

Reuben

Reuben had some admirable qualities in his character, but overall he was, as Jacob summarised the character of his son, compared to water.

Genesis 49:3-4 [New King James] *“Reuben, you are my firstborn, my might and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity and the excellency of power. Unstable as water, you shall not excel, because you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it, he went up to my couch.”*

Except when frozen, water has no stable shape of its own. Water always shapes itself to its container or environment.

Reuben usually had good intentions, but he seemed unable to stand against a crowd. Reuben's instability made him hard to trust.

Reuben held both private and public values, but these often contradicted each other.

For example Reuben went along with his brothers in their action against Joseph while hoping to counteract the evil in private. The plan failed, [**Genesis 37:14-29**].

Compromise always has a way of destroying our convictions.

We may ask the question, why was Reuben absent when his brothers sold Joseph to the caravan of Ishmaelite merchants?

The simplest possible reason is that Reuben most conscientiously went off to mount guard the sheep, for passing foreigners could not be trusted not to steal a few choice animals as they passed by.

Genesis 35:21-22 [New King James] *“Then Israel journeyed and pitched his tent beyond the tower of Eder. And it happened, when Israel dwelt in that land, that Reuben went and lay with Bilhah his father's concubine; and Israel heard about it.”*

Reuben's sin was costly, although not right way, as the oldest son, he stood to receive a double portion of the family inheritance and a place of leadership among his people, [Deuteronomy 21:17].

Reuben may have thought he had got away with this sin, but there will always be a penalty to pay for every sin that is not confessed and repented of, [Galatians 6:7; Numbers 32:23].

The birthright that Reuben should have had was symbolically bequeathed to Joseph, through his two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, the reason stated was the sin he committed with Jacob's concubine, Bilhah, [**Genesis 49:3-4**]. The Hebrew word translated “*excel*” is “*yâthar*” meaning to remain, referring to Reuben's position as firstborn.

Reuben showed the great love and respect for his father by offering his own sons as a guarantee that Benjamin's life would be saved, [**Genesis 42:8-24**].

Reuben saved Joseph's life by talking the other brothers out of murder, [**Genesis 37:12-22**].

Lessons that we can learn from the life of Reuben –

How consistent are our public and private lives? We may want to think that they are separate, but we cannot deny that they affect each other.

Punishment for sin may not be immediate, but it is certain.

How closely does Jacob's description of his son Reuben, "*turbulent as the waters*" describe your life?

Do circumstances shape the way we respond to challenges that we face in our lives, as water takes the shape of the container it is in?

Sin that is not confessed, repented of and covered with the blood sacrifice of Jesus Christ, will cause us to lose our inheritance, an eternal place in the created family of God, the Kingdom of God.