

And Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days:

² "Gather together and hear, you sons of Jacob,
And listen to Israel your father.

³ "Reuben, you are my firstborn,
My might and the beginning of my strength,
The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power.

⁴ Unstable as water, you shall not excel,
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;
Instruments of cruelty *are in* their dwelling place.

⁶ Let not my soul enter their council;
Let not my honor be united to their assembly;
For in their anger they slew a man,
And in their self-will they hamstringed an ox.

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, you *are he* whom your brothers shall praise;
Your hand *shall be* on the neck of your enemies;
Your father's children shall bow down before you.

⁹ Judah *is* a lion's whelp;
From the prey, my son, you have gone up.
He bows down, he lies down as a lion;
And as a lion, who shall rouse him?

¹⁰ The scepter shall not depart from Judah,
Nor a lawgiver from between his feet,
Until Shiloh comes;
And to Him *shall be* the obedience of the people.

¹¹ Binding his donkey to the vine,
And his donkey's colt to the choice vine,
He washed his garments in wine,
And his clothes in the blood of grapes.

¹² His eyes *are* darker than wine,
And his teeth whiter than milk.

¹³ "Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea;
He *shall become* a haven for ships,
And his border shall adjoin Sidon.

¹⁴ "Issachar is a strong donkey,
Lying down between two burdens;

¹⁵ He saw that rest *was* good,
And that the land *was* pleasant;
He bowed his shoulder to bear *a burden*,
And became a band of slaves.

¹⁶ "Dan shall judge his people
As one of the tribes of Israel.

¹⁷ Dan shall be a serpent by the way,
A viper by the path,

That bites the horse's heels

So that its rider shall fall backward.

¹⁸ I have waited for your salvation, O LORD!

¹⁹ "Gad, a troop shall tramp upon him,

But he shall triumph at last.

²⁰ "Bread from Asher *shall be* rich,

And he shall yield royal dainties.

²¹ "Naphtali *is* a deer let loose;

He uses beautiful words.

²² "Joseph *is* a fruitful bough,

A fruitful bough by a well;

His branches run over the wall.

²³ The archers have bitterly grieved him,

Shot *at him* and hated him.

²⁴ But his bow remained in strength,

And the arms of his hands were made strong

By the hands of the Mighty *God* of Jacob

(From there *is* the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),

²⁵ By the God of your father who will help you,

And by the Almighty who will bless you

With blessings of heaven above,

Blessings of the deep that lies beneath,

Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.

²⁶ The blessings of your father

Have excelled the blessings of my ancestors,

Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills.

They shall be on the head of Joseph,

And on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.

²⁷ "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;

In the morning he shall devour the prey,

And at night he shall divide the spoil."

²⁸ All these *are* the twelve tribes of Israel, and this *is* what their father spoke to them. And he blessed them; he blessed each one according to his own blessing.

²⁹ Then he charged 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 of Machpelah, which *is* before Mamre in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought with the field of Ephron the Hittite as a possession for a burial 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* there *were* purchased from the sons of Heth." ³³ And when Jacob had finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet up into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

Introduction

The key to understanding this passage is found in the last verse, verse 28.

This clearly explains what the passage is trying to teach us.

²⁸ All these *are* the twelve tribes of Israel, and this *is* what their father spoke to them. And he blessed them; he blessed each one according to his own blessing.

Jacob was very close to dying and he gathered all of his sons together in order to prophesy what their future would be.

A dying man's declaration is very important, especially someone as important as Jacob.

I expect like me, at the outset of studying this passage, we might say, **what has this passage got to say to me today?**

Well it has got something to say to all of us because God's word has something to say to all cultures for all times in history.

God's word is **living and I will try to make it alive for you today.**

There are a number of questions that we need to ask of this passage in order to discover both its truth and relevance for the people at that time and for us today.

Here are the questions that I hope to answer as we go through the passage so that we will have a greater insight than we had when we first arrived this morning.

1. Did Jacob's prophecy about his sons come true?
2. What purpose does this prophecy have for the sons of Jacob, since none of them will be alive and be able to see the promised land of Israel. They would die in Egypt.
3. What reason did Moses have for recording this conversation between Jacob and his sons?
4. Why did Reuben, Simeon, and Levi receive a rebuke from their father for their sinful behaviour, when Judah who was just as great a sinner, received the greatest blessing of all the sons. He would also be the forefather of the Messiah, Jesus Christ.
5. What can we learn from these prophecies for ourselves today?

Before we get into the text we need to remind ourselves that we are **dealing with prophecy** in this passage.

Prophecy is a foretelling of future events and situations.

This prophecy reveals things to come for the descendants of Jacob's sons.

The prophecy concerns the future tribes of Israel.

In other words, the prophecy concerns the future of God's chosen people, Israel.

We don't need to look for **specific fulfillment, but fulfillment in general.**

The second thing we need to be reminded of is that this passage is about "blessing".

We are told that the words spoken by Jacob are a blessing.

All of the descendants of the sons of Jacob were blessed in that **they were to be part of the nation of Israel.**

All of them would enter into the land of Canaan and have an inheritance of part of the land.

Admittedly, some would receive a greater blessing than others.

The third thing we are told from v. 28 is that the future prophecy is **not independent of the past.**

We are told that each of the sons was given a blessing **that was appropriate for them.**

In other words, **their blessing** was related to their past behaviour.

Perhaps Judah is the exception, but there are reasons for this, as we will see later.

Now let us get into the text and see what information we are given about Jacob and the blessing he gives to his 12 sons.

1. **The judgement blessing of the older brothers - v. 2-7.**

In v. 2-7 we are informed about the judgement blessing of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi.

Reuben, who was the first born **should have had the greatest blessing.**

This would have been a **double portion of the inheritance.**

However, his blessing was taken away from him and given to Joseph.

(1 Chronicles 5: v. 1)

Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel—he *was* indeed the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that the genealogy is not listed according to the birthright;

So Reuben, for whom his father had great expectations, **failed in his responsibilities and lost out on what he could have had.**

He is described as **unstable as water.**

It has been suggested by some commentators that Reuben's lust was more **political than sexual.**

He had a **good position, but he wanted more.**

More power, and more glory.

He wanted to rule over the family and **take his father's place.**

This is the exact situation that caused an Angel to fall and become Lucifer.

Lucifer has other names that include, the dragon, Satan, the devil, the deceiver, the prince of the power of the air.

It is important that we understand the origin of Satan and I would like to read some verses that teach us about this.

Although the verses are related to historical events at the time, we have no doubt about the fact that we are introduced to the origin of Satan and why he was thrown out of Heaven.

Isaiah 14: v. 12-14

¹² "How you are fallen from heaven,

O Lucifer, son of the morning!

How you are cut down to the ground,

You who weakened the nations!

¹³ For you have said in your heart:

'I will ascend into heaven,

I will exalt my throne above the stars of God;

I will also sit on the mount of the congregation

On the farthest sides of the north;

¹⁴ I will ascend above the heights of the clouds,

I will be like the Most High.'

Ezekiel 28: v. 13-15.

¹³ You were in Eden, the garden of God;

Every precious stone *was* your covering:

The sardius, topaz, and diamond,

Beryl, onyx, and jasper,

Sapphire, turquoise, and emerald with gold.

The workmanship of your timbrels and pipes

Was prepared for you on the day you were created.

¹⁴ "You *were* the anointed cherub who covers;

I established you;

You were on the holy mountain of God;

You walked back and forth in the midst of fiery stones.

¹⁵ You *were* perfect in your ways from the day you were created,

Till iniquity was found in you.

You only have to put the letter D in front of all the evil in this world today and you will discover who is behind it all.

Next we are informed about **Simeon and Levi.**

They both behaved in an ungodly way.

They are described as **instruments of cruelty. This is not a good description.**

Their big problem was **violence and senseless destruction**, and as a result they would be **divided and scattered.**

(You can read about some of their exploits in Gen. 34: v. 25-30, but I will not be quoting them)

Just like those people in Genesis Chapter 11 who joined together for disobedience, they were **scattered and dispersed by the introduction of new languages.**

2. The graceful rising up of Judah - v. 8-12.

Knowing as we do from the pages of Genesis, **we would not expect Judah to be given a promise of future blessing. He was just as bad a sinner as his other brothers.**

However, as we have discovered through our series on the life of Joseph, **God had been working in the life of Judah and he was a changed person, through God's grace.**

We have just been through this teaching and have noticed how he has changed for the better, even willing to sacrifice his life for the sake of his youngest brother.

Judah was going to be a **young lion** and his descendants were going to be **blessed and be a great blessing.**

There was definitely a lot of **GRACE** poured into this person and his descendants, because through them would come the "**Gospel of Grace**" through the Jewish Messiah, **Jesus Christ.**

It is in the information contained in v. 10 that is of great significance.

(v. 10 in the N.L.T.)

¹⁰The scepter will not depart from Judah,
nor the ruler's staff from his descendants,
until the coming of the one to whom it belongs,
the one whom all nations will honor.

Jacob prophesied that from the tribe of Judah would come the Kings of Israel.

The prophecy made it clear that **Judah would always have a ruler until the Messiah came.**

This prophecy was eventually fulfilled in history.

3. The other Brothers blessing – v. 13-21 & v. 27.

From verses 13-21 and v. 27 we are informed about the **blessing that will come to the other brothers.**

These blessings are rather brief and some of them are a little difficult to work out.

Zebulen was going to live by the sea- side and be a sea faring tribe.

Issachar is a sturdy donkey resting between two saddle packs, he was going to be a **hard worker.**

Dan would be successful in defending himself.

Gad would be wise in battle.

Asher will dine on rich foods and produce great crops.

Naphtali will be like a deer let loose. He will use beautiful words.

There is nothing too negative about any of these brothers.

The prophecies are general in their content and not too specific or important.

4. The Blessing upon Joseph – v. 22-26.

In v. 22-26 Moses records the blessing upon Joseph.

Joseph's future is described as one of **fruitfulness and abundant blessing.**

Joseph had been bitterly treated by his brothers.

Joseph in the early stages of his time in Egypt was **put in prison for a crime he did not commit.**

Nevertheless, Joseph **remained steadfast and the difficult experience matured his character.** He rose up to have the best job in Egypt.

It was God Almighty, the God of Jacob who sustained Joseph during his difficult time and raised him up for a specific purpose.

Joseph was going to be abundantly blessed.

Joseph was most worthy of any blessing which Jacob might pronounce.

Finally, we come to Benjamin in v. 27.

²⁷ "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf;

In the morning he shall devour the prey,

And at night he shall divide the spoil."

Jacob described Benjamin as a ravenous wolf. This made him out to be a person to be avoided.

He was going to be fierce and aggressive. **If you read Judges Chapter 19 through to 21 you will discover that Jacob's prophecy was correct.**

Having given a very brief explanation of the prophecies of Jacob concerning each of his sons, we must return to our original questions if we are to gain a grasp of the purposes of Jacob's prophecy.

(1) Did every detail of Jacob's prophecy come to pass, as he predicted?

We need to answer that question with a **NOT YET.** Some of them were fulfilled and some of them are **NOT YET** fulfilled.

So what explanation can we give for these prophecies not being precisely fulfilled?

The first explanation is that the history of Israel is not yet complete.

We are still living in the **history of Israel.**

The purposes of God for Israel **are not yet complete.**

There are many Old Testament Prophecies concerning Israel that **have NOT YET happened.**

This does not mean that they will not happen, but they have not happened yet.

Romans 11: v.11-27 in the N.L.T.

¹¹ Did God's people stumble and fall beyond recovery? Of course not! They were disobedient, so God made salvation available to the Gentiles. But he wanted his own people to become jealous and claim it for themselves. ¹² Now if the Gentiles were enriched because the people of Israel turned down God's offer of salvation, think how much greater a blessing the world will share when they finally accept it.

¹³ I am saying all this especially for you Gentiles. God has appointed me as the apostle to the Gentiles. I stress this, ¹⁴ for I want somehow to make the people of Israel jealous of what you Gentiles have, so I might save some of them. ¹⁵ For since their rejection meant that God offered salvation to the rest of the world, their acceptance will be even more wonderful. It will be life for those who were dead! ¹⁶ And since Abraham and the other patriarchs were holy, their descendants will also be holy—just as the entire batch of dough is holy because the portion given as an offering is holy. For if the roots of the tree are holy, the branches will be, too.

¹⁷ But some of these branches from Abraham's tree—some of the people of Israel—have been broken off. And you Gentiles, who were branches from a wild olive tree, have been grafted in. So now you also receive the blessing God has promised Abraham and his children, sharing in the rich nourishment from the root of God's special olive tree. ¹⁸ But you must not brag about being grafted in to replace the branches that were broken off. You are just a branch, not the root.

¹⁹ "Well," you may say, "those branches were broken off to make room for me." ²⁰ Yes, but remember—those branches were broken off because they didn't believe in Christ, and you are there because you do believe. So don't think highly of yourself, but fear what could happen. ²¹ For if God did not spare the original branches, he won't spare you either.

²² Notice how God is both kind and severe. He is severe toward those who disobeyed, but kind to you if you continue to trust in his kindness. But if you stop trusting, you also will be cut off. ²³ And if the people of Israel turn from their unbelief, they will be grafted in again, for God has the power to graft them back into the tree. ²⁴ You, by nature, were a branch cut from a wild olive tree. So if God was willing to do something contrary to nature by grafting you into his cultivated tree, he will be far more eager to graft the original branches back into the tree where they belong.

²⁵ I want you to understand this mystery, dear brothers and sisters, so that you will not feel proud about yourselves. Some of the people of Israel have hard hearts, but this will last only until the full number of Gentiles comes to Christ. ²⁶ And so all Israel will be saved. As the Scriptures say, "The one who rescues will come from Jerusalem, and he will turn Israel away from ungodliness.

²⁷ And this is my covenant with them, that I will take away their sins."

We are living in a privileged age, when Gentiles, that is non Jewish people, are coming to Christ and being grafted into the Jewish Vine.

I do believe, because of the teaching of Revelation, many Jewish people will come to Christ just before Jesus Returns and on His return.

The promises to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, **were never fully realized in Israel's history,** and thus they **are still viewed to be future.**

How can we be surprised, then, that some prophecies are not yet fulfilled?

The second thing we need to appreciate is that "**Repentance**" in the lives of people, **changes their present and future circumstances.**

Imagine that you are a father and you have a son who is an alcoholic or heroin addict.

You may predict that they will die very young, but if they stop drinking or stop taking drugs, then their life span **may be extended**.

So we need to view prophecy here in the same way.

God will relent on things promised if people repent.

We only have to read the book of Jonah to discover this truth.

(See Jonah 3: 10 – 4: v. 2)

This truth is also made clear in Jeremiah Chapter 18: v. 7-10. (in N.K.J.)

⁷The instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to pluck up, to pull down, and to destroy *it*, ⁸if that nation against whom I have spoken turns from its evil, I will relent of the disaster that I thought to bring upon it. ⁹And the instant I speak concerning a nation and concerning a kingdom, to build and to plant *it*, ¹⁰if it does evil in My sight so that it does not obey My voice, then I will relent concerning the good with which I said I would benefit it.

(2) What purpose does this prophecy serve the sons of Jacob, because they will all die before God causes the nation to return to Canaan?

The main purpose of the prophecy for Jacob's sons is that their character and behavior **not only affects their future, but future generations.**

It is the same today. **If parents behave badly this tends to affect their children in some way.**

Deuteronomy 5: v. 9

⁹you shall not bow down to them nor serve them. For I, the LORD your God, *am* a jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children to the third and fourth *generations* of those who hate Me,

Deuteronomy 5: v. v. 29-33

²⁹Oh, that they had such a heart in them that they would fear Me and always keep all My commandments, that it might be well with them and with their children forever! ³⁰Go and say to them, "Return to your tents." ³¹But as for you, stand here by Me, and I will speak to you all the commandments, the statutes, and the judgments which you shall teach them, that they may observe *them* in the land which I am giving them to possess.'

³²"Therefore you shall be careful to do as the LORD your God has commanded you; you shall not turn aside to the right hand or to the left. ³³You shall walk in all the ways which the LORD your God has commanded you, that you may live and *that it may be well with you*, and *that you may prolong your days* in the land which you shall possess.

(3) Why did Moses record the words of Jacob?

The reason Moses recorded the words of Jacob is **exactly the same.**

Moses wanted to teach the Israelite nation that **present actions, nearly always shape future lives unless repentance takes place.**

(4) Why did Reuben, Simeon, and Levi receive a rebuke from their father, but Judah was equally as guilty for past sins?

The simple answer is that Judah **repented of his sins and changed his behavior.**

However, we never read about the other brothers repenting or changing their behavior.

(5) What can we learn today from these prophecies that will shape our lives for the future?

The first thing that we need to learn is that **most of us live our lives for today** and we don't have **too much concern for the future.**

The Bible teaches us that "**faith**" focuses upon the **future**, rather than the present.

Hebrews 11: v. 1.

Now faith is the substance of things hoped for, the evidence of things not seen.

There is a danger for all of us to fix our hope upon earthly things of the here and now.

We often do not focus upon our future as Christians.

1 Peter 1: v. 3-5.

³ Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who according to His abundant mercy has begotten us again to a living hope through the resurrection of Jesus Christ from the dead, ⁴ to an inheritance incorruptible and undefiled and that does not fade away, reserved in heaven for you, ⁵ who are kept by the power of God through faith for salvation ready to be revealed in the last time.

The second thing we can learn today is that **we need to live our present lives with one eye on the future.**

In other words, knowing what our future holds for us, should make us behave well in this life here and now.

Christians need to live in Peace and Purity.

2 Peter 3: v. 10-13.

¹⁰ But the day of the Lord will come as a thief in the night, in which the heavens will pass away with a great noise, and the elements will melt with fervent heat; both the earth and the works that are in it will be burned up. ¹¹ Therefore, since all these things will be dissolved, what manner of persons ought you to be in holy conduct and godliness, ¹² looking for and hastening the coming of the day of God, because of which the heavens will be dissolved, being on fire, and the elements will melt with fervent heat? ¹³ Nevertheless we, according to His promise, look for new heavens and a new earth in which righteousness dwells.

Moses was a great example to us of this thinking.

Hebrews 11: v. 24-26.

²⁴ By faith Moses, when he became of age, refused to be called the son of Pharaoh's daughter, ²⁵ choosing rather to suffer affliction with the people of God than to enjoy the passing pleasures of sin, ²⁶ esteeming the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures in Egypt; for he looked to the reward.

The third and final thing we can learn from these prophecies is about God's Grace.

Remember that **Judah was prophesied to bring forth the Messiah, and yet he had committed sins in the past.**

This is the message of "**Grace**" through faith in the Lord Jesus Christ.

The Gospel message is clearly seen through the life of Judah.

Judah committed sins, but he repented of those sins, he was sorry for what he had done, and **through God's help, he was able to be changed.**

Judah did not deserve God's love and help, and neither do any of us today.

But if we repent of our sins and turn to God, He will abundantly pour out his blessings upon us.

The greatest blessing is His Holy Spirit, who lives inside of us.

It is this Holy Spirit, who makes us like Jesus and prepares us for our future life in Heaven.

None of us deserve the blessing of the Holy Spirit, but all of us can receive it, if we put our faith and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ.

Amen.