



Overview

REUBEN (behold, a son!). Reuben was the oldest son of Jacob and Leah (Genesis 29:32).

For his crime with Bilhah he lost the right of the firstborn, which was bestowed on Judah, Genesis 35:22.

Reuben was responsible for saving the life of Joseph.

Later he moved to Egypt with his father. The tribe of Reuben numbered 46,500 men at Mount Sinai.

Because the tribe of Reuben had many herds it chose a portion beyond the Jordan, where the pasture was good, it was the area located between Moab and Gilead and near the Dead Sea.

The tribe fell into idolatry and was carried away by Tiglath-Pileser.

Reuben, the first son of Jacob

Genesis 29:32

And Leah conceived, and bare a son, and she called his name Reuben: for she said, surely the Lord hath looked upon my affliction; now therefore my husband will love me.)

The names Leah gave her children, expressed her respect and regard, both to God and to her husband.

Reuben, or See a son, with this thought, Now will my husband love me; Levi, or joined, expecting, Now will my husband be joined unto me.

Mutual affection is both the duty and comfort of the married relation; and yoke-fellows should study to recommend themselves to each other.

She thankfully acknowledges the kind providence of God in hearing her. Whatever supports and comforts us under afflictions, or tends to our deliverance from them, God must be owned in it.

1 Cor. 7:33-34

But he that is married careth for the things that are of the world, how he may please his wife.

There is difference also between a wife and a virgin. The unmarried woman careth for the things of the Lord, that she may be holy both in body and in spirit: but she that is married careth for the things of the world, how she may please her husband.

The sons of Israel

1 Chron. 2:1

These are the sons of Israel; Reuben, Simeon, Levi, and Judah, Issachar, and Zebulun,

We are now come to the register of the children of Israel that distinguished people, who were to dwell alone, and not be reckoned among the nations.

But now, in Christ, all are welcome to his salvation who come to him; all have equal privileges according to their faith in him, their love and devotedness to him.

All that is truly valuable consists in the favour, peace, and image of God, and a life spent to his glory, in promoting the welfare of our fellow-creatures.

Reuben brings mandrakes (an aphrodisiac) to his mother

Genesis 30:14

And Reuben went in the days of wheat harvest, and found mandrakes in the field, and brought them unto his mother Leah. Then Rachel said to Leah, Give me, I pray thee, of thy son's mandrakes.

The desire, good in itself, but often too great and irregular, of being the mother of the promised Seed, with the honour of having many children, and the reproach of being barren, were causes of this unbecoming contest between the sisters.

The truth appears to be, that they were influenced by the promises of God to Abraham; whose posterity were promised the richest blessings, and from whom the Messiah was to descend.

Commits incest with his father's concubines, and, in consequence, forfeits his birthright

Genesis 35:22

And it came to pass, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine: and Israel heard it. Now the sons of Jacob were twelve:

What a sore affliction Reuben's sin was, is shown, "and Israel heard it." No more is said, but that is enough. Reuben thought that his father would never hear of it; but those that promise themselves secrecy in sin, are generally disappointed.

The age and death of Isaac are recorded, though he died not till after Joseph was sold into Egypt.

Genesis 49:4

Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou went up to thy father's bed; then defiled thou it: he went up to my couch.

Reuben, Simeon, Levi (Genesis 49:3-7)

Reuben was the first-born; but by gross sin, he forfeited the birthright. The character of Reuben is, that he was unstable as water.

Men do not thrive, because they do not fix. Reuben's sin left a lasting infamy upon his family. Let us never do evil, then we need not fear being told of it.

Simeon and Levi were passionate and revengeful. The murder of the Shechemites is a proof of this. Jacob protested against that barbarous act.

Cursed be their anger. Jacob does not curse their persons, but their lusts. I will divide them.

The sentence as it respects Levi was turned into a blessing. This tribe performed an acceptable service in their zeal against the worshippers of the golden calf, Ex 32.

They were set apart to God as priests, they were in that character scattered through the nation of Israel.

1 Chronicles 5:1

Now the sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel, (for he was the firstborn; but, forasmuch 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.

He seeks to save Joseph from the conspiracy of his brothers

Genesis 37:21-30

And Reuben heard it, and he delivered him out of their hands; and said, Let us not kill him.

And Reuben said unto 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.

It came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stripped Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colors that was on him;

And they took him, and cast him into a pit: and the pit was empty, there was no water in it. And they sat down to eat bread: and they lifted up their eyes and looked, and, behold, a company of Ishmeelites came from Gilead with their camels bearing spicery and balm and myrrh, going to carry it down to Egypt.

And Judah said unto his brethren, what profit is it if we slay our brother, and conceal his blood? Come, and let us sell him to the Ishmeelites, and let not our hand be upon him; for he is our brother and our flesh. And his brethren were content.

Then there passed by Midianites merchantmen; and they drew and lifted up Joseph out of the pit, and sold Joseph to the Ishmeelites for twenty pieces of silver: and they brought Joseph into Egypt.

And Reuben returned unto the pit; and, behold, Joseph was not in the pit; and he rent his clothes. And he returned unto his brethren, and said, the child is not; and I, whither shall I go?

Joseph's brothers sell him

They threw Joseph into a pit, to perish there with hunger and cold; so cruel were their tender mercies. They slighted him when he was in distress, and were not grieved for the affliction of Joseph, see [Amos 6:6](#); for when he was pining in the pit, they sat down to eat bread.

They felt no remorse of conscience for the sin. But the wrath of man shall praise God, and the remainder of wrath he will restrain, [Ps 76:10](#).

Joseph's brethren were restrained from murdering him, and their selling him as wonderfully turned to God's praise.

His children of Reuben

And the sons of Reuben; Hanoah, and Phallu, and Hezron, and Carmi.

We have here a particular account of Jacob's family. Though the fulfilling of promises is always sure, yet it is often slow.

It was now 215 years since God had promised Abraham to make of him a great nation, Gen 12:2; yet that branch of his seed, to which the promise was made sure, had only increased to seventy, of whom this particular account is kept, to show the power of God in making these seventy become a vast multitude.

Exodus 6:14

These be the heads of their fathers' houses: The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel; Hanoah, and Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi: these be the families of Reuben.

Moses and Aaron were Israelites; raised up unto them of their brethren, as Christ also should be, who was to be the Prophet and Priest, the Redeemer and Lawgiver of the people of Israel.

Moses returns to his narrative, and repeats the charge God had given him to deliver his message to Pharaoh, and his objection against it. Those who have spoken unadvisedly with their lips ought to reflect upon it with regret, as Moses seems to do here.

1 Chron. 5:3-6

The sons, I say, of Reuben the firstborn of Israel were, Hanoah, and Pallu, Hezron, and Carmi. [4] The sons of Joel; Shemaiah his son, Gog his son, Shimei his son, [5] Micah his son, Reaia his son, Baal his son, [6] Beerah his son, whom Tilgath-pilneser king of Assyria carried away captive: he was prince of the Reubenites.

This chapter gives some account of the two tribes and a half seated on the east side of Jordan. They were made captives by the king of Assyria, because they had forsaken the Lord. Only two things are here recorded concerning these tribes. 1. They all shared in a victory. Happy is that people who live in harmony together, who assist each other against the common enemies of their souls, trusting in the Lord, and calling upon him. 2. They shared in captivity.

They would have the best land, not considering that it lay most exposed. The desire of earthly objects draws to a distance from God's ordinances, and prepares men for destruction.

Lessons for life

When Jacob knew his time to die had come, he called his sons to bless them and to correct them for past deeds, showing them that their past sins will have far reaching consequences in the future for their ancestors.

When properly understood, curses can be turned into blessings. Because of past sins, Reuben lost his birthright and first son's rights. Uncontrolled passions lead to personal and family ruin.

If you have faced such challenges in your past, remember that Jesus, the Christ of the cross will forgive you and make you a blessing.

To ask Jesus to come into your heart please pray this Prayer:

Dear Lord Jesus, I believe you are the Christ, the Son of the Living God. I ask you to forgive me of my sins and coming into my heart. I accept you as savior and will follow you as Lord. Amen.

References:

Verse Concept: Matthew Henry's Concept Bible Commentary.