

From PRISON to Palace

A Study of the Life of Joseph

Class 7 • Joseph Rewarded • Genesis 48

A. Joseph is rewarded with blessing for his sons, 48:1-22.

1. Joseph seeks a blessing for his sons, vs. 1-2.

a. Jacob knew that he was to die (v. 21), and Jewish tradition declares that he asked God for such knowledge so that he might bless his sons before it was too late.

b. Notice the intense patriarchal respect which Joseph has for his father, like all well trained Hebrews. He especially desires his father's blessing upon his children (cf. John 17:9-11). Jacob also delights to bless through his son (cf. Ps. 2:7-8).

c. Joseph's two sons by his Egyptian wife, Asenath, were first Manasseh, then Ephraim; by now they are lads or even grown men.

(1) "Manasseh" means "causing to forget" (41:51). He caused Joseph to forget his previous toils and troubles. Hence, he was greatly beloved. His descendants include Gideon and Jephthah.

(2) "Ephraim" means "double fruit" (41:52). He represented Joseph's fruitfulness that followed his earlier barren state. His descendants include Joshua and Samuel.

2. Jacob declares the ground of his blessing, vs. 3-4.

a. He recalls the blessing of the sovereign grace of El Shaddai, God Almighty, at Luz, when the Abrahamic Covenant was confirmed to him (28:10-19).

b. He especially remembered that God had promised that his seed would be "as the dust of the earth" (28:14). Hence, he believed that these grandchildren were part of that seed, and thus should also inherit Canaan. Joseph has come seeking such recognition, and Jacob is only too pleased to bestow it.

c. Application. The ground of blessing for any child of God is the promises of God, but particularly God's unconditional covenant with Abraham (Matt. 1:1; Rom. 11:28-29; Gal. 3:6-9, 16, 29). Our hope is in God's faithfulness and not our own!

3. Jacob promises to bless Joseph's sons, vs. 5-7.

a. Just as Jacob continues to include Reuben and Simeon in his inheritance, though they had greatly sinned against their father, so he is graciously disposed to embrace Ephraim and Manasseh into the circle of blessing. If he can determine not to exclude, he can also determine to include! v. 5.

(1) Because of immorality, Reuben lost his birthright, the double portion, which now Jacob once again confers upon Joseph in the blessing of his two sons.

(2) Note the reversed order; the younger Ephraim is mentioned first.

(3) Thus full tribal rights shall belong to Ephraim and Manasseh and their seed.

b. However any further sons by Joseph shall be allotted to either of these two new tribes, v. 6.

c. Suddenly, almost parenthetically, Jacob sadly muses upon his beloved Rachel; in her honour Joseph will be blessed, so that she will be the mother of three rather than two tribes, v. 7.

4. Joseph presents his sons to Jacob, vs. 8-12.

a. Jacob is now dim of eye like his father Isaac was when he deceived him and took Esau's blessing. But Joseph is a better son to him than he was to Isaac; there is no deception here, v. 8.

b. Joseph acknowledges that his children are a heritage of the Lord (Ps. 127:3-5). He much more desires that they be princes of Israel rather than princes of Egypt. Few fathers today have such a right sense of priorities. Most promote their sons to be princes of mammon rather than princes of righteousness, v. 9a.

c. In giving his patriarchal welcome, Jacob marvels at the grace of God that he is now experiencing, vs. 9b-11.

(1) The ground of blessing is Jacob's sovereign bestowal, not Joseph's initiative, v. 9b.

(2) Note Jacob's happiness in his old age rather than bitterness; he is now right with God, and acknowledges that this blessed end is God's sovereign doing, vs. 10-11.

d. Now Joseph prepares his sons for the formal blessing, and in bowing expresses his own humble gratitude, his deepest respect for his father, v. 12.

5. Jacob blesses Joseph's sons, vs. 13-20.

a. The laying on of the hands by Jacob, vs. 13-14.

(1) This is the first instance in the Bible of this particular ritual of laying on of hands, which signified the transference of blessing.

(2) Joseph's left hand presents the elder Manasseh to Jacob's right hand, assuming that the greater blessing would be given to him, v. 13.

(3) But Jacob purposely crosses his hands so as to give the greater blessing to Ephraim; evidently his eyes were not totally dim. Now Joseph must accept an unexpected reversal of headship, just as the brethren were required to accept Joseph's appointment over Reuben, v. 14.

APPLICATION:

• What spiritual lesson is taught by Jacob crossing his hands? How does this affect you?

(4) Application. God is not contained by a pattern He may have previously established. Though God ordained the Sabbath, yet He works on the Sabbath (John 5:16-17). Here divine sovereignty is seen illustrated in that Jacob's action is not according to merit in Ephraim, but solely on account of the mystery of Jacob's (God's) will.

b. The formal blessing, vs. 15-16.

(1) Joseph is in fact the object of Jacob's blessing, though the sons are a channel, v. 15a.

(2) The blessing of God the Father, the God of sovereign, immutable promise, the gracious God of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob is invoked, v. 15b.

(3) The blessing of God the Father, the God of good providence, the God who shepherds, is invoked, v. 15c.

(4) The blessing of God the Son, the Angel of Jehovah (cf. 32:24-32), the Angel who redeems, is invoked, v. 16a.

(5) And thus the blessing is detailed, v. 16b.

(a) Bless the lads for incorporating them into the Covenant given to

Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob.

(b) Bless the lads by making them a multitude in the nation of Israel.

APPLICATION:

• **Compare Genesis 48:16 to Ephesians 2:7: What lesson for your life comes to mind?**

6) Application. As in the New Testament, so in the Old Testament; the source of blessing is the Triune God, and especially its mediation through the Son of God (Rom. 5:1; Eph. 2:7; Phil. 4:7).

c. Joseph attempts to correct Jacob, vs. 17-18.

(1) Joseph here, in a moment of weakness and unlike his great antitype, represents man attempting to correct God, "when he occasionally makes a mistake"! (Job 40:1-9; Rom. 11:34). The problem is that Joseph is somewhat a traditionalist, but God is not.

(2) Joseph attempts to modify Jacob's blessing according to his desires, and thus he attempts to reverse Jacob's hands. But has he not learned that as Jacob sovereignly blessed Joseph as a lad, therefore he may bless as he pleases even now?

d. Jacob corrects Joseph, vs. 19-20.

(1) Jacob may be dull in the flesh, but his spirit is sensitive to the Spirit of God. Ephraim shall indeed be greater than Manasseh, just as God appointed Seth over Cain, Shem and Japheth over Ham, Isaac over Ishmael, and Jacob over Esau.

(2) But how shall Ephraim become a multitude of nations, v. 19? Not through the British Commonwealth and the United States, but through the divine kingdom after Solomon, the ten tribes of the northern kingdom, which took the synonymous titles of Israel and Ephraim (Is. 11:13; Hos. 5:5). Ephraim ruled over the northern tribes.

(3) Jacob declares a prophecy that from then on Hebrew parents shall desire their sons to be as Ephraim and Manasseh. Thus a conservative Jewish commentator states, "To this day, every pious Jewish father on Sabbath eve places his hands on the head of his son, and blesses him in the words: 'God make thee as Ephraim and Manasseh.' Ephraim and Manasseh would not barter away their 'Jewishness' for the most exalted position, or the most enviable career, in the Egyptian state."¹¹

APPLICATION:

• **Joseph tries to correct Jacob. Recall a moment in your life when you tried to direct God on his blessings. What did you learn from that experience?**

(4) Application. While God blesses all of His children, it is not for us to dictate to God who receives what blessings. His gifts are bestowed in sovereign grace. After all, did not Joseph likewise sovereignly bless Benjamin? (45:22).

6. Jacob blesses Joseph, vs. 21-22.

a. In saying, "I die," Jacob is yet at peace, but he also desires that Joseph be not

overly disturbed.

b. Jacob promises that God shall bless Joseph and his brethren, and bring them back into the land of promise, because His Word is sure.

c. Jacob promises a portion of the land to Ephraim and Manasseh, probably that purchased from Hamor at Shechem (33:19), which the Amorites temporarily possessed. Being a double portion, it indicated Joseph's favoured position in his father's eyes.

d. Thus Joseph spiritual's blessings are infinitely greater than his earthly ones in Egypt; likewise with all of his brethren (Heb. 11:24-27).

B. Joseph is rewarded with blessing amongst his brethren, 49:1-33.

1. Jacob invites his sons to receive a prophetic blessing, vs. 1-2.

a. Jacob, as the last of the patriarchs, now fulfills the role of a prophet (Ps. 105:8-15).

b. He is declaring what God has determined, not Jacob. Thus the injunction, "listen to Israel you father," is a solemn command for the sons to heed God's spokesman.

2. Jacob declares his prophetic blessing (cf. Moses' blessing on the twelve sons, Deut. 33:1-29), vs. 3-27.

a. Reuben has both glory and disgrace. He had dignity as the first-born as well as physical strength. But his recklessness, fluid character, instability, and immorality, deprive him of his first-born privileges. He is forgiven, but not worthy of responsibility, vs. 3-4.

b. Simeon and Levi are brethren in violence, with weapons as their friends. This was evidenced when they slew the men of Shechem (34:25-26). They shall be divided and scattered. In Joshua 19:1-9, Simeon's inheritance is intermingled with that of Judah, while in Deuteronomy 33 his name is not mentioned. Levi, representing the priesthood, received no land inheritance, and in number was relatively small in size (Num. 3:22, 28, 34), vs. 5-7.

c. Judah is a lion's cub, and thus he shall rule with strength as the national leader. To him shall be ascribed military glory, prosperity (cf. 44:14-34 and his improved character). "Messiah, Shiloh, peaceful, giver of rest," shall be born of his line (Rev. 5:5-6), vs. 8-12.

d. Zebulun shall dwell near the sea, both Galilee and the Mediterranean. This would be a favoured position, v. 13.

e. Isaachar, whose name means, "a hired worker," shall enjoy prosperity to such an extent that consequently he prefers peace to adventure (Deut. 33:18b-19), vs. 14-15.

f. Dan, meaning "to judge," would judge his people, and being in an exposed position to the north, as well as the west, would be involved in constant guerrilla warfare, vs. 16-18.

g. Gad, meaning "good fortune," would first have misfortune, but later strongly retaliate (cf. Moses portrayal as like a lioness, Deut. 33:20), v. 19.

h. Asher, meaning "happy, fortunate," likewise is a picture of tribal prosperity (cf. Deut. 33:24), due to much commerce and export, v. 20.

i. Naphtali is not only gracious and swift in movement, but also eloquent, as epitomized in Deborah and Barak (Judges 5), v. 21.

j. Joseph receives the greatest adoration, the most loving praise, the fairest portrait that a father could lavish on his son, v. 22-26.

(1) He is a fruitful vine planted beside the fountain of life (Ps. 1:3; Jer. 17:7-8), v. 22.

(2) He is a proven vessel in the furnace of God's affliction where he was sustained by God's grace, vs. 23-24.

(3) He is to be blessed from heaven, upon earth, and within his family, v. 25.

(4) He is to be blessed as greatly as was Jacob himself, for he is the prince among his brethren (cf. Moses' similar opinion, Deut. 33:13-17), v. 26.

k. Benjamin is as a ravenous wolf, warlike and at the same time skillful (Judges 20:14-16; I Chron. 8:40), v. 27.

3. Jacob is blessed in death, vs. 28-33.

a. Even Reuben, Simeon, and Levi, were blessed nevertheless, or appropriately, for they still had part in the inheritance of Jacob, v. 28.

b. His burial instructions are repeated to the brethren in great detail. This small parcel of land in Canaan was yet the beginning of the whole yet to be received (Gen. 23:20). The splendor of an Egyptian Pyramid had little appeal compared to the import of God's sure promises (50:3, 7, 11), vs. 29-32.

c. Thus Jacob died at the age of 147, being full in faith, not yet having received the promise (Heb. 11:21. 39), v. 33.

(1) Drawing his feet to his bed, with great composure and serenity, he yielded to death without a struggle such as when he entered life (Gen. 25:25-26).

(2) It is not so important how we enter life as how we leave it. Some are attractive at birth, but ugly at death; others like Jacob are ugly at birth, but attractive at death!

(3) Jacob is confident that he shall be with his Redeemer (48:16), and his redeemed brethren. Certainly the Redeemer knows that Jacob shall be there (Matt. 8:11; Luke 13:28).