

**The
Firstborn
And
The
Reubenite
Syndrome**

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This study is taken from two sermons preached one week after another. The purpose is to understand what the Scriptures reveal about the firstborn in the Holy Bible as well as to learn about the tragic loss of leadership and blessing for the firstborn son of Jacob Reuben. Reuben's sin of his youth caused untold damage to his descendants. His descendants were plagued with failures after failures because of his sin and the curse that was pronounced upon him by his father Jacob on his deathbed. The sad state of decline and failure of the tribe of Reuben is termed the Reubenite Syndrome.

Christians can draw many precious lessons concerning the firstborn in the Holy Bible. It is the author's hope and prayer that Christians should learn from the mistakes of others from the Holy Bible and avoid the Reubenite Syndrome.

While the firstborn of fallen men fail, the Firstborn from heaven, even our Lord Jesus Christ has overcome the world for us. Christians need not live out the Reubenite Syndrome that so plagued the descendants of Reuben. The victory is ours to claim even as we live according to the will of firstborn from the dead, the Head of the Church of the firstborn, our blessed Lord Jesus Christ.

For none of us liveth to himself, and no man dieth to himself. (Romans 14:7)

The Scripture makes it abundantly clear that no man lives to himself. No man dies to himself either. How he lives and dies affects others around him. Not only he will affect those around him, his descendants after him are also likewise caught in the life that he lives. How so? **Wherefore, as by one man sin entered into the world, and death by sin; and so death passed upon all men, for that all have sinned: (Romans 5:12)** Ever since the fall of Adam, the whole human race is plunged into sin. Whatever a man does in his lifetime, the consequences and the effects will be felt by others as well as those born after him. The whole web of events he weaves will in some way determine the future and destiny of his descendants. The natural law of sowing and reaping cannot be abolished. This law has been established of old and only through divine intervention can this chain of events be interrupted and put to an end according to the will of Almighty God. Because of this inevitable cause and effect relationship for the life of man, it behooves Christians to study the lives of Biblical characters so that we might benefit from the mistakes that they have made. This will hopefully help us avoid their pitfalls and by the grace of God live a life that is worthy of God's calling so that good may come upon our descendants after us.

The study of the prophecy of the tribe of Reuben is a good start. Reuben being the eldest son of the Patriarch Jacob, should have received double portion of the inheritance and the right to lead the family after the departure of Jacob. Unfortunately, he did not live up to the conduct and manner of life expected of him as the firstborn son of Jacob. As such, his descendants after him were plagued with failures after failures. This Reubenite Syndrome is a lesson for Christians seeking to live to do the good, acceptable and perfect will of God (Romans 12:1-3). A closer examination on the life of Reuben and his descendants after him will bring to light the severity of living our life in an upright manner that is befitting the children of the Kingdom of the Most High. For what we sow now, will certainly reap a harvest later on. The wheels of mortal life will spin till the web of life is complete but the web spun out of control will affect the entire chain of other lives spinning their own web of lives to the sorrows and shame of all those involved. But thanks be unto God who promised deliverance for Adam's lost and helpless race: **Therefore as by the offence of one judgment came upon all men to condemnation; even so by the righteousness of one the free gift came upon all men unto justification of life. For as by one**

man's disobedience many were made sinners, so by the obedience of one shall many be made righteous. (Romans 5:18&19)

Notwithstanding, where the child of God is told of the having received grace for grace in John 1:16 (**And of his fulness have all we received, and grace for grace.**), he is expected to live a life that is circumspect and above reproach because: **For we are his workmanship, created in Christ Jesus unto good works, which God hath before ordained that we should walk in them. (Ephesians 2:10)**

In whom we have redemption through his blood, even the forgiveness of sins: Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. (Colossians 1:14-18)

Before delving into the Reubenite Syndrome, it is necessary to study the status and privilege as well as the responsibility of the firstborn. Not much has been preached concerning the firstborn. However, the Scriptures have much to say about the firstborn. Unfortunately, the status and significance of the firstborn are seldom discussed. This is doing Christians a disservice because the Lord Jesus Christ is also a firstborn. Without learning about the firstborn, Christians often fail to appreciate this Firstborn from heaven who brought victory to the fallen race of Adam. In order to study this topic on the firstborn, we have to take a look at what the saints in the past thought about their firstborn.

Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: (Genesis 49:3) Jacob blessed all his children before he died. He made reference to the special characteristic of the firstborn. The firstborn is regarded as one's might and the beginning of his strength. It signifies fruitfulness as well as the power to reproduce. Eve was exceedingly jubilant when the first man was born into this sin cursed world. **And Adam knew Eve his wife; and she conceived, and bare Cain, and said, I have gotten a man from the LORD. (Genesis 4:1)**

Since the fall, men were promised a Redeemer, the Seed of a woman to bruise the head of the Serpent (Genesis 3:15). Eve immediately thought salvation was accomplished. Unfortunately, Eve got the wrong man who turned out to be a murderer from the beginning. So the firstborn of the first man that thought to be the Seed of the Woman turned out to be a false alarm.

However, the firstborn confirms a woman is fruitful and is capable of reproducing. That is why barrenness is frowned upon and regarded as a curse and a shame. The firstborn signifies the excellency of dignity as well

as the excellency of power. The status of the firstborn carries a very important function in God's creation. The ramification of the conduct and behaviour of the firstborn has far reaching consequences. All parents expect the firstborn to be upright and set a good example to his brothers and sisters. He will be watched over as though the rise and fall of the family depends on him. In ancient kingdoms, the firstborn is the prince who will usually succeed the throne. The seat of power and prestige rests on the firstborn. The firstborn comes with privilege as well as responsibility. It is a very important office by God's calling and not an occupation.

Jacob understood the significance of the position of the firstborn very well. He tried his best to secure this position of the firstborn though he was born after his brother Esau. Before he was born, there was already a war inside of his mother's womb.

And Isaac was forty years old when he took Rebekah to wife, the daughter of Bethuel the Syrian of Padan-aram, the sister to Laban the Syrian. And Isaac intreated the LORD for his wife, because she was barren: and the LORD was intreated of him, and Rebekah his wife conceived. And the children struggled together within her; and she said, If it be so, why am I thus? And she went to enquire of the LORD. And the LORD said unto her, Two nations are in thy womb, and two manner of people shall be separated from thy bowels; and the one people shall be stronger than the other people; and the elder shall serve the younger. And when her days to be delivered were fulfilled, behold, there were twins in her womb. And the first came out red, all over like an hairy garment; and they called his name Esau. And after that came his brother out, and his hand took hold on Esau's heel; and his name was called Jacob: and Isaac was threescore years old when she bare them. (Genesis 25:20-26)

Before Jacob was born, he was already struggling with his brother in their mother's womb. The two boys were fighting to be the firstborn. When Jacob was born, he was holding onto his brother's heel having lost out in the womb. This is very interesting power struggle that began even before the birth of these two sons of Isaac. The depravity of sinful men is just too amazing. How we wish this world had not plunged into sin! When the two boys were grown, this issue of the firstborn was still the bone of contention between the two of them. When Esau was hungry, Jacob took advantage of the situation and forced him to sell his birthright before he would feed him.

And Jacob sod pottage: and Esau came from the field, and he was faint: And Esau said to Jacob, Feed me, I pray thee, with that same red pottage; for I am faint: therefore was his name called Edom. And Jacob said, Sell me this day thy birthright. And Esau said, Behold, I am at the point to die: and what profit shall this birthright do to me? And Jacob said, Swear to me this day; and he sware unto him: and he sold his birthright unto Jacob. Then Jacob gave Esau bread and pottage of lentiles; and he did eat and drink, and rose up, and went his way: thus Esau despised his birthright. (Genesis 25:29-34)

Esau apparently had no regard for his birthright as the firstborn. He held his status of the firstborn with low esteem. The Scriptures recorded that he despised his own birthright. Because of this, his brother Jacob took advantage of him. Even when Isaac wanted to bless Esau before he thought he might die, Jacob impersonated Esau. So the quarrel between the two brothers had reaching boiling point.

And Jacob said unto his father, I am Esau thy firstborn; I have done according as thou badest me: arise, I pray thee, sit and eat of my venison, that thy soul may bless me. And Isaac said unto his son, How is it that thou hast found it so quickly, my son? And he said, Because the LORD thy God brought it to me. And Isaac said unto Jacob, Come near, I pray thee, that I may feel thee, my son, whether thou be my very son Esau or not. And Jacob went near unto Isaac his father; and he felt him, and said, The voice is Jacob's voice, but the hands are the hands of Esau. And he discerned him not, because his hands were hairy, as his brother Esau's hands: so he blessed him. And he said, Art thou my very son Esau? And he said, I am. (Genesis 27:19-24)

We see Jacob's audacity in this matter and he would do anything just to be the firstborn. He had no qualms using God to lie to his father in his quest to be the firstborn. So he had to flee for his life after offending his brother Esau this time who had the intention to kill him after the death of their father Isaac. Then this supplanter Jacob fell in love. Heaven has a way to make fun of fallen man. He fell in love with Rachel. Laban his father-in-law promised to let him marry her if he served him for seven years. He did that but this time, his father-in-law deceived him just like he deceived his father in the past. He gave him Leah instead. When Jacob complained and confronted Laban for fraud, this was what he was told. **And it came to pass, that in the morning, behold, it was Leah: and he said to Laban, What is this thou hast done unto me? did not I serve with thee for Rachel? wherefore then hast thou beguiled me? And Laban said, It must not be so done in our country, to give the younger before the firstborn. (Genesis 29:25&26)**

The conversation stopped there and Jacob complained no more. Why? Because the firstborn must be married off first. Jacob had to keep quiet now for impersonating his brother as the firstborn. There was no way for Rachel to fake to be the firstborn like him. Years later when he had to return to face Esau, the Lord dealt with him and confronted him. **And Jacob was left**

alone; and there wrestled a man with him until the breaking of the day. And when he saw that he prevailed not against him, he touched the hollow of his thigh; and the hollow of Jacob's thigh was out of joint, as he wrestled with him. And he said, Let me go, for the day breaketh. And he said, I will not let thee go, except thou bless me. And he said unto him, What is thy name? And he said, Jacob. And he said, Thy name shall be called no more Jacob, but Israel: for as a prince hast thou power with God and with men, and hast prevailed. (Genesis 32:24-28)

It is very interesting to note that the angel asked Jacob for his name. The angel certainly knew his name. The question was not intended to find out about his name. It was for the purpose of confronting Jacob whether he would still call himself Esau, the firstborn like he did in the past. Jacob was at the end of the road and was been dealt with. When this angel of the Lord asked him what was his name, he no longer wanted to fake to be Esau, the firstborn. Years ago he lied to his father through the teeth that he was Esau the firstborn, now he confessed that his name was Jacob and not Esau. He had given up trying to be the firstborn. He confessed that he was Jacob, the supplanter and not Esau. He probably remembered what his brother said about his name years ago when he deceived his father claiming to be Esau, the firstborn.

And he said, Is not he rightly named Jacob? for he hath supplanted me these two times: he took away my birthright; and, behold, now he hath taken away my blessing. And he said, Hast thou not reserved a blessing for me? (Genesis 27:36) These words from his brother Esau's bitter cry to his father begging for a blessing must be piecing him right into his heart. This incident might seem to him like it was just yesterday during this time of confrontation with the angel. He found himself in the same situation like Esau his elder brother. Now Jacob was asking the angel of the Lord to bless him just like Esau begging his father to bless him in the past. Is he not rightly named Jacob? The name Jacob means supplanter. But Jacob received a name changed for his repentance. His named was changed to Israel meaning a prince that had power with God.

We likewise are like Jacob in the flesh. When God dealt with us and asked who we were, we replied we are a sinner and not a saint. But God changed our low estate when we come to the end of ourselves. God tells us that we are no longer a sinner but a saint. Being the firstborn carries

tremendous responsibility. Esau was a bad example who despised his birthright by selling it to serve his belly.

Not only Jacob regarded the firstborn as someone very important to him, Joseph likewise had great expectation for his firstborn Manasseh. When Jacob blessed his two sons, Joseph was upset. **And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the firstborn. And Joseph said unto his father, Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head. (Genesis 48:14 &18)**

Joseph wanted Jacob to bless his firstborn first and with double portion of blessing. But Jacob did the exact opposite. As a prophet, he foresaw the future of the two peoples and Jacob blessed them accordingly just like Isaac had blessed him above his elder brother Esau years ago. Jacob did not bless Ephraim above Manasseh by mistake. He knew the position of the firstborn better than Joseph. The firstborn carries a very special place in the heart of a father. God also places special emphasis on the firstborn. This is the case when God judged Egypt.

And thou shalt say unto Pharaoh, Thus saith the LORD, Israel is my son, even my firstborn: And I say unto thee, Let my son go, that he may serve me: and if thou refuse to let him go, behold, I will slay thy son, even thy firstborn. (Exodus 4:22&23)

God warned Pharaoh to let His firstborn go or else God would kill their firstborn. Firstborn for firstborn was God's stern warning issued to Pharaoh. God came to claim for His firstborn and Egypt paid with their firstborn for refusing to let Israel go. Touching the firstborn of Almighty God is touching the apple of His eyes. The special place of the firstborn in God's sight cannot be underestimated. It is sure folly to go against God's firstborn. Egypt thought she could keep God's firstborn hostage to serve her had her firstborn wiped out in a night. No one can prosper by hardening against Almighty God. God will have mercy on those who obey Him.

And all the firstborn in the land of Egypt shall die, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sitteth upon his throne, even unto the firstborn of the maidservant that is behind the mill; and all the firstborn of beasts. And it came to pass, that at midnight the LORD smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, from the firstborn of Pharaoh that sat on his throne unto the firstborn of the captive that was in the dungeon; and all the firstborn of cattle. (Exodus 11:5&12:29)

Sanctify unto me all the firstborn, whatsoever openeth the womb among the children of Israel, both of man and of beast: it is mine. (Exodus 13:2) So all the firstborn belongs to God. Make no mistake, God is jealous for His firstborn. Those who go against God's firstborn will pay dearly for it during the day of reckoning. Hence, after this episode, the law concerning the firstborn was established.

And every firstling of an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb; and if thou wilt not redeem it, then thou shalt break his neck: and all the firstborn of man among thy children shalt thou redeem. And it shall be when thy son asketh thee in time to come, saying, What is this? that thou shalt say unto him, By strength of hand the LORD brought us out from Egypt, from the house of bondage: And it came to pass, when Pharaoh would hardly let us go, that the LORD slew all the firstborn in the land of Egypt, both the firstborn of man, and the firstborn of beast: therefore I sacrifice to the LORD all that openeth the matrix, being males; but all the firstborn of my children I redeem. But the firstling of

an ass thou shalt redeem with a lamb: and if thou redeem him not, then shalt thou break his neck. All the firstborn of thy sons thou shalt redeem. And none shall appear before me empty. (Exodus 13:13-15; 34:20)

All the firstborn children must be redeemed with an animal sacrifice. The family can keep the firstborn by exchanging it with an animal sacrifice for the firstborn belongs to God. They must be redeemed and God does not accept human sacrifice like the false religions of the land that killed their firstborn. The firstling of an ass can be redeemed with a lamb otherwise the firstling would be killed. No man can keep the firstborn which belongs to God. Pharaoh tried to keep God's firstborn and he paid for it with his own firstborn. Every firstborn child must be redeemed. This is not negotiable. This law was to teach the children of Israel what God did to the Egyptians when they refused to let the children of Israel go. When the children of Israel left Egypt, all the firstborn of Israel must be redeemed as well. A special decree was issued to the children of Israel on this matter.

And I, behold, I have taken the Levites from among the children of Israel instead of all the firstborn that openeth the matrix among the children of Israel: therefore the Levites shall be mine; Because all the firstborn are mine; for on the day that I smote all the firstborn in the land of Egypt I hallowed unto me all the firstborn in Israel, both man and beast: mine shall they be: I am the LORD. (Numbers 3:12&13) For they are wholly given unto me from among the children of Israel; instead of such as open every womb, even instead of the firstborn of all the children of Israel, have I taken them unto me. For all the firstborn of the children of Israel are mine, both man and beast: on the day that I smote every firstborn in the land of Egypt I sanctified them for myself. And I have taken the Levites for all the firstborn of the children of Israel. (Numbers 8:16-18)

When the children of Israel were delivered, the Lord took the Levites in the place of all the firstborn of Israel to serve Him. The Levites replaced all the firstborn of Israel that day. God killed all the firstborn in Egypt but spared the firstborn of Israel. That is why all the firstborn of Israel belongs to God. God spared them and so they must be redeemed. Hence after their deliverance from Egypt, instead of a few hundred thousand families offering a sacrifice to God to keep their firstborn, God took the Levites in the place of all the firstborn of Israel. This is the law for the children of Israel. This is

the beginning of the law requiring all the firstborn of the children of Israel to be redeemed. The importance of the firstborn in the sight of Almighty God cannot be underestimated. God is preparing to bring in His firstborn from heaven to die for sinners. The psalmist tells us: **Also I will make him my firstborn, higher than the kings of the earth. (Psalm 89:27)** God has a firstborn and this firstborn will be higher than the kings on earth.

He smote also all the firstborn in their land, the chief of all their strength. (Psalm 105:36) The firstborn also signifies the chief of all their strength. They hold the firstborn in very high regards. And God destroyed all the firstborn in Egypt to show who is the ultimate Ruler of the Universe. The day is coming when God will deal with Israel, the firstborn of Jehovah God, to exalt them to their proper place in God's plan of redemption for fallen men.

And I will pour upon the house of David, and upon the inhabitants of Jerusalem, the spirit of grace and of supplications: and they shall look upon me whom they have pierced, and they shall mourn for him, as one mourneth for his only son, and shall be in bitterness for him, as one that is in bitterness for his firstborn. (Zechariah 12:10)

The firstborn is regarded as the power of the man and his family. It is his strength and might. It is the chief of his strength. It is the beginning of his fruitfulness. It is his excellency of dignity and power. The death of the firstborn is a tragic blow to him and his family. The mourning for the loss of the firstborn is very bitter. Here is the picture of the day when Christ returns to earth to establish His Kingdom. The children of Israel will mourn because they had wronged Him and had crucified Him. It is like they had killed their own firstborn son. They mourned for Him because of His death for them and Christ is the firstborn from the dead. They will mourn very bitterly in the future when the Lord returns.

When the Lord Jesus Christ first came to earth, He was the firstborn Son of God made manifest in the flesh. **And knew her not till she had brought forth her firstborn son: and he called his name JESUS. (Matthew 1:25)** The incarnation of the Lord is the firstborn from a virgin's womb. This had never happened before in history by the will of man and would never be repeated. It is scientifically impossible to have a virgin giving birth. Fallen men may try cloning and all kinds of fraud to prove they could also reproduce this miracle to thumb their nose at Almighty God. They will not succeed. This firstborn of Christ in the flesh is supernatural and not natural. Christ is the firstborn in the flesh as the Son of Man and at the same time He is also the eternal Son of God.

For whom he did foreknow, he also did predestinate to be conformed to the image of his Son, that he might be the firstborn among many brethren. (Romans 8:29) Christ is also the firstborn among many brethren. Christ is very fruitful and Christ reproduces many sons and brings them to glory. Christ gives birth to many brethren and causing them to become born again in the Spirit without the work of the flesh or the will of man. Christ is indeed the firstborn and we who are saved are to be conformed to His image, the image of the firstborn from the dead.

Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn of every creature: For by him were all things created, that are in heaven, and

that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him, and for him: And he is before all things, and by him all things consist. And he is the head of the body, the church: who is the beginning, the firstborn from the dead; that in all things he might have the preeminence. (Colossians 1:15-18)

Christ is also the firstborn of every creature because all things are created by Him. Without Him was not anything made that was made. Everything was created by Him and for Him. Christ is the firstborn of all creatures and as such, He must have the preeminence. Christ is the chief of strength and He is before all things. Christ is the Head of the Church who is the beginning and the firstborn from the dead.

He was the Passover Lamb of God sacrificed for sinners so that we might bear the image of the firstborn of God. **Through faith he kept the passover, and the sprinkling of blood, lest he that destroyed the firstborn should touch them. (Hebrews 11:28)** The saints in the past kept the Passover to prevent their firstborn being killed. God made Christ, the firstborn to be sin for us who knew no sin. Christ is our Passover Lamb sacrificed for us so that we might escape death and live. God allowed Christ to be killed like the firstborn in Egypt. Through Christ, we become born again in the Spirit who will acquire His image, the image of the firstborn of God.

And Jacob called unto his sons, and said, Gather yourselves together, that I may tell you that which shall befall you in the last days. Gather yourselves together, and hear, ye sons of Jacob; and hearken unto Israel your father. Reuben, thou art my firstborn, my might, and the beginning of my strength, the excellency of dignity, and the excellency of power: Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch. (Genesis 49:1-4)

Jacob was not a prophet until the end of his life. His manner of life was less than desirable during his younger days. However, towards the end of his life, he was recorded as a hero of faith according to **Hebrews 11:21: By faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff.**

Before he died, he summoned all his sons and revealed to them the future of their respective descendants. Reuben being the firstborn was the first to receive this prophetic message concerning his descendants after him. **Unstable as water, thou shalt not excel; because thou wentest up to thy father's bed; then defiledst thou it: he went up to my couch. (Genesis 49:4)**

Jacob was dying and that did not mean he had to say something nice to every one of his sons. Jacob was addressing Reuben in verse 4 but the personal pronoun was changed suddenly to “he” when Jacob accused Reuben before all his sons. This sudden switch of attention must come as a surprise to all. It was as though Jacob was talking with everyone and then now pointing a finger at Reuben. He was telling them what Reuben did years ago. What a bolt of thunder must have been for Reuben hoping to receive a blessing from his dying father. How shameful! What reproach! He probably would have dug into a hole to hide himself if it were possible. Reuben after all was Jacob’s firstborn son destined to receive double portion of the blessings as well as the leadership role in the family. But what is the meaning of the name Reuben?

And when the LORD saw that Leah was hated, he opened her womb: but Rachel was barren. 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. (Genesis 29:31&32) Reuben in Hebrews means “See, a son” or “Behold, a

son". As a firstborn son, he was to be given double portion of blessing according to the tradition of the fathers. This tradition was later institutionalized under the Mosaic Law especially concerning men having more than one wife.

If a man have two wives, one beloved, and another hated, and they have born him children, both the beloved and the hated; and if the firstborn son be hers that was hated: Then it shall be, when he maketh his sons to inherit that which he hath, that he may not make the son of the beloved firstborn before the son of the hated, which is indeed the firstborn: But he shall acknowledge the son of the hated for the firstborn, by giving him a double portion of all that he hath: for he is the beginning of his strength; the right of the firstborn is his. (Deuteronomy 21:15-17)

This special emphasis on the firstborn has become a law even for some men trying to contravene the right of the firstborn. The firstborn is the firstborn and no man can disannul it. This usually happens with a man having more than one wife who will give special favour to the son of the favoured wife. So a law is written to prevent such tampering of the rights of the firstborn. The firstborn is supposed to get a double portion of the inheritance. It cannot be changed just because the husband loves the other wife more and gives her son a double portion of inheritance instead of the right of the firstborn from the wife whom he dislikes. However, concerning Reuben, his right was forfeited because of what he did in the past being unstable as water.

Polygamy is not God's perfect will for man. However, God allows it because of the weakness of man and also for woman who cannot have children on her own. What God disallows is fornication and adultery, which is punishable by death. When David committed adultery, the Lord rebuked him in **2 Samuel 12:8&9: And I gave thee thy master's house, and thy master's wives into thy bosom, and gave thee the house of Israel and of Judah; and if that had been too little, I would moreover have given unto thee such and such things. Wherefore hast thou despised the commandment of the LORD, to do evil in his sight? thou hast killed Uriah the Hittite with the sword, and hast taken his wife to be thy wife, and hast slain him with the sword of the children of Ammon.**

God condones men for having more than one wife, but adultery is a sin worthy of death. Movies almost always promote a one man one wife family but they also promote fornication and adultery. The world is always anti-Bible and the way God reveals His will to man is not always acceptable to fallen man. It is common practice for man to have more than one wife and that is why Paul told Timothy and Titus that a Bishop or a deacon must only be a husband of one wife. Man having more than one wife is not the sole practice of the Jews. The Gentiles likewise practise polygamy. God would rather a man marry more than one wife and be responsible for them and their children than to marry one wife and commit fornication and adultery with other women outside of marriage.

Moses even allowed a man to put away his wife because of the hardness of the heart of man but this was not so in the beginning. I am not promoting polygamy but I am only showing you the reality of fallen man lest you be brainwashed by the media of woman's right but promote abortion where there is no infant's right to live.

So the firstborn is to be given double portion of the inheritance. Reuben forfeited his birthright by decree from above through the blessing of the prophet Jacob before he died. Man cannot disannul the birthright of the firstborn but God can. What Reuben did was the sin of fornication and adultery with Bilhah before the Law which was punishable by death. Job who lived before the Law of Moses called it a crime in **Job 31:11: For this is an heinous crime; yea, it is an iniquity to be punished by the judges.** 1 Corinthians 5 also dealt with a church member who cohabited with his father's wife which Paul demanded to be delivered to Satan for the destruction of the flesh that the spirit might be saved.

Therefore Reuben was a fornicator and he lost his right to rule the family and the privilege to receive a double portion of the inheritance. While Esau was a fornicator, Reuben is worst for committing fornication with his father's wife.

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. For Judah prevailed above his brethren, and of him came the chief ruler; but the birthright was Joseph's:) (1 Chronicles 5:1&2)

Here, we are told the birthright was given to Joseph who indeed inherited a double portion of the land grant under his two sons Ephraim and Manasseh. However, the leadership role of the family was transferred to Judah who prevailed from which came the Lion of Judah, our Lord Jesus Christ – the Seed of the woman. Reuben was left out of all the blessings and the birthright, which indeed were supposed to be his to begin with. Unfortunately, it was conditional upon his obedience and performance. Let us consider what Reuben did as recorded in Gen 35.

And Rachel died, and was buried in the way to Ephrath, which is Bethlehem. And Jacob set a pillar upon her grave: that is the pillar of Rachel's grave unto this day. And Israel journeyed, and spread his tent beyond the tower of Edar. 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: (Genesis 35:19-22)

Bilhah was Rachel's maid. She was given to Jacob to be his concubine after Rachel could not conceive. Bilhah was used by Rachel in her fight with her sister Leah to find favour with Jacob. After Rachel died, Reuben failed in his unbridled passion and defiled Jacob's couch. Jacob heard about this incident but he did not confront his son Reuben.

Apparently, all his other sons might not be aware of this incident. So when Jacob revealed this matter on his deathbed, it must have been a terrible surprise for him and the rest of his brethren. This was shocking news indeed. These were the words from a dying man and there was no time and not the occasion to clear his name or to excuse the sin of his youth. How would the sons of Bilhah, Dan and Naphtali, think of Reuben from now on? How would these two brothers treat Reuben from now on? Can Reuben still look into the eyes of his brothers as though nothing had happened? What he did in the past was so shameful that it would be hard for Dan and Naphtali to remain cordial with Reuben in the future. What Reuben did during his youth was not something he would be proud of many years down the road. His failure to conduct himself befitting that of the firstborn of the family cost him everything. He should have learned from the lesson of his uncle Esau.

Esau the firstborn sold his birth right. Esau despised his birthright. In the same manner, Reuben despised his birthright. Esau sold his birthright to satisfy his belly. Reuben forfeited his birthright to satisfy his flesh. Christians likewise sell their Christian birthright as a member of the Church

of the firstborn by walking in the flesh. Some sins are so severe while they are forgiven, the child of God will lose his inheritance in the life to come during the reign of Christ in the Kingdom Age. Christians should heed the warning in **Hebrews 12:16: Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright.** A fornicator and a profane person will not inherit the kingdom of Christ. What Reuben did had far-reaching consequences for it affected his descendants in a major way concerning their attitudes and their way of life.

Now Korah, the son of Izhar, the son of Kohath, the son of Levi, and Dathan and Abiram, the sons of Eliab, and On, the son of Peleth, sons of Reuben, took men: And they rose up before Moses, with certain of the children of Israel, two hundred and fifty princes of the assembly, famous in the congregation, men of renown: And they gathered themselves together against Moses and against Aaron, and said unto them, Ye take too much upon you, seeing all the congregation are holy, every one of them, and the LORD is among them: wherefore then lift ye up yourselves above the congregation of the LORD? (Numbers 16:1-3)

The first major incident the descendants of Reuben found themselves in was joining Korah in his rebellion against Moses. This is the first manifestation of their character trait being unstable as water. As the tribe of the firstborn of Jacob, the Reubenites could have had a leadership role to resolve the disputes between the brethren where they would look up to as the chief tribe. Unfortunately as a character flaw, they were unstable as water and they joined in an unjust rebellion against the will of God in properly delegated authority. Moreover the Reubenites were also self-centred.

Now the children of Reuben and the children of Gad had a very great multitude of cattle: and when they saw the land of Jazer, and the land of Gilead, that, behold, the place was a place for cattle; The children of Gad and the children of Reuben came and spake unto Moses, and to Eleazar the priest, and unto the princes of the congregation, saying, Ataroth, and Dibon, and Jazer, and Nimrah, and Heshbon, and Elealeh, and Shebam, and Nebo, and Beon, Even the country which the LORD smote before the congregation of Israel, is a land for cattle, and thy servants have cattle: Wherefore, said they, if we have found grace in thy sight, let this land be given unto thy servants for a possession, and bring us not over Jordan. And Moses said unto the children of Gad and to 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? Thus did your fathers, when I sent them from Kadesh-barnea to see the land. For when they went up unto the valley of Eshcol, and saw the land, they discouraged the heart of the children of Israel, that they should not go into the land which the LORD had given them. And the LORD's anger was kindled the same time, and he sware, saying, Surely none of the men that came up out of Egypt, from twenty years old and upward, shall see the land which I sware unto Abraham,

unto Isaac, and unto Jacob; because they have not wholly followed me: Save Caleb the son of Jephunneh the Kenezite, and Joshua the son of Nun: for they have wholly followed the LORD. And the LORD's anger was kindled against Israel, and he made them wander in the wilderness forty years, until all the generation, that had done evil in the sight of the LORD, was consumed. And, behold, ye are risen up in your fathers' stead, an increase of sinful men, to augment yet the fierce anger of the LORD toward Israel. (Numbers 32:1-14)

The children of Israel had not conquered the land West of Jordan yet. But the Reubenites wanted their inheritance first on the East of Jordan much like Lot who wanted the land for his cattle during Abraham's time. Being forfeited of a double portion of inheritance, they wanted their inheritance first. Here again, we witness the character trait of Reuben who just could not wait. They could not wait upon the Lord to give inheritance to all the tribes of Israel. They wanted their lion's share first. They justified their decision based on human logic. They had flocks and cattle just like Lot who was self-serving. As the chief tribe of the eldest son, they were not living and leading by example. They could not command respect from the other tribes of Israel.

Then Joshua called the Reubenites, and the Gadites, and the half tribe of Manasseh, And said unto them, Ye have kept all that Moses the servant of the LORD commanded you, and have obeyed my voice in all that I commanded you: Ye have not left your brethren these many days unto this day, but have kept the charge of the commandment of the LORD your God. And now the LORD your God hath given rest unto your brethren, as he promised them: therefore now return ye, and get you unto your tents, and unto the land of your possession, which Moses the servant of the LORD gave you on the other side Jordan. But take diligent heed to do the commandment and the law, which Moses the servant of the LORD charged you, to love the LORD your God, and to walk in all his ways, and to keep his commandments, and to cleave unto him, and to serve him with all your heart and with all your soul. So Joshua blessed them, and sent them away: and they went unto their tents. (Joshua 22:1-6)

After the conquest of Canaan, Joshua allowed the Reubenites, the Gadites and the half of Manasseh to depart to their own land East of Jordan. But something happened along the way that almost led to a civil war.

And the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh returned, and departed from the children of Israel out of Shiloh, which is in the land of Canaan, to go unto the country of Gilead, to the land of their possession, whereof they were possessed, according to the word of the LORD by the hand of Moses. And when they came unto the borders of Jordan, that are in the land of Canaan, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh built there an altar by Jordan, a great altar to see to. And the children of Israel heard say, Behold, the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the half tribe of Manasseh have built an altar over against the land of Canaan, in the borders of Jordan, at the passage of the children of Israel. And when the children of Israel heard of it, the whole congregation of the children of Israel gathered themselves together at Shiloh, to go up to war against them. (Joshua 22:9-12)

They built an altar by Jordan River fearing that their brethren would cut them off from Israel. Such unfounded fear and unilateral action almost led to a civil war with the rest of the tribes West of Jordan. If they wanted to erect a monument as a witness, they should have discussed the matter with the rest of the tribes before they left. They should have sought their consent instead of doing what they thought was right in their own eyes. The Reubenites, being the elder tribe had no leadership capability. They were unable to reason well and gain the respect of the other tribes.

The LORD God of gods, the LORD God of gods, he knoweth, and Israel he shall know; if it be in rebellion, or if in transgression against the LORD, (save us not this day,) That we have built us an altar to turn from following the LORD, or if to offer thereon burnt offering or meat offering, or if to offer peace offerings thereon, let the LORD himself require it; And if we have not rather done it for fear of this thing, saying, In time to come your children might speak unto our children, saying, What have ye to do with the LORD God of Israel? For the LORD hath made Jordan a border between us and you, ye children of Reuben and children of Gad; ye have no part in the LORD: so shall your children make our children cease from fearing the LORD. Therefore we said, Let us now prepare to build us an altar, not for burnt offering, nor for sacrifice: But that it may be a witness between us, and you, and our generations after us, that we might do the service of the LORD before him with our burnt offerings, and with our sacrifices, and with our peace offerings; that your children may not say

to our children in time to come, Ye have no part in the LORD. Therefore said we, that it shall be, when they should so say to us or to our generations in time to come, that we may say again, Behold the pattern of the altar of the LORD, which our fathers made, not for burnt offerings, nor for sacrifices; but it is a witness between us and you. God forbid that we should rebel against the LORD, and turn this day from following the LORD, to build an altar for burnt offerings, for meat offerings, or for sacrifices, beside the altar of the LORD our God that is before his tabernacle. And when Phinehas the priest, and the princes of the congregation and heads of the thousands of Israel which were with him, heard the words that the children of Reuben and the children of Gad and the children of Manasseh spake, it pleased them. (Joshua 22:22-30)

What they requested years ago, had now become an issue. Again, what they decided to do was based on human logic. What they did had no sanction from Jehovah God. They did not discuss the matter with the other tribes before they left. Neither was the counsel from Jehovah God sought before they embarked on this matter. It almost led to civil war because of their unilateral decision to build an altar on their side of the inheritance. Such lack of discernment and double-mindedness was sadly the portion of the Reubenites. Furthermore, their indifference and lack of commitment to the rest of the tribes showed up in times of war.

And the princes of Issachar were with Deborah; even Issachar, and also Barak: he was sent on foot into the valley. For the divisions of Reuben there were great thoughts of heart. Why abodest thou among the sheepfolds, to hear the bleatings of the flocks? For the divisions of Reuben there were great searchings of heart. (Judges 5:15&16)

The downward decline of the Reubenites was evident. They preferred to stay away from battle. They did not wish to assist their brethren in times of adversity and hostility from their enemies. They were self-serving and content to saving their own skin. They remained at home while their brethren jeopardized their lives for the brethren and for the cause of Jehovah God. How many Christians are like the Reubenites who prefer the comfort of their own home than to labour for the Lord and engage the enemies in spiritual warfare? They have lost the leadership role as members of the Church of the firstborn who will one day judge the world and angels.

The decline of Reuben was felt almost immediately when comparing with the other tribes. **As the LORD commanded Moses, so he numbered them in the wilderness of Sinai. And the children of Reuben, Israel's eldest son, by their generations, after their families, by the house of their fathers, according to the number of the names, by their polls, every male from twenty years old and upward, all that were able to go forth to war; Those that were numbered of them, even of the tribe of Reuben, were forty and six thousand and five hundred. (Numbers 1:19-21)**

The number of the children of Israel above age 20 at the beginning of the wilderness trip was 46500. Their number taken at the end of 40 years was 43730. **These are the families of the Reubenites: and they that were numbered of them were forty and three thousand and seven hundred and thirty. (Numbers 26:7)** The firstborn usually multiplied faster than the rest but this was sadly not the case for Reuben.

The prophecy of Jacob took almost immediate effect. Their numbers were already in decline before they possessed the promised land while almost all of the other tribes increased and prospered in numbers. This decline was so serious that Moses before he died prayed that the tribe of Reuben be preserved in **Deuteronomy 33:6: Let Reuben live, and not die; and let not his men be few.**

And Israel said unto Joseph, Do not thy brethren feed the flock in Shechem? come, and I will send thee unto them. And he said to him, Here am I. And he said to him, Go, I pray thee, see whether it be well with thy brethren, and well with the flocks; and bring me word again. So he sent him out of the vale of Hebron, and he came to Shechem. And a certain man found him, and, behold, he was wandering in the field: and the man asked him, saying, What seekest thou? And he said, I seek my brethren: tell me, I pray thee, where they feed their flocks. And the man said, They are departed hence; for I heard them say, Let us go to Dothan. And Joseph went after his brethren, and found them in Dothan. And when they saw him afar off, even before he came near unto them, they conspired against him to slay him. And they said one to another, Behold, this dreamer cometh. Come now therefore, and let us slay him, and cast him into some pit, and we will say, Some evil beast hath devoured him: and we shall see what will become of his dreams. 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. And it came to pass, when Joseph was come unto his brethren, that they stript Joseph out of his coat, his coat of many colours 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? (Genesis 37:13-30)

The brethren were ganging up against Joseph intending to kill him. Evidently, Reuben being the eldest son was answerable to his father. It appeared that he had repented and was trying to save Joseph from his brethren who planned to kill him. Then when they sold him to Egypt when

Reuben was not around, he was terrified and sought ways to break the news to his father. Though they lied to their father that Joseph had been killed by a wild beast, which Jacob believed, Reuben's leadership role had already diminished.

Years later when the brethren went down to Egypt to buy food because of the famine, Joseph detained Simeon and demanded that they brought Benjamin his brother to Egypt so that they might continue to buy food from Egypt. This was what Reuben suggested.

And Jacob their father said unto them, Me have ye bereaved of my children: Joseph is not, and Simeon is not, and ye will take Benjamin away: all these things are against me. And Reuben spake unto his father, saying, Slay my two sons, if I bring him not to thee: deliver him into my hand, and I will bring him to thee again. And he said, My son shall not go down with you; for his brother is dead, and he is left alone: if mischief befall him by the way in the which ye go, then shall ye bring down my gray hairs with sorrow to the grave. (Genesis 42:36-38)

Reuben requested Jacob to let him bring Benjamin to Egypt in order to buy them food. His request was rejected because Jacob could not trust him. He was so desperate as to suggest that Jacob kill his two sons if he did not bring Benjamin back to his father. What was in his mind? He implied as though his sons were not from the same stock being descendants of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob. The instability of Reuben is past finding out. Eventually Jacob allowed them to bring Benjamin to Egypt to buy food.

And Judah said unto Israel his father, Send the lad with me, and we will arise and go; that we may live, and not die, both we, and thou, and also our little ones. I will be surety for him; of my hand shalt thou require him: if I bring him not unto thee, and set him before thee, then let me bear the blame for ever: For except we had lingered, surely now we had returned this second time. And their father Israel said unto them, If it must be so now, do this; take of the best fruits in the land in your vessels, and carry down the man a present, a little balm, and a little honey, spices, and myrrh, nuts, and almonds: And take double money in your hand; and the money that was brought again in the mouth of your sacks, carry it again in your hand; peradventure it was an oversight: Take also your brother, and arise, go again unto the man: And God Almighty give you mercy before the man, that he may send

away your other brother, and Benjamin. If I be bereaved of my children, I am bereaved. (Genesis 43:8-14)

The leadership role was given to Judah even before Jacob prophesied of his ascendancy to lead the twelve tribes of Israel. As for Reuben, not much had been recorded about him. He was no longer the spokesman when dealing with Joseph in Egypt. The downward decline of Reuben had begun long before Jacob uttered the words of disapproval in his prophecy regarding the descendants of Reuben on his deathbed.

Lest there be any fornicator, or profane person, as Esau, who for one morsel of meat sold his birthright. For ye know how that afterward, when he would have inherited the blessing, he was rejected: for he found no place of repentance, though he sought it carefully with tears. (Hebrews 11:16&17)

Reuben being the eldest son like Esau the firstborn was rejected for leadership role of the family. This is due to his lack of temperance and just a moment of folly. He is categorized with Esau as a fornicator and a profane person. He found no place of repentance though he sought it carefully with many tears. Esau no longer led the family of Isaac. His descendants eventually became enemies of the children of Israel. Reuben no longer got back his leadership role as the head of tribes. They became self-centred and self-serving and continued their downward decline through the history of the nation of Israel. Reuben did not produce one single prophet, military leader, judge or important person in the history of Israel as recorded in the Holy Bible.

But whoso committeth adultery with a woman lacketh understanding: he that doeth it destroyeth his own soul. A wound and dishonour shall he get; and his reproach shall not be wiped away. (Proverbs 6:32&33)

Brethren, there are sins where they could be forgiven but the scar and consequence will remain for the rest of our earthly life. Avoid the Reubenite Syndrome. They bring shame and reproach and many painful memories and hurt to others around us. The devil works in the children of disobedience and all of us are within the crosshair of his wiles.

Abstaining from all appearance is the crucial first step. Do not think we are strong and we can withstand such insidious attacks from the devil. Do not trust our flesh. Many mighty have fallen. The Christians' perspective is to help one another to avoid contracting this disease.

So we, being many, are one body in Christ, and every one members one of another. (Romans 12:5) And whether one member suffer, all the members suffer with it; or one member be honoured, all the members rejoice with it. (1 Corinthians 12:26) Rejoice with them that do rejoice, and weep with them that weep. (Romans 12:15)

There is nothing to glory when a brother is fallen. All of us are equally vulnerable to Satan's whiles. Do not become another statistics and be put out of action for doing the Lord's work. Reuben's sin affected his descendants. David's sin likewise caused untold damaged to his family. If you love your children, do not sin. If you love your wife, do not sin. Woman, if you love your husband, do not drive him to sin. A wife is also partly responsible for not protecting her husband in this very dangerous world in which we live. But the man is ultimately responsible for his indiscretion and folly.

Many firstborn of fallen men have failed especially so for Reuben, the eldest son of Jacob. However, the firstborn from heaven, our blessed Lord Jesus Christ has succeeded and has overcome the world. Christians are now more than conquerors through Christ because we are to be conformed to the image of this firstborn from the dead – the Head of the Church of the firstborn. So ask the Lord to help you and grant you stability and consistency in your walk with Him. Avoid the Reubenite Syndrome at all cost. Do not be unstable as water. **A double minded man is unstable in all his ways. (James 1:8)** Lay hold on God's great and precious promises.

To the end he may stablish your hearts unblameable in holiness before God, even our Father, at the coming of our Lord Jesus Christ with all his saints. (1 Thessalonians 3:13) Now our Lord Jesus Christ himself, and God, even our Father, which hath loved us, and hath given us everlasting consolation and good hope through grace, Comfort your hearts, and stablish you in every good word and work. But the Lord is faithful, who shall stablish you, and keep you from evil. (Thessalonians 2:16&17; 3:3) Be ye also patient; stablish your hearts: for the coming of the Lord draweth nigh. (James 5:8) But the God of all grace, who hath called us unto his eternal glory by Christ Jesus, after that ye have suffered a while, make you perfect, stablish, strengthen, settle you. (1 Peter 5:10)

Christians should live by the great and precious promises of God. The Reubenite Syndrome is avoidable. Christians must remember we are also the firstborn of God in Christ. So we have to live up to the great expectation as firstborn sons of God. As firstborns, we have great privileges as well as responsibilities to live a life that is pleasing in the sight of the Lord. We are not alone in this endeavour and many have gone on before us. Success is

within reach when we set our eyes on the Lord Jesus Christ, the Author and Finisher of our faith.

To the general assembly and church of the firstborn, which are written in heaven, and to God the Judge of all, and to the spirits of just men made perfect, And to Jesus the mediator of the new covenant, and to the blood of sprinkling, that speaketh better things than that of Abel. (Hebrews 12:23&24)

So Christ leaves us a legacy to follow Him. Christ founded the church of the firstborn. We are all members of this Church of the firstborn. May we live up to the expectation as firstborn sons of God! May we all conduct ourselves as the excellency of dignity and power of the firstborn as members of the church of the firstborn. May we all walk as firstborn being chief in strength of the firstborn for our God. May we always remember, we are members of the Church of the firstborn and live up to the expectation of the firstborn.

If you have been blessed with the reading of this book and you wish to contact the author, you may write to him at charles@kiv-asia.com.