

Let's continue our worship service this Sunday morning by turning for our Scripture reading to Genesis chapter 49. Genesis chapter 49. We began last Sunday a brief excursion into the characteristics and the later history of the twelve tribes of Israel.

We are going to spend some time this morning examining the significance of the twelve tribes and their characteristics in the later history of Israel. We have the benefit of hindsight. Obviously, someone who first picked up a copy of Genesis after Moses wrote it would not have had the benefit of some of the later history that we are privy to.

But it all weaves together to teach us something very important about the way that God works things together for good. Because, as you can already remember from what we know to this point in Genesis and what we know from our previous studies in the Word of God, the history of Israel has its ups and downs. The history of the patriarchs certainly has its ups and downs.

And yet, God has worked all things together in accordance with His own will to reflect His glory and His plan and purpose throughout human history. And it's a great comfort to know that, particularly when we are asking and seeking and knocking on the door to understand God's purpose and plan, to fulfill God's calling in our lives, that even when we stumble and fall, as the old gospel song says, "When I stumble, when I fall, His love covers it all. He hides me behind the cross."

And through the grace of God and the person of Jesus Christ, our lives that would just be a wreck and a mess can actually reflect progress, transformation, and ultimately Christ's likeness. And we see this reflected and, in some ways, foreshadowed in the history of the nation of Israel. Genesis chapter 49, where we will, in the not too distant future, arrive, gives the last words of Jacob to his sons.

These sons that we have seen come into the world in Genesis chapter 30. Here in chapter 49, Jacob is on his deathbed. Just as his father Isaac gave a blessing, Jacob is going to give this blessing.

So Jacob called his sons and said, "Gather together that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days." Already, we know that this is once again in that prophetic mode that we saw with Isaac. The blessing—we see a particular ministry of God the Holy Spirit on the patriarch as he is there on his deathbed.

And he is given vision of the future. And the pronouncement that he makes has great significance. When you see him say, "Gather together that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days," who is he talking to? Is he talking just to Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, and the remaining sons? In the last days, he is talking about their offspring and their posterity, isn't he? Because these twelve sons are not necessarily going to be standing in the last days. "Gather together that I may tell you what shall befall you in the last days. Gather together and hear, you sons of Jacob, and listen to Israel, your father.

"Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, the excellence of dignity and the excellency of power. Unstable as water, you shall not excel, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it. He went up to my couch."

We'll be seeing that episode here shortly in Genesis. Verse 5: "Simeon and Levi are brothers. Instruments of cruelty are in their dwelling place.

"Let not my soul enter their council. Let not my honor be united to their assembly. For in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they hamstrung an ox."

You may be familiar—this is the revenge for the rape of their sister Dina, where they deceived some men and said, "Well, fine." The man who had slept with their sister wanted to make good and marry her, and they said, "Okay, fine, but in order to marry anyone from our clan, you have to be circumcised." And these men agreed, and so the whole bunch of them were circumcised. And while they were recovering—there's a lot of discomfort, especially in those days, with grown men undergoing that ritual—Simeon and Levi, with their fighting men, went down and massacred these people and hamstrung their animals as an act of revenge.

Jacob says in verse 7, "And cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel. I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.

“Judah, you are he whom your brothers shall praise. Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies. Your father's children shall bow down before you.” Who's his father? Jacob. So who are the father's children? It's all the rest of the children of Israel.

“Judah is a lion's whelp. From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He bows down, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who shall rouse him. The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the people.”

You can see reflected in the lion image here the principle of leadership, the rulership of the nation, and he has the victory over the prey. But you know what happens after a lion kills an animal and feeds. We've had this recently in our Tarzan reading for the girls at night. A lion feeds on a carcass or on a kill, and when he's had his fill, he goes off and lays down and sleeps, sometimes for days at a time, while he digests this big meal.

And in the same way that when a lion lies down, who's going to go? If the lion is laying down, maybe he shouldn't be laying down. Maybe he should be up providing leadership for the nation. But if he lays down on the job, so to speak, who is going to rouse him? He's got the responsibility in it. If he doesn't rise up and take leadership, who will? Who's going to rouse the lion? So that implies responsibility as well as the privilege of leadership.

“To him shall be the obedience of the people. Verse 11: binding his donkey to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine, he washed his garments in wine, and his cloth in the blood of grapes.” These are the purple robes, but you can also see the foreshadowing of the bloodstained garments of the Lord Jesus Christ mentioned in Revelation.

“His eyes are darker than wine and his teeth whiter than milk. Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea. He shall become a haven for ships, and his border shall adjoin Sidon.

“Issachar is a strong donkey lying down between two burdens. He saw that rest was good and that the land was pleasant. He bowed his shoulder to bear a burden and became a band of slaves.

“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. I have waited for your salvation, O Lord.”

Odd juxtaposition. We'll be going through this prophetic oracle that Jacob delivers in detail when we get to chapter 49. But you can see quite a lot in there already, I'm sure, when you see the viper biting the horse's heels. We've already had reference to a serpent biting the heel earlier in this book, and in connection with a prophecy of salvation. The first promise of salvation was in that same context. And here you have Jacob harking back to it: “I have waited for your salvation, O Lord.

“Gad, a troop, shall tramp upon him, but he shall triumph at last. Bread from Asher shall be rich, and he shall yield royal dainties.

“Naphtali is a deer let loose. He uses beautiful words.

“Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well. His branches run over the wall. The archers have bitterly grieved him, shot at him and hated him. But his bow remained in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob. From there is the shepherd, the stone of Israel. By the God of your Father who will help you, and by the Almighty who will bless you with blessings of heavens above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb, the blessings of your Father have excelled the blessings of my ancestors up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. They shall be upon the head of Joseph and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.”

You'll notice the repeated references there to blessings because the blessings of the firstborn that Jacob manipulated his brother Esau out of have devolved all the way down through the brothers to arrive at the eleventh son, Joseph. And he receives the blessings, one of which is the double portion.

“Benjamin is a ravenous wolf. In the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.”

All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father spoke to them. And he blessed them. He blessed each one according to his own blessing.

Jacob, of course, learns the lesson of the example of his own father, who was not prepared to bless both sons. But you see here the fact that the sons of Jacob, although they are individuals and have individual characteristics, are the progenitors of the tribes of Israel.

And these tribes are going to have characteristics. They're going to occupy particular territories. They're going to have a later history. Some will rise and become strong. Others will fall and all but disappear. God foretells this through the mouth of their father Jacob as he blesses them on his deathbed.

Even though he has some pretty harsh things to say about the sons, he blesses each one. And he's going to pass away and be gathered to his fathers here. And that is how the book of Genesis will end.

But we began last time, as we return now to our study in Genesis chapter 30, we saw that Jacob is outside the land of promise, away from his father's house, away from his mother's influence, away from all of the things that he is heir to. He is sojourning as a stranger in a strange land, although he is with his relatives, because he needs to learn things.

There have been weaknesses exposed in his soul through his failures, through his deceptions and his manipulations and so forth. And so he is sojourning outside the land, and God is going to use this period of time to teach him things that he can learn best in this environment.

And so his one-sided view of the primogeniture and the blessings and the inheritance of the firstborn, he's going to get a fresh perspective on that in the household of later generations. What it means to be deceived, what it means to be manipulated—he's going to be on the receiving end of those things, and already has been, in the switching of brides on his wedding night and the additional years of service that he will incur for the one that he thinks he's in love with and that he really wants.

And so God is teaching Jacob. God promised Jacob before he ever left the land at Bethel, "I will be with you every step of the way," in essence. "I will bring you back to this land."

And so even as he is undergoing these trials and learning these painful lessons, God is with him, and God is working these things together for good, and God is building up the areas in Jacob's soul that have been shown to be manifestly weak.

When you think about our situation, we are also strangers and pilgrims. Although we have a heavenly citizenship, although we are heirs of spiritual blessings in heavenly places, as Paul tells us in Ephesians chapter 1, we are sojourning outside the land of our inheritance, outside the land of our eternal dwelling.

But God is with us, and God is teaching us things. God is building up the weak areas in our souls as we spend time in this earth, in this society, fallen nature and fallen world. So we have a lot to learn as we look at Jacob and his experiences.

In chapter 30, we saw that Jacob acquires a wife—actually in chapter 29—and that is Leah. Leah is the woman to whom he is joined, and she is his wife. Everybody else after that, it's like the ladies that Abraham tangled himself up with, Hagar.

And then after Sarah's death, of course, he married another woman or two and had many other children. Very little is mentioned about them in Scripture other than that they also were sent to the east and became nations. But Sarah is—if you say, "Well, who was Abraham's wife?" It was Sarah. "Well, who was Jacob's wife?" It was Leah.

We tend to think, well, Rachel was the one, and that's the one he was after and the one he wanted, the pretty sister and so forth. But Leah is Jacob's wife. And we're going to see that that is made manifest by God through some pretty significant things that will come later.

But in chapter 30 of Genesis, we reviewed last time the story of Rachel being barren and giving her maid Bilhah to have children born on her knees. Bilhah bore the children, and Rachel adopted them and called them her own. She names them. She brings them up as her own.

Then Leah, when she finds that she has stopped bearing, then she runs her handmaid in, Zilpah. Zilpah has a couple of children. She has Gad and Asher.

Then we had the story of Reuben, and I may have done some bad math last time. I think I was talking about how old Reuben probably was when he went and looked for these mandrakes. But a good observation was made there that all of this takes place during the second seven years that Jacob is serving for Rachel. And so he could not have been older than five or six at this time.

So I think I said he could have been as old as nine or ten. But if you do the math, you find out that he really could not have been because all of these things take place. He may have just been even younger, maybe only four or five years old, because there are some additional children that are born after this.

And all of this takes place between year seven and year fifteen that Jacob spends with Laban. So Reuben has to be born at the beginning of that period, and his younger siblings are born toward the end of that period. Joseph is born before the six years that we're going to see shortly.

So anyway, he was probably old enough to walk around and find things, but he wasn't nine or ten, and I think that's what I had suggested last time. Anyway, he goes out and finds the mandrakes, the love apples, brings them in. The two sisters argue, and one bargains the other out of the mandrakes because they were considered to be an aphrodisiac and a fertility-inducing type of food.

So Leah hires Jacob, and as a result she conceives and bears Issachar. Then Leah conceived again and bore a sixth son, and he is Zebulun. Then in verse 21, afterwards she bore a daughter and called her name Dina, or Dinah, we generally say.

Then God remembered Rachel, and God listened to her and opened her womb, and she conceived and bore a son and said, "God has taken away my reproach." When you think about this, how many children have now been born? There have been four with the concubines. There have been six with Leah in terms of sons, plus a daughter. So there have been eleven children come into the family before Rachel has her son.

Joseph is the twelfth child in the family, the twelfth to be fathered by Jacob, and I believe that's right. Did I do my math right? I think so.

So it came to pass in verse 25, when Rachel had born Joseph, that Jacob said to Laban, "Send me away that I may go to my own place and to my country. Give me my wives and my children for whom I have served you, and let me go, for you know my service which I have done for you." And then we'll follow a negotiation where Jacob is going to serve additional time for his flocks and herds.

But this is the point at which we stop to examine because there is going to be one more son, Benjamin, born to Rachel, and that will close out the family. But these sons and their origins, their names, the tribes whose names they bear, have great significance, and this is a good place to pause and look at them.

So we began last time, and I reviewed for you some of the characteristics, first of all, of Reuben, the tribe of Reuben that will spring from him. And what I wanted to do this morning is draw this up on the board for you and give you some idea of how this is going to turn out.

So I'm going to put down the left side of the board here, first of all, Reuben. He's the firstborn. Then we have Simeon, Levi, Judah. Those are the first four sons, all born to Leah.

Then Rachel is angry and upset, and she gives her maid Bilhah to her husband Jacob, and so then you have Dan and Naphtali born to Bilhah. This, of course, gets Leah back into the picture with her maid Zilpah, and so Zilpah bears Gad and Asher.

Then you have the episode of the mandrakes, and as a result of that Leah conceives and bears two more children, which are Issachar and Zebulun. Then in Genesis 30, we have the story of Rachel finally giving birth to— We have Dinah, which I guess we can include in there under Zebulun. Then we have Joseph, and we will ultimately have Benjamin, whose mother is Rachel. This is kind of fading out, isn't it?

In talking about the tribes and their later history, it's very fascinating to see the places where they are compared or where they are grouped. One of the places where this takes place is in Numbers. You might turn over to Numbers 1 because a census is taken after the children of Israel leave Egypt, and God gives directions for their assembly, how they are going to camp and how they are going to march.

The leaders of each tribe are listed in chapter 1 of Numbers. It gives the patriarch there. And then in verse 19 and following: "As the Lord commanded Moses, so he numbered them in the wilderness of Sinai. The children of Reuben, Israel's oldest son, their genealogies by their families, by their father's house, according to the number of names, every male individually, from 20 years old and above, all who were able to go to war, those who were numbered of the tribe of Reuben, were 46,500."

Then it goes on to give the children of each of the other tribes. These are just the men of war. These are 20 years old and up who are able to engage in combat.

Verse 47 tells us, "The Levites were not numbered among them by their father's tribe, for the Lord had spoken to Moses, saying, 'Only the tribe of Levi you shall not number, nor take a census of them among the children of Israel. You shall appoint the Levites over the tabernacle of the testimony, over all its furnishings and over all that belong to it. They shall carry the tabernacle and all its furnishings. They shall attend to it and camp around the tabernacle. When the tabernacle is to go forward, the Levites shall take it down. When the tabernacle is to be set up, the Levites shall set it up. The outsider who comes near shall be put to death. The children of Israel shall pitch their tents, every one by his own camp, every one by his own standard according to their armies.'"

Now that word "standard" there in verse 52 tells us that there were flags or banners associated with each of the tribes. And at this time, since you don't really have the idea of literacy where people would be able to read and write as a general rule, there wasn't much call for it among the common population. These standards or flags are going to have pictures on them, just like we have flags today.

There are symbols on a flag rather than, as you see in military units, where it might say, "Headquarters Battery, 3rd Battalion, 12th Marines." Instead of saying something along those lines, these would have a picture or have a color combination that could be observed and discerned from a distance. And this would be a rallying point, a gathering point for someone who wants to find their tribe and ultimately their clan and family and their own tent.

"But the Levites shall camp around the tabernacle," in verse 53, "the tabernacle of the testimony, that there may be no wrath on the congregation of the children of Israel. And the Levites shall keep charge of the tabernacle of the testimony. Thus the children of Israel did according to all that the Lord commanded Moses, so they did."

Now in Numbers chapter 2, "The Lord spoke to Moses and Aaron, saying, 'Every one of the children of Israel shall camp by his own standard beside the emblems of his father's house. They shall camp some distance from the tabernacle of meeting.'"

So up here on the board, if we go to the center here, I'm going to put a little representation of the tabernacle, which was a tent. And of course we know around the tabernacle we had the square enclosure with a gate in front there. This would be at the center of the camp.

Actually, I should change this because it faces to the east. I have it facing to the south, so since I can erase, you probably can't, but I'm going to put the tent here facing east. And this would be the gate over here in the east, just as it was mirrored later on in the temple, which, as you recall, the gate faced the Mount of Olives, which was to the east.

So there's our tabernacle in the center of the camp. It tells us in verse 3, "On the east side"—and I have north as up and south as down, just like on a map—"on the east side, toward the rising of the sun, those of the standard of the forces with Judah shall camp."

So over here on the east, I'm going to put Judah and his armies. Nahshon, the son of Amminadab, shall be the leader of the children of Judah. His army was numbered at 74,600.

"Those who camp next to him shall be the tribe of Issachar." So we have Issachar over here. His army is numbered at 54,400. A little thicker here.

Then comes the tribe of Zebulun, and Eliab, the son of Helon, shall be the leader of the children of Zebulun. His army was numbered at 57,400. So over here on the east, we have Judah, we have Issachar, and we have Zebulun. Okay?

Then all who are numbered according to the armies of the forces with Judah, 186,400, these shall break camp first. So this is the number one contingent when they break camp. These will be the first ones to move.

“On the south side shall be the standard of the forces with Reuben according to their armies.” So we have Reuben down here. If you're not doing this already, I would encourage you to draw this picture because we're going to see some interesting things once we get the camp laid out.

“Those who camp next to him,” in verse 12, “shall be the tribe of Simeon.” His army comes in at 59,300. Then comes the tribe of Gad, gives his leader and his numbers down there. So we have Reuben, Simeon, and Gad in the south. And he's got a total of 151,450.

They're going to be the second to break camp. So these in the south are going to break camp second. Then in verse 17, “The tabernacle of meeting shall move out with the camp of the Levites in the middle of the camp.” So here's Levi up here right with the tabernacle. And we'll call this 2.5 in the order of march.

So Judah and his bunch, then Reuben and his bunch, then the tabernacle comes out. And the reason I do that is it says in verse 18, “On the west side shall be the standard of the forces with Ephraim.” Ephraim's going to be over here at the west, and gives his army at 45,500.

Next to him comes the tribe of Manasseh. Gamaliel, the son of Pedazur, is his leader, and his army in verse 21 is numbered at 32,200. Then comes the tribe of Benjamin. Benjamin on the west.

And it says in verse 24, “All who are numbered according to the armies of the forces with Ephraim, 108,100, they shall be the third to break camp.” So we'll put a three here.

Then in verse 25, “The standard of the forces with Dan shall be on the north side with their armies.” Ahiezer, the son of Ammishaddai, his army was numbered at 62,700. “Those who camp next to him shall be the tribe of Asher.” So we have Dan and Asher.

And then finally, then comes the tribe in verse 29 of Naphtali. His army is 53,400. “All who are numbered with the forces of Dan, 157,600, they shall break camp last with their standards.” So these are going to be number four up here.

So once again, if you put the totals here, the ones who are with Judah, you have 186,400 in the first regiment there, you might say. With Reuben and his bunch, you have 151,450. Then in the third group with Ephraim, you have 108,100. And in the final group with Dan, you have 157,600.

When you add this all together, you get something on the order of 605,100, if I remember my math. And these are, of course, just the number of fighting men. If you go and add together all of the—I'm sorry, 605,550 is the total if you add all those four numbers together. So that's just the fighting men.

When you add the young'uns and the women and so forth, you get up much closer to the two million plus and the mixed multitude and so on that wound up leaving Egypt with Moses. And that also excludes the Levites.

So looking at the numbers for each tribe, if you figure that on average there's somewhere between 50,000 and 60,000 per tribe, if there's about that many in Levi, you could add that in in terms of the number of adult males, you would come up on the order of 650,000, 660,000, somewhere on that order because the Levites were not numbered.

So this is important to us, and we're going to let this sit for a moment because we want to look at some of the characteristics of these tribes, and then we're going to come back and see why they were laid out this way.

But let's return now to our discussion. We've already seen the characteristics of the tribe of Reuben, the firstborn, and I'm going to go rather quickly. You can glean most of this if you have a concordance and look at the Scriptures, or you can find a Bible dictionary or something like that that may even cover more detail than I'm going to. We'll have to move rather quickly through this.

But as I mentioned last time, the Korah, Dathan, and Abiram rebellion that took place in the wilderness—Dathan and Abiram were Reubenites. They're from the firstborn tribe, and this is sort of—you get the idea that maybe the issue in this rebellion is, “Well, we're the firstborn. We're from the tribe of Reuben,” and they're trying to undo what took place a few hundred years earlier when the blessings and the assignments were portioned out among the twelve brothers. They say, “We're the firstborn. We should be the leaders,” and joining them is Korah.

But when the discipline, the judgment takes place in Numbers 26—actually Numbers 16, I think, is where the rebellion takes place, and then in Numbers 26:11, we find out that although the children of Dathan and Abiram perished with them, apparently the children of Korah did not. He was the Levite that was with Dathan and Abiram.

So, and this you can find a reference perhaps in the blessing of Moses in Deuteronomy chapter 33 when he pronounces his blessing on Israel. He has some things to say that Levi should continue, but not in great numbers.

But later on, when the land is portioned out, Reuben and Gad are going to be neighbors. They are the two tribes that live on the east side of the Jordan. Remember, there's a story later on about how they go to set up a rock to memorialize the fact that they are going to always be a part of the nation of Israel, but their brethren on the other side of the Jordan misinterpret it and think that they're getting ready to secede from the union, so to speak.

And they all gather their armies and march down on Reuben and Gad, and Reuben and Gad say, “Oh no, that's just the opposite. This stone is a marker to remind us that we're a part of you all, and we're not going to let the river divide us.”

So, but the river really did divide them, and in their later history they eventually come under the influence or the rulership of the Moabites and so on. It's interesting to note in Judges chapter 5, you remember when the armies of Israel go up against Sisera, you have Deborah and Barak, and when it lists the tribes that go out to fight Sisera, Reuben and Gad didn't make the trip. They weren't there.

Now, they were there for the conquest of the land. They came across, and their armies were actually in front of the battle array to go out and win the land. But in the later history under the Judges, after Joshua's death, after the land had been conquered and settled, then it seems like they kind of stopped participating.

Even though they had the rocks set up in the valley, in later history they didn't really remain true to their word. But they were warlike. Since they were kind of on their own over there, they were good warriors and so forth. We find this out in 1 Chronicles 5, in verse 18. They were valiant men, men able to bear the buckler and sword and able to shoot with the bow and skillful in war.

Because they were out there kind of on the flank, they didn't have other tribes to really help them out at short notice. And it says in 1 Chronicles 5:19, they cried out to God in the battle, and He was entreated of them because they put their trust in Him. So there were some good believers over there who knew what it took to win a battle in that particular episode.

When David was becoming king over Israel, in 1 Chronicles 12:37, it says along with Gad and Manasseh, Reuben sent a contingent of 120,000 men with all manner of instruments of war for the battle, men of war that could order the battle array, men who came with a perfect heart to Hebron and to make David king. So they came across the Jordan, sent their men, and they were supporting David as king.

In the roster of David's mighty men, if you look in 1 Chronicles 11:42, there's a Reubenite listed in there named Adina, A-D-I-N-A. He was the chief of the Reubenites, and 30 with him, and a little band of hoplites or something along with him there.

Because of their geographic isolation, at least in part, it seems that in the later history of Israel they did give in to the influence of the Moabites and the surrounding peoples there and get into idolatry and so forth. And by the time you get down to 2 Kings 10, verse 32, they suffered under the invasion of Hazael during the reign of Jehu. They trespassed against the God of their fathers and played the harlot after the gods of the peoples of the land, and they were eventually carried away and taken to Pul, king of Assyria, when you have the Assyrian invasion. They were carried away, and this is 1 Chronicles 5:25 and following.

So even though they were over in a different area of the land, they wind up suffering the fate of the northern tribes when discipline comes in from God. And the prestige and so forth that should have been Reuben's because of his birthright is specifically stated to have passed to Joseph in 1 Chronicles 5:1.

And yet the tribe of Reuben is present in the restored Israel. When you look at the regathered tribes and so forth, Ezekiel mentions this in chapter 48 and verse 6. So his tribe does survive its many historical problems.

So that's a brief rundown of Reuben. We already mentioned his personal indiscretion—would be putting it lightly—when he goes in and sleeps with one of the handmaids.

The next son is Simeon, and he is, among other things in his personal life, he was the hostage left behind when the sons returned from Egypt and Joseph had Simeon remain behind. He seems to have been one of the primary instigators wanting to kill Joseph. You remember Judah diverted the brothers from killing Joseph to selling him into slavery, which is sort of a faint praise, I guess.

But Simeon seems to have been a primary instigator, and Joseph, I think, in a way maybe has a little fun with Simeon. We'll study that story more closely. But Simeon has to remain behind as a hostage until the brothers go get Benjamin and bring him back down. That's in Genesis 42.

But the tribe of Simeon suffers quite an unusual fate. We saw in Genesis 49, when we read the blessing and the oracle of Jacob, he says, "Simeon and Levi are brethren," and talks about their violence and their anger, and he says, "I will divide them in Jacob and scatter them in Israel."

The later history of the tribe of Simeon, there's really not much in the Bible about them, and they were absorbed into the tribe of Judah. In the blessing of Moses in Deuteronomy 33, Simeon's not even mentioned. So that already they have diminished.

When Joshua chapter 15, verses 21 and following, you have the apportionment of cities to the tribe of Simeon. By the time you get down to the time of Nehemiah, when they're returning to the land from the captivity, Nehemiah 11:26 through 29, the cities that had been Simeon cities are given to Judah because the Simeonites seem to have dissipated.

So that came true, what Jacob spoke, that they would be scattered in Israel, and their tribe sort of disappears off the scene. There are some later references to them. Even though their tribal area is down in the south, they shared a border with Judah down in the south, but their fate is associated with the northern kingdom, and you find this in 2 Chronicles 15:9, 2 Chronicles 34:6, and they're associated with the ten northern tribes in Ezekiel 48, several verses there, 24, 25, and 33, and even Revelation 7, verse 7.

They geographically were located down with Judah, but they share the fate of the northern kingdom because of their apostasy. But there's not a whole lot else in the Bible about the Simeonites. You can find individuals here and there, but that sin of theirs appears to have been very great, not only with regard to Joseph. Simeon seems to have been exceedingly violent. It's he and Levi that do the hamstringing of the horses and the slaughter of the ones they hold responsible for the rape of Dinah. And, of course, he seems to have been the leading proponent of killing Joseph during that episode. So his fate seems to be among the worst.

We have a few more tribes to cover here, obviously, and this is probably a good place to pause and take our break. Once again, to keep in mind, though, if we were to stop at this point this morning, what would we think about what we have seen? God has a plan regardless of origin, regardless of failures. God has a plan that will come to pass. God has a purpose that He has ordained.

We can be on the positive blessing side of it. We can be on the negative discipline side of it. But if we are believers, we are saved eternally. We will be brought into the land. We will be given that dwelling place that Christ has gone to prepare.

The question that remains for us is not to settle our eternal fate in terms of destination, but to settle our eternal fate in terms of where we will fit in the plan of God. Will we—how much of His glory will we reflect? And you can see in the careers of these sons of Jacob that it depends on what we choose. We choose what befalls us. It's not fate. It's not kismet. It's...