

**DEATH AND BLESSING OF ISRAEL: PART 2**  
**REJECTED AND RESTORED: REUBEN, SIMEON, AND LEVI**  
**GENESIS 49.1-7**

Context: Individual seed of the woman has become the corporate seed of the woman.

**STRUCTURE**

Birth order (chs 29-30, 35): 1. Reuben 2. Simeon 3. Levi 4. Judah (sons of Leah) 5. Dan 6. Naphtali (sons of Bilhah, handmaid of Rachel) 7. Gad 8. Asher (sons of Zilpah, handmaid of Leah) 9. Issachar 10. Zebulun (sons of Leah) 11. Joseph 12. Benjamin (sons of Rachel)

Our text: an extended parallelism/*chiasm*.

A The sons of Jacob are gathered together (1-2)  
 B Reuben (3-4)  
 C Simeon and Levi (5-7)  
 D Judah (8-12)  
 E Zebulun (13)  
 F Issachar (14-15)  
 G Dan (16-18)  
 F' Gad (19)  
 E' Asher (20)  
 D' Naphtali (21)  
 C' Joseph (22-26)  
 B' Benjamin (27)  
 A' Jacob is gathered to his people (28-33)

Dan at the center bespeaks of Israel's future. Serpent: good and bad. Samson is a Danite and speaks cunning riddles and delivers Israel. But Dan eventually apostatizes (Jdgs 1, 18). Israel becomes serpentine (cf. Mt 3.7; Jn 8.44).

Through the apostasy YHWH will bring salvation.

**A. THE SONS OF ISRAEL ARE GATHERED TOGETHER (1-2)**

*Jacob calls his sons: a template for the future:* Cp. Dt 33; also NT epistle of James/Jacob.

*Jacob and Israel:* Time of transition as Jacob is becoming Israel, the priestly nation.

Israel = the one who wrestles with God and prevails (32.22-32). The sons of Israel—Israel—will have the same vocation.

*The prophecy:* he will tell them what will happen “in the days to come” or “in the latter days.” Cp. Isa 2.2; Dan 10.14; Hos 3.5

Jacob's prophesying makes Jacob a prophet. What is a prophet?

Tells what will be (sometimes). Something more fundamental. Prophets are those who have been brought into the council of God to confer with him. They have matured to the point that they can go back and forth with God in his council as did Abraham and Moses; both of whom are considered prophets.

Prophets eat the word of God like Ezekiel and John the Apostle, digested it, and ruminated it so that it has become so much a part of the fiber of who they are, that when they speak—even if they are not quoting the exact words—their words reflect the will of God, being consonant with what God says. E.g., Moses and Deut.

Jacob has been molded into the likeness of God, sits in his council, and now he speaks to his sons and organizes them for their continuing mission.

Prophecy = the blessing; cf. v. 28. What they have been given by way of prophecy, then, *is* the blessing of God.

Our vocation is a blessing and blessing is all tied up in our responsibility to *be* God's people in the world and for the world.

**B REUBEN: THE FALLEN FIRSTBORN (3-4)**

*Initial power (3):* “my firstborn, my might, and the chief/beginning of my strength.” Focus on Reuben but emphasizes Jacob with “my.” Jacob is emphasizing Reuben's relationship to him.

The firstborn takes up vocation of the father. Reuben falls. Reveals the power of Jacob: Reuben's fall reveals the fact that the world is still reeling under the effects of the sin of Adam. This is why "firstborns" have to be replaced.

Jacob's strength is only the strength of original creation corrupted by sin. Jacob, in this sense, is powerless to change the world and bring in God's future because his strength—Reuben—fails.

The "excellency of dignity" and "excellency of power," Reuben is the best that the old creation has to offer.

**Undisciplined power (4):** "unstable as water." He will "not have preeminence" (NKJ "you shall not excel"). Reason: he defiled his father's bed.

"unstable as water" - sea is powerful, but it is untamed; it is unrestrained power and is therefore destructive. See his offering up his two sons for the life of Benjamin.

Cf. also James (Jacob) 1.6-8. Reuben doesn't have patient faith.

Reuben defiling father's bed: Gen 35.22. Not primarily an act of passion, but an act to seize father's authority. (cp. e.g., 2 Sam 12:8, 11; 16:21-22 with 20:3; 1 Kgs 2:22; 20:3-7).

"Defiled" Jacob's bed. "Defiled" has association with the sacrificial system. The firstborn son had the responsibility of being a priest. He was the one that was to take up the responsibility of the father in this area later on. Cp. nation of Israel as firstborn (Ex 4.22) and priests.

Reuben defiled this and is replaced. Joseph receives double-portion and Judah receives reign; cf. 1 Chr 5.1-2

Reuben finds a place within Israel and eventually inherits land east of the Jordan. Reuben, while losing his initial position, is restored by grace.

#### **C SIMEON AND LEVI: BROTHERS OF WRATH (5-7)**

**Crime (5):** "brothers" = in coalition in sin. Referring back to ch. 34 and incident with Dinah and Shechem.

Shechem told that he could marry her and people would intermarry and be one people if they would submit to circumcision. They did. On the 3<sup>rd</sup> day after the circumcision, Simeon and Levi kill all the men.

They used the faith as a pretext for personal revenge. Instead of taking their willingness to submit to circumcision as a sign of cleansing, they decided that wasn't enough because they were angry.

Trans. difficult: ESV has it: "weapons of violence are their swords." If we take the NKJ rendering, then there could be the allusion that they brought these men into their house—i.e., through circumcision—and used this as a pretext to murder them.

**Punishment (6a):** Prophets—mature, godly men—are the ones who can give right counsel. Simeon and Levi have shown just the opposite qualities. You are not to take counsel from an angry man nor learn his ways. Cp. Prov 22.24

They lost any kind of ability to rule following the fall of their brother.

**Crime (6b):** "hamstrung an ox" - ox refers to Israel and his/their witness among the Shechemites. (for ox ref. cf. Dt 25.4/1 Cor 9.9/1 Tim 5.18; for witness ref. cf. Gen 33.18-20). "Hamstrung" sounds like "troubled" in 34.20.

**Punishment (7):** Divided from one another and scattered in Israel.

Simeon is incorporated into Judah (cf. Josh 19.1-9; Jdgs 1.3, 17). Levites have no land inheritance. Grace: Simeon becomes a part of the kingly tribe. Levites show zeal for YHWH at the golden calf at Sinai (Ex 32.26). They replace the firstborn in their priestly duties (cf. Num 3.12).

**(1)** There are distinctions between us, yet we are one. **(2)** Power without self-control is destructive. **(3)** God is gracious in restoration.