

**Text:** Genesis 48-50

**Title:** The End of the Beginning

**Truth:** Jacob gives a prophecy about the patriarchs still relevant today.

**Date/Location:** July 9, 2023 at FBC (previously May 28, 2006)

## Introduction

When I began this series in Genesis in August of 2022, I did not expect to develop a sermon series through the entire book! Just the first 12 chapters or so, I thought. But we are coming to the end of a detailed study of the entire 50 chapters of text. We have seen how this “book of beginnings” adds to the weight of evidence that God’s word is critically important from start to finish. The Bible as a whole, with Genesis specifically in our minds in this series, equips us to be godly people in accordance with 2 Timothy 3:16-17. Let us see what we can glean in these chapters.

### I. Jacob Blesses Manasseh and Ephraim, Genesis 48

- A. This chapter is about the blessing that Jacob bestowed on his two grandsons Manasseh and Ephraim, who were Joseph’s two sons. Jacob recounted how God had promised him the Abrahamic covenant and the land for an everlasting possession. He then said that he was “adopting” Joseph’s two sons as his own. This seems to us like a bold action, but it is a very honorific one. It effectively doubled Joseph’s inheritance from his father. Another result of this was that the two youngsters would become heads of two of the tribes in Israel—although they would die long before the nation left Egypt to go back to the land of promise. They never resided in the lands named after them.
- B. Jacob recalled the sad story of his love—Rachel—passing away beside him in the land of Canaan and burying her near Ephrath.
- C. You will recall the prominent place of the blessing at the end of a patriarch’s life (chapter 27). This was going to happen again, this time with Jacob presiding over the blessing instead of stealing the blessing. A similarity in the two situations is that Isaac was dim of eyesight, and now Jacob is blind as well. He ensures the identification of the two grandsons. He knows all too well the

difficulty of identifying the right person while blind and trying to pronounce the all-important blessing on them because he himself had deceived his own father in this situation. Joseph assured him of the identity of the grandsons.

**About the importance of such a blessing.** Human author Moses (and thus God's Spirit as well) has placed quite some importance on these end-of-life blessings. One way we can discern that is that he devotes two chapters here in Genesis 48-49 and one in chapter 27 to this material. The contents of the blessings hold a great deal of significance for the future unfolding of history because they are connected to the Abrahamic covenant and are at least partially prophetic in nature. There is the concern of through whom those blessings flow (Isaac or Ishmael, Jacob or Esau) as well as the level of participation (as with Reuben in Genesis 49).

The blessings also relate on a human level to the distribution of personal property and land.

I am afraid that in our day, the only concern is the material one—what does the will or trust say? Who gets the finances? Like it is some kind of free windfall. The focus of the Christian person must instead be on the **spiritual** heritage passed down from one generation to the next.

- D. Remember that Manasseh was the firstborn, and Ephraim was second (41:50-52). It was a great blessing for Jacob to not only see Joseph alive, but to see the next generation as well. Joseph placed the boys strategically for his blind dad's benefit—using Joseph's left hand to guide Manasseh toward Jacob's right hand and using his right hand to guide Ephraim toward Jacob's left. Jacob's right hand was the place of higher blessing.
- E. Then a surprising thing happened. Despite Jacob's advanced age and poor eyesight, he crossed his hands so that his right hand would not be on first-born Manasseh's head, but on the younger Ephraim, and vice versa. He intended to bless the younger son Ephraim above the older son Manasseh. This blessing is a prophecy that Ephraim would become greater than his older brother, just

like the younger Jacob was chosen over his older brother Esau. That is an interesting parallel to the previous generation.

- F. The crisscross arrangement of the blessing displeased Joseph and he tried to correct his dad. Dad told him that he knows what he is doing. Dads often say that, don't they?! Manasseh would indeed be blessed, but Ephraim more. Therefore, Ephraim was set ahead of his brother. Both would be a pattern for the blessing of others.
- G. As for the content of the blessing in verses 15-16, Jacob identifies God as the God of his fathers and the God of his provision and protection. He asks God to bless the young grandsons and puts his name upon them.
- H. Jacob reflected on the fact that he was dying, but that Joseph's two clans would get back to the promised land. God would be with them. This was not an immediate thing—it would be several generations in the future. He confirms our earlier belief that he had given an extra portion to Joseph compared to the other 11 brothers. (Eventually Levi would not have his own portion, so the extra “offspring” of Jacob could take his spot.
- I. That portion had to do with the land of the Amorite. Jacob mentions an otherwise unknown event in which he had to use force to secure a place to dwell. This fact is not recorded earlier in Genesis, but it is not surprising because the inhabitants of the land often troubled his father Isaac about water wells and grazing space. The generation before that, Abraham had to defend his dwelling place and rescue nephew Lot. The violence did not entirely escape Jacob's generation.

## **II. The Prophetic Blessing of Jacob on His Sons, Genesis 49**

- A. Chapter 49 records a prophecy for each son. Reuben is laid low because of his sin with his father's concubine Bilhah (35:22). This is sad because he was “the beginning of my strength” as firstborn. Jacob chastised Simeon and Levi because of their violent behavior. Jacob's pronouncement on these three men was not a blessing but was a curse.
- B. Jacob prophesies that Judah will be prominent among the brothers so that they will serve him (like with Joseph). He will be victorious

over his enemies, he will be like a lion, and the scepter is mentioned as not departing from him (his tribe). This seems—to most Bible students—to be a reference to the Messiah. But why is that? Judah will be the progenitor of a line of rulers up to a person identified as Shiloh. He will be like a lion, and later references to the Messiah include that (Revelation 5:5). He will have the obedience of the people of Israel (Psalm 110:2-3), and have a place of prominence, even washing his garments in wine. The allusion to the blood-stained garments of the Messiah in dying for sin and judging sin is hard to miss (Isaiah 63:1-4). He will be a very fine looking person. I take that to refer to the Messiah at the end, not the marred-visage-Messiah of Isaiah 52-53.

The meaning of the word *Shiloh* is debated. The larger phrase may be translated as “until the one comes to whom the scepter belongs” or “until he comes to whom it belongs.” It is admittedly a bit confusing. But Jesus did come from the line of Judah, and He fits the other descriptors perfectly.

- C. Zebulun will live by the seaside. Issachar would be an industrious bunch of people, like a strong donkey, but destined to become a band of slaves. Dan has a special place of judgment (as his name indicated, 30:6). The end for Dan is not good: his impact on others is terrible. Jacob hopes for the tribe’s salvation, but we wonder because Revelation 7:5-8 omits Dan (it includes Manasseh *and* Joseph).
- D. Gad, Asher, and Naphtali get small portions of the chapter, but they too are blessed: Gad after some tribulation; Asher with agricultural plenty; and Naphtali in his speed and agility as well as superior oratorical or hymnic abilities.
- E. Next comes Joseph. Jacob extols his fruitfulness. The “running over the wall” is *not* code for lost tribes moving to distant lands. It simply means he is like a very vibrant and lively plant. He was tried very sorely in his early life, but he came through and was strengthened. God did this for him. Jacob especially offered his blessing to Joseph in what seems like a reward to make up for tribulation, and it reflects Joseph’s old “favorite” standing.

- F. The prophecy describes the youngest son, Benjamin, as a ravenous wolf. He has some violent or warrior tendencies in him and will make use of those at various points in the history of Israel as well as in King Saul and the apostle Paul, both from Benjamin.
- G. Jacob (Israel) once again commanded that his body be buried in the land of his fathers in the cave of Machpelah. Very soon after saying these words, he mustered his last strength to get into bed and he died there.

### III. The Burial of Jacob and End of Joseph's Story, Genesis 50

- A. The death of the patriarch brought great sadness to Joseph and his family. The process of embalming is first mentioned here in the Bible. Following the Egyptian method, it took 40 days, and a total of 70 days passed for the mourning period. The Egyptians mourned the death of Jacob, as he was the father of one of their prominent leaders. Joseph appealed to Pharaoh to let him bury his father as instructed, and Pharaoh consented. There were 7 days of additional mourning once they reached the burial ground.
- B. Upon the passing of their father, the other brothers were once again stricken by their guilty conscience and feared that Joseph would now get back at them for their sins against him. He reaffirmed to them that he believed God had allowed their sin against him to save the nation of Israel. He trusted in God, not his brothers, and could truly forgive his brothers for what they had done. He was not bitter. He even brought *them* comfort. Can you do that? Do you believe that God is *sovereign* over all things?
- C. To end the account, Moses tells us that Joseph died at the age of 110 and was embalmed in Egypt. He saw his son's children to the third generation, which means he knew his grandsons and great grandsons, and perhaps even the great-great grandsons. He made the family promise that when they left Egypt at some future point, they would take his bones to be buried in the land of Canaan. This is like what his father Jacob asked, but with a less stringent time constraint. He too was embalmed and put into a coffin, as was the custom of the Egyptians at that time. This was around 500 years *before* King Tutankhamun.

## Conclusion

Remember that Moses penned the book of Genesis under the inspiration of God around 400 years after the events had occurred. It is without doubt that there was a healthy and accurate oral traditional of these major events passed down for generations, but God ensured that we have the completely accurate account of what happened.

There are many things to remember from the book of Genesis, but here are a few big ones:

1. The Abrahamic covenant, and its continuance through Isaac, Jacob, and the children of Jacob. It remains in effect today in the sense that its promises have not yet been fulfilled. One of those promises is *being* fulfilled to those who share the faith of Abraham (Galatians 3:8).
2. The sovereign providence of God over human history, as seen throughout the book of Genesis and particularly in the life of Joseph. Not only does God know what He is doing, He planned it all in advance and is guiding everything to the end that He planned!
3. The negative long-lasting and far-reaching consequences of sin. We saw that death reigned because of the sin of Adam. Blessings and opportunities were lost because of sin. Death and violence abounded.
4. The blessing of God remains upon those who trust in Him, and collaterally to those around God's children. Genesis also speaks much of the curse that comes because of sin and another type of curse due to opposition to God and His people.
5. A primary purpose of Genesis is to inform us as to the origin, purpose, and destiny of the people of Israel. The last three-fourths of Genesis deal with one human family: the Hebrews, descended from Abraham through Isaac, Jacob, and the 12 patriarchs. This narrative sets the stage for the book of Exodus and the remainder of the Bible.