

Genesis 48 – Adoption & Blessing

This section is Jacob's dying blessing for his sons, just as his fathers did, he passes down the inheritance and the blessing as the promises of God move to the next generation of Israel. Chapter 48-49 constitute this blessing scene. The family is gathered around Jacob as he blesses each one by one. Chapter 48 is the double portion blessing upon Joseph that is extended to his two sons and chapter 49 is the blessing Jacob pronounces on his other sons. In this chapter (48) we see the sons of Joseph adopted into the blessed inheritance.

I. The Setting (1-2)

A. Joseph Comes To His Father When He Hears Of His Illness

1. Joseph takes his two sons with him to Jacob's bedside.
 - a. These are not little boys
 - b. They were born before Jacob came to Egypt and before the famine began - and now Jacob is about to die. We were told he lived 17 years in Egypt so they are at least 18-20 years old.
 - c. Joseph's two sons were born in Egypt but he gave them Hebrew names – Ephraim and Manasseh – showing that they are connected to his Hebrew heritage.
2. We aren't told until ch. 49 but all Jacob's sons are also here in this scene.

B. Jacob summons his strength to pronounce the blessing

1. This is a pic of a frail ailing, 147 year old man
2. He is clinging to life to pass on the blessing and inheritance

II. Jacob's Declaration of Adoption (3-7)

A. Jacob recounts God's Promises to Him (3-4)

1. God (El Shaddai) appeared and blessed him at Luz (Bethel)
2. God promised to make him fruitful and numerous
3. God promised to give the land as a possession
 - a. Genesis 35:11-15
4. Jacob is reciting the authority he has been given to pass on this blessing
 - a. God has not appeared to Joseph as far as we know
 - b. The promise still belongs to Jacob for God appeared to him.
5. Jacob recognizes that he is not the source of the blessing – God is
 - a. as heir of these promises, his adopted sons would inherit them as well

B. Jacob declares his intent to adopt Joseph's sons (5-6)

1. Jacob says that Joseph's sons "are mine"
 - a. this would be as if they came from him directly
 - b. they will be adopted as full sons of Jacob
 - c. they are not half Hebrew half Egyptian – they are part of the covenant family
2. Jacob says they will be as his first born sons
 - a. He specifically mentions Reuben and Simeon, his 1st born sons
 - b. The sons of Joseph will receive their portion of inheritance
 - i. Joseph receives the 1st born's double portion
 - ii. This is how both sons receive a portion

- c. 1 Chronicles 5:1-2 - 1 The sons of Reuben the firstborn of Israel (for he was the firstborn, but because he defiled his father's couch, his birthright was given to the sons of Joseph the son of Israel, so that he could not be enrolled as the oldest son; 2 though Judah became strong among his brothers and a chief came from him, yet the birthright belonged to Joseph),
 - 3. Jacob says that any other sons of Joseph are not adopted (6)
 - a. any others would be subsumed into the two tribes of Ephraim and Mannasseh
 - b. Joseph's progeny will be part of these tribes
 - C. Joseph's two sons will be of Rachael's line (7)
 - 1. Jacob recalls Rachael's passing near Bethlehem
 - 2. She died giving birth to Benjamin – the implication is that Joseph's sons will be as those born to Rachael.
- III. The Adoption Ceremony Performed (8-12)
- NOTE: many have pointed to this as a formal Near Eastern adoption ceremony
- A. The Formal Presentation of The Sons (9)
 - 1. Jacob asks "who are these?"
 - a. Jacob has lived in Egypt for 17 years now – he knows Joseph's sons – he already knows their names (v.5)
 - b. This is the formal presentation of the sons to be adopted
 - c. It is part of the ceremony. It's like saying "who gives this woman to be married" in a marriage ceremony.
 - 2. Joseph presents his sons to Jacob for adoption
 - B. The Ceremonial Adoption (10-12)
 - 1. Jacob's eyesight is failing so Joseph brings the sons to Jacob
 - 2. He would ceremonially place the sons kneeling at Jacob's knees upon his bed
 - 3. Jacob kissed the sons and embraced them
 - a. This is just like the passing of the blessing from Isaac to Jacob (although he thought it was Esau) – Gen. 27:26 Then his father Isaac said to him, "Come near and kiss me, my son." 27 So he came near and kissed him. And Isaac smelled the smell of his garments and blessed him...
 - 4. Jacob gives glory to God for His providence in all that is happened with Joseph and the blessing of seeing his grandsons (11)
 - C. Joseph Worships God and Honors His Father (12)
 - 1. Joseph removes the sons from Jacob's knees
 - a. The sons aren't sitting on his knees. They are standing or kneeling by his knees.
 - b. Joseph removes them so that he may prostrate himself before his father
 - c. Joseph displays his grace and humility before his father – he is the most powerful man in Egypt honoring his father and being thankful for the inclusion of his sons into the family of the covenant.
 - 2. By giving his sons as Jacob's heir, he is consenting to them being rejected from future status in Egypt
 - a. Joseph lived out his life as Lord over Egypt – no record of his kids having any status or rank in Egypt over the next 400 years
 - b. Why would he do such a thing?

IV. The Blessing Is Given (13-16)

A. Joseph Prepares His Sons To Receive The Blessing (13)

1. He positions them strategically as he presents them so that Jacob's right hand would be upon Manasseh.

a. Manasseh is the first born and the right hand is seen as the hand of greater blessing – the place of greatest honor (See Jesus at the right hand of Father)

b. Joseph is staging the scene of the blessing – 1. Because his father cannot see well and 2. Because in Joseph's mind, this is the proper way since Manasseh is the firstborn and deserves the greater status and blessing.

2. He presents them before his father to receive the paternal blessing now that they are his adopted children.

B. Jacob unexpectedly crosses his hands to bless the sons (14-16)

1. Jacob crosses his hands when he reaches out to bless the sons (14)

a. He places his right hand on Ephraim and his left on Manasseh

2. Jacob pronounces the blessing from God on Joseph & by extension the sons (15-16)

a. Jacob declares the authority and faithfulness of the God from whom this blessing comes (He invokes God to give blessing)

b. He spans three generations saying that this God is the one whom Abraham and Isaac walked before

i. "walked before" speaks of their obedience and faith to God

c. He calls God his shepherd who has cared for his life

i. Jacob knew all about shepherding

ii. He could see that God had been his רֹעֶה (*ro`eh*) – his shepherd throughout his life

iii. Jacob could not have overlooked that fact that this would make him akin to the sheep he spent his life shepherding.

d. He calls the angel of God his גֹּאֵל (*go`el*) – his redeemer / deliverer / savior

NOTE: the "angel" of God has appeared many times in Genesis most often in times filled with danger or turmoil. (Gen. 16:7-11; 21:17; 22:11-18; 24:7; 31:11; 32:25-31)

i. He has delivered Jacob from all evil? Did Jacob not experience evil, hardship, suffering?

ii. He told Pharaoh that his "Few and evil have been the days of the years of my life, and they have not attained to the days of the years of the life of my fathers in the days of their sojourning." (Genesis 47:9)

iii. Jacob sees that though he had indeed suffered much – God has redeemed it all for Jacob's good and the fulfillment of God's promises

e. By this God, Jacob declares a blessing upon these boys

i. Jacob's family name will be carried on through them

ii. Jacob prays they would grow into a great multitude

- he is praying that the blessing and promise would be realized through them as well as his natural sons

V. The Prophetic Announcement (17-20)

A. Joseph is displeased with Jacob's reversal of the sons (17-18)

1. Joseph tries to move his father's hands to have the right hand be on Manasseh
2. Joseph tells Jacob this is not right. Manasseh being the first born should be under his right hand
 - a. Maybe Joseph assumes his father's ailing eyesight caused him to be confused
 - b. Here is one of the few times in Genesis that Joseph is wrong in his thinking and pronouncements
 - c. this would be seen as a slight against Manasseh, the first born

B. Jacob refuses Joseph's Correction (19)

1. Jacob clarifies that he knows exactly what he is doing
2. He (Manasseh) shall also become a people and be great – meaning a multitude
3. Jacob clarifies that the younger brother's people will be greater than the older
 - a. Epharaim's offspring shall become a multitude of nations
 - b. No doubt a reminder of Jacob's blessing over his older brother Esau
4. Why does Jacob do this?
 - a. He is guided by God and seeing with the eyes of faith
 - b. Hebrews 11:21 By faith Jacob, when dying, blessed each of the sons of Joseph, bowing in worship over the head of his staff.
 - c. It took a lifetime, but Jacob finally realizes he must follow God's will not his own scheming
5. This is the 5th time God has reversed a birth order
 - a. Seth / Cain
 - b. Shem / Japheth
 - c. Isaac / Ishmael
 - d. Jacob / Esau
 - e. Ephraim / Manasseh

C. Jacob Blesses Ephraim and Manasseh (20)

1. Jacob foretells that Ephraim and Manasseh will be so blessed that their names would be used proverbially in Israel – “By you”
2. But he put Ephraim before Manasseh
 - a. this is evident in the genealogies of Numbers
 - b. Ephraim precedes Manasseh in Numbers 1:10
 - c. Ephraim is more numerous than Manasseh (Num. 1:32-33; 34-35)

VI. Jacob Gives Joseph a Portion of Land (21-22)

A. Jacob announces that he is going to die

1. This is said before all the family – remember they are all there

B. Jacob reminds them of the promise of God to bring them back to the land

C. Jacob gives Joseph a piece of property above and beyond what he gives the others (translated variously as portion, ridge, shoulder, mountain slope – “Shechem”)

1. Many struggle to identify when this took place and where this parcel is
2. “mountain slope” is the word “Shechem” which is also the name of the city where Jacob's sons killed all the males. Jacob did buy a piece of property there from Hamor for 100 pieces of silver – but here he says he took it with sword and bow.

3. Is Jacob using Amorites in general for all Canaanites? Is he saying that it was he who took Shechem vicariously through the wicked act of his sons? Is this speaking of an event not recorded in Genesis?

4. Is this it? – Joshua 24:32 As for the bones of Joseph, which the people of Israel brought up from Egypt, they buried them at Shechem, in the piece of land that Jacob bought from the sons of Hamor the father of Shechem for a hundred pieces of money. It became an inheritance of the descendants of Joseph.

D. Joseph is most powerful man in Egypt – why does he need a piece of land in nowhere country?

1. Egypt is just temporary – this tiny piece of land is down payment on God's promise

In the adoption into covenant family of the sons – it reminds us of our adoption into the covenant family.