

00-09-24a

Let's begin our worship this morning with a word of prayer. Father, we thank you for this day. We thank you for the environment that you have created for us in this nation and in this time.

We have so many modern conveniences. We have freedom. We have privacy.

We have opportunity each and every day to pursue our calling and our relationship and growth under your care. We thank you for the sustaining grace that protects us and provides for us and sustains us in so many ways, all because of what our Lord and Savior Jesus Christ did for us on the cross. We thank you that not only did he minister to us in the past, but he ministers to us in the present as he sits at your right hand and intercedes on our behalf.

His Spirit has been sent to us to lead and guide us through the power of your Word. We have been granted the sustaining strength of your everlasting arms. And we pray this morning as we worship and study together that God the Holy Spirit will make us aware in an even greater and more enduring way of the place that we occupy in your plan and purpose, that we may grow in grace and knowledge of our Lord and Savior, that we will fulfill the purpose for which you have created us and left us here on this earth after our salvation.

We pray that we will be fully equipped for every good work. We will be transformed by the renewing of our minds so that not only will we live successfully and fruitfully in this life, but also be prepared for the things that you have for us in the next. We ask your blessing on those who teach and preach the Word this morning throughout our nation.

We pray that all of us in the church will have a fresh awareness of our corporate responsibility as the Body of Christ, as the Bride of Christ, to serve as a light and a witness in the world and to use the opportunities that we have in the circumstances of this life to grow, to have the thoughts and intents of our hearts be fully tuned to your divine, eternal purpose. We ask your blessing on us as we worship together. We ask it in Jesus' name.

Amen. For our scripture reading this morning, turn with me to Psalm 118. Psalm 118.

My good friend Don Hargrove has, for the past year and a half to two years, I'd have to go back and see exactly when he started, but in his studies up in Tulsa, has gone through Psalm 119 and took one verse each session. And that's been a very fruitful study. Very lengthy study, but very, very fruitful.

You figure one verse a week, you'd have to go for some 176 weeks to go all the way through that. And he recently completed that study. But we're one Psalm earlier in Psalm

118.

This is subtitled in the New King James, Praise to God for His Everlasting Mercy. And if there's one thing we're going to see this morning in our study of the oracle that Jacob delivers to his sons, it is the everlasting mercy of God. The psalmist says, Oh, give thanks to the Lord for He is good, for His mercy endures forever.

This is a refrain that we see many places in the Psalms, isn't it? There are a couple of Psalms where this verse alternates with statements about God's provision and blessing in many different areas of life. Let Israel now say, His mercy endures forever. Let the house of Aaron now say, His mercy endures forever.

Let those who fear the Lord now say, His mercy endures forever. You get the idea that that would be a great responsive reading. I used to do responsive reading in some of my earlier incarnations.

You get the idea that corporate worship could be led in this way where each new idea is introduced and then that verse serves as a refrain. To think about the enduring nature of God's mercy, that's one of the contrasts between the divine and the earthly. Everything earthly is temporary, but God's mercy is eternal.

It never changes. I don't know if you've ever thought about this. I don't mean to digress from our reading, but isn't it a wonderful thing that God is eternal and unchanging in His goodness? I don't know how... We can't even comprehend God coming into being or God being the omnipotent and eternally divine controlling force in the universe.

But what if it wasn't so? What if the eternal divine controlling force in the universe was whimsical and subject to impulse? He can do anything He wants. And they talk about how power corrupts and absolute power corrupts absolutely. And you think, well, here's God with absolute power.

What if He was capricious? What if He just took it into His head a couple of thousand years into eternity to say, you know, this whole scheme has kind of run its course and served its purpose. I'm kind of bored with it. I think I'll just roll it all up and do something different.

And we would be extinguished or we would all be tossed into the lake of fire or any one of a number of other outcomes. We take it for granted that God is good. We take it for granted that God is merciful.

But it is a wonderful thing to appreciate and to remember that God's compassion and God's mercy endures forever. It will never change. And that's not something we should take for granted.

All we have to do is look around us in this world to see that things change, to see that it's

difficult to find something that you can place your faith in for life. But it's a wonderful truth that God doesn't change. He never disappoints.

He never fails. He never falls short. And so when this verse is repeated here in the early part of Psalm 18, it ought to remind us that this is something to be thankful for.

It's something to appreciate that God is unchangeable. Verse 5, I called on the Lord in distress. The Lord answered me and set me in a broad place.

When we're in distress, we feel like we're in narrow straits. Dire straits is a phrase. It even became the name of a rock band for a while.

But straits, that's a narrow place. We talk about being between a rock and a hard place. What does God do? He takes us out of those straits and puts us in a broad place.

The Lord is on my side. I will not fear. What can man do to me? In reality, man can do a lot to us.

But that's in the short term, in the short perspective. Once again, when you contrast the earthly and the divine, the temporary with the eternal, there really isn't anything man can do to compare with what God does for us in the eternal sense. The Lord is for me among those who help me.

Maybe I should reemphasize that. The Lord is for me among those who help me. Therefore, I shall see my desire on those who hate me.

It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in man. It is better to trust in the Lord than to put confidence in princes. Think about that during election season.

All nations surround me, but in the name of the Lord, I will destroy them. They surround me. Yes, they surround me.

But in the name of the Lord, I will destroy them. So much for the sweetness and light inclusive gospel of companionship that we see touted today. They surrounded me like bees.

They were quenched like a fire of thorns. For in the name of the Lord, I will destroy them. You pushed me violently that I might fall, speaking to His enemies.

But the Lord helped me. The Lord is my strength and song, and He has become my salvation. The voice of rejoicing and salvation is in the tents of the righteous.

The right hand of the Lord does valiantly. The right hand of the Lord is exalted. The right hand of the Lord does valiantly.

I shall not die but live and declare the works of the Lord. The Lord has chastened me

severely, but He has not given me over to death. Open to me the gates of righteousness.

I will go through them, and I will praise the Lord. This is the gate of the Lord through which the righteous shall enter. I will praise You, for You have answered me and have become my salvation.

The stone which the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone. This was the Lord's doing. It is marvelous in our eyes.

This is the day the Lord has made. We will rejoice and be glad in it. Save now, I pray, O Lord.

O Lord, I pray, send now prosperity. Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. We have blessed you from the house of the Lord.

I can never read this verse without thinking about the tragic entry because people are saying, Hosanna, blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord. Where does Jesus go when He enters on Palm Sunday? He goes to the temple. And what does He find? He looked around and then He left because the people are not there in the temple blessing Him.

It's a hollow, shallow similitude of acceptance. But it isn't from the heart. It isn't from the temple.

It's not genuine worship. Jesus goes to the temple, looks around, and leaves. And He says, You will not see Me again until you say, Blessed is he who comes in the name of the Lord.

God is the Lord and He has given us light. Bind the sacrifice with cords to the horns of the altar. We looked at this in connection with the transfiguration in Luke 9. You have the light, the shining forth, the glistening that takes place when Jesus is transfigured, when He is metamorpho, in front of James and John and Peter.

But connected with that in this verse is the binding of the sacrifice to the horns of the altar. And that's one of the things that they have to come to an understanding of as Jesus' ministry progresses, as they realize that the gospel of the kingdom is not going to be accepted in that generation in Israel, that the glory of the Lord is inevitably and inextricably connected to His priestly ministry, the sacrifice that satisfies the righteousness and justice of God. You are my God and I will praise You.

You are my God. I will exalt You. Oh, give thanks to the Lord, for He is good, for His mercy endures forever.

One of the great things about so many of the passages like this in Scripture is that it is a reminder to us that in spite of our failures, in spite of our sinfulness, in spite of our

weakness and our falling short of the glory of God, that does not limit God in glorifying Himself. In fact, it creates the opportunity to turn cursing to blessing. And that's really going to be the theme of our study this morning as we return now to Genesis 49.

Genesis 49. I was looking back and I realized this morning that we began our study of the oracle of Jacob to his sons back in July of the year 2000. This is now toward the end of September.

And there is just so much meat in here. I've had difficulty moving through and beyond it. And I hope to do that this morning.

I think we will, Lord willing, conclude our study of this oracle this morning. But as you will probably agree with me, it has been a very rich study. We resume this morning in verse 16.

We've already seen the oracle for Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Zebulun, and Issachar. And last time we looked closely at Dan. In verse 16, Jacob, under the ministry of God the Holy Spirit, says, Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel.

Dan shall be a serpent by the way, a viper by the path, that bites the horse's heels so that its rider shall fall backward. We spent some time looking at those concepts and the inevitable connection in our mind with a serpent biting the heel going all the way back to Genesis 3 in the fall and what God pronounced as a curse on the serpent. He shall bruise thy head, thou shalt bruise his heel.

And even in the midst of pronouncing judgment after the fall, there is linked with it and as a part of it, the promise of a coming one, the seed of the woman. And of course we know the history of the tribe of Dan. It was a relatively small tribe.

Territory was included down amongst what was assigned to Judah. But after a time, the tribe of Dan migrated north. We see this in the book of Judges.

And they eventually occupied the northernmost section of the land allotted to Israel and eventually become one of the main centers of pagan practice and idolatry. And in that sense, the tribe of Dan, although small, leads the entire northern kingdom down the road to ruin. And they go out under the fifth cycle of God's judgment under the Assyrian captivity in the later history of Israel.

The next brother who is addressed, and of course at this point you have the interruption in verse 18 where it is as though Jacob in contemplating the bitter fruit that is going to be eaten by the nation of Israel in the course of these various failures and distractions that are going to take place and history stops and says, I have waited for your salvation, O Lord. There are many things that are spoken of in Scripture as being waited for. It has the idea of enduring patiently even though things look adverse.

People waited for deliverance, waited for salvation all down through history. Beginning in the garden and going forward even now we are in a period of waiting for our ultimate deliverance. What's especially notable in verse 18 is the word for salvation.

It is Yeshua. We know that this word group, the verb to deliver yields us the noun which gave Joshua his name and which later in history gives Jesus His name. I think it is regrettable that we have not been able to stick closer to the original.

I'm not sure why we transliterate so badly into English. I think the name Yeshua is a beautiful name in Hebrew. I don't understand why we couldn't just bring it across like that.

There's been a lot of songs written about Jesus, name I love, concentrating on the beauty of the name Jesus, but that's not actually His name at all. It isn't J-E-S-U-S. It is Y-E-S-H-U-A.

And because of a long history and so on, we continue to refer to Him as Jesus. But it is equally mysterious to me that somehow the name James came into English when in fact it is Yaakov or Jacob. Even in the Greek text, it's Jacob.

I don't know how we got to James except that King James authorized the first widely used translation into English and they wanted to accommodate Him and put His name in there. They said, well, Jacob, that starts with a J. It's just a mystery to me. At any rate, that's the word that we have here when He says, I have... and there's almost a double entendre there, isn't there? I have waited for Your Yeshua, O Lord.

And even in the midst of these... and this is in the central portion of this oracle. And over and over again, we're reminded of the failures of Reuben, the failures of Simeon and Levi, and the potential for failure even with Judah who has many good things said about him. The potential for failure with Zebulun, associated with the evil sea and with his border up amongst the pagans in Sidon.

Issachar, who has strength to bear a burden, but instead lays down and compromises and becomes a band of slaves. Dan, who has the opportunity to judge and be a decisive factor. Even though he's small, he's decisive.

He can topple a horse and rider, but he's not a good animal. He's pictured as a viper and the viper is inevitably associated with the serpent and with evil. We're going to see even in the later history the foreshadowing of this, the plague of serpents, the fiery serpents that go through Israel because of their focus on wrong things and their complaining and their carping in the wilderness.

And then a bronze serpent is going to be put up on a pole and the one who looks on the serpent is saved and the plague has stayed at that point. Jesus refers to that later on when He says, as Moses lifted up the serpent in the wilderness, even so must the Son of

Man be lifted up. And I find it significant that immediately after talking about Dan being the viper by the path toppling the horse and rider, He says, I have waited for your Yeshua.

He's going to be lifted up just as the bronze serpent will be during the wilderness wanderings and is going to be the means of deliverance. But then we pick up this morning in verse 19, Gad, a troop shall tramp upon him, but he shall triumph at last. Gad's name means a troop.

If we refer back to the time of his birth when he was named, back in Genesis chapter 27. Actually, I think it's a page or two before that. I always lose the place of all those births.

It's chapter 30. And verse 10, Leah's maid Zilpah bore Jacob a son. This is when Leah had stopped bearing and so you have a handmaid coming in.

And so she gives Zilpah, her maid, to Jacob as a wife. And when she bears a son, Leah says, a troop comes. So she called his name Gad.

Why does she say a troop comes? Well, there was always the possibility of having a girl. And as politically incorrect as it sounds, in the patriarchal society, people looked for sons when they had children. And Leah has already had Reuben and Simeon and Levi and Judah, four sons, and then she stopped bearing.

So Rachel gets into the act with Bilhah. And Leah, because she has had four sons, puts Zilpah into the running. And when Zilpah produces a son, this is the fifth son now.

And so she says, it's a troop. I've got enough to make a little platoon here of my sons. This is a little infighting, a little bit of competition with her sister.

Her sister has gotten a couple of sons. Dan and Naphtali have come from Bilhah. And so she says, well, the score is 4-2 here.

And so I've upped the score by one. And a troop is on the way. This is just the first of many more sons that I'm going to have to keep ahead of my sister, so to speak.

But in the oracle here in 49.19, Jacob says, Gad, a troop, shall tramp upon him, but he shall triumph at last. There are in Hebrew only six words in this verse. Everything takes place in six words.

And four of them have this G-D infix, the Gad. So it's a pun. It's a play on his name.

Four out of these six words have Gad in there somewhere. It says, Gad, a troop, is the word Gad. Tramping upon contains G-D as a part of the word.

And triumph and so forth. Four of these six words have this in. So what is the emphasis? It is on his being numerous.

And when you think of the trampling of many feet, you think of both being numerous and also the idea that you can either trample or be trampled. There's a truism about yelling fire in a crowded theater. We see every so often a story of people getting into a panic and trying to flee from a stadium or from a building and people actually falling and being trampled and killed in the effort to escape.

And you can't think of a worse death than being trampled to death. Well, I suppose you could think of a worse death, but it's certainly a bad way to die. I think about the chariot race in Ben-Hur where the stuntman falls off the chariot and he's trampled to death by the horses that follow.

And so this is not a happy picture. He says, Gad, a troop shall tramp upon him. And you think, well, that's going to be the finish of Gad.

If he's, instead of being a troop, he becomes the trampled. But then it says, he shall triumph at last. And a literal translation of this is he will raid their retreat.

You can see the idea of a retreat or something that takes place at the last. There's a lot of these poetic statements in Hebrew. Because the words are so rich and have such a spectrum of meaning, you can take something from one end of the spectrum or the other and come up with entirely different translations.

And if you take the New American Standard or the New King James and the NIV and the New Century Version and the New English Bible and a lot of the other popular modern translations and lay them side by side, sometimes you'll come to a verse and it's completely different from one translation to the next. Get a parallel Bible and look at them and see this. And it's because of the richness of Hebrew.

And this is where it's particularly important to be sensitive to the context and to be able to narrow that range of meaning down to what is meant in that passage. Sometimes God uses that richness of connotation to tell us a lot in a small space. So what's going on here with Gad? A troop will tramp upon him, but he shall triumph at last, or he shall raid their retreat.

They're going to trample over him and go on, but then he's going to pick himself up and go and raid them. He's going to endure this trampling and come back to achieve a victory. So there is an intermediate period of bad things happening, but in the end he's going to come back and hurt the ones who hurt him.

You see the qualities of endurance and of resilience. The whole meaning of the word resilience in English I think is a good representation of what's being spoken of here because something that's resilient means it gets pushed down and it bounces back. And of course to find out that you have resilience you have to be pushed down, and that's not necessarily a pleasant experience.

But to bounce back, to come back from adversity, and to achieve victory, to have recompense is a desirable thing. So overall you would say, although it has a negative component, it is overall a positive statement about Gad. He's going to endure trampling, but he's going to come back and prevail.

Then in verse 20, Jacob says, Bread from Asher shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties. You think, well, prediction in the future, he's going to yield rich bread. This sounds like kind of a positive pronouncement.

And he shall yield royal dainties. Well, let's think about royal dainties. These are dainties for the king, dainties for the princes, dainties for the rulers.

Right away you think, well, who are these rulers? There's been no projection that there's going to be a king in Israel. You have the rulership of Judah that is foretold, but this was on the family model, wasn't it? Rulership in the family. There's a family priesthood.

There's family leadership, elders of tribes and so on. And you have sort of a democracy because the rulers are coming up from the people. But when he says royal dainties, this implies a monarchy.

This implies a caste system where you have the royalty and then you have everybody else. And so sort of hidden in this prediction is the idea that there's going to be dominance. And it doesn't necessarily mean that it is a king from within.

This may be some other king that has subjugated one or more tribes in Israel and is taking these dainties for themselves. So you don't really know. There's a positive idea that well, he's productive.

He is attractive. These are dainties. This is rich bread and royal dainties.

And so it sounds like this is going to be really desirable food. This would be like expensive crackers and caviar kind of a thing. But who is it? It doesn't say he's going to be consuming it.

He's going to produce it. But it sounds like the royalty, somebody else, is going to be dominating and taking these things for themselves. And they're going to be the chefs in the kitchen and the people laboring in the fields to produce these things.

But someone else, someone in a dominant position is going to consume them. So once again, this prediction sounds positive, but has negative overtones, has negative implications. Why is there royalty at all? There's been no mention of royalty except in the tribe of Judah.

And are the people in Asher, are they going to be producing these dainties and sending them down to Judah, to the one holding the scepter? Or are they going to be producing

them for some foreign king? So there's a little shadow over this prophecy that he's going to produce rich bread and royal dainties. Then you go down to Naphtali, verse 21. Naphtali is a deer let loose.

He uses beautiful words. And you think, well, this is great. A deer, a doe in the fields.

What's the first thing you think of of a deer let loose? It's grace and beauty, isn't it? It's beauty of form, beautiful movement. One of the best pieces of animation that you will ever see is the Disney Bambi movie. The flowing lines and the way that those deer move.

And if you've ever seen deer leaping away, their movement is effortless, it's graceful. There's wonderful beauty of form there. And then here are beautiful words that are going to be used by Naphtali.

And this is kind of a shift, because Naphtali, if you remember the birth, the sisters are wrestling with each other. It's a competition. And Naphtali was one of the sons of Bilha, one of the handmade tribes.

And Bilha was Rachel's maid. And Rachel was barren and not having any children. So she ran Bilha into the tent there to get pregnant and produce a son.

And she said, now I'm back in the game. I'm competing with my sister again. I've got a way to run up my score here.

So Naphtali, wrestling. And wrestling, you think about sumo wrestling or professional wrestling or whatever, you don't associate grace and beauty with that. It's sweaty.

It's grappling and rolling around and bending people into unnatural positions and trying to pin them and defeat them. You don't associate that with the grace and beauty of a deer. But here is a change for Naphtali.

Instead of wrestling and competing, this is a deer that's been let loose. And so you have grace and beauty and beautiful words. Words instead of physical competition.

And it reminds us when Jacob himself was wrestling and he said, I will not let you go until you speak some beautiful words to me. I want the blessing. And so there's a shift from the physical to the esoteric or the ephemeral.

These things that are beauty of form and beauty of sound. Once again, even as we think that there's grace and beauty associated with Naphtali, where is the substance? That's the question we ask ourselves. It's one thing to be speaking with the tongues of men and of angels, but if there isn't substance in it, the substance of love is just a noise.

It's a sounding brass and a tinkling cymbal. And so there is the question that's left in the air. There's nothing intrinsically negative in being a beautiful deer and using beautiful

words.

But the question is, does it do any good? Deer were one of the cloven-hoofed animals that were acceptable for food. And venison is a wonderful meat, but this is not a deer that's been cooked up on the grill. This is one that's been set loose and you're just looking at it as it goes away.

It's been let loose and it's fleeing. And these beautiful words, are they doing any good? Are they serving any purpose? So that's the question left in the air by this blessing on Naphtali. Well, I want to stop and analyze these three members, along with Dan, who are the four handmade tribes.

Dan, Gad, Asher, and Naphtali. If you sit down and make a listing of the brothers and the oracle that is pronounced upon them. In fact, I've done this.

I've made a positive column and a negative column. And all of them have a negative side. If it's not explicitly stated, some of them it sounds like it's all negative.

Simeon and Levi, you can hardly find anything good to say that Jacob has for them. Others, it sounds all good, but there's this question left hanging in the air. Well, is this really a blessing? Is this really a good thing for the tribe? And overall, the tone of Jacob's oracle leaves many more questions than it gives answers.

And it pronounces many more negative things than it does positive. You almost hesitate to call this a blessing on the sons. You'll remember that Reuben, on the positive side, he's strong, he's mighty, he's dignified and powerful.

He's the beginning of things. You'd think this is all positive, but on the negative side, he's unstable. He's unfaithful.

He is unclean. He defiles the bed of his father. And so this strength and might and dignity are corrupted by this instability and breaking of bounds.

Simeon and Levi, if you look at the pronouncement on them, they are unified, aren't they? They're brothers. The first thing Jacob says is they're brothers. They stick together.

This is loyalty, unity. And they have a great passion for right things. You think about the wrong that was done to their sister Dinah.

They want recompense. They want justice for this. So they are passionate about wrongs that have been committed.

And they're organized. Jacob says they're in a council. They sit down and have a meeting together.

And they're going to form a plan, a plan of attack. And so you can see these as positive

things, but their anger, their cruelty, their ungoverned passion. They have a passion for justice, but it's ungoverned.

They will do anything to strike back and to take justice into their own hands. And so that's the negative side. Judah, many positive things said about Judah.

He's going to be a victor. He's the lion that goes up from the prey. Leadership, he's the scepter and the lawgiver between his feet.

We know, not necessarily from the oracle, but from his speech before Joseph, that he is self-sacrificing. He has a sense of place and of responsibility. He's willing to put himself on the line for his brother Benjamin.

And he's going to prosper. Jacob says he's going to have the donkey and the vine and the dark eyes from wine and the white teeth from milk and so on. Great prosperity is promised to his tribe.

Leadership. Rulership. But on the negative side, is this passion going to be his undoing? Is the wine going to go to his head? We saw that wine biting like a serpent over in the Proverbs.

Is he going to become complacent? He goes up from the prey and he lies down like a lion. And who can approach him? He's potentially unapproachable and unteachable. We see this in the later line of kings descended from David, the tribe of Judah, where they don't listen to wise counsel.

They are sated with their power and sated with their victories. This was David's own greatest problem. The armies are out fighting the battles and he's back home waking up late in the day and letting passion go to his head when he sees Bathsheba and so forth.

And so there's that potential. Zebulun, we saw, dwelling by the haven of the sea, becoming a haven for ships and having his border adjoining Sidon. Well, this is potentially a good thing.

You have the opportunity for prosperity and commerce with the nations. He's out on the border where he can traffic and make a profit. But on the negative side, he's susceptible to all of the things that those nations are party to.

The sea is the symbol for ungoverned evil in the Old Testament. The wicked are like the troubled sea. God has to establish His throne upon the seas.

He has to overcome it. It's untamable and unmanageable by man. Man can't do anything about the sea.

You see that with the disciples in the boat. We're going to perish. We have no control over this situation.

And so being on the border with Sidon, having contact with the pagans, this is the potential for failure and compromise. Dan, the judge, he's small but decisive. He's going to be a decisive factor.

Even though he's a little animal, he can topple the big animal and the rider who governs him. And this can be a good thing. If your enemies are coming in and you have this decisive factor.

He's a hidden factor. The serpent is something that's not seen. He strikes by surprise.

And you study the history of military warfare and see that many times the best laid plans of men go awry because there was some hidden factor, some seemingly insignificant thing that was the nail that fastened the shoe to the horse that had a rider who made all the difference. And ultimately, for want of a nail, the battle is lost and the kingdom is lost. And Dan is that nail potentially.

But yet, even though he's decisive and will judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel, he's associated with the snake and the viper. And he can also be the one who topples the horse and rider of Israel. He can be the Achilles heel for the nation itself.

And that's exactly what he turns out to be in the later history. So now we come to Gad and Asher and Naphtali. Gad has endurance and resilience.

He's numerous. He's a troop. But why does he get trampled? Why does he have to endure this trampling? Is this a good thing? What happened that he's going to be trampled? He's going to be on a border where troops are going to come across and trample him.

And that's not a good thing. God doesn't promise us trampling in the millennial kingdom or in the eternal future kingdom of God, does He? It's not intrinsically a good thing. And so this question is left hanging in the air.

Why is he being trampled? That's not a pleasant experience. What is happening to the nation? The blessings of the millennial kingdom don't include being trampled. Asher, he's productive.

He produces these royal dainties and rich bread. And that sounds like a great thing. Asher, his name means happy.

You go back to the time of his birth. It ought to be a happy time. You've got production and attractiveness and happiness.

But who is this bread being served to? Who's taking the bread and consuming it? And you run the risk of being tasty. Rich food, the richer it is, the less of it you can actually eat. It tastes great, but it is insubstantial.

It doesn't nourish. It doesn't equip you for the long haul. You don't take royal dainties and rich bread along when you're going on a journey or when you're going to be needing rations for battle.

So the potential here is to be tasty, but not nourishing. Royal dainties are typically something that are attractive to the palate, but aren't nutritional, aren't valuable for growth and doing work. The royalty they lay around on beds of ease with olives being popped into their mouth and so forth, they're not accomplishing anything worthwhile.

Peeled grapes and so on, these royal dainties. So this is the unspoken risk involved with Asher. Naphtali, grace of form, beauty of speech, but once again, where is the substance? This was even intrinsic in their birth, isn't it? This idea that, well, I want the favor of my husband.

I'm competing with my sister. The handmaids are running. These handmade tribes.

It looks like you're gaining sons. It looks like you're gaining favor with your husband, but it was form and appearance without substance. It wasn't really contributing to the furtherance of the plan of God.

It wasn't really bringing either one of these women into greater favor with Jacob. And so it is a triumph of form over substance. I was listening to a church service this morning and they were playing a great hymn, How Firm a Foundation, Ye Saints of the Lord.

Beautiful hymn. Great words. But there was an orchestra playing underneath it and it was an arrangement and they changed some of the chords around and the first thing I thought of, it reminded me of, you remember the theme from the Magnificent Seven and they played it back when cigarettes were on TV.

They played it, the guy riding the range. Well, that was the orchestra arrangement under How Firm a Foundation and there were cymbals and drums and horns and it overwhelmed. You could hardly understand what the people were saying.

And I thought, you know, this is a triumph of form over substance. The form and the orchestration have completely overwhelmed the substance and the message of the words. And that's the risk that we run in our lives as believers is that form is going to supersede and take the place of substance.

It's going to look great. It's going to have beauty of form. It's going to sound beautiful, but the substance might be missing.

We're going to pause here and take our break. And when we come back, we're going to finish our analysis of this and then we're going to move to the triumph of God's grace. We're going to find where the substance really is.

We're going to see what happens in the later history of Israel that is going to fill the gaps and is going to overcome the potential negatives that Jacob either pronounces or suggests for each of his sons. It's a fascinating study. And what we're left with at the conclusion of this first lesson is each of us has strengths and weaknesses.

We have positives and negatives. Are we going to allow the power of God, the grace of God, the enduring, everlasting mercy of God to come in and make our positives worthwhile and fill in the gaps of our negatives, turn our cursing into blessing? It is a potential for each one of us, but it's something that we have to seek. Left to ourselves, we will go to the negative, unfruitful side every time.

It is up to us to throw ourselves on the mercy of God and claim His grace so that our lives do bear fruit that is eternal and lasts as long as God's mercy. Let's pause here and take our break.