

# Genesis 49 - The Prophetic Future of the 12 Tribes; Death and Burial of Jacob

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(i) Death (49:29-33)

## Genesis 49

(c) Jacob's final prophetic utterances to the tribes (49:1-28)

(i) Reuben (49:1-4)

**1** Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, "Assemble yourselves, so that I may tell you what will happen to you in the days to come.

**1** Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, "Assemble yourselves that I may tell you what will befall you in the days to come.

**1** After this, Jacob called his sons together and told them, "Assemble yourselves around me so I can tell you all what is going to happen to you in the last days.

**1** And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days.

**2** "Gather together and listen, sons of Jacob; Yes, listen to Israel your father.

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

2 "Gather together and listen, you children of Jacob. Listen to your father Israel."

2 Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father.

- Patriarchal blessings: (Cf. 27:26-29; 49:1-28); and later Moses will do likewise (Cf. Deut 33)

- The words of a dying father to his sons were considered to be an irrevocable testament, acceptable as decisive evidence in court cases

— Beyond any legal recognition, these patriarchal blessings also had the supernatural aspect of the spirit of prophecy, whereby these men of God spoke what was divinely revealed to them

The order of the sons as Jacob deals with them is not the same as found in Gen 30-31, except for the first four. The actual order runs as follows:

- The sons of Leah: Reuben, Simeon and Levi, Judah, Zebulun, and Issachar
- The sons of the handmaids beginning with Bilhah's son Dan
- Zilpah's two sons, Gad and Asher
- Bilhah's other son Naphtali
- The sons of Rachel, Joseph and Benjamin

The future history of the tribes is viewed as an outgrowth of the present character of each son. The character of each son, to some degree, becomes the character of his tribe.

3 "Reuben, you are my firstborn, My might and the beginning of my strength, Preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.

3 "Reuben, you are my firstborn; My might and the beginning of my strength, Preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power.

3 "Reuben, you're my firstborn, my strength, and the first fruit of my vitality. You excel in rank and excel in power.

3 Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power:

- Describes Reuben's position: "firstborn," "might," "beginning of my strength" are all firstborn terms (Deut 21:17; Ps 78:51; 105:36)

4 "**Uncontrollable as water, you shall not have preeminence**, Because you **went up to your father's bed**; Then you defiled *it*—he went up to my couch.

4 "Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence, Because you went up to your father's bed; Then you defiled *it*—he went up to my couch.

4 But you're as undisciplined as a roaring river, so eventually you won't succeed, because you got in your father's bed, defiled it, and then approached my couch."

4 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.

- "Uncontrollable as water" - literally, "boiling over as water"; pictures him as passionate, emotionally unstable

— He also had a weakness of will and lack of self-control, which added up to a lack of firmness of purpose

- "...you shall not have preeminence" - the result of his instability and lack of self-control would result a lack of success, and a curse instead of a blessing: Reuben would lack preeminence

— His firstborn rights were removed and divided between Joseph and Judah

— Although Reuben was endowed with strength and firstborn rights, he proved unstable, not excelling, and thus lost his birthright

— Later, Reuben's tribe, as not aiming to excel, chose a settlement on the other side Jordan

- "...went up to your father's bed" - the reason his loss of birthright: Reuben's sin (35:22), where he had sex with Bilhah, one of the handmaids

— Reuben's forfeited birthright was given to Joseph (1 Chr 5:1-2); his privileges as priest passed to the sons of Levi. His right to be the head of the tribes of Israel (i.e. his kingly right), would go to Judah.

### **Summary of Jacob's Prophecy of Reuben**

Excellency and the dignity was his birthright as the firstborn; but this was forfeited by sin because he proved to be unstable as boiling water.

The style of Jacob's blessing of Reuben is one majestic phrase followed by another majestic phrase, building up to an ominous collapse, emphasizing a contrast between a man and his calling. The Tribe of Reuben never produced anyone of significance: it never produced a judge, a prophet, or a leader.

It was Reuben who advised his brothers not to kill Joseph, and returned to the pit to release him (37:21,29). The tribe of Reuben was involved in the rebellion in the wilderness (Num 16:1). In the first census (Num 1:20-21), he numbered 46,500; in the second census (Num 26:5-7), he numbered 43,730, a decrease. His failure in leadership during the period of the Judges is brought out in Judges 5:15. He was overshadowed by Gad and overrun by Moab (2 Kings 10:32-33; 1 Chr 26:31-32).

The prayer of Moses in Deut 33:6 was: "Let Reuben live, and not die; Nor let his men be few." Moses had to intercede to make sure Reuben did not disappear altogether. Reuben played a minor role in Israel's subsequent history.

### **By-Pass of Firstborn**

- Seth > Cain
- Shem > Japheth
- Isaac > Ishmael
- Jacob > Esau, Judah
- Joseph > Reuben
- Moses > Aaron
- David > All his brothers

(ii) Simeon and Levi (49:5-7)

5 "Simeon and Levi are brothers; Their swords are implements of violence.

5 "Simeon and Levi are brothers; Their swords are implements of violence.

5 "Simeon and Levi are brothers; their swords are violent weapons.

5 Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations.

- Joseph chose to deal with Simeon and Levi together

- Both were full brothers, sons of Leah

— Not only were they full brothers in blood, but also in violence; both brothers were characterized by violence

— This was Jacob's moral judgment for their actions in Gen 34, in response to the rape of Dinah

— It should be clear that this was not "holy war" these brothers practiced, as was the case with Joshua; this was pure vengeance

6 "May my soul not enter into their council; May my glory not be united with their assembly; For in their anger they killed **men**, And in their self-will they **lamed oxen**.

6 "Let my soul not enter into their council; Let not my glory be united with their assembly; Because in their anger they slew men, And in their self-will they lamed oxen.

6 I'll never join their council; I'll never enter their assembly. In their anger they committed murder and lamed cattle just for fun.

6 O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their selfwill they digged down a wall.

- Jacob completely disassociates himself from the deeds of Simeon and Levi

- "...men" - singular (collective); they slaughtered the entire male population of Shechem (34:25-26)

— Jacob clearly categorized their act as murder

- "...lamed oxen" - means that they lamed cattle for fun (34:27-28)

— Evidently, as they left Shechem and the other brothers took plunder from the city, the boys cut the tendons of the oxen so they could no longer continue working

— This did not take the oxen as spoil; instead they “hocked” them, for the purpose of laming them, rendering them useless and helpless. This was obvious animal cruelty.

7 “Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; And their wrath, for it is cruel. I will **scatter them in Jacob, And disperse them among Israel.**

7 “Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; And their wrath, for it is cruel. I will disperse them in Jacob, And scatter them in Israel.

7 Their anger is cursed, because it is so fierce, as is their vehemence, because it is so cruel. I will separate them throughout Jacob’s territory and disperse them throughout Israel.”

7 Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.

- First, Jacob curses their anger and cruelty

- “...scatter them in Jacob, And disperse them among Israel” - their judgment was that neither tribe received its own territory in the Land; their territories were within the territory of other tribes

## **Simeon**

- Simeon is the second son of Jacob by Leah (29:33) and is associated with Levi in the terrible act of vengeance against Hamor and the Shechemites (34:25-26)
- He was detained by Joseph in Egypt as a hostage (42:24)
- His tribe decreased in the wilderness by 2/3 (Num 1:23; 26:14); dwindled in number, sank into insignificance
- Moses pronounces no blessing on this tribe
- However, they didn’t lose their identity: there were 13 Simeonite princes in days of Hezekiah (1 Chr 4:34-38)
- Simeon was the weakest tribe in number: he numbered 59,300 in the first census (Num 1:23); 22,200 in the second census (Num 26:14), a decline of 37,100
- A member of Simeon’s tribe was involved in the sin of worshipping Baal-Peor (Num 25:14) through immorality
- Simeon is omitted from the tribal blessings of Moses in Deut 33
- When the Jews did get to the Land, Simeon settled, not in his own territory, but in the southern part of Judah’s territory (Joshua 19:1-9, Judges 1:3)
- In subsequent history, Simeon smote the inhabitants of Mount Seir (1 Chr 4:42-43)

## **Levi**

- Levi’s zeal against idolatry was a cause of the tribe’s priestly appointment (Ex 32:26-28; Deut 33:9-10; Mal 2:4-5)

- They did side with Moses in the sin of the golden calf (Ex 32:26-29), but in keeping with Jacob's curse, Levi did not receive his own territory. Rather, the Tribe of Levi was scattered in 48 different Levitical Cities throughout the other Tribes of Israel (Num 18:20-24; 35:1-8; Deut 10:8-9; Joshua 14:4; 21:1-42).
- They were exempt from enrollment for military duty (Num 1:47-54, with 1 Chr 12:26) and subordinate to the sons of Aaron (Num 3:9; 8:19; 18:6)
- They were teachers of the law (Deut 33:10; 2 Chr 17:8-9; 30:22; 35:3) and were judges (Deut 17:9; 1 Chr 23:4; 26:29; 2 Chr 19:8-11)
- They guarded the king's person and house in times of danger (2 Kings 11:5-9; 2 Chr 23:5-7).

(iii) Judah (49:8-12)

**8 "As for you, Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's sons shall bow down to you.**

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

8 "Your brothers will praise you, Judah. Your hand will be at the throat of your enemies, and your father's children will bow down to you.

8 Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee.

- Jacob's "blessings" on the first three sons ended up being curses. However with Judah, the tone changes:

- "...your brothers shall praise you" - a promise of preeminence

— There is a wordplay in Hebrew, as the name Judah means "praise"; this phrase literally means: "Praise, your brothers will praise you"

- "...Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies" - Judah shall succeed in war (2 Sam 22:41; Ps 18:40)

— In 37:26-27, Judah refused to put his hand upon Joseph; now Judah is praised for putting his hand on his enemies

- "...Your father's sons shall bow down to you" - again showing the preeminence of Judah

— Judah set forth first (Num 2:9)

— He headed the march through the wilderness (Num 10:14)

— He prevailed above his brothers (1 Chr 5:2)

— Judah was chosen by God to go up first against the Canaanites (Judges 1:1-2)

**9 "Judah is a lion's cub; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He crouches, he lies down as a lion, And as a lion, who dares to stir him up?**

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

9 Judah is a lion cub. My son, you have gone up from the prey. Crouching like a lion, he lies down, Like a lioness, who would dare rouse him?

9 Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up?

- This verse deals with Judah's power in four poetic phrases:

- "...Judah is a lion's cub" - emphasizes vigor and nobility

- "...From the prey, my son, you have gone up" - he will succeed in killing and consuming his prey

- "...He couches, he lies down as a lion" and "...as a lion, who dares to stir him up?" -

Judah is pictured as the lion of the Tribe of Judah

— Balaam used a similar figure for Israel (Num 24:9)

10 **"The scepter will not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes,** And to him *shall be* the obedience of the **peoples.**

10 "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes, And to him *shall be* the obedience of the peoples.

10 The scepter will not depart from Judah, nor a ruler's staff from between his feet, until the one comes, who owns them both, and to him will belong the allegiance of nations.

10 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.

- "The scepter will not depart from Judah" - the term "scepter" is the symbol of kingship; it refers to their tribal identity and the right to apply and enforce Mosaic Laws and adjudicate capital offenses

— Holding the scepter emphasizes Judah's right to rule; this means His preeminence is not going to disappear

— It is significant that even during their 70-year Babylonian captivity (606-537 BC) the tribes retained their tribal identity [Josh McDowell, *Evidence that Demands a Verdict*, pp. 108-168.]

— They retained their own logistics, judges, etc. (Ezek 1:5,8)

- "...Nor the ruler's staff from between his feet" - this means the lawgiver will not cease. Messiah will have theocratic administration; Judah's right to rule will not disappear.

- "...Until Shiloh comes" - there is more than one way to understand this phrase, however the point is that the ruling staff and the scepter will not depart from Judah until he come whose right it is and then He will receive it forever. There will be no need for any succession. He, of course, is the Messiah.

- “until” - does not imply termination (as in 28:15); it does mean that Judah will exercise royal power finally, to the end when the Messiah comes to rule the world
- Royal power will be passed from generation to generation in Judah in succession “until He come whose right it is” (see note below). Once it is given to the Messiah, royal power remains forever with Him
- “Shiloh” was understood by the early rabbis and Talmudic authorities as referring to the Messiah [Targum Onkelos, Targum Pseudo-Jonathan, and Targum Yerushalmi, The Messiah: An Aramaic Interpretation; The Messianic Exegesis of the Targum, Samson H. Levy, Hebrew Union College Jewish Institute of Religion, Cincinnati, 1974.]
- The Hebrew word *shiloh* is a possessive pronoun rendered “whose it is” or “whose right it is”; the phrase would be rendered “the scepter will not depart from Judah ‘until He come Whose right it is’”
- Both the LXX and Dead Sea Scrolls translate it this way. The Dead Sea Scrolls read: A ruler shall not depart from the Tribe of Judah while Israel has dominion. There will not be cut off a king in it belonging to the line of David. For the staff is the covenant of the kingship; the thousands of Israel are the feet, until the coming of the Messiah of Righteousness, the Branch of David, for him and to his seed has been given the covenant of the kingship over his people for everlasting generations.
- It is a very close parallel to Ezek 21:27, which reads: “...until he come whose right it is; and I will give it to” him. In the preceding verse (v26), Ezekiel mentioned the crown, which, like the scepter, is a symbol of kingship
- “...peoples” - a reference to the non-Jewish nations (Gentiles); the Gentiles will obey Him during His messianic rule

In 6-7 AD, King Herod’s son and successor, Herod Archelaus, was dethroned and banished to Vienna, a city in Gaul. Archelaus was the second son of Herod the Great. The older son, Herod Antipater, had been murdered by Herod the Great, along with other family members. (It was quipped at the time that it was safer to be a dog in that household than a member of the family!) After the death of Herod (4 BC?), Archelaus had been placed over Judea as “Entharch” by Caesar Augustus. Broadly rejected, he was removed in 6-7 AD. He was replaced by a Roman procurator named Caponius. The legal power of the Sanhedrin was immediately restricted and the adjudication of capital cases was lost. This was normal Roman policy [Josephus, Wars of the Jews, 2:8. Also, The Jerusalem Talmud, Sanhedrin, folio 24.] The scepter had, indeed, been removed from Judah, but Shiloh had come. While the Jews wept in the streets of Jerusalem, a young son of a carpenter was growing up in Nazareth. He would present Himself as the Meshiach Nagid, Messiah the King, on the very day which had been predicted by the Angel Gabriel to Daniel five centuries earlier (Dan 9:24-27).



11 **"He ties *his* foal to the vine, And his donkey's colt to the choice vine; He washes his garments in wine, And his robes in the blood of grapes.**

11 "He ties *his* foal to the vine, And his donkey's colt to the choice vine; He washes his garments in wine, And his robes in the blood of grapes.

11 Binding his donkey to the vine and his mare's foal to its thick tendrils, he will wash his garments in wine and his robe in the juice of grapes.

11 Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes:

- Judah's prosperity is discussed in four phases:

- "He ties *his* foal to the vine" - typically a vine is not a secure item to bind a foal; however, the implication is that the vine is so strong that one can harness a foal to it securely

- "...his donkey's colt to the choice vine" - the emphasis is on abundance

- "...He washes his garments in wine" - the emphasis is on high yield and plenty of wine

- "...his robes in the blood of grapes" - this depicts the Messiah as coming in judgment (Cf. Is 63:1-6; Rev 14:17-20)

- The basic point of v11 is that Judah will prosper in his assigned territory. Indeed to this day the land of Judah is a vine-growing country, rich with vines

12 **"His eyes are dull from wine, And his teeth white from milk.**

12 "His eyes are dull from wine, And his teeth white from milk.

12 His eyes are darker than wine and his teeth whiter than milk."

12 His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk.

- "His eyes are dull from wine" - emphasizes exuberant intoxication from overdrinking in abundance; not immoral drunkenness, but simple abundance

- "...his teeth white from milk" - as with "red eyes," white teeth indicate an abundance of dairy products, including milk

Other notes about Judah:

- He interceded for Joseph's life when brethren were about to slay him; proposed selling him to the Ishmaelites (37:26-27)
- He has incest with Tamar, his daughter-in-law (38:12-26)
- His tribe is loyal to the house of David at the time of the revolt of the ten tribes (1 Kings 12:20)
- Led first division of Israel in their journeys (Num 10:14)
- He was commissioned of God to lead in the conquest of the promised land (Judges 1:1-3; 4-21)
- Made David king (2 Sam 2:1-11; 5:4-5)

## Summary of Jacob's Prophecy of Judah

A summary of Jacob's blessing upon Judah:

- (1) Judah is to be praised, to rule, and through him Messiah will come
- (2) He will have the preeminence among his brothers
- (3) The brothers will acknowledge his superiority
- (4) He will have victory over his enemies
- (5) He will have royal authority
- (6) The line of Judah will administer a kingdom

It should be noted from this that God already had a plan for Israel to have a king, but now it is revealed that the king was to come from the Tribe of Judah. Therefore, it was not totally wrong for Israel later on to ask for a king. The sin was in the wrong motivation, and they had the timing wrong as well; the result was that the first king was of a tribe other than Judah, and they suffered for it.

(iv) Zebulun (49:13)

**13** "Zebulun will reside at the seashore; And he *shall be* a harbor for ships, And his flank *shall be* toward Sidon.

**13** "Zebulun will dwell at the seashore; And he *shall be* a haven for ships, And his flank *shall be* toward Sidon.

13 "Zebulun will settle down near the sea shore and become a safe haven for shipping, bordering Sidon."

13 Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for an haven of ships; and his border shall be unto Zidon.

- All three phrases predict that Zebulun would be enriched by seaborne trade, between the Sea of Galilee and the Mediterranean (though it did not actually border the Mediterranean (Cf. Joshua 19:10-11)

— However, Zebulun was close enough to the coast and near enough to Sidon to be enriched by sea trade

— A major highway of the time, *Via Maris*, passed through Zebulun

— In the messianic kingdom, the borders of the tribes will be different; at that time, Zebulun will border the sea (Ezek 48:26)

- In subsequent history of Zebulun's tribe (Deut 33:18), Moses said that Zebulun would rejoice in his going out

- Zebulun is mentioned in the Song of Deborah (Judges 5:18) as the tribe whose men risked their lives for Israel's independence

- In Judges 12:11-12, Elon the Judge came from Zebulun

- In 1 Chr 12:33,40, among David's supporters were men from the Tribe of Zebulun

- The territory of Zebulun was to be a major area of Messiah's ministry (Is 9:1), fulfilled by the fact that the City of Nazareth was in the tribal territory of Zebulun (Matt 4:15-16)
- Jonah the Prophet was from the Tribe of Zebulun.

(v) Issachar (49:14-15)

**14 "Issachar is a strong donkey, Lying down between the sheepfolds.**

**14 "Issachar is a strong donkey, Lying down between the sheepfolds.**

14 "Issachar is a strong donkey, resting between sheepfolds.

14 Issachar is a strong ass couching down between two burdens:

- "...strong donkey" - *hoamor gerem*, literally, bony ass; designates a powerful beast of burden that submits himself to the galling yoke without complaint in order that he may be free to lie quietly in ease and comfort

- Issachar is connected with a beast of burden; it was devoted more to agriculture than to political power

- Issachar, located in the fertile broad pleasant plain of Esdraelon, was often subject to invading armies. Jacob was predicting that the tribe of Issachar would submit to the Canaanite invader, who would fasten the yoke upon them

- Issachar numbered 64,300 in Num 26:25, and 87,000 in 1 Chr 7:1-5; only Judah and Dan were stronger

- "...Lying down between the sheepfolds" - Issachar preferred a life of ease rather than a life of service, and that was his weak side; he was not particularly ambitious

15 "When he saw that a resting place was good And **that the land was pleasant**, He **bowed his shoulder to carry burdens**, And became **a slave at forced labor**.

15 "When he saw that a resting place was good And that the land was pleasant, He bowed his shoulder to bear *burdens*, And became a slave at forced labor.

15 He observed that his resting place was excellent, and that the land was pleasant; he bent down, picked up his burdens, and became a slave at forced labor."

15 And he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute.

- Instead of working or fighting, the men of this tribe would submissively allow themselves to become slaves of the peoples of the land. They would prefer shame and slavery to courageous action.

- "...that the land was pleasant" - Issachar received a fertile plot of the Land, the Jezreel Valley, he would not fight for it, so he became a burden bearer

- This does not mean he was cowardly, he was just lazy

- Gideon does not mention Issachar's tribe as part of his Galilean Army

- "...bowed his shoulder to carry *burdens*" - Issachar preferred to be merely a laborer; since he was quite strong physically, he "lowered his shoulder" to be able to accept the burden
- "...a slave at forced labor" - *mas oveid*, a worker of subjugated people
- He chose to submit to leaders and become their slave because he thought it better to enjoy the fruits of a good land, even though to do so required submission to the corrupt Canaanites
- He was willing to trade his liberty for the material things in life

(vi) Dan (49:16-18)

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

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

16 "Dan will judge his people as one of Israel's tribes.

16 Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel.

- Dan shows another disparity between calling and achievement (Cf. Reuben, v3-4)

— Dan was the first tribe to fall into idolatry (Judges 18:30); in 931 BC Jeroboam set up a golden calf in Dan to provide opportunity for pagan worship. The omission of Dan in Rev 7 is commonly attributed to this.

— Dan is slighted in genealogies: names of his sons omitted (46:23; Num 26:42); name blotted out (1 Chr 1-10; Rev 7); mentioned last (Num 10:25; Joshua 19:47-49; 1 Chr 27:16-22).

- Jacob viewed Dan as the judge, which keeps with the meaning of his name ("Judge")

— This was fulfilled in Samson, who was from this tribe (Judges 13-16)

- Although he is listed as one of Israel's tribes, he is frequently listed last (he is omitted from the list in Rev 7); however, the tribe does not disappear—it is included in the messianic kingdom (Ezek 48:1-2,32)

17 "Dan shall be a **serpent** in the way, A **hornedviper** in the path, That bites the horse's heels, So that its rider falls backward.

17 "Dan shall be a serpent in the way, A horned snake in the path, That bites the horse's heels, So that his rider falls backward.

17 Dan will be a snake on the path, a viper on the road that snaps at the heels of horses, causing their riders to fall off.

17 Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.

- This verse describes Dan as a warrior, picturing him fighting a guerrilla war

- "...serpent" - *nachash*, signifies not only a snake in the grass, but a venomous reptile with deadly fangs

— Dan was to provide justice (“Dan” means “judge”), but the tribe chose treachery, like a snake by the roadside  
- “...horned viper” - an arrow snake; typically a small, but successful, snake  
— A serpent that is ready to strike, which brings harm to those deserving of it  
- The adder biting the horse, causing the rider to fall backward, describes the exploits of Samson and the Danite attack on the northern city of Laish, which later became the capital of Dan (Judges 18:1-31)

18 “For Your salvation I wait, LORD.

18 “For Your salvation I wait, O LORD.

18 “LORD, I’m waiting for your salvation.”

18 I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD.

- Jacob prophesied Dan’s salvation, although throughout Israel’s history, Dan was prone to idolatry (Judges 18:1-31; 1 Kings 12:28-30; 2 Kings 10:29)

— This salvation will come about because Dan will be part of Israel’s national salvation and restoration (Ezek 48:1)

- This is the first use of the word “salvation” of 78x in the OT

(vii) Gad (49:19)

**19 “As for Gad, a **bandofraiders** shall attack him, But **he will attack at their heels.****

**19 “As for Gad, raiders shall raid him, But he will raid at their heels.**

19 “Bandits will raid Gad, but Gad will raid them back.”

19 Gad, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last.

- In the Hebrew Text, the verse contains six words, with four of those six based on a word play with Gad’s name. The NKJV translates it: “A troop shall troop upon him. But he shall troop on their heels.”

— The point is that Gad will be raided by raiders, but he will eventually raid them

- “...band of raiders” - a marauding band; a marauding band will press on him, and he will be overcome by a troop

— Gad will be consistently attacked and harassed by hostile troops and by hostile enemies.

His territory was in the Trans-Jordan, on the east side of the Jordan River, where he suffered from constant border attacks from the desert tribes (1 Chr 5:18-19; Jer 49:1)

- “...he will attack at their heels” - he, in turn, will press upon them, and he will raid them in retaliation; raid upon their heel and overcome them in the end

— His fighting ability will eventually overcome them. His fighting ability is also mentioned in the blessing of Moses for this tribe (Deut 33:20)

— Gad’s fighting ability is also noted in 1 Chr 5:18-22

- Elijah was of this tribe (1 Kings 17:1)

(viii) Asher (49:20)

**20** "As for Asher, **his food shall be rich**, And he will yield **royal delicacies**.

**20** "As for Asher, his food shall be rich, And he will yield royal dainties.

20 "Asher's food will be delicious; he will be a provider of delicacies fit for royalty."

20 Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties.

- "...his food shall be rich" - emphasizes abundance and prosperity; he will desire rich food  
(Cf. Deut 33:24)

— It implies that he will have a rich territory (Joshua 19:24-31); his land bordered the Mediterranean coast, which is suitable for growing many things

— Even today, it is rich in olive trees producing olive oil

- "...royal delicacies" - he will produce delicacies and will produce the choice food of kings

(ix) Naphtali (49:21)

**21** "Naphtali is **a doe let loose**; He **utters beautiful words**.

**21** "Naphtali is a doe let loose, He gives beautiful words.

21 "Naphtali is a free running deer who produces eloquent literature."

21 Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words.

- "...a doe let loose" - pictures an unstrained ability of movement; like a deer with all restraints removed and set free

— The territory of Naphtali is mountainous, and the picture of his people as being free, mountain people with great ability in warfare (Judges 4:1-24)

- "...utters beautiful words" - emphasizes his sophistication in speech

— He has the gift of refined and agreeable speech and the capable use of words (Judges 5:1-31)

(x) Joseph (49:22-26)

**22** "Joseph is a **fruitful branch**, A **fruitful branch by a spring**; *its* **branches hang over a wall**.

**22** "Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a spring; *its* branches run over a wall.

22 "Joseph is descended from a fruitful vine, a fruitful vine planted near springs of water. His branches climb over walls.

22 Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall:

- "...fruitful branch" - the Hebrew reads "the son of a fruitful tree"; "fruitful" here has the same root as the name Ephraim, which means "double fruit"

— This is a theme for Joseph also found in 41:52

- "...fruitful branch by a spring" - the Hebrew again literally reads "the son of a fruitful tree," but this time it mentions that it is by a fountain, meaning it has its own water supply and is not dependent upon rain

- "...branches hang over a wall" - emphasizes the spread of fruitfulness

— This pictures a branch so spread out with fruit that it goes over the wall of the orchard itself

— The fulfillment of this is seen in the tribe census for Joseph in Numbers

23 "The archers provoked him, And shot *at him* and were hostile toward him;

23 "The archers bitterly attacked him, And shot *at him* and harassed him;

23 Even though enemies attacked him, shooting at him and pursuing him viciously,

23 The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him:

- This verse refers to the mistreatment Joseph suffered at the hands of his brothers and Potiphar and his wife

24 But **his bow remained firm**, And **his arms were agile**, From the hands of **the Mighty One of Jacob** (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),

24 But his bow remained firm, And his arms were agile, From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (From there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel),

24 nevertheless his bow remained steady and his arms kept in shape by the strength of Jacob's Mighty One, in the name of the Shepherd, Israel's Rock,

24 But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:)

- Jacob poetically describes Joseph's survival in four phases:

- "...his bow remained firm" - describes Joseph's spiritual and moral strength, that his bow stayed taut

— The Hebrew literally means "to retain a fixed shape." In spite of all opposition to Joseph, God caused the attacks against Joseph to fail, so the enemies' bows did not release their deadly shafts or arrows.

- "...his arms were agile" - Joseph's faith was tested, and it became stronger so that he was elevated in Egypt

- "...the Mighty One of Jacob" - the means of Joseph's survival; it was God who sustained him

- The final parenthetical phrase indicates that the same God who sustained Jacob will produce the Messiah

25 From the God of your father who helps you, And by the Almighty who blesses you

**With blessings of heaven above, Blessings of the deep that lies beneath, Blessings of**

### **the breasts and of the womb.**

25 From the God of your father who helps you, And by the Almighty who blesses you *With* blessings of heaven above, Blessings of the deep that lies beneath, Blessings of the breasts and of the womb.

25 by your father's God who helps you, by the Almighty who will keep on blessing you with blessings from heaven above, with blessings from the deepest ocean, with blessing from the breasts and the womb.

25 Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb:

- This verse moves from the past to Joseph's future blessings

- The source of Joseph's future blessing will be God; the blessings are both prosperity and posterity

- Three blessings are listed:

- "...blessings of heaven above" - the blessing of dew, crucial for growing summer crops in Israel since there is no rain during the summer months (27:39; Deut 33:13)

- "...Blessings of the deep that lies beneath" - refers to springs and fountains, a major source of water in a dry climate (Deut 33:13)

- "...Blessings of the breasts and of the womb" - Joseph will become the largest tribe because it developed into two tribes and united they are the largest (Ephraim and Manasseh)

26 "The blessings of your father Have surpassed the blessings of my ancestors Up to the **furthest boundary of the everlasting hills**; May they be on the head of Joseph, And on the top of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers.

26 "The blessings of your father Have surpassed the blessings of my ancestors Up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills; May they be on the head of Joseph, And on the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers.

26 Your father's blessings will prove to be stronger than blessings from the eternal mountains or bounties from the everlasting hills. May they come to rest on Joseph's head, May they be set upon the brow of the one who was separated from his own brothers."

26 The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren.

- This verse states the Joseph was to receive the blessing of Jacob; in other words, the blessings that Jacob received from God were greater than those received by Abraham and Isaac



- Abraham and Isaac could give the Patriarchal Blessing to one son each; Jacob was able to bless 12 sons, and earlier, two sons of Joseph
- "...furthest boundary of the everlasting hills" - the LXX translates this: "the blessing of the eternal mountains" (Cf. Deut 33:15)
- The meaning is of excess, overabundant blessings
- All of these "excessive" blessings would be transferred to Joseph
- Jacob's superior blessings, above Abraham and Isaac, will now extend to Joseph
- Joseph received the birthright, and Jacob's possessions were willed to Joseph

(xi) Benjamin (49:27-28)

**27** "Benjamin is a **ravenouswolf**; **In the morning he devours the prey**, And in the evening he **divides the spoils**."

**27** "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; In the morning he devours the prey, And in the evening he divides the spoil."

27 "Benjamin is vicious like a wolf; what he kills in the morning he devours in the evening."

27 Benjamin shall ravine as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.

- The emphasis on Benjamin is on his war-like character
- "...ravenous wolf" - he is like a vicious wolf that tears in pieces
- It speaks of fierce cruelty, which describes a tribe violent in spirit: a ravenous, devouring wolf (Cf. the cruel Benjamites in Judges 20; Saul, a Benjamite, in 1 Sam 9:1-2; 19:10; 22:17)
- "...In the morning he devours the prey" - he is aggressive, and usually on the side of victory
- "...divides the spoils" - he will be so successful that he will be able to share the spoil of his substance with others

**28** All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them. He blessed them, every one with the blessing appropriate to him.

**28** All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them. He blessed them, every one with the blessing appropriate to him.

**28** That's how Israel blessed these twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father told them when he pronounced his blessing for them, blessing each one with a blessing suitable for them.

**28** All these are the twelve tribes of Israel: and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them.

- This summary shows that these prophecies go beyond the sons themselves to the tribes

Benjamin produced some rather famous fighters: one of the Judges, Ehud (Judges 3:15-30); Saul (1 Sam 9:1—11:15) and Jonathan (1 Sam 14:1-52). Other famous Benjaminites in

the OT were Mordecai and Esther; in the NT, the Apostle Paul (Rom 11:1-2). Other references to this tribe include: Judges 5:14,19-21; 1 Chr 8:1-40; 12:1-7; 2 Chr 14:8; 17:17.

(d) Jacob's death and burial (Gen 49:29—50:14)

(i) Death (49:29-33)

29 Then he commanded them and said to them, **"I am about to be gathered to my people;** bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite,

29 Then he charged them and said to them, "I am about to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite,

29 In his last words, Jacob issued this set of instructions to them all: "I'm about to join our ancestors. Bury me alongside my ancestors in the cave in the field that used to belong to Ephron the Hittite.

**29** And he charged them, and said unto them, I am to be gathered unto my people: bury me with my fathers in the cave that is in the field of Ephron the Hittite,

- "...I am about to be gathered to my people" - an indication of Jacob's faith in the afterlife

- Jacob's instructions were that he was first to be "gathered unto (his) people" (die), then after that, his body was to be taken to be with his fathers (burial)

— The distinction is that being gathered to his people is different than being buried with the fathers

30 in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is opposite Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field from Ephron the Hittite as a burial site.

30 in the cave that is in the field of Machpelah, which is before Mamre, in the land of Canaan, which Abraham bought along with the field from Ephron the Hittite for a burial site.

30 It's the cave in the field near Mamre at Machpelah in the land of Canaan that Abraham bought to serve as a cemetery.

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 for a possession of a buryingplace.

31 There they buried Abraham and his wife Sarah, there they buried Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and there I buried Leah—

31 There they buried Abraham and his wife Sarah, there they buried Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and there I buried Leah—

31 It's where Abraham and his wife Sarah were buried, where Isaac and his wife Rebekah were buried, and where I buried Leah.

31 There they buried Abraham and Sarah his wife; there they buried Isaac and Rebekah his wife; and there I buried Leah.

- This is the only mention of Leah's death; her death was not recorded as an event in Genesis as Rachel's death was; yet it was Leah, not Rachel, who was buried in the Cave of Machpelah

— Leah finally achieved in death what she was unable to achieve in life: to be close to Jacob

32 the field and the cave that is in it, purchased from the sons of Heth."

32 the field and the cave that is in it, purchased from the sons of Heth."

32 Both the field and the cave that's in it were purchased from the Hittites."

32 The purchase of the field and of the cave that is therein was from the children of Heth.

33 When Jacob finished commanding his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

33 When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

33 After concluding this set of instructions to his sons, Jacob tucked his feet up into bed, quit breathing, and was gathered to his ancestors.

33 And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people.

- Everything Jacob wanted to say had been said; it was as if he chose the moment of his own death

— Jacob was finally "gathered unto his people," which according to earlier in Genesis, was in Sheol

See [12 Tribes of Israel](#) for more information on how the 12 Tribes are listed in Scripture.