

Israel Blessed the Rest of His Sons

In our last topic, we saw that we want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain why the prophecy given regarding Judah is so important because of what those verses teach us about the ministry of Christ. In this topic, we will see that Israel continued his prophecies about his remaining sons.

In Genesis 49:16-21, we read, “Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. 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. I have waited for your salvation, O Lord! Gad, a troop shall tramp upon him, but he shall triumph at last. Bread from Asher *shall be* rich, and he shall yield royal dainties. Naphtali is a deer let loose; he uses beautiful words.” Dan was the first son of Bilhah, the maid of Rachel. The name “Dan” means a *judge*. In these verses, we see that Israel said the time would come when some of the descendants of Dan would serve as judges in the land of Israel. The best known of those judges was a judge who ruled during the time of the book of Judges. Judges 13:2 says, “Now there was a certain man from Zorah, of the family of the Danites, whose name *was* Manoah; and his wife *was* barren and had no children.” This verse says that Manoah was from the tribe of Dan. The son who was born to Manoah and his wife was Samson. His service as a judge in Israel is covered in Judges 13-16.

Israel went on to say that Dan would be like a snake that was along a road or path. The fact that Israel used both “serpent” and “viper”, which are different words for snakes and refer to different kinds of snakes, shows that he was making an important point to his sons. The skins of many snakes blend in with the ground so they are not noticed along a path or a road. This makes it possible for a snake to strike without warning. However, if the snake is not expecting something to come along the path, the snake may strike because it was unexpected. If a man is riding a horse when a snake strikes, the horse will react. If it is bitten on the front heel, the rider may slide backward and fall off the horse. The same thing happens when a judge gives his judgment because his judgment is sudden. Even though Samson made wrong choices during his life, in his death, the Lord brought salvation to Israel. Judges 16:28-30 says, “Then Samson called to the LORD, saying, ‘O Lord GOD, remember me, I pray! Strengthen me, I pray, just this once, O God, that I may with one *blow* take vengeance on the Philistines for my two eyes!’ And Samson took hold of the two middle pillars which supported the temple, and he braced himself against them, one on his right and the other on his left. Then Samson said, ‘Let me die with the Philistines!’ And he pushed with *all his* might, and the temple fell on the lords and all the people who *were* in it. So the dead that he killed at his death were more than he had killed in his life.”

Next, Israel spoke about Gad. When Israel settled the land of Canaan, Gad was one of

the tribes that settled on the east side of the Jordan River. Every time an army came from the east against Israel, Gad would be attacked before the enemy even crossed the Jordan River. This forced them to become strong fighters or get killed. We see some of the results in 1 Chronicles 12:8, where we read, “*Some* Gadites joined David at the stronghold in the wilderness, mighty men of valor, men trained for battle, who could handle shield and spear, whose faces *were like* the faces of lions, and *were* as swift as gazelles on the mountains.” Then, verse 14 adds, “These *were* from the sons of Gad, captains of the army; the least was over a hundred, and the greatest was over a thousand.” We see that some of the men of Gad became strong soldiers who were also able to lead many others in battle.

In contrast to the tribes who received their inheritance east of the Jordan River, the tribe of Asher received its inheritance along the Mediterranean Sea. Since their land was close to the water, their crops were very plentiful. This meant they were able to provide excellent food for the palace of the king because of their wonderful crops. The Lord gave the people of Naphtali a much different gift. The people of that tribe became known for the beautiful words they spoke. An illustration of this gift can be found in the book of Judges. Deborah and Barak were two of the judges in Israel. After the Lord gave them victory over the king of Canaan, who ruled in Hazor, Deborah and Barak wrote a beautiful song that is recorded in Judges 5. That city of Hazor was actually in the inheritance of the tribe of Naphtali and they had brought part of the people of Israel under severe bondage for twenty years. The beautiful song, in Judges 5, celebrated the victory the Lord gave Israel over the army of Canaan in defeating the army of Hazor after these many years of suffering.

The final two blessings Israel gave were to Joseph and his two sons. In Genesis 49:22-27, we read, “Joseph *is* a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; his branches run over the wall. The archers have bitterly grieved him, shot *at him* and hated him. But his bow remained in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the Mighty *God* of Jacob (From there *is* the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), by the God of your father who will help you, and by the Almighty who will bless you *with* blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. The blessings of your father have excelled the blessings of my ancestors, up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. They shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers. Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.” Joseph had experienced much rejection by his brothers, and others in Egypt, yet the Lord had continued to bless him. Now, his father said the same thing would happen to his descendants in the future.

The word translated “bough” is used a total of four thousand nine hundred and six times in the Old Testament. It is usually translated either *son* (two thousand nine hundred and seventy-eight times) or *children* (one thousand five hundred and sixty-eight times). Most of the rest of the uses are related to those two words. Since this prophecy is given to both

Joseph and his two sons, this word is used to speak of Joseph and his two sons plus all of the generations to come. A bough is one of the larger branches or a main branch of a tree. When a tree is planted by a spring of water, the tree is well-watered and the main branches become strong branches. Psalm 1:3 says, “He shall be like a tree planted by the rivers of water, that brings forth its fruit in its season, whose leaf also shall not wither; and whatever he does shall prosper.” As a result, a fruitful bough speaks of the blessing of the Lord that would come in the future. The descendants of Joseph would be strong, fruitful and a blessing to others.

Joseph had gone through much suffering during the early part of his life. Genesis 42:21 says, “Then they said to one another, ‘We *are* truly guilty concerning our brother, for we saw the anguish of his soul when he pleaded with us, and we would not hear; therefore this distress has come upon us.’” This suffering was the result of the way the brothers treated Joseph. Genesis 37:4 and 37:24 say, “But when his brothers saw that their father loved him more than all his brothers, they hated him and could not speak peaceably to him...Then they took him and cast him into a pit. And the pit *was* empty; *there was* no water in it.” Finally, they sold Joseph as a slave, and he was taken to Egypt and resold to Potiphar. Instead of turning to evil, Joseph had his faith and trust in the Lord. Joseph told the wife of Potiphar, in Genesis 39:9, “‘*There is* no one greater in this house than I, nor has he kept back anything from me but you, because you *are* his wife. How then can I do this great wickedness, and sin against God?’” Joseph did not yield to temptation, but remained strong because he depended on the strength God provided.

Then, Israel went on to speak of the future blessing that would come on Joseph and his family. This blessing would come on Joseph from the Mighty God of Jacob. He is the One who would send the One who is the Shepherd and Stone of Israel, as well as the foundation stone for all true believers. The Lord would continue to be the source of his help in the future. In fact, the Lord would bless Joseph and his descendants with great blessings. Israel said that would be the blessings that came from the heaven above, which speaks of the fact they would come from the Lord. The Lord would extend this blessing to the depths of the earth. He would also bless Joseph with many descendants, some of whom would have a key part in delivering Israel from their enemies, such as Gideon and Samuel. Israel said the blessings that would be on the family of Joseph would be even greater than the blessings that had been passed down from his fathers to their descendants. In fact, they would stretch to the boundary of the eternal promises. Joseph had been separated from his brothers by their hatred and anger. However, the Lord would provide him with a special blessing instead.

In contrast, the descendants of Benjamin would be known for their power and military might here on this earth. Israel compared the descendants of Benjamin to a ravenous wolf. The word translated "ravenous" means to *seize, to tear the flesh and to consume it*. This tribe thought they could defeat an enemy in the morning and then divide the spoils among themselves in the evening. In Judges 20:16, the tribe of Benjamin depended on military might, “Among all this people *were* seven hundred select men *who were* left-

handed; every one could sling a stone at a hair's *breadth* and not miss." They thought they could depend on these men for military victory. Even though the tribe was almost completely destroyed, Saul was from that tribe and became the first king of Israel. Saul also depended on military strength and disobeyed the Lord. The Lord told Saul through Samuel, in 1 Samuel 15:23, "For rebellion is as the sin of witchcraft, and stubbornness is as iniquity and idolatry. Because you have rejected the word of the Lord, He also has rejected you from *being* king." We want to help our physical and spiritual children learn to explain how the prophecies of Israel showed how the descendants of Benjamin would be judged for depending on their own strength, while those of Joseph would be greatly blessed because he chose to be obedient to the Lord. May the Lord richly bless you as you help your children learn to explain these things.