

Genesis 48

Jacob is on his death bed (47:29-31) so he gives his final blessing, first to Joseph's sons, Manasseh and Ephraim (chapter 48), then to the rest of the sons (chapter 49). He will die at the end of chapter 49 and will be carried by his sons into Canaan to be buried in the cave of Machpelah (50:12-14). In this and the subsequent chapter, the verb "to bless" is found eight times (48:3, 9, 15-16, 20; 49:25, 28) and the noun six times (49:25-26, 28).

TRANSLATION - 48:1-7:

1 Then it was after these words that he said to Joseph, "Behold, your father is exhausted." And he took his two sons with him, Manasseh and Ephraim. **2** And it was announced to Jacob and he said, "Behold, your son, Joseph, has come to you." And Israel strengthened himself and sat up in the bed. **3** And Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty had revealed Himself to me in Luz, in the land of Canaan and He blessed me. **4** And He said to me, 'Behold, I am making you fruitful and I have multiplied you and I have made you for a congregation of peoples and I have given this land to your seed after you, an indefinite possession.'

5 "Even now, your two sons being born to you in the land of Egypt, before I came to you in Egypt, to me they [are], Ephraim and Manasseh, as Reuben and Simeon, they will be to me. **6** And your children which you bear after them, to you they will be. By the name of their brothers they will be called by their inheritance. **7** And I, when I came from Padan, Rachel died on me in the land of Canaan on the way a distance from the land to come to Ephrath and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath, that [is] Bethlehem."

WORDS:

"To be exhausted" (verse 1) also means "sick." It is used 75 times; only here in Genesis. On "God Almighty," see comments at 17:1. "To make" and "to give" (verse 4) are both the same verb, "to give." Yet, the first occasion should be translated "make" due to its context. The word "indefinite" is, again, the word often translated "eternal." Yet, biblically speaking, the land of Canaan is not an "eternal" possession for Israel. Its first use was at 3:22 and has been used a dozen times in Genesis. "Congregation" (used 123 times) is the Hebrew word corresponding to the Greek word, *ekklesia*, translated "church or congregation or assembly" in the NT. It was first used in Genesis at 28:3.

"Children" (verse 6) was first used at 11:28 and 12:1. It is not the normal word for "children." It is used 22 times and can mean "relatives or native land." The word "inheritance" is used 222 times, illustrating its importance in the biblical narrative. The word is found most densely in Numbers (46 times), Deuteronomy (25 times), and Joshua (50 times) as the land is divided up among the tribes as an inheritance.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

For the location of Bethlehem and Rachel's death, see 35:16-19. On "Luz," see 28:19; 35:6. It was the original name for Bethel.

COMMENTS:

When chapter 48 opens, Joseph is carrying on his duties as vizier of Egypt when the message came to him that his father was near death. So, Joseph takes his two sons, Manasseh, the firstborn, and Ephraim. Jacob, called Israel, collects his strength and sits up in his bed to receive Joseph and his grandsons.

Beginning in verse 3, Jacob recalls God's promise to him (see 35:6-12). Jacob remembers that God had blessed him and promised to make him fruitful and numerous, and a "company" (or "congregation") of peoples. Additionally, God promised Jacob to give him, mainly to his descendants, the land in which he was living. It would be an indefinite

possession. God was not going to put a timeframe on the possession of the land, at this point, because His plan to send Jesus would take two millennia to work out.

At verse 5, Israel gets specific with Joseph's sons who were born to him in the land of Egypt. Some scholars suggest this scene is some type of formal adoption process. Whether it is formal or not, Jacob does adopt Manasseh and Ephraim as his own, setting them on the level of his own two sons, Reuben and Simeon. Observe that Jacob mentions the second-born son first, perhaps in anticipation of what he is about to do. Jacob said that only those two born of Joseph would be so adopted. Any future children will still be considered Joseph's.

The discussion of the sons and future children brings to Jacob's mind the death of his wife, Rachel (35:16-19). Jacob says, literally, "she died on me," that is, to his sorrow and regret. Perhaps Jacob sees the adoption of Manasseh and Ephraim as providing sons for Rachel which she was not able to have because of her premature death. Perhaps Rachel had expressed a desire to have even more children than just Joseph and Benjamin.

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Joseph would not have any other sons. However, he would live to see Ephraim's sons and the sons of Manasseh's son, Machir (Gen. 50:23). Machir will be given Gilead.

Contemporaries of Moses - When the promised land was divided among the tribes, the tribe of Levi did not get a share (Josh. 14:4). The reason was because the tribe of Levi provided the priests for the nation and they would be given various cities scattered throughout the nation. So, there were twelve sons and Joseph and Levi did not get a tribal inheritance; instead, Ephraim and Manasseh would receive the inheritances, bringing the number of tribes back up to twelve.

Later Hebrew writers - The historian, in 1 Chronicles 5:1-2 will state that the birthright was passed on to the sons of Joseph, Ephraim and Manasseh.

NT writers - In the "Hall of Fame" of the faithful, Hebrews 11, Jacob is mentioned, as by faith he blessed the sons of Joseph and "worshipped, leaning on top of his staff." For the Hebrew writer's use of "staff" versus our translation of the word, "bed" (at 48:2), see "Words" at 47:31.

TRANSLATION - 48:8-16:

8 Then Israel saw the sons of Joseph and he said, "Who [are] these?" **9** And Joseph said to his father, "My sons these [are] whom God gave to me in this [place]." And he said, "Bring [them], please, to me and I will bless them."

10 Now the eyes of Israel were heavy from age. He was not able to see and he brought them near to him and he kissed them and embraced them. **11** And Israel said to Joseph, "To see your face, I did not assume. And behold, God has caused me to see even your seed." **12** Then Joseph brought them from between his knees and he bowed before him to the ground. **13** So Joseph took his two, Ephraim from his right to the left of Israel and Manasseh, from his left to the right of Israel and he brought them to him.

14 Then Israel stretched out his right [hand] and put [it] on the head of Ephraim and he [was] the younger and his left [hand] on the head of Manasseh. He crossed his hands because Manasseh [was] the firstborn. **15** And he blessed Joseph and he said, "The God whom my fathers walked before, Abraham and Isaac, the God shepherding me until this day, **16** the angel, the one redeeming me from all evil, let him bless the young men. And let them be called by my name and the name of my fathers, Abraham and Isaac. And let them grow to a multitude in the midst of the land."

WORDS:

The verb "to bring near" (verse 10) is used 125 times and can mean to "draw near, bring near, or sacrifice." "To kiss" is used 32 times, 11 times in Genesis. "To embrace" is used 13 times, 3 times in Genesis. "To assume" (verse 11) can be translated "to sit in judgment, expect,

or arbitrate.” It is rarely used in the OT. “To bow” (verse 12) is that verb often translated “to worship.” See comments at 18:2.

“To cross” (verse 14) is used only here in this form. Otherwise, the word means to “understand or perceive.” It is used 60 times with this latter meaning and its related noun, “insight, understanding” is used 16 times. For the noun “angel” (verse 16), see at 16:7. The verb “to redeem” is used 104 times, most densely in Leviticus (20 times) but notably in Ruth (12 times) as Boaz is her “redeemer.” It can also mean to “deliver,” without spiritual connotations. Jacob has been “delivered” from the deception of his uncle (chapter 31) as well as the wrath of his brother (chapters 32-33).

GRAMMAR:

“Shepherding” (verse 15) is a participle form (gerund) with the definite article, referring to God. The verb is used 167 times, appropriate for the context of the OT peoples; “pasture” is used 13 times and a related word for “place of grazing” is used 10 times.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

Adoptions within an extended family were very common in the ancient near east.

COMMENTS:

In verse 8, Israel asked who the boys are. Scholars speculate as to why when he mentions them at verse 5. However, we are informed at verse 10 that Israel’s eyes were “heavy” or poor. We have not been told that he was told who these men were; perhaps he only saw their forms but not their identities. Just because he mentions them in verse 5 does not mean that he could identify them standing in front of him. It might also be possible, as some speculate, that this question was a part of the formal adoption process, verbally identifying the boys as Joseph’s sons.

Joseph echoes his own dad’s words to Esau from 33:5; the sons are gifts from God. Israel asked that they be moved closer so he could bless them. When they were within range, Jacob kissed them and embraced them. In verse 11, Israel acknowledges that he never expected to see Joseph alive. He had thought Joseph was dead (37:31-35; 42:36). Since we know that Jacob lived 17 years in the land of Egypt (47:28) and Ephraim and Manasseh were two years old or so when Jacob first moved to Egypt (41:50-54; 45:6, 11), then the two sons were twenty years old or so at this point. That being true, they were probably not literally “on the knees” of Jacob or Joseph (vs 11). The phrase is probably a figure of speech for being under the inheritance of Joseph which is now passed on to Jacob. Otherwise, it might be more literally understood as the young men moving from near Joseph’s knees to Jacob’s. Out of respect, they bow to the ground before the aged patriarch.

While Jacob did not expect to see Joseph alive, he certainly did not expect to see Joseph’s children but now he has. We have no record of Abraham having interaction with his grandchildren, Jacob and Esau. We also have no record of Isaac having interaction with the children of Jacob (or Esau). Thus, for Jacob to have interaction with his own grandchildren is unprecedented in the historical record of the patriarchs, exceeded perhaps by Joseph’s own blessing of seeing the third generation (50:23).

As he presented his sons to Israel, Joseph moved the oldest, Manasseh, to Israel’s right hand, the place of greater honor and prestige. He then moved the youngest, Ephraim, to Israel’s left hand. Yet when Jacob stretched out his hands, to lay hands in blessing (the first record of “laying on of hands” in Scripture), Jacob crossed his hands, laying the right hand on Ephraim, the younger, and his left hand on the head of Manasseh, the firstborn. The text does not reveal whether Jacob was guided by God to make this change, or not. Jacob took the blessing and the birthright from his older brother (25:27-34; chapter 27), which had negative repercussions.

Then he blessed Joseph by the God of his forefathers, Abraham and Isaac. He also acknowledged that God was his God, the one shepherding him all his life to that present day. “Shepherding” is a present participle (as a gerund), so it suggests the idea of continuous

action. In verse 16, Israel mentions the “angel” who had redeemed or delivered him from “all evil.” This angel has been identified with God personified, which is perhaps correct. Or, the angel might be closely identified with God simply because he acted with the highest authority and power from God (cf. Exo. 7:1-2).

Jacob desired for the angel to bless the lads, Ephraim and Manasseh. He desired for his name - Israel - to live on in them, which will happen as “sons of Israel” becomes the chief designation for God’s people throughout biblical history. Finally, Jacob desired for Ephraim and Manasseh to grow into a multitude in the earth. This promise, reiterated many times throughout Genesis, is the expressed fulfillment of God’s plan for man (1:28).

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - Jacob will again use the metaphor of a “Shepherd” to describe God in 49:24.

Contemporaries of Moses - God says He chose Abraham to be the father of Israel because Abraham walked in the “ways of the Lord” (18:19). Moses will encourage Israel to “walk” in the ways of God (Deut. 30:16).

Later Hebrew writers - Micah challenges Israel to return to walking humbly with God (6:8). The psalms depict God as Shepherd quite frequently: Psa. 23:1; 28:9; 77:20; 78:52; 80:1. The prophets also employ the image: Isa. 40:11; Jer. 31:9; Ezekiel 34:11-31.

NT writers - Jesus identifies Himself as the “good shepherd” (John 10:1).

TRANSLATION - 48:17-22:

17 Then Joseph saw that his father put the right hand on the head of Ephraim and it was bad in his eyes and he grasped the hand of his father to remove it from the head of Ephraim to the head of Manasseh. **18** And Joseph said to his father, “Not thus, my father, because this [is] the firstborn. Put your right [hand] on his head.”

19 But his father refused and said, “I know, my son. I know even he will be for a people and even he will become great but indeed his younger brother will become greater than he and his seed will be the fulness of the people.” **20** And he blessed them that day, saying, “By you, Israel will bless, saying, ‘May God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh.’” And he put Ephraim before Manasseh.

21 Then Israel said to Joseph, “Behold, I myself am dying and God will be with you all and He will bring you back to the land of your fathers. **22** And I myself will give you another portion, one above your brothers which I took from the hand of the Amorites, with my sword and my bow.”

WORDS:

“To be bad” is the verbal form of the adjective “evil.” Here, it does not denote a spiritual or moral idea. “To grasp” (21 times) means to “take hold of, support.” “To refuse” (verse 19) is used 41 times, 3 times in Genesis. “To become great” (verse 19) is the verbal form of the adjective “great.” This is the only time “fulness” is used in Genesis but it will be found a total of 38 times. “Sword” is found 413 times in the OT, reflecting the frequent wars which are mentioned. Its first use is 3:24. “Bow,” first used of the rainbow, in 9:13-14, 16, is used a total of 76 times in the OT.

GRAMMAR:

“But indeed” (verse 19) translates a word which draws a strong contrast with what has been said before.

ARCHAEOLOGY:

For comments on the “Amorites,” see Genesis 10:16. They are also found in 14:7, 13; 15:16, 21. They are found 87 times in the OT. The word translated “portion” (verse 22) means “shoulder” but transliterated, it gives us “Shechem.” Shechem was built on the slope

("shoulder"?) between mountains Gerizim and Ebal. Later, it will be placed within the inheritance of Manasseh, on the border with Ephraim (Joshua 17:7-9).

COMMENTS:

When Joseph saw that his father was giving the greater blessing to the youngest son, it disturbed him. The Hebrew verb is "it was evil" in the eyes of Joseph. His emotions at the event compelled him to grasp his father's right hand to remove it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. Yet, Israel refused to change his blessing. We saw at the stealing of the birthright and the blessing that, apparently, it is irrevocable. Jacob replied that he knew what he was doing. The oldest will become a great people. But, the younger brother will be even greater and his descendants will become a multitude of nations. See below for further confirmation of Jacob's words, suggesting he was prophesying of their future, doing so guided by the Spirit of God.

So Jacob blessed Ephraim and Manasseh (vs 20). His words were intended to become something like a proverb: "May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh!" A similar proverb was uttered at the birth of Obed, David's grandfather, in Ruth 4:11. In that passage, Joseph's mom, Rachel, and Leah were the subject of the blessing. Jacob, through his actions, put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

Finally, Jacob turns his attention to Joseph. He is about to die but he believes that God will be with Joseph and He will bring Joseph back to the land of Canaan, the "land of your fathers." To Joseph, Jacob will give a plot of land. A "portion," or "shoulder," or "Shechem" (see under "Archaeology" above) would be given Joseph which Jacob took from the hand of the Amorite with his sword and bow. We have no record of Jacob engaging in such armed conflict. If the reference is to Shechem from chapter 35, it was the boys, Simeon and Levi, who took the plunder after the rape of Dinah and Jacob scolded them for it (34:30).

APPLICATION:

Contemporaries in the text - The desire "God will be with you" is repeated in Genesis, by God (26:24; 31:3), by Moses (21:20; 39:2-3, 21, 23), by enemies (21:22; 26:28), and by the patriarchs themselves (24:40; 28:20; 31:5, 42; 35:3). Jews will come to believe that this parcel of land which Jacob gave to Joseph is land purchased from the Shechemites (33:18-19), in which Joseph will be buried (Joshua 24:32).

Contemporaries of Moses - After the exodus, Ephraim will number 40,500; Manasseh, 32,200 (Num. 1:33, 35). After the wandering in the wilderness for forty years, the situation will be reversed (Num. 26:34, 37). Yet at that point, Ephraim and Manasseh, together, will outnumber the tribes of Reuben and Simeon (cf. Deut. 33:17).

Later Hebrew writers - When Joshua divides the land, he notes how many were Joseph's descendants (Josh. 17:14-18). A Bible map will note how large these tribes were. Later, Ephraim will become arrogant toward her smaller tribal cousins (Judges 8:1; 12:1). Once the nation of Israel divides, Ephraim will give its nation to the northern tribes, as a whole, among the prophets (Isa. 7:9; Jer. 31:9; Hosea 5:3; 7:1). According to the historian of 1 Chronicles 5:1-2, the right of the firstborn was given to the sons of Joseph.

NT writers - John (4:5) refers to the land which Jacob gave to Joseph.