



Understanding Israel -

# Blessings and Curses

by Tim Kelley

According to Brad Scott, "God is smarter than we are". Quite a bold statement or an understatement? Depends on who you're talking to. Obviously – we know that God has it all figured out, but if you're talking to HaSatan, he probably figures he's got the upper hand. After all, look at Israel. A chosen people who have, for the most part, made a shambles of their relationship with God. Surely God will not be able to fulfill His plan through them. But God is smarter than us . . . and HaSatan.

As we continue to learn about Israel, we'll see how incredible God's plan for Israel really is . . . and when we get to the writings of Paul, we'll see why Paul called this a great mystery. But we've got a ways to go before we get to the New Testament, because we want to firmly understand what YHVH was doing with Israel in the Old Testament first.

In review we saw that when YHVH called Abraham out of Ur of the Chaldees, He promised Abram a people and a land along with a prophecy that because of Abraham's descendants, all the earth would be blessed. We learned that the term "blessed" in Genesis 12 can also mean "mixed" or "grafted", thus giving a hint of YHVH's plan for Israel. Next we saw that Jacob (Israel) had twelve sons, only one of which was named Judah. We also saw that Joseph, the oldest son of his loved wife, Rachael, was granted the status of firstborn of the family, which in those days, made him the leader and "priest" of the family. Because the firstborn of the family was entitled to a *double portion*, Jacob (whose name had been changed to *Israel*) adopted Joseph's two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, thus giving them equal parts with Joseph's brothers. He said that Joseph's sons would inherit the name "Israel" and then he gave Ephraim, the younger son, the greater blessing, basically stating that Ephraim would fill up the nations.

Now, let's look at what was prophesied for Jacob's other sons.

Genesis chapter 49 is a prophecy of what will happen to the descendants of Israel in the *latter days*, but even though they are latter day prophecies, some of them have already begun to come to pass. Going down through the list, we see that Reuben, Jacob's first son, basically receive a curse with Jacob saying "you will not excel". Simeon and Levi would be scattered amongst the tribes, which basically happened when Simeon's inheritance was surrounded by Judah and Levi was given no inheritance except for the tithes of the people. The other tribes, except for Judah and Joseph, were given minor blessings which, in some ways, may help us identify their whereabouts today.

Judah's blessing was significant. We talked earlier about how in ancient times, the family's birthright and blessing went to the oldest son. This was done because that firstborn son was "the beginning of his strength"<sup>1</sup>, but in the case of Jacob, the birthright and blessing were split. Why? Because Reuben, the actual firstborn, refused to fulfill the role. Look at how Jacob describes the character of the firstborn-

<sup>NKJ</sup> **Genesis 49:3** "Reuben, you are my firstborn, My might and the beginning of my strength, The excellency of dignity and the excellency of power.

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<sup>1</sup> Deut. 21:17

The firstborn was to be the image of his father, the tool through which the aspirations of the father could be fulfilled. He was to be full of dignity and strength, somewhat of an oxymoron when you consider that power often corrupts. Obviously, Reuben didn't qualify since he stole from his father by taking his father's concubine. Instead of rising to the role, Jacob says of Reuben-

**NKJ Genesis 49:4** (you are) Unstable as water, you shall not excel . . .

So Reuben was passed over for the blessing. Likewise, Simeon and Levi were passed over because they brought shame to the family in the matter of Shechem.

Next in line was Judah. Like his half-brother Joseph, Judah had redeeming qualities, for Judah was the son who was willing to give his own life for the lives of the family. Let's look back at what Judah said when the family was facing extinction -

**ESV Genesis 43:8** And Judah said to Israel his father, "Send the boy with me, and we will arise and go, that we may live and not die, both we and you and also our little ones.

Let's consider what had happened. Joseph had been sold into slavery and as far as Jacob or his children knew, he was dead. Now Simeon was being held captive in Egypt and was as good as dead.<sup>2</sup> And if they didn't soon return to Egypt, the rest of them would be dead. What then would have happened to the promise of their fathers, Abraham and Isaac? Did Judah understand that there was a lot at stake, not just their physical lives? I would assume he did. He probably realized that He was the last hope that the promises given by YHVH to Abraham could be fulfilled. Thus, he in essence, *sacrificed* himself for the sake of the family.

Thus, Jacob thought it best to give the blessing to Judah. The birthright, the right of the double portion had already been given to Joseph because Joseph had maintained his dignity throughout his trials, but Judah wanted to maintain the strength of the family. The word strength is an interesting word. In Hebrew, it's *az* ( אֲזַק Strong's 5784) and means strong, might, fierce. The etymology of the word indicates a strong weapon. Thus Judah, by receiving the blessing, became the strong leader of the family. This is evident by the fact that Jacob characterized Judah as a lion who would gain the honor of his brothers, and to whom his brothers would pay homage, just as they had already done to their brother Joseph. Judah's blessing of strength, power, and ruler-ship was portrayed in the life of King David.

On the other hand, Joseph's blessing was that of wealth and population. The blessing says that Joseph's branched (descendants) would "run over the wall" – in other words, *could not be contained*. Joseph's blessing included those from heaven and from the deep (abundant rain, abundant minerals). But Joseph's blessing also have an interesting twist. Let's look at part of this blessing from two different translations –

**ESV Genesis 49:26** The blessings of your father are mighty beyond the blessings of my parents, up to the bounties of the everlasting hills. May they be on the head of Joseph, and on the brow of him who was set apart from his brothers.

**LXE Genesis 49:26** the blessings of thy father and thy mother-- it has prevailed above the blessing of the lasting mountains, and beyond the blessings of the everlasting hills; they shall be upon the head of Joseph, and upon the head of the brothers of whom he took the lead.

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<sup>2</sup> Gen.42:36

In these two translations, the underlined words were taken from the Hebrew word *naziyr* (נזיר Strong's 5139) and means *consecrated or devoted ones*. This is the first time this word is used in the scriptures and this same word is often translated *Nazarite*. Thus, the second century BC translators of the Septuagint understood this scripture to indicate that at the end time, Joseph would be set apart to lead his brothers.

In essence, the birthright that would normally have gone to the oldest son was split between Judah and Joseph. The blessing of rulership was given to Judah, but the blessing of material wealth and leadership would be given to Joseph. And since both Judah and Joseph are pictures of The Messiah, we will be able to find the ultimate manifestations of these characteristics in Him.

As time went on Joseph and his brothers died and their descendants, the Israelites, multiplied in the land of Egypt. While in Egypt, they apparently lost sight of YHVH's ways, but they remembered the covenant promises given to their fathers, Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

**ESV Genesis 15:13 - 14** Then the LORD said to Abram, "Know for certain that your offspring will be sojourners in a land that is not theirs and will be servants there, and they will be afflicted for four hundred years. But I will bring judgment on the nation that they serve, and afterward they shall come out with great possessions.

During the 40 years Israel was in the wilderness, two men rose fame in addition to Moses, and Aaron. They were Joshua, from the tribe of Ephraim and Caleb from the tribe of Judah. These two stood out above the rest of Israel in that they believed the promises of YHVH and as a result, gained access to the Promised Land.

Toward the end of the wilderness journey, Moses again pronounced blessings on the tribes. Though the blessings for most of the tribes were quite different from those spoken three hundred or so years earlier by Jacob, the one for Joseph was almost identical to the earlier one, leading one to believe that Moses' prophecies were *end-time* prophecies as well. If that is true, then the prophecy for Judah is something we want to take note of because it seems to indicate a thought that is not all that common in the Messianic world. Let's examine the prophecy –

**ESV Deuteronomy 33:7** And this he said of Judah: "Hear, O LORD, the voice of Judah, and bring him in to his people. With your hands contend for him, and be a help against his adversaries."

**TNK Deuteronomy 33:7** And this he said of Judah: Hear, O LORD the voice of Judah And restore him to his people. Though his own hands strive for him, Help him against his foes.

What exactly is this saying? Is this speaking of a physical gathering of Judah back to Judea, or is it a spiritual reconciliation between Judah and the rest of Israel? Possibly a *grafting back in* to the olive tree of Israel as spoken of by Paul?<sup>3</sup> I submit the latter, for Paul understood what he taught through his thorough knowledge of the scripture.

Before he died, Moses reiterated Israel's history to the tribes. He repeated God's instructions to them, basically everything that YHVH had revealed over the past 40 years since their fathers left Egypt. He also emphasized Israel's purpose in being given the law. He said –

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<sup>3</sup> Romans 11

**ESV Deuteronomy 4:5-8** See, I have taught you statutes and rules, as the LORD my God commanded me, that you should do them in the land that you are entering to take possession of it. <sup>6</sup> Keep them and do them, for that will be your wisdom and your understanding in the sight of the peoples, who, when they hear all these statutes, will say, 'Surely this great nation is a wise and understanding people.' <sup>7</sup> For what great nation is there that has a god so near to it as the LORD our God is to us, whenever we call upon him? <sup>8</sup> And what great nation is there, that has statutes and rules so righteous as all this law that I set before you today?

Israel's purpose was to be a light to the nations. If they would *cling* to YHVH through obedience to His Torah instructions, the nations would want to be like them, and they would have divine protection from their enemies. On the other hand, should they turn away from His Torah, the blessings would be withheld and would be replaced by curses that would eventually lead to them being expelled from the land.

Though we are not going to spend time discussing the blessings and curses of Leviticus 26 and Deuteronomy 28, 29, & 30, it's important to realize that these passages define the curse that would later befall Israel and Judah. This is the curse spoken of Daniel 9:11. It is the *curse of the law* Paul referred to in the book of Galatians<sup>4</sup>.

At the end of the discussion of the curse and how the nations would view and question what had happened to Israel, Moses makes this interesting statement –

**NKJ Deuteronomy 29:29** "The secret things belong to the LORD our God, but those things which are revealed belong to us and to our children forever, that we may do all the words of this law.

What does this mean? Let's take it apart . . .

Remember, this passage begins with the nations asking why YHVH would bring to destruction an entire nation and their land? Other nations respond by saying it's because they broke His law. In essence, this is what Moses feared at the sin of the Golden Calf - - their God gave them this terrible law that they couldn't keep then He destroyed them for not keeping it. This is exactly what HaSatan wants us to believe. But wait! While in their captivity, Israel begins to repent and turn back to YHVH and to His Torah, and just as it was with Job, the latter end is better than the beginning!

This is the Mystery spoken of by the prophets and the New Testament writers . . . how is YHVH going to make an example of holiness out of a banished people. It's quite clear for those of us who understand YHVH's commitment to Israel and His covenant with the fathers, but quite difficult for others. It's all a matter of repentance and forgiveness, something that HaSatan apparently has a hard time grasping. To better understand Moses' statement, let me submit this paraphrase –

*The concealed plans of YHVH are always revealed to us and our sons as we apply the words of this Torah.*

As we study the Torah and see in the Torah YHVH's love for His people and His willingness to forgive them, we can better understand how all this will work out. 'Brings to mind this scripture.

**NKJ Mark 4:22-23** "For there is nothing hidden which will not be revealed, nor has anything been kept secret but that it should come to light. <sup>23</sup> If anyone has ears to hear, let him hear."

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<sup>4</sup> Galatians 3:13

At the death of Moses, Joshua, the descendant of Joseph, took over the leadership responsibilities of Israel and lead her across the Jordan River into the promised land. After settling into the land, Israel's history was marked with many inter-tribal conflicts. It's incorrect to assume that Israel was at any time after the death of Joshua, a united kingdom. These inter-tribal conflicts continued through the reign of Saul until David was anointed king over all Israel.

This where we'll start next time.

Shalom Aleichem!