

• *Jacob's word for each son*

### 1. Three sons who have ruined their lives

### 2. One son with a glorious destiny

• *Judah's sin and disgrace*

• *Judah's deep repentance and restoration*

• *Judah will be an honoured royal tribe*

• *Shiloh – a person to come – 'the Peaceful One'*

• *A person of great wealth*

Jacob is aware that he will soon die, and he is about to give his farewell prophecy. He calls his twelve children together<sup>□1</sup> and has a word of assessment and prediction about each of them.

□1 49:1-2

1. **There are three sons who have ruined their lives.** Reuben<sup>□1</sup> was Jacob's firstborn son. As the firstborn son he should have been the ruler of the family but his instability and the sin mentioned in Genesis 35:22 caused him to be disinherited.

□1 49:3-4

**Simeon and Levi**<sup>□1</sup> had likewise ruined their lives by their display of violence and savagery in the incident of Genesis 34:25–26.

□1 49:5-7

2. **There is one son with a glorious destiny.** The leadership of the family is given to **Judah**. We recall the story of his incestuous relationship with his daughter-in-law, in Genesis 38. Judah disgraced himself and revealed himself as a man of crudeness and brutality. When his daughter-in-law was found to be pregnant his only response was '*Bring her out and have her burned to death!*'<sup>□1</sup>. But then it was discovered that he was the father of her child.

□1 38:25

This disgrace obviously had a powerful effect in Judah's life. The next time we meet him<sup>□1</sup> he has become a compassionate man. His speech in Genesis 44:18–34 shows us how tender and merciful he became. His deep repentance led to his becoming a respected person within Jacob's family. The first three brothers, Reuben, Simeon and Levi all forfeited the right to be the leader of the family. Judah had also sinned but his repentance was deep, and it was he that was given the privilege of being the leader and ruler of the family.

□1 43:8-9

*Judah, your brothers shall praise you your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies your father's sons shall bow down before you*<sup>□1</sup>.  
*Judah is a lion's whelp; you have grown up, my son, on prey. He crouches down, he reclined for sleep like a lion, like the king of the animals! Who dares to rouse him?*<sup>□2</sup>

□1 49:8

□2 49:9

Judah will be a royal tribe, honoured by all, the 'lion' among the tribes of Israel. However his role as the leader would be rewarded in a greater way than he ever could have imagined.

*The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and the obedience of the nations comes to him*<sup>□1</sup>.

□1 49:10

Judah will retain its sovereignty as the royal tribe until one particular person comes who is called 'Shiloh'. The phrase is difficult. It clearly refers to a person. It could be a phrase meaning 'He whose right it is'. Or – as I prefer to think – it could be a name. The Hebrew root *sh-l-h* is connected with peace. It could well mean 'the Peaceful One', in which case the royal tribe continues its dominion until 'the Peaceful One' comes. The word is feminine in form but takes a masculine verb. A name with a feminine-type structure could well function in this way. There is a town of the same name. 'Shiloh' (city of peace) was the place where the tabernacle was kept for many years. Later the tabernacle was kept at Jerusalem (a word which also means 'city of peace'!) It is not unknown for a word to be both the name of a person and of a place. 'Canaan' was a person before it was a place-name.

Whatever the precise meaning, 'Shiloh' will be a person of great rule: '*the obedience of the nations comes to him.*' Shiloh' will be a person of great wealth. He lets an ass eat valuable grapes. He washes his clothes in wine<sup>□1</sup>! The days of 'thorns and thistles' will end and a land of abundant luxuriant vines and abundant wine will come instead! He has so much wine his eyes are red, and so much milk his teeth turn white<sup>□2</sup>.

□1 49:11

□2 49:12

• *Jesus born in the line on David – of the tribe of Judah*

• *Judah's identity lost after Jesus had come*

**3. Eight sons whose future will be undistinguished**

• *Seaside dwellers, farmers, fighters and nomads*

• *God's purposes to go forward through Judah and his descendant – the Lion of Judah our Lord Jesus Christ*

There came a time in the history of the world when it looked as if the tribe of Judah had lost sovereignty, and it looked as if the house of David was totally useless. Suddenly in the tribe of Judah and in the house of David, came Someone who proved that Judah had not lost its kingship, and David's line was alive and well. Jesus was born in the line of David.

Shortly after Jesus' coming the tribe of Judah lost its identity. Jerusalem was destroyed in AD 70. The tribal records were lost and today no Jew knows what tribe he is from, and no one knows who descends from the line of David. The sceptre did not depart from Judah, until after Jesus had come – but then it was totally lost.

3. **There are eight sons whose future will be undistinguished, Zebulun** was given territory by the sea<sup>□1</sup>. The tribe of **Issachar** was given a very pleasant land and became a farming people<sup>□2</sup>. **Dan** was a small tribe but its strength was greater than its size<sup>□3</sup>.

Verse 18 is an interruption in the poem. 'I wait for your salvation, O Yahweh.' Amidst all the various events that will come upon the tribes of Israel, salvation will come.

**Gad** had to constantly fight against invaders<sup>□1</sup>. **Asher** occupied fertile land and became prosperous<sup>□2</sup>. **Naphtali** will be productive ('a productive deer, which brings forth beautiful fawns') and will live a peaceful nomadic life<sup>□3</sup>.

**Joseph** receives special attention. Despite his being like a fruitful and protective tree<sup>□1</sup>, he suffered much opposition in his early days<sup>□2</sup>. He remained strong<sup>□3</sup> by the help of God<sup>□4</sup>. A number of names for God are strung together here to underline the greatness of God's protection: Jacob's Mighty One ... Shepherd ... Israel's Rock ... El Shaddai. An abundance of blessings came because of the way in which God used him<sup>□5</sup>. Joseph is treated with warmth and favour but it is noticeable that nothing special is said about his future. The future of God's kingdom would be notable in the tribe of Judah, not in the Joseph-tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh.

**Benjamin** is the last to be mentioned. He is like a violent wolf<sup>□6</sup>. The poem ends<sup>□7</sup> and after Jacob's request to be buried near the family of Abraham<sup>□8</sup>, we are told of his death<sup>□9</sup>.

None of these last eight tribes would produce anything as eminent as that which would happen through Judah. They would be seaside dwellers or farmers or fighters – but the kingdom of God would not go forward through the commonplace blessings of life. They would go forward through One chosen person, God's Elect, the Lion of the Tribe of Judah – our Lord Jesus Christ.

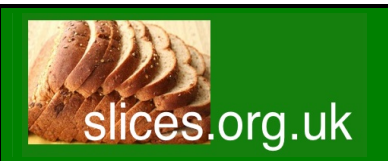
□1 49:13  
□2 49:14-15  
□3 49:16-17

□1 49:19  
□2 49:20  
□3 49:21

□1 49:22  
□2 49:23  
□3 49:24  
□4 48:25

□5 49:25b-26  
□6 49:27

□7 49:28  
□8 49:29-32  
□9 49:33



Dr Michael Eaton is highly respected internationally as a theologian, author, preacher and teacher. He lives in Kenya where he is one of the leaders of the Chrisco Fellowship. His *Preaching Through The Bible* (PTTB) books are highly popular worldwide. Michael Eaton puts the theological and practical meaning of the Bible in a clear and down-to-earth way so that what is written can be easily understood by the reader.



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