

## September 17, 2017 - Gen. 49:1-26 - Jacob's blessing and death

**Torah Reading: Genesis 49:1-26 - Jacob's blessing and death**

**Observe Yom Kippur!**

**Psalm 40**

**Haftarah - (1) Isaiah 43:22 – 44:2 + 6**

**(2) Isaiah 55:3-12 + 56:8**

**(3) Isaiah 48:12-20 + 49:13**

**Genesis 49:1** - "And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days."

Rashi - He attempted to reveal the End, but the Shechinah withdrew from him. So he began to say other things. — [from Pesachim 56a, Gen. Rabbah 98:2]

### Reuben

**Genesis 49:4** - "Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch."

i.e. when he had sex with Jacob's wives (**Genesis 35:22**)

### Simeon and Levi

**Genesis 49:5** - "Simeon and Levi are brethren; instruments of cruelty are in their habitations. O my soul, come not thou into their secret; unto their assembly, mine honour, be not thou united: for in their anger they slew a man, and in their self-will they digged down a wall. Cursed be their anger, for it was fierce; and their wrath, for it was cruel: I will divide them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel."

Referring to their slaughter the Shechemites (Genesis 34) as well as their dealings with Joseph. Jacob insists he had no knowledge of their plan at Shechem.

"digged down a wall" = "hamstring a bull" - Rashi - They wanted to "uproot" Joseph, who was called "bull," in Moses' blessing of Joseph:

**Deuteronomy 33:17** - "His glory is like the firstling of his bullock, and his horns are like the horns of unicorns (wild ox): with them he shall push the people together to the ends of the earth: and they are the ten thousands of Ephraim, and they are the thousands of Manasseh."

In the wilderness the Simeonites dwindled from 59,300 to 22,200 men (Numbers 1:23; Numbers 26:14). he is altogether omitted in the blessing of Moses Deuteronomy 33, and after the conquest of Canaan, were so feeble as to have only fifteen towns assigned them, scattered about in the territory of Judah, eventually being absorbed by that tribe.

The tradition is they became itinerant scribes and teachers. The Jerusalem Targum: "I will divide the tribe of Simeon, that they may be scribes and teachers of the law in the congregation of Jacob."

Levi's curse was turned into a blessing by the Levites' faithfulness in Exodus 32:26-28, and they were "scattered" by having no inheritance in the land, being dedicated to the Lord's service and spread across the land in 48 separate cities.

## Judah

**Genesis 49:8** - "Judah, thou art he whom thy brethren shall praise: thy hand shall be in the neck of thine enemies; thy father's children shall bow down before thee. Judah is a lion's whelp: from the prey, my son, thou art gone up: he stooped down, he couched as a lion, and as an old lion; who shall rouse him up? The sceptre shall not depart from Judah, nor a lawgiver from between his feet, until Shiloh come; and unto him shall the gathering of the people be. Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine; he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: His eyes shall be red with wine, and his teeth white with milk."

Rashi - Judah began retreating backwards [so that he (Jacob) would not reprove him for the deed involving Tamar (Gen. 38:16 ff). So Jacob called him with words of appeasement, "Judah, you are not like them."

"neck of thy enemies" - in the time of David: "And of my enemies - you have given me the back of their necks" (2 Sam. 22:41). - [From Gen. Rabbah 98:9]

"a cub and a grown lion is Judah" - He prophesied about David, who was at first like a cub: "When Saul was king over us, it was you who led Israel out and brought them in" (2 Samuel 5:2), and at the end a lion, when they made him king over them.

"from the prey, my son, you withdrew" - From what I suspected of you, (namely) that "Joseph has surely been torn up; a wild beast has devoured him" (Gen. 37:33).

Rashi - Judah withdrew from the plan to kill Joseph (Gen. 37:26) as well as the killing of Tamar when he confessed, "She is right, [it is] from me..." (Gen. 38: 26).

"He crouched, rested like a lion," - [This was fulfilled] in the time of Solomon, "every man under his vine and fig tree, etc." (I Kings 5:5) (Gen. Rabbah 98:7) a phrase considered to refer to the Days of Messiah.

Micah 4:3-4 - "Nation will not lift up sword against nation, And never again will they train for war. Each of them will sit under his vine and under his fig tree, With no one to make them afraid, For the mouth of the LORD of hosts has spoken."

## Shiloh

"until Shiloh comes" - [This refers to] the King Messiah, to whom the kingdom belongs

(שָׁלוֹ) , and so did Targum Onkelos render it: [until the Messiah comes, to whom the kingdom belongs].

Shiloh — this obscure word is variously interpreted to mean "the sent" (John 17:3), "the seed" (Isaiah 11:1), the "peaceable or prosperous one" (Ephesians 2:14) — that is, the Messiah (Isaiah 11:10; Romans 15:12)

Best divided, as in the Septuagint, into she (whom) I (to) and o (Him). “The scepter shall not depart from Judah until the One come whose it is” or as in Targum Onkelos, "until he comes whose is the kingdom,” understood to be Messiah.

Compare Ezekiel 21:27 - “Overthrown, overthrown, I will make it overthrown! It shall be no longer, Until He comes whose right it is, And I will give it to Him.”

Further: Micah 5:2 - “But you, Bethlehem Ephrathah, Though you are little among the thousands of Judah, Yet out of you shall come forth to Me The One to be Ruler in Israel, Whose goings forth are from of old, From everlasting.” (See also Matthew 2:6)

“nor a lawgiver (a lawgiver’s staff) from between his feet” - “between his feet” refers to the genitals and his seed, his future offspring. The Targums interpret this as a “teacher of the law.”

Luke 1:31-33 - “And behold, you will conceive in your womb and bring forth a Son, and shall call His name Jesus. He will be great, and will be called the Son of the Highest; and the Lord God will give Him the throne of His father David. And He will reign over the house of Jacob forever, and of His kingdom there will be no end.”

Revelation 5:5 - “But one of the elders said to me, ‘Do not weep. Behold, the Lion of the tribe of Judah, the Root of David, has prevailed to open the scroll and to loose[a] its seven seals.’”

“and to him will be a gathering of peoples” - Rashi - [meaning: a number of nations who unite to serve God and join under the banner of the King Messiah] as it is said: “to him shall the nations inquire” (Isa. 11:10).

Isaiah 11:10 - “And in that day there shall be a root of Jesse, which shall stand for an ensign of the people; to it shall the Gentiles seek: and his rest shall be glorious..”

John 12:32 - “And I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.”

“He binds his foal to a vine” - Onkelos translated the verse as referring to the King Messiah [i.e., the King Messiah will bind, etc.]. The vine represents Israel; עִירָה means Jerusalem [interpreting עִירָה as “his city,” from עִיר]. The tendril represents Israel, [referred to as such by the prophet:] “Yet I planted you a noble vine stock (שׁוֹרֵק)” (Jer.

2:21). Prosperity - The vines so numerous you can tie a donkey to it.

“he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes.” - Targum Onkelos: Fine purple shall be his garment, his raiment fine wool, crimson and colorful clothing.

This could also refer to Messiah as avenger:

Targum Pseudo-Jonathan states, “How beautiful is the King Messiah who is destined to arise from the house of Judah! He has girded his loins and gone down to battle against his enemies, destroying kings and their power, and there is neither king nor power that can withstand him. He reddens the mountains with the blood of their slain. His garments are saturated with blood, like those of him who presses the grapes.” (Compare Revelation 14:19-20 )

“His eyes shall be red with wine,” - this denotes mountains because from there one can see far away. [According to the Targum : His mountains shall be red with his vineyards.]

“and his teeth white with milk” - Targum Onkelos renders: his rocky crags shall be white.

## Zebulun

**Genesis 49:13** - “Zebulun shall dwell at the haven of the sea; and he shall be for an haven of ships; and his border shall be unto Zidon.”

Rashi - Moses said, “Rejoice, O Zebulun, in your going forth, and Issachar, in your tents” (Deut. 33:18) Zebulun would go forth [to engage] in commerce, and Issachar would engage in [the study of] Torah in tents.

## Issachar

**Genesis 49:14-15** - Issachar is a strong ass couching down between two burdens: And he saw that rest was good, and the land that it was pleasant; and bowed his shoulder to bear, and became a servant unto tribute.”

Rashi - “a bony donkey.” He bears the yoke of the Torah, like a strong donkey which is laden with a heavy burden. — [From Gen. Rabbah 99: 9] like a donkey, which travels day and night and does not lodge in a house, but when it lies down to rest, it lies between the boundaries, in the boundaries of the towns where it transports merchandise. — [From Zohar vol. 1, 242a]

“He saw a resting place, that it was good”: He saw that his territory was a blessed and good land for producing fruits. — [From Targum Onkelos , Bereshith Rabbathi]

“and he bent his shoulder to bear [burdens]”: [i.e., the yoke of Torah.]- [From Gen. Rabbah 98:12]

Issachar was considered a tribe of scholars: as it is said: “And of the sons of Issachar, those who had an understanding of the times, to know what Israel should do: their chiefs were two hundred” (I Chron 12:33). He (Issachar) provided two hundred heads of Sanhedrin. [From Gen. Rabbah 98: 12]

## Dan

**Genesis 49:16** - “Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. Dan shall be a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels, so that his rider shall fall backward.”

“Dan” = judge. But Rashi interprets it as “avenge”: Concerning Samson he uttered this prophecy. He will avenge his people from the Philistines, like “When the Lord avenges (יִדֹ) His people” (Deut. 32:36). - [From Targum Onkelos]

“a serpent by the way, an adder in the path, that biteth the horse heels”

This is a snake, and I say it is given this appellation because it bites, “and you will bite (תִּשׁוּפְנוּ) his heel” (Gen. 3:15). We find something similar in [the story of] Samson: “And Samson grasped the two pillars of the center, etc.” (Jud. 16:29), and those on the roof died. Onkelos renders [נְחָשׁ] as כְּחֵי חוּרְמָן, the name of a species of snake whose bite has no antidote, and that is the צְפַעְנִי (adder). It is called חוּרְמָן because it destroys (חָרַם) everything.

**Genesis 49:18** - “I have waited for thy salvation, O LORD.”

This is an aside by Jacob, who prays for Dan in his future conflicts.

Rashi - He (Jacob) prophesied that the Philistines would gouge out his (Samson’s) eyes, and he (Samson) would ultimately say, “O Lord God, remember me now and strengthen me now only this once, etc.” (Jud. 16:28). - [From Num. Rabbah 14:9]

## Gad

**Genesis 49:19** - “Gad, a troop shall overcome him: but he shall overcome at the last.”

“a troop will troop forth from him” - they will cross the Jordan with their brothers to war, every armed man, until the land is conquered.

“and it will troop back in its tracks” - All his troops will return in their tracks to the territory that they took on the other side of the Jordan, and no one will be missing from them. — [From Targum Yerushalmi]

## Asher

**Genesis 49:20** - “Out of Asher his bread shall be fat, and he shall yield royal dainties.”

Rashi - The food from Asher's territory will be rich, for there will be many olive trees in his territory, so that oil will flow like a fountain. And thus did Moses bless him, "and dip his foot in oil" (Deut. 33:24).

## Naphtali

**Genesis 49:21** - "Naphtali is a hind let loose: he giveth goodly words."

Rashi - A swift gazelle: He (Jacob) prophesied concerning the war with Sisera: "and take with you ten thousand men of the men of Naphtali, etc." (Jud. 4:6), and they went there with alacrity. And so it is stated there with an expression of dispatching, "into the valley they rushed forth with their feet" (ibid. 5:15).

"he giveth goodly words" - Through them, Deborah and Barak sang a song (Gen. Rabbah 98:17)

## Joseph

**Genesis 49:22-26** - "Joseph is a fruitful bough, even a fruitful bough by a well; whose branches run over the wall: The archers have sorely grieved him, and shot at him, and hated him: But his bow abode in strength, and the arms of his hands were made strong by the hands of the mighty God of Jacob; (from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel:) Even by the God of thy father, who shall help thee; and by the Almighty, who shall bless thee with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lieth under, blessings of the breasts, and of the womb: The blessings of thy father have prevailed above the blessings of my progenitors unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills: they shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him that was separate from his brethren."

The word "fruitful" in the original contains a play upon the name "Ephraim"

"the branches (daughters) spread over the wall." - The women of Egypt strode out on the wall to gaze upon his beauty (Gen. Rabbah 98:18). Also, the evil eye should have no influence over his descendants.

"The archers have sorely grieved him" - [called this because their] tongues were like arrows (רִצְפוֹ) (Gen. Rabbah 98:19) His brothers heaped bitterness upon him (Joseph), [and] Potiphar and his wife heaped bitterness upon him by having him imprisoned.

"his bow abode in strength (was established)" - Our Rabbis interpreted, "But his bow was strongly established" as referring to his (Joseph's) overcoming his temptation with his master's wife. He calls it a bow because semen shoots like an arrow.

"the arms of his hands were made strong" - This refers to the placing of the signet ring on his (Joseph's) hand.

"from thence is the shepherd, the stone of Israel" - he merited to be the shepherd of

Israel and to have a stone among the stones of the tribes of Israel [on the breastplate of the High Priest.]

“unto the utmost bound of the everlasting hills” - a limitless blessing, without boundaries, reaching the four corners of the earth.

## Benjamin

**Genesis 49:27** - “Benjamin shall ravin as a wolf: in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.”

Rashi - He (Jacob) prophesied that the Benjamites were destined to be “grabbers” : “and you shall grab for yourselves each man his wife” (Jud. 21:21), in [the episode of] the concubine [who happened to be] in Gibeah. and he prophesied about Saul, that he would be victorious over his enemies all around.

“in the morning” - He (Jacob) is referring to Saul, who arose at the beginning of the “morning (other editions: טַל is the blossoming) and sunrise” of Israel. — [From Esther Rabbah 10:13]

“at night he shall divide the spoil” - Mordecai and Esther, who were of [the tribe of] Benjamin, will divide the spoils of Haman, as it is said: “Behold, the house of Haman I have given to Esther” (Esther 8:7).

**Genesis 49:28** - “All these are the twelve tribes of Israel: and this is it that their father spake unto them, and blessed them; every one according to his blessing he blessed them.”

Rashi - One might think that he did not bless Reuben, Simeon, and Levi. Therefore, Scripture states: and he blessed them, meaning all of them. — [From Pesikta Rabbathi 7]

## Jacob’s Death

Genesis 49:29-30 - “I am about to be gathered to my kin. Bury me with my fathers in the cave, which is in the field of Machpelah.”

This is the only instance of the use of the phrase [‘I am about to be gathered to my kin’] by the speaker about himself [in the Bible] and the only case in which ‘kin’ appears in the singular Hebrew form.

Jacob's death is described without the use of the word "death." In fact, a midrash states that "Jacob, our father, did not die," although his death is referred to in the very next chapter.

Rashi - But no mention is made of death in his regard, and our Rabbis of blessed

memory said: Our father Jacob did not die. — [From Ta'anith 5b]

Ramban suggests that the purpose of the midrashic interpretation that Jacob did not die is to show that the souls of the righteous are "bound in the bundle of life in the care of Adonai." (I Samuel 25:29)

See <https://reformjudaism.org/learning/torah-study/va-ychi/generation-generation>