

## Plan and Purpose Bible Lesson #III-10—Genesis 48-49

Genesis 48 records a rather strange thing that Jacob-Israel did concerning the two sons of Joseph. We are not told what prompted Jacob to do as he does in this chapter, but it had both an immediate and long ranging effects. An understanding of the customs of the time, will help us understand better the result of what he did. (Read Genesis 48) We have talked before about the birthright when we discussed Esau selling his birthright to Jacob for a bowl of pottage. As I mentioned then, I believe we can trace the birthright tradition back to Adam when God created him. In Gen. 1:26-28, God gave man, or Adam, 2 mandates. The first was the dominion mandate in verse 26 in which God gave man dominion over all that is on the earth. The second, in verse 28, was the fruitfulness mandate in which Adam was told to be fruitful and multiply and then He reiterates the dominion mandate again. I think we can see that Adam was given both the responsibility to rule and to have family. Within the family then, the responsibility normally fell to the firstborn son to take the father's place in the family as the family patriarch upon the father's demise. His reward for this was a double portion of inheritance from his father's estate. However, the birthright was the father's to give, he did not necessarily have to give it to the oldest son. It was also something that could be sold as in the case of Esau and Jacob.

In the situation we are looking at in Gen. 48, Jacob is doing something that may appear strange to us, but he is assuring Joseph, to whom he is giving at least part of the birthright, a double portion of inheritance. We need to look ahead briefly to appreciate what is happening here. Normally the birthright would have gone to Reuben, the oldest of all of Jacob's sons, but we will see when we study chapter 49 that Reuben lost it for cause. We will also see that Jacob then split the birthright, taking the sceptre, or the rulership, or dominion part of the birthright out and giving it to Judah. 1 Chron. 5:1, 2 states plainly what Jacob did with the birthright, **"Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel, (for he was the firstborn; but forasmuch as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph the son of Israel; and the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright, For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler; but the birthright was Joseph's:)"**.

It might be well if we stepped back a little and tried to look at the big picture so that we will understand events, past, present and future better. We may be repeating ourselves some, but repetition shouldn't hurt us.

As we have said, the tradition of the birthright probably had its foundation in the two mandates that God gave to Adam upon his creation. In the story that we are looking at in Gen. 48, we are dealing with the tradition as it applies to family. In the bigger picture, the dominion mandate that was given to Judah we find manifested in the reign of David and then his son Solomon as they ruled all of Israel several hundred years later than the events of Genesis 48. However, following the reign of Solomon, the kingdom of Israel split into two kingdoms, the

kingdom of Israel and the kingdom of Judah. The dominion, or sceptre portion of the birthright remained with the kings of Judah, descendants of David and Solomon. However, ultimately Nebuchadnezzar, king of Babylon conquered and forced into captivity this kingdom of Judah. This captivity lasted 70 years, but the throne appeared to have been vacated with the removal of Zedekiah from the throne by Nebuchadnezzar. While I believe it can be proven that the throne, or sceptre stayed within the descendants of David and Solomon, but was moved to a different location, God temporarily took the dominion mandate from these descendants of David and gave it to Nebuchadnezzar. We find this in Daniel 2. Nebuchadnezzar had a dream which he could neither remember or understand and Daniel, a young captive from Judah, is telling him what the dream was and giving him the interpretation. In the dream the king saw a metal image that had a head of fine gold, breast and arms of silver, belly and thighs of brass, and legs of iron and feet of part iron and part clay. Then a stone was cut out without hands which smote the image on its feet and broke the whole image down and ground it to powder. Daniel then interprets the dream to be a prophecy of four major successive empires that would rule the world until the stone struck at the image's feet. We now know these empires to be the Babylonian Empire, the Persian Empire, the Greek Empire and finally the Roman Empire. In saying this, I don't mean to infer that there were no other kingdoms or empires on the earth. The opposite is true, but these four empires were the dominant empires or kingdoms in their particular times. Daniel tells Nebuchadnezzar in Daniel 2:37, 38, **"Thou, O king, art a king of kings: for the God of heaven hath given thee a kingdom, power, and strength, and glory. And wheresoever the children of men dwell, the beasts of the field and the fowls of the heaven hath he given into thine hand, and hath made thee ruler over them all. Thou art this head of gold."** This dominion then passed down through the leaders of each of these successive empires until our present day. We have usually been taught that the "prince of this world" is the devil, but according to Scripture, the prince of this world is the inheritor of this dominion that God gave to Nebuchadnezzar as the world power passed from one empire to the next. But note that even though these empires fell one to another, when this succession of empires reaches its end, the metal image is still whole and standing. This is where we are today. This Babylonian succession of empires, with the input and help of each empire, has developed what I refer to, for lack of a better name, as the Babylonian system. This system is directly opposed to God's system. Both the Babylonian system and God's system has its own political, economic and religious systems and they are diametrically opposed to each other. Daniel interprets that last part of the dream in verse 44, **"And in the days of these kings (the days of the kings or emperors of these empires) shall the God of heaven set up a kingdom, which shall never be destroyed: and the kingdom shall not be left to other people, but it shall break in pieces and consume all these kingdoms, and it shall stand for ever."** So while dominion of the earth had been given to men who are often ungodly and wicked, God says that He will set up a kingdom that will destroy the complete Babylonian system so that no part of it still exists.

We will be studying all of this in more detail as we continue our study, but looking at the big picture, what Jacob is doing in Gen. 48 is part of the development of this kingdom that God is setting up that will ultimately destroy this Babylonian system from the earth. While we can look at it as Jacob assuring that Joseph is getting a double portion of inheritance, which incidentally he did with Ephraim and Manasseh each receiving an inheritance in the land of Canaan as if they were one of Jacob's sons, in the big picture it is of even greater importance. In verse 16 Jacob first says, **"The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."** Jacob is referring to the angel that he wrestled all night with that we studied in Gen. 32. The name that the "Angel" gave him at the conclusion of the wrestling was "Israel" (God rules, or Prince with God). This is the name that Jacob is conferring on these two sons of Joseph. So technically, only Ephraim and Manasseh have the right to be called by that name. As I said earlier, we'll find later after the death of Solomon that the kingdom split and the southern kingdom was called Judah while the northern kingdom was called Israel as Ephraim and Manasseh were the dominant tribes within this kingdom.

Jacob goes on in Gen. 48:19 after Joseph felt that Jacob had made a mistake by putting his right hand on the head of Ephraim as he blessed them and tried to correct the mistake by moving Jacob's hands, **"And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it: he (Manasseh) also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations."**

Continuing to look at the big picture, as we read in I Chron. 5:2, the sceptre, or the rulership was conferred on Judah which we will ultimately see is conferred on Jesus Christ, a descendant of Judah through the family of King David, as ultimately Christ will sit upon David's throne which God promised David would exist forever. The rest of the birthright, the fruitfulness mandate, went to Joseph. Looking back at Gen. 1:28 at the fruitfulness mandate, I think we can say that this gave Joseph the responsibility ultimately of filling the kingdom. If we follow these two sons of Joseph through history, we know that Israel was taken captive by the Assyrians, but the promise is made by the prophet Hosea in Hosea 1 that they would once again be called the sons of the living God. So the Assyrian captivity was not their end as is often taught. We can still follow them in history if we but look, and if we do so, we will see them move across Europe to the British Isles and on across the Atlantic to America. If we look at the history of Britain and the United States, we can see by this history that it is on these two nations, the great nation and the multitude of nations, that the responsibility for multiplying the "Sons of God" fell, as they have done more to spread the Word of God, the Gospel, to the world than all other nations combined.

We speak of the two works of Christ quite often. The first was He came of Judah to receive the title of King. Through His sacrifice on the cross and His resurrection, He earned the

title of King of Kings. In His second coming, we're told in Rev. 19:13 that **"He was clothed with a vesture dipped in blood: and his name is called The Word of God."** The vesture dipped in blood identifies Him with Joseph, whose coat of many colors was dipped in blood by his brothers. His purpose will be to receive the kingdom, or the birthright. The birthright that was split by Jacob then becomes one again with the dominion and the fruitfulness in one, our Saviour Jesus Christ. It will be then that the metal image, the Babylonian system, or man's system, that was temporarily holding the dominion mandate, will be totally destroyed. It is imperative that we understand that it is these two systems of government that are opposed to each other and it is God's ultimate purpose for man to conform to His system.

(Read Genesis 49) In verse 1, Jacob says that he is going to tell his sons what is going to befall them in the last days. In verse 28, we're told, **"this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; everyone according to his blessing he blessed them."** Then in verse 33, we're told **"And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons."** So we have a mixture of things that Jacob said unto his sons just before he died, prophecy, blessing and commandments. What Jacob had to say had long term effect on these sons of his and their descendants. Obviously, God, who is sovereign of all, was speaking through Jacob as only God can know the end from the beginning.

Jacob tells his sons in verse 1 that he is going to tell them **"that which shall befall you in the last days."** As we follow these sons and their descendants through history, these things began to come to pass right away, but the ultimate fulfillment is on going and some yet to be completely fulfilled. As we study further, we'll see that the different tribes distinguished themselves on their standards, or flags with different symbols. Several of these symbols apparently originated from what Jacob had to tell his sons. We find many of these symbols in the heraldry and seals of many of the nations of today.

He begins with Reuben, his eldest son. Traditionally, Reuben would have received the birthright, being Jacob's first born son. Jacob acknowledges this in verse 3, He was, as Jacob says, **"my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power."** However, Jacob follows this up with a very serious denunciation telling Reuben he was **"unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch."** This is in reference to an event recorded in Gen. 35:22, **"And it came to pass, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine: and Israel heard it."** That Reuben lost the birthright because of this incident is confirmed in I Chronicles 5:1. We do not know much more about Reuben and his family from Biblical history except that when the Israelites came out of Egypt at the time of the Exodus, they settled on the east side of the Jordan river with the Gadites and half of the tribe of Manasseh. However, some of the symbols that were used by the Reubenites, particularly that of a man, appear in some of the symbols found today in the Scandinavian countries, Greece, Netherlands and England.

Simeon and Levi are dealt with together by Jacob. The “instruments of cruelty” mentioned in verse 5 would be the sword as this became the primary emblem of the tribe of Simeon. Jacob is referring to the incident recorded in Gen. 34:25, 26 in which Simeon and Levi killed Hamor and Shechem plus all the males of the city of Shalem because Shechem had defiled their sister Dinah. The secondary emblem of the tribe of Simeon was a “castle gate,” apparently from the reference in verse 6, **“in their selfwill they digged down a wall.”** These emblems appear in the heraldry found in a number of the Celto-Saxon nations. We know from Bible history that the tribe of Levi was scattered throughout all of the tribes of Israel and I believe remain so today, so as a result did not receive a land inheritance when the Israelites entered the land of Canaan.

As we have mentioned before, the kingship, the sceptre was to go to the tribe of Judah. Though the first king of Israel, Saul, was from the tribe of Benjamin, David became the king whose kingdom was to last forever. As part of some unconditional promises to David, through the prophet Nathan, II Sam. 7:16 tells us, speaking to David, **“And thine house and thy kingdom shall be established for ever before thee: thy throne shall be established for ever.”** That He might lawfully inherit the throne of David, Jesus Christ was born of the tribe of Judah. In verse 10 of Gen. 49, we’re told, **“The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come, and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.”** “Shiloh” means “tranquil.” This is clearly a reference to the return of Christ and the status of the Kingdom when that happens. In Biblical history, it would appear that the throne terminates when King Zedekiah is taken captive by King Nebuchadnezzar and all of his sons are killed. However, between the books of Jeremiah and Ezekiel, there are prophetic clues that tell us that the throne is not terminated, but rather changes locations ultimately, I believe, to the British Isles and continues to this day.

The lion is the primary emblem of Judah. Quoting from the book Symbols of our Celto-Saxon Heritage by W. H. Bennett, “Keeping in mind that the purpose of heraldry is to identify and to prove continuity, let us note that the Lion in one posture or another is an emblem common to nearly all sections of the Celto-Saxon people...As a national emblem, however, it is peculiarly the symbol of Britain...Nevertheless, it is not exclusively a British emblem, for it also appears in the Arms of England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, Canada, Norway, Sweden, Finland, Denmark, the Netherlands, Belgium and Luxembourg, as well as in the emblems of many of their provinces and cities.”

In Rev. 5:5, Christ is called the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Verse 9 of Gen. 49 prophetically speaks of Christ’s death (**couched** [lies down in death] **as a lion**) and resurrection (**who shall rouse him up?**) —only **“the Spirit of him that raised up Jesus from the dead”** (Rom. 8:11).

Verses 11, 12 apparently refer to great prosperity. The vine would be so productive that one would not worry about binding one’s ass to the vine in fear of it destroying the fruit or the

vine.

Judah, with the exception of a relatively small group who returned to Jerusalem following the Babylonian captivity, was scattered among the nations both by the Babylonians at the time of the captivity and also the Assyrians took the major part of Judah captive along with the Israelites so that they were mixed among the Israelites as well. I don't think we can really identify them, as a group, with any nation today. I do not consider the vast majority of the people we call Jews today to be descended from Judah. (This is another study for another time.)

Verse 13 is quite literal in Jacob's blessing of what Zebulun would become. A sea port being difficult to portray on a banner was possibly what prompted their use of ship as their main tribal emblem. However, remember that Jacob said in verse 1 that what he was saying was what would befall them in the last days. When the land of Canaan was divided among the various tribes following the Exodus, all of the land allotted to Zebulun was inland, none of it touched a sea. Many of scholars lean toward Zebulun today being primarily represented by the Netherlands. Holland's ancient emblem was a ship.

Issachar (verses 14, 15) had as their national emblem the donkey carrying a large burden as a result of this blessing. I am not familiar with much history on this tribe. Some scholars today associate the majority of the tribe of Issachar with the nation of Finland today.

The serpent and the horse (usually white) became the first symbols for the tribe of Dan (verses 16-18). The serpent was seldom used but the horse was used quite a bit, however, for some reason that I have been unable to find, later the eagle replaced the horse as the symbol for this tribe, especially as we get into the book of Revelation and see pictured in chapter 4 the camp arrangement of the Israelites as they traveled during the Exodus. Dan became the dominant tribe on the north side of the tabernacle when the Israelites camped during the Exodus. The tribe of Dan became divided while in the land of Canaan, part being on the shore of the Mediterranean and part inland. Those on the shore of the sea apparently took to the sea and are responsible for a lot of the first movement of Israelites into Europe before and during the Assyrian captivity of the rest of Israel. This is evidenced by their naming of things and places they went after their forefather Dan. Again, some scholars today believe that the majority of southern Ireland are of Danite extraction.

The emblem for the tribe of Gad (verse 19), because a troop of horsemen would be difficult to put on a standard, was instead a leader of a troop, usually holding aloft a pennant. Some scholars relate the tribe of Gad to Germany today.

In verse 20 we're told that **"out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties."** It is not known for sure what is meant by royal dainties, but in that day it would probably be sure to include wine which would require a cup, or some similar container, so it is assumed this to be the reason for Asher's emblem to be a covered cup, or goblet. The tribe of Asher, like several of the other tribes, really did not do anything that would particularly

distinguish them before going into the Assyrian captivity, so we really know very little of them so far as Biblical history is concerned. Some scholars place this tribe in South Africa today.

Naphtali is like Asher in that the tribe doesn't stand out in Biblical history. Verse 21 tells us that it is a hind let loose, so it follows that the emblem of Naphtali is that of leaping hind. At first it was a female deer, and then later changed to a male, so that today a stag is the equivalent of Naphtali's emblem. Those who try to place these tribes among the nations of today place Naphtali in Sweden.

Remember that Joseph's two sons were adopted by Jacob as his own, so when we read of the blessing to Joseph in verses 22-26, we need to be aware that some of the blessing was shared by both tribes and some are divided between them. We first read, **"Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him. But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob."** This tells us first that the tribes of Joseph were to be a very prolific people. This is born out in Israel's history as the combination of the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh far outnumber any of the rest of the tribes of Israel, with the exception of the tribe of Judah.

Other writings concerning Israel compare her to the olive tree which leads us to assume that the fruitful bough spoken of here is that of the olive tree. Also the fact that archers are said to shoot at him, but that his bow abode in strength, it follows that he would have something to do with arrows.

We need to look at one other Scripture to be able to identify the emblems of Joseph's two sons. In Deut. 33:17 Moses is blessing Joseph. He says, **"His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns: with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh."** The two tribes drew from these two blessings to establish their tribal emblems. Manasseh chose the olive branch as their primary emblem and a bundle of arrows as their secondary emblem. Ephraim chose the bull as their primary emblem and the unicorn as their secondary emblem. If we look at the Great Seal of the United States, we see that the eagle on the seal is holding a bundle of arrows in his left talon and an olive branch in his right talon. Great Britain is much more oriented toward emblems that we in the United States are, but if you look at the various seals and heraldry of Great Britain, you will see a multitude that have the bull, or ox, and the unicorn on them. Combine this with the blessing that Jacob gave Ephraim and Manasseh in chapter 48, **"he (Manasseh) also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations."** Identifying these two tribes with the United States and Great Britain helps us understand much better the rest of the blessing that Jacob gave to Joseph, for there have probably never been any two nations any more blessed than we have been.

Lastly, **“Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.”** So it follows that the emblem of the tribe of Benjamin was the wolf.

Benjamin became distinguished as the light tribe for the Kingdom of Judah which consisted of Judah, Benjamin and half the tribe of Levi when the Kingdom of Israel divided after the death of Solomon. Also, it is worth noting, I believe, at the time of Christ, the Benjaminites had settled near the Sea of Galilee following the Babylonian captivity. All of the apostles, with the exception of Judas Iscariot, were Galileans. Today, those identifying the various tribes with current day nations place Benjamin in Norway.

I think we have to be aware that there are probably individuals and elements of all of the tribes that have become a part of other tribes through the centuries, so even though I have listed the nations that some scholars believe these tribes have become, this would be far from 100% accurate. Also, most of these nations have small to large concentrations of non-Israelites as citizens of those nations as well. So when we list nations that these tribes might have become, we are speaking in generalities at best.

Once Jacob had made an end of blessing, or commanding his sons, we’re told that he charged them that they were to bury him in the cave of Machpelah where Abraham, Sarah, Isaac, Rebekah and Leah were buried. When he finished making the charge to them, he died at the age of 147.

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