

The Book of Genesis

Chapter 48

48:1-3 *Some time later Joseph was told, "Your father is ill." So he took his two sons Manasseh and Ephraim along with him. When Jacob was told, "Your son Joseph has come to you," Israel rallied his strength and sat up on the bed. Jacob said to Joseph, "God Almighty appeared to me at Luz [the original name, he had later changed it to "Bethel"] in the land of Canaan, and there He blessed me (NIV)*

48:4 *"and said to me, 'Behold, I will make you fruitful and multiply you, and I will make of you a multitude of people, and give this land to your descendants after you as an everlasting possession.'*

God's Blessing & Promise

When God blessed Jacob at Bethel, there was no recorded mention of the land being given "as an everlasting possession." The only other time this promise was recorded was when God made it to Abraham in 17:8. Therefore, Jacob understood that when God told him "the land which I gave Abraham and Isaac, to you I will give it" meant the promise as an everlasting possession was passed to him at that time, even though it was not spoken.

Jacob also neglected to mention that at Bethel God promised "kings will come from your body." This of course was intentional, due to the fact that the kings promised were to descend through Judah, not Joseph.

48:5 *"Now then, your two sons born to you in Egypt before I came to you here will be reckoned as mine; Ephraim and Manasseh will be mine, just as Reuben and Simeon are mine. (NIV)*

Patriarchal Adoption

Jacob adopted Joseph's two sons. This was a patriarchal right which he chose to invoke to make them like Reuben and Simeon, his first and second-born sons.

48:6-7 [TAN, a preface is included: "I do this because"] ***Any children born to you after them will be yours; in the territory they inherit they will be reckoned under the names of their brothers. As I was returning from Paddan, to my sorrow Rachel died in the land of Canaan while we were still on the way, a little distance from Ephrath. So I buried her there beside the road to Ephrath" (that is, Bethlehem). (NIV)***

Jacob is remembering the fact that Rachel had given him his second son shortly after returning to the land of promise, shortly after God had transferred the promises made to Abraham and Isaac to him at Bethel. Now, Joseph [son of Rachel] was providing him a first and second son shortly before the promises would be transferred from Jacob, shortly before he would die, and be returned to and buried in the land of promise.

48:8-14 *When Israel saw the sons of Joseph, he asked, "Who are these?" "They are the sons God has given me here," Joseph said to his father. Then Israel said, "Bring them to me so I may bless them." Now Israel's eyes were failing because of old age, and he could hardly see. So Joseph brought his sons close to him, and his*

***father kissed them and embraced them. Israel said to Joseph, "I never expected to see your face again, and now God has allowed me to see your children too." Then Joseph removed them from Israel's knees and bowed down with his face to the ground. And Joseph took both of them, Ephraim on his right toward Israel's left hand and Manasseh on his left toward Israel's right hand, and brought them close to him. But Israel reached out his right hand and put it on Ephraim's head, though he was the younger, and crossing his arms, he put his left hand on Manasseh's head, even though Manasseh was the firstborn.* (NIV)**

This is the first recorded account in the Bible of the laying on of hands.

***48:15-16 Then he blessed Joseph and said, "May the God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked, the God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day, the Angel [Hebrew: "goel" which means "kinsman"] who has delivered me from all harm—may He bless these boys. May they be called by my name and the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac, and may they increase greatly upon the earth."* (NIV)**

Redeemer

The kinsman is the one who has the right as nearest of kin to redeem a forfeited inheritance. Clearly, the one to whom Jacob refers is not a created angel, but God's Messenger, the Redeemer of all mankind.

Called By Israel's Name

The name "Israel," not "Joseph," was to be the future designation of the two sons of Joseph. It was also the two sons of Joseph, not the twelve sons of Jacob, who were to increase greatly upon the earth.

***48:17-18 When Joseph saw his father placing his right hand on Ephraim's head he was displeased [TAN: "thought it wrong"]; so he took hold of his father's hand to move it from Ephraim's head to Manasseh's head. Joseph said to him, "No, my father, this one is the firstborn; put your right hand on his head."* (NIV)**

From appearances, it looked like Jacob was making the same mistake as his father Isaac had—blessing the wrong one. Joseph, believing it was due to Jacob's blindness, attempted to stop the procedure.

48:19 But his father refused and said, "I know, my son, I know. He also shall become a people, and he also shall be great; but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations."

Transference of the Blessing

Jacob clarified that the blessing was being divided between both sons, even though Ephraim would be greater than Manasseh in respect to the actual number of nations and territory controlled.

As has been the case throughout Genesis, the blessing promised by God has not gone to the one who has had the right by birth, but to the one who has had no right to it, emphasizing once again that the only way to receive God's blessing is by His grace.

48:20 So he blessed them that day and said: 'When a blessing is pronounced in Israel, men shall use your names and say, "May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh."' So he set Ephraim before Manasseh. (REB)

Fulfillment of the Promises

The blessings of Joseph's sons do not play an important role in the later biblical story. They do, however, play a major role in showing how God fulfilled His promise to Abraham, Isaac and Jacob about the greatness of their physical descendants.

<i>GEN 12:2</i>	<i>"I will make of you a great nation"</i>
<i>GEN 17:2</i>	<i>"I will multiply you exceedingly"</i>
<i>GEN 17:4</i>	<i>"you shall be a father of many nations"</i>
<i>GEN 17:6</i>	<i>"I will make you exceedingly fruitful...make nations of you"</i>
<i>GEN 28:14</i>	<i>"your seed shall be as the dust of the earth, and you shall spread..."</i>
<i>GEN 22:16-18</i>	<i>"multiply your seed as the stars of heaven, and as the sand which is upon the sea shore; and your descendants shall possess the gate of their enemies"</i>
<i>GEN 26:1-5</i>	<i>"multiply as the stars...I will give unto your seed all these countries"</i>
<i>GEN 27:26-29</i>	<i>"dew of heaven, and the fatness of the earth, and plenty of corn..."</i>
<i>GEN 35:9-12</i>	<i>"a nation and a company of nations shall be of you..."</i>

48:21 Then Israel said to Joseph, "Behold, I am dying, but God will be with you and bring you back to the land of your fathers."

Additional Information

Jacob now tells Joseph what God had told him at Beersheba (46:1-4).

48:22 "Moreover I have given to you one portion above your brothers, which I took from the hand of the Amorite with my sword and my bow."

Apparently, the Amorites had taken the land Jacob had purchased from Shechem (33:19), and he had to use force to reclaim it.