

GENESIS 48:1-50:26

THE LAST DAYS OF JACOB AND JOSEPH

The last three chapters of Genesis deal with the last days of Jacob and Joseph. It has been more than a decade since Jacob's family relocated to Egypt. Jacob's health is declining rapidly. He is getting closer to the end of his days. He knows that he doesn't have much longer to live.

READ Genesis 47:28-31

Here Jacob tells Joseph his final wishes. He makes it clear that he does NOT want to be buried in Egypt. He wants to be buried in the Promised Land where Abraham and Isaac are buried. Joseph promises that he will do that for him.

READ Genesis 48:1-2

Joseph arrives at his dying father's bedside with his two sons who are now young adults. Jacob is happy to see them. While Jacob's body may be failing him, his mind is still as sharp as ever. His long-term memory is very good as we will see. Jacob begins to speak with great clarity...

READ Genesis 48:3-4

Do you remember when and where this event took place? He refers to the place as Luz, which was its old name. What was going on in Jacob's life at the time? Hint: it was seventy years before. Jacob renamed the place Bethel Do you remember? It was the whole Jacob's ladder story. Jacob was fleeing from Esau. He was on his way north to Mesopotamia, to his Uncle Laban's house. On the way there, at Bethel, Jacob had a dream. God reiterated to him the covenant that He had made to Abraham and Isaac. So, this is what Jacob is recalling as he is dying.

READ Genesis 48:5-6

Jacob adopts Ephraim and Manasseh as his very own sons. Relationally they are still Jacob's grandsons. But "covenantally" they are now his sons. By adopting Joseph's two sons this gives them equal standing with Joseph's

brothers. In essence what Jacob is doing is bestowing on Joseph a double portion of the family birthright through his two sons.

READ Genesis 48:7

So, why does Jacob mention of Rachel at this point? Why does he bring her up. One commentary explains it like this: "[Rachel] had borne Jacob 'two sons' (Joseph and Benjamin) when he was about to enter the [Promised] land, so also Joseph gave Jacob 'two sons' (Manasseh and Ephraim) when he was about to enter Egypt." That's the connection that Jacob makes to Rachel.

READ Genesis 48:8-12

Jacob's eyesight is failing him. When Joseph's sons are brought closer to him, he can see them. Jacob praises God for His goodness and grace allowing him to see Joseph again and now Joseph's two sons.

Joseph then bows before Jacob. Despite Joseph's prestigious position in Egypt, he bows down and honors his father. He shows him the utmost respect.

READ Genesis 48:13-14

Joseph arranges Manasseh and Ephraim in the normal order for Jacob's blessing, by their age. Manasseh is to Jacob's right because he is the older son. And then Ephraim would be to his left. By crossing his arms Jacob is reversing the order. Jacob gives to Ephraim the privileged "firstborn blessing." This proves to be prophetic. As we will see later in history, the tribe of Ephraim becomes larger and more influential than the tribe of Manasseh.

In the next couple of verses Jacob proceeds to bless Joseph's two sons.

READ Genesis 48:17-20

We see here that Jacob reversing the order by crossing his arms was done on purpose. It was intentional. This continues the pattern we've seen throughout Genesis where God elevates the younger son over the older son

– Isaac over Ishmael, Jacob over Esau, Joseph over Reuben (Jacob’s firstborn), and now Ephraim over Manasseh.

I just mentioned Reuben being the firstborn of Jacob’s sons. I want to discuss him as an aside. He’s Jacob’s firstborn son. Why does he get passed over? As the firstborn son, Reuben would normally be expected to have preeminence among his brothers – leadership of the tribes, priesthood (spiritual leadership) within the nation, and the double portion of the birthright (twice as much blessing). But something happened. Reuben forfeited these privileges. In Genesis Chapter 35 we read that “While he was living there [in this little town out in the middle of nowhere], Reuben had intercourse with Bilhah, his father’s concubine, and Jacob soon heard about it” (Genesis 35:22). This sin of Reuben’s dishonored his father and Jacob never forgot it. He never forgave Reuben for it. As a result, the leadership of the tribes went to Judah, the priesthood to Levi (later under Moses) and the double portion of blessing (we just saw) went to Joseph. So, that’s the reason why Reuben gets passed over as firstborn.

READ Genesis 48:21

Did you realize the Joseph eventually did return back to the Promised Land, although briefly? Jacob is reminding Joseph of the promise he had made earlier to him, to bury him back in the land of Canaan.

READ Genesis 48:22

This verse has baffled a lot of Bible scholars. You have this long history of Jacob throughout the book of Genesis. Not once does it mention what Jacob mentions here – taking by force land from the Amorites. Most scholars believe that this verse refers to a mountain slope near the town of Shechem. It is this land that Jacob had purchased from Hamor when he came back into the Promised Land (Genesis 33:19). He apparently later recaptured this hill from the Amorites, though that event is not recorded in scripture. Here Jacob is deeding this property over to Joseph and his descendants. This location will later be in the territory that the tribes of Ephraim and Manasseh will settle.

That brings us to Genesis Chapter 49 where Jacob gives his patriarchal blessing to his twelve sons. These are Jacob's final words before he dies.

READ Genesis 49:1-2

Jacob, speaking as Israel proceeds to give his blessing to his sons. He begins with the six sons of his first wife Leah. They are words of blessing and, as it turns out, they are prophetic words. We don't normally think of Jacob as a prophet, but here he is prophesying the future of his sons and the tribes that will come from them. I believe he does this under divine inspiration. Let me just summarize what he says to each of them.

READ Genesis 49:3-4

Reuben: He is described as "unstable as water," v 4. This summarizes his character. He is cursed with not having preeminence as a firstborn son (discussed earlier). Jacob mentions the sin he committed with Bilhah – "you went up to your father's bed; then you defiled it," v 4. To his dying day Jacob never forgot that. Reuben will continue to be insignificant and so will his tribe. John MacArthur points out that the tribe of Reuben would never produce a judge, prophet, military leader, or other important person.

READ Genesis 49:5-7

Simeon and Levi: These two are lumped together because of their violent actions against the men of Shechem in Genesis Chapter 34. "Cursed be their anger, for it is fierce, and their wrath, for it is cruel," v 7. Their curse is this: "I will divide them... and scatter them..." v 7. The tribe of Simeon becomes the smallest tribe and their territory is eventually swallowed up by Judah. They will disappear as a tribe altogether. The tribe of Levi later becomes the priestly tribe and is scattered throughout Israel.

READ Genesis 49:8-12

Judah: "Your father's sons shall bow down before you," v 8. "The scepter shall not depart from Judah, nor the ruler's staff from between his feet, until tribute comes from him..." v 10. The KJV and NASB say, "until Shiloh comes." Every commentary I read agrees that this is a reference to

the coming Messiah. Verse 9 describes Judah as a lion, which is a royal symbol. So then, Judah becomes the royal tribe through whom all the nation's kings will come, including the Messiah. The book of Revelation later refers to the Messiah, to the exalted Jesus who is in heaven, as "the lion of the tribe of Judah" (Revelation 5:5). In v 10-12 has all this imagery about the future Messiah. So, Judah is the one through whom the Messiah will come. This is very significant.

READ Genesis 49:13

Zebulun: His blessing is the northern coastlands around Phoenicia – "the shore of the sea," v 13. In Joshua Chapter 19 this area is assigned to the tribe of Zebulun. However, they fail to take possession of all their territory (they weren't the only tribe that this was the case). But Zebulun failed to take possession and they ended up with only a portion of the land they should have had.

READ Genesis 49:14-15

Issachar: He is referred to as a "strong donkey," v 14. This is not a derogatory term. It indicates that his descendants will be an industrious, hard-working people. They will settle in the "pleasant land," v 15. Their territory will be a beautiful, hilly, productive agricultural region southwest of the Sea of Galilee, near Mount Tabor. It is a very scenic territory.

READ Genesis 49:16-17

Next Jacob blesses one of the sons of Bilhah...

Dan: It says that he will "judge his people as one of the tribes of Israel," v 16. Samson, the most famous of Israel's judges, comes from the tribe of Dan. Dan is described as "a serpent in the way, a viper by the path," v 17; in other words, a poisonous snake! We see this play out later in their history. The tribe of Dan receives their territorial allotment in the book of Joshua. That land is on the Mediterranean coast in Philistine country. Rather than have to fight against the fierce Philistines, the Danites chose an easier path to victory. They migrated north and, like snakes, they pretended

to be harmless to the peace-loving citizens of Laish. Judges Chapter 18 records what they do next: "The men of Dan came to the town of Laish, whose people were peaceful and secure. They attacked with swords and burned the town to the ground... Then they rebuilt the city and lived in it" (Judges 18:27-28). They rename the city Dan and this is where the tribe of Dan settles. They go on to have a very sad history which includes idolatry.

READ Genesis 49:18

This verse is an interlude of sorts. As Jacob approaches the end of his life, he can't help but reflect back upon his own failures and those of his sons. He just predicted the future failure of the tribe of Dan. But Jacob's thoughts suddenly shift away from his family's faith-**lessness** to the faith-**fulness** of God. Rather than despair over their mistakes, Jacob sits up and proclaims his hope. He says, "I wait for YOUR salvation, O LORD!" This is the first mention of salvation in the Bible. Because of God's grace, because of HIS goodness, there is still hope for Jacob's less-than-perfect family!

READ Genesis 49:19

Jacob now resumes blessing his sons, speaking to the two sons of Zilpah...

Gad: The ESV says, v 19, "raiders shall raid him." The NLT says they will be "attacked by marauding bands." This tribe later chooses to settle on the east side of the Jordan River. They will come under constant attack from outside enemies. The result is that they become very valiant fighters.

READ Genesis 49:20

Asher: It says, v 20, that his "food shall be rich, and he shall yield royal delicacies." This is not a reference to eating. It describes the fertile territory that this tribe will one day possess. Asher will settle in the rich agricultural lands with its many olive groves along the northern coastline of Israel. This is where the modern city of Haifa is located.

READ Genesis 49:21

Now Jacob blesses the other son of Bilhah...

Naphtali: He is described, v 21, as "a doe let loose that bears beautiful fawns." The NASB translates that as, "He gives beautiful words." His tribe will settle to the north and west of the Sea of Galilee. The beautiful words prophesied here could possibly be a reference to Naphtali's quick and positive response whenever they were called to battle. In Judges Chapter 4 Barak summons the tribes to battle at the urging of Deborah. The tribe of Naphtali is the first to answer the call. Later in Judges Chapter 6 under Gideon the tribe of Naphtali is called to fight against the Midianites and they are quick to respond. So, the beautiful words could refer to that. But there is another possibility. Did you realize that Nazareth, Jesus's hometown, is in the territory of Naphtali? What happened in Nazareth? There was an announcement by an angel of a Messiah's birth to someone named Mary (Luke 1:26-38). Those were beautiful words indeed, weren't they?

READ Genesis 49:22-26

Finally, Jacob blesses the two sons of his beloved Rachel...

Joseph: He is Jacob's pride and joy. He is special because he was Rachel's firstborn but really because of his godly character. That is recorded for us throughout the last part of Genesis. In v 26 it says that Joseph "was set apart from his brothers." And certainly, he was. Jacob describes Joseph character, v 22, as "a fruitful bough by a spring." In v 23-24, when he was attacked and harassed in Egypt, he "remained unmoved." Joseph remained faithful to God through it all. And then God used him in a mighty way, v 24: "his arms were made agile by the hands of the Mighty One." The blessings of Jacob are passed on to Joseph's two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh. From the tribe of Ephraim will come the prophet, Samuel. From the tribe of Manasseh will come Gideon.

READ Genesis 49:27

Benjamin: He is described, v 27, as "a ravenous wolf, in the morning devouring the prey and at evening dividing the spoil." The tribe of Benjamin would become the warrior tribe. These words prophesy about the cruelty of

the Benjamites in Judges Chapter 20. You can read about that. It is a really terrible story. And then also, about the tragic life of King Saul who comes from the tribe of Benjamin. We all know his story. But it is also the tribe of the other Saul, Saul of Tarsus that we know as the Apostle Paul. He also was from the tribe of Benjamin.

READ Genesis 49:28

Jacob finishes blessing his sons. Now he gives his final words to them...

READ Genesis 49:29-32

Jacob gives very specific burial instructions in the presence of all 12 sons. And with that...

READ Genesis 49:33.

Jacob dies at the ripe old age of 147 (see Genesis 47:28).

READ Genesis 50:1-3

Embalming a dead body and the long period of mourning were the customs in Egypt for people of significance. Jacob is treated as a celebrity and all Egypt mourns for him. I find it fascinating that all Egypt mourned for the great patriarch Jacob.

The next verses, v 4-13, describe Jacob's "funeral procession" back to the Promised Land. After the 70-day mourning period is over, Joseph and his brothers escort their father's body back to the land of Canaan and bury him, as he requested, in the cave at Machpelah. This is quite an entourage. It includes a large portion of Jacob's family as well as a contingent of royal Egyptian officials. It must have been quite a sight to see this strange group making their way across the desert with Jacob's coffin.

READ Genesis 50:14

It was a 960-mile round trip to go bury Jacob. So, they were gone for a while.

READ Genesis 50:15

Why on earth would Joseph's brothers think this? Joseph has been nothing but good to them! Why would he suddenly turn against them? Well, they have obviously misjudged Joseph.

READ Genesis 50:16-17

We don't know if what they tell Joseph is true or if they just made it up. Whatever the case, their words break Joseph's heart and he breaks down and weeps. It is really sad that they would think this about him after everything he has done and what he has already told them.

READ Genesis 50:18-21.

Charles Spurgeon once preached a famous sermon called "Providence." In that sermon he uses the story of Joseph as an example of God's providence. Here is just an excerpt from that sermon:

"I think it seems very clear to any man who will dissect not only [the story of Joseph], but any other history he likes to fix upon, that there must be a God in the little accidents and dealings of daily life, as well as in the great results that tell upon the page of history, and are recounted in our songs. God is to be seen in little things. We will now notice, in the minutiae of providence, how punctual providence always is. You will never wonder more at providence, than when you consider how well God keeps time with Himself" (quote from his sermon entitled "Providence" on April 11 1858 at the New Park Street Chapel in London, England).

This sermon is all about the providence of God. Spurgeon is drawing upon the story of Joseph as a prime example of the providence of God at work. He goes on and talks about each of the things from the story that fell into place, perfectly in God's timing. God's hand of providence was really evident in Joseph's life as we have seen during this study.

Genesis ends with the death of Joseph...

READ Genesis 50:22-26

And that is the end of the book of Genesis.

Nothing is mentioned about the 53 years between Jacob's death and Joseph's death other than that little interchange between him and his brothers. All we know is that God's covenant people continue to live and to thrive in Egypt, in the land of Goshen. No explanation is ever given for why they did not return home after the seven-year famine or after Joseph's death. Perhaps if they had known what lay ahead for them, they would have returned home. But the fact is, life for them is good in Egypt, and so they remain there for the next four centuries. As we pointed out before God definitely had a purpose for them remaining in Egypt – to build a nation.

As we close out Genesis, what can we take away from these chapters?

- Jacob's blessings were an act of faith. The writer of Hebrews says, "By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff" (Hebrews 11:21). Jacob did not live to see any of these blessings fulfilled.
- Manasseh and Ephraim's double inheritance was an act of grace. They did nothing to deserve God's blessing. For that matter, neither had ANY of Jacob's sons. ALL were recipients of God's grace because of who they belonged to. We can attest to God's grace in our lives, right? "For by grace you have been saved through faith" (Ephesians 2:8). Praise God for grace!
- Lessons learned from the tragic lives of Reuben, Simeon and Levi: Sin is pervasive. It can have long-lasting impacts, not only on the individuals who sinned, but on their families as well.
- Like Jacob, do NOT focus on your own failures. Rather, focus on God's faithfulness. Jacob's hope is OUR hope: "I wait for YOUR salvation, O LORD!" (Genesis 49:18)
- Joseph did not pretend that his brothers' evil actions caused no harm to him. They did! But he was able to forgive them knowing that God used their evil to save many.
- [This one had to do with the Spurgeon quote] God is sovereign. He remains forever in control. Realize that even in the minute

details of your life, God providentially works it all out in His time and for His purposes. Joseph's life offers us a great example of this.

- Joseph's final request to carry his bones back to the Promised Land was also an act of faith. Hebrews 11 says, "By faith Joseph, at the end of his life, made mention of the exodus of the Israelites and gave directions concerning his bones" (Hebrews 11:22). Joseph did not want to leave his people behind. Thus, he did not want his body moved until everyone left Egypt. This would be fulfilled 400-plus years later in Exodus Chapter 13 when Moses ordered that Joseph's coffin be carried to the Promised Land. The whole time that the people were on their way to the Promised Land – all those years of wandering around in the wilderness – they were carrying Joseph's coffin around with them. Eventually he would be buried at Shechem.

I have just one final thought to leave you with in closing. Today, visitors to Shechem flock to Joseph's Tomb. And here again we see how God works. Shechem is known as the place where Joseph is buried. It is not remembered for the slaughter led by Jacob's two sons. That memory has faded into the background, overshadowed by the incredible legacy of Joseph!