

BLESSINGS ARE BLIGHTED BY SIN

Genesis 49: 1-7 – Pastor Richard P. Carlson

Matthew Henry, that great man of God whose six-volume commentary came to me when my Dad went home to Jesus, Matthew Henry, who lived from 1662-1714, once said, “It ought to be the business of every day to prepare for our last day.” Martin Luther, the father of the Reformation who lived from 1483-1546 declared, “There are two days on my calendar—‘Today’ and ‘That Day.’ A day is soon coming for us all when all that will really matter is how you and I lived our lives for the sake of eternity. Did we truly repent of our sins? Did we live our lives for Jesus? This is how it works for us! What are we bringing in and bringing out in confession at the mercy seat? Every sin we confess and repent of before the Father is forgiven completely. It will never be brought up again against us, whether down here or after the Rapture of the Church, or at the Judgment Seat of Christ. We all come short of the glory of God in thought, word, and deed. We all come short in sins of omission—things God wants us to do, yet we omit doing them, and sins of commission—sins we knew not to do, but did them anyway. The only road to restoration is for us to be totally-honest about our sins with the Lord. There is forgiveness for everyone who will repent and forsake his sins, the word tells us clearly in 1 John 1:9! Thank God, we have a kind, loving, forgiving Savior!

Now, the occasion for Jacob’s blessing in Genesis 49: 1-33, was not the initiative of any of his sons. Jacob took the initiative and charged his 12 sons with a message motivated by the Holy Spirit of God. Jacob called all his sons to come to his death bed—he said, in Genesis 49: 1-2, “Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you what shall happen to you in days to come. (These days to come, doubtless include the end of the age and the millennium.) Assemble and listen, O sons of Jacob, listen to the Israel, your father.” All 12 of Jacob’s sons came to this gathering, leaving their employment behind. There would be no preoccupation with resentments toward their father Jacob, no excuses however holy they may have sounded, to keep them from all coming to their father’s bedside, to see their father die, to see how he died trusting in El Shaddai, God Almighty, and to hear their father’s dying words. To separate themselves from their dad in his dying and his death would have been a sin too great for him to bear, and a sin they each would have carried to their own death. Thankfully, each of the sons of Jacob came to his dying bedside, and Jacob lived long enough to see all 12 of his sons leave work and home and pride and prejudice and pre-occupations all behind to gather around his bedside. One gathering at Jacob’s bedside was not visible, but be sure, the Lord and his angels were gathered there that day, for the angel of the Lord encamps around those who fear Him to comfort them. The occasion, calling home his grown sons to his side, and the content of Jacob’s words, shows that he had been charged

by God Almighty with a message for each son. What a comfort it must have been for Jacob to prepare to die beside his 12 sons, with none of them missing, though he had thought for 22 years that he would never see Joseph's face again.

As we see Jacob uttering his last words, he had a word for his unstable Reuben, his self-willed Simeon and Levi, his praising, courageous lion, Judah, his comforting, consoling Zebulun, his timid, self-oppressed donkey, Issachar, his cunning and sharp-dealing serpent, Dan, his overcoming Gad, his blissful Asher, his joyful graceful hind or deer, Naphtali, his fruitful Joseph and his discontented wolf-like Benjamin. We can't do justice to dealing with these prophecies and blessings in one message, so I plan to give place for four messages on Jacob's blessings to his twelve sons. The first two messages, both today and next week will deal with sins, and are prophecies and blessings that play off three subjects—Reuben, the man who covered his sin, Simeon and Levi, the men controlled by their sin, and Judah, the man, we look at next week, who confessed his sin. Today, as we carefully exegete the first three son's prophecies and blessings, I want us to see and study and sense deeply within us three features of this blessing: (1) the shocking consequence of unconfessed lust on us and on our family, (2) the shameful cost of ongoing anger and vengeance on us and on our family, and (3) the shrunken commendation of living for now and not for eternity on us and on our family.

THE SHOCKING CONSEQUENCE OF UNCONFESSED LUST ON US AND ON OUR FAMILY. (I.)

Notice Genesis 49: 3-4. "Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, the first-fruits of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. Unstable 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! This prophecy and blessing provides a sobering wakeup call to contemplate our past, present, and future life. The purposes of Jacob's prophetic words are: (1) to reveal the future; (2) to serve as a warning to all of us, against sin; (3) to motivate us to godly living; and (4) as with Judah and Joseph, to foreshadow the life and ministry of Jesus. our Messiah. These words of Jacob were not random last-minute words on the spot. No, we can tell by the weight of these words, that Jacob had written down what he intended to say, if not on paper or papyrus, these were well-thought out words written beneath his eye-lids and written on his heart. Jacob affirmed that Reuben held a special place in his heart, because he was his firstborn. Leah was the wife who gave Jacob 6 sons—Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar and Zebulun. Though Leah was not Jacob's first love, she gave Jacob his first born son. Jacob and Leah were thrilled at Reuben's birth. We read in Genesis 29: 31-32, "When the Lord saw that Leah was hated, He opened her womb, but Rachel was barren. And Leah conceived and bore a son, and she called his name Reuben, for she said, "Because the Lord has looked upon my affliction; for now, my husband

will love me.” The name Reuben literally means, “The Lord has looked upon me,” or in the context of Jacob taking his first-born in his arms, and his wife Leah saying—Reuben, meaning, “behold, this is your son.” Give much respect to Leah, for she is the mother of Levi, who founded the priestly tribe of Israel, and Judah, the father of the royal tribe of Israel. The wife Jacob never wanted, who was forced upon him, by his father-in-law, Laban, proved to Jacob, to be a better woman, wife, and mother, than he ever could have dreamed.

The firstborn son in a Hebrew family had two rights of preeminence. First, he became the new patriarch of the family. Secondly, the firstborn was entitled to receive a double blessing, a double share of all his father had. Jacob’s words of blessing started out beautiful as any blessing could be—with 5 eminent certainties about Reuben that could and would never be negated. Jacob said, “Reuben, you are (1) my first-born, (2) my might, (3) the first-fruits of my strength, (4) preeminent or excellent in dignity, and (5) preeminent or excellent in power.” What a litany of love and what high expectations Reuben was born with! A first child comes with lots of expectations! # 2—“my might” is from the Hebrew word **kowach** which means great capacity, ability, vigor, mental acumen, and power to deliver. # 5—“my power” is from the Hebrew word **ez** or **azaz** which means my fierceness, my warrior strength, my prevailing stoutness as a she-goat. Reuben’s blessing is all he could have dreamed for, if Jacob would have stopped there.

Now, a family secret, had to come out. It was an ugly thing to mention. There appears to have never been a true confession of this sin to his father. “Reuben,” Jacob goes on in v. 4. You are “unstable as water, you shall not have what was once coming to you—preeminence.” Jacob’s blessing began with his expectation of what he wanted and dreamed for Reuben to be, and it ended with who Reuben became, what Jacob could have never dreamed. The Hebrew word for “unstable” as water is **pachaz** which means weak, self-indulgent, without self-control, impetuous, unruly, turbulent, boiling up, effervescing, bubbling up, frothing, and reckless in our way of life. That was Reuben to a tee. He lost his birthright that was given to Joseph’s two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, because he was more like a flashflood, and not the measured stream coming from a reservoir. All might have been Reuben’s but for his great weakness and wickedness, his uncontrolled lust—the flooded river bank, wildly out of control—reckless, unbridled, and destructive. The picture suggests that Reuben’s weakness and wickedness was a seething wildness, an undisciplined license without checks.

Jacob seems to have been speaking directly to Reuben and at first, he continues and tells it all—“you shall not have preeminence because you went up to your father’s bed, then you defiled it.” That’s why Reuben was disqualified. After the

death of Rachel near Bethlehem, Reuben lustfully looked upon his dad's handmaid, Bilhah, the handmaid of Rachel, that Rachel gave to Jacob, when she was barren, so she could have children to give Jacob. It's all a sordid situation, but multiple marriages did not negate the fact that Jacob had four wives, Leah and her handmaid, Zilpah, and Rachel and her handmaid, Bilhah. Sacredly, they were his 4 wives, in a day when many godly men had multiple wives, and before it became clearer God hated this practice. From the beginning, God said, in Genesis 2: 24, "Therefore a man shall leave his father, and his mother, and hold fast to his wife, and they shall become one flesh." Jacob is saying something pitiful and tragic and sorrowful to Reuben about his incestuous act with Bilhah, Rachel's maid. He was saying, "You went up into your father's bed, then you defiled it." The shocking result—40 years later, was for Jacob, like it was yesterday. He remembered getting the news. We read in Genesis 35: 22, "While Israel lived in that land, near Bethlehem, Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's handmaid, or concubine. And Israel heard of it." Jacob knew, and now all the boys—all 12 must know.

Jacob quit speaking to Reuben directly. Then, to all his other 11 sons, Jacob said in the third person—hear the shock still in his voice, "He defiled...he went up to my couch!" Jacob was saying, "This act brought an end to my marriage to Bilhah. Imagine, your brother went up to my couch and slept with the mother of his two brothers, Dan and Naphtali. I believe you could have heard a pin drop as Jacob brought that news to all the sons—to show why Reuben would not get the double blessing of being the first-born. As Moses said, in Numbers 32: 23, "Be you're your sins will find you out." Reuben should have been the leader among his brothers, defending his father's honor, not defiling it. Yet, his one unstable act of self-indulgent lust and incest, robbed him of his esteemed privileges as the firstborn. Like King David who came after Reuben, both men paid a terrible price for one night of sinful pleasure. All the potential and might and mental acumen in the whole world will never benefit you or me if we don't develop self-control, especially in this area of sexual temptation. The devil knows my weakness and all our weaknesses. He has all the time in the world to wait for us to sacrifice our future on the altar of the immediate. He sets his traps. He bides his time. And he waits in the shadows for the trap to be set and trip us up. All the potential each of us have in the Lord is as fragile as saying yes to a moment of sinful lustful pleasure. Great godly gifts are worthless without godly character. The difference in Reuben and King David is one. David poured out his soul in repentance before God. That's how he became the man after God's own heart. God can forgive any sin, and he forgave David, but the scars left in David's life, and the scars left in Reuben's life after his unconfessed sin was made known to his brothers, the scars remained. Beloved, if we aren't learning to take every thought captive, every lustful desire, to the obedience of Jesus Christ, it's just a matter of time before our

great potential or our amazing name and reputation can boil away and be difficult to recapture, through reckless lust. God forgave David. Matthew Henry, back in the late 1600s said in his commentary, “We have reason to think Reuben had repented of his sin, and it was pardoned,” yet it was necessary to expose the reason for him not receiving his birthright. I hope Matthew Henry was right. Yet, in Genesis 42: 22, when Reuben spoke to Joseph, not knowing who he was, he said, “Didn’t I tell you not to sin against the boy? But you did not listen. So now there comes a reckoning for his blood.” When our confession is confessing for others, and not for ourselves, when we can see the sin in others, and accuse them, but not confess our own sins, we become unstable Reubens who will miss the double blessing and be blighted in the blessing we do receive by our own sin. Secondly,

THE SHAMEFUL COST OF ONGOING ANGER AND VENGEANCE ON US AND ON OUR FAMILY. (II.) Notice Genesis 49: 5-7a. “Simeon and Levi are brothers; weapons of violence are their swords. Let my soul come not into their councils; O my glory, be not joined to their company. For in their anger, they killed men, and in their willfulness, they hamstrung oxen. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel!” Simeon and Levi were more than biological brothers; they were two of a kind who plotted evil together. When their sister Dinah, Jacob’s only daughter by Leah was raped and defiled by Shechem, Simeon and Levi plotted the death of all the men in the city. They used God’s covenant of circumcision, which was meant for a channel of blessing, as the means of deceiving and slaughtering all the men in the town. Jacob was so ashamed of what his sons did by their anger and vengeance--the unrestrained massacre of the Shechemites for the raping of their sister. Yes, it was right to deal with the one man who raped her, Hamor’s son, Shechem. Yet it wasn’t right to wipe out an entire people—all the males in the city, just to gratify their desire for revenge. Being quick to take up the sword has ruined millions of otherwise wonderful, godly people. Jacob was shamed. He distanced himself from their treachery, saying, “Let my soul come not into their council. -v. 6. The words, “O my heart,” **kebedi** is a word expressing deep hurt, shame and sadness—meaning, “Oh my heart or Oh, my soul, literally, “I will not come into their secret, to join myself to their secret and evil designs.” Simeon’s name means “hearing” and Leah said at this second son’s birth—Genesis 29: 33—the Lord has heard that I am hated, and he has given me this son. Levi’s name meant “attached or joined” for Leah said, “This time my husband will be attached to me, because I have born him 3 sons.”

Jacob was playing on words, “I curse such an attachment to you two sons. In your anger you killed men and you willfully hocked or hamstrung oxen. To hamstring is to mutilate an oxen’s legs by cutting the sinews of the leg. It means severing the **hamstring** tendons in the thigh as a method of torture, or to incapacitate the ox.

Get this lesson from Jacob. This sin was not a one-time sin of his # 2 and 3 sons. They were still men given to fierceness, anger, wrath, and cruelty. Thus, Jacob pronounced a curse upon their anger. Beloved, the passions of uncontrolled anger and vengeance, lead to ruin. Romans 12: 19 is clear. It reads, “Beloved, never avenge yourselves, but leave it to the wrath of God, for it is written, “Vengeance is mine, I will repay, says the Lord.” Over 40 years later, Jacob still characterized his sons, not saying, “Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce, and their wrath, for it was cruel.” No, he said, “It “is” fierce and cruel. They were still angry men. They didn’t get their own selfish way, so they senselessly demanded their own rights. Beloved, do you take up the sword, and wish folk to step outside to duke it out? Do you want to prove your supremacy by fists, fighting and foolish fire in your eyes? All the brothers were listening—they knew their dad was right. The shame of Simeon and Levi’s character didn’t put them in the driver’s seat to get the first-born blessing. Beloved, do we miss God’s blessing by our anger and vengeance?

THE SHRUNKEN COMMENDATION OF LIVING FOR NOW AND NOT FOR ETERNITY, ON US AND ON OUR FAMILY. (III.)

Notice Genesis 49: 4b—“Reuben, you shall not have preeminence,” and v. 7b--“Simeon and Levi, “I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.” Choices we make today will affect our descendants for generations to come. Blessings are blighted by sin!!!! Now notice, Jacob did bless Reuben, Simeon and Levi. (Jacob did not say, “I throw you out of my inheritance, yet what they received was a minute fraction of what it should have been. For Reuben, v. 4—“You shall not have preeminence.” True to Jacob’s prophecy, the Reubenites never produced a leader of any kind for Israel. They never entered the Promised Land (Num 23), because Reuben’s tribe felt they came far enough. They did help in the conquest of Canann. Reuben’s tribe produced no significant man, no judge, no king, and no prophet. In the rebellion of Korah against Moses, two Reubenites (Dathan and Abiram) were like unstable water—so they joined themselves in speaking evil against the Lord’s anointed. 3,000 anarchists—who wanted to pick a new leader were swallowed alive in the earth by the Lord. The Reubenites failed to follow the call of Deborah and Barak to defeat the Canaanites. They stayed home with their sheep. In the last words of Moses, many years later, he prayed for the dwindling tribe of Reuben not to die out. He prayed in Deut. 33: 6, “Let Reuben live, and not die, but let his men be few.” What a shrunken blessing and commendation for the first-born Reuben.

What about Simeon and Levi? Notice the words, “I will divide you and scatter you in Israel.” That’s what happened. Jacob’s prophecy was fulfilled. The tribe of Simeon inherited land, but it was scattered throughout Judah’s territory. See Joshua 19:1-9 and 1 Chron 4:28-33, 39, 42. Some of Simeon went to the 10 tribes of Israel to be almost lost there. At the time of the Exodus, the tribe of Simeon had shrunk

to 22,200—Numbers 26: 14. The history of Simeon is that the Simeonites were first absorbed into Judah and later into the other tribes of Israel, which meant God did not let the fierce anger and vengeance of these two men overwhelm the rest of the Israelites. The tribe of Levi became priests who had no inheritance, but were scattered throughout the rest of the tribal lands, with possessions in 48 cities of the twelve tribes. These two brothers were thus separated by their father and ultimately by God to be separated from each other, and divided among themselves. Beloved when God sees anger, bitterness, and payback, vengeance and a mean spiritedness in us, He may well do with us what He did with Simeon and Levi. He may scatter us, and separate us from our strong attachment to each other. Ultimately, when we turn our venom on others, and we are joined with each other to do evil, God may separate us from our unity of evil purpose and diffuse our power, our authority, so that our legacy cannot retain its union between brothers or sisters to do evil.

Ultimately, God said Levi's inheritance would be Himself. By God's grace, and finally as a reward for their loyalty to God in accepting their scattered inheritance, God made the priestly tribe of Levi the residents of the cities of refuge. We also know that Moses came from the tribe of Levi, and we do know that Moses was the meekest of all men. Yet, if Moses were here to tell us his story, a story that makes me weep for him, what was the one reason he did not enter the Promised Land? His anger burned against the children of Israel whom he led and in anger he disobeyed God by smiting the rock twice to bring water rather than speak to the rock. For Levi, the effect of Jacob's curse remained, but by turning to the Lord, the curse became a blessing for Levi. The Romans 8:28 principle worked well for Levi, and as I close, I ask you, "Who was it that Jesus brought with Him to the Mount of Transfiguration to join him in discussing His coming passion before He went to the cross? Yes, it was Moses from the tribe of Levi, and Elijah, the Tishbite, from Gilead, and no one knows which tribe. Some say Naphtali and others Gad, and as I close, what if we find in heaven, that Elijah's unknown roots go back to one of the scattered Simeonites living in the land of Gilead? We may easily identify with Reuben and Simeon and Levi, but remember, shrunken as their blessings were, they were heirs to the land and God is soon going to give them back their land without the borders being contested. In that coming day, in Glory, believing Reubenites, Simeonites and Levites will stand with all us believing Rock Springsites, Green Riverites, Superiorites, Relianceites, Grangerites, Salt Creekites, Jamestownites, Edenites, and Farsonites in blessings that will never again be blighted by our sin. Amen.