

# CAPITOL STUDIES

MAY 10, 2023 • WEEK 18



## JOSEPH: THE CIVIL SERVANT FROM EGYPT

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### *Verse of the Week*

Genesis 49:10

The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples.

## Controlling Our Passions: Turning Curses into Blessings



CAMELOT IS THE CLASSIC STORY of King Arthur and his “Knights of the Roundtable.” Theirs was a happy kingdom until his leading knight, Sir Lancelot, fell passionately in love with Arthur’s queen, Guinevere. Lancelot and Guinevere’s unbridled passion, which seemed to promise fulfillment to the lovers, resulted in the ruin of that happy kingdom.

That plot has been played over and over in millions of homes, many of them Christian homes. The initial happiness and potential for lifelong joy is shipwrecked on the rocks of uncontrolled passion. Often, it is the passion of lust. Just as often, it is the passion of anger. Any uncontrolled passion can ruin lives.

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## INTRODUCTION

In Genesis 49, the dying patriarch Jacob calls his twelve sons to his bedside to give them a final blessing (49:28), which is also a prophecy of things to come (49:1). At first glance you may think that the first three blessings sound more like curses. Jacob strongly rebukes his sons for past sins and predicts that those sins will have far-reaching consequences in the future of each man's tribe. And yet, properly understood, corrections and warnings are blessings. These prophecies are based upon Jacob's long, careful observation of his sons' characters and personalities, but the exact prophecy for each tribe has been divinely given to Jacob by God. The uncontrolled passions (intense, overmastering desires or emotions) of Reuben, Simeon, and Levi have brought heartache and ruin to themselves personally and to their families. Jacob's words serve as warnings to his sons and their descendants of areas where they especially need to be on guard, for as we will see, it is possible to change what may seem like a curse into a blessing by turning wholly to the Lord.

In 1 Corinthians 9:24-27, it says this: "Do you not know that those who run in a race all run, but only one receives the prize? Run in such a way that you may win. **Everyone who competes in the games exercises self-control in all things.** They then do it to receive a perishable wreath, but we an imperishable. Therefore I run in such a way, as not without aim; I box in such a way, as not beating the air; but I discipline my body and make it my slave, so that, after I have preached to others, I myself will not be disqualified."

### I. GREAT POTENTIAL CAN BE RUINED BY UNCONTROLLED PASSIONS

*Genesis 49:1-4*

*Then Jacob summoned his sons and said, "Assemble yourselves that I may tell you what will befall you in the days to come. <sup>2</sup>Gather together and hear, O sons of Jacob; And listen to Israel your father. <sup>3</sup>Reuben, you are my firstborn; my might and the beginning of my strength, preeminent in dignity and preeminent in power. <sup>4</sup>Uncontrolled as water, you shall not have preeminence, because you went up to your father's bed; Then you defiled it—he went up to my couch."*

Jacob begins by building up the great potential which Reuben enjoyed as the firstborn, but he quickly moves to the incident over 40 years earlier when Reuben lay with Jacob's concubine Bilhah (Gen. 35:22). Reuben, the firstborn, should have received a double portion of the inheritance. He should have been the leader among his brothers. He, above all his brothers, should have been the one to defend his father's honor, not defile it. But his one act of indulgence robbed him of his privileges as the firstborn. Like King David after him, he paid a terrible price for a night of pleasure. It seems that Reuben had never checked his passion. The Hebrew word translated "uncontrolled" means "reckless." The picture is of water that floods its banks and goes wildly out of control. Proverbs 25:28 says, "Like a city that is broken into and without walls is a man who has no control over his spirit."



## II. UNCONTROLLED PASSIONS START WITH UNCONTROLLED THOUGHTS

The Bible doesn't tell us Reuben's motive. Perhaps it was purely a passion of lustful, sexual desire. Bilhah was likely a young girl when she was given as a handmaid to Rachel at the time of her marriage to Jacob. Reuben was the oldest of Jacob's sons, so the age difference between Bilhah and Reuben was probably less than between Bilhah and Jacob.

Perhaps Reuben was motivated by a combination of lust and the thought that he might gain some justice for his mother, Leah, who had never received the same attention as Rachel, Jacob's most-loved wife. Reuben went into Bilhah shortly after the death of Rachel, the mother of the favored sons, Joseph and Benjamin (see context, Gen. 35:22). Was Reuben trying to make sure that Jacob didn't take Bilhah, Rachel's maid, and elevate her above his mother? Was going to bed with Bilhah Reuben's way of getting back at his father? We cannot know for sure. We do know that later in Israel's history, if a son took his father's concubine to bed, it meant that he had assumed his father's place of power. Absalom did that with his father David's concubines when he rebelled (2 Samuel 16:21-22). Solomon's brother, Adonijah, also tried to grab the throne by securing one of David's concubines as his wife (1 Kings 2:13-25). Was one of Reuben's consuming passions power?

We know that acts of sin don't just happen. Little by little the mind has been allowed to dwell on the act. It's all in your head at this point. No one else knows, and no one has gotten hurt—yet. But it's only a matter of time before your life, and the lives of others, will be ruined by your reckless passion. All the potential in the world won't benefit you if you don't develop self-control. Many gifted pastors and leaders are no longer in their positions of leadership because they allowed their desire for power or sex to control them. If you aren't learning to take every thought captive to the obedience of Jesus Christ, the same thing can happen to you. We are reminded in 2 Corinthians 10:4-5 that "the weapons of our warfare are not carnal, but mighty through God to the pulling down of strong holds; Casting down imaginations and every high thing that exalteth itself against the knowledge of God, and **bringing into captivity every thought to the obedience of Christ**" (KJV).

## III. UNCONTROLLED PASSIONS ALWAYS HAVE CONSEQUENCES WHICH GO BEYOND US

The old saying is true: "Sin will take you farther than you want to go, keep you longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you want to pay." If Reuben was seeking to secure first place for himself and not lose his inheritance, his sin actually resulted in his losing both. Jacob makes it clear that this sin, though committed years before, will deprive Reuben and his descendants of the rights of the firstborn. One sin can affect thousands of descendants for hundreds of years! We need to burn into our thinking the fact that sin always has consequences, and those consequences are never just private. Present actions shape the future.





Character flaws and sins left unchecked can affect children and grandchildren for generations (Exodus 20:5). Does this mean we can never break the family “curse”? No! We will see from the story of Levi that, with God, it is possible to bring blessing from what seems to be a curse.

#### IV. UNCONTROLLED PASSIONS QUICKLY CHANGE FROM BEING RIGHTEOUS TO UNRIGHTEOUS

*Genesis 49:5-7*

*Simeon and Levi are brothers; Their swords are implements of violence. <sup>6</sup>Let my soul not enter into their council; Let not my glory be united with their assembly; because in their anger they slew men, and in their self-will they lamed oxen. <sup>7</sup>Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce; and their wrath, for it is cruel. I will disperse them in Jacob, and scatter them in Israel.*

Simeon and Levi plotted how they would get even with the Shechemites because the prince of Shechem had raped their sister. They used God’s covenant of circumcision, which should have been a channel of blessing, as the means of deceiving and slaughtering all the men in the town. They probably would have defended themselves by saying that they were righteously angry. When Jacob scolded them about what they did, they shot back, “Should he treat our sister as a harlot?” (Gen. 34:31). They argued that they were avenging the wrong done to their sister, defending her honor. But really, they were only defending their own pride. They went far beyond the bounds of righteous anger. The brothers were quite right to be angry about their sister’s rape, and Jacob was wrong to be so apathetic about it, but Simeon and Levi were very wrong in the way they dealt with their anger.

Not all anger is sin, but we must be very careful when we are righteously angry not to cross the line into unrighteous anger. That’s why Paul wrote, “Be angry and yet do not sin; do not let the sun go down on your anger, and do not give the devil an opportunity” (Ephesians 4:26-27). Even when we are righteously angry, it’s so easy to step over the line into wounded pride, giving the devil a foothold in our lives. Whenever you begin to plot vengeance under the guise of righteous anger, you’re out of line. Venting their anger without control did not relieve the anger of Simeon and Levi. Jacob indicates in his “blessing” that, over 40 years later, anger is still a part of their lives. The Bible is clear that vengeance belongs to the Lord: “Vengeance is Mine, and retribution, in due time their foot will slip; for the day of their calamity is near, and the impending things are hastening upon them” (Deuteronomy 32:35).

#### V. WHEN FAMILY MEMBERS TURN TO GOD, A CURSE CAN BE TURNED INTO A BLESSING

##### A. Make a Choice to Turn to God

Jacob distances himself from these two angry sons and predicts that Simeon and Levi will be scattered in Israel because of their anger. This



was fulfilled as the tribe of Simeon later inherited land scattered throughout Judah's territory (Josh. 19:1-9; 1 Chron. 4:28-33, 39, 42). The tribe of Levi became priests who had no inheritance and were scattered throughout the rest of the tribal lands. However, the tribe of Levi turned to the Lord, and their scattering was a great blessing to them and to others. They became the priestly tribe who served God and taught His ways to the others. Moses and Aaron were Levites, the sons of godly parents. Many other Levites in Israel's history were greatly used of God: Phinehas, whose godly zeal stemmed a plague (Num. 25:11-13); Ezra, who helped restore the nation after the captivity; John the Baptist, who prepared the way for the Messiah. Because the Levites turned to God, this seeming curse was turned into a blessing.

*Genesis 49:13-21, 27*

*Zebulun will dwell at the seashore; and he shall be a haven for ships, and his flank shall be toward Sidon. <sup>14</sup>Issachar is a strong donkey, lying down between the sheepfolds. <sup>15</sup>When he saw that a resting place was good and that the land was pleasant, he bowed his shoulder to bear burdens, and became a slave at forced labor. <sup>16</sup>“Dan shall judge his people, as one of the tribes of Israel. <sup>17</sup>Dan shall be a serpent in the way, a horned snake in the path, that bites the horse's heels, so that his rider falls backward. <sup>18</sup>For Your salvation I wait, O Lord. <sup>19</sup>As for Gad, raiders shall raid him, but he will raid at their heels. <sup>20</sup>As for Asher, his food shall be rich, and he will yield royal dainties. <sup>21</sup>Naphtali is a doe let loose, He gives beautiful words.... <sup>27</sup>Benjamin is a ravenous wolf; In the morning he devours the prey, and in the evening he divides the spoil.*

None of the sons of Jacob lived to see the fulfillment of these prophecies. They all died in Egypt. So why does Jacob give them these words, and why does Moses share them with us? One reason is to show that each person has a unique contribution to make in God's plan for the history of the world. Jacob encourages his sons and their sons after them to follow in God's ways. While not all will be as Judah or Joseph, all are essential to His plan. All need to see their roles as complementary, not competitive. While God's overall plan is fixed, each individual has the opportunity to turn to God and be used of Him in blessing the nations. It's the tension between God's sovereignty and human responsibility. God's plan is irrevocable, but He gives us moral responsibility so that each of us can choose to participate in His plan or turn against it.

## B. The Best is Yet to Come in God's Good Plan

*Genesis 49:22-26*

*Joseph is a fruitful bough, a fruitful bough by a spring; Its branches run over a wall. <sup>23</sup>The archers bitterly attacked him, and shot at him and harassed him; <sup>24</sup>But his bow remained firm, and his arms were agile, From the hands of the Mighty One of Jacob (from there is the Shepherd, the Stone of Israel), <sup>25</sup>From the God of your father who helps you, and by the Almighty who blesses you with blessings of heaven above, blessings of the deep that lies beneath, blessings of the breasts and of the womb. <sup>26</sup>The blessings of your father have surpassed*





*the blessings of my ancestors up to the utmost bound of the everlasting hills; May they be on the head of Joseph, and on the crown of the head of the one distinguished among his brothers.*

In Joseph's blessing, Jacob reminds his sons of the big plan that God has had all along. He has saved their families so He can grow them into tribes and from those tribes grow a great nation that will in turn bless all the nations of the world. For from the tribe of Judah will come a ruler to whom will be the "obedience of the peoples" (49:10).

*Genesis 49:8-12*

*Judah, your brothers shall praise you; Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies; Your father's sons shall bow down to you. <sup>9</sup>Judah is a lion's whelp; From the prey, my son, you have gone up. He couches, he lies down as a lion, and as a lion, who dares rouse him up? <sup>10</sup>The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until Shiloh comes, and to him shall be the obedience of the peoples. <sup>11</sup>He ties his foal to the vine, and his donkey's colt to the choice vine; He washes his garments in wine, and his robes in the blood of grapes. <sup>12</sup>His eyes are dull from wine, And his teeth white from milk.*

### C. Remember How God Works

The prophecy about Judah provides an important lesson about how God works. Reuben is deprived of his right as the firstborn because of his sin. Simeon and Levi are denounced for their violence and anger. Judah is next. All the brothers know the skeletons in Judah's closet. He was involved in the shameful incident with Tamar (Gen. 38). He suggested selling Joseph into slavery. But what happens? Jacob pronounces the greatest blessing of all on Judah! Only Joseph's blessing is of equal length, but even it doesn't rival the extent of Judah's blessing. Why? (1) God acts according to His grace, not human merit. No one can boast before God. (2) When we turn to God in repentance, God will bless us.

Judah has truly repented of his sin. He confessed before Joseph, "What can we speak? And how can we justify ourselves? God has found out the iniquity of your servants" (Gen. 44:16). His eloquent, heartfelt appeal to Joseph, asking that he be substituted for Benjamin, has revealed the depth of his repentance. Judah could have said, "I am cursed. I can never change," but he didn't. He made a choice to turn to God for forgiveness and help, and God blessed him.

Jacob predicts preeminence and power for the tribe of Judah, comparing him to a lion. He predicts that from the lineage of Judah will come a line of rulers that will one day culminate with the reign of "Shiloh," where wine will be as plentiful as water. Jewish and Christian commentators recognize this as a reference to Messiah. God's plan involves a Person who is coming to reign. That Person must be descended from Judah. Over 300 prophecies from the Old Testament show that Jesus Christ alone meets the qualifications of the promised Savior. God's plan centers on the person of Christ and our being rightly related to Him. He is gracious toward every sinner who repents and trusts in Him, but He will be fierce in wrath and judgment toward all who ignore or oppose Him.



## CONCLUSION

*Genesis 29:28*

*All these are the twelve tribes of Israel, and this is what their father said to them when he blessed them. He blessed them, every one with the blessing appropriate to him.*

The personal history of Judah ought to encourage us. He was a man who had a dismal beginning but who repented of his sin and inherited a great future. When he turned to God, God gave him grace to control his passions. God offers the same blessings to each of us. If we will turn from our sin, and trust in the Lord Jesus Christ who was sent from God in fulfillment of the prophecy uttered by Jacob, God will bless us beyond measure both now and forever. He does have a plan for us. We can choose to willingly be a part, or we can choose to resist. Either way, He will keep moving history ahead, right on schedule, toward the grand climax when Jesus Christ shall reign supreme, when every knee shall bow to the Lion of the tribe of Judah. Let's choose to live each day embracing God's good plan for our lives.

*Galatians 5:16-24*

*But I say, walk by the spirit, and you will not carry out the desire of the flesh. <sup>17</sup>For the flesh sets its desire against the Spirit, and the Spirit against the flesh; for these are in opposition to one another, so that you may not do the things that you please. <sup>18</sup>But if you are led by the Spirit, you are not under the Law. <sup>19</sup>Now the deeds of the flesh are evident, which are: immorality, impurity, sensuality, <sup>20</sup>idolatry, sorcery, enmities, strife, jealousy, outbursts of anger, disputes, dissensions, factions, <sup>21</sup>envying, drunkenness, carousing, and things like these, of which I forewarn you, just as I have forewarned you, that those who practice such things will not inherit the kingdom of God. <sup>22</sup>But the fruit of the Spirit is love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, <sup>23</sup>gentleness, self-control; against such things there is no law. <sup>24</sup>Now those who belong to Christ Jesus have crucified the flesh with its passions and desires.*

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Arin Hess".

Pastor Arin Hess

## FOOTNOTES

All Scripture quotations, unless noted, are taken from the *New American Standard Bible (NASB), 1995 Update*.

Some of this material came from Pastor Steven J. Cole, <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-80-problem-passions-genesis-491-7> and <https://bible.org/seriespage/lesson-81-ancient-prophecies-and-you-genesis-498-21>.



