



Genesis - Chapter Forty Eight

II. Genesis 11:27-50:26 - Patriarchal History (continues)

II.c Genesis 37:1-50:26 - Jacob's Descendants (continues)

Summary of Chapter Forty Eight

When Jacob became ill, Joseph took his sons Manasseh and Ephraim to their grandfather. Because of the blessing he had received from God, Jacob wanted to bless these two sons of Joseph, giving them the same status of inheritance as his own sons, thus giving Joseph the equivalent of a double-portion normally passed to the firstborn son.

To receive the blessing according to their own birthright Joseph placed Manasseh to receive Jacob's right hand and Ephraim his left, but Jacob crossed his hands so that Ephraim received the blessing from his right hand. When Joseph tried to correct Jacob, his father informed him the reason for doing so is that the descendants of Ephraim would become the greater people.

II.c.xv. Genesis 48:1-22 - Jacob Blesses Joseph's Sons

When Jacob is very old and close to death, he pronounces a variety of blessings on all his sons. The first part of this process is recorded in this chapter and focuses specifically on Joseph and his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. Immediately following this in Chapter 49, all of Jacob's other sons gather around his bed in order to be blessed.

While Chapters 48 and 49 stand together, the events of 48:1-22 set Joseph and his younger son Ephraim apart from all the other brothers. In particular, Ephraim receives from Jacob the blessing of the firstborn, indicating that the special line traced throughout Genesis will continue through his descendants. Various elements within Chapter 48 are reminiscent of how Jacob was blessed by his father Isaac (27:1-40).

¹ After this Joseph was told, ‘Your father is ill.’ So he took with him his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim. ² When Jacob was told, ‘Your son Joseph has come to you’, he summoned his strength and sat up in bed.

Genesis 48:1-2

The opening verses suggest that Joseph merely comes with his two sons to visit his father who is ill. There is no hint at this stage of the important developments that are about to take place.

³ And Jacob said to Joseph, ‘God Almighty appeared to me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and he blessed me, ⁴ and said to me, “I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers; I will make of you a company of peoples, and will give this land to your offspring after you for a perpetual holding.” ⁵ Therefore your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt before I came to you in Egypt, are now mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are. ⁶ As for the offspring born to you after them, they shall be yours. They shall be recorded under the names of their brothers with regard to their inheritance. ⁷ For when I came from Paddan, Rachel, alas, died in the land of Canaan on the way, while there was still some distance to go to Ephrath; and I buried her there on the way to Ephrath’ (that is, Bethlehem).

Genesis 48:3-7

God Almighty appeared to me at Luz is another name for Bethel, where Jacob first met God. Jacob vividly remembered this outstanding encounter with the Lord.

I am going to make you fruitful and increase your numbers. Jacob’s phrasing is reminiscent of exact promises God made to Abraham in Genesis Chapter 17. Abraham was careful to pass down the exact words of God’s covenant with him to the inheritors of the covenant, because the exact words of God are important.

Jacob speaks to Joseph, picking up on three distinctive issues. First, he refers to the theophany, his vision of God at Bethel, recalling the all-important promises made to him by God (28:13-15). Second, Jacob elevates his grandsons Ephraim and Manasseh to the status of full sons, on par with Reuben and Simeon. Later, this will result in Joseph’s descendants, through Ephraim and Manasseh, being viewed as two separate tribes. Consequently, when the land of Canaan is allocated, Joseph through his descendants receives one-sixth of the territory. This double portion of the inheritance confirms that Joseph was designated the firstborn in place of Reuben; refer to 1 Chronicles 5:1-2 and the comment made on Genesis

35:22-23. By naming Ephraim before Manasseh, Jacob anticipates what will transpire in vv.13-19. Third, Jacob recalls the death of Joseph's mother, Rachel, following their return from northern Mesopotamia; refer to the comment made on 35:16-20.

Paddan is an abbreviated form of Paddan-aram, refer to the comment made on 25:20.

⁸ When Israel saw Joseph's sons, he said, 'Who are these?' ⁹ Joseph said to his father, 'They are my sons, whom God has given me here.' And he said, 'Bring them to me, please, that I may bless them.' ¹⁰ Now the eyes of Israel were dim with age, and he could not see well. So Joseph brought them near him; and he kissed them and embraced them. ¹¹ Israel said to Joseph, 'I did not expect to see your face; and here God has let me see your children also.' ¹² Then Joseph removed them from his father's knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth.

Genesis 48:8-12

Who are these? Like the eyesight of his father Isaac, Jacob's eyesight has deteriorated in old age (27:1). For this reason he finds it difficult to clearly identify Joseph's two sons.

They are my sons, whom God has given me here. The names of Joseph's sons were Manasseh, the firstborn, and Ephraim, the younger. The name Manasseh means forgetfulness, and the name Ephraim means fruitfulness (41:51-52).

I did not expect to see your face; and here God has let me see your children also. Jacob recognises that it is by the grace of God that he has lived long enough to see this day, a blessing others have recognised also: <<*After this Job lived for one hundred and forty years, and saw his children, and his children's children, four generations*>> (Job 42:16), and: <<*May you see your children's children. Peace be upon Israel!*>> (Psalm 128:6).

Joseph bowed himself with his face to the earth. Joseph lived his own life as a high official of Egypt for many years, and had no contact with his father during that time. Yet it did not diminish the reverence he had towards his father. His action was the reverse of what Joseph had dreamed of as a young man.

¹³ Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand towards Israel's left, and Manasseh in his left hand towards Israel's right, and brought them near him. ¹⁴ But Israel stretched out his right hand and laid it on the head of Ephraim, who was the younger, and his left hand on the

head of Manasseh, crossing his hands, for Manasseh was the firstborn.

¹⁵ He blessed Joseph, and said,

‘The God before whom my ancestors Abraham and Isaac walked,
the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,

¹⁶ the angel who has redeemed me from all harm, bless the boys;
and in them let my name be perpetuated, and the name of my
ancestors Abraham and Isaac;

and let them grow into a multitude on the earth.’

¹⁷ When Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand on the head of Ephraim, it displeased him; so he took his father’s hand, to remove it from Ephraim’s head to Manasseh’s head. ¹⁸ Joseph said to his father, ‘Not so, my father! Since this one is the firstborn, put your right hand on his head.’ ¹⁹ But his father refused, and said, ‘I know, my son, I know; he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great. Nevertheless, his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his offspring shall become a multitude of nations.’ ²⁰ So he blessed them that day, saying,

‘By you Israel will invoke blessings, saying,

“God make you like Ephraim and like Manasseh.”’

So he put Ephraim ahead of Manasseh.

Genesis 48:13-20

He blessed Joseph. Jacob did not bless Joseph directly. The blessing of Joseph is intimately linked to the blessing of his two sons. By placing his right hand on the head of Ephraim, however, Jacob gives him priority over his older brother Manasseh (41:51-52). Although Joseph protests, thinking his father has mistakenly placed his right hand on the wrong head, Jacob is emphatic that Ephraim should be blessed as the firstborn ahead of Manasseh. Subsequent history reveals that the Ephraimites become one of the leading tribes, with Joshua guiding the people into the Promised Land. But the Ephraimites are later rejected by God in favour of Judah: <<*He rejected the tent of Joseph, he did not choose the tribe of Ephraim; but he chose the tribe of Judah, Mount Zion, which he loves. He built his sanctuary like the high heavens, like the earth, which he has founded for ever. He chose his servant David, and took him from the sheepfolds; from tending the nursing ewes he brought him to be the shepherd of his people Jacob, of Israel, his inheritance*>> (Psalm 78:67-71).

The right hand in the Bible always has the idea of the favoured position because generally speaking, the right hand is the hand of strength and skill. The right hand is associated with God's strength (Exodus 15:6), favour (Psalm 16:11), and help (Psalm 20:6). This is why Jesus is described as sitting at the right hand of God the Father (Mark 14:62).

The God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day. Jacob's testimony was a testimony of grace, not personal merit. He did not say how faithful he was to God, but how faithful God was to him. Unlike modern shepherds who tend to drive their sheep forward with the help of their dog, the ancient shepherd was one who led his sheep and they followed him blindly in trust that he would care for them: <<*The LORD is my shepherd, I shall not want*>> (Psalm 23:1), and: <<*He will feed his flock like a shepherd; he will gather the lambs in his arms, and carry them in his bosom, and gently lead the mother sheep*>> (Isaiah 40:11). Jesus, as God the Son, fulfils that role for those who are willing follow him: <<*I am the good shepherd. The good shepherd lays down his life for the sheep*>> (John 10:11).

The angel who has redeemed me from all harm is either a further reference to God or to an angel carrying out the instructions of God: <<*Rescue me, O my God, from the hand of the wicked, from the grasp of the unjust and cruel*>> (Psalm 71:4), <<*I will deliver you out of the hand of the wicked, and redeem you from the grasp of the ruthless*>> (Jeremiah 15:21), and: <<*If our God whom we serve is able to deliver us from the furnace of blazing fire and out of your hand, O king, let him deliver us*>> (Daniel 3:17).

²¹ Then Israel said to Joseph, 'I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your ancestors. ²² I now give to you one portion more than to your brothers, the portion that I took from the hand of the Amorites with my sword and with my bow.'

Genesis 48:21-22

I am about to die, but God will be with you and will bring you again to the land of your ancestors. This was truly a passing of the torch from Israel to Joseph. Israel was the last of the three great patriarchs to pass from the scene, yet God has made provision for the nation to survive and grow.

Jacob anticipates that after his death, his family will return to the land of Canaan. To Joseph alone he bequeaths one portion more than would be allotted to the descendants of his brothers, thus giving him the rights of the firstborn son.

That he had taken the land by force from the Amorites, possibly refers to 34:25-29, as confirmed by 33:18-19, and Joseph's own final burial place: <<*The bones of Joseph, which the Israelites had brought up from Egypt, were buried at*

Shechem, in the portion of ground that Jacob had bought from the children of Hamor, the father of Shechem, for one hundred pieces of money; it became an inheritance of the descendants of Joseph>> (Joshua 24:32). There remains the possibility that Jacob and his family had to fight for some portion of land during the period Joseph was in Egypt and this was unrecorded in scripture. The land would finally pass to their descendants during the time of Joshua. The apostle John makes a brief reference to this plot of land: ***<<So he came to a Samaritan city called Sychar, near the plot of ground that Jacob had given to his son Joseph>>*** (John 4:5). This included the well from which Jesus requested the Samaritan women to provide him with a drink.