

A Lord's Day Snippet!

Biblical And Southern Studies

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1 The wandering star, and fleeting wind,
Both represent th' unstable mind:
The morning cloud and early dew,
Bring our inconstancy to view.

2 But cloud, and wind, and dew, and star,
Faint and imperfect emblems are;
Nor can there aught in nature be
So fickle and so false as we.

3 Our outward walk, and inward frame,
Scarce through a single hour the same;
We vow, and straight our vows forget,
And then these very vows repeat.

4 With flowing tears, Lord, we confess
Our folly and unsteadfastness:
When shall these hearts more fixed be,
Fix'd by thy grace, and fix'd for thee?

Benjamin Beddome (1717-1795)

Unstable as Water

“Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel.”

Genesis 49:4

We have entered the chamber of a dying man. The shadow of death has fallen over his household. Life's sun is setting as a father gathers his children in his presence for final words. Parents want the best for their children especially when giving them a final farewell. Final words are gathered as precious pearls being treated as rare. The death bed is impacting to some who gather around it. We enter the last moments of a man who was a prince with God. The final words he utters will be prophetic. This is Jacob's final colloquy respecting each of his sons and their descendants. He begins chronologically. Someone said the saddest four words of tongue or pen are these four words "It might have been," and this was true of the oldest son. Remember Jacob's words are spoken and recorded by inspiration of the Holy Spirit.

The eldest sons in Hebrew families were usually regarded as sacred to God because God exempted the first born in Egypt where the blood was applied. The first born represented the first fruits. Jacob said that Reuben was "the beginning of his strength." The first born was to perpetuate the family and its holdings. Reuben was the excellency of dignity and power, but

sadly he forfeited his position. He had manifold privileges compared to his brothers which he rendered forfeit.

Father Jacob's prophecy was "Reuben, thou art ... unstable as water, thou shalt not excel." The word "unstable" in the Hebrew has the implication of motion as a stream flooding its banks and in its moral application it represented rashness or moral licentiousness that violated the moral rules of God. The word pictured one who followed his own will just as water when it is poured out seeks its own level. Genesius in his Hebrew Lexicon said it meant to boil up as water under heat does and thus represented the bubbling up of lust and passion.

Reuben is pictured as unstable as water for his instability, impatience, and impetuosity. Robert S. Candlish correctly pointed out, "Two things may be noticed at the outset. First, it is partly retrospective as well as prospective. It proceeds upon a review of the past, as well as upon foreknowledge of the future. Jacob reads off the fortunes of his sons ... under the light of what they had shown themselves to be. This does not detract from the prophetic character of the poem; for its predictions are not such mere conjectures as observation might suggest. But an important principle in the divine administration is thus brought out. It is that of transmitted character; and, within certain limits, transmitted destiny too.... Secondly, The chief interest of the prophecy centres in two of its utterances, that about Judah, and that about Joseph."

Reuben the firstborn should have led the way for his brothers, but he was as unstable as water. Oh, what might have been. His instability lost him everything as he was impatient, impetuous, unruly, and fleshly. Like many professing Christians who cannot be stable members of a local church because they are always finding fault, showing spiritual instability, displaying unruly spirits. They are filled with self-love, ingratitude, and are unprincipled and thus unholy, they have a form of godliness but deny it (See 2 Tim. 3:1-5). Yes, unstable as water!

Jacob did not try to cover up for his son Reuben. And his sins were visited on the generations that followed, "the sins of the fathers are visited upon the children to the third and fourth generation." Reuben's trait of instability was a trait that his children demonstrated over and over again. His offspring never had a good influence on the nation, never produced great deeds, never produced a judge or prophet or hero, no prominent leaders descended from him and nothing significant seems to have been recorded of the tribe of Reuben. His birthright was given to Joseph, and his kingship was transferred to Judah. The Reubenites settled short of the promised land. "And Moses said unto ... the children of Reuben, Shall your brethren go to war, and shall ye sit here? And wherefore discourage ye the heart of the children of Israel from going over into the land which the LORD hath given them" (Num. 32:6-7). They eventually lost their land and pagans replaced them. This is why many of the cities of Reuben were among those cited under the curse upon the Moabites (Jer. 48).

What should we learn from Reuben and his offspring? Promise and position do not secure a person; parents cannot secure a person against failure; instability produces sorrow; and unstable church members will not prosper for they will produce only instability and weakness in the faith. Remember the reminder the Lord gave the church of Laodicea, "I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot.... I will spue thee out of my mouth." Spiritual instability is destructive and will never edify the body of Christ. "The wicked are like the troubled sea, when

it cannot rest, whose waters cast up mire and dirt. There is no peace, saith my God, to the wicked”” (Isa. 57:20-21). Reuben the Unstable was a sad character of history. Only the grace of God can make a life changing difference! The LORD alone puts “a new song in my mouth, even praise unto our God: many shall see it, and fear, and shall trust in the LORD. Blessed is that man that maketh the LORD his trust.”

C. H. Spurgeon proclaimed, “Now, do not think I am drawing a fancy picture. I beg to inform you I am not; there are persons here who are furnishing me with the model; and if they choose to think me personal I shall be obliged to them, for I intend to be. These persons are to be found in all churches and among all denominations. You have met them everywhere. They are as unstable as water; they do not excel.”