

Text: Genesis 49:16-21, 27

Title: "The blessings of God on a nation"

Time: 11/15/09 am

Place: NBBC

Introduction: Last Wednesday was Veterans Day. One of the great blessings we have known as a country is the men and women who have served it sacrificially and well. We have people like that with us here today. On behalf of our church, thank you for your service and sacrifice.

The God of Jacob is the one who blesses and judges nations; this is a doctrine the Bible teaches, and one that the founders of our country taught as well. After 10 weeks of deliberation at the Constitutional Convention, the participants reached an impasse that threatened to dissolve their hopes for a unified nation before it even had a chance to get started. In that moment of imminent despair, Benjamin Franklin, perhaps the most irreverent of the men gathered then for that work, rose and made the following proposal:

"In this situation of this Assembly, groping as it were in the dark to find political truth, and scarce able to distinguish it when presented to us, how has it happened, Sir, that we have not hitherto once thought of humbly applying to the Father of lights to illuminate our understandings? . . . To that kind providence we owe this happy opportunity of consulting in peace on the means of establishing our future national felicity. And have we now forgotten that powerful friend? Or do we imagine that we no longer need his assistance? I have lived, Sir, a long time, and the longer I live, the more convincing proofs I see of this truth – that God governs in the affairs of men. And if a sparrow cannot fall to the ground without his notice, is it probable that an empire can rise without his aid? We have been assured, Sir, in the sacred writings, that 'except the Lord build the House they labour in vain that build it.' I firmly believe this; and I also believe that without his concurring aid we shall succeed in this political building no better than the Builders of Babel."

Thus far in our study of Genesis 49 we have made our way through some distinctly Israeli prophetic words, those of Reuben, Levi and Simeon, Judah, and Zebulun and Issachar. Joseph's blessing also has some unique emphases related to God's chosen people. We will look at that one next time. But the blessings of Dan, Gad, Asher, Naphtali, and Benjamin seem to be of such a general nature that we can interpret them broadly as descriptive of the kind of blessings that any nation needs from the God of Jacob as He governs in the affairs of men. I want us to use that as our organizing principle as we study these blessings together. Our title is "The blessings of God on a nation," and we will notice five of these, one pertaining to each of these five tribes.

I. Dan: The blessing of self-governance (vv. 16-18).

Illustration: Lord Christopher Monckton is a name you may not be familiar with. He is the former science advisor to British Prime Minister Margaret Thatcher. On October 14, Monckton addressed an audience at Bethel University in St. Paul Minnesota warning Americans about a conference being held in Copenhagen next month regarding a global climate change treaty. Here is what Monckton said about the treaty to be considered then: "I have read that treaty. And what it says is this: That a world government is going to be created. . . . They are about to impose a communist world government on the world. You have a president who has very strong sympathies with that point of view. He's going to sign. He'll sign anything. He's a Nobel peace laureate. Of course he'll sign it! So, thank you, America. You were the beacon of freedom to the world. It is a privilege merely to stand on this soil of freedom while it is still free. But in the next few weeks, unless you stop it, your president will sign your freedom, your democracy, and your prosperity away forever -- and neither you nor any subsequent government you may elect would have any power whatsoever to take it back again."

Application: Benjamin Franklin understood how blessed and unusual the right of self-government is for a nation in a way many Americans today fail to. We need to appreciate this blessing and be vigilant about defending it politically. The blessing Jacob pro-

nounces on Dan is the right to judge his own people. The blessing of self-governance is a blessing of the God of Jacob on a nation that the globalism spirit of antichrist seeks to take away (Revelation 13).

But before we leave the prophecy of Dan, we also need to understand what is involved with this serpent. Here I believe that Jacob refers to an issue of self-government that has nothing ultimately to do with civil government or the politics of the tribe. There is evidence in the Dan oracle that much of what Jacob says about Dan is actually more about Jacob personally than it is about Dan. He mentions the biting of a heal, and the word for "heal" is the word "Jacob." He refers to Dan being one of the tribes of "Israel," the new name given Jacob. So the oracle says that Jacob, the heal, would be bitten by Dan, yet Dan would be a tribe of Israel. Finally, we have the affirmation of verse 18 from Jacob: "For Your salvation I wait, O Lord!"

Dan was the first son born to Jacob of a concubine, Rachel's concubine Bilhah. That plan was hatched after a major argument between Jacob and Rachel, which brought this patriarch to one of the low spiritual valleys he experienced (Gen. 30:1-6). I believe that with this oracle Jacob is expressing remorse for the events that led to the birth of Dan, which he describes as a time of spiritual backsliding in his own life. I want us to notice two lessons about such times from Jacob's example:

1. The sin that causes us to fall and turn back is a deceitful thing. When Jacob refers to Dan as a serpent, he uses a term that Hebrew scholars believe referred to an animal called the horned serpent. The horned serpent is especially good at camouflaging itself, and that seems to be the emphasis of v. 17. What does this tell us about the sin Jacob committed? Well, we might say that it was difficult to see it coming, and when it came it was hard to understand it as sin.

Remember why Dan was called Dan? It was Rachel who gave him that name with the declaration: "God hath judged me, and hath also heard my voice, and hath given me a son!" Rachel jus-

tified and excused her wrong, and this was evidence that the wrong she had committed had deceived her. We need to take to heart the warning of Scripture against this deception when it comes to our own sin: "But exhort one another daily, while it is called Today; lest any of you be hardened through the deceitfulness of sin" (Heb. 3:13b).

2. But ultimately, this oracle is not about the bite of Dan that Jacob experienced, but about Dan's ability to know God's blessing as one of the tribes of Israel. In spite of Jacob and Rachel's failure, God was going to bless Dan. Where sin abounds, grace does much more abound. And so reflecting on his own sinfulness and unworthiness, Jacob blurts out his mighty confession that he eagerly awaited the salvation of the Lord. He knew that eternal life was his in spite of his sins and failures. That is the assurance of God's forgiveness that you and I need.

II. Gad: The blessing of a strong defense (v. 19).

Application: Gad, we remember, is one of the two and ½ tribes that settled to the east of the Jordan River. This prophecy is fulfilled as a prediction of Gad's continual need for vigilance against Ammon and Moab throughout its history. The oracle actually reads, "As for Gad, a troop shall attack *us* [rather than him], but he himself shall attack at the heel (i.e., put to flight)."

The oracle seems to indicate that Gad would not only defend himself, but also the nation as a whole. There were, of course, examples of this in Gad's history. They joined the entire nation fighting their battles west of the Jordan even after being given land east of the river. In addition, 1 Chronicles 12:8 summarizes their sacrifice and valor in the time of David: "From the Gadites there came over to David in the stronghold in the wilderness, mighty men of valor, men trained for war, who could handle shield and spear, and whose faces were like the faces of lions, and they were as swift as the gazelles on the mountains."

A strong national defense is a form of God's blessing on a nation. This is one of the enumerated responsibilities our Constitution

gives our Federal Government: “We the People of the United States, in Order to form a more perfect Union, establish Justice, insure domestic Tranquility, provide for the common defense, promote the general Welfare, and secure the Blessings of Liberty to ourselves and our Posterity, do ordain and establish this Constitution for the United States of America.” We ought to honor the service of our men and women in uniform, and we should choose leaders who believe in the importance of a strong national defense.

III. Asher: The blessing of natural resources (v. 20).

Illustration: It was the habit of George Washington to send circulars to the governors of the colonies during the Revolutionary War, which kept them updated on the progress of the war. The last of these letters he sent after the war notifying them of his retirement from his command. In that circular, Washington reflected on the way that God had blessed America with rich natural resources: “The citizens of America, placed in the most enviable condition, as the sole lords and proprietors of a vast tract of continent, comprehending all the various soils and climates of the world, and abounding with all the necessaries and conveniences of life, are now by the late satisfactory pacification, acknowledged to be possessed of absolute freedom and independency; they are, from this period, to be considered as the actors on a most conspicuous theatre, which seems to be peculiarly designated by Providence for the display of human greatness and felicity; here, they are not only surrounded with every thing which can contribute to the completion of private and domestic enjoyment, but Heaven has crowned all its other blessings, by giving a fairer opportunity for political happiness, than any other nation has ever been favored with.”

Application: As Americans we are amazingly blessed, and it is the God of Jacob who has blessed us so. We have know the royal dainties and rich resources of Asher’s blessing. Washington went on in his letter to discuss the responsibility that such gifts call us to, and he sums them up with a reference to Micah 6:8 which says, “He has shown thee, O man, what is good; and what

does the Lord require of thee, but to do justly, and to love mercy, and to walk humbly with thy God?" Jesus said that to whom much is given of him shall much be required. What does God require? Do justly, love mercy, walk humbly. God's bounty upon us becomes a curse when it makes us do wrong, love ourselves, and act arrogantly.

IV. Naphtali: The blessing of beautiful words (v. 21).

Application: Jacob calls Naphtali a fallow deer. The fallow deer is a species of deer original to the Middle East that exists in a variety of colors and that is speckled with mottles. It is truly a beautiful animal. Jacob uses the animal to speak of a national blessing Naphtali would experience, that of free and beautiful words.

Application: It is not enough for speech to be free speech for it to be a true blessing of the God of Jacob on a land. It must be free and beautiful in the eyes of the Lord. When the Bible speaks of what is beautiful before God, moral purity is included. We are to worship the Lord in the beauty of holiness. Beauty and holiness go hand in hand. The need to keep free speech beautiful in God's eyes is not only the responsibility of Israel. Psalm 96:7-10 is addressed to all the nations of the world. The core of our nation today is rotting because free speech has become ugly debauchery. The perversion of television programs and internet sites destroys lives and their homes while carrying the mantel of free speech.

Illustration: Our founding fathers understood that moral perversity would destroy the Republic they were establishing under the Providence of the God of Jacob. John Adams had this to say on the topic on October 11, 1798 as he addressed the officers of the first brigade of the third division of the militia of Massachusetts: "While our country remains untainted with the principles and manners which are now producing desolation in so many parts of the world; while she continues sincere, and incapable of insidious and impious policy, we shall have the strongest reason to rejoice in the local destination assigned us by Providence. But should the people of America once become capable of that deep simulation towards one another, and towards foreign nations,

which assumes the language of justice and moderation while it is practicing iniquity and extravagance, and displays in the most captivating manner the charming pictures of candor, frankness, and sincerity, while it is rioting in rapine and insolence, this country will be the most miserable habitation in the world; because we have no government armed with power capable of contending with human passions unbridled by morality and religion. Avarice, ambition, revenge, or gallantry, would break the strongest cords of our Constitution as a whale goes through a net. Our Constitution was made only for a moral and religious people. It is wholly inadequate to the government of any other."

V. Benjamin: The blessing of a productive workforce (v. 27).

Illustration: Deer hunting season has begun in earnest around here. That fact really never changes the life of a golfer like myself much, but it is very important to many in these parts. Deer hunting is better than golfing, because deer tastes a whole lot better than golf balls. The hunter gets a reward the golfer does not.

Application: I think that this is the emphasis of the blessing on Benjamin. He is described as an effective hunter, a wolf that tears his prey and consumes it in the morning. He then distributes it in the evening. This description fits what we all need to be, part of a productive workforce. Paul says as much, "He who steals must steal no longer; but rather he must labor, performing with his own hands what is good, so that he will have something to share with the one who has need" (Eph. 4:28).

Illustration: When Benjamin Franklin first came to the city of Philadelphia, he only had a few coins in his pocket. At his death his estate was worth over \$250,000. Part of his will stipulated that two trust funds should be set up with part of his estate, one for the town of Boston and the other for the town of Philadelphia. The funds were to provide loans to married couples under the age of 25 to get a start in life. In 1990 the funds were worth \$6.5MM and still distributing "the spoil" to those cities.

A productive workforce finds the ability to be a generous workforce. On the national level, policies that hurt job creation run contrary to this form of God's blessing on a country. On a personal level, we need to be a people like Benjaminites, who work hard that we might be able to give to others in need.

Conclusion: God's greatest blessing on any land are the prayers of her local churches: "First of all, then, I urge that entreaties and prayers, petitions and thanksgivings, be made on behalf of all men, for kings and all who are in authority, so that we may lead a tranquil and quiet life in all godliness and dignity. This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Savior, who desires all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth." The religious freedom we exercised together today is the greatest blessing that the God of Jacob can bestow on a nation, and He gives this blessing because He desires all men to be saved and come to a knowledge of the truth. Jacob knew the truth that God saves the sinner, and so he could exclaim in spite of the sin of his life, "For your salvation I eagerly wait, O Lord." Can you?

"A man came—I think it was actually in Philadelphia—on one occasion to the great George Whitefield and asked if he might print his sermons. Whitefield gave this reply; he said, 'Well, I have no inherent objection, if you like, but you will never be able to put on the printed page the lightning and the thunder.' That is the distinction—the sermon, and the 'lightning and the thunder.' To Whitefield this was of very great importance, and it should be of very great importance to all preachers, as I hope to show. You can put the sermon into print, but not the lightning and the thunder. That comes into the act of preaching and cannot be conveyed by cold print. Indeed it almost baffles the descriptive powers of the best reporters."

—David Martin Lloyd-Jones,

Preachers and Preaching