

## Appendix 5 Three Texts Concerning Blessings: Genesis 48, 49 and Deuteronomy 33

In these three texts, there is tension; Joseph and his sons seem to take center stage in the divine blessing (Gen 48:8-20, 49:22-26 and Deut 33:13-17) while Judah is blessed only with the kingly motif (Gen 49:8-12, Deut 33:7).<sup>900</sup> In this article, we first deal with Deuteronomy 33 and then we discuss the tension of Joseph-Judah in Genesis.

The blessings given by Moses to the Israelites before his death are recorded in Deuteronomy 33.<sup>901</sup> Only one verse is devoted to Judah but five verses to Joseph. Nonetheless, if viewing these two sayings (of Moses' blessing) in light of the entire chapter, the significance is found neither in Joseph nor in Judah but, as Lai concludes,

The saying about the Lord seems to be the most important in Deuteronomy 33. At the beginning of the poem, there are 14 lines devoted to the praising of Yahweh (vv. 2-5), and again at the end of this poem another 15 lines are devoted to Him (vv. 26-29). These verses, 29 lines in total, are concerned with the praise of Yahweh who had appeared to deliver His people. The Lord Himself, and not any one of the tribes, is the center of Moses' blessing.<sup>902</sup>

If Lai is correct in his remark, then the real tension between Judah and Joseph is not found in Deuteronomy 33 but in Genesis, to which we now turn.

From a discourse perspective, the account of Joseph plays a dominant role in the latter part of Genesis: Genesis 37, 39-48 and 50. Furthermore, Jacob's blessing to Joseph is the longest saying among those to all his sons, including the one to Judah in Genesis 49.<sup>903</sup> Nonetheless, the narrator of Genesis has put a caveat in Joseph's story in Genesis 38: Joseph may be blessed by his father among all his siblings, but it is Judah from whom kings will arise (Gen 49:10), and who will ultimately rule over his brothers (v. 8).

The placement of Genesis 38 has puzzled some scholars, who note the interruption of the flow of Joseph's story and attempt to explain it away by making a connection between Genesis 38 and its immediate context.<sup>904</sup> Nonetheless, we should ascertain the message of Genesis 38 and then read it in view of the larger context of Genesis.

On the surface, Genesis 38 talks about two key figures, Judah and Tamar. Yet, according to the stage set in the first 12 verses, the message is that the seed of Judah

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**900** Please refer to chapter five where we discuss Genesis 49:8-12.

**901** For its similarities and differences with Genesis 49, see Lai, "Jacob's blessing," 254-59. Cf. Peter C. Craigie, *The Book of Deuteronomy*, NICOT (Grand Rapids, Mich.: Eerdmans, 1976), 393.

**902** Lai, "Jacob's Blessing," 258. On the same page Lai also notes that the saying to Levi is the second lengthiest after Joseph's, bearing in mind that Moses is from the tribe of Levi.

**903** Joseph's being Jacob's favorite son may also explain why Joseph received a lengthy blessing from Jacob; see Gen 37:3-4.

**904** See, for example, Hamilton, *Genesis 18-50*, 431-32.

was put in jeopardy.<sup>905</sup> Tamar, through a series of events, was impregnated with Judah's seed, reversing this jeopardy. In light of the Genesis narrative, the seed of Judah appears in line with one of the key aspects of the divine promise given to the patriarchs, namely, the descendent aspect of God's promise. By placing this possible jeopardy of Judah's seed at this juncture of the narrative, the narrator betrays his main concern; Judah and his seed are of paramount importance warranting the interruption of Joseph's story.

The Judah-Joseph tension persists into the tribal aspect of the Israelite's history. According to Genesis 48, Jacob blessed Joseph's two sons but put Ephraim over Manasseh (vv. 20). It is Ephraim whose tribe became dominant in the Northern Kingdom (Israel) in the period after Solomon,<sup>906</sup> while the tribe of Judah was dominant in the Southern Kingdom (Judah). Nonetheless, the Judah-Joseph (in Ephraim) tribal tension dissolved politically when the Assyrians destroyed the Northern Kingdom (2 Kings 17), and the tension dissolves theologically when God chooses the tribe of David over the tribe of Joseph or Ephraim in Ps 78:67-72, especially vv. 67-68:<sup>907</sup>

וַיֹּאמֶת בְּאַהֲלֵל יוֹסֵף וּבְשְׁבַט אַפְרַתּוּם לֹא בְּחָר  
וַיַּבְחַר אֶת-שְׁבַט וְהַוְרָה אֶת-הַדָּר צִוְּן אֲשֶׁר אֲהָב

In summation, Joseph may have received a lengthy blessing from Jacob and Moses, but it was Judah who secured a royal place in God's election. Given what we have delineated, Judah's prominence in Genesis 49 makes sense not only in the Pentateuch but also throughout the history of Israel.

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**905** Sailhamer, *Pentateuch*, 209.

**906** See 1 Kings 11:26, 12:25. See VanGemeren, *Progress of Redemption*, 173. He remarks that already in Moses and Joshua's times, there may have been some tension between Judah and Ephraim/Manasseh.

**907** We are indebted to VanGemeren, who points out this psalm reference. Cf. Ps 76:2-3[1-2], which reads: "In Judah God is known; his name is great in Israel. His tent is in Salem, his dwelling place in Zion." Also in Ps 78:9-11 we find the indictment that Ephraim fails to keep God's covenant and does not live by God's law.