

The Sons of Jacob

GENESIS 29–30; 34–35; 38–39; 48–49

1. Read Genesis 29:31–30:24. What do you see in the earliest days of Jacob’s family that are the seeds of future heartache and conflict in the family?

Jacob was tricked into marrying Leah and he didn’t love her. He loved Rachel whom he also married. This created rivalry and resentment. Leah was desperate to be loved and Rachel was desperate to have children. When Leah was able to have children and Rachel could not conceive, that only added to the rivalry and resentment. Rachel, jealous, erupted—making Jacob furious with Rachel, and making Rachel desperate enough to give Jacob her maid to sleep with. Then Leah did the same thing. Leah’s desperation drove her to bribery and superstition in a further effort to “one-up” Rachel. This rivalry and resentment in the lives of the mothers must have led to rivalry and resentment between the children.

2. Read Genesis 34. Remembering that Moses wrote Genesis for the children of Israel as they prepared to enter the Promised Land where they would need to drive out the Canaanites who were living there, what warnings should they have received from this terrible episode?

The Israelites could not become comfortable living among the Canaanites or they would become defiled by them. It was also a real warning about misusing something as sacred as circumcision for such an unholy purpose of deception and slaughter. God was very concerned that his people glorify his name among the peoples of the earth, and be a

blessing to all the peoples of the earth, but through this corrupt way of taking revenge and stealing plunder, they did not bring honor to God's name.

3. Read Genesis 35:21–26. How was Reuben's action likely more than simply a sexual matter, and how was Jacob's response less than adequate?

This was an act of sedition, an attempt to replace his father as head of the clan. And there is no evidence that Jacob took any action right away. He seems to have been passive at that point, which may have played a part of the continuing rebellion that led to the brothers' attempted murder of Joseph.

4. The story of Judah's sinfulness in Canaan, recorded in Genesis 38, is a stark contrast to Joseph's righteous acts in Egypt, recorded in Genesis 39. In the chart below, compare and contrast similar elements in these accounts:

Judah's Sexual Sin with Tamar	Joseph's Refusal to Sin Sexually with Potiphar's Wife
Gen. 38:1 Judah left home willingly.	Gen. 39:1 Joseph was taken forcibly from the Promised Land.
Gen. 38:16 Judah was carried away by his lust after one look at Tamar dressed as a prostitute.	Gen. 39: 7, 10 Joseph refused to give in to temptation even after being repeatedly propositioned by Potiphar's wife.

Gen. 38:18, 25 Judah's signet and cord and his staff were used as evidence against him.	Gen. 39: 12–13, 16–18 Joseph's garment was used as false evidence against him.
Gen. 38:26 Judah stood justly accused.	Gen. 39:19–20 Joseph stood unjustly accused.

5. Read 38:27–30. Over and over again in Genesis, God has surprised us by choosing the one we didn't expect, proving that he is the one who determines who is esteemed in his sight. How is this the case with Judah and with his sons, Zerah and Perez? (Be sure to include the insight gained from Matthew 1:3 or Luke 3:33).

Tamar became pregnant through the despicable sin of Judah. So of all the children born to Jacob's sons, it would seem that Judah would not be the son to be in the line of the Promised One, and that neither of his sons conceived in such wickedness would be in that line. Yet we learn from the New Testament genealogies that Perez was an ancestor of both Mary and Joseph. Perez was not the firstborn, yet he was the one chosen by God from whom Christ would be descended. Out of a wicked sin, God brought the Holy One of Israel.

6. Read Genesis 48. Whereas Joseph was born in Canaan and spent his early years in the Patriarch's tents, Joseph's sons were born in Egypt and grew up in the luxury and opportunities of Pharaoh's courts. Their mother was the daughter of an Egyptian priest of sun worship. With this in mind, why would it have been important to Jacob to adopt these boys as his own and bless them?

Manasseh and Ephraim might be tempted to lean toward their Egyptian heritage and privilege rather than identify themselves with the people of God. By adopting them as his own sons, and giving them his own name to carry on, they would be sealed, in a sense, into Jacob's family and assured a place in Israel's future.

7. Read Genesis 49: 1–28. How is each aspect of the prophecy for Judah and his tribe fulfilled by Christ? In the chart below, read the specific prophecy Jacob spoke and note in the second column how it is fulfilled by Christ.

Prophesied to Judah	Fulfilled by Christ
Praise: "Judah, your brothers shall praise you . . . bow down before you." (Gen. 49:8)	Phil. 2:9–10 Jesus is the descendant of Judah to whom all praise belongs and before whom every knee will bow.
Power: "Your hand shall be on the neck of your enemies. . . . Judah is a lion's cub." (Gen. 49:8–9)	Rev. 5:5, 11:16–18 Jesus is the Lion of the Tribe of Judah, who will reign in power, rewarding his servants and destroying his enemies.
Preeminence: "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet." (Gen. 49:10)	Rev. 19:14–16 Jesus will rule over all people as the King of Kings and Lord of Lords.
Prosperity: "The choice vine . . . washed his garments in wine. . .	John 2:1–11; Eph. 1:18; 2:7 During his ministry, Jesus exhibited the abundance he promises. Jesus

. Teeth whiter than milk.” (Gen. 49:11–12)	will share with us his own inheritance, which is the richness of his grace.
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8. Genesis has provided us with a history on the origins of the people of God—the people God has called to himself and covenanted with. The rest of the Bible is not a general history of the world but the history of God’s people, and the Bible ends with a picture of the future of God’s people. What key truth do we learn about those God calls “my people” from each of the following verses:

- u Genesis 17:7–8: God established his people by a covenant with Abraham—an everlasting covenant in which he promised to “always” be “your God” to Abraham and his descendants.
- u Exodus 3:10: Just as God sovereignly brought Jacob and his sons to Egypt, he established and increased them as a people while there and sent Moses to bring them out of Egypt.
- u Ruth 1:16: Though Ruth was a Canaanite, she went with Naomi because she wanted to be part of the people of God. This shows that being part of the people of God is not a matter of race, but of faith.
- u Isaiah 19:21–25: Foreign nations who were once enemies of Israel will turn to the Lord and will be called by God, “my people.”
- u Jeremiah 24:7: To be “my people” is not a matter of race but a matter of the heart—having a heart that embraces the Covenant God and lives before him in repentance and obedience.

- u Ezekiel 37:12–14: God’s purposes for his people are and always have been centered in resurrection to the ultimate land of Israel, which is the new heaven and new earth.
- u Zechariah 2:10–12: Many nations will become part of “my people.”
- u Romans 9:25–27: Those who were not “my people” will be called “beloved,” “sons of the living God,” and “my people.” And only the faithful remnant of the sons of Israel will be saved.
- u Galatians 3:27–29: God’s people are not defined by race or class or gender, but are one in Christ Jesus. If you belong to Christ, then you belong to the people of God who will inherit the promises made to Abraham.
- u Revelation 21:7: In the new heaven and new earth “all who are victorious” are the true people of God who will inherit the blessings of God