

**CALVARY PANDAN BIBLE-  
PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH**  
[Adapted from Bethel Bible-  
Presbyterian Church, 10 Downing St.  
Oakleigh, Vic, 3166]

## **DHW BIBLE CLASS**

### **LESSON 37**

## **THE BOOK OF GENESIS**

### **Chapter 48-49**

## **INTRODUCTION**

Jacob had confessed to Pharaoh that the days of his life were “few and evil.” God gave him another seventeen years in Egypt. Jacob blessed his sons and uttered words of faith and hope before he died. There was not a word of complaint against God. If possible, he trusted God even more firmly and deeply.

When Jacob blessed his sons just before his death, he also sketched the salient outlines of their future history. His last words concerning the character and the continuing development of God’s promises to Israel through his twelve sons are full of prophetic significance. Each prophecy was based on Jacob’s clear perception of the present character and individual traits of his sons. Upon this perception, the Holy Spirit supernaturally revealed to Jacob the future history of the twelve tribes – the nation of Israel.

## **OUTLINE**

### **A. Jacob Raised Joseph’s Sons to the Status of His (48:1-7)**

1. Joseph, being informed that his father was sick, took his two sons to see him (v.1).
2. Jacob strengthened himself to sit up in his bed to receive Joseph (v.2).
3. Jacob recounted God’s covenant blessings of making Israel great and of the Promised Land for an everlasting possession (vv.2-4).
4. Jacob elevated the sons of Joseph to the status of his sons (vv.5-7)

### **B. Jacob Exalted the Younger Ephraim Over His Elder Brother Manasseh (48:8-22)**

1. Jacob expressed his desire to bless the two sons of Joseph (vv.8-11).
2. Jacob blessed Ephraim over Manasseh (vv.12-20).
  - a. Joseph reverently brought his two sons to Jacob for his blessings with Manasseh in his birthright position (vv.12-13).
  - b. Jacob, however, put his right hand on Ephraim (v.14).
  - c. Jacob blessed the lads with the Abrahamic covenant (vv.15-16).

- d. Joseph was not pleased that Jacob's right hand was not on his firstborn (vv.17-18).
  - e. Jacob expressed that he knew and continued his blessing making the younger greater than the elder (vv.19-20).
3. Jacob, by faith, told Joseph that God would bring them back to the Promised Land. He gave Joseph a double portion of the inheritance (vv.21-22).

### **C. Jacob Gave His Prophetic Blessings to His Twelve Sons (49:1-27).**

1. Jacob called his sons together and gave them his prophetic blessings (vv.1-2)
2. Reuben (vv.3-4).
  - a. He was the firstborn, the beginning of Jacob's strength (v.3).
  - b. He was unstable (v.4a)
  - c. He lost his birthright because of his carnal sin (v.4b).
3. Simeon and Levi (vv.5-7).
  - a. They were cruel and murderous (vv.5-6).
  - b. They would be scattered among their brethren (v.7).
4. Judah (vv.8-12).
  - a. His name means, "praise" and he would act valiantly (v.8).

- b. Jacob used the figure of a lion to describe his power (v.9).
  - c. Judah would rule Israel (v.10).
  - d. Judah would be abundantly blessed (vv.11, 12).
6. Zebulun (v.13).

Zebulun would dwell near the coasts and be a haven for ships (13).

7. Issachar (vv.14-15).
- a. He was described as a strong ass but lazy (v.14).
  - b. He preferred the life of ease and luxury by serving others (v.15).
7. Dan (vv. 16-18).
- a. Dan, the firstborn of Rachel's maid, Bilhah, would judge "his people" (v.16).
  - b. Dan would be "a serpent by the way" (v.17).
  - c. Jacob broke out in praise to the Lord for deliverance (v.18).
8. Gad (v.19).
- Gad would be attacked. He would triumph in the end (v.19).
9. Asher (v.20).
- Asher's land would be very fertile and produce dainties for royalty (20).

## 10. Naphtali (v.21).

He was described as “a hind let loose”. He uttered “beautiful words” (21).

## 11. Joseph (vv. 22-26).

- a. Joseph would be fruitful (22).
- b. Joseph would be attacked by his enemies but he would prevail over them (23, 24).
- c. Joseph would be greatly blessed with rain, springs of water, marriage and children (25, 26).

## 12. Benjamin (v.27).

Benjamin would “raven like a wolf,” characterising his warlike qualities and skill.

#### D. Jacob Instructed His Sons About His Burial Place (49:28-50).

1. Having blessed his twelve sons, Jacob charged them to bury him in the cave of Machpelah (vv.28-30).
2. Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Leah had been buried there (vv. 31, 32).
3. Jacob passed away (v.33).

### COMMENTARY

#### Rehearsing God’s Promises the Way to Strengthen Our Faith

Joseph brought his two sons to Jacob, having heard that he was sick.

Jacob praised God who appeared to him in Luz in the land of Canaan (48:3). His use of “God Almighty” is significant. In his recounting of God’s covenant promises, he highlighted four things: that God would make him fruitful, that God would multiply him (his posterity), that God would make him a great nation, and that God would give the land of Canaan to his descendants as an everlasting piece of real estate (48:4). He ended by praising God who had given him the joy of seeing not only Joseph but also Joseph’s children (48:11). Jacob’s faith was strengthened by his recounting of God’s promises. He was comforted and encouraged by God’s words. His faith and hope in God were reflected in his words to Joseph that after his death God would bring them back to “the land of your fathers” (48:21).

Jacob did not impart the threefold right of the firstborn – priesthood, kingship and the double inheritance – to his favourite son Joseph. This reflects Jacob’s reception of spiritual illumination concerning God’s purpose. The kingship was given to Judah. The priesthood was given to Levi. As a sign of his special regard for his beloved Joseph, Jacob gave him the “double inheritance” usually reserved for the firstborn. Instead of Joseph’s line being continued through one son, Jacob adopted both Manasseh and Ephraim as his own sons equal in status with Reuben and Simeon. Thus instead of Ephraim and Manasseh being just two branches of one tribe, they become two fully recognised tribes in Israel and Joseph’s own name was dropped.

### God's Thoughts and Ways are Not Our Thoughts and Ways

When Jacob knew that Joseph's sons were present, he expressed his wish to bless them. Instead of placing his right hand on Manasseh, the elder, and the left hand on Ephraim, Jacob criss-crossed his hands so that his right hand was on Ephraim. Incidentally, this is the first mention of the laying of hands as a symbol of blessing.<sup>1</sup> Joseph was not pleased and pointed out the "mistake" to his father, but Jacob replied that he knew what he was doing. Jacob had walked before God for many years, and had attained the spiritual maturity to discern the will and ways of God. In later years history testifies that Ephraim became one of the largest tribe of Israel and assumed a leading part in the ten tribes of the northern kingdom.

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<sup>1</sup> A similar procedure was used to dedicate priests:

Numbers 27:18 And the LORD said unto Moses, Take thee Joshua the son of Nun, a man in whom *is* the spirit, and lay thine hand upon him;

Numbers 27:23 And he laid his hands upon him, and gave him a charge, as the LORD commanded by the hand of Moses.

Deuteronomy 34:9 And Joshua the son of Nun was full of the spirit of wisdom; for Moses had laid his hands upon him: and the children of Israel hearkened unto him, and did as the LORD commanded Moses.

In the New Testament church officers were ordained by the laying of hands too:

Acts 6:6 Whom they set before the apostles: and when they had prayed, they laid *their* hands on them.

Acts 8:17 Then laid they *their* hands on them, and they received the Holy Ghost.

1 Timothy 4:14 Neglect not the gift that is in thee, which was given thee by prophecy, with the laying on of the hands of the presbytery.

2 Timothy 1:6 Wherefore I put thee in remembrance that thou stir up the gift of God, which is in thee by the putting on of my hands.

### Jacob's Blessing of His Sons is Predictive Prophecy

There is an element of predictive prophecy in Jacob's blessing of his twelve sons. Jacob used the phrase "in the last days" (49:1). This refers to an undetermined time in the future. It could be early or late.<sup>2</sup> Jacob's prophecy intimated his faith. Under divine inspiration, he looked ahead to the claiming of the Promised Land after his death, and beyond.

### Sinful Actions May Disqualify People from being Leaders

First, Jacob gave his blessings to Reuben. As the firstborn, he should have possessed the secret of Jacob's strength, pride, and power. His tribe should have been the leading tribe of Israel. It was his sexual sin with Bilhah,

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<sup>2</sup> Compare the use of the expression in the following passages:

Daniel 2:28 But there is a God in heaven that revealeth secrets, and maketh known to the king Nebuchadnezzar what shall be in the latter days. Thy dream, and the visions of thy head upon thy bed, are these; 29 As for thee, O king, thy thoughts came *into thy mind* upon thy bed, what should come to pass hereafter: and he that revealeth secrets maketh known to thee what shall come to pass.

Daniel 2:45 Forasmuch as thou sawest that the stone was cut out of the mountain without hands, and that it brake in pieces the iron, the brass, the clay, the silver, and the gold; the great God hath made known to the king what shall come to pass hereafter: and the dream *is* certain, and the interpretation thereof sure.

Ezekiel 38:16 And thou shalt come up against my people of Israel, as a cloud to cover the land; it shall be in the latter days, and I will bring thee against my land, that the heathen may know me, when I shall be sanctified in thee, O God, before their eyes.

Jeremiah 23:20 The anger of the LORD shall not return, until he have executed, and till he have performed the thoughts of his heart: in the latter days ye shall consider it perfectly.

for which he showed no repentance that cost him his primogeniture birthright. Jacob described him as being “unstable as water.” The metaphorical expression describes one who is emotionally unstable and destructive. Reuben’s descendants never rose up to prominence.

Next in line were Simeon and Levi. They were mentioned together because they had the same nature. Jacob did not forget their cruel and wicked deeds in organising the massacre of the Shechemites. They too lost the birthright because of their lawlessness and violence. Jacob placed on record his own absolute separation from such a crime. He predicted that they would be divided and scattered in the nation of Israel. Simeon was dispersed and became the weakest tribe. Levi’s curse was later changed to a means of blessing. At a later time, the sons of Levi gathered with Moses to crush a rebellion against God. For their loyalty, God gave Levi the privilege of leading the people to God through the Levitical priesthood. Their “scattering” throughout the lands allotted to the other tribes became their particular glory.

### **Spiritual Leadership Is Given to the Praiseworthy and Responsible**

Judah was next in line. His name means “praise” and his brothers would praise him. Admittedly, Judah had his faults. He suggested selling Joseph as a slave into Egypt, but we know that his suggestion was a compromise to save Joseph’s life. He broke his promise to Tamar and unknowingly committed sexual sin with her. However, when faced with the evidence, his acknowledgement signalled his true repentance.

Judah had many exemplary traits. He displayed leadership qualities, responsibility and strength of character. He persuaded Jacob to let Benjamin go down to Egypt by standing surety for him. In Egypt, he offered his own life in order that Benjamin might go free and his father be spared more sorrow.

Judah was given power over his enemies and power of leadership over his brothers. His is the kingly line. History showed that out of Judah came the great and powerful kingdom under David, and the greater son of David, the Lord Jesus Christ, and the King of kings! Judah was likened to a lion, which portrayed royal dignity and power. The lion emphasised power while the sceptre represented rulership. Jacob used metaphors to describe great abundance and wealth in his kingdom.

### **Jacob’s Blessing on the Others**

Zebulun was to have his territory in “the haven of the sea.” When the lands were allotted, Zebulun was sandwiched between Asher at the Mediterranean coastline and Naphtali on the shore of Galilee. Zebulun benefited from the commerce, which flowed between the rich Galilean valley and the trading port of Asher.

Issachar would receive a fruitful land and would produce an abundance of food. Dan, the first-born son of Rachel’s maid, Bilhah, would judge “his people.” In Deuteronomy 33:7 “his people” refers to the whole nation, so Jacob was saying that the tribe of Dan would occupy an important judicial position in the future state of Israel. This was partially fulfilled when Israel was judged for twenty years by Samson, a Danite,

Judges 13:2: *And there was a certain man of Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name was Manoah; and his wife was barren, and bare not.*

The expression that Dan would be “a serpent by the way” was fulfilled by the treacherous corruption of the worship of Jehovah. The golden calf was set up in Dan’s territory so that God’s people would not go to His temple in Jerusalem.

Gad’s decision to live in the Transjordan exposed it to the constant threat of invasion. It would be constantly attacked and harassed, but it would ultimately triumph.

Asher would occupy a fertile and highly productive land. This was fulfilled when Joshua gave that tribe the lowlands of Carmel, west to the Mediterranean and north to the territory of Tyre.

Napthali would possess mountainous land and would display the gift of sophistication of speech. Little subsequent data on Napthali make it difficult to determine the extent of his “beautiful words.” Barak was from the tribe of Napthali.

The imagery used by Jacob concerning Joseph portrayed growth and prosperity.

Benjamin was likened to the wolf because of his warlike character. At one point this tribe stood against all the others in defence of its wickedness in Gibeah (Judges 20, 21). History confirmed this description.

## **Abiding Faith in the Promises of God**

Jacob charged his children to bury his body in Machpelah, the cave which Abraham, his forefather bought for a burial place. Abraham and Sarah were buried there, so were Isaac and Rebekah, and Leah. His demand that his body be interned in Canaan strongly suggested his abiding and unfailing faith and hope in God. Jacob gave up his spirit and “was gathered unto his people.” He died at a good old age of one hundred and forty-seven! AMEN.

## **DHW BIBLE CLASS**

### **LESSON 37**

## **THE BOOK OF GENESIS**

### **Chapter 48 & 49**

## **DAILY READINGS & DISCUSSION**

### **QUESTIONS**

#### **Daily Readings**

Monday: Genesis 48:1-7; Psalm 86:1-17; Hebrews 11:21.

Tuesday: Genesis 48:8-22; Isaiah 55:6-13; Romans 9:22-25.

Wednesday: Genesis 49:1-15; 2 Peter 3:14-18.

Thursday: Genesis 49:16-27; Hebrews 10:35-39; Hebrews 11:6.

Friday: Genesis 49: 28-33; Hebrews 11:21; Ephesians 1:1-14.

**Discussion Questions**

1. What decision did Jacob make regarding the two sons of Joseph?

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2. What impact did the recounting of God's covenant promise have on Jacob?

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3. Why was Jacob's recounting of God's promise portrayed as a supreme example of his faith?

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4. Why was Joseph displeased that Jacob had his right hand on Ephraim instead of Manasseh?

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5. How were the blessings given to Reuben, Simeon and Levi related to their past actions (49:3-7)?

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6. What was Jacob's prophecy concerning Judah?

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7. Why did Jacob bestow the rights of the firstborn son on Judah?

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8. Can you see any common traits in the animals used in Jacob's prophecies (49:9-27)?

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11. How did Jacob's last words regarding his burial demonstrate his faith and hope in God?

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9. Who were the archers and what were the events referred to in Genesis 49:23?

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12. What specific area(s) of your life do you trust the Lord to take control of?

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10. In your opinion, what was the secret of Joseph's victory as declared in Genesis 49:24?

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