

Genesis 49:1-33

We come now to what is perhaps the grandest hour in the life of the patriarch Jacob. Up until this point, his life had been a series of "few and evil" days, as he described them to Pharaoh. It was a life marked by struggle, deception, and the heavy weight of a weary pilgrim. But here, in the sunset of his years, we see the beauty of a life that has finally been fully surrendered to the hand of the Lord God Almighty.

As Jacob gathers his sons around his bed, he isn't just saying goodbye; he is speaking by the Spirit of God. He is looking down the corridor of time to tell them what will befall them in the last days. It is a beautiful thing to see a man of God finish well, with his eyes fixed not on the struggles of the past, but on the promises of the future.

The Character of the Tribes

As the sons stand there—likely in order of their birth—Jacob begins to address them. He starts with Reuben, the firstborn. By rights, he should have been the leader, the "excellency of dignity." But Jacob reveals the tragic flaw: Reuben was "unstable as water." Because of his past compromise and lack of moral fiber, he would never excel. Beloved, stability is the fruit of a life anchored in God. Without it, even the greatest potential is washed away.

Then he turns to Simeon and Levi. These two were bound together, but it wasn't a godly bond; it was a bond of "self-will" and "cruelty." Jacob says they would be scattered. And we see this later in history: Simeon's inheritance was swallowed up within Judah, and Levi was given no land of his own, but rather forty-eight cities throughout the nation. God deals with the heart, and He deals with our anger.

The Lion and the Shiloh

But then, the tone shifts as he gets to Judah. The name Judah means "praise," and Jacob prophesies that his brothers would praise him. We see a transformation in Judah's life—from the man who suggested selling Joseph into slavery to the man who offered his own life as a substitute for Benjamin.

Jacob says:

"The scepter 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." (Genesis 49:10)

This is a glorious Messianic prophecy. "Shiloh" refers to the Prince of Peace, the Messiah. History records that the scepter did not depart from Judah until the coming of the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. It was Jesus who came to bring true Shalom. He is the one to whom the people will be gathered.

The Secret of Joseph's Strength

When Jacob reaches Joseph, he describes him as a "fruitful bough by a well." Joseph had been shot at by the "archers"—the arrows of jealousy from his brothers, the arrows of temptation from Potiphar's wife, and the arrows of false accusation. Yet, his bow "abode in strength."

How? How did Joseph stay sweet and strong through such betrayal? The text tells us: his hands were made strong "by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob." That is the secret, friends. Joseph didn't have a natural capacity to forgive; he had a supernatural capacity because God was holding his hands.

Practical Application: The New Nature

Many of us are prone to excuse our old habits, saying, "That's just the way I am; I have a temper because I'm a Reuben or a Simeon." But the Word of God challenges that. When you are born again, you are given a new nature.

- The old man was crucified with Christ.
- We are called to "mortify" or put to death the deeds of the flesh.
- If we are still rattling the crib of spiritual infancy after twenty years, demanding our own way, something is wrong.

God doesn't want to just patch up your old nature; He wants to form Christ in you. He wants to give you the "gentleness of the Lamb" and the "strength of the Lion." Don't make provision for the flesh. Stop cuddling the very things that Jesus died to set you free from.

A Challenge for the Believer

Are you walking in the spirit or the flesh? Are you allowing the "Mighty God of Jacob" to hold your hands when the archers shoot at you? My challenge to you today is to stop excusing your "old man" and start walking in the "newness of life." Reckon yourself dead to sin and alive to God. Let the fruitfulness of Joseph be the hallmark of your life because you are planted by the Well of Living Water.

An Invitation to the Unbeliever

Perhaps you feel like Reuben—unstable, drifting, and without hope. Or maybe like Judah before his change—carrying the weight of your past mistakes.

I want you to know that there is a Shiloh who has come. Jesus Christ did not just come to be a teacher; He came to be your Substitute. On that cross, He shed His precious blood to wash away every sin you have ever committed. He took your judgment so you could have His peace. And when He rose from the dead, He declared to the entire world that He is truly God, the Savior, and the Lord over all.

He is the "Salvation of the Lord" that Jacob cried out for in verse eighteen. If you will turn from your way and put your trust in Him today, He will give you a new life and a hope that goes beyond the grave.