branches climb over a wall."

Jeremiah 17:7, 8

But blessed is the man who trusts in the Lord, whose confidence is in him. He will be like a tree planted by the water that sends out its roots by the stream. It does not fear when heat comes; its leaves are always green. It has no worries in a year of drought and never fails to bear fruit.

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

(Secrets for Successful Living by Robert D. Foster)

". . . Let there not be among you any root which could produce such poison and wormwood." (Deut. 29:18)

This command is emphatic . . . don't tolerate any infectious root. None at all! Small ones grow into big ones. Keep the heart clean and cultivated of all that would poison and defile.

(cont.)

Cut to the core the roots of resentment and ill will.

Axe clean all bitterness and the unforgiving spirit.

Annihilate . . . don't tolerate the cancer of envy and jealousy.

How often we cover . . . smother . . . or ignore the roots of doubt, despair and discouragement. Don't fan the flame . . . it will spread. In the words of Hebrews 12:5, ". . . a disturbance by which the majority shall be contaminated."

Take any root . . . every root which could produce. Every living root does produce and reproduce. It doesn't keep to itself. It multiplies and leavens the whole.

The root of bitterness grew rapidly in the hearts of a few men in the Sinai Peninsula. Soon the entire nation of Israel was murmuring against the grace of

God. They sowed the seed of discontent and reaped the harvest of national disaster. The root of fleshly confidence was and still is a poisonous root. Allowed to mature and culture in the personal life and leadership of Samson, it caused the loss of his hair, his eyes, his life and the prosperity of his people.

The root of pride in the heart of evangelist Jonah caused the biggest fish story of the ages. A tiny resentment against the Gentile city of Ninevah has become the classic example of "provincial pride."

"If the root be holy . . . so will be the branches" (Romans 11:16).

Successful fruitage depends upon solid rootage.

(Joseph: God's Man in Egypt by Leslie Flynn)

Jacob's dying blessing described Joseph as a fruitful tree by a well, "whose branches run over the wall" (Gen. 49:22). Joseph spent many years behind walls: in a pit, caravan, Potiphar's house, and prison, yet his blessings ran over the walls to save his family and an entire nation. All who drink deeply of the wells of God's grace will sooner or later overcome the barriers of life, to bring forth fruit that will bless others.

John 15:8

By this is my Father glorified: That you bear much fruit and so prove to be my disciples.

"With bitterness archers attacked him; they shot at him with hostility."

The archers have to be his own brothers as well as Potiphar's wife.

verse 24

But his bow remained steady, his strong arms stayed limber, because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob"

His bow remained steady, and his arms remained strong, and it's because of the hand of the Mighty One of Jacob that was upon him.

"Because of the Shepherd"

Genesis 48:15

Then he blessed Joseph and said, "May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my Shepherd all my life to this day."

"The Rock of Israel"

He is the Mighty One, the Shepherd, and the Rock.

verse 25

Because of your father's God, who helps you,

2 Chron. 32:7, 8

Be strong and courageous. Do not fear or be dismayed because of the king of Assyria nor because of all the multitude which is with him, for the one with us is greater than the one with him. With him is only an arm of flesh, but with us is the Lord our God to help us and to fight our battles, and the people relied on the words of Hezekiah, king of Judah.

Because of the Almighty who blesses you, He not only helps you, Joseph, he also blesses you "with blessings of the heavens above, blessings of the deep that lies below, blessings of the breast and womb." Yes, indeed, Joseph has been abundantly blessed.

"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."

v. 27 Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he devours the prey, in the evening he divides the plunder."

Benjamin, the last of the twelve to hear from his father, is the secondborn son of Rachel, and with his birth she died.

Benjamin was a tribe of warriors. They had archers and slingers.

Judges 20:16

Among all these soldiers there were 700 chosen men who were left-handed, each of whom could sling a stone at a hair and not miss.

Saul, the first king over Israel and military genius, was from the tribe of Benjamin.

(Commentary on the Old Testament by C. F. Keil and F. Delitzsch)

Morning and evening together suggest the idea of incessant and victorious capture of booty (Del.). The warlike character which the patriarch here attributes to Benjamin, was manifested by that tribe, not only in the war which he waged with all the tribes on account of their wickedness in Gibeah (Judg. xx.), but on other occasions also (Judg. v. 14), in its distinguished archers and slingers (Judg. xx. 16; 1 Chron. viii. 40, xii.; 2 Chron. xiv. 8, xvii. 17), and also in the fact that the judge Ehud (Judg. iii. 15 sqq.), and Saul, with his heroic son Jonathan, sprang from this tribe.

(Notes on Genesis by George Bush)

That is, shall tear his prey in pieces. As Judah is likened to a lion, Issachar to a strong ass, Dan to a serpent, and Naphtali to a hind let loose, so Benjamin is here compared to a ravenous wolf, to denote the warlike character of this tribe, their activity, courage, and success in their conflicts with the enemies of Israel. Although the image is not on the whole disparaging, for the Most High himself in allusion to his judgments against his enemies is compared to a leopard and a bear, Hos. 13:7,8, yet it probably betokens a degree of fierceness and rapacity, not to say cruelty, which would be a stain upon the memory of this tribe with succeeding generations.

v. 28 All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them, giving each the blessing appropriate to him.

Now out of the twelve sons comes the twelve tribes of Israel. We have studied together what their father said to them when he blessed them, giving them each the blessing appropriate to him.

v. 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,

v. 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.

v. 31 There Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, there Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and there I buried Leah.

v. 32 The field and the cave in it were bought from the Hittites.

v. 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.

Death is the final act of a well-ordered life. Jacob has run his race and finished his course. He has discharged his stewardship. He's been faithful to finish.

What a tribute and testimony he is to the twelve boys who are standing around the bed, having just heard his prophetic words.

CONCLUSION:

What are some of the lessons we can learn from this particular study?

LESSON #1: God grant us stability in these unstable times.

LESSON #2: Deliver us from anger and cruelty.

LESSON #3: Jesus Christ is the lion of the tribe of Judah who is going to come to rule and reign.

LESSON #4: We can miss God's best for us by failing to do His will today.

LESSON #5: FREEDOM and FRUIT ought to characterize our lives.

LESSON #6: Our father is glorified with much fruit.

LESSON #7: The Hand, the Shepherd, and the Rock of Israel wait to deliver us.

LESSON #8: Jacob teaches us how to die.

Can you say with Jacob: I look for your deliverance, O Lord. Will it be your pleasure to be at peace when that hour of demise comes?

(Growing Through Mid-Life Crises by John Sterner)

I subsequently came up with a number of differences; but one of the most important was that Ralph had no faith. There was no one who loved him all of the time, no one who would never leave him nor forsake him, no one to give ultimate purpose to his life. Without faith in God, one must face up to total aloneness in the world. Without God, all love is conditional; if you do this or act that way, then you will be approved and loved. If not, forget it. Without God, life is empty and death is terrifying.

(The Rebirth of America by the Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation)

There's probably more uncertainty about the most important matter in the world than about any other. Let me illustrate: If you were to ask 100 persons at random about war, politics, or pollution, you would get a fairly definite opinion from most. But ask the same 100 persons, "Are you a Christian?" or, "Are you going to Heaven when you die?" The vast majority would answer the varying degrees of doubt--I don't know"...I'm not sure"...I'm working on it"...I've no idea." Most of these same persons would tell you that they believe in Jesus Christ, and that they believe in Heaven. Yet they don't know whether or not they are going to Heaven.

What, by the way, would your answer be?

Most of us know definitely whether or not we are working and whether or not we are married. Yet we do not know whether or not we have eternal life.

Most persons know where their destination is when they're traveling somewhere. Yet ask them where their final destination will be--where they will be living forever--and very few know!

(The Rebirth of America by the Arthur S. DeMoss Foundation)

In the eighteenth century, a godly mother knew that her years of life were coming to an end. She taught her young son all that she knew about God and the Christian life.

When her son was seven, she died. That son soon rejected his mother's teaching. He went off to sea and eventually became the captain of a slave trading ship. His crew became so disgusted with the depravity of his actions that one day when he fell overboard while in a drunken stupor, they rescued him by throwing a harpoon into him and pulling him back into the ship. Thereafter John Newton walked with a limp. Later he became a Christian, and every limp was a reminder of God's matchless grace to a wretched sinner. He is the composer of "Amazing Grace," as well as hundreds of other hymns.

In Evil Long I Took Delight

In evil long I took delight,
Unawed by shame or fear,
Till a new object struck my sight,
And stopp'd my wild career:
I saw One hanging on a Tree
In agonies and blood,
Who fix'd His languid eyes on me.
As near His Cross I stood.

Sure never till my latest breath,
Can I forget that look:
It seem'd to charge me with His death,
Though not a word He spoke:
My conscience felt and own'd the guilt,
And plunged me in despair:
I saw my sins His Blood had spilt,
And help'd to nail Him there.

Alas! I knew not what I did!
But now my tears are vain:
Where shall my trembling soul be hid?
For I the Lord have slain!
--A second look He gave, which said,
"I freely all forgive;
This blood is for thy ransom paid;
I die that thou may'st live."

Thus, while His death my sin displays
In all its blackest hue,
Such is the mystery of grace,
It seals my pardon too.

(cont.)

With pleasing grief, and mournful joy,
My spirit now is fill'd,
That I should such a life destroy,
Yet live by Him I kill'd!

John Newton, 1725-1807

Grady Nutt in his book *The Gospel According to Norton* says,

Nicodemus was a Jew of the Jews and thought himself in right relationship to God because of his earth birth. Jesus said that a man must be, of his own will, born a second time from above, or he cannot be rightly related to God.