

JACOB BLESSES JOSEPH'S SONS (Genesis 47:28—48:22)

The final days of the patriarchs was now approaching. Jacob had lived in Egypt for seventeen years, including five years of famine followed by a dozen years of peace and prosperity. He had lived an adventurous life, struggling and finally succeeding in the battle of faith. Jacob had stolen his brother's birthright and deceived his father into granting him his brother's blessing. Jacob was forced to flee to Mesopotamia, but along the way God promised to bless him. In distant Mesopotamia Jacob married two wives, fathered twelve sons, and accumulated great wealth. When he returned to Canaan, the land of promise, he was bereaved of his favorite son Joseph. As it turned out, God had preserved Joseph, elevating him to great power in Egypt. Joseph saved his father and his whole family by providing food for them during a period of extreme famine. Jacob relocated to Egypt where, at the age of 147 he now faced death. But Jacob, over all those years of doubt and despair, had become a man rich in faith. When he pronounced a blessing on Joseph's two sons, Jacob revealed a heart that had learned to submit to God. Interestingly, the author of Hebrews chooses from Jacob's entire colorful career this blessing on Joseph's sons to summarize Jacob's life (Hebrews 11:21). Jacob's reflective faith teaches us that God wants us to learn to trust Him every day to the very end of our days. Specifically, we can draw four lessons from Jacob's final blessing on Joseph and his sons.

Reflective faith links death with the worship of God (47:28-31).

Jacob knew that his days were short. However, he didn't run from death. He accepted the reality of death and chose to end his days in worship of God.

Jacob lived a long life under God's providential care (47:28).

Genesis 47:28 states that Jacob lived in Egypt seventeen years, to the age of 147. He'd spent twenty years in Mesopotamia and seventeen years in Egypt. He lived the balance of his life, 110 years, in Canaan. God had provided for Jacob all along the way. Jacob had come to recognize the providential care of God in his life.

Jacob demanded that Joseph bury him in the land of promise (47:29-30).

Jacob, once again called Israel as a name that reflected his transformation into a man of faith, knew that he was approaching death. He, therefore, summoned Joseph in order to express his burial wishes. He asked Joseph to make a solemn promise, symbolized by placing one's hand under the other's thigh (compare Genesis 24:2-4). Jacob demanded that Joseph show him mercy and declare truthfully that he would not bury his father in Egypt. Instead, Jacob wanted to go home. He would finally rest with his fathers—an expression of faith in an afterlife.—and therefore desired to be buried

with his fathers in the Promised Land. God had promised Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob the land of Canaan and Jacob would be buried nowhere but there. Joseph agreed to his aging father's demand.

Joseph swore that he would bury his father as requested and Jacob bowed in worship (47:31).

Again, Jacob insisted that Joseph swear to bury him in Canaan, and Joseph declared his commitment to his father's wishes. At this point "Israel bowed" either on the head of his "bed" or the end of his "staff"—the two words have the same Hebrew consonants. Hebrews 11:21 decides the interpretation in favor of "staff." Apparently Jacob kept his staff at hand, a hint at his nomadic lifestyle and possibly his readiness to take one more journey, the journey of death. Jacob's act of bowing, while possibly a display of respect directed toward his politically prominent son, seems instead to be an act of worship toward God. The word translated "bow" often carries the significance of worship, and again Hebrews 11:21 states that Jacob worshiped by bowing on his staff. We can picture this scene, an old man in faith anticipating his death and honoring God into whose presence he would soon make his last journey. This touching scene reveals the depth of Jacob's faith. He was ready to accept the reality of death, and he would worship God until his dying day.

Reflective faith celebrates the sovereign ways of God (48:1-11).

Reflective faith, in addition to linking death and worship, celebrates the sovereign ways in which God works in our lives. Jacob's actions teach us this truth.

Joseph took his two sons to see his ailing father, Jacob (48:1-2).

Shortly after Jacob made his burial request known to Joseph it became apparent that this aged patriarch was approaching death. Word of Jacob's deteriorating condition reached Joseph who quickly went to see his father. This time Joseph took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, both of whom had been born prior to Jacob's arrival in Egypt and prior to the seven years of famine (Genesis 41:50-52). By this time these two boys had grown into young men in their twenties. Together with their father Joseph they went to see Jacob and receive his blessing. Jacob, upon learning that Joseph had arrived, sat up in bed to receive him.

Jacob described God's revelation of His covenant (48:3-4).

Jacob rehearsed for Joseph his vision of God that had taken place so many years before. As Jacob fled to Mesopotamia, God appeared to him at Luz, the ancient name for Bethel (Genesis 28:19). There the mighty God, El-Shaddai, blessed Jacob. Jacob described this blessing, revealing a sharp memory of this momentous event. God promised to make Jacob fruitful with many offspring. He would also give the land of

Canaan to Jacob and his descendants as an eternal possession (compare Genesis 28:13-15). God has passed down His grand covenant with Abraham through Isaac and then Jacob. God had kept His promise. Now Israel's offspring were a growing nation.

Jacob declared that Joseph's two oldest sons would be considered equal to his own sons (48:5-6).

Jacob now extended his blessing to Joseph and his two sons. He expressed his wish to make Ephraim and Manasseh equal to his own sons, including Reuben and Simeon, his own first two sons. Joseph's descendants would constitute two tribes in Israel, not just one. Joseph would, therefore, receive a double portion of Jacob's blessing. Any children born to Joseph after this blessing would be considered a part of these two tribes. Historically, Ephraim and Manasseh did indeed inherit separate portions of the Promised Land as distinct tribes in Israel.

Jacob reminisced about the death of Joseph's mother Rachel (48:7)

Jacob's words of blessing on Joseph seem to have prompted him to think about Joseph's mother, Rachel. Rachel, to Jacob's great sorrow, had died and was buried in Canaan, in the region of Ephrath, near the town of Bethlehem. Clearly, Jacob's heart was still in the land of promise. His impending death would be a reunion with those whom he loved and who had passed on before him.

Jacob embraced Joseph's two sons and expressed his satisfaction at having lived to see them (48:8-11).

At this point, through his failing eyes, Jacob realized that Joseph was not alone with him in the room. He asked about the other two men who were with Joseph, and Joseph explained that these were Jacob's grandsons—gifts from God. Jacob, again called Israel, invited these grandsons to come near him so he could pronounce a blessing over them. Joseph guided his sons into the arms of his father, and Jacob kissed and embraced them. Jacob reflected on the fact that at one point he never expected to see Joseph again. He thought Joseph was dead. But now here stood Joseph as well as Joseph's two sons. Jacob was deeply satisfied with God's goodness in allowing him this reunion over these last years of his life. He had come to appreciate the sovereign ways of God.

**Reflective faith proclaims
the blessings of God (48:12-20).**

Reflective faith looks back at the past with heightened insight, and it looks to the future with hope and anticipation. Jacob pronounced a prophetic blessing on Joseph's two sons. God would continue to fulfill his covenant blessings within this family.

Joseph presented his two sons to Jacob to receive his blessing and Jacob favored the younger instead of the older (48:12-14).

Joseph's sons had apparently knelt at Jacob's beside, at his knees. Joseph now positioned them to receive the blessing from Jacob, himself bowing before his father in deep respect. Joseph presented his older son, Manasseh, at Jacob's right hand to receive the greater blessing. He placed the younger son, Ephraim, at Jacob's left hand. But Jacob crossed his arms, placing his right hand on Ephraim's head and his left hand on Manasseh's head. He would grant the greater blessing to the younger son.

Jacob blessed Joseph and his two sons, asking God to prosper the two boys (48:15-16).

First, Jacob blessed Joseph. He described God as the God of his fathers, Abraham and Isaac. God had been his shepherd throughout his lifetime. God had been an "angel" who protected him from harm. Jacob then invited this loving God to bless Joseph's sons. These two boys were to be considered Jacob's own sons, and they would increase greatly.

Joseph tried to correct Jacob's placement of his hands on the two boys but Jacob insisted that the younger would be greater (48:17-19).

Joseph naturally assumed that his father had become confused about which son was oldest, the usual recipient of the greater blessing. So Joseph tried to reposition his father's hands so that Jacob's right hand would rest on Manasseh. But Jacob resisted, stating the he knew exactly what he was doing. He promised that Manasseh would become great, but the younger Ephraim would become even greater—a group of nations. God had often honored the younger over the older, even as He had done for Jacob over his older brother Esau. What Jacob gained by deception he now would grant intentionally, showing that he had grown to depend on God to fulfill His promises. Historically, Ephraim became the most significant tribe in the northern nation of Israel, even lending his name to that nation (Isaiah 7:2; Hosea 4:17). God's ways are not our ways, and we must learn to honor His will above our own plans.

Jacob pronounced God's blessing on Joseph's two sons (48:20).

Jacob then expressed his blessing over Ephraim and Manasseh, saying, "In you (God) Israel will bless. May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh." Ephraim and Manasseh would, according to Jacob's blessing, become prosperous tribes in Israel.

**Reflective faith finds rest
in the promises of God (48:21-22).**

Jacob's reflective blessing reminds us that a deepening faith rests on the promises of God. Jacob had learned to trust in God's promises and anticipated the return of his descendants to the Promised Land.

Jacob assured Joseph that God would restore His people to the land of promise (48:21).

Jacob perceived that his death was imminent. The time had come for him to pass off the scene of human history. However, Jacob was ready. His faith had matured. He trusted God. He, like all who have a living faith in the living God, could peacefully welcome death. Although Jacob's life was nearing its end, he looked ahead to the future. He promised Joseph that God would be present with the Israelites and take them back to the land of their fathers. ("You" in this verse is plural, probably referring to all of Jacob's descendants.) God would fulfill His grand covenant by restoring His people to the Promised Land and making them into a great nation, a nation through which all nations on the earth would be blessed.

Jacob granted Joseph a particular place in the land of promise (48:22).

Jacob now turned his attention specifically toward Joseph. This aging father acknowledged Joseph's rule over his brothers. He then granted Joseph a particular plot of land in Canaan. He describes this plot as a "ridge" that he had taken from the Amorites by physical force—by sword and bow. The word "ridge" can be translated by the proper name "Shechem." What event of conquest Jacob had in mind is not recorded in Genesis, but Shechem may have held some special significance to Joseph since it was near Shechem that Joseph's brothers had sold him into slavery (Genesis 37:12-18). However, the significant point of Jacob's statement to Joseph is the fact that God would restore the land of promise to the Israelites. Jacob's faith had grown deep over the years. His reflective faith as seen in his final days teaches us that God wants us to learn to trust Him every day to the very end of our days.