

“The Stone of Israel”
Genesis 49:13-28
August 20th, 2017

Whether you have children or not, *if you could give five pieces of practical advice to your children as they left for college, what would you say?* From a list of 35, I’ve gleaned 5 nuggets from the list a Christian father gave to his Christian son upon leaving for college:

- 1) When things seem to be really bad, they usually aren’t... just wait a little while, it’ll get better. Trust me. Better yet, trust God.
- 2) You will be tempted like you’ve never been tempted before. It takes character, lots of it, to not succumb. You have a very large reservoir of character. Don’t forget it. Tap into it at every turn.
- 3) Don’t cut corners or take short cuts in your work or in your studies. Don’t just do that which is easy. Try hard. Do that which is hard. It does eventually get noticed and does produce results.
- 4) True independence is achieved when you’re no longer dependent on anyone else. Seems logical right? But remember that we’ll always depend on God.
- 5) Budget your time. Prioritize where it’s spent. Time can be spent faster than money can. And it can be wasted just as much as money can. And in my view, time is more precious than money. We have precious few days on this earth.

Pretty sound advice, wouldn’t you say? The practice of one generation passing life lessons on to the next goes back to the time of our first parents, Adam and Eve, in the Garden of Eden. As you’ll know, we look to the opening chapters of the Bible’s first book, Genesis, to find that out. We’re at the other end of Genesis in our lengthy study through the “Book of Beginnings.”

Last Sunday, we began to study **Genesis Chapter 49**. Jacob was an old man by this time; he was on his deathbed. We looked at the words of blessing Jacob gave his first four sons – Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Jacob’s words for the first three were firm, bordering on harsh. Their conduct had rendered them ineligible for leadership in the family after Jacob’s death. But, Judah received high praise from Jacob. That was the son (tribe) through whom the Messiah would come. Today, we’ll look briefly at the other 8 brothers, and learn what may be in store for them “in the days to come.”

Genesis 49:13-28:

“Zebulun shall dwell by the haven of the sea; He *shall become* a haven for ships, and his border shall adjoin Sidon.

¹⁴“Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between two burdens; ¹⁵He 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.

¹⁶“Dan shall judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel. ¹⁷Dan 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.

¹⁸I have waited for your salvation, O LORD!

¹⁹“Gad, a troop shall tramp upon him, but he shall triumph at last. ²⁰“Bread from Asher *shall be* rich, And he shall yield royal dainties.

²¹“Naphtali *is* a deer let loose; He uses beautiful words.

²²“Joseph *is* a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a well; His branches run over the wall. ²³The archers have bitterly grieved him, shot *at him* and hated him. ²⁴But 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), ²⁵By the God of your father who will help you, and by the Almighty who will bless you *With* blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. ²⁶The blessings of your father have excelled the blessings of my ancestors, up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills. They shall be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of him who was separate from his brothers.

²⁷“Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; in the morning he shall devour the prey, and at night he shall divide the spoil.” ²⁸All 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.”

In this passage, we see 8 sons addressed who would become the fathers of 8 tribes of the Old Testament nation Israel. Jacob describes 4 of them by comparing them to animals; 3 of his sons Jacob describes according to characteristics of nature; and one son he compares to a military term. Most of Jacob’s words are given to his favored son Joseph (5 verses in English), whose two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh would become two of the 12 tribes.

Zebulun is the first addressed in verse 13. Interestingly, George Washington lay his hand on this verse when he was sworn in to office as our nation’s first President in 1789. Zebulun’s most noteworthy offspring would be *Elon*, a judge of Israel (**Judges 12:11**).

Isaachar is addressed in verses 14 & 15. That tribe would also produce a judge of Israel – *Tola* (**Judges 10:1-2**). Dan is addressed in verses 16 & 17. It’s most notable tribesman would be the most famous judge in Israel– *Samson* (**Judges 13-16**).

Verse 19 addresses Gad. Verse 20 addresses Anna’s tribe – Asher. *Anna* was a prophetess who identified the baby Jesus as the Redeemer of His people when He was brought to Jerusalem by his parents for circumcision.

In verse 21, Jacob addresses Naphtali. That tribe produced *Barak*, who along with Deborah defeated Jabin, the king of Canaan (**Judges Chapter 4**).

In verses 22-26, we read of Jacob’s blessing upon Joseph. His son Ephraim received a great blessing from Jacob. That tribe would produce 5 of the 15 judges in Israel: *Gideon*, *Abimelech*, *Jair*, *Jephthah*, and *Samuel*. This tribe also produced Moses’ successor, *Joshua*, who led the people in their conquest of Canaan.

Verse 27 contains the blessing Benjamin received. This small but powerful tribe would produce Israel’s first king, *Saul* and his son *Jonathan*. Saul’s military commander, *Abner*, was a Benjamite. *Mordecai* and *Esther* were from the tribe of Benjamin. The great Apostle *Paul* had his roots in the tribe of Benjamin.

That summarizes the important human aspect of the passage of Scripture today. But, I’d have us look to the even more important aspect – the divine involvement; God’s participation.

The first proof of God's involvement is found in verse 18 – Jacob's words - "I have waited for your salvation, O LORD!" **God is the Surety of our Salvation.** This verse is likely a prayer Jacob thought or voiced in the midst of giving blessings to his sons. *Have you in the past – or are you presently – praying for someone's salvation?* If not, you should be – especially if you are a believer in Jesus Christ. The very fact that you are praying to God for others proves what Scripture says in many places – Salvation from the punishment due our sins comes from God. Salvation is not something we are able to initiate or provide.

- **Psalm 3:8a** "Salvation *belongs* to the LORD..."

- **I Samuel 2:1** – Hannah speaking to God said, "My heart rejoices in the LORD...I smile at my enemies, because I rejoice in Your salvation."

- **Jonah 2:9** – "Salvation *is* of the LORD."

- **2 Thessalonians 2:13** – The Apostle Paul writing to Christians (the church of the Thessalonians) "...God from the beginning chose you for salvation..."

Application: Jacob waited for God's salvation. And, so often, do *we* wait on God's salvation. Not for our own (we don't desire salvation - let alone wait for salvation - unless God has given us the spiritual capacity to embrace His gift of grace). Sometimes despite their parents' best efforts, some children do not embrace the Lord Jesus Christ as Savior, until sometime after they have left home; you may be praying for your unbelieving spouse or relative; you may be praying for a friend to come to saving faith in Jesus. Do not lose hope, dear ones! Our role is to pray for others, and proclaim the gospel to them. We must leave it up to God to bring the increase!

The second proof of God's involvement in **Genesis 49** comes with verse 24b – "But his bow (referring to Joseph) remained in strength, and the arms of his hands (again, Joseph) were made strong by the hands of the Mighty *God* of Jacob..." Not only is God **the Surety of our Salvation**, He is the **Source of our Strength**.

Joseph is in view here as the one whose bow remained in strength. He grew strong by enduring affliction from his brothers, from Potiphar's wife, and the hardships of life behind bars. He knew about suffering, and may often felt as if he wasn't up to the task.

A 10-year-old boy decided to study judo despite the fact that he had lost his left arm in a car accident. The boy trained with an old Japanese judo master. After three months, the master had taught him only one move. "Sensei," the boy asked, "*Shouldn't I be learning more moves?*"

"This is the only move you'll ever need to know," the sensei replied. Several months later, the sensei took the boy to his first tournament. The boy easily won his first two matches. The third match proved to be more difficult, but the boy deftly used his one move to win the match.

He was now in the finals match. The boy appeared to be overmatched. Concerned he might get hurt, the referee called a time-out. The sensei insisted that the match continue. Soon after the match resumed, his opponent dropped his guard. Instantly, the boy used his move to pin him. The boy was the champion!

On the way home, the boy asked, "Sensei, how did I win the tournament with only one move?" "You won for two reasons," the sensei answered. "First, you've almost mastered one of the most difficult throws in all of judo. And second, the only known defense for that move is for your opponent to grab your left arm." The boy's biggest weakness had become his biggest strength.

God provides strength for His people. For instance,

- In **2 Samuel 22:3**, David writes of “The God of my strength, in whom I will trust; my shield and the horn of my salvation, my stronghold and my refuge; my Savior...”
- **Psalm 46:1** – “God is our refuge and strength, a very present help in trouble.”
- In **Nehemiah 8**, we read of Nehemiah and Ezra addressing God’s people saying, “Do not sorrow, for the joy of the LORD is your strength.” (**Nehemiah 8:10**)

Application: Dear ones, resist the temptation to minister in the power of your flesh, and not the strength of the Lord. Spiritually speaking, isolation weakens Christians. To try to get through this life as a spiritual lone ranger will not result in a strong Christian. The cliché is true in the spiritual realm – ‘there is strength in numbers!’ Fight the temptation to try to live a Christian life in the power of your flesh, or by yourself. You will fail, and you will fail greatly! Sunday morning gatherings are the basis for building a week of ministry, service, and fellowship. To regularly, even periodically, neglect the Sunday gathering is to neglect your spiritual health!

We’ve seen that God is the **Surety of Salvation** and He is the **Source of Strength**. Verse 24 also teaches that He is our **Security as Shepherd and Stone**. Since Jacob himself was a shepherd, he knew what was involved in caring for sheep.

- In **Psalm 23**, David recognized “the Lord (as his) Shepherd...” (**Psalm 23:1**);
- The prophet Isaiah wrote of a Shepherd for God’s people in **Isaiah 40:11** – “He will feed His flock like a shepherd; He will gather the lambs with His arm...”

The Shepherd that Jacob spoke of in today’s passage, and the One to whom David and Isaiah pointed was the Lord Jesus Christ. In fact, Jesus adopts the language to Himself as we read in John’s gospel account (**John 10:11 & 14**) – “I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd gives His life for the sheep.” “I am the good shepherd; and I know My *sheep*, and am known by My own.”

When you think of a stone, you think of strength, stability, and security, and God provided all that and more to Jacob during his difficult earthly life. “The Stone of Israel” describes the one who is stable and unchanging. That God was thought of as a stone or rock is evident in several passages of Scripture:

- **Psalm 118:22** – “The stone *which* the builders rejected has become the chief cornerstone.”
- **Isaiah 28:16** – God says through Isaiah, “Behold, I lay in Zion a stone for a foundation, a tried stone, a precious cornerstone, a sure foundation...”
- The passage that Ron read earlier from **Ephesians 2** ties this to Jesus Christ – “Jesus Christ Himself being the chief *cornerstone*...”

Application: - God shepherds His people today through the ministry of His Word and prayer. The elders of the Church have the ultimate responsibility to ensure God’s people are shepherded properly. **Acts Chapter 20** records Paul summoning the elders of the Church at Ephesus to meet with him as he passed through their area. Verse 28 strikes at the heart of the matter. Paul exhorts the Ephesian elders -“Therefore take heed to yourselves and to all the flock, among which the Holy Spirit has made you overseers, to shepherd the church of God which He purchased with His own blood.”

Today's verse of the week shows that each believer in Jesus Christ is a stone in the building of the local congregation. Turn their with me now in your bulletin (bottom right hand, inside) – **I Peter 2:4 & 5** – “Coming to Him *as to* a living stone, rejected indeed by men, but chosen by God *and* precious, you also, as living stones, are being built up a spiritual house, a holy priesthood, to offer up spiritual sacrifices acceptable to God through Jesus Christ.” **I Peter 2:4 & 5**

MP 1 – God is the Surety of our Salvation;

MP 2 – God is the Source of our Strength;

MP 3 – God is our Security as Shepherd and Stone.

The closest thing I received from my parents that mirrors Jacob's words to his sons was a poem written by British Nobel laureate Rudyard Kipling. I kept that poem on the dresser in my room through much of my childhood. The poem is entitled – simply – “If.”

“If you can keep your head when all about you are losing theirs and blaming it on you,
If you can trust yourself when all men doubt you, but make allowance for their doubting too;
If you can wait and not be tired by waiting, or being lied about, don't deal in lies, or being hated, don't give way to hating, and yet don't look too good, nor talk too wise:

If you can dream—and not make dreams your master; If you can think—and not make thoughts your aim;
If you can meet with Triumph and Disaster and treat those two impostors just the same;
If you can bear to hear the truth you've spoken twisted by knaves to make a trap for fools, or watch the things you gave your life to, broken, and stoop and build 'em up with worn-out tools:

If you can make one heap of all your winnings and risk it on one turn of pitch-and-toss,
And lose, and start again at your beginnings and never breathe a word about your loss;
If you can force your heart and nerve and sinew to serve your turn long after they are gone, and so hold on when there is nothing in you except the Will which says to them: ‘Hold on!’

If you can talk with crowds and keep your virtue, or walk with Kings—nor lose the common touch,
If neither foes nor loving friends can hurt you, if all men count with you, but none too much;
If you can fill the unforgiving minute with sixty seconds' worth of distance run,
Yours is the Earth and everything that's in it, and—which is more—you'll be a Man, my son!”