Studies in Genesis - 33

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ISRAEL’S PROPHETIC BLESSING UPON THE TWELVE TRIBES

HIS DEATH AND BURIAL
THE DEATH OF JOSEPH

Genesis 48:1—50:26

One of the most significant prophecies concerning the history of the children of Israel is that which tells of the blessing pronounced upon the twelve tribes by the aged patriarch whose name the nation bears. That prophecy is recorded in chapters forty-eight and forty-nine of Genesis, the first of which tells of Jacob’s prophetic blessing upon Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph’s two sons; the second, of his blessing upon his own twelve sons. Because Jacob had adopted Ephraim and Manasseh as his own, they are reckoned among the twelve tribes; and because Joseph inherited the birthright which Reuben had forfeited, his sons were the first to receive Israel’s prophetic blessing.

But immediately the question arises as to why Jacob adopted Joseph’s two sons, when he had twelve of his own; and how, out of these fourteen, we are to find only twelve tribes. From the facts of Scripture and from inference we arrive at this conclusion: Because Joseph received a double portion above his brethren (Gen. 48:22), he was doubly represented through his two sons. Therefore, the name of Joseph does not appear in the allotment of the land of Canaan under Joshua, whereas the names of Ephraim and Manasseh do. Thus Joseph, who received the birthright, was especially honored through his two sons; for the double portion went with the birthright.

Then, too, Levi became the father of the priests and the Levites, who ministered to the nation’s spiritual needs. To this tribe there was no single portion of the land given; but forty-eight cities, scattered throughout Canaan, were their inheritance (Joshua 21:41). Therefore, in the allotment of the Promised Land among the tribes Ephraim and Manasseh took the places of Joseph and Levi.
Yet sometimes in the inspired record the names of Joseph and Levi appear in the enumeration of the twelve tribes, whereas those of Ephraim and Dan are omitted. And again we wonder, "Why?" In answer to this question, we quote a paragraph from the pen of Walter Scott, taken from his "Exposition of 'The Revelation'":

"In the enumerations of the tribes throughout Scripture, of which there are about eighteen, the full representative number, twelve, is always given; but as Jacob had thirteen sons (counting Ephraim and Manasseh instead of Joseph), one or another is always omitted. Levi is more generally omitted than any other. In the Apocalyptic enumeration (Rev. 7:4-8) Dan and Ephraim are omitted. Both of these tribes were remarkable as being connected with idolatry in Israel—the probable reason for the blotting out of their names here (Deut. 29:18-21). But in the end grace triumphs, and Dan is named first in the future distribution of the land amongst the tribes (Ezek. 48:2); but while first mentioned, he is the farthest removed from the temple, being situated in the extreme north." (Dan is also omitted in the list of the tribes given in I Chron. 2:1—9:44.)

It is interesting to note that, in the enumeration of the tribes by Ezekiel, prophetic of their places in the millennial kingdom, the same twelve are listed that Joshua named in the allotment of the land of Canaan after the wilderness wandering. (See Joshua 13:1—19:51.) That is, Ephraim and Manasseh take the places of Joseph and Levi.

This study of Jacob's prophetic blessing upon the twelve tribes of Israel forms the major portion of our lesson for today. Then we plan to read the closing words of Genesis, to see also the record of the death and burial of Jacob and the death of Joseph. In our next lesson, "the Lord willing," we want to take a backward glance through this first book of the Bible, which has been the basis of our study for some time; and in looking back, by way of summary and conclusion, we shall find ourselves also looking forward to many precious truths presented here and unfolded throughout the entire Word of God.

It is a rich and full message that lies before us in the three closing chapters of Genesis, our study for today. Jacob
was about to die. He had given commandment concerning his burial in the land of his fathers. And before his death, he gathered his children about him to hear words that the Holy Spirit alone could have put into his mouth. It was the Lord's own prophecy that He was about to speak through the aged patriarch. And it held promised blessing, even for the sons of Jacob!

They had not made a reputation for themselves that was an honor to their father. Joseph alone stood out as a very godly man. The tribe of Benjamin later on became fierce and warlike. The other ten brothers had sold Joseph into slavery, and had lived with a lie upon their consciences for more than twenty years. Reuben had committed an unspeakable sin, thus forfeiting his birthright. Simeon and Levi had perpetrated one of the blackest crimes in history. Judah also had brought shame upon Jacob's household. And yet God honored them by making them the fathers of the twelve tribes of Israel. That is grace once more manifested on behalf of undeserving sinners!

But God's grace will yet be made fully known to the world through the twelve tribes of Israel when Jesus comes in glory, and when the twelve apostles "shall sit upon twelve thrones, judging the twelve tribes of Israel" (Matt. 19:28). The wonders of God's grace shall never cease! On the Isle of Patmos John saw "that great city, the holy Jerusalem," which "had twelve gates, and at the gates twelve angels, and names written thereon, which are the names of the twelve tribes of the children of Israel. . . . And the wall of the city had twelve foundations, and in them the names of the twelve apostles of the Lamb" (Rev. 21:10-14). God is not through with His chosen people; they are an everlasting nation, even as He said unto them,

"For as the new heavens and the new earth, which I will make, shall remain before me, saith the Lord, so shall your seed and your name remain" (Isaiah 66:22).

Israel is scattered over the face of the earth today, and has been for many centuries. But God knows where each tribe is; and He will fulfill every promise He has made to these sons of Abraham. Before Jacob had gone down into
Egypt, the Lord had told him that his family would there become a great nation; and it did. Jacob’s prophetic blessing upon the twelve tribes gave evidence of his God-given faith to take hold of the promises of God. He was dying in a strange land, not possessing Canaan, yet believing that his posterity would inherit it. And as someone has aptly expressed it, he “disposed of what God had promised as one would an earthly estate” with a property deed. Just before Jacob died, he was not occupied with Joseph’s glory in Egypt, great as that was. Rather, he was concerned about his own burial in the land he knew his children would inherit, and in God’s future dealings with Israel as a nation. Old age had blinded his eyes, “so that he could not see” (48:10); but with the eye of faith, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he looked down the centuries to see what God had promised. And seeing, he believed it!

It will be helpful if, throughout this lesson, we keep before us the map of the twelve tribes and their respective portions of the land, given them by lot, under the guidance of God, in the days of Joshua. And a comparison of Jacob’s blessing upon the tribes with that pronounced by Moses shortly before his death (Deut. 33:1-29) is most enlightening.

For some of the information contained in this lesson we are indebted to Arthur W. Pink for his “Gleanings in Genesis.”

Jacob’s Blessing upon Ephraim and Manasseh

A moment ago we said that, because Joseph received the birthright, his two sons were first in Jacob’s thoughts as he bestowed the blessing of God upon the twelve tribes. It is well for us to remember that in the original Hebrew and Greek writing of the Old and New Testaments there were no chapter and verse divisions. Therefore, let us think of Genesis forty-eight and forty-nine as one continuous record.

“And it came to pass after these things, that one told Joseph, Behold, thy father is sick: and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And one told Jacob, and said, Behold, thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and
Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed” (48:1, 2).

As he began to speak to Joseph, the old father’s thoughts went back to Bethel and God’s appearance unto him there, with His promise of the covenant blessing. Then he claimed Ephraim and Manasseh as his own sons, and spoke of the death and burial of Joseph’s mother, the beloved Rachel. It must have been a scene filled with tenderness and emotion.

To his father’s query as to who the boys were, Joseph gave God the praise, saying that He had given him these two sons during his stay in Egypt. And although Jacob was blind and could not see the lads, yet he kissed them and embraced them there. Once again he thanked God for sparing him to see Joseph and his children, after all the years of grief over his supposed death. In filial love and respect Joseph “bowed himself” before his father “with his face to the earth.”

Then Jacob did the unusual thing, “wittingly” blessing the younger son with the greater blessing. Let us get the picture clearly in mind:

“And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel’s left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel’s right hand, and brought them near unto him. And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim’s head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh’s head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the firstborn” (48:13, 14).

Joseph was “displeased” when his father gave the greater blessing to the younger son. He tried to explain, evidently supposing that Israel in his blindness had made a mistake. But the father said, “I know it, my son, I know it ... he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations ... and he set Ephraim before Manasseh” (48:17-20). We do not know why Ephraim was to be greater than Manasseh, but Jacob was following the guidance of God, whose sovereign knowledge and will we do not question. And Israel’s later history proves that Ephraim became “the representative” of the ten northern tribes, called the “kingdom of Israel” after they were separated from Judah and Benjamin.
Egypt, the Lord had told him that his family would there become a great nation; and it did. Jacob’s prophetic blessing upon the twelve tribes gave evidence of his God-given faith to take hold of the promises of God. He was dying in a strange land, not possessing Canaan, yet believing that his posterity would inherit it. And as someone has aptly expressed it, he “disposed of what God had promised as one would an earthly estate” with a property deed. Just before Jacob died, he was not occupied with Joseph’s glory in Egypt, great as that was. Rather, he was concerned about his own burial in the land he knew his children would inherit, and in God’s future dealings with Israel as a nation. Old age had blinded his eyes, “so that he could not see” (48:10); but with the eye of faith, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he looked down the centuries to see what God had promised. And seeing, he believed it!

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(48:21). And having reminded this favored son of his double portion, his thoughts turned toward the blessing upon the brothers of Joseph.

**Jacob's Prophetic Blessing upon His Twelve Sons**

"And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days. Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father" (49:1, 2).

The words, "in the last days," point on to God's yet future dealings with Israel, although the nation's past history has already fulfilled, in large measure, the prophecy outlined by Jacob here.

**Reuben**

"Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power" (49:3).

That was the natural inheritance of Reuben, the firstborn; but, as we have already seen, this oldest son of Jacob had lost his birthright by a very gross sin, bringing upon himself a curse instead of a blessing:

"Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch" (49:4).

In a former lesson we quoted I Chron. 5:1, 2, which passage names this sin of Reuben as the cause of his forfeiture of the birthright. The subsequent history of the tribe descended from him proved that neither he nor his children excelled in anything. From him came no prophet, ruler, or judge. His tribe was content to settle on the east of Jordan when, under Joshua's leadership, the nation possessed the land of Canaan. Neither did his family "excel" numerically. Yet the grace of God gave Reuben a place among the tribes, and blessing in the end.

**Simeon**

Simeon and Levi are grouped together as men of "cruelty," "anger," and "selfwill." And they, too, received a
Egypt, the Lord had told him that his family would there become a great nation; and it did. Jacob’s prophetic blessing upon the twelve tribes gave evidence of his God-given faith to take hold of the promises of God. He was dying in a strange land, not possessing Canaan, yet believing that his posterity would inherit it. And as someone has aptly expressed it, he “disposed of what God had promised as one would an earthly estate” with a property deed. Just before Jacob died, he was not occupied with Joseph’s glory in Egypt, great as that was. Rather, he was concerned about his own burial in the land he knew his children would inherit, and in God’s future dealings with Israel as a nation. Old age had blinded his eyes, “so that he could not see” (48:10); but with the eye of faith, and under the guidance of the Holy Spirit, he looked down the centuries to see what God had promised. And seeing, he believed it!

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land, they were given the honored place near unto the taber-
nacle in the wilderness; for the priests were located on the east of this tent of the congregation; the Levites, on the north, south, and west.

God's choice of the tribe of Levi for the ministry in His house was a very great honor; and from this tribe one family was selected for the priesthood, that of Aaron. Moses' blessing upon Levi (Deut. 33:8-11) emphasizes the privileges and responsibilities of this tribe:

"They shall teach Jacob thy judgments, and Israel thy law: they shall put incense before thee, and whole burnt-sacrifice upon thine altar. Bless, Lord, his substance, and accept the work of his hands: smite through the loins of them that rise against him, and of them that hate him, that they rise not again."

Moreover, God provided abundantly for the material needs of Levi through the tithes and offerings of all the tribes.

Moses, Israel's great Old Testament leader, lawgiver, prophet, and judge, came from the tribe of Levi (Exod. 2:1, 2). The first high priest in Israel, wonderful type of our blessed Lord, was Moses' brother, Aaron. And one of the books of the Bible bears the name of Levi—"Leviticus." What grace! After all, grace is the theme of all the Word of God.

**JUDAH**

Because the blessing upon Judah (49:8-12) contains one of the clearest prophecies of the coming of Christ, let us note every detail carefully. For not only did David's kingly line come through Judah; but Christ Jesus, the King of kings, came through the house of David. And yet Judah's shame, as we saw from chapter thirty-eight, was unspeakable. Again, "where sin abounded, grace did much more abound" (Rom. 5:20).

The first thing we note is that to Judah, whose name means "praise," Jacob said,

"Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise."

All praise and honor and glory belong to God. David and Solomon were honored as few earthly monarchs have ever
been honored. But when David’s greater Son returns to reign, then all men, angels, and demons will confess that He is “Lord of all.” His blood-bought children have ever praised His name; but in that coming day the praise that belongs to Him will be universal.

“Thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies.”

Under David and Solomon the kingdom of Judah had dominion over the enemy; but when Jesus comes again to rule, He shall have “dominion also from sea to sea, and from the river unto the ends of the earth” (Psalm 72:8).

“Thy father’s children shall bow down before thee.”

Again, David and Solomon ruled over the united kingdom in Israel; and all Israel shall bow down before the Lord Jesus, the King of the Jews.

In verse 9 of Jacob’s prophecy concerning Judah he is called “a lion’s whelp,” “a lion,” and “an old lion,” all of which speaks to us of the growth in power and dominion of the kingly tribe. It also reminds us of one of the names of Christ; for in Rev. 5:5, 6 we read that “the Lion of the tribe of Judah” is “the Lamb” that was slain. The lion is the king of the forest; and this figurative name for our Lord tells of His right to David’s throne. His first coming was to redeem sinners; His second coming will be to claim His throne and His kingdom.

Verse 10 makes the application to our Lord unmistakable:

“The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a law-giver (i.e., 'the ruler's staff') from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be.”

The sceptre is the king's rod of power, and Shiloh is a name for Christ. Both Jews and Christians admit that undeniable fact. Three interpretations for the meaning of “Shiloh” are given, all of which are applicable to our Lord:

(1) “The Sent” One; (2) “The Seed”; and (3) “The Peacemaker,” or “The Peaceable or Prosperous One.” Christ told the Jews many times that He was sent by the Father, sent down from heaven, as the Gospel of John repeatedly states. He is “the seed of woman” foretold in Gen. 3:15, and referred to throughout the Scriptures under this figure. (See [10]
also Gal. 3:16.) He is also called “the seed of Abraham” and “the seed of David” (Gen. 21:12; Rom. 1:3). And Isaiah prophesied that the One, upon whose shoulder the government should be, is none other than “The Prince of Peace” (Isaiah 9:6).

It is remarkable that, long after the ten northern tribes were taken into captivity, having no king on the throne, Judah’s kingly line was preserved throughout the Babylonian captivity, and was restored to Canaan, in order that Christ might be born in Bethlehem at God’s appointed time. And it is significant that “Judah maintained at least the semblance of government in Israel until after the crucifixion;” and that since 70 A.D., when Titus destroyed Jerusalem, the Jews have had “no national existence.” Did Jacob not prophesy, saying, “. . . until Shiloh come”? Was the sceptre not to remain with Judah until the King was born into the world? This is one of the clearest, most convincing proofs that the Lord Jesus was Israel’s Messiah. The genealogical records were accurately kept until Christ was born in Bethlehem; and since the final dispersion, 70 A.D., all such records have been lost. “Shiloh must have come!” God took care of all these things in a wonderful way! And Jesus came through Judah’s line, as Matthew and Luke plainly tell us!

The last clause of verse 10 looks forward to the return of Christ in glory, when all peoples will worship and honor Him. It is also true that believers in Him have been gathered unto Him throughout all the centuries since the fall of Adam; but all people everywhere will be literally and marvelously gathered unto Him when they see Him coming in power and great glory.

Verses 11, 12 have a double reference: to the tribe of Judah, whose inheritance was in the rich vineyards of southern Palestine; and to Christ, of whom Isaiah wrote in symbolic words, very like Jacob’s prophecy, saying:

“Who is this that cometh from Edom, with dyed garments from Bozrah? this that is glorious in his apparel, travelling in the greatness of his strength? I that speak in righteousness, mighty to save. Wherefore art thou red
been honored. But when David’s greater Son returns to reign, then all men, angels, and demons will confess that He is “Lord of all.” His blood-bought children have ever praised His name; but in that coming day the praise that belongs to Him will be universal.

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However that may be, Zebulun and Naphtali bordered on the Sea of Galilee, literally fulfilling Jacob's prophecy concerning Zebulun, whose borders also extended to Zidon, even as Jacob foretold. Living by the sea, these tribes were engaged in maritime pursuits. Concerning the valor of Zebulun and Naphtali in battle, Deborah said that "they jeopardized their lives unto the death in the high places of the field" (Judges 5:18). While the children of Zebulun do not stand out on the pages of Israel's history for special recognition, yet they were an upright, brave tribe, "not of double heart" (I Chron. 12:33).

It has also been suggested that Moses' prophetic blessing upon Zebulun and Issachar, who had the land just to the south, looked forward to their "going out" with the Gospel message in the time of Christ. Eleven of the twelve disciples of the Lord came out of Galilee, Judas being the only exception. This is what Moses said:

"Rejoice, Zebulun, in thy going out; and, Issachar, in thy tents. They shall call the people unto the mountain (i.e. Mount Zion); there they shall offer sacrifices of righteousness: for they shall suck of the abundance of the seas, and of treasures hid in the sand" (Deut. 33:18, 19).

Issachar was given one of the most fertile regions of the land of promise; and the people of this tribe were an agricultural people, energetic, patient, bowing the "shoulder to bear," and becoming "a servant unto tribute." The figure of the ass was not used as a term of contempt; but rather, as a term of respect, for the ass was a "useful beast of burden" upon which kings rode. Our Lord Himself, in His triumphal entry into Jerusalem, fulfilled the prophecy of Zech. 9:9, who wrote, saying,

"Rejoice greatly, O daughter of Zion; shout, O daughter of Jerusalem: behold, thy King cometh unto
thee: he is just, and having salvation; lowly, and riding upon an ass, and upon a colt the foal of an ass." (Cf. Matt. 21:5).

In fighting Israel's battles Issachar was known for her "valiant men of might" (I Chron. 7:5).

**DAN**

The prediction concerning Dan is veiled in mystery; yet putting the prophecies of Jacob and Moses together, we find at least three facts stated very definitely. Dan was to be: (1) a "judge"; (2) "a serpent by the way"; and (3) "a lion's whelp."

"Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward" (Gen. 49:16, 17).

"Dan is a lion's whelp: he shall leap from Bashan" (Deut. 33:22). (Cf. Judges 18:1-31 for the fulfillment of the prophecy, "He shall leap from Bashan," in Dan's cruel "attack on Laish" near Mount Hermon.)

In the beginning of our study today we called attention to the fact that Dan is omitted from the list of the twelve tribes, recorded in I Chron. 2:1—9:44 and in Rev. 7:4-8. We saw the probable reason for this omission by the Holy Spirit was Dan's idolatry; his tribe was the first to go into heathenism. (See Judges 18:30.) We saw also that, in the prophecy of the millennial kingdom, grace triumphs, and Dan is brought back. Dan is often found last in the chronology of the tribes, or near the end of the list. He was the last to receive his inheritance in the days of Joshua (Joshua 19:47, 48).

Samson, the thirteenth of the judges, was of the tribe of Dan (Judges 13:2, 24); and this unpredictable man, who had such great power, often used in such strange ways, was, as it were, subtle as a serpent and strong as a lion. In him, at least, the prophecy was fulfilled that Dan should "judge his people."

Moreover, some students of prophecy believe that the Antichrist will come from the tribe of Dan, a veritable "serpent by the way, an adder in the path." Those who hold
this view see in this one reason why Dan’s name is omitted from the list of the twelve tribes in the seventh chapter of Revelation. There 144,000 Jews, 12,000 from each tribe, are being “sealed” during the terrible reign of the Antichrist. If it is true that this false Messiah will come out of Dan; and if the tribe follows him, receiving “the mark of the beast”; then it is easy to understand why none from this tribe will be among the 144,000 missionaries of that “time of Jacob’s trouble.” These “sealed” ones will go into all the world to proclaim the coming of the King, even Jesus, Israel’s Messiah and Lord. If this view is true, then in that yet future day Dan will “judge his people” in the person of the Antichrist with the treachery of a serpent and the cruelty of a lion. But let us not be dogmatic about this matter. Where God’s Word is silent, we do well not to speculate; and yet, since the Antichrist will evidently be a Jew, this may be the meaning implied in these searching prophecies of Jacob and Moses.

Jacob’s testimony in Gen. 49:18 is striking, coming as it does immediately after his prophecy concerning Dan:

“I have waited for thy salvation, O Lord."

It is as though, having seen the serpent-like ways of Dan, his thoughts went back to “that old serpent, which is the Devil,” and to God’s curse upon him in the Garden of Eden. There, in Gen. 3:15, we read that “the seed of woman,” even the virgin-born Son of God, was to “bruise” the serpent’s head. Jacob, knowing something of the subtlety and treachery of Satan, thanked God for His salvation in the coming Saviour.

**GAD**

The prophetic blessings of Jacob and Moses in reference to Gad both foretold frequent warfare with marauding bands of the enemy, from which battles Gad usually came out victorious:

“Gad, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last” (Gen. 49:19).

“And of Gad he said, Blessed he he that enlargeth Gad: he dwelleth as a lion, and teareth the arm with the crown of the head. And he provided the first part for
himself, because there, in a portion of the lawgiver, was he seated; and he came with the heads of the people, he executed the justice of the Lord, and his judgments with Israel” (Deut. 33:20, 21).

Gad was one of the two and one-half tribes which settled on the east of Jordan, between half of Manasseh on the north, and Reuben on the south. The inheritance of Gad was known as the land of Gilead. The prophecy, “He provided the first part for himself,” seems to refer to his claiming his own portion of the land before the tribes occupied their territory on the west of the River Jordan.

Located, as Gad was, on the border-land that adjoined the country of marauding, desert tribes, the children of Gad were often subjected to attack by these plundering bands, such as the Ammonites and the Midianites. At one time they were “vexed and oppressed” by the enemy for eighteen years (Judges 10:8). Then God raised up Jephthah, the ninth judge, to deliver them; and Jephthah was a “Gileadite” (Judges 11:1). Later on Gad was one of the first tribes to be taken into captivity (I Chron. 5:26). It is thought that Jer. 49:1, 2 and Zeph. 2:8, 9 refer to their future deliverance in the end of the age, when they “shall overcome at the last.”

ASHER

Again, we compare the blessings of Jacob and Moses pronounced upon Asher for a significant prophecy that subsequent history has fulfilled to a remarkable degree:

“Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties” (Gen. 49:20).

“And of Asher he said, Let Asher be blessed with children; let him be acceptable to his brethren, and let him dip his foot in oil” (Deut. 33:24).

From Joshua 19:24-31 we learn the location of Asher’s inheritance in the land of Canaan; and a glance at the map will show us that it was on the Mediterranean Sea coast, between the city of Tyre and Mount Carmel, west of Mount Lebanon, and including also the city of Sidon. It is one of the most fertile districts in Palestine, especially in the production of corn and oil. The Grecian name for this beautiful...
strip of sea coast was Phoenicia, which means "the land of the palms." Asher, together with Zebulun, Naphtali, and Issachar, occupied the territory known later on as "Galilee of the Gentiles." And Asher was ever one-half Gentile, we are told.

The name "Asher" means "blessed"; and blessing upon the tribe was prophesied, both by Jacob and by Moses, as we have just read from the Scripture text. It was to a widow in Zarephath, in Asher's territory, that God sent Elijah for "bread" in the days of famine (I Kings 17:9). Hiram, king of Tyre, sent David "cedar trees, and carpenters, and masons" to help in building David's palace (II Sam. 5:11). Fir trees, the cedars of Lebanon, and costly stones were sent on floats or rafts down the sea coast to Solomon in Jerusalem, for the building of the beautiful temple (I Kings 5:1-18). These things were "royal dainties" for the two greatest kings over united Israel in all Old Testament times.

It is of interest to note also that Anna, the aged prophetess, who recognized the Baby Jesus in the temple as the One who brought "redemption in Jerusalem," came from the tribe of Asher. And seeing the Christ Child, she "gave thanks unto the Lord" (Luke 2:36-38).

We read a moment ago from Moses' prophecy concerning Asher these significant words, "... and let him dip his foot in oil." Only this week an article was called to our attention which told how this prophecy of Moses, uttered thousands of years ago, is being fulfilled in Palestine today. Another glance at our Bible map will show that the territory occupied by Asher was almost the shape of a human limb. The southern portion, including Mount Carmel, is in the shape of a boot or a foot. And the city of Haifa today, which is the western terminus of the greatest oil pipe line in the world, is in the foot-formation of the land allotted to Asher. This city of Haifa today is a coveted spot by all the nations of the Old World. Moses' prophecy is being literally fulfilled before our very eyes. But let us quote from this recent article:

"There are three cities in modern Palestine that are vying with one another in rapid growth and public interest: Jerusalem, Tel-Aviv, and Haifa."
“Haifa is the industrial center of Palestine, and curiously enough, it is the commercial metropolis that is rapidly becoming one of the most beautiful cities of the East. It was formerly a sleepy seaport-city, lying sluggish and dormant like the rest of Palestine. Since the first World War, the city has awakened to new life. It is growing with unprecedented rapidity, and is destined to become one of the great gateways between the Occident and the Orient. It is connected by rail with Egypt, and through the Suez Canal with the trade lanes to India and the East. It is linked by trans-desert motor with Arabia and Iraq, ancient Assyria. It is connected by steamer with Mediterranean ports, Great Britain, and America. In short, it is a city of almost unlimited future possibilities.

"The most costly single work under construction in the world," was one description of the oil pipe line stretching almost a thousand miles from Mesopotamia to Haifa. An army of over 9,000 men was employed for more than eighteen months to build it, and one report stated that it is ‘the greatest pipe line ever carried through as a single enterprise.’ The purpose of it, of course, is to make money for a corporation representing American, British, French, and Persian oil interests. But once again it appears that men are unwittingly fulfilling prophecy. Moses predicted that Asher would ‘dip his foot in oil.’ Is that prophecy being fulfilled? Yes, at the rate of more than a million gallons a year! How little did the engineers who built the pipe line dream that they were fulfilling prophecy when they made their plans for its construction, and laid the pipes through the foot of Asher into the city of Haifa!"

NAPHTALI

“Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly
cords” (Gen. 49:21).

“Naphtali” means “wrestling”; and the picture here is that of “a hind let loose.” “It was as though Jacob said, ‘Naphtali is as a deer caught in the toils of the hunters, hemmed in by them, but by his struggles he escapes from their snares.’” And being set free, Naphtali “giveth goodly words,” in thanksgiving for liberty.
A striking fulfillment of this prophecy in Israel's history took place when Barak, whose name means "lightning," went "with hind-like swiftness" down the slopes of Mount Tabor to meet Sisera and his army. But for the grace and power of God, who fought for him, Barak and his men would have been like the trapped deer, once they were down in the valley; but God delivered them, and they were "let loose" by a great victory. In thanksgiving for God's deliverance, Deborah sang her song of praise, "goodly words," indeed. (See Judges 4:1—5:31.)

Many centuries later the Lord Jesus went throughout the cities of Naphtali in "Galilee of the Gentiles," preaching "goodly words," healing the sick, telling the multitudes of Capernaum, Bethsaida, and Chorazin that He came to ransom their souls from eternal death and separation from God.

JOSEPH

Since we have already dwelt at length on the familiar, beautiful story of Joseph; and since we have already considered Jacob's blessing upon Ephraim and Manasseh, Joseph's two sons; we need only read here Jacob's abundant blessing upon this favorite son. It is very similar to Moses' blessing upon Joseph, recorded in Deut. 33:13-17.

Joseph's double portion that was his by virtue of the birthright, realized in his having two sons who were fathers of tribes, is referred to in Gen. 49:22:

"Joseph is a goodly bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall."

In his fruitfulness he was a source of blessing to others, his branches running "over the wall."

"The archers," who "sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him," were none other than his own brethren.

"But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob."

The sublime faith of Jacob shines out here in the names he gives to his God: (1) "The mighty God of Jacob"; and how well the patriarch had reason to know the exceedingly great power of his Lord! (2) "The Shepherd, the Stone of
Israel”; (3) “The God of thy father (i.e., Jacob)”; and (4) “The Almighty.”

The word “is” in verse 24 is in italics, which means that it was added by the translators to make the meaning clear; but in this case the added word obscures the real meaning. It makes it appear that Jesus, “the Shepherd and Stone of Israel,” came through Joseph; but all prophetic Scripture teaches plainly that He was to come, as, indeed, He did come, through Judah. A better translation and punctuation would be, “‘His hands were made strong by the hands of the Mighty (One) of Jacob, from thence—the Shepherd and Stone of Israel.’ It was ‘from thence,’ i.e., from the Shepherd and Stone of Israel,” that Joseph received all his strength and blessing. (A. W. Pink).

Verses 25 and 26 are filled with blessings both material and spiritual, fruitfulness of every kind. And the history of Joseph’s sons fulfilled the prophecy—and will fulfill it when the tribes are restored to their own land in the reign of their Messiah and King.

**BENJAMIN**

“Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil” (Gen. 49:27).

In fulfillment of this prophecy, Benjamin became the most fierce and warlike of all the tribes, particularly in his early history, engaging in “petty and inglorious warfare, especially in the violent and unjust contest with the other tribes.” The last three chapters of the book of Judges tell the sad story of how Benjamin was almost, but not quite, exterminated.

And yet in Moses’ prophecy concerning Benjamin we see once more how wonderfully the grace of God triumphs:

“And of Benjamin he said, The beloved of the Lord shall dwell in safety by him; and the Lord shall cover him all the day long, and he shall dwell between his shoulders” (i.e., the place of strength). (See Deut. 33:12.)

This beautiful prophecy will be literally fulfilled when Benjamin knows the blessing of her rightful King!
It is of interest to remember that Saul, Israel's first king, and the enemy of David, came from the tribe of Benjamin. And Saul of Tarsus, who bitterly persecuted the early church, was a descendant of this tribe. In his life the grace of God was abundantly manifested; for Saul, the persecutor, became Paul, the missionary martyr of the Cross!

This brings us to the close of Jacob's prophetic blessing upon the tribes.

"All these are the twelve tribes of Israel: and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them" (Gen. 49:28).

Already many centuries have passed; and Israel has been preserved, in spite of peril and fire and sword—not that the tribes deserve it, but because God always keeps His promises! And forever His chosen people shall "remain." God hath spoken it! Just as today we do not deserve everlasting life, so with Israel, as with all sinners of all ages, God's grace abounds and will abound throughout eternity.

**Jacob's Death and Burial**

In our last lesson we saw that it was by faith that Jacob charged his sons not to bury him in Egypt, but to take his body back to the land of his fathers (Gen. 49:29-32). And now we read in the closing verse of this chapter the record of Israel's death:

"And when Jacob had made an end of commanding his sons, he gathered up his feet into the bed, and yielded up the ghost, and was gathered unto his people."

Doubtless because of Joseph's exalted position in Egypt, Jacob's death was mourned by the Egyptians with all the ceremony and honor that royalty was accustomed to receive. Forty days were required for embalming his body according to the custom among the ancient Egyptians; seventy days in all the country mourned for Israel. (See Gen. 50:1-3.) "And when the days of mourning were past," Joseph asked and received permission from Pharaoh to take his father's body back to Canaan, to bury it in the cave of Machpelah, where Abraham and Sarah, Isaac and Rebekah, and Leah were buried.
It must have been a most imposing funeral procession that journeyed some three-hundred miles from Egypt to Canaan! In the caravan were:

“. . . all the servants of Pharaoh, the elders of his house, and all the elders of the land of Egypt, and all the house of Joseph, and his brethren, and his father’s house: only their little ones, and their flocks, and their herds, they left in the land of Goshen. And there went up with him both chariots and horsemen: and it was a very great company” (50:7-9).

On the border between Egypt and Canaan, at “the threshing-floor of Atad, which is beyond Jordan” they mourned another seven days; so that the inhabitants of the land said, “This is a grievous mourning to the Egyptians” (50:10, 11). After Joseph and his brethren had buried their father in the land of Canaan, as he had commanded them, then “Joseph returned into Egypt, he, and his brethren, and all that went up with him to bury his father” (50:12-14).

THE DEATH OF JOSEPH

In a former lesson we considered Gen. 50:15-21, in which we read of the fear of Joseph’s brethren after their father’s death, and of Joseph’s grief that they doubted his love for them, as well as of his kindness toward them. We saw that he recognized the hand of God in all that had happened unto him.

And now in 50:22-26 we read the story of Joseph’s last days and the record of his death. He lived to be one-hundred and ten years old; and as we remember that he was thirty when he first “stood before Pharaoh,” we realize that he had ruled Egypt for eighty years. How beloved he must have been by the people he had befriended! And how good God had been to him, to use him so greatly, and to let him live to see his children’s children of the third generation!

Perhaps Joseph’s reason for not asking his brethren to take his body back to Canaan immediately following his death can be attributed to the feeling the Egyptians had for him, and their desire to keep his body in Egypt. It was as if they considered that he belonged to their nation. And yet
Joseph’s great faith in the promises of God was evidenced by his request that they take his “bones” to Canaan in the day when God should lead them back to their own land. Indeed, he made his brethren swear that they would fulfill this promise:

“And Joseph said unto his brethren, I die: and God will surely visit you, and bring you out of this land unto the land which he sware to Abraham, to Isaac, and to Jacob. And Joseph took an oath of the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you, and ye shall carry up my bones from hence” (50:24, 25).

Twice in these verses it is recorded, “God will surely visit you.” That was faith. Joseph believed the covenant God had made with Abraham, and confirmed to Isaac and Jacob. He believed the promise of the Lord who had told Jacob not to be afraid to go down into Egypt, that He would surely bring him out again and into his own land. The testimony of the Holy Spirit to Joseph’s faith is recorded in Heb. 11:22:

“By faith Joseph, when he died, made mention of the departing of the children of Israel; and gave commandment concerning his bones.”

Four-hundred and thirty years after Jacob had taken his household down to Egypt, Moses led Israel out of that land that had become a place of bondage.

“And Moses took the bones of Joseph with him: for he had straitly sworn the children of Israel, saying, God will surely visit you; and ye shall carry up my bones away hence with you” (Exod. 13:19).

Forty years later Moses died, and Joshua led Israel into the Promised Land.

“And the bones of Joseph, which the children of Israel brought up out of Egypt, buried they in Shechem, in a parcel of ground which Jacob bought of the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for an hundred pieces of silver: and it became the inheritance of the children of Joseph” (Joshua 24:32; cf. John 4:5, 6).
“So Joseph died, being an hundred and ten years old: and they embalmed him, and he was put in a coffin in Egypt” (Gen. 50:26).

Thus Joseph’s body was kept in Egypt until the day when Moses and Joshua obeyed his commandment concerning his burial in the land of his fathers. Thus the patriarchal age had come to an end. And thus we are nearing the close of this series of studies in this first book of the Bible, which opens with the majestic words, “In the beginning God . . .” and concludes with the symbolic expression, “. . . in a coffin in Egypt.”

In our next and last study we hope to draw some practical lessons, by way of summary and review, that will be a source of inspiration and spiritual edification, as throughout the years, till our Lord comes, we shall continue to study this wonderful book of Genesis. Yea, the Word of our God shall abide forever!

And now, as we bring today’s lesson to a close, as we look back over the centuries to see the manifold tokens of God’s blessing upon His people, Israel; and as we look forward to that coming day, when they shall know Him as their Messiah and King; as we see how the blessing foretold by Jacob has been literally fulfilled, we love to think also of the concluding words of Moses’ blessing upon the twelve tribes, so like the one spoken by his forefather, Jacob:

“As thy days, so shall thy strength be. . . . The eternal God is thy refuge, and underneath are the everlasting arms. . . . Israel then shall dwell in safety alone. . . . Happy art thou, O Israel: who is like unto thee, O people saved by the Lord, the shield of thy help, and who is the sword of thy excellency! (Deut. 33:25-29).