Main Thought  Jacob, a prophet, blesses his twelve sons with their unique destinies within their common destiny as a nation.

INTRODUCTION (1-2).
• These are both blessings and anti-blessings (Reuben, Simeon, Levi).
• This is the first sustained poem in the bible and one of the oldest.
• It emphasizes JUDAH (5 verses) and JOSEPH (5 verses) giving a glimpse of the future split (931 BC) of Israel into Judah (south) and Israel (north).
• It is given publically for all to hear unlike Isaac’s (Esau and Jacob).
• Genesis begins/ends with the blessing of creation and now its children.

LEAH’S SIX SONS (3-15).
• REUBEN (3-4). The first three are anti-blessings for sins (9:25; 27:39-40). No prophet, judge, priest, or king comes from this tribe. What loss!
• SIMEON AND LEVI (5-7). They shared the same sin (34:25, 30), they will share the same fate. SIMEON would be absorbed into Judah (Josh. 19:1, 9) and Levi would be scattered among 48 towns among the 12 tribes.
• JUDAH (8-12).
  - Because of Judah’s repentance (44:33) for his sin with Tamar, he will become the largest tribe (Num. 2:3-4; 10:14). Judah’s right to rule is validated by his own brothers (all sons of Jacob).
  - He is likened to a lion – THE LION OF JUDAH (Rev. 5:5).
  - The SCEPTER is a symbol of eminence and kingship (Num. 24:17). It will NOT DEPART (fulfilled in the Davidic Covenant – 2 Sam. 7:16 – forever) UNTIL HE COMES (Shiloh; Christ at his 2nd Coming – Ezek. 21:26-27; Rev. 11:15).
  - He will be VICTORIOUS (10b), WEALTHY (11), and BEAUTIFUL (12).
• ZEBULUN (13). Though landlocked, they prospered by the sea.
• ISSACHAR (14-15). Lazy but “understood the times” (1 Ch. 12:32).

BILHAH TWO SONS (16-19).
• DAN (16-18). Known for justice and treachery (Judg. 18:27; Samson).
• This PRAYER anticipates fierce hostilities against the tribes.
• GAD (19). In Transjordan, they were constantly attacked (Deut. 33:20).

ZILPAH’S TWO SONS (20-21).
• ASHER (20). Abundant food by the sea in western Galilee (Deut. 33:24).
• NAPHTALI (21). Freedom of movement in the Hula valley and Galilee.

RACHEL’S TWO SONS (22-28).
• JOSEPH (22-26). Barren Rachel produced the most fruitful tribe. They were victorious because of the MIGHTY ONE (Judg. 5:22 – steeds), the SHEPHERD (Psa. 23:1), the ROCK OF ISRAEL (Deut. 32:31).
• BENJAMIN (27-28). Noted for bravery/skill in war (Judg. 20:16; 1 Chron. 12:2).
• The narrator concludes the BLESSING (3x) of the twelve tribes of Israel.