

Gen 48 - Jacob Blesses Ephraim and Manasseh

HEME: Joseph visits Jacob during his last illness; Jacob blesses Ephraim and Manasseh.

This tells us of Jacob's last sickness and his blessing of the two sons of Joseph. We are told in Heb_11:21 that "by faith Jacob, when he was a dying, blessed both the sons of Joseph; and worshipped, leaning upon the top of his staff."

This chapter gives us another occasion to see further evidence of the spiritual growth of Jacob. He has come a long, long way since his early days. We may feel that it is unfortunate that these traits which appear in the last days of Jacob were not present in his early life. But isn't it wonderful to be able to observe in this that spiritual life is a growth and a development! It is not some sensational experience which takes place in a moment of time, but it is described scripturally as a walk in the Spirit. There was too much of the old nature in Jacob when he was a young man, and the new nature is not discerned until he is an old man.

A fine-looking couple in Memphis, Tennessee, had come forward after a service. I asked them what they came forward for. They said they wanted all that God had for them. I found out that they came forward every Sunday. They thought they would have some sensational, momentous experience that would all of a sudden make them fully grown Christians. Scripture tells us we are to "... grow in grace, and in the knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ" (2Pe 3:18). We see in Jacob that we must wait for the fruit of the Spirit to develop. But thank God for the possibility of growth in our lives and for the patience of God which permits it. Also, we can thank Him that He doesn't move in, as we would, and try to force growth. God very patiently dealt with Jacob, and He will deal very patiently with you and me. - McGee

Gen 48:1-3 Now it came to pass after these things that Joseph was told, "Indeed your father is sick"; and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. And Jacob was told, "Look, your son Joseph is coming to you"; and Israel strengthened himself and sat up on the bed. Then Jacob said to Joseph: "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan and blessed me,

Can you imagine the thrill that fills the heart of this old man? Here comes Joseph, his favorite son, with his two young boys. Jacob never dreamed he would see Joseph again because he thought he had been killed. Yet he sees Joseph elevated to this important position in Egypt, and he can trace the way God had worked out the affairs of his life. Jacob had been in Egypt for 17 years now. He is an old man and is dying, but he musters his strength to sit at the edge of his bed. Notice that his thinking goes back to the time God appeared to him at Luz, and he says to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me." Jacob has come a long way. We see now the faith of Jacob. He is now trusting God. He is not bragging about himself. As a young man he was clever and could get what he wanted—or so he thought—and he would use any kind of method to get it. But now, as he looks back over his life, he remembers when God appeared to him at Bethel, both when he was leaving the land of Canaan and when he was returning. He says, "God appeared to me there, and God blessed me."

Now we see the faith of Jacob—McGee

Gen 48:4 and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.'

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Let's pay special attention to God's promise that Jacob mentions, which runs through the Old and New Testaments. He made the promise to the line of the patriarchs: Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob. There are three specific points to the covenant: (1) the nation, (2) the land, and (3) the blessing. But the two important things for Jacob right here are these: (1) "I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people"; (2) "and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession."

The third part of the covenant is important for you and me. "In thee shall all the families of the earth be blessed."

The reason that you and I are sitting down with the Bible right now is because God has made good two-thirds of this promise which He covenanted thousands of years ago. The one-third is still not fulfilled. The Jews do not have the land of Israel yet. Oh, they have a little border of it, but it is certainly a bone of contention. When they get the land from the hand of God, they will live there in peace. Every man will be under his vine and his fig tree. They will own property and pay no taxes. That sounds like the Millennium, doesn't it? Well, that is what it will be. – McGee

Gen 48:5-6 And now your two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine. Your offspring whom you beget after them shall be yours; they will be called by the name of their brothers in their inheritance.

These two grandsons, the two sons of Joseph, will each become a tribe. One would conclude that there are thirteen tribes of Israel, since there are twelve sons, and now the two sons of Joseph are each to become a tribe. There was no tribe of Joseph, but there were the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh, and that makes thirteen in any man's mathematics. Yet the Bible counts twelve tribes. You see, the tribe of Levi was not counted as a tribe. They became the high priestly tribe and were not given any land or territory but were scattered as priests throughout the other tribes. So, they were not counted as a tribe. You may consider that to be a rather devious way of counting, but I didn't do it; the Word of God counts it that way. That is the way God wanted it to be, and so that is the way God made it.

Ephraim and Manasseh are over 17 years old because they were born before Jacob came to Egypt. They each become a tribe.

Notice now that Jacob's mind goes back to Rachel, his beloved, the mother of Joseph. - McGee

Gen 48:7 But as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died beside me in the land of Canaan on the way, when there was but a little distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath (that is, Bethlehem)."

My friend, when you and I sing "O Little Town of Bethlehem," we think of the birth of Jesus, but if Jacob could hear us, he would think primarily of the death of his beloved and beautiful Rachel. Here he is on his deathbed, and his thoughts go back to the place where he buried her. That was his heartbreak. - McGee

Gen 48:8-9 Then Israel saw Joseph's sons, and said, "Who are these?" Joseph said to his father, "They are my sons, whom God has given me in this place." And he said, "Please bring them to me, and I will bless them."

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Have you noticed that both Isaac and Jacob had trouble seeing when they got old? The brightness of the sun may have something to do with it. Even today there is a lot of eye disease in the Mideast countries. When I was in the Arab countries, I noticed a great many old people who seemed to have difficulty getting around. They weren't entirely blind, but they certainly couldn't see very well. So, we notice here that Jacob didn't recognize the boys. - McGee

Gen 48:10-12 Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, so that he could not see. Then Joseph brought them near him, and he kissed them and embraced them. And Israel said to Joseph, "I had not thought to see your face; but in fact, God has also shown me your offspring!" So, Joseph brought them from beside his knees, and he bowed down with his face to the earth.

Perhaps the fellows are a little embarrassed by their grandfather's show of affection for them. It seems that the two boys tried to get away from their grandfather when he lavished his affection upon them. - McGee

Gen 48:13-14 And Joseph took them both, Ephraim with his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh with his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near him. Then Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand on Manasseh's head, guiding his hands knowingly, for Manasseh was the firstborn.

Joseph is bringing the boys to their grandfather that he might bless them. The one who would stand before Israel at his right hand would be the one with priority.

Ephraim is to become the leader above Manasseh. Later on, we will see that the tribe of Manasseh marched under the banner of the tribe of Ephraim in the wilderness march, as described in Numbers. Joshua came out of the tribe of Ephraim, by the way, and there were many great men from that tribe. It became the tribe with priority—there is no question about that.

Do you see what happened here? Even though Jacob couldn't see too well, he could tell what Joseph was doing. Joseph was pushing the older son to the position of Jacob's right hand and the younger son toward the left hand. So, what did old Jacob do? Well, he just switched hands. He crossed his hands and put his right hand on the younger son.

Why did he do this? There is no doubt that he had tender affection for both boys. They were the sons of his favorite son Joseph. He knowingly gives the blessing to the younger, and I think one reason may have been that he was the younger and he had received the blessing. So, he passes the blessing on to the younger son here.

This is an interesting principle that runs all the way through the Scriptures. For instance, in the choice of David, David was the youngest of the sons of Jesse. Why did God choose him? God is illustrating for you and me a great spiritual truth. God does not accept primogeniture—that is, natural birth. Never will He accept it. There must be the new birth. Therefore, God does not pay attention to our customs. We say that the oldest boy has the responsibility in a family. Well, the oldest boy is not the one whom God always chooses. That is, God does not choose the natural man—He chooses no man because of his natural ability. How we need to learn this truth in our day! Now don't misunderstand me. God can use talent, but it must be dedicated to Him! If it took talent alone to bring about revival, we would have had revival in California years ago. We have Christian talent all around, but we don't have revival. Why not?

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Because the talent is not dedicated to God. I tell you, my friend, it must be yielded to Him to be used of Him.

And old Jacob crossed his hands as he laid them on the heads of his grandsons so that he gave the younger boy the priority. – McGee

Note: Even Joseph wants to control things and tries to politely correct Jacob. Do you struggle with control issues? Here we see that we have to give it all to God!

God's economy does not work like ours. We have to remember that He usually uses people we would not think of like fisherman, tax collectors, and terrorists to be disciples.

Gen 48:15-16 And he blessed Joseph, and said: "God, before whom my father's Abraham and Isaac walked, The God who has fed me all my life long to this day, The Angel who has redeemed me from all evil, Bless the lads; Let my name be named upon them, And the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; And let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth."

"The God which fed me all my life long unto this day." He reaches spiritual heights here, my friend. "The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads." He has nothing to boast about except a wonderful Redeemer. And they did "grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth" just as he said. – McGee

Do you act like Joseph and credit all your successes and even the food you have as blessing from God? If you don't now, don't worry as you recall it took old Jacob till past 100 years to figure that out.

Gen 48:17-19 Now when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so, he took hold of his father's hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. And Joseph said to his father, "Not so, my father, for this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head." But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations."

Then Jacob blessed the grandsons, giving the birthright to Ephraim, who was the younger. Joseph tried to correct this in favor of Manasseh, the firstborn, but Jacob said that he had done this intentionally. What memories must have gone through his mind as he, by faith, gave the blessing to the younger. Years earlier his own father had unknowingly blessed him, the younger. But now he was blessing the younger, not through ignorance, but because he was in touch with the God who holds the future. - McGee

Gen 48:20-22 So he blessed them that day, saying, "By you Israel will bless, saying, 'May God make you as Ephraim and as Manasseh!' " And thus he set Ephraim before Manasseh. Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers. Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow."

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Notice Jacob's *faith* in God. That is, Joseph, through his *two* sons, would have a greater inheritance than the other brothers would have.

This apparently was a personal gift made by Jacob to Joseph (see [Joh 4:5](#)). It was a ridge near Sychar where Joseph was buried. It compensated for the fact that two tribes came from Joseph and they needed more territory. It was a parcel of land which Jacob first bought from the Amorite, then later they retook it by force. Jacob returned the compliment, and by force he reclaimed it. It has been an area of controversy up to the present time. It is here that modern Israel wants to build on the West Bank.

Notice: The extra blessing is a land where bravery and faith is required, and it is still under conflict today.

Do you ever feel like some of the blessings you have are the subject of conflict?