***Reuben

RV129-02***

We continue studying Revelation 7:4-8 on the topic of the tribulation evangelists. This is section number three.

**Israel was God's Client Nation**

Following the release of the Jewish people from slavery in Egypt, after four centuries, they became what we might call God's client nation on earth. They were the nation that represented Him to all the other nations on the face of the earth. They were given the real truth of the Old Testament Scriptures. As the possessors of God's truth, they were the source of divine viewpoint enlightenment to all the other nations in the world. As God's client nation, Israel prospered and grew strong in contrast to the nations round about them, to whom they witnessed the truth of God. Those nations, by and large, were negative to the truth which God's client nation brought them. So, instead of becoming strong, as Israel did in every way, and instead of becoming prosperous as Israel did, they continued to become weak; to grovel in the dirt; and, to be a very low caliber type of culture.

However, in time, there was the deliberate abandonment of God's truth by the Jewish people themselves. They forgot where their prosperity and good times were coming from, and that resulted in the loss of their client nation status in the year 70 A. D. From thence, they were no longer the primary representatives of God on the face of the earth. Since then, other people (other nations) have been raised up by God to fill that role of the client nation. No doubt, the United States is on the last stages of being that client nation today. We are the people who are in the position to be the greatest contributors to divine viewpoint enlightenment, and to support and finance the work of God.

**The Dispensation of the Jews**

Since the tribulation era (that we are studying here in the book of Revelation) is actually the last phase of the dispensation of the Jews, it is fitting that the special body of God's witnesses that are raised up in that era should themselves be Jews.

**The Period of Promise**

The era of the Jewish dispensation began with a period that we call promise. It was the first segment of the dispensation when the Jews were the primary people that God was dealing with. This was the era where Abraham received the great promises concerning himself and the nation that would descend from him.

**The Period of the Law**

Following that segment, we came to the major part of the era of the Jews, which we refer to as the period of the Law, and that began with the Mosaic Law, and ran through most of the Old Testament Scriptures. That period came to an end with the crucifixion of the Messiah Savior in the city of Jerusalem.

**The Dispensation of the Christians**

The last part of the dispensation of the Jews was split off by the interruption of 2,000 years of church history. The dispensation of the Christians came in, and has been the people that God is dealing with currently.

**The Period of the Tribulation**

But once the church is raptured (removed), then the last segment of the dispensation of the Jews has to be completed – that last seven years of the tribulation era. So, here in Revelation, we're back in the dispensation of the Jews. Therefore, it is fitting that the evangelists should be drawn from the Jewish people. There will not be a Jewish nation, as such, in the tribulation representing God. They will not again be the client nation. It would simply be individual Jews that will be selected on the basis of their tribal descent, which only God knows, and they will be appointed to this specific task of representing God as individuals. The preservation of these representatives from each of the tribes of Israel is in itself a great example of the grace of God.

The family heritage, however, of these tribes does not reflect much credit on them to make them worthy of being God's spokesmen. As our eye runs through the verses here in Revelation 7:5-8, which name these specific 12 tribes, and our minds go back to the patriarch that began each of these tribes, we have an interesting observation about each one. We can look at the particular son of Jacob who is the founder of that particular tribe, and we can take a look at those men to see what kind of characteristics they had, and what kind of qualities they had. What where their habits? It is fantastic how history subsequently demonstrated that the people who descended from that tribe reflected the characteristics of their founder.

This principle, of course, is clearly enunciated in the Old Testament in Exodus 20:5-6, where God, in presenting the law says, "To the Jewish people, "You shall not bow down yourself to them nor serve them (that is, idol gods), for I, the Lord your God, am jealous God, visiting the iniquity of the fathers upon the children unto the third and fourth generation of them that hate Me; and, showing mercy and to thousands of them that love Me and keep My commandments."

**Children Imitate their Parents**

What that passage is very clearly demonstrating to us is that the kids imitate their parents. If a child grows up in a home, the Jews were told, "When your children see you worshiping these pagan idols, what do you think they're going to do? They're going to pick up that same attitude (that same concept), and that evil will go down to the third and fourth generation. It'll just multiply. It'll snowball down." By the same token, he says, "If you as parents will demonstrate obedience; subjection; and, respect for the Word of God, and you function upon the Bible and upon the principles of Scripture, then you will go down the line over the years, and you will discover that your children will pick up the same attitude. They will respect the Scriptures. They will be subject to the principles of doctrine, and consequently, they will be blessed to the third and fourth generation." The thing has a snowball effect in the other way.

Well, as we look at the family of Jacob and these men, one of the things that comes through very strongly is a new appreciation for the grace of God. This is a great encouragement, I think, to us. As you look at these tribes, from the head of the family on down, as I say, by and large, they're not very commendable. Yet, these are the people that God is going to turn the tribulation world upside-down with. How nice to know that God still uses people who are less than perfect, and less than desirable in many respects.

**Jacob**

Jacob was the head of the family. He was the Father of the 12 patriarchs who formed these tribes. Jacob himself, as you know, was a man who had a lot of spiritual problems himself (his name means supplanter), until God finally squared away spiritually. He knocked him around; gave him enough hardship; gave him enough problems; and, and finally brought him to the place where he got himself oriented to divine viewpoint. He turned his back on that old life, and all that human viewpoint, baloney, and guff. He became, as his new name indicated, Israel, prince of God.

Unfortunately, when parents have their bad times, and when parents have their bad characteristics, especially in the era when their children were growing up, the kids don't forget it. The kids don't flush it out of their character, and they grow up reflecting it exactly. All of us are well aware of the fact that we are impressive when we look at a child, and we know his parents, how the kid looks like the parents. We who are in Christian education and the club ministries are often amazed at something else. We discover that the children act like their parents. It is not necessarily that it's bad, but you will see that they laugh like their parents do. A girl tosses her head the way her mother does. They have the mannerisms of their parents. You can just identify who it is that is their influence, and that they are reflecting. The children themselves and not doing this deliberately. This is just being brought through subconsciously. This is true from the time that you have a small child. Those of you who have little children, you better believe that they are sponges. They are picking up the things that are your ways of speaking; your ways of thinking; and, worst of all, your way of reacting to circumstances and situations.

Jacob had a lot of bad influence on his kids when they were growing up, and he compounded it as he got out of line with God's order relative to the subject of marriage. Here was the family situation with Jacob, which is the background of our Revelation passage and these tribes. We're going to spend a little time (for a couple of sessions) looking at these tribes.

Jacob had an uncle (his mother Rebekah's brother). The uncle's name was Laban. His uncle Laban had two daughters. We read about them in Genesis 29:16: "And Laban had two daughters. The name of the elder was Leah, and the name of the younger was Rachel." It so happened that Jacob had to go to live with his Uncle Laban after he stole the birthright from his brother Esau. Esau was out to do him in. So, his mother, Rebekah, said, "You go get away from Esau now." So, he ends up there, and the first thing he does when he walks in is he sees these two young women of marriageable age, and he makes a quick evaluation of them.

**Leah**

Genesis 29:17 tells us something about Leah. It says that, "Leah was tender-eyed." That's the King James translation. What it really means is that the girl was weak-eyed. When you walked up to Leah, she was squinting at you. Furthermore, Leah was what we would describe as a plain Jane. So, he looks at this older girl, and right away she's squinting at him, and she is plain Jane, and she just makes him nervous.

**Rachel**

On the other hand, he takes a look at the younger girl Rachel. Genesis 29:17 says that, "She was beautiful and well-favored, which means that Rachel was the epitome of feminine beauty. So, right away, Jacob knew what God had called him to do: to marry Rachel. And he proceeded to ask for her hand in marriage.

In Genesis 29:18, we read of the deal that he made with his Uncle Laban. He came to his Uncle Laban, and he says, "Uncle Laban, have I ever got a deal for you?" And he proceeded to explain it. Jacob loved Rachel and said, "I will serve you seven years for Rachel, your younger daughter. Uncle Laban, also being a good Jewish businessman, said, "That sounds like a good deal to me. I'll take it." So, the bargain was settled. He was to serve seven years to secure Rachel as his bride.

In Genesis. 29:19-20, we read, "Laban said, 'It is better that I give her to you than that I should give her to another man. Abide with me.' So, Jacob served seven years for Rachel, and they seemed unto him but a few days, for the love he had for her." He was really in love with Rachel. This was love at first sight in a big way. The years just flew by. Seven years sounds like a long time, but in contrast to the old song, Seven Years with the Wrong Woman, this was seven years with the right woman, and the time just skidded by for him. Pretty soon, before he knew it, the seven years were gone.

"So, Jacob said unto Laban, 'Give me my wife, for my days are fulfilled that I may go in unto her;'" so that we can get married, in other words. "And Laban gathered together all the men of the place and made a feast." Laban proceeds to set up the marriage ceremony. But old Uncle Laban is as sneaky and tricky as Jacob himself. The girls are married in a veil that covers them practically from head to foot. Consequently, you can't see who's under there. So, Uncle Laban proceeds to make the arrangements for the wedding, and then substitutes plain Jane Leah for beautiful Rachel.

Genesis 29:25-26: "It came to pass that in the morning, behold, it was Leah. And he said to Laban, 'What is this that you have done unto me? Didn't I serve you for Rachel? Wherefore then have you beguiled me?'" And in verse 26, Uncle Laban explains to him that the reason he has done this is because, in their part of the world, they can't give the younger daughter in marriage before the elder daughter.

So, Laban says, "Fulfill her week (have a week of a honeymoon with Leah), and we will give you this also for the service which you shall serve with me, yet seven other years." Laban says, "One week from now, you can marry Rachel, but you're going to owe me seven years of service for her too.

Verse 28 says, "And Jacob did so, and fulfilled her week, and he gave him Rachel, his daughter, as his wife also." So the marriage was consummated.

We read in verse 30, "And he went in also onto Rachel, and he loved Rachel more than Leah, and served with him yet seven other years." So, in this way, Jacob ended up with Leah as his wife, and with Rachel as his wife as well.

In the process of all of this, Uncle Laban is naturally giving out wedding gifts and diaries. And one of the things that he gives to his daughters is one of his servant girls. So, we're told that, as part of the wedding gifts, Laban gave his maid Zilpah to Leah. Genesis 29:24: "And Laban gave unto his daughter Leah, Zilpah, his maid, for a handmaid. And he gave to Rachel another servant girl, Bilhah. Genesis 29:29: "And Laban gave to Rachel his daughter, Bilhah, his handmaid, to be her maid."

Right off the bat, Rachel the beauty (the loved one) could not bear children, which was a great tragedy immediately in her life, and in the home. Leah was able to bear children. So, in quick order, Leah bore Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah. Then she discontinued bearing children.

Rachel, seeing that she could not bear children, decided to give her handmaid Bilhah to her husband to marry, and to become his wife. Genesis 30:3-4: "And she said, behold my maid Bilhah. Go in unto her, and she shall bear upon my knees that I may also have children by her." So, she gave him Bilhah her handmaid as his wife, and Jacob went in unto her.

The result of this arrangement was that Bilhah bore two sons for Jacob. Genesis 30:5: "And Bilhah conceived and, bore Jacob a son. And Rachel said, 'God has judged me, and has also heard my voice, and has given me a son.' Therefore, she called his name Dan." And Bella, Rachel's maid, conceived again, and bore Jacob a second son. And Rachel said, 'With great wrestlings I have wrestled with my sister, and I have prevailed.' And she called his name Naphtali."

Now, when Leah saw that Rachel was getting into the act with sons via her handmaid Bilhah, Leah proceeded to get back into the action by giving her handmaid Zilpah to Jacob as his wife. So, we read in Genesis 30:9: "When Leah saw that she had ceased bearing, she took Zilpah her maid, and gave her Jacob as his wife." The result of this marriage to Zilpah was two additional sons. Genesis 30:10: "And Zilpah, Leah's maid, bore Jacob a son. And Leah said, 'Good fortune,' and she called his name Gad. And Zilpah, Leah's maid, bore Jacob a second son. And Leah said, 'I am happy, for the daughters will call me blessed.' And she called his name Asher." At this point in time, Leah again bore two sons for Jacob. Genesis 30:17: "And God hearkened unto Leah, and she conceived, and bore Jacob the fifth son. Leah said, 'God has given me my hire because I have given my maiden to my husband.' And she called his name Issachar. And Leah conceived again, and bore Jacob the sixth son. And Leah said, 'God has endued me with a good dowry. Now my husband will dwell with me, because I have born him six sons.' And she called his name, Zebulun."

Finally, God removed the barrenness of Rachel, and she also bore two sons to Jacob. In Genesis 30:22, we read, "And God remembered Rachel, and God hearken to her and opened her womb. And she conceived and born a son, and said, 'God has taken away my reproach.' She called his name Joseph, and said, 'The Lord shall add to me another son.'" And indeed, that is exactly what, in time, God did do. For we read in Genesis 35:16 concerning the birth of the second son: "And they journey from Bethel, and there was but a little way to come to Ephrath, and Rachel travailed, and she had hard labor. And it came to pass, when she was in hard labor, that the midwife said to her, 'Do not fear. You shall have this son also.' And it came to pass, as her soul was in departing (for she died), that she called his name Benoni, but his father called him Benjamin." To his dying mother, he was indeed "the son of my sorrow," which is what "Benoni" means. But to his father, he was "Benjamin:" "the son of my right hand."

So, this occasion of the birth of the final son was both happy and sad, because while on the one hand, it was the youngest, and in many respects the most precious of the sons by the woman Jacob really loved, it was also the time when that one who had been his real sweetheart finally passed away and died.

**The 12 Tribes of Israel**

These four wives bore the 12 sons of Jacob, who became the patriarchal heads of the 12 tribes. Leah's sons were Reuben, Simeon, Levi, Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun. The sons of Rachel were Joseph and Benjamin. The sons of Zilpah, who had been Leah's maid, were Gad and Asher. And the sons of Bilhah, who had been Rachel's maid, were Dan and Naphtali. The order of the birth was in this way: one, Reuben; two, Simeon; three, Levi; four, Judah; five, Dan; six, Naphtali; seven, Gad; eight, Asher; nine, Issachar; ten, Zebulun; 11, Joseph; and, 12 Benjamin.

Joseph, when he was in Egypt, married an Egyptian girl named Asenath who bore to him two sons: Manasseh; and, Ephraim. Genesis 41:50-52: "And unto Joseph were born two sons before the years of famine came, whom Asenath, the daughter of Potipherah, priest of On, bore unto him. And Joseph called the name of the first born Manasseh, for he said, 'God has made me forget all my toil, and all my father's house.' And the name of the second, he called Ephraim: 'for God has caused me to be fruitful in the land of my affliction.'"

Joshua 17:17 indicates that the house of Joseph was actually made up of two tribes: "And Joshua spoke unto the house of Joseph, even to Ephraim and to Manasseh, saying, 'You are a great people, and have great power. You shall not have one lot only.'" Joseph would receive a double portion, in fact, with the tribal structure, with two tribes, each making up a half-tribe of that dynasty.

In Joshua 22:1 the tribe of Manasseh is specifically referred to as a half-tribe: "Then Joshua called the Reubenites and the Gadites, and the half-tribe of Manasseh."

**Monogamy**

So, coming to an analysis of these families, on the basis of what we have seen here, you can see that this was not a desirable family situation, where you have a man with four wives. You do understand, right off the bat, that contrary to what Joseph Smith said, this was not an acceptable arrangement with God. He went back to this sort of thing to justify the polygamy in Mormonism. The truth of the matter is that the Lord Jesus made it very clear, when this subject was discussed in New Testament, that God's order is monogamy. Originally, he made one male for one female, and what has happened here was immediately a violation of that principle.

When Jacob was a very old man in Egypt, and on his deathbed, he called his sons into the room. They gathered around his bed. His eye went from one to the other, and as it did, God the Holy Spirit took over Jacob, and began making prophetic utterances concerning an analysis of each of these sons. The analysis of these sons reflected where these men would go with their families, and what kind of a progeny they would produce.

So, turn to Genesis 49:3: the prophetic portrayals of Jacob concerning his sons under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit. He begins, of course, naturally, with the eldest son, who was Reuben. He says, "Reuben, you are my first born, my might, and the beginning of my strength; the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power." The name Reuben means "see a son." And, of course, he was a joy to Leah, and he was, of course, a very great joy, as the firstborn son always is, to his father. This was the son that was of special esteem to Jacob, because he was indeed the son of Jacob's youth.

**Reuben**

As the first born son, Reuben inherited three wonderful things that were his and nobody else's. Number one was that when his father died, he would become the leader of the family, and his line of descendants would fulfill the promise of the Messiah made to Abraham. Genesis 27:1-4: "And it came to pass that when Isaac was old, and his eyes were dim so that he could not see, he called Esau, his eldest son, and said unto him, 'My son.' And he said unto him, 'Behold, here I am.' He said, 'Behold, now I am old. I do not know the day of my death. Now, therefore, take your weapons, your quiver, and your bow, and go out to the field, and make me some venison. And make me savory foods such as I love, and bring it to me that I may eat, that my soul may bless you before I die.'" Here we have Isaac about to pass on the birthright authority to his son Esau.

And you know the rest of the story. Jacob bought the birthright from Esau, who held it in contempt. Genesis 25:31-34: "Jacob said, 'Sell me this day your birthright.' And Esau said, 'Behold, I'm at the point to die. What profit shall the birthright be to me?' And Jacob said, 'Swear to me this day.' And he swore unto him, and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. And Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentils. He did eat, and drink, and rose up, and went his way. Thus, Esau, despised his birthright." Esau says, "I don't care if I'm the first son. Do you want the birthright? If you give me that bowl of food you have there, it's yours." The result was that he sold his birthright with contempt. Later, he shed many tears when he realized how much he had lost, because he lost not only the privilege of being the one through whom the Messiah was to come, and being the one who was to become head of the family, but he lost everything else that was the rights and the privilege of the firstborn. Then, of course, you know that Jacob came in and tricked his father, Isaac, into thinking that he was Esau. And Isaac gave the blessing to Jacob.

In Genesis 27:34-37, we read of Esau's response when he discovered (when he realized) to his horror that he had indeed lost the privilege of his birthright: "And when Esau heard the words of his father, he cried with a great and exceedingly bitter cry, and said unto his father, 'Bless me, even me also, O my father.' And he said, 'Your brother came with subtlety, and has taken away your blessing.' And he said, 'Is not he rightly named Jacob (supplanter)? For he has supplanted me these two times. He took away my birthright, and behold, now he has taken away my blessing.' And he said, 'Don't you have a blessing for me?' And Isaac answered and said unto Esau, 'Behold, I have made him your lord.'" That's what was crushing: The firstborn son gets to be head of the family. "And I have given to him all his brethren for servants, and with grain and wine I have sustained him. And what shall I do now unto you my son?'" Esau blew the whole thing.

So, the firstborn son, Reuben, had this privilege, first of all. Secondly, it was Reuben's privilege to assume the role of the family priesthood. He was the contact point with God, and everybody was dependent upon him. This was before the era of the Mosaic priesthood. You have this illustrated in the book of Job, which was probably written even before the book of Genesis. In Job 1:5, you have this family priesthood arrangement: "And it was when the days of their feasting (that is, the feasting – the party that Job's children had put on) were finished, that Job sent and sanctified them, and rose up early in the morning, and offered burnt offerings according to the number of them all. For Job said, 'It may be that my sons have sinned and cursed God in their hearts.' Thus did Job continually." As the priest of the family, he saw to it that the appropriate sacrifices were made to cover the potential sin of his children, when they may have been careless about taking care of it themselves. That was a very significant role. If you wanted to go to God, you didn't go directly, as we go today. You had to go through the family priest. This was a very significant position.

In Genesis 8:20, we read, "Noah built an altar unto the Lord, and took of every clean beast and of every clean fowl, and offered burnt offerings on the altar." Following the flood, Noah demonstrates now that he is the family priest.

In Genesis 22:13, you have Abraham about to sacrifice Isaac, again acting as family priest: "He looked, and beheld behind him, a ram caught in the thicket by his horns. Abraham went; took the ram; and, offered him up for a burnt offering in the stead of his son." What was Abraham doing? He was exercising his role as the family priest.

So, if you were a son, no one in the family, as Reuben was, you received the authority to be head of the family upon the father's death, and the honor of being the line through which the Messiah Savior would come. Secondly, you assumed the role as family priest, and thus everything in the family toward God was channeled through you. Then the third thing was that if you were the number one son, you got a double-portion of all of the Father's possessions.

In Deuteronomy 21:17, we read, "But he shall acknowledge the son of the hatred for the firstborn by giving him a double-portion of all that he had. For he is the beginning of his strength. The right of the firstborn is his." Here are regulations being given relative to some domestic conflicts that might arise. And one of the things that was to be dealt with, in terms of the firstborn, was that he gets a double-portion.

So, as Jacob's first born, Reuben was of course, his father's pride and joy, the child of his young manhood, and was the son who had all the great privilege and potential and hope in the family. However, in time, Reuben grew up, and he proved to lack the personal honor, the integrity, and the stability befitting the head of the family. Just because someone is the eldest son does not indicate that he has the qualities and character befitting that honored position, and it is an honored position. In Genesis 35:22, we read about a very dishonorable thing that Reuben was guilty of. It was a moment of kicks that cost him the privileges of his position as the firstborn: "And it came to pass that when Israel (that is, his father Jacob) dwelt in that land (away from home), that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah, his father's concubine (that is, his father's wife), and Israel heard it." So, on one occasion, when his father is away on business, Reuben is guilty of incest and of adultery. We find that he forfeited the rights of primogenitor belonging to the first born, just as Esau had done previously. The right of family rulership now was lost to Reuben.

We find that it was given instead to the tribe of Judah, and from the tribe of Judah came the royal line of Jesus Christ the Messiah. We find that the priesthood was taken away from Reuben, and it was given to the tribe of Levi. We find that the double-portion was taken away from Reuben, and it went to Joseph, who ended up with two sons, so he, in fact, had two tribes representing his family line. Reuben himself was, in the Father's description, a very carnal man.

In Genesis 49:4 Jacob says of Reuben, as he lies there on his bed looking at the sun, "Unstable as water, you shall not excel." "Unstable as water" means "boiling like water." This was characteristic of Reuben. One moment, he was zealous for God; one moment, he was a champion of right; the next moment, a victim of his signature; and, the next moment, groveling like he was an animal. He was boiling up and down and fluctuating. However, we must credit Reuben with this: He was ready to intercede, to save his brother Joseph's life, when his brothers turned against him and wanted to kill him, on that occasion when they trapped him in the field when he came to visit them.

In Genesis 37:21, we read, "And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands and said, 'Let us not kill him' (his little brother Joseph). And Reuben said onto them, 'Shed no blood, but cast him into this pit that is in the wilderness, and lay no hand upon him, that he might rid him out of their hands to deliver him to his father again." He figured, "Later on, I'll come, when everybody's asleep. I'll pull the boy out of the pit, and I'll turn him loose." We must say that he had his moments of nobility and of quality.

In Genesis 42:22, this incident comes up again. They are confronted by Joseph, who is now second-in-command in Egypt. They've gone there for food. They don't recognize Joseph, but he recognizes them. Joseph says that he's going to keep the second oldest brother, Simeon, as a hostage until they go home and bring young Benjamin to prove that they're not spies. Of course, Joseph knew all this. This was his way of getting Benjamin there: "Reuben answer them saying, 'Didn't I speak unto you saying, 'Do not sinned against the child (that is, Joseph)? And you would not hear? Therefore, behold, also his blood is required.'" They were just sure that this ruler, who looked very arrogant to them and whom they feared, not knowing it was their blood-brother Joseph, was going to kill Simeon. They didn't expect to see Simeon alive again. Reuben says, "This is the result of what you guys insisted on doing. I told you not to put him in a position where his life was in danger."

Of course, they thought he, having been taken off into slavery, was long since dead. Furthermore, when he does return home, and faces his father, Jacob, and explains to him that this ruler (this second-in-command in Egypt) insists on bringing the youngest boy, Benjamin, back with them so that they can release Simeon, Jacob becomes completely perturbed over the fact that he lost a precious boy to him in Joseph. Now, all he has left of the wife that he really loved (his one really true love), is little Benjamin, and now they're going to put him under threat.

So, in Genesis 42:37, we see another noble quality, after all, in Reuben: "And Reuben spoke unto his father saying, 'Slay my two sons if I don't bring him to you. Deliver him into my hands, and I will bring him to you again.'" Now, that's kind of a noble position. Finally, Reuben is acting like a man of integrity; a man of enterprise; and, a man that you would like to see as the head of your family. Reuben says, "If you give me the boy, I'll take him, and my sons are at your disposal. If I don't come back with him, you may slay my two sons," which was Reuben's way of saying, "I'll bring him back."

However, the Reubenites inherited their founder's instability, and it showed up in wars with the Canaanites when Deborah and Barak were leading a war against the Canaanites. Judges 5:15-16 tell us that the Reubenites refused the call to arms. The Reubenites refused to turn out for the battle. Again, this was showing that they were up-and-down. You could count on them one time; and, then you couldn't count on them the next time.

So, Jacob, as he looks at Reuben, predicts that he will never excel. He will never be the foremost among the 12 tribes, which was his right. Why? Verse 4 says, "Because you went up to your father's bed, then you defiled it: you went up to my couch." You would think that here was a mistake in a moment of passion; a moment of foolishness; and, a moment of not thinking, and that all would be forgiven and forgotten. But with God, these things are very serious. In the case of Reuben, Jacob had the insight from the inspiration of the Holy Spirit to look at his Son and say, "You're not going to be the firstborn. The rights of primogenitor have been removed from you, and they will be distributed to other tribes in the family. You have lost it all."

So, we read, "in 1 Chronicles 5:1-2: "Now, the sons of Reuben, the firstborn of Israel (for he was the firstborn), but for as much as he defiled his father's bed, his birthright was given unto the sons of Joseph, the son of Israel. And the genealogy is not to be reckoned after the birthright. For Judah prevailed above his brother. And of him came the Prince, but the birthright was Joseph's."

Well, history has demonstrated that there was no great Jewish leader that was ever furnished to the nation by the tribe of Reuben. They never accomplished any great feats. There never was a judge from the tribe of Reuben. There was no prophet that was raised up by God from the tribe of Reuben. The tribe of Reuben never excelled in anything, and it was finally simply taken off into captivity in Assyria.

So, the advantage of one's birth can indeed be squandered by getting involved with Satan's world system and its evils. Reuben failed to use his volition to capitalize on the spiritual advantages of his birth, and the material advantages of his birth. Reuben could have had it all just by the fact that he was firstborn. And yet, he failed to take advantage of it. How often does that happen to someone who has the opportunity to capitalize on the blessings of his birth? He failed to function consistently on God's divine viewpoint. He was erratic; he was sloppy; he was compromising; he was weak; and, he lost it all. He was just boiling water that kept popping up and down. What happened? The result was the people of lesser privilege; people of lesser ability; and, people who had less opportunity took his place under the divine blessings and under freedom.

While Reuben is not named first in Revelations 7:5, we do want to observe that his descendants are nevertheless included as part of God's tribulation evangelists. This again shows us that God brings victory out of defeat, and that God graces us out beyond what we deserve. Reuben is such a sad example of what is so often true.

This often happens to the second- and third-generation Christian; the kid who grows up with Christian parents; the kid who grows up in a home where his parents were pioneers in the Lord's work. Maybe they were in the local church, and they were there operating and functioning. They were the people who were bringing it together, and their children were growing up in all the blessings and the privilege. When they grew up, what do they do? Do they go to work and get a job and say, "Now it's my turn to start pouring money into that?" No, they don't even think about it: "My parents are going to finance the work." Do they grow up and start thinking about the fact that: "Now I have an opportunity to take a place of service within that ministry?" They never seem to be able to rise to the level of their heritage.

Why is that? Every time, one reason is that they get caught up in the cosmic system of Satan. In the world system that Satan has put out there, Reuben now ponders what might have been for him had he taken advantage of the opportunity. His poor great-grandfather, Abraham, was born in just plain heathenism of the darkest kind, and God brought him out. Along came his grandfather, Isaac. The second generation followed in his father's pattern. And along came his father, Jacob, who took a lot of steps down, but finally got straightened out, and at least was pointing him in the right direction. But Reuben couldn't rise to it. All Reuben could do was be the erratic that he was, and be a second-generation failure type.

Dr. John E. Danish, 1984

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