

11.12 Jacob Blesses His Sons and Dies (Genesis 49:3–33; 50:1–14)

✓ “Check” it out; opinion, inference, supposed conversation, or fact one can verify follows
[...] indicates a remark to the teacher that usually should not be read. It also indicates answers to questions.

Visuals and Tools:

- Pictures and other visuals found at the end of this lesson. Please give credit to the sources of pictures.
- Check “Activities” and “Handwork” found below for additional materials.
- (optional) *Herein Is Love Commentary Series; Genesis, A Commentary for Children*, by Nancy Ganz, Shepherd Press, 2002. Thoughts by her in the following story are indicated by (Ganz).

Bible Time Tips and Terms to Teach: Vocabulary words are enlarged for flashcards at the end of this lesson. Print, cut out, and glue to card stock, or just print on colorful cardstock.

- *scepter*: the rod held by kings showing their authority; in this lesson it is a symbol of a royal lineage
- *to embalm*: to preserve human remains by treating them with drying and chemicals to delay or stop decomposition of the body
- *threshing floor*: a flattened surface, usually circular and paved, where a farmer threshes and winnows the grain harvest
- *mourning*: grieving

Scripture (NASB)

Genesis 49:1 Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, “Assemble yourselves that I may tell you what will befall you in the days to come.

2 “Gather together and hear, O sons of Jacob; And listen to Israel your father. [The following blessings were in poetic form but are condensed for the sake of space.]

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

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

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

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

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

16 “Dan shall judge his people, As one of the tribes of Israel. 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. 18 “For Your salvation I wait, O LORD.

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

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

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

22 “Joseph is a fruitful bough, A fruitful bough by a spring; Its branches run over a wall. 23 “The archers bitterly attacked him, And shot at him and harassed him; 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), 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. 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.

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

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. 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, 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. 31 There they buried Abraham and his wife Sarah, there they buried Isaac and his wife Rebekah, and there I buried Leah-- 32 the field and the cave that is in it, purchased from the sons of Heth.” 33 When Jacob finished charging his sons, he drew his feet into the bed and breathed his last, and was gathered to his people.

50:1 Then Joseph fell on his father’s face, and wept over him and kissed him. 2 Joseph commanded his servants the physicians to embalm his father. So the physicians embalmed Israel. 3 Now forty days were required for it, for such is the period required for embalming. And the Egyptians wept for him seventy days.

4 When the days of mourning for him were past, Joseph spoke to the household of Pharaoh, saying, “If now I have found favor in your sight, please speak to Pharaoh, saying, 5 ‘My father made me swear, saying, “Behold, I am about to die; in my grave which I dug for myself in the land of Canaan, there you shall bury me.” Now therefore, please let me go up and bury my father; then I will return.’” 6 Pharaoh said, “Go up and bury your father, as he made you swear.”

7 So Joseph went up to bury his father, and with him went up all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household and all the elders of the land of Egypt, 8 and all the household of Joseph and his brothers and his father’s household; they left only their little ones and their flocks and their herds in the land of Goshen. 9 There also went up with him both chariots and horsemen; and it was a very great company. 10 When they came to the threshing floor of Atad, which is beyond the Jordan, they lamented there with a very great and sorrowful lamentation; and he observed seven days mourning for his father. 11 Now when the inhabitants of the land, the Canaanites, saw the mourning at the threshing floor of Atad, they said, “This is a grievous mourning for the Egyptians.” Therefore it was named Abel-mizraim, which is beyond the Jordan.

12 Thus his sons did for him as he had charged them; 13 for his sons carried him to the land of Canaan and buried him in the cave of the field of Machpelah before Mamre, which Abraham had bought along with the field for a burial site from Ephron the Hittite. 14 After he had buried his father, Joseph returned to Egypt, he and his brothers, and all who had gone up with him to bury his father.

Introduction/Review:

When Jacob had come to Egypt, he had been 130 years old. After staying in Egypt seventeen years, how old

was he? [147 years.] Knowing he would soon die, he called Joseph to him in order to get a promise that when he died, Joseph would take him back to the land of his fathers to be buried. Where was that? [Canaan.] Show this land to me on a map. [Help student(s) do so.]

Before his death, Jacob got sick; so Joseph brought his two sons to be blessed by their grandfather. How did Jacob bless them? [He crossed hands and blessed Ephraim, the second born, more than Manasseh, the firstborn.]

Story:

After blessing Ephraim and Manasseh, Jacob/Israel summoned his sons to him, saying, “Gather yourselves together so that I may tell you what will happen to you in the days to come. Assemble and hear, O sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel your father.” Then, beginning with the oldest, he pronounced a prophecy—sometimes with a blessing and sometimes not—on each son.

Reuben

Who is the eldest son? [Reuben.] Reuben’s “blessing” was not so great. This is what Jacob said about him: “You were my might and the beginning of my strength. ✓However, although as firstborn you should have been preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power, you are as uncontrolled as water. You shall not have preeminence.”

Jacob gives another reason for this insult, but we know from past lessons that although he did try to save Joseph, he was a little wild in his promises, saying to his father when asking if Benjamin could go to Egypt, “Slay my two sons if I don’t bring him back to you.” If we look ahead to future years after this prophecy, we discover no prominent descendants of Reuben except two, Dathan and Abiram, who, sadly, were prominent in resisting God (Ganz).

Simeon and Levi

The next two sons, Simeon and Levi, are linked in Jacob’s prophecy: “Simeon and Levi are brothers; their swords are implements of violence. Let not my glory be united with their assembly because in their anger they slew men. Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce and cruel. I will disperse them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.”

This, too, was no blessing. Later, we learn that Levi, although becoming the priestly tribe, was allotted no permanent land. Simeon’s land was within Judah’s land, and no one of prominence in this tribe is recorded in Scripture (Ganz).

Judah

Judah received a significant blessing from Jacob: “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. . . . 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. . . .” The important part of Judah’s prophecy is “The scepter shall not depart from Judah,” for it tells the tribe from which later kings of the nation of Israel would come. The fact that “the scepter shall not depart” means that Judah’s descendant, Jesus, would come to rule and reign forever.

We will not talk about the prophecies of Dan, Naphtali, Gad, Asher, Issachar, Zebulon, and Benjamin, for they, with the possible exception of Dan, are of minor significance in Bible history.

Joseph

As we read the blessing on Joseph, listen to see if you can determine what Jacob had come to learn about him. “Joseph is a fruitful tree bough by a spring whose branches run over a wall. The archers bitterly attacked him and shot at him. They harassed him, but his bow remained firm.” What do you learn from these words? [That he knew that Joseph survived being bitterly attacked by others.]

Jacob continued with a true blessing for this favorite son of his. “From the hands of the Mighty One of

Jacob” (see how he claims this God as his own now?) “ . . . from the God of your father who helps you . . . come blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of children. The blessings of your father have surpassed the blessings of my ancestors. . . . May they be on the head of Joseph and on the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers.”

These last sentences tell us that Jacob considered himself blessed beyond even Abraham and Isaac. This is the same man who had thought he would go to his grave bereaved. Jacob asked that those blessings would continue to Joseph, who was set apart from his brothers in his honor and ability.

Jacob’s death

Thus, Jacob/Israel blessed every one of his sons with a blessing appropriate to him. But he had one more thing to say. “I charge you to do something: I am about to be gathered to my people; bury me with my fathers in the cave in the field of Machpelah, which Abraham bought for a burial site. My family members, including Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and my wife Leah, are already buried there.”

Jacob had finished charging his sons. It was time for him to die. He drew his feet into his bed and breathed his last. Joseph, full of grief, fell on his father’s face, wept over him, and kissed him.

The final separation caused by death, especially of one who is beloved, is difficult. For those who die without knowing the Lord, the separation is even more sorrowful, for that dead person then has no hope of coming to Jesus for salvation.

Joseph commanded the physicians to embalm his father. It took forty days for this process. In addition, the Egyptians mourned for him seventy days. That was a long funeral! But it wasn’t over, for Joseph spoke to Pharaoh, saying, “My father made me promise when he was about to die, ✓“Bury me in my grave which I have in the land of Canaan.’ Please let me go up and bury my father; then I will return.”

Jacob’s burial

Pharaoh answered, “Go up and bury your father as he made you promise.”

So Joseph took with him all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his household, and all the elders of the land of Egypt. Add to that all the households of Joseph and his brothers. The only ones the family left in Goshen were their little ones, their flocks, and their herds. Chariots and horsemen accompanied them, perhaps for protection. It was a huge funeral procession.

As this large company of people entered Canaan, they came to a threshing floor and stopped in order to observe the Hebrew custom of mourning for seven days. ✓This was not a quiet expression of sorrow but a loud and mournful wailing. The text calls it “a very great and sorrowful lamentation.” In fact, when the Canaanite people saw the grieving going on, they said, “This is a grievous mourning for the Egyptians.” They even renamed the place with a word that means “the mourning of the Egyptians.”

From that place, Joseph and his brothers carried Jacob’s body to Hebron, where the family burial cave called Machpelah was located. There they buried their father in keeping with his wishes. Then the whole caravan returned to Egypt as Joseph had promised Pharaoh.

Lessons from this lesson:

- We see Jesus

The blessing about the scepter’s not departing from Judah is a prophecy of Jesus Christ Himself. His rule and reign is everlasting.

Although we did not cover this part of Judah’s prophecy in today’s lesson, the statement, “He washes his garments in wine,” likely refers to Jesus’ blood being shed.

- One’s actions, even those done in youth, matter.

- We need to be respectful of others' mourning. Each of us is different and grieves in his or her individual or cultural way.

Activities:

- Play dough: scepter; cave; bed; chariot; horse; casket
- Snack: Brownies or other sweet bar.
- Discuss Egyptian embalming. Well, maybe not, for it is gross. Here is a site with information: <https://www.mylearning.org/stories/a-step-by-step-guide-to-egyptian-mummification/220?>
- Sing stanzas 1–6 of “Joseph,” found at Lesson 11.01 or on the Songs page at teachingthebibletokids.org, where an audio and a visual are available.
- Discuss funeral observations such as the number of cars that follow a hearse to the cemetery, closed casket or open, preaching the gospel at a funeral, presenting stories of the deceased.
- Review questions: (Game: Place artificial “funeral” flowers in a vase for each correct answer.)
 1. Why did Jacob assemble all his sons before his death? [To “bless”/prophesy about each one.]
 2. Tell one thing about Reuben’s “blessing.” [He would not be preeminent; he was as uncontrollable as water.]
 3. Tell what Jacob predicted for Simeon and Levi because of their slaughter of the men of Shechem. [They would be scattered in Israel.]
 4. What was special about Judah’s blessing? [He would be the tribe through which the Messiah, Jesus Christ, would come.]
 5. Fill in the blanks. Joseph is _____ among his brothers. [Distinguished; separate; more accomplished, or similar answer.]
 6. Name three things that took place regarding Jacob’s death. What was done for or about him? [Embalmed, a process lasting forty days; mourned for seventy days in Egypt; taken to Canaan; mourned for seven days there; buried in the cave tomb of his family at Machpelah.]
 7. Name three people who had already been buried at the cave of Machpelah. [Abraham; Sara; Isaac, Rebekah; Leah.]
 8. Name two different groups of people who accompanied Jacob’s body to Canaan. [The servants of Pharaoh; the elders of his household; the elders of the land of Egypt; Jacob’s sons and their families; chariots; horsemen.]

Memory Verse[s]: (NASB)

- Genesis 49:10—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.

Handwork:

- Our modern-day funerals usually feature flowers. Make paper flowers. The following site has a slightly complicated but pretty calla lily: <https://www.messforless.net/calla-lily-craft-for-kids/>. Visit this next site for an easy tissue paper flower with pipe-cleaner stem: <https://www.verywellfamily.com/tissue-paper-flowers-craft-620428>.

scepter

to embalm

threshing floor



