

### **Beneath Joseph's Technicolour Dream Coat Family Blessings and Curses – Genesis 48 - 49**

As Jacob's life and story draw to a close, the time comes to pass on his blessing to his sons (Genesis 48 – 49). Some of Jacob's words truly sound like blessings. For example, Joseph's blessing contains the word 'bless' six times in just five verses (Genesis 49:22 – 26). But some of these 'blessings' sound more like punishments and curses: "*Simeon and Levi... Cursed be their anger, so fierce, and their fury, so cruel. I will scatter them in Jacob and disperse them in Israel*" (Genesis 49:5 – 7). The theme of blessing and curse runs throughout the first five books of our Bible (Genesis – Deuteronomy). The first occurrence is God's original blessing and curse upon his creation (Genesis 1:27 – 2:3; 3:14 – 19). The other bookend to this theme is found at the end of the five books of Moses where God places before the recently redeemed people of Israel the following choice, "*This day I call heaven and earth as witnesses against you that I have set before you life and death, blessings and curses. Now choose life, so that you and your children may live.*" (Deuteronomy 30:19) There are four important truths about blessing and curse to be found in these five Biblical books:

- While humanity forfeited its original blessing by sinning, God remains determined to bless his people, beginning with the blessing of Abraham (Genesis 12:1 – 3)
  - Receiving God's blessing or curse can be a direct consequence of our own obedience or disobedience (e.g. Genesis 2:8 – 9, 15 – 17 and Deuteronomy 30:19 [*above*]).
  - Through Jacob's blessing upon Ephraim and Manasseh (Genesis 48) we're reminded again that God's blessings can be based upon his sovereign choice rather than on human birthright.
  - We can only reason that Judah's blessing (Genesis 49:9 – 12) was based on grace more than merit (e.g. remember the story of Judah and Tamar in Genesis 38?) Furthermore, despite Jacob's history of favouritism towards Joseph, God (through Jacob's blessing) chose Judah to become the predominant tribe in Israel and the family branch through whom Christ would be born<sup>1</sup>.
1. Read Genesis 48. Why do you think the theme of the younger son being blessed over the older son is so prominent in Jacob's family? (Also Gen 21:1 – 13 and 25:19 – 23)
  2. Read Genesis 49:1 – 7. What did Jacob's three oldest sons, Reuben, Simeon and Levi, do to earn their father's wrath?
  3. Why do you think that Judah was chosen from among Jacob's 12 sons as the leader of Israel and the father of the messianic line [leading to Christ]? (Genesis 49:8 – 12)
  4. Given that Joseph and Benjamin were Jacob's two favourite sons, why do you think Benjamin's blessing is so short and sharp? (Compare Genesis 49:22 – 26 and 49:27).
  5. What does it mean in 49:28 that each son received a blessing appropriate to him?
  6. Read Galatians 3:6 – 14. Explain why our promised blessing in Christ is not a matter of human merit but of God's grace.

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<sup>1</sup> Later in Israel's history Joseph and Judah became the names associated with Israel's divided kingdom: The tribe of Ephraim (Joseph's son) was predominant in the Northern kingdom and Judah in the Southern. But God promised to unite Israel again under Christ. (See Ezekiel 37:15 – 24)