

LIFE GROUPS

Genesis 49:1-12

INTRODUCTION

As your group time begins, use this section to introduce the topic of discussion.

ICE BREAKER QUESTION: Have you ever received a blessing? What was that experience like?

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1. **What is your biggest takeaway? How was your experience with the Life Tool's this past week?**
2. **How does the way that Jacob blessed his sons at the end of his life, reflect on him as a father? What do you think it means in the Bible for a father to bless their children?**

The life of Jacob is full of interesting twists and turns. His name meant “deceiver,” and for a large part of his life, he lived up to that name. He tricked his older brother out of his birthright and their own father’s blessing; he manipulated his uncle Laban so that he became very wealthy; he showed favoritism to his son, Joseph, that provoked his other sons to be angry enough to sell Joseph into slavery. In Genesis 49, after his family had been reunited, he blessed these same sons.

When God blesses someone, it’s a promise to be fulfilled. It’s a little different when a father blesses his children; the blessing is a declaration of what God has promised, but it’s also meant to guide and motivate the person being blessed. A child would receive the blessing and it would be motivation for that child to pursue the kind of life within the blessing.

The expectation of Jacob's sons was that their father was going to bless them and that his blessing would provide a glimpse of their future, much like Noah had given to his sons (cf. 9:18–27).¹

This said, some of his sons' blessings contained no word of blessing and were, in fact, curses. This is because the broader blessing of all mankind was in view as the judgments passed upon certain of his sons opened the way of blessing through the lives of other of his sons. Jacob's blessings were at the very base of the blessings we enjoy in Christ today, as we will see.²

It is a fundamental principle in God's economy that the actions of individuals will affect the lives of their descendants. This pattern is clear in the patriarchal narratives, for the deeds and dispositions of the patriarchs were passed on in one way or another to their children. Genesis 49 exemplifies this theme with the deathbed oracle of Jacob's blessing. We have here the last of the great sayings in Genesis. Jacob, by faith and under divine inspiration, looked forward to the conquest and the settlement of Israel in the land of Canaan and then beyond to a more glorious age, as he distributed blessings to his sons.³

His predictions were based on their actions and their characteristics. No doubt Jacob could discern enough of their traits to make reasonable projections, but in some cases his words went beyond his experience and were more like a prophetic oracle.⁴

3. Read Genesis 49:1-7. How did these brothers' sins impact the kind of legacy they would leave? What can we learn from the blessing of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi?

For a second, Reuben's hopes welled, but then came the curse, "one of the fiercest denunciations in Genesis" (Wenham). Old Jacob had been fearful of doing anything to Reuben in his lifetime, but he now cursed him from his deathbed: "Unstable as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it—

¹ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 549–550.

² R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 550.

³ Allen P. Ross, [*Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 697.

⁴ Allen P. Ross, [*Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 700.

he went up to my couch!”(v. 4) Jacob’s pent-up hurt and revulsion was driven into Reuben with a final switch to the distancing third person, “*he* went up to my couch!”⁵

Reuben was characterized by irresolution. The family of Reuben would not have the character to lead—and this failure of character was first seen in the ancestor’s sin.⁶

When Reuben’s descendants settled in the Transjordan, they soon disappeared from history, and no prophet or judge or king would ever come from the tribe of Reuben. Reuben’s descendants were characterized by a lack of leadership and resolve. The only time the tribe of Reuben appeared to exercise leadership was in the spiritual rebellion of Dathan and Abiram (cf. Numbers 16:1).⁷

Children often inherit the sinful proclivities of their parents, and the history of the tribe of Reuben would bear this out. No prophet, judge, or king came from Reuben. Instability characterized this family, manifested in the indecisiveness of this tribe when God’s people later came under attack (Judg. 4:1–5:16). Though blessed to be counted among the Lord’s own, Reuben and his descendants nevertheless reaped consequences for their sins. – Ligonier Article

Having heard Jacob’s fierce rejection of Reuben, it might be expected that the leadership would fall to the next in line, Simeon or perhaps Levi. But it is unlikely that these two held much hope of it because after their genocidal slaughter of the Shechemites, they had withstood their father’s intense correction (cf. 34:30, 31).⁸

And both tribes were divided and scattered, so that neither of them were given a portion of the land. The tribe of Simeon virtually disappeared after the time of the conquest of the promised land. And when the tribe of Levi was given the responsibility of the priesthood, its people were therefore disallowed from having their own territory.⁹

Because of the violence of Simeon and Levi, Jacob would have nothing to do with their deeds or thoughts. They had acted in pride and anger and, in their pleasure (*rāṣōn* signifying they had desired to do it), destroyed the community and hamstrung oxen (*‘iqq^erû-šôr*)—making unprofitable for others what they chose not to take for their own use. Their anger was

⁵ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 550.

⁶ Allen P. Ross, [*Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 701.

⁷ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 550.

⁸ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 551.

⁹ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 551.

cursed, meaning that they were cursed (*ārûr*), or expelled, from the community. Such ruthless violence eliminated those tribes from the leadership of the nation as well.¹⁰

“Levi is also scattered throughout Israel, but his tribe fares better in the history of redemption. Moses, a son of Levi (Ex. 2:1–10), later mediates the old covenant. Moreover, God would choose the Levites to be His priests (Num. 3:5–13), restoring honor to these displaced sons of Jacob. John Calvin writes that God’s “incredible goodness unexpectedly shone forth, when that which was the punishment of Levi became changed into the reward of the priesthood.”” – Ligonier Article

“The different destinies of Levi and Simeon show that Jacob’s words could be tempered by grace. Though cursed and scattered, Levi was later exalted not of his own merits but because of the Lord’s mercy. Our God is one who is delighted to extend His grace, and we should not be shocked when the most wicked sinners embrace His mercy. With our prayers and gifts, let us support the church’s outreach to those who seem to be the farthest from the kingdom.” – Ligonier Article

4. Read Genesis 49:8-12. What hope do you see in the blessing of Judah? Why does Judah still get a blessing even when he also sinned like his older brothers?

In these verses, Jacob said that the future kingship of the family of God would be entrusted to Judah. He would be like a lion, the dominate animal in creation. He would be lord over his brothers even though he was not the oldest. This is surprising since generally in that culture the greater blessing would go to the oldest.

Judah was an arch-sinner like his brothers. But unlike them, the Scripture records that a change had taken place in Judah’s life. Evidently his infamy with Tamar had precipitated a deep humiliation of soul—“She is more righteous than I” (38:26)—which then provided the lowliness essential to an elevation in character. It was Judah who later pleaded before the viceroy for his brother Benjamin (cf. 44:18–32) and offered himself as Benjamin’s substitute (cf. vv. 33–34)—a prophetic shadow of Christ’s substitutionary death.¹¹

As Judah awaited his father’s words, it was precisely because of Judah’s growth in humility, character, and love that he surely had no idea of the astonishing oracle that his father was about to pronounce—which would establish the kingly role of Judah until Messiah would come.¹²

¹⁰ Allen P. Ross, [*Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 702.

¹¹ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 551.

¹² R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 551.

The oracle on Judah predicts a fierce dominance of Judah over his brothers, who would praise him. These verses provide a miniature preview of the kingship of Judah that would span the years until Messiah should come.¹³

5. What is Judah’s blessing pointing to and how is the gospel foreshadowed in those verses?

Judah’s brothers’ descendants would bow down to his descendants, just as they had bowed down to Joseph. The tribe of Judah would take its enemies by the neck. Judah would become a ferocious lion—here pictured as seizing its prey, hauling it back to its den, and fiercely crouching over it. The image of Judah as a lion would become common to biblical literature (cf. Numbers 24:9; Micah 5:8; Ezekiel 19:1–7). King David’s exploits in subduing Israel’s enemies caused him to sing, “you gave me my enemies’ necks” (cf. 2 Samuel 22:41, ESV margin; Psalm 18:40, ESV margin). His deeds gave rise to the messianic title, “Lion of Judah.”¹⁴

Yet while there is no consensus as to what the exact wording should be, there is a unified understanding that the “scepter” and “ruler’s staff” are symbolic of a kingship that would remain with Judah until the Messiah comes—“and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples” (the nations of the world). As the fourth-century A.D. Jewish Targum Onkelos had it, “until the Messiah comes, whose is the kingdom, and him shall the nations obey.”¹⁵

The Messiah was prophesied throughout the book of Genesis and became the unifying message of the Old Testament. The Messiah died and rose again, according to the Scriptures (cf. 1 Corinthians 15:1–3).

This side of the cross, we know that the means to the ultimate age of joy led through the cross. Jesus on the eve of his crucifixion offered a different cup to his followers—the cup of the new covenant in his blood that was to be shed for his people. So we understand that the exuberant, endless wine of the kingdom can only be ours through the shed blood of the Lion of the tribe of Judah.¹⁶

By the miracle Jesus was signifying that the kingdom was at hand—a message that he also declared verbally. The creation of the abundance of wine signaled that the Messiah was present. And everyone knew that Messiah would come out of Judah.

¹³ Allen P. Ross, [*Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 702.

¹⁴ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 552.

¹⁵ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 552.

¹⁶ R. Kent Hughes, [*Genesis: Beginning and Blessing*](#), Preaching the Word (Wheaton, IL: Crossway Books, 2004), 554.

In Genesis the promise of the kingdom went to Judah because (1) the sons in line before him defaulted their right by sin and (2) Judah had shown himself responsible and praiseworthy (note Gen. 43:9 and 44:33). Participation in the blessing thus depended on obedience to God.¹⁷

6. Read Titus 2:3-7 & 2 Timothy 2:2. How do these verses point us to the responsibility of the church to be spiritual parents? How are you being a spiritual parent today?

“In Titus 2, Paul instructs his pastor friend to teach what accords with sound doctrine. Titus was to teach sound doctrine (chap. 1), but he was also to teach what accords with sound doctrine, or what is fitting for sound doctrine. The context makes clear that what accords with sound doctrine is sanctified, reverent, godly love and wisdom. Even the best of classrooms can't teach these things. In 2 Timothy 3, Paul says that Timothy had followed his teaching, his conduct, his aim in life, his faith, his patience, his love, his steadfastness, his persecutions, and the sufferings that happened to him. Timothy was well mentored. Paul's discipling of Timothy certainly involved doctrine (listed first), but it included things that can best be fostered outside the pulpit.” – Ligonier Article (Mentoring Others)

“Second Timothy 2:2 says, "And what you have heard from me in the presence of many witnesses entrust to faithful men who will be able to teach others also." Notice the multiplication anticipated. Paul (first generation) instructed Timothy (second generation). Timothy would tell "faithful men" (third generation), who would be able to teach "others" (fourth generation). There is a proverb that most of us have heard that says if you give a man a fish, you will feed him for a day, but if you teach a man how to fish, you will feed him for a lifetime. Paul takes discipleship to yet another level. I've heard it said that the point of 2 Timothy 2:2 is to teach others not only to fish for themselves, but how to train fishermen who can in turn teach others also. If the Lord enables you and me to do that, we can feed an entire village, or even the world. But it will take biblical mentoring for that to happen.” – Ligonier Article (Mentoring Others)

“Such mentoring is not reserved for ordained elders. They have a special role in shepherding, to be sure. To them have been given the keys of the kingdom, and they clearly have shepherding responsibilities that are reserved only for them. But mentoring is something that goes on in families, extended families, and in the church. Informally, it goes on without any encouragement because everyone will find someone to talk to about the issues of life. But let me encourage you (all of you reading this article will all be older and more mature than someone else in the church) to pray boldly for more opportunities to mentor others. Titus 2 makes clear, for example, that older women are to train younger women to love their husbands and children, to be self-controlled, pure, working at home, kind, and submissive to their husbands.” – Ligonier Article (Mentoring Others)

¹⁷ Allen P. Ross, [*Creation and Blessing: A Guide to the Study and Exposition of Genesis*](#) (Grand Rapids, MI: Baker Books, 1998), 704.

7. What does it look like for parents to bless their children today? Are you, as a parent, taking an active role in blessing your children?

Passing on the blessing isn't passive; it's active on both the part of the parent and the child. As parents, blessing our children doesn't have to be a mystical process. When we remind them of who God has created them to be and that He has a purpose for their lives, we are blessing them. We are also blessing them when we prepare them well to live for Jesus in the world and expressing our confidence that they can. We do this by verbally telling them about God and His plan and giving them real life skills to operate in a godly manner in the world. But it's important to note that the ultimate blessing is not money or comfort; it's the blessing of the gospel. When parents pass on the gospel to their children, they are truly blessing them.

"In the very act of blessing, we become part of the means by which God blesses the person that we're speaking to." – John Piper

"But in a blessing, we are talking directly to people or a person. And when we use the word *you*, we don't mean God; we mean *you* — the person we're talking to. And yet we are intending for God to be the one who acts in response to our blessing. In other words, a blessing is moving in two directions. We really do intend for two persons to hear what we are saying: the one we are addressing directly, and God, whom we intend to hear us and will give the blessing on the person that we're talking to.

So when we say, "The Lord bless *you* and keep *you*," we are directly speaking to another person or group of people, but we're asking the Lord to do the blessing. When we bless someone, we're making plain that we believe God is the decisive actor, but that he uses human means to perform his act of blessing." – John Piper

"So in sum, look your children in the eye, and speak grace and peace into their lives based on the gift of God in the death of Jesus. And make plain the central blessings that Christ has purchased for his children: freedom from sin, everlasting life, everlasting joy, the personal presence of God — of Jesus — keeping them through all the hardships of life and suffering."
- John Piper

a. How does that help us understand the responsibility of parents to bless their children, and the responsibility of children when they are blessed?

As parents, we have the responsibility to help our children look forward into the future. In doing that, we help them see that when God blesses them, they are responsible to live in accordance with that blessing.

8. How can you help your family more fully understand the greatest blessing of the gospel?

These verses look forward to the day when the kingship of Judah will ultimately and forever be fulfilled—with Jesus, who is from Judah’s line. In that day, God will restore everything that’s broken, and there will be no more hunger or tears or pain. When we take hold of this greatest blessing, we can bless others by sharing it with them.

PRAYER

Thank God that as our Father, He has blessed us with the greatest blessing in Jesus. Ask Him to help the parents in your group learn how to take an active role in blessing their children. Pray for the children represented in the group, that they would receive the blessing of their family.



FURTHER STUDY

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/reuben-gets-his-due>

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/devotionals/simeon-and-levi-divided>

<https://www.thegospelcoalition.org/sermon/the-testament-of-jacob-1/>

<https://www.ligonier.org/learn/articles/mentoring-others>

<https://www.desiringgod.org/interviews/how-do-i-bless-my-children-before-bed>