

We're ready now to resume our study in the book of Genesis, chapter 49. We've begun taking a look at the specifics of Jacob's final blessing on his sons. We know that this is divinely inspired.

It is an oracle from God that is binding. We remember the attitude that Esau and Jacob had about Isaac's blessing, because, knowing that once given it cannot be retracted, it is an oracle that, in a sense, defines the future. One of the things that we noted in our Scripture reading this morning from the Psalms is that there can be difficult circumstances.

There can be hard times for a variety of reasons. We've done studies in the past on why Christians suffer: suffering for discipline, suffering for blessing. There are 11 or 12 different possible reasons why we undergo stress, and most of them are designed for blessing, to encourage our growth, to turn us when we're starting to head in the wrong direction, to strengthen our weak areas, to give us the opportunity to apply the Word of God, and to put into practice the things that are up to that point perhaps only theoretical, or what the denominational churches like to call head knowledge instead of heart knowledge.

But one of the reasons I wanted to cover that particular concept in Scripture is, let's say that a few generations after Jacob, or maybe many generations after Jacob, you wake up some morning and realize that you're in the tribe of Dan, or you're in the tribe of Issachar, and the destiny of your portion of Israel has been predicted by your ancestor Jacob. And he says, "Well, Issachar is a strong donkey lying down between two burdens. He saw that rest was good and that the land was pleasant, so he bowed his shoulder to bear a burden and became a band of slaves."

You think, "Well, this doesn't bode too well. Where's the prosperity and the green pastures and the still waters and the fruitful vine and the every man with his own olive tree and that kind of thing? This sounds like him buckling down under the load and deciding, 'Well, why even get up again?'" and just turning into a band of slaves." We are subject to forces beyond our control.

We are born into circumstances, whether it be our genetic heritage, our race, or our gender, or there's all kinds of things that people think trap them and make them victims. But there's nothing in our circumstances that cannot be turned to advantage. Disadvantages become advantages under the power of God.

When we turn at His reproof, when we respond to His correction, when we pursue His calling, things that may have appeared to be disadvantages turn into advantages. I saw a little bit of the Iron Man competition from 1999, how they fill stuff on TV on Saturday afternoons, and I was busy doing something else, had the TV playing in the background, and it caught my eye because they were showing the Iron Man competition. They swim some unholy distance, and then they ride a bicycle for some other incredible distance, and then they run a marathon at the end of that, and whoever gets there first wins.

It's incredibly challenging. Most people, a marathon would kill the average one of us, but they run this 26 miles after having done this long swim and the bike. I didn't see the swimming portion, but they were showing not only the well-conditioned athletes in training that were competing for this honor of winning the Iron Man, they also showed people who were in wheelchairs or with a peg leg—or I probably shouldn't say peg leg—with an artificial limb or other disabilities, who decided that they were going to run the Iron Man competition.

There was one man in particular; his son is a quadriplegic. His son looks a lot like Stephen Hawking, if you've ever seen that famous physicist who can't even speak except through using a computer, and has the normal physical appearance of someone with quadriplegia in that the limbs are twisted, and he had very limited ability to maybe wave his arms, but he's essentially helpless. Well, they made a special chair and bolted on the front of a 15-year-old racing bike, and his father carried his son all the way through these three different events.

I assume he strapped him on his back or had some other means of towing him when he did the swimming. I didn't see that part, but the part where I started watching was where they were in the bicycle thing, and you've seen these infant seats that sit on the back of a bike or even up between the handlebars. Well, they had a modified form of that up in front of the handlebars, and his father—and he knew he wasn't going to come in first or place or anything—they just wanted to do it because his father does all of these things with his son, and his son enjoys getting out, and so they had worked out and trained for this.

His father is 59 years old, and the son was in his early 20s or probably closer to 30, but it really meant a lot to them to finish. And so during the bicycle portion, something went wrong with their bike. It was 15 years old, and the front brake came loose some kind of way, and the headwinds came up on this island where they were competing, and everybody else passed them by. They were the last ones.

It was one vehicle trailing them. It got dark, and he was still pedaling away, and then this happened, and they had to wait half an hour while someone brought a replacement part for their bike, and they were too late. They had hoped to make the minimum cutoff time.

There's a time you have to arrive at the changeover point to go to the run where you're officially in the race. After a certain time, there's no point in going because you're not still officially recognized in the race. Well, because of this delay, there was no way they could make that time, but once the part came, they did it anyway, and he went to the changeover point and then got a thing.

You've seen the kind of the three-wheeled buggies. Some of y'all have one where you can take an infant while you're running. Well, they had a modified form of this with some armrests on it, and they changed over and went because they wanted to finish.

It was a very moving thing to see the point at which they crossed the finish line. I think it was very meaningful for the father and for the son, and the reason is that they overcame a great adversity. They showed many others who finished.

There's a man who was a Navy SEAL and took a bullet in the spine down in Panama and was a paraplegic, lost the use of his legs, but he decided rather than focusing on what he had lost to focus on what he had left, and so he developed tremendous, amazing upper body strength, and he strapped himself in a racing wheelchair, and you could see him pushing himself backward, dragging his legs behind him down to the beach to do the swim portion. And then he got on a bicycle that had—it was like an upside-down bicycle—the pedals were up where your hands are, and he pedaled himself all the way through the bike part with his hands. And then when he got to the run part, he got in his racing wheelchair, and just using his hands, he had special gloves, and I could see him hooking those rings on the wheels with his thumbs. Twenty-six miles up and downhill against winds and everything else. He had done it in '98, and in '99 he beat his own record time by half an hour.

So my point in bringing up that illustration is that even in the secular world, people can recognize that they have a limitation or a disability or a disadvantage and use that to make it an advantage. And the experience that those people had in the Ironman, the sweet sense of victory in crossing the line in the face of those things, gave them something they might never have experienced if they had been normal people. All of us, I think, growing up in school learned about Wilma Rudolph, who, growing up as a child, had her legs so badly burned they said she would never walk, but her mother massaged her legs every day in the morning and in the evening, and she ended up becoming an Olympic runner. And there are many, many stories like that of people. We just saw Lance Armstrong win the Tour de France again this year after overcoming testicular cancer.

So people tend to think, “Well, my circumstances have limited me. My situation has made it impossible for me. I'm unable; I'm not party to the opportunities that others might have who don't have my set of circumstances.” But in the spiritual realm, it is even more true that God can take disadvantages and turn them to advantages.

People in these tribes in Israel might look back at their heritage. They might look back at this blessing from Jacob and say, “Well, what's the point? I'm doomed to be a slave if I'm in the tribe of Issachar, or I'm going to be nothing but a warrior if I'm in the tribe of Benjamin, and it's all been predicted. It's set in the past.

“I can't change it, so just go with the flow. I'll just sit down between the two burdens and become a slave.” Individual believers in every age have the opportunity to respond to the call of God and to reach heights that eye has not seen and ear has not heard and that haven't even entered into the heart of man, things that God has prepared for us, and in some cases we could not get there except for the disabilities and the disadvantages that we started with.

It is that very thing that God can use to push us beyond where we might have gone if we just had the average standard issue of circumstances. So my encouragement to all of us as we look at these blessings is not to think, “Well, this is a curse instead of a blessing.” Remember, this is the blessing that Jacob is pronouncing on his sons, and even in this blessing he pronounces discipline, and he says, “Reuben, you're not going to inherit.

“You're not going to fulfill your potential as the firstborn.” But what about the offspring of Reuben? Are they all going to be embittered wannabes and might-have-hads and should-have-beens? Not at all. Regardless of what tribe Israelites were born into, they had the same God, they had the same promises that were given to Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob, and regardless of their destiny as a tribe, which is symbolic and is communicative at the symbolic level for believers in every generation since, the individuals within those tribes—and if you look at the later history of Israel, there are men from these tribes who do extraordinary things.

Levi doesn't get a very good shrift here in the blessing from Jacob, but there are some great Levites in the later history of Israel who do amazing things. So it is just a reminder that our fate is in our own hands, the extent to which we avail ourselves of God's mercy. It's just like the psalm that we looked at this morning.

What do we do with the hard things that may have come to us from God's hand? We can just settle into them and absorb it and say, “Well, c'est la vie, that's just the way it is,” or we can see the potential that God builds in, even in discipline, even in judgment. The worst things that ever happened to Israel, there was always a remnant who availed themselves of the grace of God and who used that time to distinguish themselves and to be lights in the midst of a dark and perverse generation, who became heroes of the faith, prophets who were sawed asunder. I heard a fellow on the radio this morning going through Hebrews chapter 11, talking about the heroes of the faith that suffered adversity, but they claimed the promises of God in those circumstances, and their faith was brought to light.

So, it is not just an adversity; it's an opportunity, if we look at it that way. So again, when we see in verse 3, “Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength,” he has all of the advantages.

He's born with all of the things you would think, “Well, victory is going to go to the strong here. He's got it sewed up. He's got the excellence of majesty, or dignity, and the excellency of power.”

When it says excellency, it's repeated twice in verse 3b: excellency of dignity and excellency of power. He's got not only a natural gift for leadership and a charismatic influence on those around him; he is awe-inspiring. He may have been physically very impressive and physically very powerful and had a commanding presence.

You know, this is what people are looking for. This is in demand. This seems to ensure success at the human level.

But that same word that is translated excellency in verse 3b shows up in verse 4a: “Unstable as water, you shall not excel.” And the word excel there is from the same word.

It's Yatar, Y-A-T-A-R. It's a very rare word in Hebrew and in the Bible, but it's used three times here in the space of two verses. And in a way, it implies the fact that these are rare gifts.

It's a rare opportunity that Reuben has, but he blows it. Why? Because he is unstable. In verse 4a here, the word translated unstable is another one of these kind of rare words.

It appears to mean something along the lines of frothy or troubled or uncontrollable. And when you think about water, when you can control and channel the power of water, you get hydroelectric power being produced from a dam. Or you get—I have a picture from my ancestors a hundred-some-odd years ago where they had a mill that was driven by a water wheel.

And you can put the wheel in the water and it will get power and accomplish things that would take many, many people or many, many animals to do. But if you can't control the water, when there's floods, when the water is unruly, we've all seen hurricane waters, we've seen flood waters. When the water is out of control, it damages instead of benefiting.

I've been reading a fascinating book talking about the history of Egypt and why the various dynasties rose and fell and what produced famines and plagues and things. And the flooding of the Nile, of course, everyone knows that's what gave that valley its fertile agricultural potential, was the annual flooding of the Nile. And this silt and rich soil that had washed down from the upper regions, which is actually the southern part of Egypt, would come down and be distributed over the land.

And it was a natural fertilizer and they had incredible crops. But when the Nile over-flooded, and they've just recently begun to figure out that there are records that indicate that there were periods when the Nile flooded way too much, well, the water didn't recede and they couldn't plant crops.

And in the midst of all of this water and all of this fertile soil, they couldn't produce anything because it was too much water. It wouldn't get out of the way and let them—but rice maybe is all they could try to grow. So if you cannot control the power, if you cannot—if you don't have guidance and direction, you're like a ship under full sail with no rudder.

And this is why it is so much a part of life to learn self-control. Sometimes it has to be imposed from the outside. It has to be taught by parents or by boot camp or by a military experience or in some other rigorous environment.

Sometimes we learn it through trial and error. But to have self-control, this is what Reuben lacks. He's got all of these gifts, but he can't control himself.

He's apparently impulsive. He has a surge. This frothiness of the water may also speak of his passion.

He has this passion. I'm not so sure that it was a physical desire as it was a passion to seize leadership in the family that caused him to go up to his father's couch and to sleep with Jacob's concubine, Bilhah. And that is what is specifically referred to here.

“Unstable as water, you shall not excel.” He says, “You're the excellence of majesty and you're the excellence of power, but you're not going to excel. You're frothy as water or troubled like water.”

That passage, I think it's over in Isaiah 58 or thereabouts. It says, “The wicked are like the troubled sea when it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, for the wicked.”

Why will he not excel? Verse 4: because you went up to your father's bed, then you defiled it. He went up to my couch. And this, of course, refers back to what we had recorded earlier in Genesis where he went up and slept with Bilhah and his father Israel heard of it.

And we had a very brief reference to this in 35:22 of Genesis. When he pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder, it happened when Israel dwelt in that land that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine, and Israel heard. It doesn't say that anything happened.

And it puts us in mind of, in a later generation, when Joab murders Abner to revenge the death of his own brother. David doesn't do anything to him at the time, but he curses him from his deathbed. And when you go over to 1 Kings chapter 2, verses 5 and 6, you see a similar thing.

You wonder if perhaps, whether it was fear of retaliation or consequences, to discipline the individual at the time. But because Reuben seems to be very powerful in the family, it may be that Jacob didn't feel up to disciplining him at the time. But on his deathbed, he pronounces this curse.

David does the same thing in 1 Kings 2:5. He says, “Moreover, you know also what Joab, the son of Zeruiah, did to me and what he did to the two commanders of the armies of Israel, to Abner, the son of Ner, and Amasa, the son of Jether, whom he killed. He shed the blood of war in peacetime and put the blood of war on his belt that was around his waist and on his sandals that were on his feet.

“Therefore do according to your wisdom and do not let his gray hair go down to the grave in peace.” And so David charges his son Solomon to pass judgment and sentence on Joab. But David himself didn't do it.

And here in the same way, Jacob seems to be giving the parting shot to Reuben for this grave infraction in the past. He says, “You went up to your father's bed, then you defiled it.” This word defile is a word that means to take something holy and render it unclean.

At all the times in Leviticus when you see defiled and unclean, it's the same word. And this tells us that the marriage bed is undefiled, as Paul tells us in the New Testament. And to breach the bounds of marriage—and we ask ourselves, “Well, it seems like this was polygamy.”

And it was. However, it is still sanctified. There is sanctity in the marriage relationship between Jacob and Bilhah that was violated by Reuben for his own purposes, whatever they may have been.

We're not told. But you will recall that over in Leviticus, you have the statements regarding uncovering the nakedness of various individuals and the prohibited relationships. And, of course, that uncovering the nakedness in chapter 18 of Leviticus is a euphemism or a phrase that means physical relations, sexual intimacy.

And he says in verse 8 of Leviticus 18, "The nakedness of your father's wife, you shall not uncover. It is your father's nakedness." And this is distinct from verse 7, where it says, "The nakedness of your father or the nakedness of your mother, you shall not uncover.

"She is your mother. You shall not uncover her nakedness." And Reuben might have been able to say, "Well, she's not really my mother. She's a sort of a stepmother, one of three."

However, the law of God, which is later written down here in 18:8, says that even if she's a wife, not your mother, you still cannot. And all of these different forms of sexual immorality that are spoken of there are prohibited.

By the way, there's a sort of a sarcastic email floating around where I guess Dr. Laura or somebody on radio was pointing out that the Bible prohibits homosexuality and says that it's an abomination. And so this little email comes out and says, "Oh, well, I appreciate you straightened that out for me. Now I've got a few questions for you."

And then it asks, "My neighbors are complaining when I sacrifice the ox out here on my altar," and, you know, finding things that we don't observe in—you know, backtalking teenagers should be stoned to death. "Should I do it myself or should I invite all the neighbors over?" And this kind of thing.

It's making a mockery of things in the Word of God and saying, "Well, in the same way that we don't observe those, we shouldn't be observing the prohibition against homosexuality." And I've seen people make some attempts to try to answer those observations.

But in a nutshell, if you look at Leviticus 18, down in verse 22 of that same chapter, "You shall not lie with a male as with a woman. It is an abomination, nor shall you mate with any animal to defile yourself with it, nor shall any woman stand before an animal to mate with it. It is perversion."

All of these things are placed in the same category. It's in the same category with incest and with adultery and a man sleeping with his aunt or his—it says, don't take a mother and her daughter and a woman and her sister and that sort of thing. "You will not lie carnally in verse 20 with your neighbor's wife to defile yourself with her."

These are all put on the same par. And people say, "Well, there was a death penalty for homosexuality." Well, that's not indicated here.

What it says is verse 29, "Whoever commits any of these abominations, that person who commits them shall be cut off from among their people." They are—their citizenship in Israel is revoked. They are cast out.

They do not inherit. They don't have any privileges. They don't approach for worship.

They're cut off from the fellowship of Israel. It doesn't specifically say that they are killed here. And all of these offenses are put on the same level.

So in the same way that you would treat incest, adultery, bestiality, that's the category into which homosexuality is placed. And people who try to say, "Oh, well, it's ridiculous to have the death penalty for homosexuality. Look at all these other ridiculous things in the Bible."

Well, don't base it on this passage. Is it an abomination? Yes. But so is sleeping with your neighbor's wife.

So are bestiality and sleeping with a mother and her daughter at the same time and that sort of thing. Well, if people think homosexuality is OK, then do they think all these other things are OK? And if not, where do they draw the line and why?

So these sort of superficial, oversimplistic ideas don't bear weight if you look at what the Bible says in context. Anyway, this that Reuben did was wrong. It's wrong in six different ways.

And because of that, and it seems to be a metaphor or symbolic of his problem, it's a manifestation of a problem. It isn't just the offense. It's the fact that this seems to be something that's typical of him.

It says, "You went up to your father's bed and defiled it." And then he says, "He went up to my couch." And it's very strange in Hebrew because the person changes.

He is addressing Reuben in the first person and second person. "My couch, you went up to your father's bed." Talks about Reuben in the second person and himself in the third person.

"You went up to your father's bed, then you defiled it." Then it is as though he turns his attention to the rest of the brothers and he says, "He went up to my couch." You get the idea that really he had finished at the end of verse 4 when he says, "Then you defiled it."

And then Jacob still—it's as though he can't believe it. He looks at the rest of the brothers and he says, "He went up to my couch," which is just unconscionable to violate that relationship, especially when you think of the timing.

You calculate how old Leah must have been at that time. I seriously doubt she wasn't a desirable woman when Jacob married her. He preferred Rachel.

And then Bilhah, her handmaid, is going to be somewhere in the vicinity of Leah's age. She's Leah's handmaid and Leah is Reuben's mother. So he goes into this servant girl who's already been the mother of two sons back not long after he was born.

What's the attraction? It is far more likely to have been a seizure of power in the family, the details of which are not recorded. But it's not just the immoral act; it's the motivation behind it.

And his power and his charisma and his ability to seduce Bilhah was used for his own purposes. And so Jacob turns to the sons and says, "Look what he did. He went up to my couch."

So the point here is you can start with all the advantages, but your choices can fritter them all away. And that's something even secular humanity has recognized. So you might think, "Well, the privileges of the firstborn then would devolve to the next in line, Simeon or Levi."

But he says in verse 5, "Simeon and Levi are brothers. Instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place." Well, right away we have to do some work in Hebrew because obviously Simeon and Levi are brothers.

That sort of goes without saying. And so someone said, "Well, this is talking about the fact that they are alike, that they're confederated, they're closer, they sort of make a unit." The two of them are addressed together.

So they're perhaps confederated or allied. And the word brothers is used in this sense in 1 Kings 9:13 and 1 Kings 20:32. But it doesn't make real good sense.

And when we start working on the next phrase, this is notoriously difficult. This puzzled ancient interpreters and modern as well. "Instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place."

Well, none of these words are right. Instruments—the only thing that's right in there is cruelty or violence. But there's a word here called makharat.

The consonants are M-C-R-H. And this is almost a hapax legomenon in Scripture. In fact, in this form, it is a hapax.

It's the only place that it's found. And so they've tried to figure out, "Well, what does this mean?" Because literally it says, "Their makharat are weapons of violence," if you treat this as a phrase.

So what is makharat? And so some people just say, "Well, their instruments are weapons of cruelty," or "Their weapons are instruments of cruelty," or just make it a synonym. And it doesn't really say anything.

Well, karah, C-A-R-A-H, has two or three different meanings, or there are words that are spelled the same that have different meanings. There are two or three different roots. One of them means to dig.

And we have kor, C-O-R, that's related to this. And you remember the passage in the Psalms where it says, "They pierced my hands and my feet." I think it's Psalm 22, where it says that my hands and feet they have pierced.

Well, the word pierced there is from kor, and the root meaning of that word is to dig or to bore a hole in something. That's one root of karah. Another one means a trade or do merchandise, to engage in business and transact business, karah.

And then a third root means to feast, to have a feast and celebrate something. It's complicated by the fact that if you change the final H to a T, you have karat. And when you make this a feminine plural and put a suffix on the end to indicate that it belongs to men in the plural, this could also be from karat.

And put the mem in front of it and it takes the noun karat, or the verb karat, which means to cut, and makes it a noun. And it becomes ma-karat. And this would have the idea of cutting as with a circumcision knife or circumcision sword, because we know from the context that this is referring back to what happened at Shechem.

They were planning a wedding feast, so you have the idea of karah in the sense of feast. They got the men to circumcise themselves and then took advantage of them, so you have the idea of ma-karat being a circumcision knife. You also have the idea of a covenant or a treaty, and karat is the verb used with barit.

The word barit means covenant, and it doesn't say we drew up a covenant or we made a covenant, it says we cut a covenant. Whenever you see that phrase in the Old Testament, made a covenant, it's karat plus barit. You cut a covenant because you would actually grave this into stone, and so you get the idea that there is, as I mentioned in the first session, these words are poetic, they resonate, they imply several things, and all of this refers back to that time in Shechem where they agreed, they made a covenant, they cut a covenant with Hamor and Shechem to let their sister Dinah be married, and they had the men be circumcised, and yet they used that circumcision as a weapon against those men.

But I find that this actually works best if you take verse 5, "Simeon and Levi," and put a colon after it, because this is the heading: Simeon and Levi. He has turned—we know Jacob has just turned to the group because he says, "He went up to my couch," and so he's already addressing the brothers—and now he says, "Simeon and Levi," and he addresses them, and you put a colon there, and the word brothers goes down with instruments, the word translated instruments, and what this—an equally good translation would be, "Simeon and Levi: brothers, they destroyed; they treated violently their covenantors, the men who entered into covenant with them, they treated violently."

This, in fact, when it says, "Brothers, they destroyed," this is the way the Samaritan Pentateuch—you know, the Samaritans kept their own copy of the books of Moses. Sometimes when we have textual problems, we can look at theirs, and their version will preserve a better reading. Now, there are other places where they consciously changed it to their own advantage, and you have to be careful of the Samaritan Pentateuch, but in many cases it's a good reference when we're looking at obscure passages, because it will preserve an older and better reading.

So the Samaritan Pentateuch and the Septuagint, which was translated—this is before the Masoretic text really came into prominence—when they translated the Septuagint, when you look at the Greek that came from the Hebrew manuscripts that existed circa 300 BC, it also says, "Brothers, they destroyed," and this really makes better sense: "Simeon and Levi, brothers they destroyed; they treated violently their covenantors," and here that ma-karat would be those who are karat, who are cutting a covenant.

But all of those ideas are wrapped up in this. What did they do? They took something that was supposed to be peaceful, a covenant, a time of feasting, a time of fraternal relationship. If Hamor and Shechem become their brother-in-law and father-in-law to their sister Dinah, then they're going to be brothers, they're going to enter into a fraternal relationship with the men of Shechem.

But they converted that into violence. They used a ruse, a deceit, and used peace to wreak havoc and violence on these men. He says in verse 6, "Let not my soul enter their counsel, let not my honor be united to their assembly."

Well, what is Jacob's soul? What is his honor? Well, this speaks of the eternal things associated with Jacob, doesn't it? This is the blessing of Jacob, this is the heritage of Jacob, the promises that God has made to him.

His honor is the glory associated with Israel, and he says, he's not just talking about himself personally, he's on his deathbed, but in the years to come and in the generations to come, Jacob's honor and Jacob's soul is not going to connect itself with their assembly. They assembled themselves for a covenant and they turned it into an assembly for warfare and violence, and deceitful violence. It wasn't honorable, it wasn't right, it wasn't justified.

And so he says, "Do not join my soul to their counsel, let not my honor be united to their assembly." Why? "For in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they hamstrung an ox."

When you go back and read the account of the destruction of Shechem, there's nothing in there about oxen and there's nothing in there about hamstringing them. It doesn't make much sense to hamstring an ox. You can hamstring horses; you have that over in Judges, or maybe it's Joshua, during the course of a battle they hamstrung some horses.

But hamstringing an ox, oxen don't move that fast to begin with. And as it turns out, this is not really the best translation of this, and to make a long story short, the word here for hamstrung also means to uproot, and the word that is translated ox, if you just repoint it in Hebrew, it means wall.

Because also, in Hebrew poetry or in Hebrew oracles of this nature, you state something and then when you restate it in the next line, it should be an advance, it should be even worse. "Six things does God hate, yea, seven are an abomination to Him." The next line should get stronger.

And to slay a man, how can hamstringing an ox? It's weaker. It's a less onerous thing to say. But, "In their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they uprooted a wall."

And this was the wall of protection around Jacob. Jacob has to get up and leave the Shechem area because of this. There was an understanding, there was a separate but cordial relationship between the house of Jacob and the people of Shechem, Hamor and so on.

And not only did they slay a man, but they uprooted and destroyed a relationship between two neighboring peoples, which is a larger thing. It reminds me of a serviceman over in Okinawa who got drunk and went up and defaced a bunch of graves in a Japanese cemetery. Well, it's one thing to deface a headstone, but that action disrupted the relations between the United States and Japan and made it much more difficult for the United States to continue to justify their presence on the island because this is just one more way the Japanese can argue, the Okinawans can argue, that the Marines shouldn't even be there.

And so in this way it is an acceleration. And what does this mean? Once again, you have Simeon and Levi pursuing their own interests. Reuben was disqualified because he pursued his own goals and his own interests, had all of his advantages and turned them into a perverse direction.

Simeon and Levi do the same thing, where they looked like they were going to have a feast, looked like they were going to cut a covenant. It's as though in modern English, if you wanted to use a real loose translation, their treaty pen is a weapon of violence. The treaty pen that they were going to sign that covenant with, they picked it up and stabbed the guy in the throat.

Let not my soul enter their counsel. Let not my honor be united to their assembly. Psalm 1:1: "Blessed is the man that walks not in the counsel of the ungodly, or stands in the way of sinners, or sits in the seat of the scornful."

They're scornful of the relationship that Jacob has built up with these people. They feel justified because a wrong has been committed and their sister was violated in engaging in a wrong themselves. You have this today in the Christian community with people who march on abortion clinics and do a lot of other things in terms of civil disobedience and breaking the law.

People have even shot abortion doctors because they say, "Well, they're doing a wrong thing. So it's all bets are off. All rules are suspended. All's fair in this war."

In the same way, in a smaller way, in our lives, we can often think, “Well, I got shortchanged here. I got an injustice.” So that justifies me going and committing a sin and creating an injustice, which in the eyes of God may be even greater than the one that sparked the problem in the first place.

And that is Simeon and Levi's problem. So Jacob distances himself from them. And what is their fate going to be? “Cursed is their anger, for it is fierce.

Cursed is their wrath, for it is cruel.” Reuben's problem was ambition. It was a desire to obtain for himself the things that belong to his father in an illegitimate way.

Simeon and Levi have uncontrollable anger. When they get angry, they're out of control. They can't rein themselves in.

And so Jacob curses their anger and their wrath. He says, “I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel.” And you can see the fulfillment of this later on, because Levi, the tribe of Levi in particular, has no inheritance in the land.

They are the priests, and they are going to take those weapons of violence and turn them back to covenant use. It's very ironic where they took the instrument of a covenant and made it an instrument of violence with Shechem. Well, the sons of Levi are going to be taking the knives and invoking the covenant.

Every time they cut the neck of an animal, every time they perform a blood sacrifice, they are taking the knives like they used to kill the men of Shechem and devoting them to covenant use. And so there's a great turn of fate there.

Well, this is where we need to stop for this morning. We've covered the first three sons of Jacob, and in all three of these, we have seen that there is a choice to be made. They also had the opportunity for the blessings of the firstborn when Reuben falls out and is no longer eligible.

Simeon and Levi both are in line for all of the blessings of the firstborn. But they also disqualify themselves through their anger. They commit unjustified homicide.

They cannot rein in their wrath. And so their blessing also takes the form of a disciplinary curse. The question we ask ourselves is, will we lose our inheritance?

Will we forfeit the blessings that are coming to us by reason of our position in Christ because we don't have self-control or we cannot rein in our anger or other mental attitude sins? We have to hope that as we study these things together, that truth will remind us of the importance of coming before the Lord and acknowledging our sins and responding to our calling, redeeming the time because the days are evil. Let's close here in a word of prayer.

Father, we thank You for the privilege of studying Your Word together. We pray that God the Holy Spirit will enlighten us, teach us, correct us, and instruct us in righteousness through these things. For we ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen.