

JANUARY 24

Genesis 48-49

In the story about Jacob and Esau, there were two incidents we read about where Jacob unrightfully took something from Esau. The first thing Jacob took from Esau was his birthright; that is, the firstborn was entitled to inherit everything from the father. The second thing Jacob stole was the blessing. Now, while the birthright was cultural and legal, the blessing seems to be specific to this family in that God had promised a spiritual blessing to them through Abraham. It could be that the thought of spiritual blessing went back to the promise to Adam and Eve. Abraham could have known Noah or Shem and Shem could have known Seth, Adam's son. This lineage (Adam to Noah to Abraham) was the connection of people God was using to carry the promise of a coming redeemer into the future and to all mankind.

Genesis 48

This story is very straightforward. I only have a few comments.

Jacob "adopts" the two sons of Joseph to be number one and two in Israel. God apparently led Jacob to do this, but it wouldn't really turn out quite like Jacob thought. Putting Manasseh and Ephraim into the equation here would not have made anyone mad. It would be 400 years until the Exodus and when Jacob blesses his sons in the next chapter, these young men, not boys, are not mentioned. In essence, Joseph gets two tribes, though it is hard to see any positive impact by these tribes.

What is interesting here is that Ephraim seems to get both the birthright and the blessing. We'll see that the blessing to Ephraim will have an interesting "moment" during the 40 years in the wilderness. Other than that moment, it is hard to say that the tribe of Ephraim had any notable contribution in Israel's later history. In the next chapter, God makes His choice for the lineage of the blessing, in another way.

As disciples, we obey the Lord, now, as He directs. We don't need to worry if God makes other choices tomorrow that seem to indicate that what we did yesterday was meaningless. Too often we see a decision the Lord makes and then we "write the story" of how that decision or event is going to work out for His glory. Then, our "story," or what we have told everyone was "absolutely God's plan or will," dissolves. The problem is not with the Lord, it is with us assuming that the "leading," or "event," or "healing" of today will be something other than what it obviously is, "the leading for today." Our expectations can hurt us. A disciple follows. We are servants, workers in His harvest; but He is God, our Lord, and we follow whether it makes sense to us or not. If He tells us to dig a hole today and it gets filled in tomorrow, that is His business. (Those of us who were in the military already understand this as standard operating procedure. ☺) We are servants of God and followers of Christ and workers in the harvest.

Genesis 49

Now, most of these blessings are cryptic. Other than God, no one really knows what they all mean. Glean from these blessings what you can from what is obvious. And one other thing, in Bible study methods there is a thing called "the law of proportion." That means, in making observations, look for the length of the blessings. Two blessings stand out as having a larger proportion of text, and therefore, of Jacob's attention and blessing.

Vs. 1-2 It is hard to know if this event was something all families did or whether it was expected. This was more than standing around someone's death bed. Given the importance of what had happened between Isaac, Jacob, and Esau, all of the sons might have known that a moment like this was coming and I'm sure they expected the blessing to be given to Joseph.

Vs. 3-4 Reuben is both preeminent and unstable. He doesn't get a blessing.

Vs. 5-7 The brothers murderous do not get a blessing.

Vs. 8-12 These are very important verses. As we read these it makes us wonder what it was about Judah that made Jacob elevate him. I've been pointing to this as we've read, so some of the guess work is taken out. If you look at all the symbols you'll see that Judah will have victory like a lion; he will rule forever and he will have prosperity and blessing. All of this becomes more visible in David and it is all fulfilled in Jesus, the eternal King, the promised child and the Lion of the tribe of Judah (Rev. 5:5).

V. 13 This is interesting because Jacob is actually saying what Zebulun's land allotment would be about 490 years before Joshua divided the land. For Moses and the people this would be somewhat interesting.

Vs. 14-15 This "blessing" on Issachar hardly seems complimentary. It may be that we don't understand the figures of speech and this was saying that Issachar would be strong and enjoy serving.

Vs. 16-18 I always wonder about this "blessing." Dan was the first of the tribes to fall into idolatry. Is that in here somewhere? Only the Lord knows. Notice the number of verses here compared to the next three sons.

V. 19 I suppose this blessing on Gad can be seen as complimentary.

V. 20 It looks like the best cooks of Israel will come from Asher.

V. 21 Naphtali would apparently give Israel beautiful children. The area of Naphtali was around the Sea of Galilee.

Vs. 22-26 You can see that Judah and Joseph receive the largest blessings.

V. 27 This may be showing us that those of the tribe of Benjamin would become skillful fighters. Also, the only left-handed people we know of in the Bible were warriors from the tribe of Benjamin. (Judges 3:15 and 20:16)

Vs. 28-33 This is the final instruction of Jacob and his death.

V. 31 Call me sentimental, but I think it is "sweet" that God chose Leah to be buried in the family tomb with Sarah and Rebekah, the women of the promise. Leah was unloved, yet was blessed by God and bore more children than any of the other women. And through Leah came the Christ.

Matthew 15:29-16:12

As Jesus returned to Galilee from Tyre and Sidon, He went through a region called the Decapolis or Ten Cities. These cities had large Gentile populations.

Matthew 15:29-39

Vs. 29-31 Jesus' "attractional" ministry had the effect of gathering a crowd for Him to teach. Jesus' miracles were acts of mercy and were evidence that the Father was in Jesus and had sent Him. Faith and welcoming Christ as Savior and Lord were always the main point of the miracles He did. The effect of feeding the 5000 (read John 6) was to expose the crass need fulfillment of the people. The people who ate were the people who later rejected Jesus. This is why disciples should never be fooled by numbers. People (and Christians are people) use churches. Good leaders and disciples, who make disciples focus people on the necessity of living faith, following Christ into the harvest, as disciples making disciples in the harvest. Church is never ever about a crowd or primarily about our needs. Church is about strengthening and encouraging the disciples in the harvest. Nothing should distract us from the mission.

V. 31 Notice that they glorified the "God of Israel." Many of these people would have been Gentiles.

Vs. 32-39 This "feeding" had several purposes. It gave the disciples more training in handling a large group, and it gave them confirmation that they could depend on God. The people were mostly Gentiles, showing both the people and the disciples, that Jesus and His offer would be going to the Gentiles. And it set them up for what was about to happen with the Pharisees.

Notice that there were 4000 men besides women and children. This means you can take the number for this feeding (and the previous feeding) and triple it. This was a very large crowd.

Matthew 16:1-12

Vs. 1-4 Jesus had already rebuked the Pharisees and Sadducees regarding seeking signs, but He added a new "picture" here. Jesus points them to their ability to look at the sky and understand the weather. So then, why couldn't they figure out what was happening at that time with Him in Israel? The miracles, healings, and feedings were hard things to ignore. Jesus is telling them that they were suppressing truth by purposely missing the obvious. The real issue was sin. They didn't want to believe, regardless of the evidence.

Vs. 5-12 So what is the *leaven of the Pharisees*? In Luke 12:1 Jesus tells the disciples that it is hypocrisy. It is teaching that gives lip service to the truth, allowing people to say they are obeying when they are actually disregarding the obvious truth. Since Jesus is warning His disciples, it means they could do that too. The tragedy of saying one thing and living another is all too common in the church.

We laugh at the disciples in the boat, acting like the 12 stooges, "Hey, did you bring bread? No, I didn't. I thought it was your turn. Nuts, I think Jesus wants bread. Holy cow, we're in trouble." I'm sure this was a moment when Jesus just shook His head.

This is a very interesting lesson. They missed what Jesus was saying because they were anxious for their daily needs. How often do we not hear the Lord because of the cares of this life? Jesus has already taught them the importance of not worrying or being anxious about food or clothing or anything else. This then is one of the reasons disciples need to live in complete trust in His care. If not, we get embroiled in life and fail to hear His voice.

Psalm 20

Vs. 1-5 These read like a benediction pronounced on others by David. Notice the repetition of *may*.

Vs. 6-9 David can give this pronouncement of blessing because of his experience with the Lord. God's promises and steadfast love never failed.

Proverbs 4:20-27

Imagine that this is the Father speaking to you and that the "word" is not simply these proverbs, but the entire Word of God. His Word is for the heart of faith that sees through the eyes of faith that God deeply loves us and is trying to help us in this world of death. That pleading that Solomon is doing is really the Spirit pleading with you. Notice the commands or exhortations in these verses. The strength, joy and desire of a disciple is to follow Christ into the harvest, abiding in Him and His Word, bearing fruit to the glory of the Father. That is the path we are to ponder.