

Comments on Genesis 48

In this chapter, Jacob invokes the beginning of the covenant between himself and the Lord as he is leaving his home (v. 3-6, cf. ch. 27-28), and the consummation of that covenant when he returns home (v. 7, cf. ch. 35). Now at the end of his life, he pushes that covenant forward with his chosen favorite son, Joseph and his two grandsons.

The father's blessing given by Jacob is bestowed upon Ephraim with the theme of the adoption of all nations to his lineage. As such, the covenant with Abraham, Isaac and Jacob is perpetuated by his natural children and grandchildren through Joseph, but also by all nations who will be adopted into the family of Ephraim.

The text of this chapter can be arranged as follows:

Introduction (v. 1-2) - Jacob, Joseph, Manasseh, Ephraim

A - Children & land, Lord's promise on departure from home (v. 3-4)

B - Adoption (v. 5)

C - Fulfilment (v. 6)

A - Children & land - Lord's promise on return to home (v. 7)

B - Adoption (v. 8-14)

C - Fulfilment (v. 15-20)

Conclusion (v. 21-22) - Jacob, Joseph, Ephraim

Jacob adopts both Manasseh and Ephraim as his own, and then blesses Ephraim over Manasseh. What is Jacob's intent? To foreshadow the adoption of the Gentiles into Israel and assign them to Ephraim's lineage, cf. Isa. 49, Rom. 11, 1 Ne. 13-15, 1 Ne. 22, Jacob 5.

Manasseh is the firstborn of Joseph, who is the firstborn of Rachel. However, Joseph is not the firstborn of Jacob, even though he is the favored son of Jacob. Manasseh holds the position of firstborn of Joseph, but Jacob's adopting them entitles Jacob to give Ephraim his father's blessing as though

he were part of the original twelve sons. The blessing through the adoption is then a symbol of Jacob/Israel inheriting all of the nations of the earth, as they will be adopted into Ephraim's family.

Jacob takes Ephraim over Manasseh, precisely because he isn't the firstborn. The Gentiles are not the firstborn of the covenant, they are second in the covenant by adoption, just like Ephraim. Manasseh is Joseph's firstborn in the covenant, Ephraim isn't, so Jacob adopts him as his own just as he will adopt all of the Gentiles as his own.

Also poignant is the fact that Jacob makes this covenant as a father's blessing. This is not a covenant the Lord makes with the Gentiles, because the Lord will not covenant with Gentiles now that there is a covenant with Abraham which is perpetuated by lineage. If the Gentiles want to participate, then they must do so by adoption into Abraham's lineage. This is why we have an end to the age of the Patriarchs. The God of Abraham, Isaac and Jacob remains as such because Jacob's covenant with the Lord as Israel makes him the father of many nations both by natural birth and by adoption. No longer are other sons being separated out and set aside (e.g., Ishmael, Esau). All are being taken into the family of Israel based on their acceptance of the Lord as their God.

Rachel is the pivotal wife and point of v. 7 because she died early in childbirth. As Jacob cannot obtain more children by her naturally, he takes them by adoption. He will take all of the Gentile nations by adoption when his chosen wife can no longer bear him natural literal offspring. Jacob's mourning for Rachel extended to all the wives, as there were no additional children born to Jacob. The death of Rachel signaled the end of Jacob's natural children, and at the end of his life Jacob is now taking all worshippers of the Lord as his adoptive children through Ephraim.

The Lord's Covenant with Israel: Promise of Life, Protection from Death

One of the overarching themes of the Jacob narrative is the preservation of life amid the constant threat and eventual reality of death. In ch. 27-28, 35 and 48 all are connected by the promise of life amid death.

In ch. 27, Esau plans to murder Jacob when Isaac dies, as revenge for stealing the blessing. Isaac believes he is going to die, and that is why he gives the father's blessings (Isaac doesn't die until ch. 35). Jacob flees for his life and

covenants with the Lord that He will be Jacob's God if he survives and returns (cf. ch. 28).

In ch. 35, Jacob returns home, and fulfils his promise by covenanting with the Lord, but only after surviving the threat of death from Laban (ch. 31) and then Esau (ch. 32-33). Shortly before covenanting with the Lord, we learn the death of Deborah. Shortly after the covenant, Rachel dies, and then Isaac dies.

In ch. 48, at the end of Jacob's life, he summons Joseph and his two sons and promises them great posterity, including the adoption of the Gentiles, and a return to the land promised to Abraham. After blessing Joseph's sons, and his own sons, Jacob dies.

In the original covenant with Abraham, the Lord promises him so many children they will be as numerous as the stars in the night sky (cf. 15:5). At the end of Jacob's natural life, there is a significant number of Abraham's great children, and Jacob has opened up all nations of the earth into adoption into Abraham's family.

¹ And it came to pass after these things, that one told Joseph, Behold, thy father is sick: and he took with him his two sons, Manasseh and Ephraim. ² And one told Jacob, and said, Behold, thy son Joseph cometh unto thee: and Israel strengthened himself, and sat upon the bed.

v1-2 The Introduction. Joseph is informed his father Jacob is on his death bed, so Joseph takes his two sons and goes to visit him (v. 1). Jacob is told Joseph is coming, so he rallies his strength and sits up on bed (v. 2).

v1 "one told Joseph", it is clear Jacob wanted to summon Joseph and his two sons in specific, before he summons all of the twelve of them in the next chapter, so Jacob sends one servant specifically to Joseph.

v2 The imagery of Joseph rising up is in contrast to the message of v. 21, where Jacob is telling them he is going to die. He is on his death bed, but will raise himself up one last time to bless his children before death.

³ And Jacob said unto Joseph, God Almighty appeared unto me at Luz in the land of Canaan, and blessed me, ⁴ And said unto me, Behold, I will make thee fruitful, and multiply thee, and I will make of thee a multitude of people; and will give this land to thy seed after thee for an everlasting possession.

⁵ And now thy two sons, Ephraim and Manasseh, which were born unto thee in the land of Egypt before I came unto thee into Egypt, are mine; as Reuben and Simeon, they shall be mine.

⁶ And thy issue, which thou begettest after them, shall be thine, and shall be called after the name of their brethren in their inheritance.

v3-6 Jacob reiterates the fundamental promises from the events of 28:10-22 (v. 3-4). He then tells Joseph he is adopting his two sons as though they are his own, even as Reuben and Simeon are his own (v. 5). Any additional sons Joseph may have will also be part of this adoption and will fall under the names of Manasseh and Ephraim (v. 6).

v3-4 The reader has the full set of details in ch. 27-28, but Jacob at present is only interested in the specific promises the Lord made to him, which he is now propagating through Joseph and his sons. So, he distills it down to posterity and land.

v4 "multitude of people", this is what Jacob addresses in the blessing on Ephraim of "multitude" in v. 16 and "multitude of nations" in v. 19. It is not just referring to a large number of literal children, it is referring to the adoption of all nations.

"this land...everlasting possession", in contrast to Pharaoh's land grant in 47:6-11, which depends on the whims of the Egyptian rulers, the Lord has promised Abraham land, cf. 15:16-21.

v6 Jacob tells Joseph that all of his children will be called under the name of either Manasseh or Ephraim in the inheritance given by Jacob. This is an obscure passage, but when taken in the context of the blessing of adoption Jacob is giving it becomes more clear what he is referring to. Jacob has selected Ephraim as the recipient of his father's blessing, leaving Manasseh as the recipient of Joseph's birthright of the firstborn.

Jacob is implying all of Manasseh's and Ephraim's natural children are already of their respective lineages. However, all of the additional children of Joseph, whether natural or adoptive, will inherit the blessings of Ephraim. There is nothing in the text to suggest Joseph had additional sons, but there is nothing at present when Jacob is blessing Joseph from preventing Joseph from having additional children. However, there will be many children adopted into Joseph's family, and

that adoption will be through Ephraim, his son, per v. 16 and 19.

⁷ And as for me, when I came from Padan, Rachel died by me in the land of Canaan in the way, when yet there was but a little way to come unto Ephrath: and I buried her there in the way of Ephrath; the same is Bethlehem.

v7 The death of Rachel in childbirth (cf. 35:16-21) signals the end of Jacob's begetting of children. Once Rachel, the preferred wife, starts bearing children, Jacob abandons the beds of the other wives. This verse suggests his mourning over Rachel's death ended the line of natural offspring, so Jacob is taking Jacob's two grandsons as his own by adoption to drive a theological point.

This verse's reference to the events of ch. 35 is oblique, but unmistakable. It informs the reader that out of the tumult of events in that chapter, the one that hurt Jacob the most was the loss of Rachel, the beloved first wife.

But, this would have also have been a traumatic event for Joseph as well, as Rachel was his mother. Joseph was with the family for that event, and would have mourned Rachel's passing with Jacob. This is a loss both Jacob and Joseph would have shared together.

In the current context, it also serves to explain why Joseph and his two sons are being singled out in the present chapter. Joseph is the firstborn and most favored son of the original chosen wife. Jacob never chose Leah, Bilhah or Zilpah, they were part of the original intended marriage to Rachel.

While the death of Rachel is invoked here as the connection between Jacob and Joseph, it is also clearly intended to invoke the context of 35:9-15, where Jacob fully commits to the Lord in fulfilment of his statement in 28:20-21. This is why Jacob references the death of Rachel traveling back to his ancestral land. Jacob's doing so with twelve sons represents the Lord's preservation of Jacob and prospering of his family, despite the suffering and losses the family experiences.

⁸ And Israel beheld Joseph's sons, and said, who are these? ⁹ And Joseph said unto his father, They are my sons, whom God hath given me in this place. And he said, Bring them, I pray thee, unto me, and I will bless them. ¹⁰ Now the eyes of Israel were dim for age, so that he could not see. And he brought them near unto him; and he kissed them, and embraced them. ¹¹ And Israel said unto Joseph, I had not thought to see thy face: and, lo,

God hath shewed me also thy seed. ¹² And Joseph brought them out from between his knees, and he bowed himself with his face to the earth. ¹³ And Joseph took them both, Ephraim in his right hand toward Israel's left hand, and Manasseh in his left hand toward Israel's right hand, and brought them near unto him. ¹⁴ And Israel stretched out his right hand, and laid it upon Ephraim's head, who was the younger, and his left hand upon Manasseh's head, guiding his hands wittingly; for Manasseh was the firstborn.

v8-14 Jacob sees Joseph's sons and asks Joseph who they are (v. 8). Joseph responds that they are the sons whom God has provided. Jacob asks Joseph to bring them to him so he may bless them (v. 9). Jacob's eyesight is poor, so Joseph brings the two of them close to him, and Jacob hugs and kisses them (v. 10). Jacob gives thanks that not only was he able to see Joseph again after thinking he was dead, he was able to see Joseph's sons (v. 11). Joseph pulls Manasseh and Ephraim back from Jacob and then bows down to his father (v. 12), in respect. Joseph then positions Manasseh at Jacob's right hand, and Ephraim at Jacob's left hand (v. 13). Jacob crosses his hands intentionally, placing the left hand on Manasseh's head (v. 14).

The comments on Jacob's poor eyesight and Joseph's intentional placement of the sons is given to provide context to Jacob's intentional blessing of the younger son with the father's blessing, and explain their subsequent conversation in v. 17-19.

There is also interplay in the difference in the blessing here of Jacob as the patriarch and Isaac as the patriarch. While Isaac was physically blind, he was even more spiritually blind. The deception wrought on him by Rebecca and Jacob ended up being the Lord's will, and was necessary because he cared little for the Lord. However, Jacob in his old age, while nearly blind, is filled with the Spirit of the Lord and therefore acts wittingly according to His will. Note the parallels between the two stories of Isaac's blessings and Jacob's blessing (e.g., end of life, blindness, questioning, embracing).

v8 "Who are these?", while Jacob's eyesight is poor, that is not the issue here. Jacob is questioning Joseph from a theological point of view. Jacob is asking Joseph if he understands these children are a blessing from God, and if he understands what Jacob is about to do in adopting them as sons and not leave them as grandsons. Jacob is asking Joseph if they are his sons, or

are they a fulfilment of the Lord's promises to Abraham. Who are these? They are the Lord's, they are Abraham's, they are Jacob's, in addition to being Joseph's.

¹⁵ And he blessed Joseph, and said, God, before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac did walk, the God which fed me all my life long unto this day, ¹⁶ The Angel which redeemed me from all evil, bless the lads; and let my name be named on them, and the name of my fathers Abraham and Isaac; and let them grow into a multitude in the midst of the earth.

¹⁷ And when Joseph saw that his father laid his right hand upon the head of Ephraim, it displeased him: and he held up his father's hand, to remove it from Ephraim's head unto Manasseh's head. ¹⁸ And Joseph said unto his father, Not so, my father: for this is the firstborn; put thy right hand upon his head. ¹⁹ And his father refused, and said, I know it, my son, I know it: he also shall become a people, and he also shall be great: but truly his younger brother shall be greater than he, and his seed shall become a multitude of nations. ²⁰ And he blessed them that day, saying, In thee shall Israel bless, saying, God make thee as Ephraim and as Manasseh: and he set Ephraim before Manasseh.

v15-20 In blessing Joseph's sons, Jacob blesses Joseph. Jacob appeals to the Lord his God, the God of his father and grandfather, who has blessed and protected him, to bless his grandsons, so they will continue the name of his family and become a great population on the earth (v. 15-16).

Joseph sees that Jacob has switched hands and goes to correct what he sees as a mistake (v. 17-18). Jacob rejects Joseph's attempt, saying he knows what he is doing, because the younger son will be greater than the older brother, as he will become a multitude of nations (v. 19). All Israel will bless Ephraim and Manasseh, with Ephraim first (v. 20).

Jacob himself was the beneficiary of a reversed father's blessing, and some of the elements of the current text are similar to the preceding text (cf. ch. 27). But, while Isaac had been duped by Rebecca and Jacob, in this case Jacob knows what he is doing.

v15-16 Modern translations typically present these two verses are presented as poetry, for example:

¹⁵ And he blessed Joseph, and said,

 "The God before whom my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,
 The God who has been my shepherd all my life to this day,

¹⁶ The angel who has redeemed me from all evil,
Bless the boys;
And may my name live on in them,
And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac;
And may they grow into a multitude in the midst of the
earth." (NAS)

And he blessed Joseph, saying,

"The God in whose ways my fathers Abraham and Isaac walked,
The God who has been my shepherd from my birth to this day—
The Messenger who has redeemed me from all harm—
Bless the lads.
In them may my name be recalled,
And the names of my fathers Abraham and Isaac,
And may they be teeming multitudes upon the earth." (JPS)

The poetic prayer brings the past history of Jacob's fathers into the contemporary setting, he bears witness to the Lord's hand in his own life, and then prays for the grandsons and future generations of both his own literal offspring and the adopted Gentiles. Jacob's prayer very much is intended to meld the past, present and future of their extended family.

v16 "The Angel which redeemed me from all evil", likely a reference to 32:1, meant to invoke the Lord's hand of Providence in Jacob's life, which he prays for Joseph and his sons as well. While the case of 32:1 is a specific example, Jacob's intent is more likely to be a more broad inclusion of the many instances where the Lord has protected him.

v19 "a multitude of nations", the Hebrew here is "melo' ha-goyim" literally translating to "the fullness/mass of the nations" with the Hebrew term "goyim" being translated to either "nations" or "Gentiles". Jacob is saying Ephraim will inherit a multitude of Gentiles, cp. 27:29, 28:14, 35:11.

²¹ And Israel said unto Joseph, Behold, I die: but God shall be with you, and bring you again unto the land of your fathers.

²² Moreover I have given to thee one portion above thy brethren, which I took out of the hand of the Amorite with my sword and with my bow.

v21-22 The conclusion. Jacob states flatly that his life is at an end, but Joseph's lineage will continue and be brought to the land promised to Abraham (v. 21). And, Jacob has given Joseph the double portion of literal offspring and the adoption of

Gentiles, which is granted by the word of the Lord (v. 22).

v22 "one portion above they brethren", the extra portion is the Gentile nations adopted through him, in addition to his natural children.

"the Amorite", a general reference to the inhabitants of the land where Abraham lived (cf. 14:13), which was promised to Abraham once the sins of the Amorites was so great they should be wiped off the face of the land, cf. 15:16. Jacob's intent is to specifically invoke the original promise to Abraham, and the dependency of his promises on those.

"with my sword and with my bow", clearly a figurative reference to Jacob's reliance on the Lord to fight his battles (cf. ch. 32-33, 35:5), as in the very next chapter Jacob curses Simeon and Levi's literal use of weapons, which jeopardize their family (cf. 49:5-7). Compare Isa. 49:2 where Isaiah quotes this phrase in the context of the adoption of the Gentile nations into Israel.

There are also similar sounding references when Jacob blesses Judah (cf. 49:2) and Joseph (cf. 49:24) individually in the next chapter.

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