

Introduction

Jacob looked into the hearts and the history of his children.

^ Concerning their *history*...
He told them, "Gather together, that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days."

%o Concerning their *hearts*...
He identified the inner motivations of his children, the Spirit of God allowing him to penetrate to their deepest thoughts and intents.

Jacob spoke to them about their future history as a prophet, and he spoke to them about their hearts as a parent.

In his roles as prophet and parent you will see two things:

#1 Jacob Gives You A Prophet's Perspective
On The Dispensations Of His Children

#2 Jacob Gives You A Parent's Perspective
On The Dispositions Of Your Children

#1 Jacob Gives You A Prophet's Perspective
On The Dispensations Of His Children

On his deathbed Jacob looked backward and forward over the plan of God for his children and their descendants.

In Chapter Forty-eight he looked *backwards*. He spoke of how God had appeared to him many years earlier:

Genesis 48:3 Then Jacob said to Joseph: "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me,

Genesis 48:4 "and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.'

Beginning in the last part of Chapter Forty-eight and continuing through Chapter Forty-nine, he looked *forward*, right up to what he calls "the last days" of his children's descendants.

His prophetic words stretch through human history and even look beyond our own day and age into the future. That is why I say that you are looking at the *dispensations* of his children.

Dispensation is a Bible word, used about twenty times in the New Testament. It is used to describe God's dealings with His people at various stages of their history. These various stages are called dispensations.

In Chapters Forty-seven and Forty-eight Jacob establishes the foundation of God's dealings with His people, the nation of Israel. In Chapters Forty-eight and Forty-nine Jacob examines the dispensations of the nation of Israel.

God's dealings with the nation of Israel are established in the *unconditional promise of the land*; Israel's dispensations are examined from the perspective of her *initial possession of the land* under Joshua, the judges, and the kings, and her *eventual possession of the land* under Jesus.

{ Israel's Unconditional Promise Of The Land...

Genesis 47:27 So Israel dwelt in the land of Egypt, in the country of Goshen; and they had possessions there and grew and multiplied exceedingly.

Genesis 47:28 And Jacob lived in the land of Egypt seventeen years. So the length of Jacob's life was one hundred and forty-seven years.

Genesis 47:29 When the time drew near that Israel must die, he called his son Joseph and said to him, "Now if I have found favor in your sight, please put your hand under my thigh, and deal kindly and truly with me. Please do not bury me in Egypt,

Genesis 47:30 "but let me lie with my fathers; you shall carry me out of Egypt and bury me in their burial place." And he said, "I will do as you have said."

Genesis 47:31 Then he said, "Swear to me." And he swore to him. So Israel bowed himself on the head of the bed.

Genesis 48:1 Now it came to pass after these things that Joseph was told, "Indeed your father *is* sick"; and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim.

Genesis 48:2 And Jacob was told, "Look, your son Joseph is coming to you"; and Israel strengthened himself and sat up on the bed.

Genesis 48:3 Then Jacob said to Joseph: "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me,

Genesis 48:4 "and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you *as* an everlasting possession.'

God made Jacob an unconditional promise: "Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you *as* an everlasting possession." Jacob took the promise literally. He requested that he be buried in the land God had promised as an expression of his faith in God's unconditional promise to establish his descendants as a nation forever in the land of Canaan.

It is key to Bible interpretation, and especially the interpretation of prophecy, that you understand God's unconditional promise to the nation of Israel. The physical offspring of Jacob, the Jews, were promised the everlasting possession of the actual land of Canaan. All of human history is providentially guided by this promise.

As Jacob prophesies over his descendants, he describes certain details of their initial possession of the land under the leadership of Joshua, the judges, and the kings.

{ Israel's Initial Possession Of The Land...

We will look briefly at the descendants and how Jacob's prophecy worked out in their initial possession of the land.

Manasseh and Ephraim are the subject of Genesis 48:5-22. Jacob gave the birthright to Joseph by elevating Manasseh and Ephraim to the rank of firstborn sons. He blessed Ephraim over Manasseh, even though Manasseh was the firstborn of Joseph. This was by God's design in prophecy. As you read the history of Israel in their initial possession of the land, Ephraim's descendants indeed became the greater of these two tribes. Ephraim became so dominant that, after the ten tribes broke away to set up a rival kingdom, it was an Ephraimite, Jeroboam, who led the rebellion. As time wore on the tribe of Ephraim gave its name to the entire Northern Kingdom.

Genesis 49:3 Reuben, you are my firstborn, My might and the beginning of my strength, The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power.

Genesis 49:4 Unstable as water, you shall not excel, Because you went up to your father's bed; Then you defiled *it*; He went up to my couch.

Reuben was told, "you shall not excel." His tribe never did! Not one of the judges was a Reubenite. His descendants were the first tribe to demand its inheritance,

and their rashness chose to settle on the wrong side of the Jordan River. They were the first to be carried into captivity by the Assyrians.

Genesis 49:5 Simeon and Levi *are* brothers; Instruments of cruelty *are in* their dwelling place.

Genesis 49:6 Let not my soul enter their council; Let not my honor be united to their assembly; For in their anger they slew a man, And in their self-will they hamstrung an ox.

Genesis 49:7 Cursed *be* their anger, for *it is* fierce; And their wrath, for it is cruel! I will divide them in Jacob And scatter them in Israel.

Simeon and Levi are linked together on account of their cooperation in cruelty. Jacob tells them they will be divided and scattered in the land. Simeon's descendants were given no inheritance in the land. In Joshua 19:9 you read, "The inheritance of the children of Simeon *was included* in the share of the children of Judah, for the share of the children of Judah was too much for them. Therefore the children of Simeon had *their* inheritance within the inheritance of that people." They were scattered so that by the time of King Josiah they were counted with the people of Ephraim, Manasseh, and Naphtali (2 Chronicles 34:6). The tribe of Levi was similarly scattered.

Judah is promised that Israel's kings, including the Messiah would descend from him. "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, Nor a lawgiver from between his feet, Until Shiloh comes; And to Him *shall be* the obedience of the people" (Genesis 49:10). Shiloh is a reference to Jesus, and much of this prophecy to Judah is speaking of the future reign of Jesus on earth after His second coming. With the anointing of David as king, this prophecy was assured its fulfillment. Jesus, physically descended from David, is the Lion of the tribe of Judah prophesied here.

Genesis 49:13 Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea; He *shall become* a haven for ships, And his border shall adjoin Sidon.

Zebulun's descendants "shall dwell by the haven of the sea." It literally reads, "toward the seashore." According to Joshua 19:11 the land assigned to the tribe of Zebulun was "up toward the sea."

Genesis 49:14 Issachar is a strong donkey, Lying down between two burdens;

Genesis 49:15 He saw that rest *was* good, And that the land *was* pleasant; He bowed his shoulder to bear *a burden*, And became a band of slaves.

Issachar is said to be a strong donkey, but lazy. His descendants would enjoy the good land assigned to them, but they would not strive for it. Eventually they would be pressed into servitude. Historically, Issachar's descendants had rich lands producing rich crops which attracted marauders and captors.

Genesis 49:16 Dan shall judge his people As one of the tribes of Israel.

Genesis 49:17 Dan shall be a serpent by the way, A viper by the path, That bites the horse's heels So that its rider shall fall backward.

Dan is compared to a serpent. His descendants introduced idolatry into Israel. It was in the territory assigned to the Danites that King Jeroboam set up a golden calf.

Genesis 49:19 Gad, a troop shall tramp upon him, But he shall triumph at last.

Gad is next. Of him Jacob prophesied that, although invaders might assault his home, he would in turn repel them. Gad's descendants inherited the land east of the Jordan, on the edge of the kingdom of the Ammonites and other desert peoples, and was especially open to their attacks. The descendants of Gad, however, fought well against these enemies.

Genesis 49:20 Bread from Asher *shall be* rich, And he shall yield royal dainties.

Asher's land, as prophesied by Jacob, was the rich northern seacoast (Joshua 19:24-31).

Genesis 49:21 Naphtali *is* a deer let loose; He uses beautiful words.

Naphtali is described as "a hind let loose." His descendants were known for swiftness, as warriors fleet of foot. The best known of his descendants was Barak, who, with Deborah, won a mighty victory in the time of the Judges. The prophesy of "goodly words" refers in part to the song of Deborah and Barak recorded in Judge's 5:1-31.

The prophecy regarding *Joseph* involved fruitfulness and victory over his foes. Regarding fruitfulness, Jacob said "Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well" (Genesis 49:22). Jacob had given Joseph a double portion in the land by adding Ephraim and Manasseh to his descendants. Regarding their foes, Jacob said, "but his bow remained in strength" (Genesis 49:24). Joseph's son Ephraim gave Israel Joshua, the great military leader who led their conquest of Canaan against overwhelming odds.

Genesis 49:27 Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; In the morning he shall devour the prey, And at night he shall divide the spoil.

Benjamin is described as a conqueror, "Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; In the morning he shall devour the prey, And at night he shall divide the spoil." (Genesis 49:27). This prophecy is both a promise and a warning. The tribe of Benjamin would be bold and strong, successful in warfare, but at the same time it might become cruel and vicious. Saul, Israel's first king, was a Benjamite whose character precisely corresponded to Jacob's prophecy.

Thus, with great prophetic insight, Jacob foresaw Israel's initial possession of the land.

{ Israel's Eventual Possession Of The Land...

God's promise was that Israel's descendants would possess the land "as an everlasting possession." This looks forward, beyond our own time, to the Kingdom of Jesus Christ when He returns to earth in His Second Coming.

What can you learn in this prophecy about the historic dispensations of Israel's descendants? You can see an outline of the entire history of the nation in its various stages.

Reuben's adultery is described. Just so, the nation of Israel would often commit spiritual adultery during her initial possession of the land.

Simeon and *Levi* are said to be divided and scattered. Israel was divided into two kingdoms, a northern and a southern, and both were eventually conquered. The Jews were subsequently scattered throughout the known world by their various conquerors.

Judah is the ancestor of Shiloh - Jesus. In the overview of Israel's history, Judah speaks of the first coming of the Messiah to Israel.

Zebulun is described as a merchant among the nations of the world. Having rejected Jesus as Messiah, God scattered the Jews. Wherever they settled they became known as shrewd merchants.

Issachar is persecuted and a burden. The modern history of civilization is the story of the persecution of Israel, and of the burden she has become to the other nations of the world.

Dan is the serpent. This speaks of future deception in Israel, and is one reason many Bible commentators say that the Antichrist will be a descendant of this tribe.

Gad, *Asher*, and *Naphtali* look ahead to the Great Tribulation. During that time the Jews will be hunted down, but God will preserve them; "a troop shall tramp upon them, but they shall triumph at last (Genesis 49:19). God will raise up evangelists from Israel to reach the world with the Gospel of Jesus Christ; "bread..." and "goodly words" (Genesis 49:20-21).

Jesus will return at the end of the Great Tribulation. This is represented by the prophecy to *Joseph*. At last, the nation of Israel will possess her land, as promised, "as an everlasting possession" as Jesus establish His one thousand year kingdom on earth - depicted by the prophecy to *Benjamin*. "He shall devour the prey" and "he shall divide the spoil" (Genesis 49:27). At His coming Jesus shall destroy all Israel's enemies, and in His Kingdom He shall give them the spoils.

, God's unconditional promise to Israel resulted in their initial possession of the land, and it *will* result in their eventual possession of the land. That's why we keep our

eyes on events in Israel today! Israel has been regathered to her ancient land. God is setting the stage in the Middle East, in Asia, and in Europe for the next stage in His dealings with Israel. We are on the verge of the Great Tribulation.

#2 Jacob Gives You A Parent's Perspective On The Dispositions Of Your Children

Let me qualify what I am about to say. This text in Genesis is primarily about God's dealings with Israel through various stages of her history - past, present, and prophetic. The text speaks of the doctrine of Israel.

It can also have a devotional application, if we are careful not to go too far. As Jacob prophesied over his sons one by one, he showed a keen insight into their hearts as well as their history. He knew their dispensations; he also knew their dispositions. It is in this devotional sense that Jacob gives you a parent's perspective on the dispositions of *your* children.

{ You first get a parent's perspective on the *condition* of your children, from Manasseh, Ephraim, Reuben, Simeon, and Levi.

Manasseh and Ephraim give you a perspective on worldliness. These two boys grew up with all the finest of Egypt. The world would exert a tremendous pressure and influence on them. The world will exert tremendous pressure and influence on your children...Jacob called upon them to deny Egypt and to instead prefer the future kingdom of Jesus Christ.

Reuben was controlled by his passions. As a natural man he was "unstable as water." Just so, your children are given over to pleasing the flesh... They must be made to restrain their passions.

Simeon and Levi are called "self-willed." Their self-will expressed itself in anger, violence, deception, retaliation, and destruction of property. Selfishness is a characteristic of your child's heart... There is also a warning and a strategy for parents. Don't let your child become involved with others who will encourage his or her self-will and rebellion. If he or she does, divide them!

In these five descendants of Jacob you see the condition of your own children. They are lost sinners who, if left alone, will be unstable as water, satisfying their passions and selfishnesses in the world.

{ You next get a parent's perspective on the *conversion* of your children, from Judah.

Judah represents salvation in Jesus, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. You remember back in Chapter Forty-four how Judah offered himself as substitute for his imprisoned brother - a beautiful type of Jesus Christ.

Your children need to get saved...

{ You get a parent's perspective on the calling of your children, in *Zebulon* and *Issachar*.

The text presents the occupations of these two - one a merchant, the other a farmer. God has a calling for your children...

{ In the rest of Jacob's sons you get a parent's perspective on the *character* of your children.

Dan is compared to a serpent; then you read "I have waited for your salvation, O Lord." This is a parent's heartfelt cry that their child would be genuinely saved...

Gad would suffer, but triumph in the end. Your children need to have their character shaped by triumphant suffering...

Asher would produce rich bread, and he would share his delicacies with others. This speaks of your children being grounded in God's living bread - the Bible...

Naphtali gave "goodly words," speaking to you of your children sharing their faith with others...

Joseph forgave his brothers and brought them all together into a glorious fellowship with one another. Your children should be learning how to love others in the fellowship of believers...

Benjamin was a warrior. So, too, are your children to be spiritual warriors...

, The dispositions of Jacob's descendants, when taken together, give you a pretty good composite of the disposition of each of *your* children! They are born lost and in need of salvation. Once they have received the Lord and are born again, they must be encouraged to submit to Him, to persevere, and to grow.

Conclusion

Ours may very well be the last generation before the return of Jesus Christ.

In light of His soon coming, let's make sure our children are not a *lost* generation.