

The Belonging: A Study in Genesis 37-50
Lesson 8 - Jacob's Blesses Joseph's Sons
Genesis 48

Blessings impart belonging, the assurance of being fully accepted.

We rejoice with Jacob, having spent the last seventeen years of his life with Joseph and his family in Egypt. Jacob's family has been reconciled and reunited. All twelve sons and their extended families are living in close proximity to the aging patriarch.

I wonder how the missing twenty-two years of Joseph's absence have been explained. Did the brothers confess to their father? Did Joseph sidestep any direct questions from his father about the lost years? The Bible does not say. I would like to think the brothers repented and confessed their part in Joseph's disappearance, but we cannot be certain about that. At any rate, I dare say that Jacob has never known such joy as he watches his boys prosper in the land and their families continue to be fruitful and multiply (Genesis 47:27).

Just seventeen years earlier, on the occasion of being presented to Pharaoh, Jacob declares the sum total of his years have been "few and unpleasant" (Genesis 47:9). But now, as he is approaching death, Jacob's testimony is one of deep faith and joyful gratitude for God's faithfulness and providential care all the days of his life.

I. The Bedside (Genesis 48:1-7)

Jacob is in his final days. Joseph and his family reside in the palace, where he continues to attend to the affairs of state. A short time after Jacob has made known his wishes for his burial (Genesis 47:29-31), attendants bring Joseph word that his father is rapidly failing. Joseph goes immediately to his father's bedside with both his boys in tow. His sons, Manasseh and Ephraim, are most likely in their early twenties. They are no doubt dressed as the young Egyptian courtiers they are. They have been brought up in Pharaoh's court, so their appearance, manners, education, and experiences must have been more Egyptian than Hebrew.

News of Joseph's arrival causes Jacob to rally. He musters all his strength and sits up on the side of his bed with the help of his dedicated staff. It appears Joseph's boys remain outside, allowing their father to have some private time with their grandfather. Jacob's words are not the muddled musing of an aged man. Like Abraham and Isaac, the Spirit of prophecy descends on Jacob and enables him to see with great clarity the future of his people. Jacob focuses Joseph's attention upon the two most important events of his life as an explanation for what he is about to do.

Twice God has appeared to Jacob, the first being after his deception of Isaac with the wrath of Esau still ringing in his ears (Genesis 28:10-22). Esau promises to kill him and Jacob is forced to flee to the desert.

There he is out there in the desert, sentenced with death, shrouded in darkness, surrounded by desert, alone, fearful. He has hurt others. He had hurt himself. He is in a place of alienation. He is in a place of separation. He is in a place of—thank God—confrontation, because the Lord meets him there. He has a dream, and he sees the

ladder, and that ladder goes up and up all the way to heaven...And there were angels ascending and descending upon that ladder; up and down they went. And God gave to Jacob a mighty revelation of Himself. And Jacob said, "God will be my God." He was saved. He was born again (Dr. Adrian Rogers, Retrieved from his sermon *Dying Grace*).

The second time God spoke to Jacob was after the disaster in Shechem (Genesis 35:6-13). At this encounter, God says, "Your name is Jacob; you shall no longer be called Jacob, but Israel shall be your name" (Genesis 35:10).

At the end of one hundred and forty-seven years of living, the thing that means the most to him is that, first of all, he has met God. Second, God has given him a new name. One event has to do with changing his nature and one has to do with changing his name! How glorious!

In Revelation 2:17, John writes that all believers will receive a new name, "To everyone who is victorious I will give some of the manna that has been hidden away in heaven. And I will give to each one a white stone, and on the stone will be engraved a new name that no one understands except the one who receives it" (NLT). A new nature in Christ. A new name in Heaven. Rejoice, beloved, we belong to the Lord Jesus and one day we will be gathered to our heavenly home where we belong!

Birth order and birth rights were significant in Bible times. Reuben will be stripped of his birthright because of his sin of laying with Bilhah, Jacob's concubine. Under normal circumstances, the birthright would be given to the next son, Simeon. However, Simeon and Levi (the next in birth order) were guilty of the mass murder of the Shechemites (Genesis 34:25). As a result, it will be Joseph who receives the rights of the first born.

Joseph continues to be his father's favorite. Benjamin brought with him the sad memory of Rachel's death. Reuben is contemptible, Simeon and Levi are cruel, Judah is carnal, the sons of the slave women are corrupt. And then there is Joseph. Joseph is his pride and joy! Jacob announces that he is claiming Joseph's two sons as his own. In fact, he will elevate his grandsons' standing in the family above his actual oldest sons, Reuben and Simeon. The death of his darling Rachel is fresh on his mind. It is fitting therefore, that Rachel's firstborn Joseph, be given the inheritance rights of the firstborn. So, Jacob gives the double portion to Joseph by bringing in Ephraim and Manasseh as full sons; it is his last tribute to a memory that will not die.

II. The Blessing (Genesis 48:8-20)

"Blessings impart belonging, the assurance of being fully accepted." Dallas Willard defines blessing as "the projection of good into the life of another. It isn't just words. It's the actual putting forth of your will for the good of another person" (Dallas Willard as quoted by Alan Wright, *The Power to Bless*, p. 19)

In this section, the Scripture describes a tender exchange between Jacob, Joseph, and his two grandsons. Jacob pronounces a blessing over his grandsons. The blessing on Joseph's two sons is primarily a blessing upon Joseph, as Moses reminds us in Genesis 48:15.

Hebrews 11:21 says, "By faith Jacob, as he was dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, and worshiped, leaning on the top of his staff." Out of Jacob's long life, the writer of Hebrews, under the inspiration of the Holy Spirit, selects this as Jacob's outstanding act of

faith. There is a bit of irony in this fact since this is just the same type of situation in which Jacob had tricked his father into giving him the blessing rightly due his older brother. Beloved, only God can redeem our mistakes and use us for His glory!

Joseph brings his sons close to Jacob, whose eyesight is clearly failing, “and he kissed them and embraced them” (Genesis 48:10). To Joseph he says, “I never expected to see your face, and behold, God has let me see your children as well” (Genesis 48:11). This is a dramatically different testimony than the one he gave when being introduced to Pharaoh! (Genesis 47:9). In the intervening seventeen years, Jacob’s faith walk has been intentional and life changing. It is possible the influence of Joseph has caused Jacob to look at his life circumstances through the lens of the sovereignty of God.

Joseph prepares his sons to receive their grandfather’s blessing “and bowed with his face to the ground” (Genesis 48:12) before Jacob. At the moment, it is possible that both Jacob and Joseph remember his dreams as a seventeen-year-old (Genesis 37:5-11). Concerning Joseph’s dreams, “his brothers were jealous of him, but his father kept the saying in mind” (Genesis 37:11). Joseph arranges them with the older to Jacob’s righthand and the younger at Jacob’s left. But then Israel crosses his hands, giving the firstborn blessing to Ephraim instead of Manasseh.

As we saw in our lesson: “For the fifth time in the book of Genesis, we meet a reversal of the birth order. God had chosen Abel, not Cain; Isaac, not Ishmael; Jacob, not Esau; and Joseph, not Reuben; and now He would choose Ephraim over Manasseh” (*The Belonging*, p. 232).

What a reminder that God’s ways are not our ways. It is interesting to note that Jacob had already reversed the order of the brothers when he spoke to Joseph in Genesis 48:5, “Now your two sons, who were born to you in the land of Egypt, are mine; Ephraim and Manasseh shall be mine.” The history of Israel will reveal that God’s sovereign hand is behind the hands of Jacob as he lays his hands upon them.

When Jacob speaks the official prayer of blessing, he evokes God’s presence with his own ancestors. As God has guided Abraham and Isaac, he prays Joseph’s sons will receive the same providential care. And asks that God will shepherd them as He has all the days of Jacob’s life. Jacob prays for their salvation and asks God to continue the godly legacy of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob through them.

When Joseph notices that his father has crossed his hands, pronouncing the firstborn blessing on Ephraim instead of Manasseh, he is displeased with his father. Joseph grasps Jacob’s hands in order to correct his mistake. Israel assures Joseph that Manasseh “will become a people and he also will be great” but Ephraim will be greater “and his descendants shall become a multitude of nations” (Genesis 48:19). Ephraim inherits the headship of the whole twelve, forfeited by Reuben (1 Chronicles 5:1-2). Jacob concludes by saying the people of Israel will pronounce a blessing by evoking the success of Ephraim and Manasseh. Kinda like when we here in the South say, “Well, bless your heart!”

Alan Wright writes,

For 3,700 years, Jews dads have been speaking blessing to their children—pointing out a child’s gifts or virtues and forecasting good things for the future. But for thousands of

years, these fathers have started the blessing for their sons with the...words, “May God make you like Ephraim and Manasseh” (*The Power to Bless*, p. 21).

For those of you who had fathers that understood the power of words of blessing, this study has caused you to praise God for your family. For those who do not have this in your life experience, I have good news for you. Ephesians 1:3 says, “Blessed be the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ, who has blessed us with every spiritual blessing in the heavenly places in Christ.” Regardless of your earthly father, regardless of your life experiences, regardless of your abundant blessings or lack thereof, through Christ Jesus you have been made “heirs of God and fellow heirs with Christ” (Romans 8:17). God’s greatest blessing always rests in God Himself. Beloved, when you have Him, you are truly blessed! Hallelujah! What a Savior!

III. The Belonging (Genesis 48:21-22)

The double blessing in Joseph’s sons is confirmed, but its fulfillment will be in Canaan, not Egypt. Jacob, speaking prophetically, says, “God will be with you, and bring you back to the land of your fathers” (Genesis 48:21). Egypt is a place of sojourning, a place where the Hebrews were residing for a season. The Promised Land is the place of their covenant relationship with God. In His timing, He will lead them out of Egypt and return them to the land of His promise.

John Phillips explains,

Jacob’s words [in Genesis 48:22] about the Amorites are puzzling. But we must remember the spirit of prophecy was still upon him. He was speaking of himself as the embodiment of the nation and speaking of the future as though it were the past—as though the conquest of Canaan and the slaying of the Amorite were already an accomplished fact (*Exploring Genesis: An Expository Commentary*, p. 360-361).

Blessing imparts belonging, the assurance of being fully accepted. Beloved, we are operating under the blessing of God in Christ Jesus. We are “aliens and strangers” just passing through this world. In God’s timing, we will be gathered home to live eternally with the Lord and His people. We will finally be home, where we belong!