

# SOVEREIGN GRACE PLANS THE FUTURE I

## Genesis 49: 1-15

*Please review this week's catechism question.*

Prayer prompter: Pray 1 Kings 8: 57-58 for the person on your right.

### INTRODUCTION

Have you ever wished you knew what the future held? Have you ever wished that you would have known what the future held? Why have you wished to know the future?

We are fascinated by the future because we know that if we understand the future we can do things in the present to prepare for it. God, through his word has told us a lot about the future. He has done this so that we will act in the present in order to prepare for the future. In Genesis 49:1-2 we are told that Israel, on his deathbed, calls together his 14 living sons and commands them to pay attention to what he is about to say. He says, "Gather around so that I can tell you what will happen to you in days to come." He tells his sons that he is going to act as God's prophet and inform them of what the future is going to be like for them.

Why does Jacob do this and why does Moses record what he says for us? He tells his sons these things and then Moses records his declaration for us so that they and we will act in the present to prepare for the future. We are going to examine what kinds of preparations we should make in light of what Jacob tells his sons about the future.

### STUDY

1. Use your imagination and facts you know and describe what the scene might look like.

*Jacob is 147 years old and is seated upon his bed in his tent. He is propped up with ornate pillows and covered with richly ornamented blankets. Gathered around him are his twelve sons born of his four wives and his two grandsons, Joseph's oldest boys, whom he just adopted as his own. The men gathered around Joseph range in age*

*from the twenty-something adopted sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, to Reuben who is probably in his seventies. Except for the adopted sons all of these men are married and the heads of growing extended families that will soon become the tribes of the nation Israel. Jacob calls them to himself, commanding them to gather around and to listen to what he has to say.*

2. What does Jacob tell Reuben?

*The first thing he says to Reuben sounds good. He affirms that he is his firstborn and then he recounts the privileged status of the firstborn son. The firstborn son is the glory of the father. He represents Jacob's strength and has by right the place of highest honor and prestige in the family. However, Jacob quickly informs Reuben that the position of honor and power that ought to be his has been taken away from him. He will no longer excel in honor or power in the family.*

3. What is the reason Reuben will no longer excel? Read Genesis 35:19-22.

*Jacob quickly informs Reuben that the position of honor and power that ought to be his has been taken away from him because over forty years (The time from Joseph's sale into slavery and the reunion of Jacob and Joseph is 22 years and Jacob has lived in Egypt for 17 years and this event was prior to Joseph's betrayal.) prior to this he had sexual relations with Jacob's wife and Rachel's maidservant, Bilhah. Reuben did not act like a firstborn son ought to act, preserving the honor of his father but rather he sinned against his father and defiled his father's bed. The word defile is the word that is used to describe all kinds of detestable behaviors.*

4. What does Jacob say about his #2 & #3 sons, Simeon and Levi? What will happen to them in "days to come" and why? Review Genesis 34.

*He condemns these men just as he condemned Reuben, but for a different reason. He condemns them for their anger and their violence. Their violence was expressed most clearly when they deceived and then murdered all the men of the city of Shechem because the son of the king of Shechem seduced and raped their sister. Do you remember Genesis*

34? It is an X-rated story easily as violent as any movie made by Hollywood. He does not want to have anything to do with them because they are such angry and violent men. Jacob says they are under God's curse for their action. He says that God will scatter them in Israel.

5. What is the point Jacob is making by talking about these brothers old sins and God's judgment on them?

*This act of Reuben was mentioned in one verse back in chapter 35. For over 40 years no mention has been made of this act of Reuben's. It would have appeared that he got away with this vile act without any consequence. It has appeared for 40 years as if God did not notice, nor did he care. However, we discover here that God did notice and that God is going to make Reuben pay for what he has done. We've already seen part of his loss of excellence in that Joseph's two boys received the blessing of the firstborn. Reuben's future among the tribes of Israel will be a future of dishonor and insignificance. In fact, after Israel conquers the land of Canaan, Reuben is barely mentioned again. The tribe Reuben fades from the scene of Israel's history.*

*Again, for over 40 years it has appeared that Simeon and Levi have gotten away with murder. Apart from a one sentence, self-pitying protest from their father at the time, their angry violence has gone unnoticed. It appeared as though God were not paying attention, that they were not going to have to suffer any consequence for their deed. But here we find out God did notice and he is going to make them pay. After Israel conquers the land of Canaan, Simeon is given land in the midst of Judah and is dispersed as a distinct tribe. They become a part of Judah and cease to exist as an independent tribe. Levi, on the other hand, is scattered throughout the nation of Israel in 22 cities. In other words, while every other tribe is given a region to live in, the Levites are given no land but instead live in 22 cities that are scattered throughout the nation Israel.*

6. What affect should this have on these 14 sons and on us?

*These three men have lived free and unburdened by their sins. They and the rest of their brothers have presumed that God did not notice or care. Now they are discovering that God has noticed and that God does care. The fact is that most people appear to get away with their sins. Sure,*

*some people go to jail and some people suffer some harm for what they do but most people do not suffer anything due to their sins. What you need to know is that even though no one may notice for over forty years, even for a lifetime, yet God knows. He sees. One day you will have to give an account for what you have done. Right now God is warning you, letting you know that there is a day of accounting on the way when you will be gathered not before a wizened old shepherd but before the glorious King of kings and Lord of lords, Jesus Christ. Nothing is hidden from his sight but all things are open and laid bare before him. On that day everything you whispered in the inner room will be shouted from the housetops, everything hidden will be revealed, including the motives of every man's heart. God is telling you this so that you will repent before it is too late. Confess your sins to God. Tell a trusted friend who can help you fight. Turn from them and flee to Christ who will receive every sinner who comes to him.*

**God reveals the future to us so that we will repent of our sins.**

7. What does Jacob tell his fourth son, Judah about what will happen to him in days to come?

*His brothers will praise him. The verb for praise that is used here is used hundreds of times in the OT and except for here and two other places, it always is used of men praising God. Judah is going to become the chief tribe among the tribes of Israel. He is going to be treated like God by the other tribes of Israel. He is going to subdue all of his enemies. He is compared to a lion who captures his prey, eats his fill and lays down and no one and nothing dare challenge his power. In verse ten Jacob tells his sons that there is going to be a succession of kings from the tribe of Judah that will terminate in one final king. The king of Israel, the king of the Jews will come from the tribe of Judah. This king will be so powerful that the peoples of the world will obey him. In verses 11-12 is a poetic description of the prosperity that this king will usher in. Grapes and wine are used throughout the poetic literature of the OT and the prophets as a symbol of the abundance of heaven. Vines will be so common they will be used as hitching posts. Wine will be so common that it will be used as wash water. His rule will be complete and he will create a time of unrivaled prosperity, peace and abundance for the people of God.*

**8.** What reason is given as to why Judah's future will be so glorious? Is there anything surprising to you about this in light of the Genesis 37-48?

*There is no reason given as to why God is going to do this. This is very surprising given the reality of who Judah is and the preeminence of Joseph for the last 12 chapters. Judah's life has also been full of sin. He is the cynical brother who proposed making a profit off Joseph's demise. Rather than merely killing him, he is the one who suggested they sell him into slavery. Then he is the brother who left his father's family to go live among the Canaanites, the enemies of God and married a Canaanite woman. He is the one whose two oldest sons were wicked and God killed. He is the one who betrayed the widow of his son and refused to take care of her. He is the one who slept with a prostitute who turned out to be his daughter-in-law. He is the hypocrite who was going to have his pregnant daughter-in-law killed for adultery until he discovered that she was pregnant with his baby. Judah is as much of a sinner as Reuben, Simeon and Levi. However, none of his sins are mentioned. There will be no negative consequences for Judah or his descendants. Rather, Judah's future is glorious. Additionally, why Judah and not Joseph? This is completely unexpected. If there were going to be a king, you would have expected him to come from Joseph. Why not Ephraim, most recently given the firstborn's blessing and one of the noble princes of Egypt? He would seem to be the perfect candidate. A son of Jacob and a ruler of the Gentiles. We see God's sovereign grace at work again. God chooses whom he will bless according to the pleasure of his own will.*

**9.** Read 1 Kings 10: 1, 4-9, 23-25. How is Solomon a fulfillment of this prophecy about Judah?

*If you will remember, the first king of Israel was Saul who was from the tribe of Benjamin. However, God rejected him as king because of his disobedience and then he called a young shepherd boy who killed a giant Philistine warrior with his sling shot, David, the son of Jesse, from the tribe of Judah. David subdued all his enemies. He was the warrior king who conquered all the enemies of Israel and finally brought peace to the land. However it was his son Solomon who brought in a period of peace and prosperity that was unrivaled either before or after him. Jacob is describing the reign of King Solomon over 800 years before it happens.*

**10.** Read 1 Kings 11: 9-13, 41-43 and 12: 1-17. How are Solomon and his son Rehoboam not a fulfillment of the prophecy?

*While King Solomon's reign is a fulfillment of this prophecy it is an incomplete prophecy because the rule of Judah will not end while King Solomon's rule came to an end when he died. Then, shortly after his son, Rehoboam became king the scepter did depart from Judah. There was a civil war and the northern ten tribes, led by Ephraim rebelled against Judah and the kingdom was never united again. Judah's brothers never again praised him and never again did all the peoples of the earth come to obey him. In other words the kings of Judah, including Solomon while partially fulfilling this prophecy, did not completely fulfill it.*

**11.** Read Revelation 5. In what ways is this vision of Jesus a fulfillment of Jacob's prophecy in Genesis 49?

*In John's vision God is seated on his throne and in his right hand is a scroll that is sealed with seven seals. This scroll is God's plan for the history of the world. It is his plan to bring an end to this world and to create a new heavens and a new earth. However, in the vision a mighty angel cries out, "who is worthy to break the seals and open the scroll?" In other words, who has the right and the power to implement God's plan for the salvation of the world? Who will be the agent of his wrath and of his mercy? There is no one found worthy in all heaven and earth. John begins to weep, as it appears that God's purposes are going to be thwarted. Then one of the elders says to him, "Do not weep! See the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has triumphed. He is able to open the scroll and its seven seals." Then Jesus appears in John's vision as a lamb, looking as if it had been slain. He takes the scroll from the hand of God. When he takes the scroll, the plan of God for the vindication of his glory into his hand all of heaven falls before the lamb and they sing a new song. The "one to whom the scepter belongs" is the Lord Jesus Christ. He is the Son of David, the Lion of the tribe of Judah. His kingdom will not end. He is the chief of all the sons of Israel and all of his brothers will praise him. He is the one who will put his hand on the necks of all his enemies. All the nations of the world will obey him.*

**12.** In v. 8 what are the two options given as to how people will respond to Judah through his glorious descendant?

*Everyone will either be his brother who will bow before him in worship or his enemy, whom he will cause to bow by his power. Everyone will either bow out of love for Christ or he will cause them to bow by the power of his justice.*

**13.** How do you want to face Jesus, as his enemy or as his brother? If he were to return right now how would you stand before him, as an enemy or as a brother? Why do you think this? How will you respond to this reality?

**God reveals the future to us so that we will trust in and submit to Christ, the Lion of Judah.**

**14.** If you were the child of Jeffrey Dahmer or some other notorious criminal, would you want people to know you were related?

*No. All of us would try to hide the fact that we were related to a notorious criminal because of the shame.*

**15.** Moses, the author of Genesis is a descendant of Jacob and a Levite, why does he hold up his family's "dirty laundry" for all to see?

*If you have read Exodus through Deuteronomy, you know that the Levites are the tribe of Israel given the responsibility and the privilege of serving God as priests and caretakers of the tabernacle. They are not given an inheritance of land among the nation of Israel because they are told, "God is their portion." They are scattered among the nation in 22 cities so that they can instruct the people of Israel in the law of God. Moses, a Levite, is the one who gets to come into the very presence of God on Mt. Sinai and receive the law. Aaron, his brother and then his sons after him, get to offer the sacrifices in the temple and to enter the Most Holy Place, into the very presence of God. The primary point of all these promises is that God is giving them a glorious future not because of who they are but in spite of who they are. God's judgment—I will scatter them in Israel—is at the same time God's grace—they will have him as their portion, rather than a piece of property.*

*The founders of God's holy people are not holy. They are not heroes. They are a bunch of evil bums. Just go down the list. I've already recounted Judah's sins and yet the Messiah will come from him. Zebulun and Issachar both participated in the sale of Joseph and the cover up and yet they are going to inherit land and prosperity in Canaan. All of the descendants of Israel, the people of God who bow before the Lion of Judah, are going to gain an eternal heaven. We have a future hope based upon the gracious promise of God, not based upon our having done something to earn it or deserve it. We are going to heaven because of what Jesus has done for us, not because of what we have done for Jesus.*

**16.** What effect should knowing that the promises are made to us by God's grace and not because of whom we are, have on us?

*We should be full of gratitude and of hope. This knowledge should enable us to endure whatever suffering may come our way as we know we have been given such great promises by God's unmerited favor. What inspires such hope is the knowledge that even though I am such a wicked sinner, yet God has guaranteed me a glorious future through what Jesus Christ has done for me in his death and resurrection. What I believe these sons understand in this prophetic word is that these promises are being given, not because of what they have done but because of God's unmerited, unearned, undeserved kindness. We have such a hope made more sure by the suffering our dear Lord Jesus. Let's live in hope and so persevere in a life of suffering love because we are so overcome with the enormity of what has been promised us in Jesus.*

**17.** How does knowing that God's promises are made to you by grace and not by your goodness affect you?

**God reveals the future to us so that we will live in hope.**