

Dynamics of Family Leadership

Lesson for September 25, 2022

Unit I: God Calls Abraham's Family

Scriptural Background: Genesis 35:19-34

Printed Text: Genesis 25: 22b -26; 38:24-26; 49:10-12

Key verse: "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." (Genesis 49:10, NKJV)

Word Study

Hook

Even that first famous Adams generation (children of second President John Adams, 1735-1826) had more than its share of black sheep. John and Abigail's eldest child, Abigail, married a wasteful person and at her death left her children to their care. Son Charles married the sister of his spendthrift brother-in-law, dissipated family funds, died of alcoholism and left his widow to the care of his parents. Son Thomas Boylston also became an alcoholic, again bequeathing his children to the care of the family. Though John Quincy (1767-1848) turned out well, he and his unhappy wife Louisa hardly went unscathed. Their first son was an alcoholic and committed suicide at the age of 31. Their next son was expelled from college, failed in business, and died of an alcohol-related illness. Only their youngest son, Charles Francis (1807-86), reacted against the family pattern by his exemplary sobriety, his prudence in business and fervent dedication to his wife and children. He spent years writing the biography and editing the words of his grandfather John Adams. But he concluded, "The history of my family is not a pleasant one to remember. It is one of great triumphs in the world but of deep groans within, one of extraordinary brilliancy and deep corroding mortification."

Charles Francis Adams, in *U.S. News and World Report*, December 12, 1988

Today's lesson provides an account of Jacob's (Israel's) family dysfunctionality and its ultimate consequences.

Key Terms

1. **Binding** (Genesis 49:11) – To tie, attach. Imprison, tether
2. **Born** (35:26) – To bear, bring forth, beget.
3. **Depart** (49:10) – To turn aside; go away; leave; pass away.
4. **Feet** (49:10) – foot; part of the body; step; toes.
5. **Maid servant** (35:26) – Maid; female servant; "handmaid" (KJV); "servant" (NIV)
6. **Sons** (35:23) – offspring; children; brothers.

Lesson Background

Genesis 35 begins after Jacob had just endured a terrible experience with the defilement of his daughter Dinah followed by the slaughter and plundering of the Shechemites by his sons. Any father, who cares about his children and wants them to honor God, would be devastated by such events. At this time God spoke to Jacob to remind him of His original appearance to Jacob, the promises He had made, and the covenant Jacob himself had made with God. This had occurred at Bethel, as recorded in Genesis 28:19. Here God told Jacob to return there and build an altar. Clearly, God was calling on Jacob to renew his covenant and his service to God.

Jacob then commanded his family and everyone with him to put away their foreign gods, change their garments, and purify themselves. Jacob then told his family they would go to Bethel, as God had told him to. He would make an altar so they could worship the true God who had come to him in his distress and had cared for him ever since. This is what God had promised to do, and Jacob had promised to serve God as a result.

God had earlier appeared to Jacob at Bethel. Now He appeared to him again and renewed His covenant. God repeated that the name Jacob wore should be Israel, no longer Jacob. God then repeated the promise to Jacob that He had given to Abraham and Isaac. Jacob then did as he had done the first time God had spoken to him at this place. He set up a memorial of stones in the form of a pillar and poured oil over it (Genesis 28:18-22). Then he again called the place Bethel.

Jacob then decided to travel on from Bethel. Shortly before he came to Ephrath (also called Bethlehem), Rachel came into childbirth. Her labor was hard, but the midwife assured her the son would be born. She did have the son, but she died doing so. Before she died, she named the son BenOni, meaning Son of My Sorrow. Jacob chose not to use that name. He named the son Benjamin, meaning Son of My Right Hand, though others say it means Son of Days (old age). When Rachel died, Jacob again put up a pillar as a memorial. But this was a memorial to her death and was placed at her gravesite. Jacob had suffered hard times. First came the problems with his daughter and his sons, then his wife died. Yet God was molding Jacob to make him the kind of man He wanted him to be.

In Genesis 35:21-22a, Jacob continued traveling and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder. There another sinful tragedy occurred. *“And it came to pass, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father’s concubine: and Israel heard [it].”* Reuben committed adultery with Jacob’s servant wife Bilhah. It was bad enough that a young man of the countryside had defiled his daughter Dinah. That was sinful, but in this case, Jacob’s firstborn son committed adultery with one of Jacob’s own wives! This act was incest and caused the son of Israel to be disinherited.

It is at this point that this week’s lesson begins.

Lesson In Depth

I. Forfeiting the Birthright (Genesis 35:22b – 26)

Sons of Jacob were twelve: The birth of Benjamin in Canaan (verse 18), furnished reason to simply review the sons born outside of Canaan.

The sons of Leah: Jacob's first wife, which are six, and are named in order, according to their birth: Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun.

The sons of Rachel: Rachel, Jacob's second wife had two children, Joseph and Benjamin. **And the sons of Bilhah:** Then Bilhah's sons, who was Rachel's handmaid, are listed. They were Dan and Naphtali.

And the sons of Zilpah: And lastly, the sons of Zilpah, Leah's handmaid, which were two also, Gad and Asher.

This report is given to us here because it fits into the chronological scheme at this point, and it prepares us for the time when Jacob will take away from Reuben the rights of the firstborn (Genesis 49:34).

The theme for Unit I: God Calls Abraham's Family, is important to remember as we journey through today's lesson. The scriptures in this part of the lesson provide an account of the sons of Jacob/Israel in the order of their birth and specifying their mothers. Why? This is done to establish the birthright. In Hebrew culture the birthright was important as we saw in the lesson of Esau and Jacob (see also additional information on the birthright at the end of this lesson). According to Hebrew law, the eldest son was to receive the birthright. In the case of Jacob, this would be Reuben. In the first part of Genesis 35:22 the immoral behavior of Reuben, the first born, jeopardizes his receipt of the birthright. The second and third in line for the birthright have also committed immoral acts in Shechem that exclude them from receiving the blessing. Yet, God's perfect plan always has a way of being brought to fruition.

II. The Repentant Heir Apparent (Genesis 38:24-26)

The Book of Genesis is not yet finished describing the wickedness among Jacob's sons. We have been told how Reuben (Jacob's oldest son committed adultery with one of Jacob's wives and how Jacob's next two sons (Simeon and Levi) murdered a whole city of men (Genesis 34). In Genesis 37 we have been told how the brothers in general were so jealous of Joseph that they nearly killed him and were willing to sell him as a slave. Chapter 38 tells of the immorality in the life of Judah, the fourth son in line.

Judah settles apart from his brothers and marries a Canaanite woman named Shua; they have several sons. When it's time for Judah's son Er to marry, Judah finds him a wife named Tamar. But Er is wicked and is put to death by the Lord. So, Judah tells another son, Onan, to sleep with Tamar in order to beget offspring for Er. But Onan spills his semen on the ground, not wanting to beget offspring that won't be considered his. The Lord puts Onan to death for this. Judah then

plans to have his younger son, Shelah, marry Tamar one day, but he tells Tamar to return to her father's house for the time being.

Eventually Judah's wife Shua dies. Tamar has been waiting for Judah to marry her to his next youngest son, Shelah, but Judah delays. It seems that Tamar decided to take initiative to remind Judah of his promise. When Tamar hears that Judah is shearing his sheep nearby, she changes out of widows' clothes and veils herself, then sits by the road. When Judah sees her, he doesn't recognize her and thinks she's a prostitute. When he asks to sleep with her, Tamar requests the pledge of Judah's signet, cord, and staff until he can pay her properly with a goat. Tamar conceives and goes home, taking the items with her.

It at this point that today's lesson takes place.

It was told Judah, saying, Tamar thy daughter in law is with child by harlotry: When the widowed, unmarried Tamar was found to be pregnant, it was evident that it was from some kind of sexual immorality.

And Judah said, bring her out and let her be burned: Judah found it easy to pass judgment on someone who sinned just as he sinned, without passing the same judgment on himself. Double standards prevailed in that Judah, no less guilty than Tamar, commanded her execution for immorality.

Not that Judah can be thought to be a civil magistrate in a Canaanitish and Heathen city where he sojourned, and as such pronounced this sentence on her at once, or even had the power of life and death in his own family; and besides Tamar was not in his, but in her own father's house. But, this criminal action of Tamar was judged adultery, because she was, of right, and according to a custom or law then in use, the wife of Shelah.

When she was brought forth: From her father's house, not to the place of execution, or in order to be burnt, but to the court of judicature, in order for her trial.

She sent to her father-in-law, saying, please determine whose these are: She sent a messenger to him, and by him the signet, bracelets, and staff, be they what they may, she had received from him as a pledge for the goat he promised her. Tamar ordered the messenger to say, at the same time he showed Judah these things that she was with child by the person to whom they belonged. Which was a very modest way of laying it to his charge, and yet very striking and convincing.

Tamar acted shrewdly and vindicated herself against the charge of harlotry. She made the logical appeal of noting that the man who hired her was just as guilty as she was. Suddenly the tables were turned. Judah was the guilty one. She had the evidence against him.

She has been more righteous than I: However, even Judah could see through to the real issue. He was at fault for not providing for Tamar a son through his last son Shelah. This was not an accolade for her moral character and faith, but a commendation by Judah for her attention to inheritance rights of her family line and his shameful neglect thereof.

Judah was wrong on two accounts. He had committed fornication with her, and he had not kept his word when he refused to give Tamar his son Shelah.

Judah realizes he was the one who sinned and admitted it. Her death sentence was rescinded.

III. **Grace Overrides Dysfunction** (Genesis 49:10-12)

The beginning of Chapter 49 Jacob offers his last words to his sons, telling each of them what will happen to them. The blessings don't just apply to the individuals, but to the tribes that will descend from each of them. Reuben "defiled" by sleeping with Bilhah in Genesis 35; Simeon and Levi violently attacked the men of Shechem. Judah's blessing is much more positive. Although Judah, Jacob's fourth-born, sinned, Jacob's spiritual insight recognized him as qualified to head the royal tribe that he would generate in the future, take his name, and produce Israel's kings. Though his character has been somewhat mixed in Genesis, Judah will be the ancestor of the kingdom of David. Unlike his brothers before him, Judah repented of his immoral infidelity.

The scepter shall not depart from Judah: The scepter was a symbol of royal power. Lawgiver refers to a club or rod. When a dignitary was seated, the staff would rest between his feet. Jacob was not saying his rule would end when Shiloh came. On the contrary, this term denotes the turning point at which the superiority of Judah will continue, not then to cease, but at that time to be enlarged.

Until Shiloh come: From David until the Herods, a prince of Judah was head over Israel (even Daniel in captivity). The promise was that Israel would keep this **scepter** until **Shiloh comes**. Even under their foreign masters during this period, Israel had a limited right to self-rule, until A.D. 7. At that time, under Herod and the Romans, their right to capital punishment – a small but remaining element of their self-governance – was taken away.

Shiloh: Shiloh is a hidden name for Messiah; it is made up of three grammatical parts (*sh-l-oh*), meaning Him to Whom It (the Scepter or Kingdom) belongs.

And unto him shall the gathering of the people be: Means literally, "And unto him shall be the obedience of the peoples." This can refer only to the Messiah.

Binding his foal unto the vine, and his ass's colt unto the choice vine: This blessing also contained a description of Judah's material abundance (the vine... the choice vine). Judah's land was great wine-growing country.

And he washed his garments in wine, and his clothes in the blood of grapes: An overexaggerated expression, setting forth the great abundance of wine in this tribe, of which there was such plenty that if they would, they might have used it instead of water to wash their clothes in, but not that they did do so, only might if they would. And may denote the great quantity of spiritual blessings flowing from the love of God, which come by Christ.

His eyes shall be red with wine: Signifying, not the overindulgence of this tribe, and their unrestrained use of wine, and the effect of it on them. Instead, it signifies the goodness and generosity of their wine, that if drunk plentifully of, and especially to excess, would have such an effect (see Proverbs 23:29).

As applied to the Messiah, who was of this tribe, it may denote not so much the beauty of his eyes, as the Targums paraphrase it. As the joy and pleasure that sparkled in his eyes when he shed his blood on the cross, enduring that, and despising the shame of it, for the joy of the salvation of his people. Or the clearness of His sight in beholding the actions of his enemies, and especially of the fierceness and fury of his wrath against them, whose eyes are said to be as flames of fire (Revelation 1:14).

And his teeth white with milk: Denoting the fruitfulness of his land, producing fine pastures, on which flocks and herds fed, and gave abundance of milk. The spiritual sense may respect Christ and his people and be expressive of the purity of Christ's nature, life, and doctrine, and of the holiness of His members, their faith and conversation.

All of this has to do with the blood of Jesus which was shed and remembered through the wine. In all this, we need to see Christ through the blessings of Judah. Our lives with Christ are eternal, just as the blessings of Judah were everlasting.

So many shadows of Jesus are in the above. He is the Lion of the tribe of Judah. He is the true Conqueror (over death). He will draw all men unto Him. Every word is really speaking of Jesus.

Lesson Summary

The Abrahamic family lineage is riddled with problems and dysfunction, yet God is faithful to his promises. The key to triumphing over family brokenness was, and still is, accepting and upholding three divinely appointed legacies: authority, covenantal agreement, and abundant blessing, all of which are rooted in the overarching legacy of grace. The story of Abraham and his family experienced these legacies that are relevant even today.

Judah, like his three older brothers, had committed serious sins, but in the matter of going to Egypt for grain and bringing about reconciliation with Joseph, he had taken a role of strong, wise leadership. He had shown great repentance for his wrongs and commitment to do right. As a result, his tribe would become the ruling tribe. They would have the leadership and preeminence that might have been expected to go to Reuben. *“Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel—he was indeed the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel, so that the genealogy is not listed according to the birthright; yet Judah prevailed over his brothers, and from him came a ruler, although the birthright was Joseph's”* (1 Chronicles 5:1-2). He would dominate his enemies. Other family members would praise him, and Jacob's descendants would bow down to him. Again, the reference may include the immediate sons but probably refers more to future generations.

Judah is compared to a lion's whelp (offspring) who goes up from the prey and lies down. Lions are powerful animals, thought and spoken of like royalty (Ezekiel 19:5-7; Micah 5:8,9). They are dignified, strong, and dominant. These qualities would characterize Judah's tribe. Verse 10 specifically becomes a major link in the chain of prophecies regarding the coming Messiah. Judah would have the scepter, symbol of kingly authority. Lawgivers would come from between his feet — as his offspring. The tribe of Judah became the tribe of kings, the offspring of David being the rulers. (Numbers 24:17; Psalm 60:7; 108:8).

God accepts those who genuinely repent and submit to His authority despite their past. Because of His amazing grace, God still looks beyond faults and failures in the lives of believers and uses those who have a repentant spirit and commit to obey His Word faithfully.

Hebrew Birthright

The right of possession into which the eldest son is born. The first son born to the father occupied a prominent place in the Hebrew family (Genesis 27:19; 35: 23; 41:51; 49:3; II Samuel 3:2). Such a one is the "first-born" in the proper sense and is to be distinguished from sons who are "first-born" merely in the sense of being the first child born to one of the several wives that men might have.

The first-born son took rank before his brothers and sisters (Genesis 26:31, 32; 43:33). Usually, the father bequeathed to him the greater part of the inheritance, except when a favored wife succeeded in obtaining it for one of her sons (Genesis 27.; I Kings 11:11-13). In early days the will of the father fixed the part of the chief heir, but the law of Deuteronomy demands for him a double portion of all the possessions and forbids favor being shown to a younger son (Deuteronomy 21:15-17). After the death of the father the first-born son was the head of the family; he had to provide for the widows of his father and for his unmarried sisters, since they ordinarily did not have any hereditary rights. The later rabbinical law obliges him to give a dowry when one of them was to be married. The old law claims all the first-born sons (in the larger sense, "whatever opens the womb") for Yhwh (Exodus 13:2; 22: 29). Some explain this by ascribing a certain sacredness to the first-born; others suppose that the elders were obliged to consecrate them as "nazir" or Nazarite. (Jewish Encyclopedia)

The birthright thus had to do with spiritual direction, whereas the **birthright blessings** had to do with material superiority. When the Almighty "elected" Abraham, both elements were included in the Divine charge: "I shall make you a great nation. I shall bless you and I shall make your name great"

The family blessing was a way to designate who became the head of the extended family when the father died. Like the birthright, the blessing generally went to the eldest son but not always. Again, using Jacob's family, Reuben should have received the blessing, but because of his sin, he was skipped. Next in line was Simeon, but he and his brother Levi (third in line) had destroyed a town in anger over the rape of their sister. For that Jacob decided that they were not suitable to lead the family. Therefore, the blessing came to Judah. Thus, in Jacob's family the person receiving the blessing and the person receiving the birthright or double portion (Joseph) were two different people.

A change in the blessing also happened in Isaac's family. Before Isaac's twin sons were born, God said, "*Two nations are in your womb, Two peoples shall be separated from your body; One people shall be stronger than the other, And the older shall serve the younger*" (Genesis 25:23). Because God placed the older son under the younger son, he was stating that the second born was to receive the blessing. Now Isaac in his old age decided to change this and give the blessing to his eldest son, Esau, anyway. However, his wife overheard his plan and arranged it so that Jacob tricked Isaac into thinking he was his brother. Thus, Isaac gave the blessing to his second son, just as God said, even when he tried to go against God.

The blessing in Abraham's descendants was particularly important because God stated to Abraham that from his descendants the Savior of the world would come. The blessing followed the path of those who were Jesus' ancestors. Jesus was a descendant of Judah, who had received Jacob's blessing (Hebrews 7:14).